

# To *li* or not to *li*

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# Agenda for today

- ▶ Empirical scope: ‘neutral’ polar questions in Russian
  - ① *Li-questions (Li-Qs)*: formed by particle *li* + fronting
  - ② **Declarative string questions (Decl-Qs)**: formed by intonation
- ▶ Overarching issues:
  - ▶ How do those strategies differ?
  - ▶ Where do those differences stem from?
  - ▶ How does it fit into the polar question typology?

# Roadmap

① Setting the stage

② Li-Qs

③ Decl-Qs

④ Li-Qs vs. Decl-Qs

⑤ Outlook

# Setting the stage I

- ▶ Research on Slavic questions
  - ▶ *wh*-questions: studied up and down
  - ▶ polar questions: comparatively less explored
- ▶ Research on questions
  - ▶ much interest in 'special', non-canonical questions (stay tuned for Eckardt, Walkden, and Dehé in prep.)
  - ▶ especially: semantic & pragmatic nuances associated with non-standard polar questions (e.g., variety of biased questions; Goodhue 2022)
- ▶ This talk: contribution to both those lines of research
  - ▶ Russian: two strategies for neutral polar Qs
  - ▶ Our focus: subtle distinctions between them

## Setting the stage II

- ▶ Caveat
  - ▶ ‘Neutrality’ of a question: tricky to define (Farkas and Roelofsen 2017; Farkas 2022 a.o.)
- ▶ Our take for today’s purposes (cf. Searle 1969 and much later work)
  - ▶ Sp wants to have an answer (ensures sincerity)
  - ▶ Sp does not know the answer (excludes quiz & rhetorical Qs)
  - ▶ Sp has no expectations/preferences wrt the answer (excludes biased Qs)
  - ▶ Sp expect Ad to be in position to provide an answer (excludes conjectural & non-intrusive Qs)
- ▶ Both our strategies count as neutral

## Setting the stage III

- (1) *Neutral context: Gérard Simon is interviewing a prospective secretary Marie, asking her whether she understands her duties.*

- a. **Li-Q:** fronting of the focused constituent

Gоворите ли вы по-руски?  
speak.2PL.PRS LI you.NOM Russian  
'Do you (formal) speak Russian?' (constructed)

- b. **Decl-Q:** special prosody ( $\neq$  'rising declarative')

Вы говорите по-руски?  
you.NOM speak.2PL.PRS Russian  
'Do you (formal) speak Russian?'

(context and (1b) are from the 1981 film *Teheran 43*)

## Setting the stage IV

- ▶ Known differences between Li-Qs and Decl-Qs (cf. Comrie 1984; Schwabe 2004; Shvedova et al. 1980)
  - ▶ Li-Qs: often described as more formal
  - ▶ Decl-Qs: root phenomenon
- ▶ Today: novel empirical contrasts targeting conversational dynamics
- ▶ Upshot
  - ▶ Li-Qs: true neutral Q, a simple alternative operator
  - ▶ Decl-Qs: intonation signals “please react”
  - ▶ Focus: conceptual picture & empirical landscape, not formal analysis
- ▶ Not discussed: questions with negation (cue: Maria and Radek’s talk; also Zanon 2023)

# Roadmap

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- ② Li-Qs
- ③ Decl-Qs
- ④ Li-Qs vs. Decl-Qs
- ⑤ Outlook

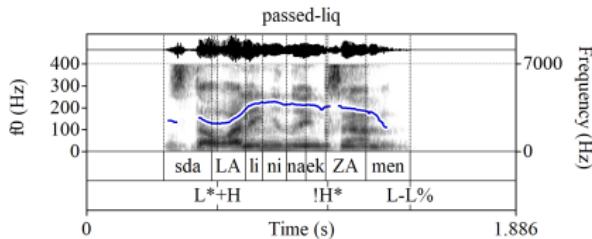
- ▶ *Li*: 2-position clitic (Franks and King 2000:349–357)
- ▶ Two types of uses
  - ① Polar questions: *li*-clauses unmistakenly interrogative
  - ② And some other suspiciously related environments (important in determining *li*'s syntactic status and overall semantics)
- ▶ Other Slavic languages: not always the same picture

