Hypothesis: Factors licensing left peripheral placement of foci are not additive, i.e. the acceptability of a sentence should be determined only by the stronger factor when two aspects of interpretation would license the leftward displacement of a focus.

Based on: Skopeteas & Fanselow’s (2011) finding that object fronting does invoke an exhaustive interpretation for predictable objects and does not for unpredictable objects.

Experiment 1: the effect of predictability in non-contrastive contexts

(1) C: Was hat der Bürgermeister heute Vormittag gemacht?
   ‘What did the mayor do this morning?’
   a) Der Bürgermeister hat einen Brief geschrieben.
      the mayor has a letter written
      ‘The mayor wrote a letter.’
   b) Einen Brief hat der Bürgermeister geschrieben.
   c) Der Bürgermeister hat einen Fahrplan geschrieben.
      the mayor has a schedule written
      ‘The mayor wrote a (train/bus) schedule.’
   d) Einen Fahrplan hat der Bürgermeister geschrieben.

Significant main effects ($p < 0.001$ for both word order and predictability), and a significant interaction ($p = 0.006$) according to a mixed model with random intercepts for subjects and items.
Experiment 2: the effect of predictability in contrastive contexts

(2) C: Alle denken, dass der Bürgermeister eine Rede geschrieben hat. Fritz vermutet aber: ‘Everybody thinks that the mayor wrote a speech. Fritz, however, assumes:’
    a) Der Bürgermeister hat einen Brief geschrieben.
       the mayor has a letter written
       ‘The mayor wrote a letter.’
    b) Einen Brief hat der Bürgermeister geschrieben.
    c) Der Bürgermeister hat einen Fahrplan geschrieben.
       the mayor has a schedule written
       ‘The mayor wrote a (train/bus) schedule.’
    d) Einen Fahrplan hat der Bürgermeister geschrieben.

![Figure 2: mean ratings with 95% CI](chart.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word order</th>
<th>predictability</th>
<th>mean (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SVO</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>5.62 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>4.79 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVO</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>4.50 (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>3.87 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: mean ratings, SE in brackets

Significant main effects ($p < 0.001$ for both word order and predictability), no significant interaction ($p = 0.40$) according to a mixed model with random intercepts for subjects and items.

Our interpretation of the results: Low predictability has a facilitating effect on object fronting in the absence of other facilitating factors. Overt contrast is a stronger facilitating factor and thus makes the effect of predictability vanish.

References