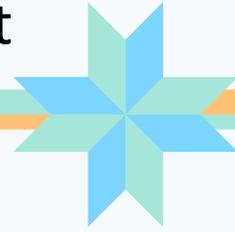# Identificational focus in Udmurt

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## 1. Introduction

The information structure of the Udmurt sentence is an understudied field of the Udmurt syntax, where even such elementary questions as the potential positions of the focused constituents remain poorly understood. The present paper argues that foci are not restricted to the immediately preverbal and the sentence-final positions, as Tánczos (2011) claims, and that the Udmurt sentence structure contains a sentence-initial identificational focus position.

## 2. Background

Up to now, the most elaborated structural representation of the information structure of the Udmurt sentence has been offered by Tánczos (2011) in a generativist framework.

Tánczos states that

- the Udmurt sentence structure contains a recursive topic position followed by a non-recursive focus position on its left periphery. Focusing entails obligatory verb movement:

(1) [$_{Top}$ T'erminatorez        kinoťeatryn  [$_{Foc}$ SAŠA  učkiz.]]
    Terminator-ACC  in the cinema    Alex  watched
'It was Sasha who watched the Terminator in the cinema.'

- Due to the influence of the Russian language, in a non-standard variety of Udmurt, a sentence-final focus appeared, as well:

(2) T'erminatorez        kinoťeatryn    učkiz    SAŠA.
    Terminator-ACC  in the cinema  watched  Alex
'Id.'

Other sources (Zhuikov 1937, Bulychov 1947, Koniukhova 1964. Vilkuna 1998, Timerkhanova 2006, 2011, Asztalos 2012), however, suggest that the appearance of focused items is not restricted to the above mentioned two positions.

## 3. Aims and claims

The present research aimed at examining
- in which syntactic positions foci can appear in Udmurt, and
- whether identificational and information foci show a positional difference.

The results suggest that
- Identificational focus is assigned a sentence-initial structural position preceding the topic position(s).
- Identificational focus is not necessarily contrastive.
- Focused items can appear in other positions, as well: *in situ*; immediately or non-immediately preceding the verb; sentence-finally. I hypothesize that such cases are instances of information focus.

## 4. Terminology

- **Focus**
Following É. Kiss (1998), this paper distinguishes between two main focus types:

  - *Identificational focus* fulfils a logical operation by identifying "the exhaustive subset of contextually given elements for which the predicate phrase actually holds". In many languages, identificational focus is assigned a special functional position in the preverbal field of the sentence. In Russian, e.g., the identificational focus position can freely precede or follow the topic position(s):

(3) a. - *Što  Jakov  priňos?*
       what  Jacob  brought
       'What did Jacob bring?'
    b. - *Jakov POSYLKU  prin'os. / POSYLKU  Jakov  prin'os.*
       Jacob  parcel-ACC  brought / parcel-ACC  Jacob  brought
       'It was a parcel that Jacob brought.'        (Dyakonova 2009: 72)

Cross-linguistically, the identificational focus position can be [+contrastive] or [±contrastive] depending on whether it can operate only on a closed or also on an open set of possible entities.

  - *Information focus* is intended as a constituent conveying new, non-presupposed information. It typically appears *in situ* (in Russian, sentence-finally, see [4]), and it is marked with a pitch accent:

(4) context: 'Did Jacob bring anything?'
    *Jakov prin'os  POSYLKU.*
    Jacob  brought  parcel-ACC
    'Jacob brought A PARCEL.'        (Dyakonova: ibid.)

- **Topic**
Topic was defined as a specific and referential argument of the verb which represents "an individual […] from among those present in the universe of discourse as the subject of the subsequent predication" (É. Kiss 2004: 11) (e.g., *Jakov* in [3b.] and [4b.]).

## 5. Methods

- **Data collection**
Linguistic data was collected in Izhevsk from 2013 on by means of four consecutive questionnaires. Three of the questionnaires were mainly concerned with object foci, and one with subject, dative and adverbial foci, as well. The questionnaires were filled out by approximately 20 native (Udmurt-dominant) speakers (employees and students of the Udmurt State University), between the ages of 19–60.

- **The questionnaires**
The informants had to make grammaticality judgements about sentences that contained the focused item in different positions (*in situ*, immediately preverbal, non-immediately preverbal, sentence-initial, sentence-final positions). The sentences were situated in focus-eliciting contexts: wh-questions, alternative questions, polar questions with correcting answers etc. Since such questions in certain languages can be answered both with identificational and with information focus (cf. É. Kiss 1998), the meaning of focused noun phrases modified by numerals was investigated, as well. In fact, in certain languages (e.g., in Hungarian), numeral modifiers have an interpretation 'exactly *n*' exclusively in the identificational focus position (5a.), while in other syntactic positions (5b.) they mean 'at least *n*' (É. Kiss 2006, Patona 2013).

(5) a. *János KÉT HAMBURGERT eszik meg egy nap.*
      John  two  hamburger-ACC  eats PRT one day
      'John eats (exactly) TWO HAMBURGERS per day.'

    b. *János két hamburgert        megeszik egy nap.*
      John  two  hamburger-ACC  eats        one day
      'John eats (at least) two hamburgers per day.'        (Patona 2013: 46)

Subjects, objects and datives which were already present in the starting sentence of the dialogues were interpreted as topics in the sentence containing the focused item similarly to the examples in (3b.).

## 6. Linguistic data

- **Distribution of foci**
The data confirmed the claim of Tánczos (2011) about the existence of the immediately preverbal and the sentence-final focus positions. However, all of the applied focus-eliciting questions gave grammatical results with the other tested focus positions, as well. Some informants showed a preference for in *situ* foci over all other options.

