

# Patterns of prominence in Russian yes–no questions

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# Russian yes-no questions

1. marked by complementizer/particle *li*
  - intonation not described
2. marked by “question intonation”
  - superficially indistinguishable from declarative
  - “IK-3” contour (Bryzgunova 1977): rising from mid to very high, then falling to low
  - located on finite verb (“general question”) or other constituent (“special question”)
  - problematic:
    - IK-3 has more functions (“non-terminativity” etc.)
    - Can intonation determine sentence types?

# Overview

## 1. Introduction

## 2. *li*-YNQs

- ☐ Accent
- ☐ Focus

## 3. “Intonationally marked” YNQs

- ☐ focus x mood experiment
- ☐ results for production and perception tasks
- ☐ mood or sentence type marker?

## 4. [Q] and focus in Russian

- ☐ VERUM focus
- ☐ [Q] as a focus particle

## 5. Conclusions

# Sources of evidence (1)

- Radio Mayak (*radio lighthouse*) corpus
  - unofficial source, collected from www; recordings & transcripts of radio interviews/discussions
  - annotation: approximate time anchors and POS/morphosyntactic tags
  - query: *ad hoc* cgi-access to CWB (cqp) using Stefan Evert's Perl-CWB libraries
  - (semi-)automatic replay and dumping to Praat
  - size: ca. 565.400 tokens, 53.900 types (of forms), ca. 68 hours of recorded material

# Sources of evidence (2)

- experimental data (Meyer/Mleinek *to app.*)
  - *reading task*: constructed examples in systematically varied context conditions (*focus x force*)
  - measuring differences in pitch maximum and pitch-to-syllable alignment on a relative time scale
  - *perception task* on part of the reading data (*force*)
- judgments from literature, some interview data

