

To Q or not to Q?

Background Rudin (2018) (*PhD*); Rudin & Rudin (2022) (*FASL29*) discuss a typological generalization that languages where *rising declaratives* (L* H-H%) comprise non-canonical yes/no questions (YNQs), like English and Bulgarian, also allow for *rising imperatives*, used as friendly requests or disinterested suggestions, as in (1), but languages where rising declaratives comprise regular YNQs, like Macedonian, don't.

- (1) a. You poured me wine_{L* H-H%}? (rising declarative as a non-canonical question)
 b. Pour me wine_{L* H-H%}? (rising imperative as a friendly request)
 c. A: What should I do while I'm waiting for you?
 B: I don't really care. Pour yourself wine_{L* H-H%}? (rising imperative as a disinterested suggestion)

This paper looks at Russian, further expanding the typology of how languages realize various discourse-oriented meanings across sentence types. While, like in Macedonian, regular Russian YNQs are formed via an “intonation-only” strategy, said intonation doesn't involve a rising tune, but what I call here the *Q-Peak*. I show that the Q-Peak can also be used in friendly, but invested requests similar to (1b)—but not in disinterested suggestions like (1c). I propose that the Q-Peak realizes an operator that asks the addressee to respond to an issue—appropriate in (some) questions and invested requests, but not in disinterested suggestions.

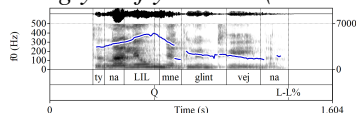
Q-Peak in questions In Russian, the default strategy of forming a neutral matrix YNQ is to have the same string one would have in a declarative sentence and to place a special prosodic peak, which I will call the *Q-Peak* and label as Q, on the locus of prosodic focus marking within the semantically focused constituent. The Q-Peak, illustrated in (2) for what Esipova & Romero (2023) (*Ms.*) call *polarity-seeking YNQs* (with semantic focus on polarity, whose prosodic locus in this case is the stressed syllable of the inflected verb), is articulatorily and perceptually distinct from focus marking in assertions (e.g., Meyer & Mleinek 2006, *JoP*).

- (2) *You were supposed to pour me mulled wine. I'm asking you if you have (no bias either way).*

Ty nalil_Q mne glintvejna_{L-L%}? ♣

you poured me mulled-wine

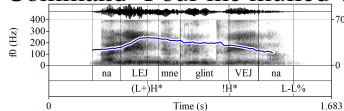
‘Have you poured me mulled wine [or not]?’



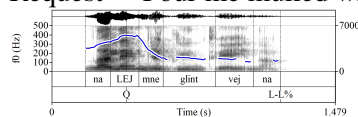
Q-Peak in requests I observe that the Q-Peak can be used in different sentence types to mark friendly, but invested requests. I illustrate two cases here. (i) Imperatives: (3a), with an (L+)H* on the verb, is by default interpreted as a command, but (3b), with a Q-Peak on the verb, is a friendly (but invested) request; (4) is a naturalistic example of a Q-Peak-marked friendly imperative request. (ii) FUT.1SG Q-Peak-marked declarative string sentences asking for permission in (5) (constructed) and (6) (naturalistic).

- (3) Nalej mne glintvejna
 pour.IMP me mulled-wine

a. Command ‘Pour me mulled wine!’ ♣



b. Request ≈ ‘Pour me mulled wine[, will you]?’ ♣



- (4) Nužno mnogo deneg. Pomogite nam_{L-L%}? ♣

need.ADJ much money help.IMP us

‘A lot of money is needed. Help us[, will you]?’ (MURCO)

- (5) Ja nalju_Q sebe glintvejna_{L-L%}? ♣

I pour.FUT.1SG myself mulled-wine

≈ ‘I’ll pour myself mulled wine[, OK]?’

- (6) Mam, ja voz’mu_Q kovrik_{L-L%}? ♣

Mom I take.FUT.1SG rug

≈ ‘Mom, I’ll take the rug[, OK]?’ (MURCO)

No Q-Peak in suggestions Rudin & Rudin (2022) already report some discrepancies between invested requests like (1b) vs. disinterested suggestions like (1c) in some Bulgarian speakers. The distinction between the two appears even sharper in Russian, as the Q-Peak cannot be used in such disinterested suggestions. Thus, in (10-i), the asserted indifference clashes with the speaker's investment in the outcome signalled by the Q-Peak. Note that this isn't an issue of where the Q-Peak goes, i.e., what the semantic focus is. Russian declarative string YNQs can have a sentence-level focus and, consequently, a sentence-level Q-Peak under