- **Focusing without constituent reordering/ In situ foci**
In a sentence like (6), all of the constituents can be focused in their neutral position (cf. Bulychov 1947, Koniukhova 1964, Vilkuna 1998). Thus, the constituent order of sentences containing a focused item might be identical with their neutral order:

(6) *Ćukaźe  Saša  ńulesky    mynoz.*
    tomorrow  Alex  to the forest  will go
    'Tomorrow Alex will go to the forest.'

- **Sentence-initial and other non-immediately preverbal foci**
Focused constituents with all of the examined syntactic functions – subjects ($F_S$), objects ($F_O$), datives ($F_{Dat}$) and adverbials ($F_{Adv}$) – can appear sentence-initially (cf. Zhujkov 1937, Bulychov 1947, Timerkhanova 2006, 2011) and in other preverbal but non-verb-adjacent positions, as well. Similarly to Russian, foci (F) can precede the sentence topic(s) (T), or appear between two topics:

| | FTTV | TFTV |
|---|---|---|
| $F_S$ | (context: *'Who can see the forest?'*) *SAŠA  ńulesez  adźe.* Alex  forest-ACC  sees 'It is Alex who can see the forest.' | (context: *'It was Maša who gave the Bible to Eve.'*) *Öz,  Jevaly  PET'A Biblijez  śotiz.* did not  Eve-DAT  Pete  Bible-ACC  gave 'No, it was Pete who gave the Bible to Eve.' |
| $F_O$ | (context: *'What did Pete give to Eve ?'*) | |
| | *TA  KN'IGAJEZ Peťa Jevaly  śotiz.* this book-ACC  Pete  Eve-DAT gave | *Peťa TA  KN'IGAJEZ Jevaly  śotiz.* Pete  this book-ACC  Eve-DAT  gave |
| | 'Pete gave THIS BOOK to Eve.' | |
| $F_{Dat}$ | (context: *'Whom did Pete give the book to?'*) | |
| | *JEVALY  Peťa kńigajez  śotiz.* Eve-DAT  Pete  book-ACC  gave | *Peťa JEVALY  kńigajez  śotiz.* Pete  Eve-DAT  book-ACC  gave |
| | 'Pete gave the book TO EVE.' | |
| $F_{Adv}$ | (identical to [6]) | (context: *'Alex will call Anastasia today.'* *Uz,  Saša  ČUKAŹE  Nasťaly  źingyrtoz.* will not  Alex  tomorrow  Anastasia-DAT will call 'No, Alex will call Anastasia TOMORROW.' |

- **The identificational focus test**
The test involving the numerical modifiers has shown that numerals have the 'exactly *n*' interpretation only in the sentence-initial focus position (7). In all of the other examined focus positions they have the meaning 'at least *n*' (8).

(context: *'How many apples does Kate give to John per day?'*)

*'exactly two'*:

(7) *KYK ULMO Kaťa nunally    byde Ivanly    śotja.*
    two apple  Kate  day-DAT  per John-DAT  gives
    'Kate gives John (exactly) TWO APPLES per day.'

*'at least two'*:

(8) a. *Kaťa Ivanly nunally byde KYK ULMO śotja.*
    b. *Kaťa nunally byde KYK ULMO Ivanly śotja.*
    c. *Kaťa nunally byde Ivanly śotja KYK ULMO.*
    'Kate gives John (at least) TWO APPLES per day.'

- **Contrastive and non-contrastive contexts**
Sentence-initial foci can appear both in contrastive (9) and non-contrastive (10) contexts:

(9) a. - *Artur    Sašajez    -a    šukkiz?*
       Arthur  Alex-ACC  PTCL  hit
       'Was it Alex whom Arthur hit?'
    b. - *Öz,    PET'AJEZ  Artur šukkiz.*
       did not  Pete-ACC  Arthur  hit
       'No, it was Pete whom Arthur hit.'

(10) a. - *Kine    Vika  čupaz?*
        whom  Vick  kissed
        'Whom did Vick kiss?'
     b. - *SAŠAJEZ    Vika  čupaz.*
        Alex-ACC  Vick  kissed
        'It was Alex whom Vick kissed.'

## 7. Results

- The data suggest that different focusing strategies exist parallelly in Udmurt: besides the immediately preverbal and the sentence-final positions, constituents can be focalized *in situ*, in sentence-initial and in non-immediately preverbal positions, as well. *In situ* focusing was preferred by some speakers over the other options.
- The sentence-initial focus position revealed to be an identificational focus position by virtue of the test in (5).
- The identificational focus position is associated with [± contrastive] feature.
- The identificational focus position precedes the topic positions.
- Since the identificational focus position also in Russian can precede the topic positions (though, it can follow them, as well, see section 3), the possibility that the Russian contributed to the formation of the identificational focus position in Udmurt cannot be excluded.
- A way to analyze non-sentence-initial foci is to take them for instances of information focus. Thus, information foci seem to show a big freedom concerning their distribution in the sentence.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper presented novel data based on empirical testing of the distribution and the interpretation of focused constituents in Udmurt. Although it had mainly descriptive aims, its results could be useful for a further refinement of the structural representation of the Udmurt sentence in a specific framework. The data suggest that the scale of the potential positions of foci is wider than assumed by Tánczos (2011), who claims that foci in Udmurt are either left-adjacent to the verb or sentence-final. The data also indicate and that there is a sentence-initial, non-necessarily contrastive identificational focus position preceding the topic positions. Foci occupying other positions are presumably instances of information focus.

Since information foci can be located in a wide range of positions, the question arises how exactly prosody interacts with word order in focus marking. This might also be a subject of future research.

## Acknowledgements

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