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?

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 and asks her about her general skills.*

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

       Govorite   li vy   po-russki?
       speak.2PL.PRS LI you.NOM Russian
       'Do you (formal) speak Russian?'   (constructed)

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

       Vy   govorite   po-russki?
       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)

Li-Qs
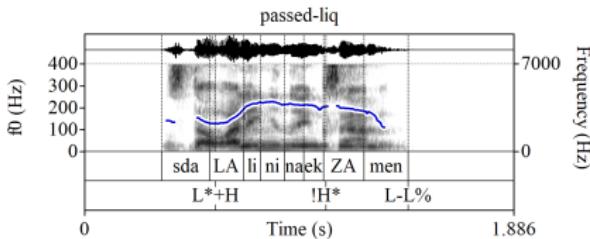
- *Li*: 2-position clitic (Franks and King 2000:349–357)
- Two types of uses
  1. Polar questions: *li*-clauses unmistakenly interrogative
  2. And some other suspiciously related environments (important in determining *li*'s syntatic status and overall semantics)
- Other Slavic languages: not always 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$_{L*+H}$ li   Nina
pass.SG.F.PST   li   Nina.NOM
ekZA$_{!H*}$men$_{L-L\%}$? 🔊
exam.ACC
'Did Nina pass the exam?'

passed-liq

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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')
- Synchronically
    - alternating disjunctions: *to li* X, *to li* Y and X *li*, Y *li*
    - modal advebials: *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

Decl-Qs

- Declarative strings characterized by Q-peak
- Q-peak
  - special prosody of polar questions
  - $\neq$ 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)
- $\neq$ English-type rising declaratives
- $\neq$ Questions w/out *li*
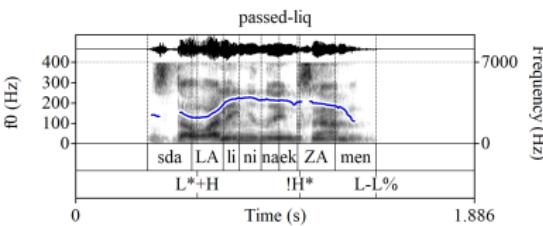
Decl-Qs: basics I

- ▶ 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)]

        SdaLA$_{L^*+H}$ li Nina
        pass.SG.F.PST li Nina.NOM

        ekZA$_{!H^*}$men$_{L-L\%}$? 🔊
        exam.ACC
        'Did Nina pass the exam?'

passed-liq
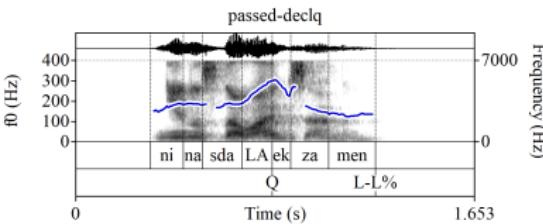
    b. **Decl-Q:**

        Nina   sdaLA$_Q$
        Nina.NOM pass.SG.F.PST

        ekzamen$_{L-L\%}$? 🔊
        exam.ACC.SG
        'Did Nina pass the exam?'

passed-declq

Decl-Qs: basics II

Decl-Qs $\neq$ 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
  - ▶ $\neq$ prosody of canonical imperatives
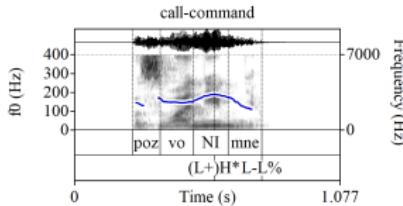
(4) **Standard imperative**
(functional heterogeneous; cf. Kaufmann 2012; Schmerling 1982)

PozvoNI$_{(L+)H^*}$ mne$_{L-L\%}$. 🔊
call.IMP   me
'Call me.'
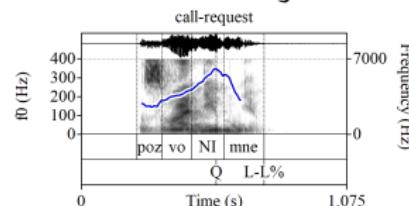
(5) **Q-peak suggestion**: Sp invested in the outcome, but can't impose it, wants a reaction

PozvoNI$_Q$ mne$_{L-L\%}$? 🔊
call.IMP   me
$\approx$ 'Call me, will you?'