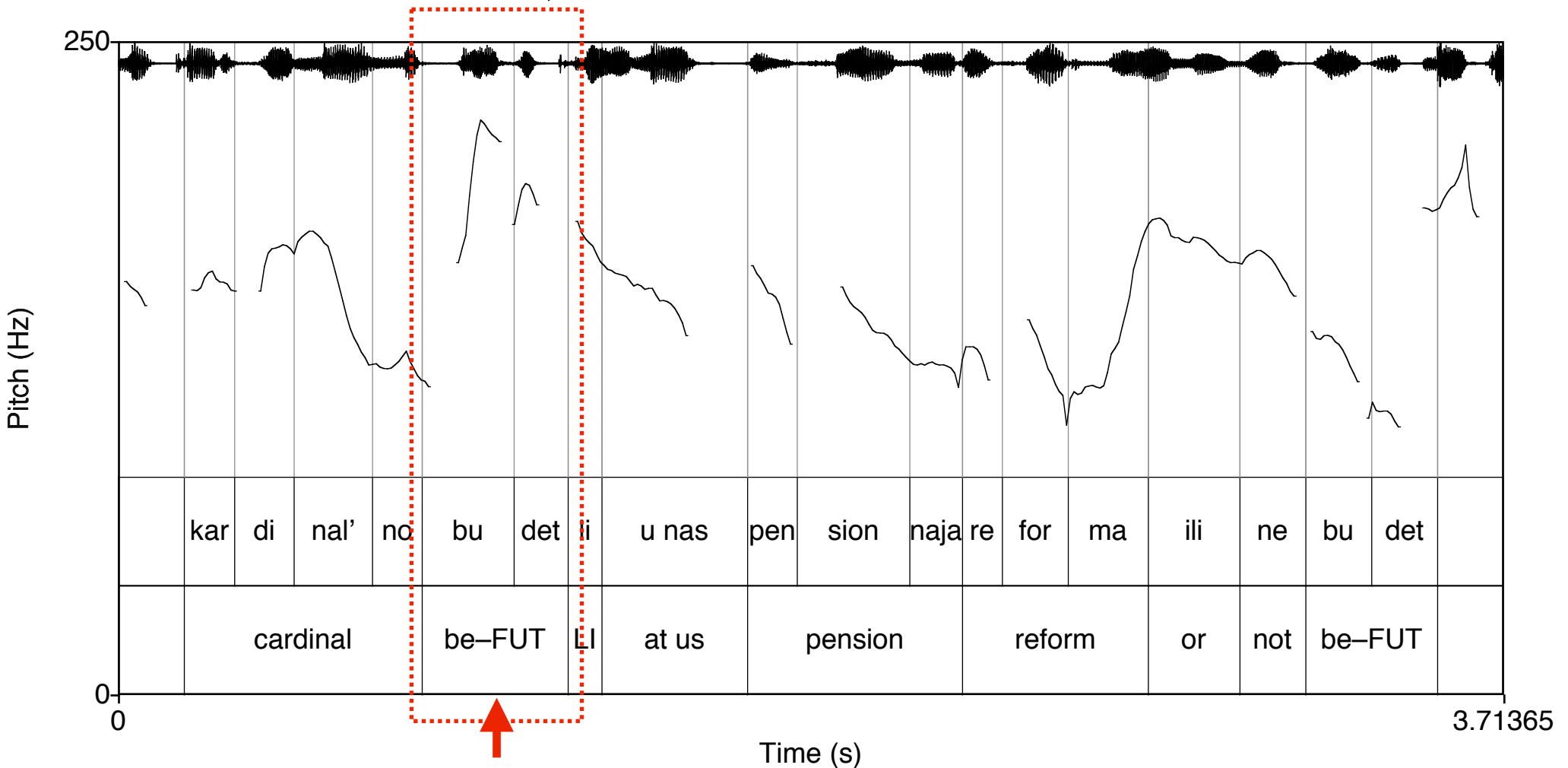
# *li*-YNQs

King (1994), Schwabe (2003):

- [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>C</sub> V+*li* ... : no focus
  - King (1994): allow for (contrastive) foci later in the sentence
  - Schwabe (2003): set of propositions (unstructured)
- [<sub>CP</sub> XP [<sub>C</sub> *li* ... : XP=focus
