

# Focus positions and the distribution of interrogative phrases in Udmurt

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# Main questions of the talk

- 1) some recent works claim that **Udmurt** is undergoing an **SOV > SVO** change (Tánczos 2013, Asztalos, Gugán & Mus 2017, Asztalos 2018, a.o.)
  - is this presumed ongoing change also **reflected in the placement of interrogative (*wh*-) words/phrases?**
- 2) *wh*-phrases have been claimed to target the **same position as foci** in a wide range of languages
  - is this also true of Udmurt?

# Aims

- Describing the distribution of single *wh*-phrases in main clauses in Udmurt
  1. in light of the ongoing SOV > SVO change of Udmurt
    - potential Russian influence?
  2. in relation to **focus placement**
  3. potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases:
    1. areal and generational variation
    2. information structure
    3. differences in interpretation

# Claims

- possible (linear) positions for *wh*-phrases:



- foci may target the same positions, but the most typical positions for *wh*-items  $\neq$  as those for foci
- ***wh* XV/*wh* VX** (sentence-initial):
  - **most common** both in **old** and in **contemporary Udmurt texts**
  - neutral for **young** speakers living in **Udmurtia**
  - correlates with a major acceptance and production of **VX** order and **sentence-final foci**

## Claims – cont.

- **X *wh* V**:
  - more frequent in **old** than in contemporary **texts**
  - neutral for speakers of Udm. living in **Tatarstan**
  - correlates with a preference for **V-final** structures and **imm. preverbal foci**
- **V *wh* → *echo*-questions** → sporadic
- **X *wh* Y V → X is topicalized** → sporadic

# Outline

1. **Typological background:** *wh*-phrase placement, focus placement and word order types
2. Data
3. The distribution of *wh*-phrases and of foci in **old** and **contemporary Udmurt** texts
4. *Wh*-phrase placement in **Russian**
5. **Potential factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases in contemporary Udmurt
6. Conclusions

# Cross-linguistic distribution of interrogative phrases

- Dryer (2013):

**1. obligatorily initial**

**2. not obligatorily initial**

- *in situ*
- focus position
- immediately preverbal
- sentence-final

**3. mixed:** some *wh*-phrases obligatorily initial, some not

# Word order type, *wh*-placement, focus placement

	V-initial	SVO	V-final
<b><i>wh</i></b> (based on Greenberg 1966, Dryer 1991, Primus 2001)	<b>sentence-initial</b>	no correlation	<i>in situ</i>
		<b>sentence-initial</b>	<b>imm. preverbal</b>
		<i>in situ</i>	(sentence-initial)
<b>focus</b> (based on Cypionka 2007)	(not examined)	sentence-initial	<b>imm. preverbal</b>
		postverbal	sentence-initial
		<b>sentence-final</b>	



# Data

- previous literature
- material used for my doctoral dissertation (Asztalos 2018):
  - written material:
    - “old” texts: end of 19th – beginning of 20th cent. (folktales, newspaper, drama)
    - contemporary texts: newspaper; blog posts by young Udmurts
  - questionnaire studying the word order preferences of native speakers of Udmurt (fieldwork in 2014-2015)
    - 2 rough areal groups: speakers living in *Udmurtia/Tatarstan*
    - 2 rough generational groups: *younger/older*
- recent consultations with a native speaker

# *Wh*-phrase placement in old Udmurt

- Shutov (1999: 19), Karakulova & Karakulov (2001: 80):  
***wh*-phrases** in old Udmurt were typically **immediately preverbal**:

(1) *Ad'ami köña syle?*  
person how\_much costs  
'How much does a person cost?'