What is Q-Peak? II

▶ Q-peak in requests
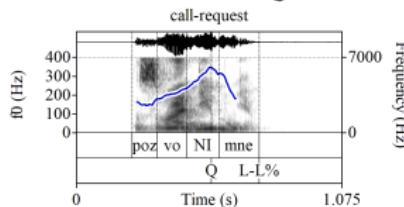
    ▶ Suggestion $\neq$ weak/tentative commitment (unlike rising imperatives in English and Bulgarian; Rudin and Rudin 2022)

    ▶ incompatible with indifference and acquiescence uses (Condoravdi et al. 2019; von Fintel and Iatridou 2017)

(6) A: 'How can I reach you?'
      B: Da   mne bez   raznicy…
           ADVERS me   w/out difference.GEN.SG
           'I don't care'
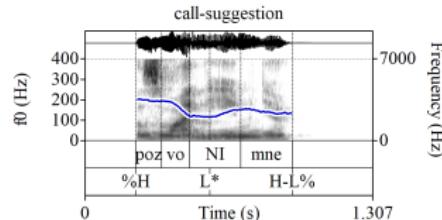
(7) B'. # Q-peak [=(5)]
        PozvoNI$_Q$ mne$_{L\text{-}L\%}$? 🔊
        call.IMP   me
        $\approx$ 'Call me, will you?'

        B''. ✓Mid-plateau
            PozvoNI$_{L*}$ mne$_{H\text{-}L\%}$ … 🔊
            call.IMP   me
            'Call me …'

call-request

call-suggestion

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

Li-Qs vs. Decl-Qs: a comparison

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

	Li-Qs	*Decl*-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 $\neq$ 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

    a. 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.)'

    b. #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

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)
    - $\neq$ 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)

(13) New info focus on the subject

    A: ✓'Who called Nina?'

    A': # 'What happened?'

    B: [LiudMI$_{(L+)H*}$la]$_F$
       Liudmila
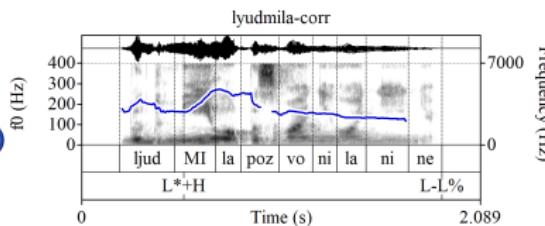
       pozvonila   Nine$_{L-L\%}$. 🔊
       call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT
       '[Liudmila]$_F$ called Nina.'
       ≈ 'It is Liudmila who
       called Nina'.

Appendix: Focus prominence II

(14) Corrective focus on the subject

    A: 'Marina called Nina.'

    B: [LiudMI$_{L^*+H}$la]$_F$
       Liudmila.NOM

       pozvonila   Nine$_{L-L\%}$!
       call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT
       ≈ 'It is [Lyudmila]$_F$ who
       called Nina!'

(15) Decl–Q with focus on the subject

    A:. 'Who called Nina?'

    B:. [LiudMI$_Q$la]$_F$
       Liudmila.NOM

       pozvonila   Nine$_{L-L\%}$?
       call.SG.F.PST Nina.DAT

       'Was it [Liudmila]$_F$ who
       called Nina?'

▶ **2p future requests** (note the preference for a null subject—no such preference if there's negation):
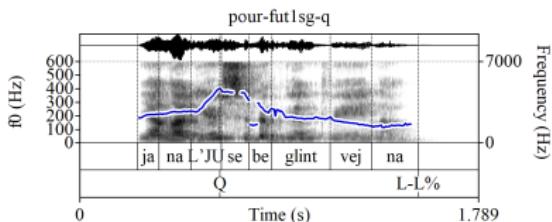
(16) NaliËsh_Q   mne glintvejna_{L–L%}?   🔊
      pour.2SG.PRES   me   mulled-wine.GEN.SG
      ≈ 'Could you pour me mulled wine?'
      (Lit.: 'Will you pour me mulled wine?')

Appendix: More Q-Peak requests II

▶ **1p future requests** ("permission requests"; Sp assumes that permission will be granted):
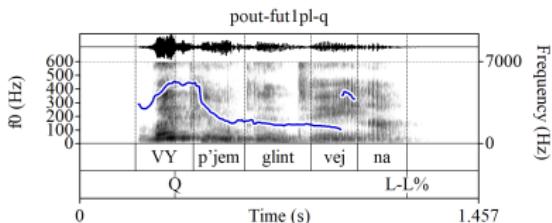
(17)   Ja   naLIU$_Q$ sebe   glintvejna$_{L-L\%}$?   🔊
       I   pour.1SG.PRES myself mulled–wine.GEN.SG
       ≈ 'I'll pour myself mulled wine[, OK]?'

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) VY_Q p'em   glintvejna_L-L%? 🔊
    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 language'.

(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/quexistentials: *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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