## *Li* in questions

- ▶ *Li*'s host: focus of the question, signals how the question fits into a larger discourse (cf. Turkish *mi*, Kamali and Krifka 2020)
  - ▶ Focused constituent:
    - ▶ obligatory fronted
    - ▶ ordinary focus marking ( $\approx L+H^*/L^*+H$ )
  - ▶ Overall prosody (cf. Yanko 2019): no final rise (standard for Russian Qs)
- (2) *Li-Q with focus on the main predicate* (no non-trivial higher QUD signalled; Esipova and Romero 2023)

*Nina was supposed to take an exam and I am interested in the outcome, though I don't have any indication as to how it went.*

SdaLA<sub>L\*+H</sub> li Nina  
pass.SG.F.PST li Nina.NOM  
ekZA<sub>!H\*</sub>men<sub>L-L%</sub>?   
exam.ACC  
'Did Nina pass the exam?'



# *Li* outside of questions

- ▶ Diachronically
  - ▶ vanilla disjunction *ili* (< *i* 'and' + *li*) 'or'
  - ▶ vanilla conditional *esli* (< *est'* 'be.3SG.PRES' + *li*) 'if'
  - ▶ disjunction & indefinite *libo* (< *li* + *bo* 'because')
- ▶ Synchronously
  - ▶ alternating disjunctions: *to li X, to li Y* and *X li, Y li*
  - ▶ modal adverbials: *chut' li* 'hardly', *edva li* 'unlikely', *vriad li* 'unlikely'
- ▶ Such environments: signature of Q-particles across languages (e.g. Hungarian *vagy*, Japanese *ka*, Sinhala *hari* – or Polish *czy*; see Szabolcsi 2015)
- ▶ Unified compositional semantics for *li*
  - ▶ possible and desirable
  - ▶ suggests a non-complementizer analysis (pace Franks and King 2000; Schwabe 2004; see also Rudnitskaya 2000 for syntactic evidence)

## What *li* does: bottom line

- ▶ *Li*-Qs
  - ▶ ordinary polar Qs
  - ▶ ordinary focus marking on the fronted constituent
- ▶ *Li* elsewhere
  - ▶ Q-particle
  - ▶ precise semantics: matter for future research

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## Decl-Qs

- ▶ Declarative strings characterized by Q-peak
- ▶ Q-peak
  - ▶ special prosody of polar questions
  - ▶ ≠ vanilla focus marking in assertions (see Meyer and Mleinek 2006 for discussion and appendix for data)
  - ▶ also possible with suggestions and some other requests  
(possibly derivable from interrogatives)
- ▶ ≠ English-type rising declaratives
- ▶ ≠ Questions w/out *li*

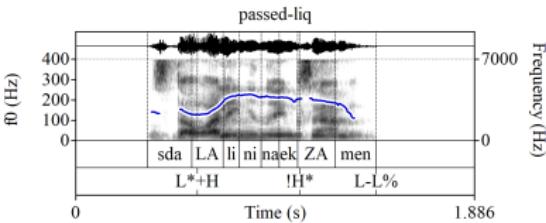
# Decl-Qs: basics I

- ▶ Word order: same as declaratives (hence “declarative string”)
  - ▶ Prosody: “Q-Peak” on the semantically focused constituent, no final rise (see Esipova 2023; Esipova and Romero 2023)
- (3) *Nina was supposed to take an exam and I am interested in the outcome, though I don't have any indication as to how it went.*

a. **Li-Q:** [= (2)]

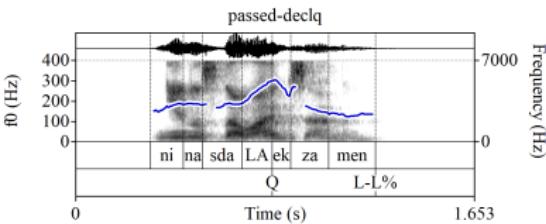
SdA $L^*+H$  li Nina  
pass.SG.F.PST li Nina.NOM  
ekZA $!H^*$  men $L-L\%$ ?

exam.ACC  
'Did Nina pass the exam?'



b. **Decl-Q:**

Nina sdaLA $Q$   
Nina.NOM pass.SG.F.PST  
ekzamen $L-L\%$ ?   
exam.ACC.SG  
'Did Nina pass the exam?'



