This paper discusses the importance of argument structure for the word order of a large number of European languages. It presents some preliminary results of a research project on word order typology at the University of Leuven. We will first point out striking similarities in the word order of several genetically unrelated European languages. Then we will explain these in terms of our model of competing motivations and finally we will compare our solution to the Head-Complement Theory, a proposal made and immediately rejected by Matthew Dryer (1992:106).

1. THE RELATOR AREA. From the point of view of classic word order theories (i.e. those before Dryer’s Branching Direction Theory and Hawkins’ Performance Theory), English word order is problematic: there is a split between pairs of elements in which the head precedes the dependent and pairs of elements in which the head follows the dependent. This can be illustrated with the following examples:

   head-dependent:
   V-O  (I) read-a book
   Prep-NP  in-the basket
   Sub-Cl  because-she loves you
   N-Rcl  examples-that I showed you before
   N-Gen  uncle-of Gerald

   dependent-head:
   Adj-N  good-guys
   Gen-N  Gerald’s-uncle
   Dem-N  this-cake
   S-V  he-drinks
   Adv-Adv  very-well

   English is not an isolated case in this respect. It is the westernmost language of a large area with strikingly similar word order, which cuts across genetic subgroupings. This area includes the Scandinavian languages, Mordva, the Fennic languages (Livonian, Estonian, Votic, Ingrian, Finnish, Karelian & Veps), Northern Saamic, the Slavic languages and to a certain extent Karaim.

2. THE RELATOR PRINCIPLE. It would lead us too far to criticise Hawkins' and Dryer's approaches here. Instead, we will limit ourselves to presenting our description and explanation of the facts. Two preliminary remarks have to be made. First, we consider words to be the basic elements of which serialisation has to be described and explained, not constituents, grammatical relations or other units. Second, constructions should be considered in their own right. The traditional approach of only considering binary patterns is arbitrary. These remarks can be illustrated by means of two genitive constructions in English:

   Edward’s brother
   the corner of the house

   Usually these are presented as word order alternatives for a binary structure of a noun and a semantically defined genitive, i.e. of the house is fully identified with Edward’s. In our view these are not word order alternatives whatsoever, but alternative encoding strategies for the genitive relation. The internal ordering in both constructions has to be accounted for individually. In the case of the ‘s-genitive two words are involved, in the case of the prepositional genitive three. Thinking in terms of binary patterns makes it impossible to see that elements like of, which we call relators, are iconically placed in between their relata (corner and house) in English. In fact, 2nd relata can be equated with complements.

   A relator, a notion we adapted from Functional Grammar (e.g. Dik 1989), is a word or morpheme that has two syntagmatic slots (relata) in its semantic-syntactic structure such that the relator defines a specific
3. THE HEAD COMPLEMENT THEORY. Matthew Dryer’s large cross-linguistic survey of word order is confined to binary patterns and compares the order of pairs of different kinds of elements to the order in the pair verb-object. Nevertheless, some of his empirical findings are in line with ours. He found that not all pairs of head and dependent are correlation pairs (i.e. correlate with the pair verb-object) and concluded that the head-dependent theory in its simplest form must be wrong. But on the other hand he noted that all pairs of head and complement are correlation pairs, e.g. complementizer-S and copula-predicate. Therefore he formulated the following principle (p106):

The Head-Complement Theory (HCT): Verb patterners are heads and object patterners are complements. That is, a pair of elements X and Y will employ the order XY significantly more often among VO-languages than among OV languages if and only if X is a head and Y is a complement.

The validity of this observation is predicted by the relator principle since a second relatum is always a complement of the relator. However, Dryer rejected the HCT because of correlation pairs such as verb–PP, adjective–Standard of comparison and noun-relative clause, in which the second element is not subcategorized for by the first (i.e. the object patterner is not a complement). The problem is that Dryer does not recognize the relator here and fails to take into account the first relatum. This can be illustrated by the order of noun and relative clause. The relativizer is a relator here. It is placed iconically between its first relatum (the nucleus) and its complement or second relatum (the head of the relative clause). The other problematic constructions can be treated along the same lines. The pair V-PP should be split up into Verb (1st relatum) – preposition (relator) – Noun (second relatum). Comparison is encoded in a range of different ways in the languages of the world, but most European languages have a (typologically marginal) comparative particle. This particle (than in English) is a relator, the so-called standard of comparison being its second relatum (or complement). The first relatum is the comparee.

Thus, it turns out that the Head-Complement Theory can be remedied if one looks at the right constructions, taking into account the iconic order of the relator constructions: 1st relatum – relator - 2nd relatum.