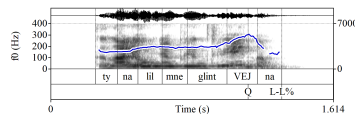
the reading that Esipova & Romero (2023) call *explanation-seeking*, as illustrated in (7). But a sentence-level Q-Peak still can't be used in disinterested suggestions like (10). In fact, imperatives with a sentence-level Q-Peak are odd (some other requests can have a sentence-level Q-Peak, but remain “invested”), as shown in (8). Russian does also have English-style rising declaratives, as in (9), albeit with a seemingly more restricted range of uses. (There is some overlap in uses between Q-Peak-marked explanation-seeking YNQs like (7) and rising declaratives like (9), but there are also some differences.) Imperatives produced with the same rising contour can to some extent be used as disinterested suggestions, although a more prototypical contour for them seems to be a final mid-plateau, as shown in (10-ii,iii) (cf. English “disinterested” lists in Beckman & Ayers 1997 (*ToBI*) and downstepped plateau imperatives in Jeong & Condoravdi 2017 (*BLS43*)).

(7) *We're having dinner. I stepped away and come back to a glass of mulled wine next to my plate.*

Ty nalil mne glintvej_Qna_{L-L%}? ♣

you poured me mulled-wine

‘[What’s the explanation for this?] Did you pour me mulled wine?’

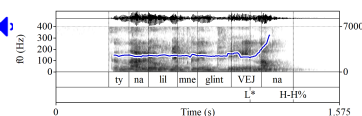


(8) #Nalej sebe glintvej_Qna_{L-L%}? ♣ (9) Ty nalil mne glintvej_{L*}na_{H-H%}? ♣

pour.IMP me mulled-wine

you poured me mulled-wine

‘You poured me mulled wine?’



(10) A: ‘What should I do while I’m waiting for you?’

B: Da mne bez raznicy. Nalej sebe

ADVERS me without difference pour.IMP self

glintvejna

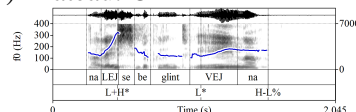
mulled-wine

‘I don’t care. Pour yourself mulled wine?’

(i) Q-Peak: # ♣

(ii) Rise: ? ♣

(iii) Plateau: OK ♣



What does the Q-Peak do? First, let’s list some of the meaning components a question can have: 1. Creating a partition; in YNQs: $\{p, \neg p\}$ (e.g., {‘you poured me mulled wine’, \neg ‘you poured me mulled wine’}). 2. Raising an issue wrt that partition (\approx indicating that this partition is relevant for the current discourse). 3. Asking the addressee to respond to this issue. 4. Focus, signaling how this issue fits into a larger discourse structure (e.g., (2) vs. (7) raise the same issue, but signal different parent QUDs). Components 1–2 seem to be core components of what we routinely call “questions”; 3 is optional in the sense that it can arise pragmatically without being syntactically represented and is obviously absent in, e.g., conjectural and self-addressed questions; 4 is not intrinsic to questions, but must be expressed in them. The observation made here that the Q-Peak can be used in friendly, but invested requests, but not in disinterested suggestions—combined with the converging observation in Esipova & Korotkova 2023 (*FDSL16*) that Russian Q-Peak-marked YNQs cannot be used as conjectural or self-addressed questions—suggest that the Q-Peak realizes a syntactically represented component 3, i.e., asking the addressee to respond to the issue raised by the constituent it combines with (the shape of the Q-Peak), and 4, i.e., focus (by virtue of being the main prominence of the utterance). For declarative string Q-Peak-marked YNQs, we have two possibilities then: (i) silent operator(s) contributing components 1 and 2, creating an issue-raising constituent the Q-Peak can combine with; (ii) coercion into an issue-raising interpretation that is not syntactically represented. For FUT.1SG (also FUT.2 and 1PL) Q-Peak-marked requests that have the same form as declarative string YNQs, we can adopt the same analysis, plus further pragmatic reasoning (cf. *Could you pass me the salt?* in English). For imperative Q-Peak-marked requests, a coercion-based analysis seems more reasonable; e.g., in (3b), we coerce an issue-raising interpretation wrt {‘you will pour me mulled wine’, \neg ‘you will pour me mulled wine’}, and the Q-Peak asks the addressee to respond to this issue, which is less imposing than a regular imperative. The clash in (10-i) then happens because turning our suggestion into an issue, whose resolution the speaker asks for, indicates that the speaker is not, in fact, indifferent to whether the addressee pursues their suggestion. In the talk, I would also have a discussion of the typological picture, omitted here due to limitations of space.