NEGATED POLAR INTERROGATIVES IN RUSSIAN

Under scrutiny are Rus constructions like (1), which involve preposed negation in the context of a polar interrogative (NegYN). In addition to pointing out some previously unreported facts, I provide an analysis which bears on the behaviour of quantifiers and wh-indefinites. The key novel contribution involves the generalization that in Rus, wh-indefinites are not licensed by Q-operators as is standardly assumed; rather, they are licensed by an operator residing in Mood.

(1) Context:
A. Sergey promised to stop by at some point this week but didn’t specify the day.
B. The speaker has evidence that somebody stopped by. It is also known that Sergey is a hermit and a misanthrope who rarely graces his friends with visits.

Ne zazodil li Sergey segodnja? [NegYN]
neg stop.by Q Sergey today

(i) OK. Did Sergey (not) stop by today? = Could it be that Sergey stopped by today?
= Did Sergey surprise us with a visit today?

(ii) *‘Didn’t Sergey stop by today?’

English Y/N questions with preposed negation like (2) carry epistemic implicature, whereby the speaker believes or expects the positive answer to be true (Romero & Han 2004). Russian (1), though remarkably similar to its English kin from (2), is not necessarily biased towards a positive answer. (1) encodes either a conjecture or a surprise but lacks the implicature found in (2). To convey the sense of (2), a “biased” complementizer (neuzeli/razve glossed as ‘really’ in (3)) is required. Observe further that the English “biased” sentence from (1)-ii is infelicitous in the contexts (1)-A/B suitable for Russian NegYNs.

(2) Isn’t Jane coming?
(3) Neuzeli/razve Džejn ne pridet?
really Jane neg come

In addition to forming YN questions by placing the verb before li, Rus has an option of fronting a non-verbal constituent, which gives rise to the focus construal of the fronted XP, as in (4). In its negated incarnation, such constructions serve to convey uncertainty or surprise: (4) is compatible with the context from (1)-B and imparts the surprise; in (5), the interlocutor casts doubt on the addressee’s remark.

(4) (Ne) Sergey li zazodil segodnja?
neg Sergey Q stopped.by today

(5) Scenario: Boys are playing in the yard. They hear the voice of Mishka’s mom, calling one of her two children.

A: Ne obraščajete vnimanja. Ona zovet Mašku. ‘Don’t mind her. She is calling Mashka.’
S: A ne Mišku li (ona zovet)?
and neg Mishka Q she calls
= Are you sure it’s not Mishka she is calling?

These facts suggest that the negation element ne in such contexts is best treated as an evaluative Mood marker (as in Yoon 2011), which encodes the speaker’s assessment of the event as (un)expected, (not) surprising or (un)fortunate. Assuming Cinque’s (1999) hierarchy of functional projections in (6)a, I endorse (6)b for Russian NegYN: the question marker li is in C, while Evaluative Mood is headed by ne.

Sentences like (1) are derived as in (6)c: the verb moves in a cyclic fashion forming a complex head with Eval and eventually li. XPs proceed in the manner of (6)d: the negated constituent moves to Spec, EvalMoodP, and, following the incorporation of EvalMood ne, fronts to Spec, CP.

(6) a. MoodSPEECH ACT > MoodEVALUATIVE > MoodEVIDENTIAL > ModEPISTEMIC > T…
b. [CP __ li=Q [Eval Mood ne [TP …]]]  
c. [CP ne+V+li=Q [Eval Mood ine+V [TP …]]]  
d. [CP ne XP li=Q [Eval Mood ineXP [TP …]]]

NegYNs show a curious interaction of quantifiers and indefinites. Standard wisdom holds that a wh-indefinite, an entity homophonomous with a wh-word, can be licensed by a Q operator, as in (7) (Yanovich 2005). However, these commonly cited examples feature a “biased” complementizer in (7)a and a NegYN in (7)b. The former, for one, is illicit in embedded clauses, as shown in (8)a. In addition, razve attenuates the YN question with a degree of “surprise, uncertainty, doubt, and disbelief” (Русская грамматика 1980: 388). The latter can appear in embeds, but only under certain predicates: cf. (8)b with a non-factive vs. (8)c with a factive. Their meaning, as discussed above, likewise involves uncertainty or surprise. So, the
intuition here is that the wh-indefinites are not licensed by the Q-operator per se, but rather appear to be linked to modality. If true, then there is a potential for unification with the rest of contexts for wh-indefinites, identified by Yanovich in (9): conditionals in (a), subjunctive clauses in (b), and certain epistemic operators in (c) all require an introduction of a particular Mood head.

Consider what the dataset in (10)/(11) further reveals. Wh-indefinites are apparently good with verbs (negated and non-negated alike) before li, as in (10)a/a’. With fronted XP constituents, the absence of negation on the preposed element leads to the degradedness in (10)b’. Finally, neither negation nor a Q-operator can salvage wh-indefinites in the contexts with universal quantifies like (11)a/b even though a NegYN with a quantifier is possible in principle, as in (11)c/d.

(7) a. Razve kto prišel? [Yanovich 2005]
   really who (=anybody) came
b. Ne prixodil kto?
   neg came who (=anybody)

(8) a. *Ja sprosil, razve kto prišel.
   I asked really who came
b. ?*Ja sprosil, (ne) prixodil kto.
   I neg know neg came Q who

(9) a. Esli kto pridet, pozovis menja. [Yanovich 2005]
   if who comes call me
b. Petja zaper dver’, čtoby kto ne vošel.
   Petja locked door that SUBJ who neg entered

   neg look.for Q whom Andrej
   neg Andrej Q whom look.for

(11) a. *Ne vse li kogo iščut?
   neg all Q whom look.for
b. *Vse li kogo iščut?
   all Q whom look.for
   c. (Ne) vse li to kogo iščut?
   neg all Q whom-to look.for
   b. (Ne) vse li meštajut ob ýtom?
   neg all Q dream about that

Assume that ne is responsible for wh-indefinites’ licensing. If so, the contrast between (10)b and (11)a can be accounted for as in (12)a/b. The quantifier induces a blocking effect (similar to the quantifier-induced blocking effects in wh-interrogatives proposed in Beck (1996)): in (12)b, the licensor ne, which incorporates with the QP, is separated from its licensee kogo. A non-quantificational element in (12)a does not disrupt the licensing relationship. Finally, both (10)b’ and (11)b are bad, because there is no licensor, as sketched in (12)c. The final issue concerns the behaviour of verbs in (10)a/a’. The negated version is unproblematic: nothing impedes the licensing of kogo by ne in (10)a. For (10)a’, I assume a null EvalMood, which licenses the wh-indefinite. The conditions for this apparent optionality of ne with verbs are considered in the paper, along with the well-known facts associated with NegYN – the felicity of genitive of negation and prohibition of n-items in these contexts.

(12) a. [CP ___ li=Q [Eval Mood ne XP [TP kogo]]] [= (10)]
b. [CP ___ li=Q [Eval Mood ne vse [TP kogo]]] [= (11a)]
c. [CP vse/XP li=Q […[TP kogo]]] [= (10) / (11b): no licensor]

References: