

# **Effect of word order on yes/no questions in English as compared to Russian**

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# Background

- Why English and Russian?
  - History
  - Syntax
  - Contrast
- Why yes/no questions?
  - Types
  - Views
  - Intonations



# Hypothesis

- In yes/no questions, English is neutral (unmarked a la Jakobson) because it tends to retain its basic word order, whereas Russian is emphatic (marked) because it tends toward different word orders

# Inverse yes/no questions

## □ Auxiliaries

- Do, be, have
- Passive ‘by-’

## □ Modals

- ‘objazan’ (‘must’), ‘mogu’/‘mog’ (‘can’/‘could’ or ‘may’/‘might’), ‘budu’ (‘will’/‘would’ or ‘shall’), and ‘dolžen’ (‘should’)

## □ Behavior

- Inversion with subject
- Particle “li”
  - Fronting
  - Presuppositions

# Inverse yes/no questions (cont.)

## □ Special case

### ◦ Main verb “be”

- VSO in English
- Zero form of “be” (est’[PRS])

### ◦ Noncanonical

#### ● “There”

- Is there a paper on the table?
- Tam est’ bumaga na stole?

#### ● “It”

- Is it the paper that we are talking about today?
- Eto bumaga, o kotoj my govorim segodnja?

# Echo and tag yes/no questions

- Similarities
  - Types
  - Tags
- In English
- In Russian
- Differences
  - Echo questions



# Minimalist view

## □ Inertness of English verbs

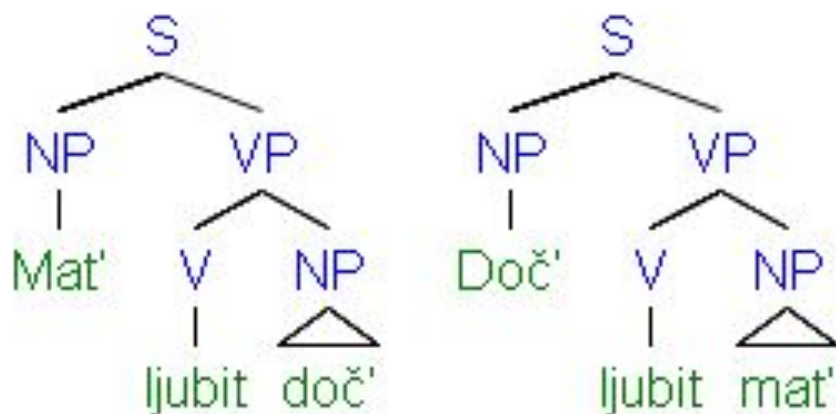
- $[_{CP} ? [_{TP} \text{she} [_{T} [_{VP} \text{swims fast}]]]] \Rightarrow [_{CP} \text{does}_i [_{TP} \text{she} [_{T} t_i [_{VP} \text{swim fast}]]]]$

## □ Russian violation of c-command?

- $[_{CP} ? [_{TP} \text{ona} [_{T} [_{VP} \text{plavajet bystro}]]]] \Rightarrow [_{CP} \text{plavajet}_i \text{li} [_{TP} \text{ona} [_{T} [_{VP} t_i \text{ bystro}]]]]$

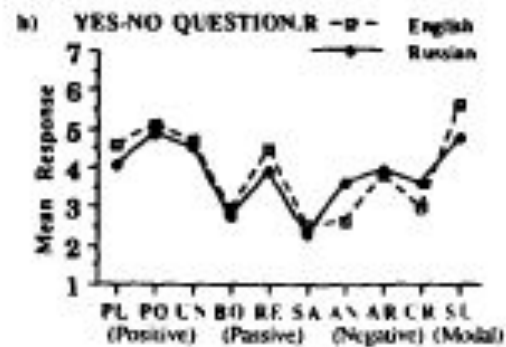
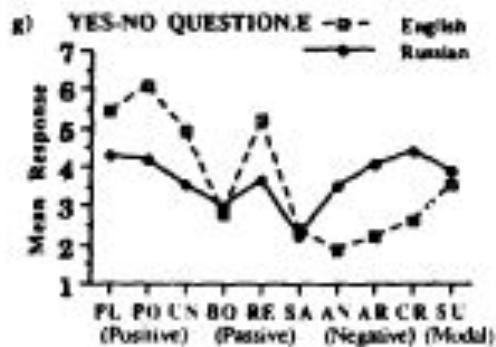
## □ PF versus LF

- Mat' ljubit doč'.



# Intonations in yes/no questions

- The emotive experiment
  - Kyril T. Holden and John T. Hogan (1993)



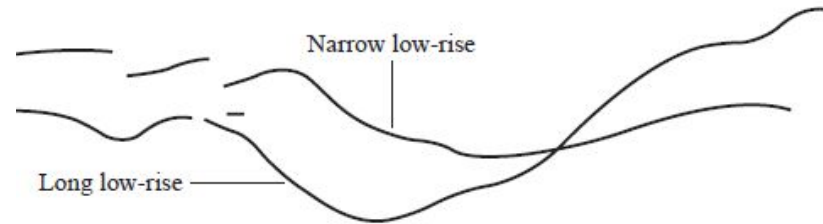
Mean judgments of ten emotions signalled by English and Russian intonation on four sentence types: left column – English subjects; right column – Russian subjects.



# Intonations (cont.)

## □ PF versus LF in English

- Rising versus falling pitch
- High-rise versus low-rise
- Long low-rise versus narrow low-rise (Levis 1999)



## □ Intonational effect in Russian

- Functional Sentence Perspective
  - Theme-(transition)-rheme
- Topic Focus Articulation
  - Topic and comment (discourse-neutral information and focus)

# Intonations (cont.)

## □ Svetozarova writes:

- It is important to emphasise that, whatever means are employed in marking special sentence stress, whether purely phonetic or positional, the effect is in principle the same, namely a kind of “augmented meaning”, the actualisation of certain presuppositions... Thus, sentence intonation in Russian, in the form of one of its most important subsystems – sentence stress – not only organises words into a single meaningful unit, but, by accomplishing this in a variety of ways, succeeds in transmitting extremely important information of a pragmatic nature as well (sic) (1998:269f.).

# Conclusions and discussion

- Support of hypothesis
- Future implications
  - Research beyond yes/no questions
  - The Future of English? (1997)
  - Applications of English and Russian?

- 1 Working language of international organisations and conferences
- 2 Scientific publication
- 3 International banking, economic affairs and trade
- 4 Advertising for global brands
- 5 Audio-visual cultural products (e.g. film, TV, popular music)
- 6 International tourism
- 7 Tertiary education
- 8 International safety (e.g. 'airspeak', 'seaspeak')
- 9 International law
- 10 As a 'relay language' in interpretation and translation
- 11 Technology transfer
- 12 Internet communication

Major international domains of English