Two types of verb fronting in Russian

Masha Esipova (masha.esipova@nyu.edu) New York University

**QUESTION**
- Russian has two types of verb fronting with doubling (VF): when the fronted verb is an infinitive (uninflected verb fronting, UVF), and when it is fully inflected (inflected verb fronting, IVF):
  1. Pit’ (- to) on p’ët, no v meru. DrinK_{ppv.inf} TOP he drink_{ppv.prs.sg} but in measure ‘Drink he does, but modestly.’
  2. P’ët *(- to) on p’ët, no v meru. DrinK_{ppv.prs.sg} TOP he drink_{ppv.prs.sg} but in measure ‘As for the fact that he drinks, that’s indeed true, but he does so modestly.’
- What are the meaning differences b/n UVF and IVF, and how does the syntax/semantics mapping work in the two cases?

**DIFFERENCE 1: CONTEXTS**
- For UVF a predicative antecedent is enough; it can also be used in response to unbiased, information-seeking polar questions. IVF can only be used to confirm an antecedent assertion (and possibly in response to biased, confirmation-seeking questions):
  1. A: My ne možem vzjat’ Ivan na rabotu. On ved’ p’ët! we NEG can take Ivan on work he EMP drinks ‘We cannot hire Ivan. [I am reminding you that] he drinks!’
  2. B: Pit’ / # p’ju- to i ja p’ju, drink_{ppv.inf} / drink_{ppv.prs.sg} TOP and I drink_{ppv.prs.sg} čto s togo? what from that ‘And how did you sleep?’

**DIFFERENCE 2: NEGATION**
- When there’s negation on the lower copy of the verb, the higher copy can’t contain negation in UVF, but must contain one in IVF:
  1. A: Pit’ / * p’ët- to on ne p’ët, drink_{ppv.inf} / drink_{ppv.prs.sg} TOP he NEG drink_{ppv.prs.sg} no robotnik vsé ravno ploxoj, but worker still bad ‘Drink he doesn’t, but he’s still a bad worker.’
  2. B: Ne * p’ët- / p’ët- to on ne NEG drink_{ppv.inf} / drink_{ppv.prs.sg} TOP he NEG p’ët, no robotnik vsé ravno ploxoj, drink_{ppv.prs.sg} but worker still bad ‘As for the fact that he doesn’t drink, that’s indeed true, but he’s still a bad worker.’

**DIFFERENCE 3: FOCUS**
- In UVF the focused constituent lower in the clause doesn’t have to be the lower occurrence of the verb, but in IVF it does:
  1. A: A vy kak spali… and how you slept ‘As for sleeping, I slept well…’
  2. B: Spat’ / *-spal- to ja spal HOROŠO… sleep_{ppv.inf} / sleep_{past masc.sg} TOP I sleep_{past masc.sg} well ‘As for sleeping, I slept well…’ [corpus example]

**SYNTAX OF UVF AND IVF**
- Assumption: Russian verbs don’t move to T (Bailyn 1995), but to some intermediate position φ between the highest aspectual projection and T (or Neg when there is one).
- UVF
  - The largest AspP gets fronted; the verb has acquired all the aspectual, but not tense & φ-feature morphology.
  - If the fronted AspP contains copies of the verb’s arguments, they remain (unpronounced) and uninterpreted.

**SEMANTICS OF UVF AND IVF (INFORMAL)**
- VF constructions are Contrastive Topic + Focus (CT+Φ) constructions, in the sense of Büring 2003, evoking a pair-list question.
- Possible pair-list questions for UVF:
  - What predicate modified by what modifier returns T?
  - What predicate modified by what modifier returns T when a certain condition? E.g., with Ivan as the agent and the existential closure over events applied, λe. drink(e) → T, λe. smoke(e) → F…
  - What predicate modified by what modifier returns T when a certain condition? E.g., λe. sleep(e) → λe. well(e), λe. wake-up(e) → λe. with-effort(e)…
- IVF can only confirm that the antecedent speech act was justified, but then the contrastive continuation indicates that the truth of the asserted proposition is somehow irrelevant/unimportant. One way of thinking about it: Which assertions are justified and which are relevant/important?

**SELECTED REFERENCES**