## Decl-Qs: basics II

### Decl-Qs ≠ rising declaratives

- ▶ Prosody: distinct from assertions in production and perception (Makarova 2007; Meyer and Mleinek 2006; Rathcke 2006)
- ▶ Clause type: patterns like other interrogative clauses, evidenced e.g. by pronoun licensing (see appendix for data)
- ▶ Semantics & pragmatics: neutral inquiry, no bias towards one of the answers (unlike English rising declaratives; Gunlogson 2008 and much later work)

# What is Q-Peak? I

- ▶ Q-Peak (seemingly) outside of questions (Esipova 2023)
  - ▶ directive speech acts: suggestions
  - ▶ realized as imperatives & declarative strings
  - ▶ ≠ prosody of canonical imperatives

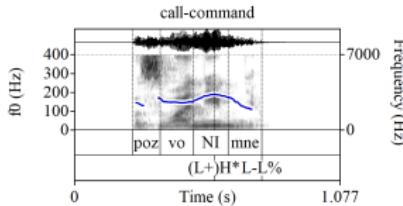
## (4) Standard imperative

(functional heterogeneous; cf.  
Kaufmann 2012; Schmerling 1982)

PozvoNI<sub>(L+)H\*</sub> mne<sub>L-L%</sub>.

call.IMP              me

'Call me.'

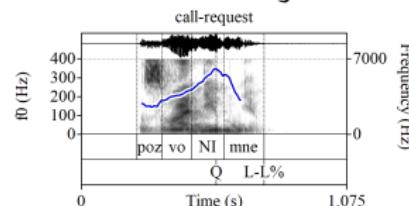


## (5) Q-peak suggestion: Sp invested in the outcome, but can't impose it, wants a reaction

PozvoNI<sub>Q</sub> mne<sub>L-L%</sub>?

call.IMP              me

≈ 'Call me, will you?'



## What is Q-Peak? II

### ► Q-peak in requests

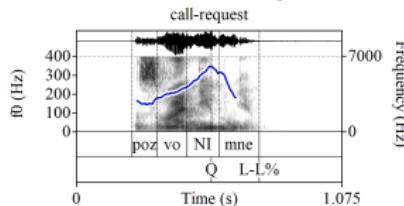
- Suggestion  $\neq$  weak/tentative commitment (unlike rising imperatives in English and Bulgarian; Rudin and Rudin 2022)
- incompatible with acquiescence uses (Condoravdi et al. 2019; von Fintel and latridou 2017)

(6) A: 'How can I reach you?'

B: Da mne bez raznicy...  
ADVERS me w/out difference.GEN.SG  
'I don't care'

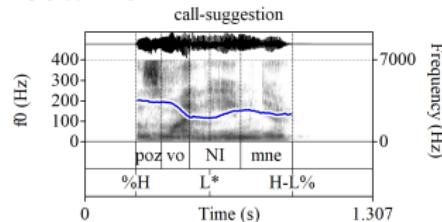
(7) B'. # Q-peak [= (5)]

PozvoNI<sub>Q</sub> mne<sub>L-L%</sub>? 🔊  
call.IMP me  
≈ 'Call me, will you?'



B''. ✓Mid-plateau

PozvoNI<sub>L\*</sub> mne<sub>H-L%</sub> ... 🔊  
call.IMP me  
'Call me ...'



## What is Q-Peak? III

### ► Looming issues

- ▶ Is Q-peak limited to interrogative clauses?
- ▶ If not prosodically, how do we identify questions? (some tentative suggestions in the appendix)
- ▶ Can Q-peak requests can be analyzed as interrogatives? (cf. Francez 2015, 2017 on suggesterogatives in English and Hebrew)
- ▶ We leave this possibility open without arguing for it explicitly

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## Li-Qs vs. Decl-Qs: a comparison

- ▶ Our two strategies: not derived from each other
  - ▶  $Li \neq$  interrogative complementizer
  - ▶  $Decl\text{-}Qs \neq$  interrogative clauses without *li*
- ▶ This opens up interesting possibilities for comparison
- ▶ Our main focus: level of conversational dynamics

	<i>Li</i> -Qs	<i>Decl</i> -Qs
True out-of-the blue Qs	✓	☺
Embedded polar Qs	✓	☺
Biased Qs	☺	✓
Conjectural Qs	✓	☺