# Placement of interrogative phrases in old and contemporary Udmurt texts

	<i>X wh V</i>	Sentence-initial		Other: <i>in situ</i> <i>X wh Y V</i> <i>V wh</i>
		<i>wh V X</i>	<i>wh X V</i>	
<b>Old texts</b> (1891-1924)	9 (23,7%)	22 (57,9%)	2 (5,2%)	5 (13,2%)
<b>Contemporary texts</b> (21st cent.)	3 (1,9%)	117 (72,2%)	34 (20,9%)	8 (4,9%)

# Focus placement in old Udmurt

- **immediately preverbal or sentence-final** in the texts of Munkácsi (1887) and Wichmann (1901)
- no data from earlier periods
- sentence-final focusing presumably developed under the influence of Russian (cf. Tánczos 2010, Asztalos 2020)
- presumably, there was a previous stage of Udmurt with **immediately preverbal (non-sentence-initial) *wh*-phrases** and **immediately preverbal foci** (→ conform to SOV)

# Focus placement in contemporary Udmurt

- standard variety: **immediately preverbal** (most common/accepted, cf. Tánczos 2010, Asztalos 2020)

(2) *Tuž-ges no éber kartína-jez KAT'A dašaz.*

very-CMPR PCL nice picture-ACC Kate made

'It was Kate who made the nicest picture.' (Asztalos 2020: 32)

- Russian-influenced variety: **sentence-final** (ibid.)

(3) *Tuž-ges no éber kartína-jez dašaz KAT'A.*

very-CMPR PCL nice picture-ACC made Kate

'It was Kate who made the nicest picture.' (ibid.)

# Focus placement in contemporary Udmurt – cont.

- **preverbal but not verb-adjacent** (Asztalos 2020):

(4) *Ľera TA KUREG-EZ prazdníke vajiz.*  
Lera this chicken-ACC to.the.party brought

‘Lera brought THIS CHICKEN to the party.’ (Asztalos 2020: 37)

- marginally: ***in situ*** (Bulyčov 1947: 77, Konjuxova 1964: 6):

(5) a. *PINALJOS kolhozyn užazy.*  
children in.the.kolkhoz worked

‘It is the children who have worked in the kolkhoz.’

b. *Pinaljos KOLHOZYN užazy.* ‘It is in the kolkhoz that children have worked.’

c. *Pinaljos kolhozyn UŽAZY.* ‘Work was what children have done in the kolkhoz.’

(Konjuxova: *ibid.*)

# Interrogative phrase placement vs. focus placement in Udmurt

		<i>wh</i>	Foc
<b>“old” Udmurt</b>	Shutov (1999), Karakulova & Karakulov (2001)	<b>immediately preverbal</b>	<b>immediately</b>
	Asztalos (2018)	<b>sentence-initial</b> > <b>immediately preV</b>	<b>preV / sentence- final*</b>
<b>contemporary texts</b>		<b>sentence-initial,</b> <b>wh VX</b> > wh XV	<b>imm. preV</b> > <b>sent.-final</b> > non-immed. preV (+ <i>in situ</i> )

\*no studies on their relative frequency neither on foci in other positions

# How does this relate to the distribution of *wh*-phrases in Russian?

- **neutral** position: **sentence-initial** (Bailyn 2012, a.o.)

(6) *Gd'e*    *ty*    *rabotajeś?*      → **not necessarily V-adjacent**  
where    you    work  
'Where do you work?'

- **preverbal not clause-initial** → **topicalized** (subject) pronoun preceding it (Bailyn 2012):

(7) *Ty*    *gd'e*    *rabotajeś?*  
you    where    work

- **sentence-final** → **echo**-questions (ibid.):

(8) *Ty*    *rabotajeś*    *gd'e?*  
you    work    where    'You work where?'



Potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases 1.: Areal and generational variation

		<i>X wh V</i>	sentence-initial <i>wh</i>	
			<i>wh SXV</i>	<i>wh VSX</i>
Tatarstan	older	<b>strong preference</b>	–	
	younger	<b>preference</b>	–	
Udmurtia	older	<b>slight preference</b>	also produced	–
	younger	rare	<b>clear preference</b>	also produced

# Potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases 1.: Areal and generational variation

- **S X *wh* V :**

(6) *Lid'ija bazaryś kine adźiz?*

Lidia from.the.market whom saw

‘Whom did Lidia see at the market?’

