

Interrogative islands in Russian

FASL 35, UCSC

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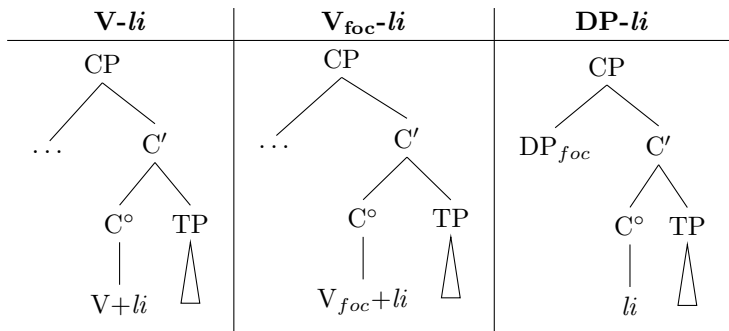
Yes-no questions in Russian

- Involve an enclitic *li*, often analyzed as interrogative C (King 1994; Rudnitskaya 2000 a.o.)
- Involve fronting of a predicate or narrowly focused phrase.

- (1) a. ... *pročitala=li* Anja knigu. (V-*li*)
... read=LI Anya book
'... whether Anya read the book.'
- b. ... *knigu=li* pročitala Anja. (DP-*li*)
... book=LI read Anya
'... whether it was a book that Anya read.'

Available configurations

- Structurally (King 1994; Rudnitskaya 2000; Dyakonova 2009):
 - V-*li***: head movement
 - DP-*li***: phrasal movement
- Featurally (Rudnitskaya 2000):
 - V-*li*** or **V_{foc}-*li***: optionally involves focus/contrast
 - DP-*li***: obligatorily involves focus



Islandhood of Russian embedded yes/no questions

- (2) #Kogda ty uznaval [razdaval=*li* Vasja edu]?
when you wondered distributed=LI Vasya food.ACC
Int. 'What is the time x, such that you were
wondering whether Vasya was distributing food at the
time x.'

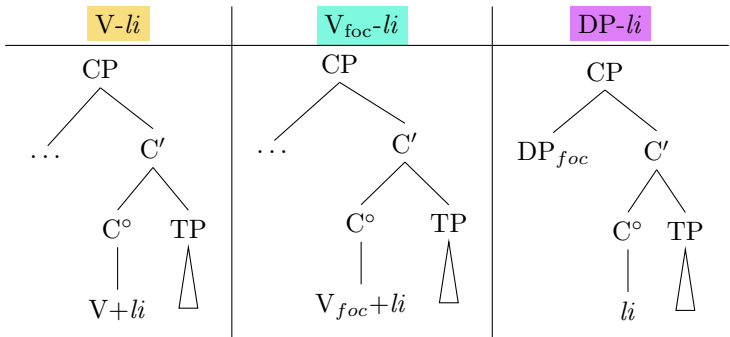
Locality theories and islandhood

- Domain-based:
 - Subjacency (Chomsky 1986) → PIC (Chomsky 2001)
 - Intermediate movement step blocked with filled specifier.
 - Thus, anticipates configuration asymmetries.
- Intervention-based:
 - RM (Rizzi 1990) → featural RM (Rizzi 2004)
 - Movement is blocked by interveners with features of the same class.
 - Relevant feature classes: [+Quant.]: wh, focus, Q; [-Quant.]: top.
 - Thus, anticipates movement type asymmetries.

An experimental study of these asymmetries was conducted.

Asymmetry predictions: domain-based

- Configurations: $V-li$ & $V_{foc}-li$ > $DP-li$
- Movement type: —



Asymmetry predictions: intervention-based

- Feature overlap is relevant for intervention (calculated over feature classes).
- Disjunction = no intervention, identity = intervention, inclusion = intermediate.
- Villata, Rizzi, and Franck (2016): this corresponds to graded acceptability.

	Top.[top]	Rel.[Op(=Q); top] ¹	Wh-mvt.[wh]
V- <i>li</i> [Q]	disj.	inclusion	id.
V _{foc} - <i>li</i> [Q, foc]	disj.	inclusion	id.
DP- <i>li</i> [Q, foc]	disj.	inclusion	id.

