

To *li* or not to *li*

Introduction Russian has two strategies for forming neutral matrix polar questions: (i) questions marked as such via prosody only (“**declarative string**” questions; **DSQs**), and (ii) questions formed via the *li* particle (***li*-questions, *li*-Qs**). Each strategy unmistakably marks polar questions: an assertion interpretation is not available, nor are *wh*-interrogatives licensed. One known difference between the two strategies is their embeddability. *Li* is obligatory in embedded polar questions regardless of the embedding environment (Korotkova 2023; Schwabe 2004). DSQs, as is common for “intonation-only” polar questions across languages (Bhatt & Dayal 2020), constitute a root phenomenon. (NB: *ili net* ‘or not’ alternative questions can be embedded without an extra *li* particle; we are setting aside the relationship between such questions and *li*-Qs.) Apart from that, *li*-Qs have been described as more formal and/or polite (Schwabe 2004), with no other differences noted between the two strategies. Our goal is to bring forth novel empirical contrasts between the two strategies and to discuss how these contrasts bear on the proper analysis thereof.

The two strategies (i) In **DSQs**, as in (1a), the surface string is the same as in assertions (with different word orders permitted based on information structure; Jasinskaja 2014). The questionhood is marked prosodically by an L+H* accent within the semantically focused constituent, typically on its last lexically stressed syllable, with a falling boundary contour. E.g., in (1a), the accent goes on the inflected verb, which is typically the locus of polarity in Russian. (Declarative strings can also have a non-neutral, bias-like interpretation when paired with a different prosodic contour; Esipova & Romero 2023.) (ii) ***Li*-Qs**, as in (1b), have received much more attention in the literature due to their interaction with focus. *Li* is a second-position clitic whose host, fronted to the left periphery of the sentence, is the semantically focused constituent (Franks & King 2000). *Li*’s status is debated. While it has been sometimes analyzed as a complementizer (King 1994; Schwabe 2004), there are both syntactic (Rudnitskaya 2000) and semantic (Korotkova 2023) arguments against this view, and we will treat it as a left-periphery focus-marking particle (cf. Kamali & Krifka 2020 on Turkish). (NB: uses of *li* outside of interrogatives suggest it has a quantifier particle profile; Szabolcsi 2015.) In *li*-Qs, the fronted constituent also gets an L+H* accent, and the boundary contour is also falling (there is also typically another prominence elsewhere in the sentence; cf. Yanko 2019).

(1) *Context: I know that Nina was supposed to take an exam and I am interested in the outcome, though I don’t have any indication as to which way it went.*

- a. Nina sdaLA_{L+H*} ekzamen_{L-L%}? (DSQ)
Nina passed exam
- b. SdaLA_{L+H*} li Nina ekZA_{H*}men_{L-L%}? (*li*-Q)
passed LI Nina exam
‘Did Nina pass the exam?’

New contrasts Below we make four novel empirical observations that set the two strategies apart.
1. **Coordination.** *Li*-Qs can be freely coordinated with *wh*-questions, but DSQs sound somewhat degraded in such contexts:

- (2) a. S KEM ty razgoVARival, i MOŽno li im doverJAT’?
with whom you talked and can LI them trust
‘Who did you talk to and can one trust them?’
- b. ?S KEM ty razgoVARival, i {im MOŽno doverjat’ / MOŽno im doverjat’}?
with whom you talked and {them can trust / can them trust}

2. **Issue saliency.** *Li*-Qs are perfectly acceptable in truly out-of-the-blue scenarios (3a). DSQs, on the other hand, can be perceived as rude discourse-initially (3b) (note that adding clausal negation

to a DSQ would restore politeness—we are setting aside the effects of negation in both DSQs and *li*-Qs). They typically suggest that the issue *p?* has been raised before, or that at least there is an expectation that the addressee would recognize the issue as relevant.

(3) *Context: approaching a complete stranger on the street.*

- a. ZNAete li vy kak projti k biblioTEke?
know LI you how go to library
- b. ?Vy ZNAete kak projti k biblioteke?
you know how go to library
'Do you know how to get to the library?'

3. **Speaker's opinionatedness.** (1) shows that neither DSQs nor *li*-Qs semantically encode epistemic bias, as they both are compatible with the speaker having no prior opinion about the sentence radical. They differ, however, in their compatibility with the speaker's bias. In particular, only DSQs (4a), but not *li*-Qs (4b), can be used in conjunction with particles *že* and *ved'*, which—in polar questions—signal the speaker's positive epistemic bias and turn a neutral question into a confirmation-seeking one (the infelicity of (4b) is not due to syntactic or linear competition with *li*, as *že* and *ved'* are not limited to interrogative clauses and can occupy almost any surface position). Likewise, only DSQs are compatible with the particle *razve* that signals a special type of negative bias (Korotkova 2023).

- (4) a. Vy (že/ved') ran'se (že/ved') byVALi v Rime?
you (ŽE/VED') earlier (ŽE/VED') were in Rome
≈ 'You've been to Rome before, right? (The speaker believes so.)'
- b. ByVALi li vy (#ŽE/VED') ran'se (#ŽE/VED') v RIme?
were LI you (#ŽE/VED') earlier (#ŽE/VED') in Rome

4. **Requiring a move.** Finally, DSQs appear to more strongly require a discourse move from the addressee than *li*-Qs. Among other things, as shown in (5), DSQs are not as good as conjectural questions, where the speaker is wondering aloud as to possible answers to their question, without necessarily expecting the addressee to reply—or even without having an addressee (cf. Eckardt 2020). Even when seemingly used rhetorically, DSQs are used to encourage/discourage an action on the part of the addressee (Esipova & Romero 2023).

- (5) a. Xm, EST' li ŽIZN' na drugix plaNEtax? Bylo b neploxo uznat'...
hm is LI life on other planets was SUBJ not-bad know
'Hm, is there life on other planets [, I wonder]? Would be nice to know.'
- b. ??Xm, na drugix planetax EST' žizn'? Bylo b neploxo uznat'...
hm on other planets is life was SUBJ not-bad know

Discussion We take the novel contrasts in 1–4—in addition to the known differences in embeddability noted in the Introduction—as evidence that DSQs and *li*-Qs have a distinct compositional structure. More specifically, in view of points 3 and 4 above, we suggest that DSQs have additional structure that includes (i) a layer that can host information about the speaker's bias; (ii) and a layer that can host an operator demanding a move from the addressee (specifically in DSQs: 'Address the issue *p?*'). This extra structure then makes DSQs unembeddable, hampers coordination with *wh*-questions (which, in contrast to DSQs, can be used conjecturally, suggesting that, at a minimum, *wh*-questions don't have layer (ii)), and implies that the issue *p?* should be salient for the addressee.

References. Bhatt & Dayal. 2020. In *NLLT*. Eckardt. 2020. In *S&P*. Esipova & Romero. 2023. In *FASL* 32. Franks & King. 2000. *A Handbook of Slavic Clitics*. Jasinskaja. 2014. Information structure in Slavic. Kamali & Krifka. 2020. In *Theoretical Linguistics*. King. 1994. In *JoSL*. Korotkova. 2023. In *SuB* 27. Rudnitskaya. 2000. In *WCCFL* 18. Schwabe. 2004. The particle *li* and the left periphery of Slavic yes/no interrogatives. Szabolcsi. 2015. In *L&P*. Yanko. 2019. In *Dialog*.