## True out of the blue Qs

- ▶ While we defined both strategies as neutral, there is a marked contrast between Li-Qs and Decl-Qs
- (8) *Approaching a complete stranger on the street.*
  - a. ✓Znaete li vy, kak projti k biblioteke? [Li-Q]  
know.2PL.PRES LI you how go.INF to library.DAT  
'Do you (formal) know how to get to the library?'
  - b. #Vy znaete, kak projti k biblioteke? [Decl-Q]  
you know2PL.PRES how go.INF to library.DAT  
(negation vastly improves (8b); we leave it aside)
- ▶ Our explanation
  - ▶ Q-peak: conventionally encodes Sp's active desire for reaction
  - ▶ Questions across the board: don't have it
  - ▶ This accounts for the perceived politeness of Li-Qs (cf. Schwabe 2004)
- ▶ NB: Li-Qs ≠ non-intrusive questions that don't expect an answer (cf. Farkas 2022 on Romanian *oare*)

## Embedded polar Qs I

- ▶ Li-Qs: only strategy for embedded polar Qs (setting alternative questions aside; cf. Biezma and Rawlins 2012)
  - ▶ Decl-Qs: banned in embedded Qs (embedding environment does not matter: true for rogative and responsive predicates alike)
- (9) Masha sprashivaet / somnevaetsia, ...  
masha.NOM ask.3SG.PRS / doubt.3SG.PRS  
'Masha asks / doubts ...'
- a. govorite li vy po-russki. [li-Q]  
speak.2PL.PRS LI you.NOM Russian  
'...whether you (formal) speak Russian'.
  - b. \*vy govorite po-russki. [\*Decl-Q]  
you.NOM speak.2PL.PRS Russian

## Embedded polar Qs II

- ▶ Well-known contrast: intonation-only Qs constitute a root phenomenon across languages (Armenian, Catalan, Georgian, Italian ...)
- ▶ Common explanations:
  - ▶ Syntactic size (Bhatt and Dayal 2020), much like the accounts of the Subject-Aux inversion in Germanic (McCloskey 2006)
  - ▶ Non-embeddability of certain tunes (Ladd 1981 and later work; though see Nguyen 2023 on embedded rising declaratives)
- ▶ Our explanation:
  - ▶ Decl-Qs: require certain conversational moves
  - ▶ Those moves: not available for embedded clauses

## Biased Qs I

- ▶ Question bias: Sp's pre-conception about the answer (see overviews in Domaneschi et al. 2017; Goodhue 2022; Romero 2020)
- ▶ Russian: host of particles that convey various flavors of bias (see Korotkova in prep for an overview; Korotkova 2023 on *razve*)
- ▶ Li-Qs: incompatible with any of those particles

(10) Confirmation Qs: Sp's expectation that prejacent holds

- Vy (zhe/ved') ran'she (zhe/ved') byvali [Decl-Q]  
you ZHE/VED' earlier ZHE/VED' be.2PL.PST  
v Rime?  
in Rome.PREP  
≈'You've been to Rome before, right? (I think so and want to double-check.)'
- #Byvali li vy (#zhe/ved') ran'she [Li-Q]  
be.2PL.PST LI you (#ZHE/VED') earlier  
(#zhe/ved') v Rime?  
(#ZHE/VED') in Rome.PREP

## Biased Qs II

- ▶ Biased Qs:
  - ▶ often aim at solving an epistemic conflict (see detailed discussion in Korotkova 2023)
  - ▶ therefore natural with strategies that require a reaction
- ▶ NB: *li* does not encode anti-bias (cf. Gyuris 2017 on Hungarian *-e*), as it is compatible with bias scenarios—but not particles—in embedded Qs (we thank Donka Farkas for this pointer)

## Conjectural Qs

- ▶ Conjectural Qs: self-addressed inquiries and strategies for thinking aloud (Eckardt 2020)
- ▶ Only Li-Qs are acceptable

(11) *Piglet, listening to Christopher Robin and Pooh's discussion of the Heffalump and wondering about its general nature and habits.*

- a. Idiot li slonopotam na svist? [Li-Q]  
come.3SG.PRS LI heffalump.NOM.SG at whistle.ACC.SG  
'Does the heffalump come when you whistle?'
- b. #Slonopotam idiot na svist? [Decl-Q]  
heffalump.NOM.SG come.3SG.PRS at whistle.ACC.SG

- ▶ Our explanation:
  - ▶ Decl-Qs require a move
  - ▶ Conjectural Qs decidedly don't

# Roadmap

- ① Setting the stage
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# Outlook

- ▶ Central claim
  - ▶ Q-peak: conventionally encodes pressure to react
- ▶ Decl-Qs
  - ▶ Convey pressure to respond
  - ▶ Much better in scenarios with a non-trivial higher QUD present (cf. English *What about?*; Bledin and Rawlins 2021)
  - ▶ ≠ Extreme ignorance Qs (such as German *bloss*-Qs; Eckardt and Yu 2020), as they are compatible with epistemic bias
- ▶ *Li*-Qs
  - ▶ Simply present two alternatives
  - ▶ A true neutral Q

# Thank you!

And stay tuned for more.