  - Schwabe (2003): set of propositions with focus (structured propositions  $\langle \lambda y.p(y), XP \rangle$  or propositions with alternative sets)
- “focus” somewhat unexplicit
  - primary accent?
  - focus of (question + positive answer)?
  - both? other possibilities?

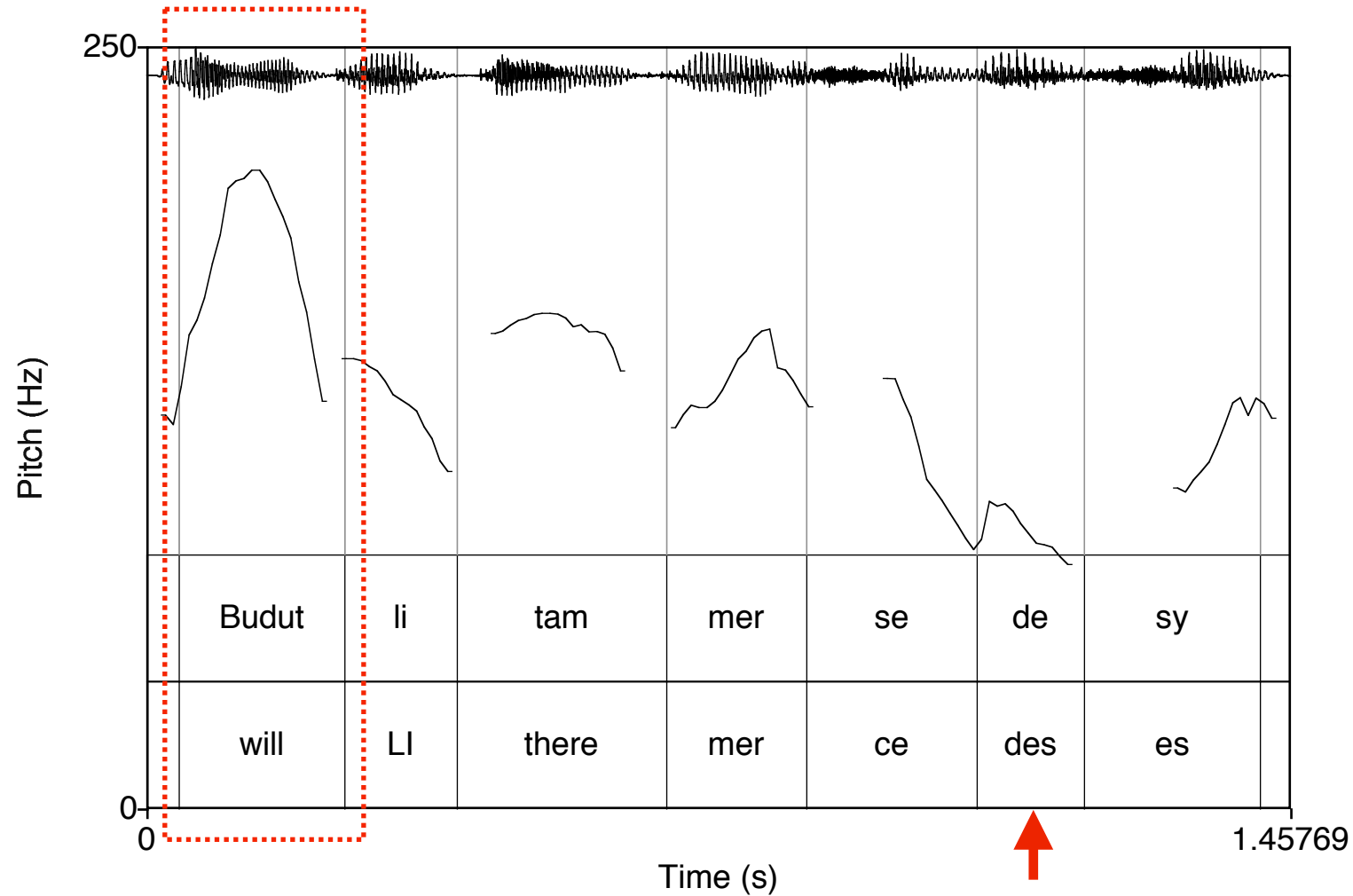
# Accent (1)

