Two types of verb fronting in Russian

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Introduction: Verb fronting with doubling (VF) is a common phenomenon cross-linguistically (Cable, 2004, Kandybowicz, 2007, a.o., Landau, 2006). Russian has two types of VF: in the first one the fronted verb is an infinitive (uninflected verb fronting, UVF) while in the second one the fronted verb is fully inflected (inflected verb fronting, IVF):

(1) Pit' (- to) on p'ët, no v meru. [UVF]
drink.IPFV.INF TOP he drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG but in measure

(2) P'ët *(-to) on p'ët, no v meru. [IVF]
drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG TOP he drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG but in measure
'Drink he does, but moderately.'

I present novel empirical data on the semantics of the two types of VF in Russian that suggest that in UVF the fronted constituent is predicative while in IVF it is propositional. I propose a syntactic analysis under which the fronted constituent is a VP in UVF and a *v*P in IVF; both morphological and semantic facts fall out naturally from that assumption. My analysis thus fares better in accounting for the Russian data than the one in (Abels, 2001), which doesn't deal with IVF at all, and the one in (Aboh and Dyakonova, 2009), which doesn't capture the semantic differences between UVF and IVF.

Semantics of VF: In both UVF and IVF the fronted constituent is a topic and both require a contrastive continuation; however, the two differ with respect to the contexts in which they can appear. UVF can be used, among other things, in response to unbiased, information-seeking polar questions while IVF cannot:

(3) A: Rasskaži mne pro Ivana. On p'ët?
tell.IMP.SG me about Ivan he drink.IPVF.PRS.3SG?
'Tell me about Ivan. Does he drink?'

B: Pit'- / # p'ët to on p'ët, no v meru.[1]
drink.IPFV.INF drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG TOP he drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG but in measure

IVF is typically used in response to assertions (and possibly biased, confirmation-seeking questions); UVF is also good in such contexts:

(4) A: My ne možem vzjat' Ivana na rabotu. On ved' p'ët!
we NEG can take Ivan on work he EMPH drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG!
'We cannot hire Ivan. He drinks! (≈ I am reminding you that he drinks.)'

B: Pit'- / p'ët to on p'ët, no delo znaet.
drink.IPFV.INF drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG TOP he drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG but trade.ACC knows

I argue that while both constructions require a discourse antecedent, UVF picks up predicates while IVF picks up propositions. Thus, in UVF the fronted constituent is semantically a predicate, e.g., the (ordinary) semantic value of the fronted constituent in the UVF examples above is $\lambda x.\textbf{\textit{drink}}(x)$. In IVF the fronted constituent is a proposition, e.g., the (ordinary) semantic value of the fronted constituent in the IVF example in (4) is ***drink(he)***. Informally, B's UVF response in (3) can be paraphrased as 'As for drinking, John does that, but moderately', while her IVF response in (4) can be paraphrased as 'As for the fact that John drinks, it is indeed true, but he knows his trade (…so his drinking is not important)'.

Note that IVF has to pick up a proposition from the common ground (or at least the speaker using IVF is acting as if it is in the common ground) and can only confirm its status (adding that it is irrelevant or unimportant in view of the fact brought up in the continuation). In unbiased polar questions, like (3), there is no suitable antecedent proposition (the sentence radical of the question is trivially not in the common ground, otherwise there would be no reason to ask the question in the first place), so IVF is not licensed. A salient predicate antecedent is present both in (3) and (4), thus, UVF is licensed in both cases.

The claim above is further corroborated by the fact that in UVF the focused constituent can be any one that can plausibly participate in constructing a set of alternatives while in IVF it can only be the lower occurrence of the verb:

[1] There is some variation across Russian speakers with respect to the acceptability of IVF, especially, in the presence of a UVF alternative. Thus, the generalizations I report here hold for speakers who accept IVF in the first place.

(5) A: A kak vy spali…?
and how you.PL sleep.PAST.PL
'And how did you sleep?'
B: Spat'- / * spal- to ja spal **horošo**…
sleep.IPFV.INF sleep.PAST.M.SG TOP I sleep.PAST.M.SG **well**
'As for sleeping / As for the fact that I slept, I slept well.' (A. Tolstoy, 'Nikita's Childhood')

I assume that in Russian the inflected verb is the locus of propositionality, and it is by focusing the inflected verb that one confirms the proposition; no other element can be focused in IVF, because there can be no new information within the IVF construction itself other than the confirmation part.