- Configurations: —
- Movement type: top > rel > wh

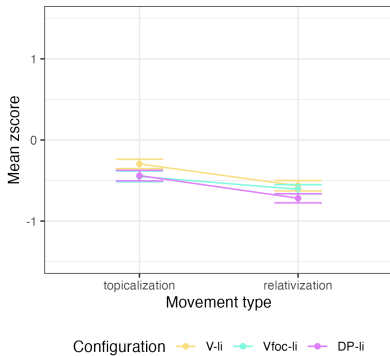
¹Abels (2012)

- Exploring configuration and movement type asymmetries thru 2 experiments.
- Extraction out of *li*-clauses.
- Audio stimuli, 1-7 Likert scale acceptability judgment task, online survey.
- Factors: *li*-configuration and movement type (mover – DO).
- I: top and rel (34 ptcps); II: top and wh (33 ptcps).

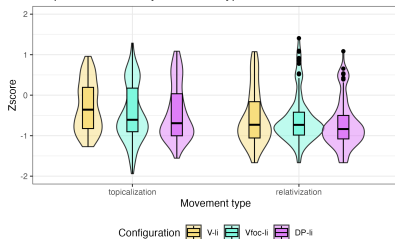
- (3) a. Kuricu=to ja interesovalas' [zapekla=li Dina].
 chicken=TOP I wondered roasted=LI Dina
 'As for chicken, I wondered whether Dina roasted it.'
- b. Kuricu=to ja interesovalas' [ZAPEKLA=li Dina].
 chicken=TOP I wondered roasted=LI Dina
 'As for chicken, I wondered whether Dina ROASTED it.'
- c. Kuricu=to ja interesovalas' [Dina=li zapekla].
 chicken=TOP I wondered Dina=LI roasted
 'As for chicken, I wondered whether it was Dina who
 roasted it.'

Experiment I: results

Interaction plot by movement type



Boxplots of zscores by movement type

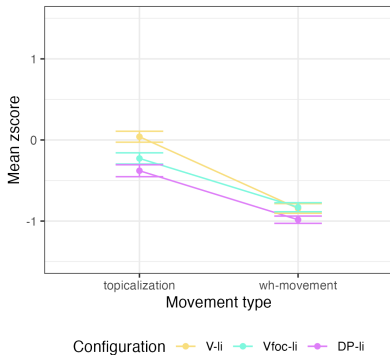


Experiment I: analysis

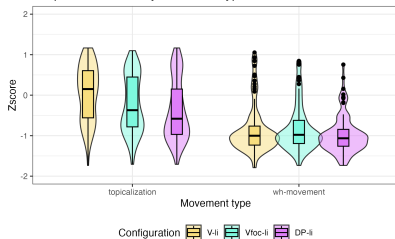
- Filler results as predicted.
- LMMs (R, package ‘ordinal’, Christensen 2018):
 - fixed effects: configuration, movement type, interaction
 - random effects: subject (slopes, intercepts), item (intercepts)
 - outcome – zscores
- By elimination of non-significant terms (using likelihood ratio tests for model comparison), the best-fit model was found to be one including movement type as a fixed effect ($p \ll 0.001$) and participant and item as random effects ($p \ll 0.001$). Neither the interaction of movement type and *li*-configuration ($p > 0.5$), nor *li*-configuration itself ($p > 0.5$) proved significant.

Experiment II: results

Interaction plot by movement type



Boxplots of zscores by movement type

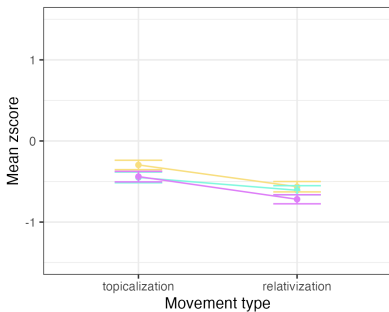


Experiment II: analysis

- Filler results as predicted.
- LMMs (R, package ‘ordinal’, Christensen 2018):
 - fixed effects: configuration, movement type, interaction
 - random effects: subject (slopes, intercepts), item (intercepts)
 - outcome – zscores
- By elimination of non-significant terms (using likelihood ratio tests for model comparison), the best-fit model was found to be one including movement type ($p \ll 0.001$) as a fixed effect and participant and item as random effects ($p \ll 0.001$). The interaction of movement type and *li*-configuration ($p > 0.1$), and *li*-configuration ($p > 0.01$) did not show significance.