- V before *li*, V focused: H\*



# Accent (2)

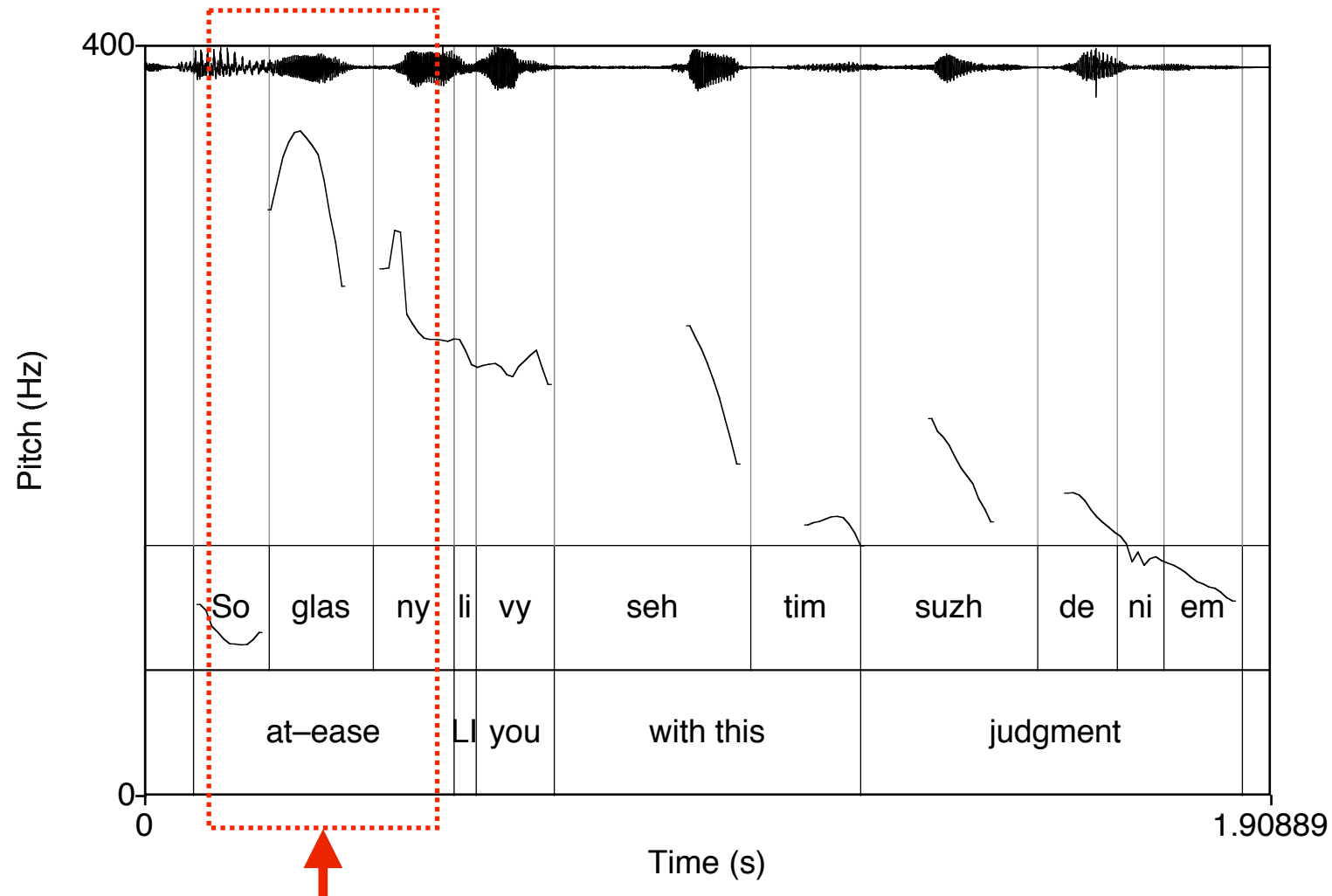
- V before *li*, later focus: H\*





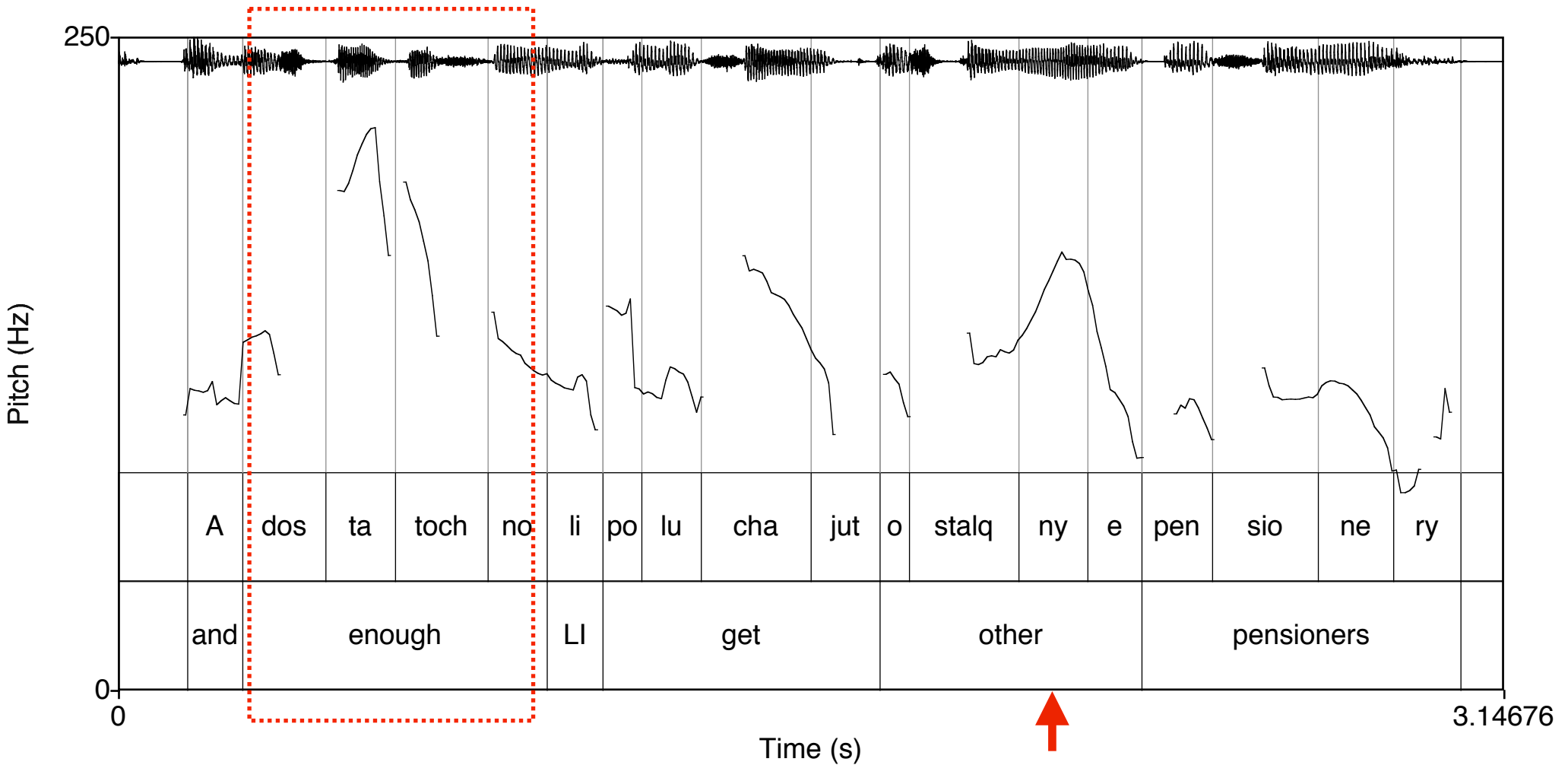
# Accent (3)