Additionally, in UVF it is possible to have sentential negation on the lower copy of the verb without having it on the higher one, but in IVF it is not:

(6) Pit'- / * p'ët to on ne p'ët, no…
drink.IPFV.INF drink.IPVF.PRS.3SG TOP he NEG drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG but
'As for drinking / As for the fact that he drinks, he doesn't drink, but…'

This follows from the assumption that in IVF the fronted constituent is a proposition that the speaker assumes to be in the common ground; thus, by using IVF in (6) the speaker is contradicting herself.

Syntax of VF: My syntactic analysis of VF in Russian operates under the following general assumptions: (i) the Copy theory of movement (Chomsky, 1995); (ii) word formation is syntactic (e.g. Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1993)); (iii) Russian verbs do not move to T, but they undergo short movement to *v* (Bailyn, 1995), and it is only in *v*, which is a phase head and thus accessible to agree with T, that verbs get tense and *φ*-feature morphology; (iv) Russian verbs acquire all aspectual morphology within VP (that is a simplification; I do not reject the idea of multiple levels of aspectual composition in Russian (Romanova, 2004, a.o.) as such, as long they are all contained within *v*P; if there are aspectual projections outside VP, then it will be the highest AspP that is fronted in UVF rather than a VP).

I propose that both UVF and IVF result from movement to Spec, TopP (one argument against a base generation analysis is obligatory aspectual identity of the two occurrences of the verb, which follows from the movement analysis, but needs additional explanation under the base generation one (Abels, 2001)), but in UVF it is a VP that is fronted while in IVF it is a *v*P; here are the structures of (1) and 0 respectively:

(7) [$_{CP}$ C [$_{TopP}$ [$_{VP}$ **drink.IPFV.INF**] [$_{Top'P}$ Top-***to*** [$_{TP}$ [$_{DP}$ **he**] [$_{T'P}$ T [$_{vP}$ [$_{DP}$ <~~he~~>]
[$_{v'P}$ *v*-**drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG** [$_{VP}$ <~~drink.IPFV~~>]]]]]]]]
(8) [$_{CP}$ C [$_{TopP}$ [$_{vP}$ <he> **drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG**] [$_{Top'P}$ Top-***to*** [$_{TP}$ [$_{DP}$ **he**] [$_{T'P}$ T [$_{vP}$ [$_{DP}$ <~~he~~>]
[$_{v'P}$ *v*-**drink.IPFV.PRS.3SG** [$_{VP}$ <~~drink.IPFV~~>]]]]]]]]

As a result, in both cases the higher copy of the verb has aspectual morphology, but it is only in IVF that it is fully inflected while in UVF it gets spelled out as an infinitive, which I assume to be the default verbal form inserted in the course of a repair operation (one cannot pronounce just a root with aspectual morphology on it). The higher copy of *v*P in IVF contains copies of all the arguments of the verb, including the Subject in Spec, *v*P, which are not pronounced at PF but get interpreted at LF. The fronted constituent in UVF, being a VP, does not contain the external argument. As for the internal argument in UVF, its surface position depends on its discourse status: it preferably scrambles to a middle-field position when it is old information (topic), but can occur in a sentence-final position if it is in focus. The higher copy of the VP typically does not contain a copy of the internal argument at PF, although there are naturally occurring counterexamples to that, and arguably, at least in some cases — for example, when the internal argument is in focus — it does not contain a copy of the internal argument at LF either (either that copy gets deleted at LF or the fronted constituent in those cases is even smaller than a VP).

Selected references: Abels. 2001. The Predicate Cleft Construction in Russian. In *FASL 9*, 1–19. Aboh, and Dyakonova. 2009. Predicate doubling and parallel chains. *Lingua* 119:1035–1065. Bailyn. 1995. Underlying phrase structure and 'short' verb movement in Russian. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 3(1):13–58. Cable. 2004. Predicate clefts and base-generation: Evidence from Yiddish and Brazilian Portuguese. *Ms., MIT*. Chomsky. 1995. *The minimalist program*. Halle, and Marantz. 1993. Distributed morphology and the pieces of inflection. In *The View from Building 20*, 111–176. Kandybowicz. 2007. On fusion and multiple copy spell-out. The case of verbal repetition. *The copy theory of movement*:119–150. Landau. 2006. Chain Resolution In Hebrew V(P)-fronting. *Syntax* 9:32–66. Romanova. 2004. Superlexical versus lexical prefixes. *Nordlyd* 32:255–278.