

Information Structure in Russian: a call for relational notions

In this talk, I will present some of the research that I did for my PhD thesis (Slioussar 2007) and in subsequent years, arguing that it is necessary and advantageous to introduce relational notions in the Information Structure (IS) field (such as *more / less accessible* instead of *given / new*).

Corpus studies (e.g. Sirotinina 1965) show that the neutral word order is 'IO DO' in Russian. The inverse 'DO IO' order was traditionally associated with DO givenness and narrow focus. Among generative studies, this was extensively discussed in (Junghanns & Zybatow 1995). However, in (1b) and (2b) both the IO and the DO are new and part of focus. In (1b), the IO is interpreted as additionally emphasized as a result of reordering. In (2b), the DO is perceived as more accessible (by virtue of being more predictable). In (3), the whole sentence is in focus, but the subject is interpreted as more salient.

- (1) a. *Nikogda by ne podumal, čto moj načal'nik ljubit životnyx.*
'I would never imagine that my boss likes animals.'
- b. *No o otдал buterbrod golodnoj sobake!*
segodnja n
but today he gave away sandwich.ACC [hungry dog].DAT
- (2) a. A: *Čto ty delaješ'?*
'What are you doing?'
- b. B: *Pišu pis'mo mame.*
write.1PERS.SG letter.ACC mom.DAT
- (3) *Redkij slučaj v gubernii: čeloveka ukusil bešenaja lisa.*
a
(a rare case in the province) man.ACC bit [rabid fox].NOM

These examples present an argument against feature-based IS theories (like Rizzi 1997) and for configurational approaches (like Reinhart 1995, 2006), thus bearing on the most important ongoing debate in the IS field. While discussing these and similar cases, I will focus on some interesting criticisms raised by Elena Titov (2008) who will also be present in the workshop. I will outline an IS model based on these observations and will argue that the necessary syntactic configurations are best derived with edge features introduced in Chomsky (2008). Finally, if time allows, I will demonstrate how relational notions can solve some persistent IS-related problems in Russian and other languages.

References

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