- XP before *li*, XP focus: H\*



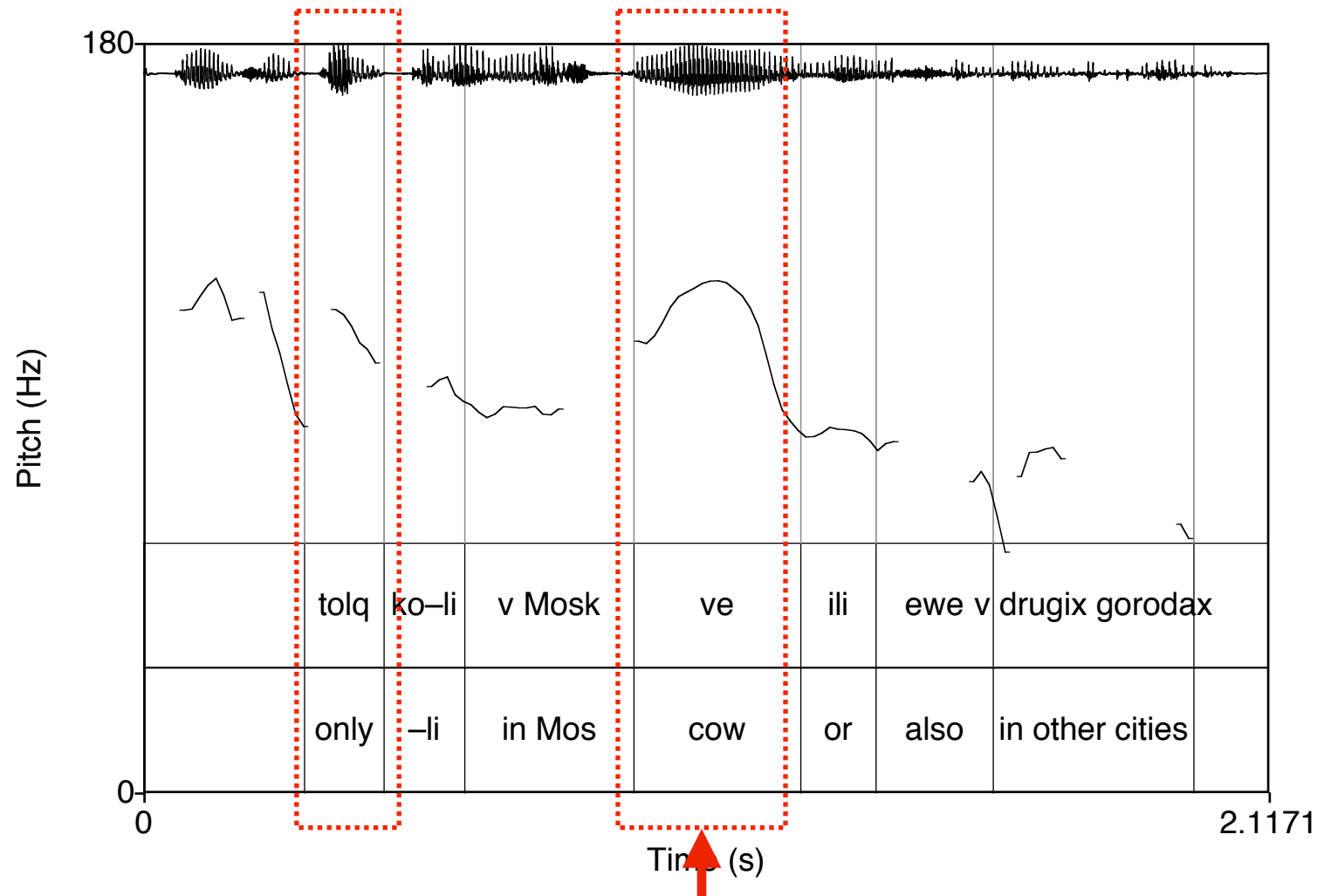
# Accent (4)

- XP before *li*, later focus: H\*



# Accent (5)

- borderline case: focus particles before *li*



# Summary: Accent in *li*-YNQs

- H\*, independently of accents later in the sentence
- *Always* H\*, even in the case of V+*li* with later focus (never deaccenting of pre-*li* material).
- Accent provides no independent reason for distinguishing V+*li* from XP+*li*
- later H\* accents found both in V+*li* and in XP+*li*

# Focus in *li*-YNQs

- Relatively clear cases:

- Preceding wh question

*Čto tam budet i čego tam ne budet? BUDUT li tam MERSEDES?*

what there be<sub>fut</sub> and what there not be<sub>fut</sub> be<sub>fut</sub> LI there mercedeses

‘What will and what will not be there? Will there be Mercedeses?’