## Appendix: *Wh*-questions I

- ▶ *Li*-Qs can be freely coordinated with *wh*-questions, but Decl-Qs sound somewhat degraded in such contexts:

- (12) a. S kem ty razgovarival, i mozhno li im  
with who.DAT you talk.PST and can.PRED LI they.DAT  
doveriat'?  
trust.INF  
'Who did you talk to and can one trust them?'
- b. ?S kem ty razgovarival, i {im mozhno  
with who.DAT you talk.PST and {they.DAT can.PRED  
doveriat' / mozhno im doveriat'}?  
trust.INF / can.PRED they.DAT trust.INF}

- ▶ *Wh*-questions don't (and can't) have the Q-Peak; the fronted *wh*-item bears prominence similar to ordinary focus marking, same as *li*-Qs (see Hengeveld et al. 2023 for some discussion)

## Appendix: *Wh*-questions II

- ▶ Our take:
  - ▶ Wh-questions thus lack the “please react” component
  - ▶ In the absence of a competitor with a “please react” component, the pragmatic effects of this lack are typically weaker in wh-questions than in *li*-Qs (which compete with Decl-Qs)
  - ▶ But it’s a bit weird to coordinate two moves within the same line of inquiry, where in the first one you don’t explicitly ask for a reaction, but in the second one you do—hence the ? in (12b)

## Appendix: Focus prominence I

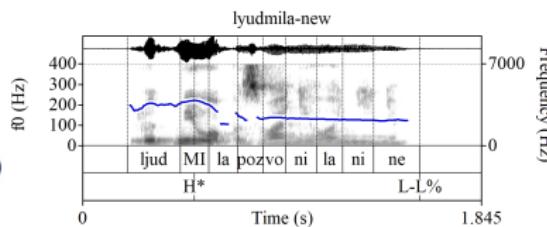
(13) New info focus on the subject

A: ✓'Who called Nina?'

A': # 'What happened?'

B: [LiudMI<sub>(L+)</sub>H\*la]<sub>F</sub>  
Liudmila

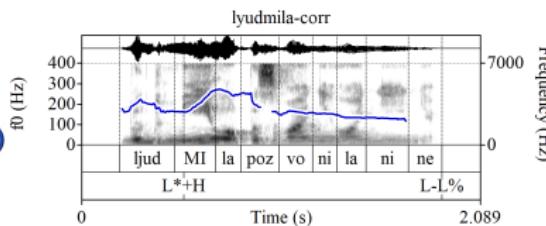
pozvonila Nine<sub>L-L%</sub>.  
call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT  
[Liudmila]<sub>F</sub> called Nina.  
≈ 'It is Liudmila who  
called Nina.'



## Appendix: Focus prominence II

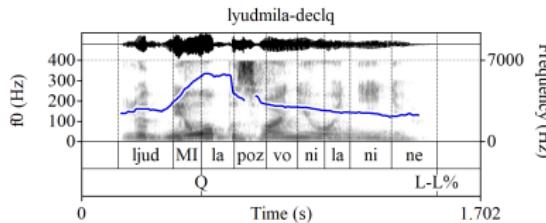
### (14) Corrective focus on the subject

- A: 'Marina called Nina.'
- B: [LiudMI<sub>L\*-H</sub>la]<sub>F</sub>  
Liudmila.NOM
- pozvonila Nine<sub>L-L%</sub>! 🔈  
call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT  
≈ 'It is [Lyudmila]<sub>F</sub> who  
called Nina!'



### (15) Decl-Q with focus on the subject

- A: 'Who called Nina?'
- B: [LiudMI<sub>Q</sub>la]<sub>F</sub>  
Liudmila.NOM
- pozvonila Nine<sub>L-L%</sub>?  
call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT  
🔈

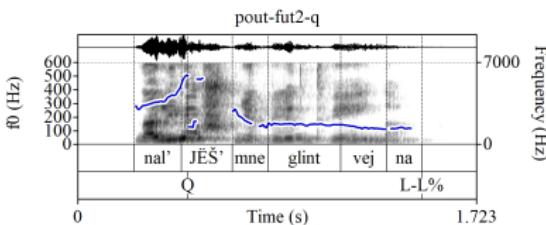


'Was it [Lyudmila]<sub>F</sub> who  
called Nina?'

