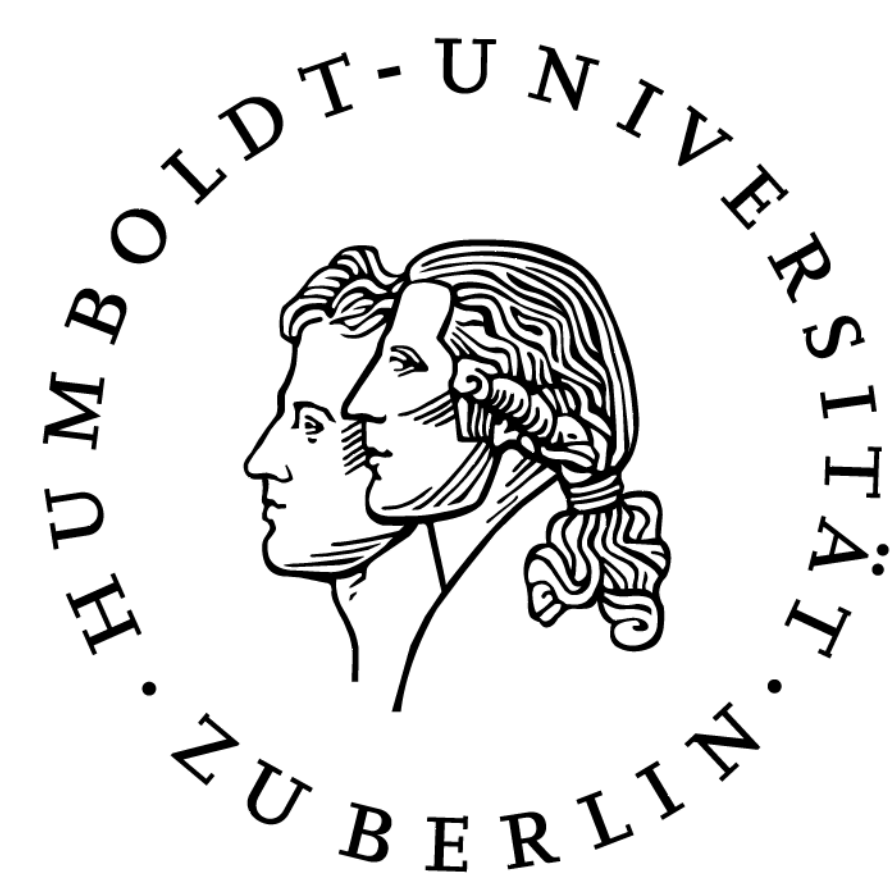# RUEG P3: Word order in monolingual and heritage Russian in Germany and the US – majority language matters

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Introduction

Word order (WO) in monolingual Russian, German and English

- Russian: SVO in neutral contexts, additionally governed by information structure (IS) (cf. Švedova 2005, Kallestinova 2007, Slioussar 2007, 2011)
- German: SOV with reordering options for non-verbal constituents, with V2 in main clauses and V-final in embedded clauses (cf. Wegener 1993, Gärtner 1998)
- English: strict SVO (apart from residual V2 position), little reordering options (cf. Eppler 1999, De Vogelaer 2007, Kempen & Harbusch 2019)

WO in heritage Russian (HR)

HR in Germany:
- heritage speakers (HSs) showed more WO variation than monolinguals (Brehmer & Usanova 2015)
- HSs produced more V-final linearizations than monolinguals (ebd.)

HR in the US:
- HSs showed rigidification of WO, i.e., increased use of SVO order (Laleko & Dubinina 2018, Polinsky 2006, Isurin & Ivanova-Sullivan 2008, Isurin 2005)
- WO patterns do not always adhere to requirements of IS (Laleko & Dubinina 2018)

Research Question and Hypotheses

Do the WO patterns produced by HSs of Russian residing in Germany and the US differ from those of monolingual speakers of Russian?

- **Hypothesis 1:** HSs in Germany will produce V-final WOs more frequently than monolingual Russian speakers (see Brehmer & Usanova 2015).
- **Hypothesis 2:** HSs in the US will produce more basic SVO orders than monolinguals (Laleko & Dubinina 2018, Polinsky 2006, Isurin & Ivanova-Sullivan 2008; Isurin 2005).

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 is not confirmed: HSs in Germany behaved similarly to monolinguals.

- Compared to Brehmer & Usanova (2015), differences in speaker populations (more homogeniuous sample in the present study) as well as in the experimental set-up might have contributed to the differences in the results.
- Results seem to be plausible, since majority German allows for WO flexibility (governed not only by syntactic factors, but also by the requirements of IS).
- Since both German and Russian allow for WO variation, that reflects the intended IS, HSs in Germany were therefore able to show WO variation in their production similar to monolingual speakers of Russian.

Hypothesis 2 is confirmed: HSs in the US differed from monolinguals by producing significantly more SVO (and less OVS) orders.

- Since HSs in the US - but not HSs in Germany - produced more SVO orders than monolinguals, transfer from the majority language English might be a possible explanation (however, some further results do not support this claim, s. poster provided by P7).
- SVO overuse may have implications for IS. In monolingual Russian, new referents are expected to appear clause-finally and the typical order of referents is "given-before-new", i.e., referents, that were already mentioned, appear before the ones, that were introduced for the first time (e.g., Slioussar 2011, Luchkina & Cole 2016). It is possible that HSs in the US neglected the requirements of IS producing more SVO orders (the data in the present sample were not evaluated regarding their pragmatic appropriateness, however Laleko & Dubinina (2018) have some indications in their data).

Word Order Study

Participants

Oral and written semi-spontaneous data of 24 age- and gender-matched speakers of Russian, drawn from the RUEG-RU_0.3.0 Corpus (Wiese et al. 2019):
- 8 HSs in Germany (mean age=17.0, SD=0.84, 4 females)
- 8 HSs in the US (mean age=15.7, SD=1.51, 4 females)
- 8 monolinguals in Russia (mean age=16.6, SD=0.49, 4 females)

The data was collected in Berlin, in the greater Washington area and St. Petersburg.

Procedure

Participants were presented with a video stimuli and they were asked to narrate what they saw according to the Language Situations method after Wiese (2020).

Annotation

For 1404 declarative clauses with a finite verb an applicable WO pattern was annotated. 783 trivalent WO patterns containing a non-oblique subject, a finite verb, and an object (both direct and oblique) were chosen for the statistical analysis (R Core Team 2020) and subsequently formed the 6 default WO patterns: SVO (501), OVS (142), SOV (71), OSV (47), VSO (15), VOS (7).

Results

Significant differences in WO distribution were found in :
- overall distribution (VOS and VSO grouped together due to a small number of data points) between HSs in the US and monolinguals
χ^2 (4, N=480) = 12.96, p= .011
- SVO overuse in HSs in the US compared to monolinguals
χ^2 (1, N=480) = 9.45, p= .002
- OVS underuse in HSs in the US compared to monolinguals
χ^2 (1, N=480) = 10.49, p= .001

Default word order patterns, absolute numbers

Default word order patterns, relative numbers (%)

Conclusion

The results show that different groups of HSs of Russian behave differently as compared to the monolingual speakers of Russian, suggesting the impact of the majority language on the WO production. Therefore, HSs in Germany may have an advantage over HSs in the US due to more flexible WO in majority language German than in majority language English.

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