- “out of the blue” - “Here is my question:”

*ČASTO li vas PREDAVALI?*

often LI you gave-away

‘Have you often been given away?’

# Focus in *li*-YNQs

- contrast with element from preceding context:

*[Dostatočno oni polučajut? Net, ne dostatočno.] A ... OSTAL'NYE p.?*

enough they get                      no   not enough                      and   other

'Do they get enough? No, not enough. And (do) the other (pensioners get enough?)'  
cf. "Accent(4)"

- alternatives (*if/whether ... or ...*)

*[... kardinal'no:] BUDET li u nas pensionnaja reforma, ili ne budet?*

decisive                      be<sub>fut</sub>   LI at us pension                      reform                      or not be<sub>fut</sub>

'... is decisive: Will there be a pension reform or won't there be (one)?'

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# Intonational YNQs

- traditional view (e.g., Siemund 2002):
  - question tune applied to a declarative clause yields a question (/ an interrogative?)
  - Russian as a paradigm case: word order as in declarative + “IK-3” contour = YNQ
- but:
  - IK-3 may have several functions
  - Intonational YNQs are non-embeddable. Does IK-3 mark questions or interrogatives? Mixed bag?
  - pattern of prominence (Ladd 1996) differs systematically from the one in declaratives:



# Prominence in iYNQs (1)

- “out of the blue” context:

Maša kupila KNIGU. [declarative: sentence-final]

Maša KUPILA knigu? [interrogative: on finite verb]

M.<sub>NOM</sub> bought book<sub>ACC</sub> (Ladd 1996)

- other loci of prominence:

Maša KUPILA knigu. [minimal or contrastive focus]

Maša kupila KNIGU? [special emphasis, focus]

M.<sub>NOM</sub> bought book<sub>ACC</sub> (Ladd 1996)

# Prominence in iYNQs (2)

- Tasks
  - disentangle mood vs. focus marking - compare to clear (*li-*) interrogatives
  - clarify intonation of proper vs. improper questions (if those exist)
- Reading Study (Meyer/Mleinek 2004, 2006)

Focus Mood	Wide Focus	Contrastive focus (verb)	Minimal focus (verb)	Contrastive focus (object)	Minimal focus (object)
YNQ	maxinter	conVinter	minVinter	conOinter	minOinter
declarative	maxdecl	conVdecl	minVdecl	conOdecl	minOdecl

- 4 speakers, 8 it./cond., randomized, fillers

# Reading Study

- Sample materials:

[Na koncerte:] Irina igrala mazurki. [maxdecl]  
at concert I.<sub>NOM</sub> played mazurkas

[A: Vy včera byli na koncerte?] Irina igrala mazurki? [maxinter]  
you yesterday were at concert I.<sub>NOM</sub> played mazurkas