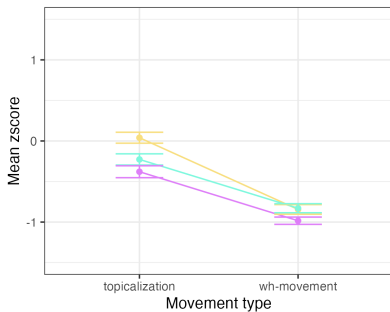
- *li*-configuration didn't prove significant.
- Movement type proved significant in both experiments: top > rel and top > wh.

Interaction plot by movement type



Configuration — V-li — Vfoc-li — DP-li

Interaction plot by movement type



Configuration — V-li — Vfoc-li — DP-li

- A study with context run: no change.
- Configuration type: domain-based predictions could not be confirmed.
- Movement type: fRM predictions were confirmed
 - Prediction was: top > rel > wh
 - Results: top > rel and top > wh. (No statistics, but suggestive that rel > wh)
 - Confounds: top shorter than rel, problems telling whether $V_{\text{foc-}li}$ is recognized.
- In line with ongoing efforts to reduce domain-based locality to intervention-based Halpert and Zeijlstra (2024) and Bailyn (2025).

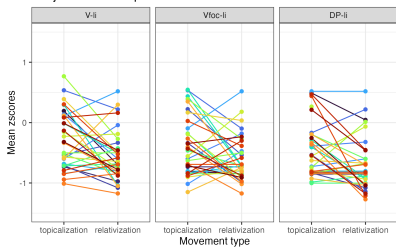
- Experimental study: factorial design.
- Length confound balanced, $V_{\text{foc-}li}$ condition eliminated.
- Test the acceptability of top and rel.

Thank you for your attention!

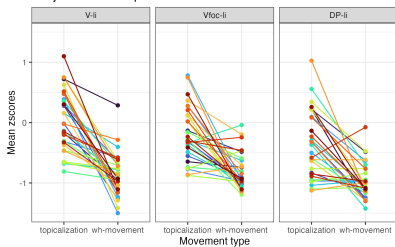
- Both experiments: 3x2
- Configuration factor: V-li, V_{foc}-li, DP-li
- Movement type factor: Contrastive topicalization and relativization (I); Relativization and wh-movement (II)
- 10 lexicalizations for each condition created, 2x3x10=60 target items
- 20 fillers (acceptable & unacceptable)
- 3 lists, 20 fillers + 10 targets each, f-f-t-f-f-t...
- 34 participants in I, 33 in II

Appendix: Variability

Subject means: experiment I

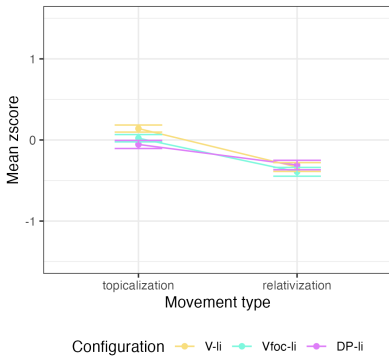


Subject means: experiment I

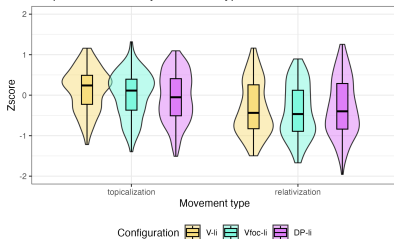


Appendix: context study

Interaction plot by movement type



Boxplots of zscores by movement type



Appendix: relativization and topicalization

(4) a. Kuricu=to ja interesoalas' [zapekla=li Dina].
chicken=TOP I wondered roasted=LI Dina
'As for chicken, I wondered whether Dina roasted it.'

b. Ja našla tu kuricu, [kotoruju ty
I found that chicken.ACC which.ACC you
interesoalas' [zapekla=li Dina]].
wondered roasted=LI Dina
'I found the chicken, which you wondered, whether
Dina roasted it.'



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