neutral for

speakers from **Tatarstan;**  
a part of **older/Udmurtia**

- ***wh* SXV:**

(7) *Kine Lid'ija bazaryś adźiz?*

whom Lidia from.the.market saw

**younger/Udmurtia**

(+ considered as grammatical by  
95% of *the total* nr. of informants)

- ***wh* VSX:**

(8) *Kine adźiz Lid'ija bazaryś?*

whom saw Lidia from.the.market

**younger/Udmurtia**

(cf. Asztalos 2018: 154)

# *Wh*-placement and its correlates

- in the data retrieved from the questionnaire, the preference for **imm. preverbal *wh***-phrase placement (*X wh V*) correlates with a preference for **V-final** structures and **immediately preverbal foci**
- the preference for **sentence-initial *wh***-positioning (*wh X V / wh V X*) correlates with a major “tolerance” for **VX** order and **sentence-final foci**, cf. Asztalos (2018)

# Potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases 2.: Information structure

- I propose that ***X wh V***
  - is **neutral** for
    - **speakers from Tatarstan**
    - a part of *older speakers from Udmurtia*
  - is **non-neutral** for
    - **young/Udmurtia**
    - a smaller part of *old/Udmurtia*
- in this variety of Udmurt, ***X wh V*** are reanalysed as sent. with a **(contrastive) topic** preceding the *wh*
  - similarly to what we see in Russian

# Potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases 2.: Information structure

Context: Remembering the Eurovision Song contest winners of the past few years and their songs

(9) *Vuono aryn mar voźmalom?* → **contrastive topic**

next in.year what we.will.wait

‘For next year, what are we expecting?’ (Marjalén zarezéz 19.05.2015)

■ **X wh Y V** presumably also involve **topicalized** elements before the *wh*-element:

(10) *Ton mar tatyn kariškod, intell'igentnoj ad'ami?*

you what here do clever man

‘And you, what are you doing here, clever man?’ (Marjalén zarezéz 02.09.2015)

# Potential **factors** determining the distribution of *wh*-phrases 3.: Interpretational differences

- **V *wh***: based on consultations with a native speaker (Y. Speshilova), to be interpreted as ***echo***-questions:

(11) *Školajazy*            *miľemyz*    *intyjazy*            ***kytćy?***  
in.their.school    us                    accommodate    where.ILL

‘So then, where did they accommodate us in their school?’

(Mynam malpanjosa, 29.03.2016)

(12) *Lid'ija*    *bazaryś*                    *adźiz*    ***kine?***  
Lidia            from.the.market    saw    whom

‘Lidia saw at the market whom?’

# Conclusions

- although *wh*-phrases and foci might have targeted the same (i.e., the immediately preverbal) position in an earlier stage of Udmurt, the **distribution of *wh*-phrases and of foci is more divergent in contemporary Udmurt**
- esp. in the variety used by young Udmurts, *wh*-phrases are most commonly **sentence-initial**, which correlates with a major acceptance and production of **VX** structures and of **sentence-final foci**
- both sentence-initial *wh*-placement and sentence-final focusing are signs of moving away from a rigid OV type (cf. also Asztalos, Gugán & Mus 2017)

## Conclusions – cont.

- Russian influence cannot be excluded:
  - widespread use of sentence-initial *wh*-phrases (young Udmurts → most Russian-influenced variety of Udmurt)
  - *X wh V* structures → reanalysis as constructions with a topicalized *X*
  - *V wh* → *echo*-questions



# Some open questions

- Are there cases when **sentence-initial** appearance of *wh*-phrases is **obligatory**?
- *in situ wh*-items and their relation to *in situ* foci
- ***wh VX*** (more common in texts) vs. ***wh XV*** (preferred by young/Udmurtia in the questionnaire): free variants? Or do they differ, e.g., in their information structure?
- The potential influence of Tatar in the regions in Tatarstan
- Providing a syntactic derivation of the position of *wh*-phrases – is there ***wh-movement*** (and optional **verb raising**) in Udmurt?

Thank you for your attention!



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  - NKFI-125206 *Nominal Structures in Uralic Languages*

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