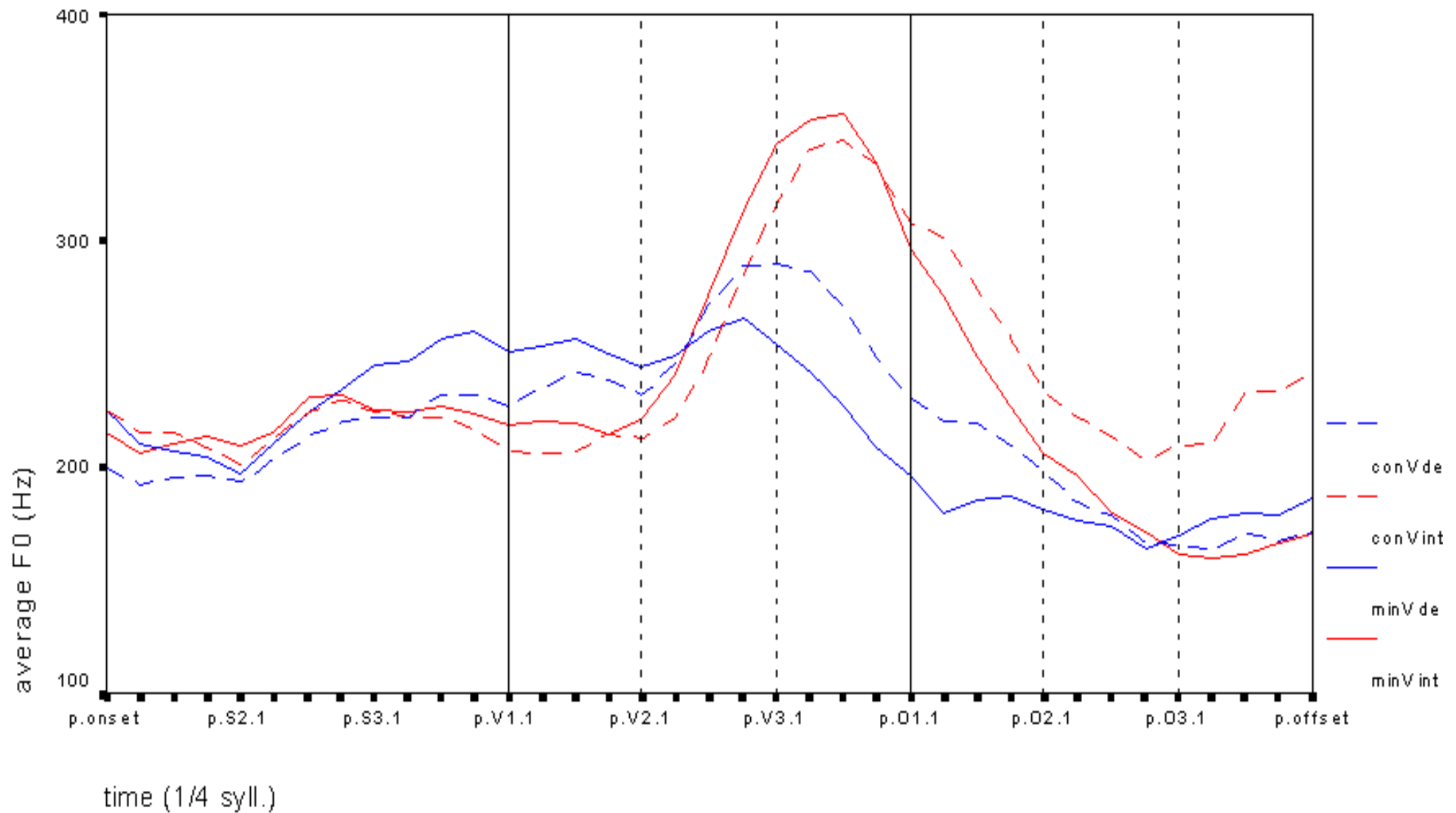
[A: Kak vam ob“jasnila Irina v tanceval’nom kružke mazurki?]  
how you<sub>DAT</sub> explained I.<sub>NOM</sub> in dancing group mazurkas

B: Irina igrala mazurki. [minVdecl]  
I.<sub>NOM</sub> played mazurkas

# Results (1)

- Essential: Comparing the right conditions.  
*Not* “out of the blue” questions vs. decl., but
  - decl/int with same conditions (context, prominence)
  - within YNQs, different contextual conditions etc.
- timing normalized, using a relative time scale (1/4 syllables)
- F0 maxima, alignment, accent shape
- YNQs: significantly **higher** and significantly **delayed** pitch maxima (compared to respective declaratives)

# Results (2)



# Results (3)

- within declaratives, contrastive or minimal focus significantly higher F0 maxima than maximal focus
- within YNQ conditions, no differences in (average) pitch height, delay, or accent shape
- peak delay characteristic of YNQs: L+H\* L(\*)
- perception test: almost perfect results for YNQ conditions; only contrastive declaratives with focus on the verb problematic (~50% precision)

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# Mood or sentence type? (1)

- evidence for “declarative questions” in Russian:  
distribution of negative indefinites:

*Ne dopustil tam nikto / \*kto-nibud` ošibku.*

not allowed there nobody somebody mistake

‘Nobody allowed for a mistake there.’

*Ne dopustil li \*nikto / kto-nibud` ošibku?*

not allowed LI nobody somebody mistake

‘Didn’t anybody allow for a mistake?’

