Handout on Choi (1996)

Goal: to explain scrambling facts of German
Ideas: a) these facts are discourse-related; b) these facts are best captured in a constraint-interaction framework

Data: (all for German)
1. Anti-focus effect: non-focused and or / topical elements can scramble, but focused elements cannot:

(note: canonical word order is (verb) indirect object direct object (verb) )

1. Q.: Was hast du dem Kassierer gegeben?
   ‘What did you give to the cashier?’
A.1: Ich habe dem Kassierer das Geld gegeben. (*italic = old info; **bold = new info)
A. 2 * Ich habe das Geld dem Kassierer gegeben
   ‘I gave the money to the cashier’

2. Q.: Wem hast du das Geld gegeben?
   ‘To whom did you give the money?’
A.1: Ich habe dem Kassierer das Geld gegeben.
A.2: Ich habe das Geld dem Kassierer gegeben.
   ‘I gave the money to the cashier’

==> this example shows that (some) old information can optionally scramble out of the VP

Further, it seems that different kinds of old information have different scrambling abilities:
3. Q.: Wie steht’s mit dem Geld? Wem hat Hans das Geld gegeben?
   ‘What about the money? To whom did Hans give the money?’
A.: Ich glaube dass das Geld Hans dem Kassierer gegeben hat. (**underline =’prominent’)
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the money to the kashier’

4. Q.: Wem hat Hans das Geld gegeben?
   ‘To whom did Hans give the money?’
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the money to the cashier’

==> it seems there are two types of old information, one that is given some conversational prominence (corresponds to traditional notion of ‘topic’ or Valduvi’s ‘link’) and one which is conversationally ‘uninteresting’ (Valduvi’s ‘tail’); further, topics scramble more easily than tails

2. Contrastive focus effect: contrastively focused elements can scramble

5. ... weil Hans ein / das Buch dem Mann gegeben hat * BUT ... weil Hans ein / das Buch dem Mann gegeben hat (nicht eine / die Zeitung)
   ‘... because Hans gave a / the book to the man (not a / the newspaper)’

==> seems a confirmation for the distinction (amply motivated elsewhere in the literature) between ‘contrastive’ and ‘presentational’ focus

3. (Alleged) specificity effects: claim that scrambling is driven by the semantics
   - namely, ‘strong / presuppositional’ phrases (which overlap with ‘specific’, ‘old’, ‘known’, etc.
     information) are interpreted outside of the VP; but ‘weak / existential’ phrases (which overlap with ‘new’
     information) are interpreted inside the VP; on that class of accounts, ‘strong’ phrases need to raise out of
     the VP to avoid falling in the scope of an existential quantifier; thus we have:
6.
Q.: Was hast du deinem Bruder geschickt?
‘What did you send to your brother?’
A.1: Ich habe den Brief meinem Bruder geschickt.
‘I sent the (* a ) letter to my brother’

BUT: the predictions of the semantic account are not borne out: we have seen that a definite NP can stay in its base position (2); conversely, an indefinite NP can scramble if it is contrastively focused (5)

Additional observation:
‘Topics’ and ‘contrastive’ foci seem to behave in a similar way cross-linguistically:

English: Beans I don’t like. (topic)
Fido they named their dog. (contrastive new info)

==> syntactic slot that hosts ‘prominent’ elements

Korean: Swuni-nun Inho-lul mannassta. (topic)
‘As for Swuni, she met Inho’
Swuni-ka Inho-nun mannassta. (contrastive focus, seems to be exhaustive)
‘Swuni met Inho (but no one else)’

==> morphological marker of ‘prominence’ (nun)

So, capture the common properties of topics and contrastive foci with the feature [+ Prom]
On the other hand, the different behavior of ‘old’ and ‘new’ information suggests the feature [+ New]

Classification of Information Types:
Topic [+ Prom, -New] Contrastive Focus [+ Prom, + New]
Tail [-Prom, -New] Focus [-Prom, +New]

Alignment constraints that drive the positioning of features at the sentential level:
==> gives us scrambling of ‘old’ info; violated when a [+New] element is contrastively focused

==> gives us scrambling of contrastive foci

These will interact with another set of alignment constraints, CANON, which refer to grammatical or thematic function:

CN1: SUBJ should be structurally more prominent than non-SUBJ functions
CN2: Non-SUBJ functions align reversely with the c-structure according to the functional hierarchy

These constraints generate the following linear precedence subhierarchies, each of which incurs a mark if violated:
SUBJ < I. OBJ SUBJ < D. OBJ I. OBJ < D. OBJ (‘<’ = linear precedence)

Point: discourse constraints and canonical structure constraints are sometimes in conflict

Rankings:
PROM >> NEW (because contrastive foci scramble:5)
CN1 >> CN2 (because of following contrast:
...dass Hans das Buch dem Schuler gegeben hat much better than
...dass dem Schuler Hans das Buch gegeben hat
‘...that Hans gave the student the book’ )
PROM >> CN1 (because topics can scramble over the subject: 3,4)
CN2 and NEW are unranked with respect to one another (because scrambling of non-prominent non-new
direct objects is optional: 1,2)

Assumption: discourse features are provided in the input

Some competitions:

a) Neutral context: Was ist passiert?-Ich glaube dass Hans dem Schuler das Buch gegeben hat.
   ‘What happened? I believe Hans gave the book to the students.’
   [tableau p. 163]

b) Ground-focus context: Wem hat Hans das Buch gegeben?
   a) Ich glaube dass Hans dem Schuler das Buch gegeben hat.
   b) Ich glaube dass Hans das Buch dem Schuler gegeben hat.
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the book to the students’
   [tableau p. 166]

c) Topic-Focus-Tail context: Wie steht’s mit dem Buch? Wem hat Hans das Buch gegeben?
   Ich glaube dass das Buch Hans dem Schuler gegeben hat.
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the book to the student’
   [tableau p. 170]

d) Anti-Focus effect: Was hat Hans dem Schuler gegeben?
   a. Ich glaube dass Hans dem Schuler das Buch gegeben hat.
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the book to the student.’
   [tableau p. 173]

e) Contrastive Focus effect: Was hat Hans dem Schuler gegeben? Die Zeitung?
   Ich glaube dass Hans das Buch dem Schuler gegeben hat
   (nicht die Zeitung)
   ‘I believe that Hans gave the book to the student, not the newspaper’
   [tableau p. 177]

f) Specificity effects: handled via discourse-semantics mapping principles:
   SP1: A specific phrase should not be [+New]
   SP2: A nonspecific phrase should not be [-New]

   SP1 is routinely violated when a specific phrase is used in answer to a question; SP2, however, is claimed
   to be inviolable

   Wie der case: Wem hat Hans ein Buch gegeben?
   a. Ich glaube dass Hans dem Schuler ein Buch gegeben hat.
   b. * Ich glaube dass Hans ein Buch dem Schuler gegeben hat
   ‘I believe Hans gave a book to the student’

   ==> this contrast comes out of the fact that the indefinite here is not assigned a discourse feature! This
   might be because it becomes a part of a larger information unit - the predicate, which reads something like
   ‘to engage in book-giving’.
   [tableau p. 185]