Scrambling

1. **Cross-linguistic scrambling**

Scrambling is a typologically rare phenomenon in which the constituents of a sentence may appear in any given order without any relevant change in meaning. This can be very clearly seen in languages like Japanese, or in subordinate clauses in German. For example:

1. Mariko-wa kino uchi-ni gohan-o tabeta.

Mariko-TOP yesterday home-at rice-OBJ ate

‘Mariko ate rice at home yesterday.’

1. Mariko-wa uchi-ni kino gohan-o tabeta.
2. Mariko-wa gohan-o uchi-ni kino tabeta.

(1)-(3) all mean the same thing to a speaker of Japanese. What must, however stay consistent is the basic positions of the subject at the beginning and the verb at the end. Changing the basic order of these elements, will change the underlying meaning of the sentence to something like focus contrast or topicalization.

1. **English**

With respect to English, there is no real scrambling that occurs in the German or Japanese sense, but there are phenomena in which English can “scramble” an element to the left periphery of the clause. This can be seen in wh-movement, but also in topicalization where English uses spec, CP to emphasize certain pieces of information:

1. The cat, Mary saw at the pet store.
2. Before eating the soup, John went into the garage.
3. Onto the bed, Garfield jumped.

These constructions are typically accompanied by a change in tone on the topicalized element. In all of these constructions, the specifier of CP is the landing site for the moved elements. This position is the dedicated landing site for all moved elements in English.