

**Scrambling in spoken Dutch:  
Definiteness versus weight as determinants of word order variation**

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Scrambling is a type of word order variation in Dutch that involves the placement of a direct object relative to an adverb, exemplified in (1)-(2):

(1) Unscrambled (adverb > object)

*Sonja heeft gisteren de kaas opgegeten.*  
Sonja has yesterday the cheese eaten  
'Sonja ate the cheese yesterday.'

(2) Scrambled (object > adverb)

*Sonja heeft de kaas gisteren opgegeten.*  
Sonja has the cheese yesterday eaten  
'Sonja ate the cheese yesterday.'

We investigated the scrambling behavior of direct objects in over 8500 sentences extracted from the Spoken Dutch Corpus. We found that scrambling strongly depends on the definiteness properties of the direct object, and that the effect of definiteness is different from what is assumed in the theoretical literature: pronouns scramble almost categorically, whereas indefinite and definite objects scramble hardly at all. The observed effect of definiteness cannot be reduced to the influence of grammatical weight, in this way establishing both factors as independent determinants of word order variation. A closer investigation of proper noun objects shows that their position relative to the adverb is influenced by their animacy, length and stress.

We propose a new measure of accessibility to account for the attested scrambling pattern, and we argue that the ordering of elements in the Dutch middlefield should be understood in terms of planning considerations on behalf of the speaker.