

Word order and prosody interaction in the encoding of Information Structure in Russian polar questions

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Background. Russian polar questions sometimes include the particle *li*, but may also look like statements on the surface — then interrogativity is marked only by prosody. Unlike some other languages, where only word reorderings [1] or stress shifts [2] are used to convey information structure (IS), Russian can employ both means to do so. This applies to both statements and questions. In a sentence containing a subject, object and verb, the neutral main stress position, associated with a sentence-wide reading, is on the object for statements, and on the verb for polar questions [3]. Additionally, authors working in the Prague school tradition analyzed languages like Czech and Russian in terms of given-new information and found a tendency to place given before new [4].

Questions. Relatively few studies covered the interaction of different means of encoding of IS. Exceptions include cross-linguistic model [5], some data on Slavic languages [6], and recent data on Russian language [7]. Another gap is the study of IS in questions, with an exception for production of questions Romance languages [8]. Our study aims to cover these gaps and answer the following research questions: (i) Do Russian speakers prefer to change the word order in polar questions, so that the focused constituent ends up in the position of the neutral main stress, or to shift the stress? (ii) Is there a tendency for given-new order in Russian polar questions?

Methods. Three texts will be constructed, each with 5 blanks (3 target, 2 fillers). A sample fragment is provided below. For each blank, participants will form a sentence using the words provided in parentheses (subject, verb, object; presented in random order), then will read the completed text aloud. Across each text, the three target words will remain identical, but the preceding context will vary in terms of IS, so that within each text, one target blank will elicit a wide-focus question, one a subject-focus, and one an object-focus question. The answers will also differ accordingly.

The experiment will be paper-based, administered individually in a quiet space, and each session will last ~ 10 minutes. Each trial will consist of a short dialogue/narrative with a blank for a question. Participants will write a question using all provided words, then will read the entire dialogue aloud, while being recorded. Three native Russian speakers will independently judge word order and stress; disagreements will be resolved by analyses of the duration and intensity of pitch accent in Praat. Mixed-effects models will test how intended reading affects word order and stress placement.

Example: part of a text with a target and a filler sentence

Malen'kaja Katja zagljadyvajet na kuxnju, vidit, kak mama razdelyvajet rybu, kotoruju ona sovsem ne ljubit, i, nasupivshis', idet v svoju komnatu. V koridorje stoit papa.

'Little Katja peeks into the kitchen, sees mom filleting fish, which she doesn't like at all, and, frowning, goes to her room. Dad is in the corridor.'

— *Chto sluchilos'?* _____ (*mama, kupit', ryba*)? **target question**

'What happened? _____ (mom, buy, fish)?'

— *Da, ona paxnjet na vsju kuxnju...* **answer supporting a wide reading**

'Yes, it smells all over the kitchen...'

— *Ladno, idi, pozovem tebjja, kogda prigotovim uzhin. Postarajemsja chto-to esche dlja tebjja pridumat'.* _____ (*uprazhnenija, poka, sdelat', russkij, po*) **filler sentence**

'Okay, go, we'll call you when we make dinner. We'll try to come up with something else for you. _____ (exercises, for now, do, Russian, in)'

References

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