## Appendix: More Q-Peak requests I

- ▶ 2p future requests (note the preference for a null subject—no such preference if there's negation):

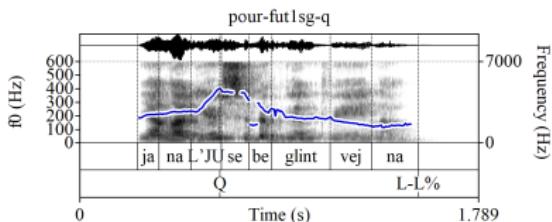
- (16) Naličh<sub>Q</sub> mne glintvejna<sub>L-L%</sub>?   
pour.2SG.PRES me mulled-wine.GEN.SG  
≈ 'Could you pour me mulled wine?'  
(Lit.: 'Will you pour me mulled wine?')



## Appendix: More Q-Peak requests II

- ▶ 1p future requests ("permission requests"; Sp assumes that permission will be granted):

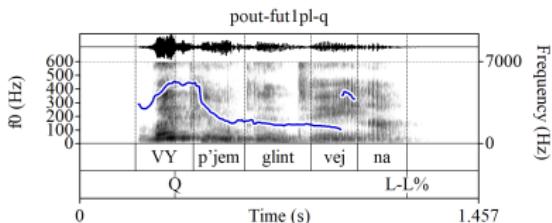
(17) Ja naL<sup>IU</sup><sub>Q</sub> sebe glintvejna<sub>L-L%</sub>?   
I pour.1SG.PRES myself mulled-wine.GEN.SG  
≈ 'I'll pour myself mulled wine[, OK]?'



## Appendix: More Q-Peak requests III

- ▶ **1PL requests** ("joint action" requests/suggestions; also possible with *davaj(te)* 'let's', and sometimes in the pseudo-past tense):

(18) VYop'em        glintvejna<sub>L-L%</sub>?        🔊  
drink.1PL.PRES mulled-wine.GEN.SG  
≈ '[Let's] drink mulled wine[, shall we]?'



## Appendix: Pronoun licensing I

- ▶ *Nibud'*-indefinites: banned in bare assertions without modal operators (Yanovich 2005), licensed in Li-Qs and Decl-Qs

- (19) declarative string assertion: only *to*-indefinite

Ty govorish na \***kakom-nibud'**/kakom-to  
you.NOM speak.2SG.PRS at any.M.DAT.SG/some.M.DAT.SG  
inostrannom jazyke.  
foreign.M.DAT.SG language.DAT.SG  
'You speak some foreign lanquage'.

- (20) Ty govorish na kakom-nibud' [Decl-Q]  
       you.NOM speak.2SG.PRS at any.M.DAT.SG  
       inostrannom jazyke?  
       foreign.M.DAT.SG language.DAT.SG  
       'Do you speak any foreign language?'

## Appendix: Pronoun licensing II

- ▶ Bare indefinites/quixentials: *wh*-pronoun when fronted, indefinite otherwise (see discussion in Hengeveld et al. 2023; Tretyakova 2009; Yanovich 2005)
  - ▶ banned in bare assertions w/out modals
  - ▶ licensed in polar, but not *wh*-questions
  - ▶ not licensed in standard imperatives (unlike *nibud'*-indefinites), but seem to be ok in Q-peak requests

(21) decl-string assertion

Mne \*kto/✓kto-to zvonil.  
me someone.NOM call.SG.M.PST  
'Someone called me.'

(22) Mne kto zvonil? [Decl-Q]  
me someone.NOM call.SG.M.PST  
'Did anyone call me?' (Tretyakova 2009:162)

## Appendix: Pronoun licensing III

- (23) Davaj sjezdim kuda. [Q-peak request]  
let go.1PL.PRS somewhere  
'Let's go somewhere.'

- (24) Pozvoni \*komu/✓komu-nibud'. [Imperative]  
call.IMP someone.DAT  
'Call someone.'

- ▶ More research needed on the exact semantics of those pronouns, but this may be tentative evidence for treating all clauses with Q-peak as interrogative

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