

## Subject–Verb Inversion in Russian

Anna Erechko  
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### 1. Introduction

Russian has basic SVO word order, i.e. SVO sentences are unmarked and have wide contextual distribution. This is the order that usually occurs in the sentences uttered in 'out of the blue' contexts or as an answer to the question 'What happened?'

- (1) Petja razbil okno  
*Peter broke window*  
 'Peter broke a/the window'

SVO is also the only interpretation available in the cases when it is impossible to distinguish the two arguments of the verb (due to the syncretism of nominative and accusative forms in some nouns)

- (2) mat' uvidela doch'  
*mother saw daughter*  
 'Mother saw daughter'  
 ≠ 'Daughter saw mother'

However, Russian allows for the subject of both transitive and intransitive (unaccusative and unergative) verbs to appear postverbally, yielding (O)VS order:

- (3) a. okno razbil Petja  
*window broke Peter*  
 'Peter broke the window'  
 b. priexal Petja  
*arrived Peter*  
 'Peter arrived'  
 c. pozvonil Petja  
*called Peter*  
 'Peter called'

The purpose of this talk is to show how sentences with subject–verb inversion can be derived in a language like Russian, which does not have verb movement. I will argue that in such constructions the subject moves out of its thematic position to the specifier of focus projection, and the remnant vP movement follows.

### 2. Analysis of VS sentences

The standard analysis of subject–verb inversion nowadays assumes verb movement across the subject located either in the specifier of VP or in the specifier of some other projection outside the VP. For instance, Cardinaletti 2002, among others, argues that in Italian subject–final sentences the subject remains in its thematic position, i.e. SpecVP.

- (4) a. (Mi) ha chiamato un uomo  
 \*There called (me) a man  
 b. Ha comprato il giornale Gianni  
 \*There bought the newspaper John

The linearly postverbal position of the subject is due to verb movement in both (4a) and (4b); in addition, object movement across the subject is also assumed in the latter example.

- Problems:
  - (i) subject–final sentences have been considered the only evidence for verb movement in Russian
  - (ii) subject in its final position does not necessarily have the VP–internal interpretation

### 3. Absence of verb movement

In languages with verb movement lexical verb can precede negation, adverbs and floating quantifiers, while in languages without verb movement the verb follows all these elements:

- (5) a. \*John likes not Mary (from Pollock 1989)  
 b. Jean (n') aime pas Marie
- (6) a. \*John kisses often Mary  
 b. Jean embrasse souvent Marie  
 c. John often kisses Mary  
 d. \*Jean souvent embrasse Marie
- (7) a. \*My friends love all Mary  
 b. Mes amis aiment tous Marie  
 c. My friends all love Mary  
 d. \*Mes amis tous aiment Marie

#### 3.1 Low adverbs placement

In Russian even lower adverbs cannot appear between the verb and the complements, but must precede the verb:

- (8) a. Petja vdrebezgi razbil (?vdrebezgi) okno  
*Peter to smithereens broke (?to smithereens) window*  
 'Peter broke the window to smithereens'  
 b. zdes' možno deshevo kupit' (?deshevo) starye knigi  
*here possible cheap buy (?cheap) old books*  
 'One can buy old books cheap here'

Adverbs cannot intervene between the verb and the sentence final subject in the inversion contexts:

- (9) a. okno vdrebezgi razbil (??vdrebezgi) Petja  
*window to smithereens broke (??to smithereens) Peter*  
 'Peter broke the window to smithereens'  
 b. zdes' deshevo prodaet (??deshevo) starye knigi moj sosed  
*here cheap sells (??cheap) old books my neighbour*  
 'My neighbour sells old books cheap here'

### 3.2 Floating quantifiers

Floating quantifiers do not occur to the right of the lexical verb in Russian:

- (10) deti (vse) pročitali (\*vse) etu knigu  
*children (all) read (\*all) this book*  
 'The children all read this book'

### 3.3 Placement of arguments

Other arguments cannot follow the subject in subject–verb inversion sentences in Russian, i.e. Russian does not allow either VSO or even XVSO orders<sup>1</sup> that languages with verb movement and subject in its thematic position permit:

- (11) a. ehtise i Maria to spiti (Greek, from Alexiadou 1999)  
*built the–Mary–nom the–house–acc*  
 'Mary built the house'  
 b. kerdhise i Maria ton aghona  
*won the–Mary–nom the–race–acc*  
 'Mary won the race'
- (12) a. mne podaril etu knigu moj drug  
*me–dat gave this book–acc my friend–nom*  
 'My friend gave me this book'  
 b. \*mne podaril moj drug etu knigu  
*me–dat gave my friend–nom this book–acc*
- (13) a. \*vchera vstretil Petja direktora  
*yesterday met Peter–nom director–acc*  
 b. \*vchera pozvonil Petja direktoru  
*yesterday called Peter–nom director–dat*  
 c. \*vchera pogovoril Petja s direktorom  
*yesterday talked Peter–nom to director–instr*

Conclusion: the distribution of adverbs, arguments and floating quantifiers show that lexical verbs in Russian either do not move or move very locally (not further than to the *v* head). In the absence of verb movement the lack of contrast between unaccusative and transitive/unergative verbs with respect to the possible subject–verb inversion remains unexpected.

