

To Q or not to Q?

Intro Rudin (2018); Rudin & Rudin (2022) 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. This paper looks at Russian, expanding the typology of how languages realize various discourse-oriented meanings across sentence types.

Q-Peak in questions While, like in Macedonian, regular Russian YNQs are formed via an “intonation-only” strategy, said intonation doesn't involve a rising tune, but 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) 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).

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).

No Q-Peak in suggestions Unlike the English-style rising tune, the Q-Peak can't be used in 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, thus, a sentence-level Q-Peak under the reading that Esipova & Romero (2023) call *explanation-seeking*: (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: (8). Russian does also have English-style rising declaratives, as in (9), albeit with a seemingly more restricted range of uses. 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: (10-ii,iii).

What does the Q-Peak do? A question can have the following meaning components: 1. Creating a partition; in YNQs: $\{p, \neg p\}$. 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 the larger discourse (e.g., (2) vs. (7) raise the same issue, but signal different parent QUDs). Components 1–2 are core components of what we routinely call “questions”; 3 is optional, i.e., it can arise pragmatically without being syntactically represented and is 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 that Russian Q-Peak-marked YNQs can't 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 being the main prominence of the utterance). For declarative string Q-Peak-marked YNQs, we have two options 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. For imperative Q-Peak-marked requests, a coercion-based analysis seems more reasonable; e.g., in (3b), we coerce an issue-raising interpretation wrt $\{\text{'you will pour me mulled wine'}, \neg\text{'you will pour me mulled wine'}\}$, 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) happens because turning our suggestion into an issue, whose resolution the speaker asks for, indicates that they are 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.