*A nikogo / kogo-nibud` drugogo iz podpol`ščikov ty ne znaeš`?*

and noone someone other from undergrounders you not know

‘Don’t you know anyone / someone else from the underground?’

(Brown&Franks 1996, 273)



# Mood or sentence type? (2)

- certain modal particles disambiguate:

- No ty *že* nikogda (/ \*kogda-nibud') ne pretendoval na rol' stratega? -  
but you MP never sometimes not aimed at role strategist  
'But you didn't ever aim at the role of the strategic leader, did you?' -

*poluutverditel'no sprosil Dok.* (Tübingen Russian Corpora)  
half-assertively asked D.  
, asked Doc half-assertively.'

- derivable purely semantically?
- hypothesis: licensing by a [Q] feature, optionally present in questions (and obligatorily in interrogative sentences)

# Mood or sentence type? (3)

- What about intonation?

- informants:

a. *Ty ne kupil nikomu PODAROK?*  
you not bought nobody-dat present

“out of the blue”

b. *Ty ne KUPIL nikomu podarok?*

FVerum, F-contrast, ...

- authentic “declarative questions” (w/ modal particles):

a. *No ved’ polučajutsja NOŽNICY?*

(Radio Mayak)

but MP arise                      scissors

‘But a gap arises?’

b. *Vy ved’ po-moemu načinaete s detskix KNIŽEK, da?*

you MP as-far-as-I-know begin from children`s books yes

‘As far as I know, you start from children’s books?’

# VERUM focus? (1)

- Schätzt Ede Wagner? (Stechow 1981)  
esteem E. W. [answer highlights the *position* of fin. V]

- Ja, er SCHÄTZT ihn. / Nein, er schätzt in NICHT.

'Does Ede like Wagner? - Yes, he does. / No, he doesn't.'

- Höhle (1992): VERUM not an *illocutionary* operator (> also in embedded clauses)
- BRRZ (1992): in the highest clausal projection
- Reich (2001 / *unpubl.*, departing from Stechow *class lect.*): Q morpheme could associate with focus on POS or NEG to derive YNQ meaning

# VERUM focus? (2)

- Romero&Han (2004):
  - operator on proposition  $p$  expressing that the speaker is certain that  $p$  should be added to the common ground (alternatives: sentential adverbs *probably*, *possibly* etc. - J. Jacobs).
  - pragmatic implicature: VERUM focus in YNQ  $p$ ? >> speaker originally believed that  $p$  did not hold
  - arises when “focal stress cannot be licensed by anything other than VERUM” (2004, 631) - not absolutely obligatory even in English, cf.

*I was wondering whether Sue visited you last week. So, DID she visit you last week?*

# VERUM and Russian iYNQs

- no obligatory pragmatic VERUM effect in YNQs
- attempts at deriving focus on V from general semantic considerations misleading:
  - language-specific / lexical factor involved
  - accent *not* on V<sub>fin</sub> in certain Russian YNQs:

“explicative questions”

(Mehlig 1994)

[What was that noise behind the wall last night?]

*Sosedī peredvigali PIANINO?* - #*Sosedī PEREDVIGALI pianino?*

‘neighbours moved piano’ / ‘Did our neighbours move the piano?’

alternative questions

*Dokladčik razvil novye IDEI ili tol’ko povtoril xorošo IZVESTNOE?*

speaker developed new ideas or only repeated well known

‘Did the speaker develop new ideas or (did he) just repeat well-known things?’

# [Q] as a focus particle

- associates with a focused constituent
  - minimal XP: *Maša kupila* [<sub>F</sub> *KNIGU*]?
  - larger XPs: alternative questions
  - up to TP: Mehlig's "explicative questions"
  - V<sub>fin</sub>
    - semantic null effect: excluded alternative (POS/NEG) brought back in by semantics of Q itself
    - allows for further operators associating with foci, cf. (optional) VERUM or secondary accents
    - V<sub>fin</sub> prominence need not be due to VERUM, thus no obligatory pragmatic effect
- lexical property of Russian (vs. other languages)

# Conclusion

- Accent in *li*-YNQs:
  - H\*; no distinction w.r.t. *XP+li* / *V+li*
  - later foci marked by H\* in both cases
- Focus in *li*-YNQs:
  - additional contextual relations involved in later foci: completive structures, contrast
- iYNQs:
  - specific accent L+H\* L(\*), marking questionhood
  - [Q] acts as a focus particle in “true” interrogatives
  - no obligatory pragmatic VERUM effect