A phase-based approach to Russian free word order
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CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of the present work was to provide a syntactic analysis of the word order variation in Russian. Theoretical guidelines for my research were the Derivation by Phase theory and the cartographic approach to the Syntax-Pragmatics interface. The working hypothesis was that IS, which in Russian is reflected in the order of sentence constituents, is directly encoded in syntax. In the spirit of Rizzi (1997, 2001a,b), Belletti (2001, 2004), Benincà and Polletto (2004), and Benincà (2006), I aimed at finding the structural points of junction between IS and syntax. Chapter one prepared the ground for the analysis. It included an overview of Russian morphosyntax and of the theoretical background to this work. The major conclusions drawn in this chapter are the following:

- Topic and Focus are the obligatory IS components of the sentence. Topic is understood as an address-pointer indicating where in the knowledge store of the interlocutor the incoming information must be entered. Focus is that part of the utterance which enhances the interlocutor’s knowledge. Pragmatic notions Topic and Focus find their formal instantiation in topic and focus exponents, i.e. lexical objects that are assigned [Topic] and [Focus] features.
- [Topic] and [Focus] features are present in the Lexicon and enter the Numeration, just as other formal features. Their checking proceeds in the usual way, i.e. by feature matching with the dedicated functional heads Top° and Foc°, respectively.

In chapter two I laid out my viewpoint on the basic architecture of an SVO sentence in Russian. Special attention was given to the issue of V-movement and first-merge positions of arguments. The following claims were put forth:

- The verb in Russian moves out of the vP, at least as high as the aspectual phrase dominating the vP.
- Arguments are generated in the order: S > IO > DO.
- Only the verb and the subject are forced to leave their first-merge positions and move into the inflectional domain in neutral contexts. Internal arguments do not undergo movement, because Case checking does not force overt movement in Russian, and there are no other formal requirements which internal arguments have to fulfil.

In chapter three I described the variety of attested word orders and their repercussions for the interpretation. The data is presented with the distinction between the Colloquial and the Standard Russian. The two registers differ with respect to the position of focus, when the latter refers to a given description. The primary conclusions reached are the following:

- A sentence in Russian is structured according to the IS schema: Topic > Discourse Neutral > Focus. Sentence constituents can leave their canonical positions to conform to this IS principle.
In Colloquial Russian, focus exponent can optionally occur in the preverbal area, if it is D-linked, where D-linking is defined as in (1).

(1) A constituent is D-linked if it has been explicitly mentioned in the previous discourse, is situationally given by being physically present at the moment of communication, or can be easily inferred from the context by being in the set relation with some other entity or event figuring in the preceding discourse.

Chapter four was an overview of the existing approaches to the word order freedom in Russian. Although the role of IS in sentence structuring has been recognized in literature, the existence of [Topic]/[Focus] features and of the corresponding functional heads, Top and Foc, in the narrow-syntactic component has been rejected. As a result, some complex and obscure cross-interface interactions have been proposed, clearly violating the thesis that Language is a maximally optimal system whereby the interfaces are simply interpreting objects created by narrow syntax.

In chapter five I presented a new analysis of IS encoding in Russian, which is developed along the lines of the cartographic model. The proposed analysis can be summarised as follows.

- The CP- and the vP-phases have a uniform structural skeleton which consists of the lexical core, the Domain, and the Edge.
- The Edge is the locus of IS-related feature checking. Thus Top and Foc heads project both within the Edge of CP as well as within the Edge of vP.
- The structure of the CP Edge in Russian corresponds to that shown in (2), wherein FrameP hosts various scene-setting expressions, TopP hosts a strong “aboutness” topic, and iterated topPs are the landing sites for weak topics, i.e. simply given non-focal constituents.

(2) \[ \text{ForceP} \text{ Force}^\circ \text{ FrameP} \text{ Frame}^\circ \text{ InterP} \text{ Inter}^\circ \text{ TopP} \text{ Top}^\circ \text{ Top}^\circ \text{ FocP} \text{ Foc}^\circ \text{ FinP} \text{ Fin}^\circ \text{ }] \]

- Weak topics are quite different from other IS constituents in that they can iterate within one and the same domain and are not restricted to the phase Edge but can occur almost anywhere in the structure. The special property of weak topics is linked to their indistinct feature specification, which is limited to [+D].
- The canonical clause-final focus in Russian occupies FocP within the vP Edge, which has the structure shown in (3).

(3) \[ \text{top}^\circ \text{ FocP} \text{ Foc}^\circ \text{ vP} \text{ }] \]

- FocPs within the vP and the CP phase can project simultaneously and interact with each other.
• The type of information encoded in both focus positions is the same, which is roughly ‘(NEW) INFORMATION’. Contrast and/or exhaustivity associated with the high FocP are subsidiary effects that arise due to the propositional nature of the CP phase.
• The vP periphery (3) is deficient relative to the CP Edge (3). This follows from the semantic difference between the two phases: the CP phase is semantically a proposition, while the vP phase denotes a situation.

Chapter six raises the issue of wh-movement in Russian. The motivation comes from an interesting property of Russian wh-words, which makes them special in comparison to wh-words in other languages. In particular, across languages wh-items may display similar distribution as focused constituents. Russian wh-words do not exhibit this behavior: they cannot occur in the canonical clause–final focus position, i.e. inside the low FocP, but must prepose either to the middle field or to the CP Edge. The proposed analysis of Russian wh-movement brings the following results.

• Russian is an optional wh-movement language, akin to French. A wh-item in Russian can undergo either true wh-movement to the CP Edge or wh-fronting, a distinct operation.
• Wh-movement results from the wh-word being pied-piped by the question particle, Q, which in this case takes the wh-word as its complement.
• Q is always covert in Russian.
• Q can also merge directly with Inter°, a head responsible for interrogation. In this case a wh-word is moved by the wh-fronting operation.
• Wh-fronting is possible in Russian due to the fact that Q can be unvalued with respect to the [wh/yes-no] specification.
• The obligatory wh-fronting is a kind of locality requirement. A wh-word cannot stay in the low FocP, i.e. following the verb, because in this position it is invisible for the Inter° head present at the CP Edge but unavailable at the vP Edge.
• A wh-word inside the low FocP is invisible for Inter° due to the Phase Extension mechanism (Den Dikken 2007, Pesetsky 2007): the V-to-Asp movement extends the first phase and turns its Edge into the Domain.

Chapter seven was an extension of the analysis of IS-encoding in Russian to other languages. Data from a number of African languages (Bantu, Gur, and Chadic) is discussed and the following conclusions are arrived at.

• All languages use the vP- and the CP-phase Edges for IS encoding.
• The vP Edge has the generalized structure represented in (4)

(4) $(\text{top})^o \atop \text{Foc}^o \atop \text{top}^o \atop \text{vP} \atop ]$]

• The CP Edge is universally complex and corresponds to the structure given in (5)
The observed crosslinguistic variation stems from the extent to which the vP and the CP Edges are activated within a given language as well as from some IS-independent language-specific parametric settings.