## 4. Properties of the postverbal subjects

Postverbal subjects in subject–verb inversion contexts in Russian do not show the same properties as VP–internal subjects in other languages.

- postverbal subject position in Russian is not restricted to weak quantifiers only, strong quantifiers are also allowed:

<sup>1</sup> The only contexts where VSO is allowed in Russian are contrastive verb topicalization and Narrative Inversion. I would assume that such sentences are derived from SVO via verb movement to the left peripheral Topic projection in the former case and to Force<sup>o</sup> with an empty operator occupying the specifier of ForceP in the latter case.

- (14) etu zadachu reshili vse studenty  
*this problem solved all students*  
 'All students solved this problem'

In Russian different forms can be used to distinguish between existential and partitive reading of weak quantifiers:

- (15) a. v parke bylo mnogo detej /\*mnogie deti  
*in park was many children*  
 'There were many children in the park'  
 b. \*mnogo detej/ mnogie deti byli v parke  
*many children were in park*  
 'Many children were in the park'
- (16) etu zadachu reshili mnogie studenty  
*this problem-acc solved many students-nom*  
 'Many students solved this problem'

- postverbal subject can be outside the scope of sentential operators:

- (17) nam ne pozvonili dva studenta  
*us neg called two students*  
 ='Two of the students didn't call us'  
 ≠'It is not the case that two students called us'

- subjects of individual level predicates can appear in the postverbal position in Russian whereas they never surface in the VP-internal subject position (Diesing 1992):

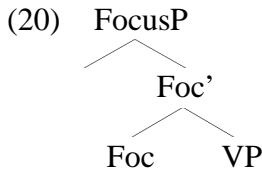
- (18) morozhenoe ljubjat deti  
*ice-cream-acc like children-nom*  
 'Children like ice-cream'

- sentences with the subject in final position are only appropriate in the contexts when subject is the only new information in the sentence, so the sentence in (19) is an answer to the question *Who broke the window?* but not to the questions *What happened?* or *What happened to the window?*

- (19) okno razbil Petja  
*window broke Peter*

### 5. Inversion as focalization

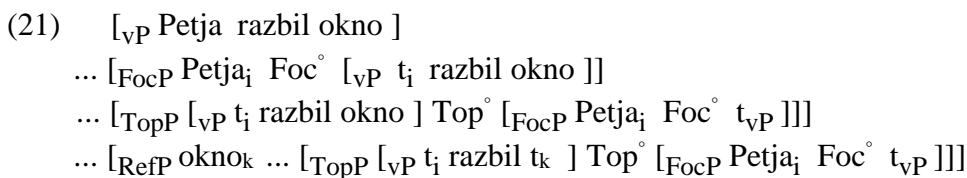
The alternative analysis that can account for the non-VP-internal properties of the inverted subjects was proposed in Belletti 1999/2001, where sentences with subject-verb inversion are taken to be instances of clause internal focalization. Belletti regards Focus as a syntactic feature heading a functional projection in the clause structure and creating a regular checking configuration. She assumes a clause internal Focus projection, in which overt DPs can be licensed, located immediately above VP:



In VS sentences the subject moves to the specifier of the FocusP and the verb moves higher up. The derivation of VOS sentences also involve movement of the subject to the specifier of FocusP followed by 'remnant topicalization' of the VP containing the trace of the subject to a clause internal Topic projection.

I would like to adopt Belletti's proposal and apply remnant movement analysis to Russian subject-final sentences. The derivation will include the following steps:

- (i) subject moves to Focus projection immediately dominating vP
- (ii) remnant vP moves higher (presumably to one of the topical positions in the IP field that host 'old' topics / scrambled constituents)
- (iii) some element moves to the specifier of RefP to fill the position of subject of predication



In verb-initial sentences (VS or VOS) the specifier position of RefP can be filled either by an empty locative argument  $\emptyset_{\text{LOC}}$  or by the remnant vP itself being subject of predication (cf. Raposo&Uriagereka1995). Inthetic expressions RefP is not projected at all (Kiss1996).

### 6. Identificational vs. information focus

Belletti 1999/2001 assumes that clause internal focus position, unlike the left peripheral one, is not associated with any special contrastive interpretation, and the postverbal subject that appears in its Spec is merely new information subject. However, Kiss 1998 argues that only identificational focus occupies the specifier of a functional projection, but information focus involves no syntactic reordering.

**Definition 1:** *Identificational focus* represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate actually holds.

**Definition 2:** *Information focus* is a part of the sentence that conveys new, nonpresupposed information marked by one or more pitch accents.

Information focus is present in every sentence, but not every sentence contains an identificational focus. According to Kiss, identificational focus differs from information focus in the following respects:

1. The identificational focus expresses exhaustive identification; information focus merely marks the nonpresupposed nature of the information it carries.

2. Certain types of constituents, universal quantifiers, *also*-phrases, and *even*-phrases, for example, cannot function as identificational foci; but the type of constituents that can function as information focus is not restricted.
3. The identificational focus does, the information focus does not, take scope.
4. The identificational focus is moved to the specifier of a functional projection; information focus, however, does not involve any movement.
5. The identificational focus is always coextensive with an XP available for operator movement, but information focus can be either smaller or larger.
6. The identificational focus can be iterated, but information focus can project.

Clause internal focus in Russian behaves with respect to some tests as information focus and with respect to the other tests as identificational focus, namely:

(a) it does not have exhaustive interpretation:

- (22) a. *etu zadachu reshili Petja i Dima => etu zadachu reshil Petja*  
*this problem solved Peter and Dima this problem solved Peter*  
 b. A.: *Etu zadachu reshil Petja*  
 B.: %*Net, Dima ee tozhe reshil*  
*no Dima it too solved*  
 %'*No, Dima solved it, too*'

(b) it does not show any distributional restrictions with regard to universal quantifiers or *even*-phrases:

- (23) a. *etu zadachu reshil kazhdyj*  
*this problem solved everybody*  
 'Everybody solved this problem'  
 b. *etu zadachu reshil dazhe Petja*  
*this problem solved even Peter*  
 'Even Peter solved this problem'

(c) it does not take scope over the material in the specifier of RefP, but it can take scope over the postverbal material:

- (24) a. *kazhduju zadachu reshil odin mal'chik*  
*every problem-acc solved one boy-nom*  
 ='Every problem was such that there was one boy who solved it'  
 b. *na ekzamene reshil odnu zadachu kazhdyj mal'chik*  
*at exam solved one problem-acc every boy-nom*  
 'At the exam every boy solved one problem'

(d) it cannot host a subconstituent:

- (25) \**etu zadachu mal'chik reshil umnyj*  
*this problem-acc boy-nom solved clever-nom*

(e) it does not project, but can be iterated (see example (26c) in section 7).

The examples above show that clause internal focus can be considered as information focus since it lacks exhaustive interpretation. The properties (d) and (e) that it shares with identificational focus probably follow if we assume that in Russian focus interpretation always arises as the result of movement to the specifier position of some focus projection, but the features [+exhaustive]/[+contrastive] are only associated with the left peripheral one, but not with the clause internal one.

### 7. Other constituents in the sentence–final position

Adverbs in sentence–final position are subject to the same contextual restrictions as sentence–final subjects. When more than one adverb appear in the sentence–final position, the order is inverted.

(26) a. Petja redko pozdno zvonit domoj  
*Peter rarely late calls home*  
 'Peter rarely calls home late'

b. *When does Peter call home?*

Petja zvonit domoj pozdno  
*Peter calls home late*

c. *How often does Peter call home late?*

Petja zvonit domoj pozdno redko  
*Peter calls home late rarely*

Cinque 1999 suggests that the occurrence of adverbs in the final position (post–complement 'space') is the result of the movement of everything that originally followed the adverb across it:

(27) a. A Natale, credo che avesse completamente perso la testa di già  
 At Christmas, I think he had completely lost his mind already  
 b. A Natale, credo che avesse di già [ completamente perso la testa ]  
 |—————|

The movement analysis allows to account for the following facts:

- everything preceding the adverbs in the post–complement 'space' is necessarily presupposed, adverbs being the only elements in focus;
- adverbs in the post–complement 'space' appear in the reverse order;
- adverbs in the post–complement 'space' take scope over the adverbs in the preverbal position:

(28) a. John [ knocked at the door intentionally ] twice  
 |—————|  
*two instances of intentional knocking*  
 b. John [ knocked at the door twice ] intentionally  
 |—————|  
*one intentional instance of knocking twice*

Under Cinque's analysis the structure for (26b) would be represented in (29):

(29) [<sub>RefP</sub> Petjak ... [<sub>TopP</sub> [ t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>k</sub> zvonit domoj ]<sub>vP</sub> Top° [<sub>FocP</sub> pozdno<sub>i</sub> Foc° t<sub>vP</sub> ]]]

## 8. Conclusion

In this talk I argued that the derivation of subject–verb inversion sentences in Russian consists of at least two steps: (i) movement of the subject to the specifier position of a clause internal focus projection located immediately above the vP, and (ii) the subsequent movement of the remnant vP across it. I also showed that the interpretation of postverbal subject suggests that clause internal focus is information and not identificational focus, despite the fact that it involves syntactic reordering.

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