

Why are some word orders more common than others? A uniform information density account

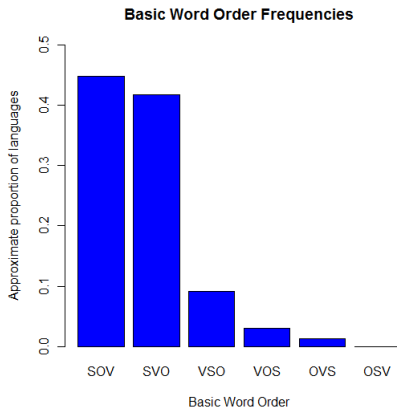
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Word order frequencies for world languages

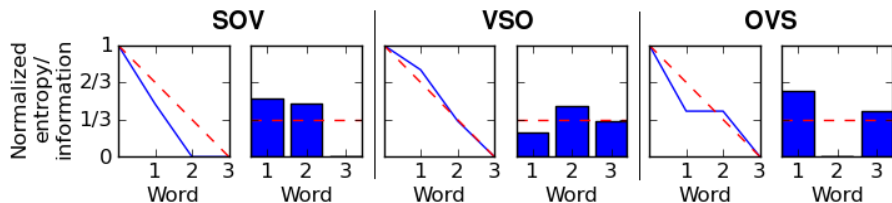
The cross-linguistic distribution of basic word order is highly non-uniform



(From Dryer 2008, survey of 1057 languages)

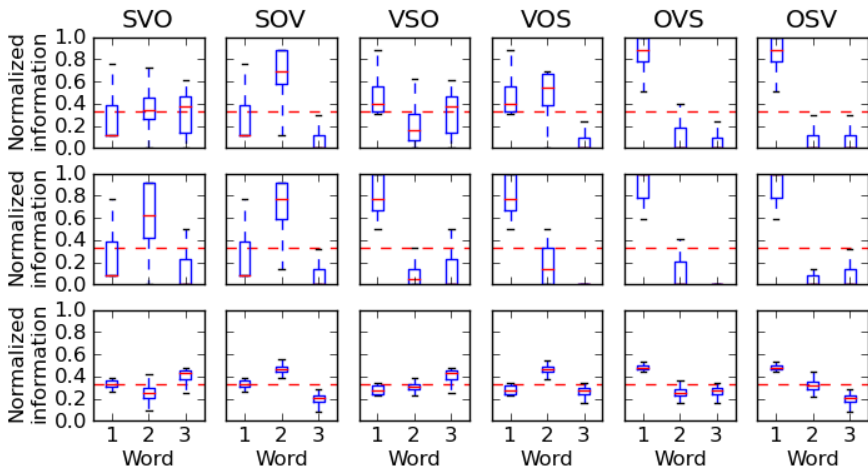
An information theoretic explanation

Different word orders distribute information across words differently



To model this we need estimates of the probabilistic structure of events in the world

Results from 3 models



Largely consistent with linguistic data