

**ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)**

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**THE STRUCTURE OF THE GENERAL QUESTION IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the structure of the general type of interrogative clauses in European languages (Russian, Polish, English, German, French, Spanish, Bashkir and Turkish), which goes a long way to building a theory of language in general and syntactic typology in particular. The study aims at establishing common and distinctive features which determine the structure of general questions in the languages of contrast. Such components include inversion of the basic word order, an interrogative particle or/and an auxiliary verb, as well as position of the interrogative word. Variation of such components causes syntactic models of the general type of interrogative clauses. An ideal model with full absence of question-building devices stands for a language etalon. The involvement of such devices of composing the structure of the interrogative clause in a concrete language brings some “tension” to this structure. The hypothesis of the study is an assumption of the dependence of the word autonomy on the degree of syntactic structure density. This hypothesis is verified on the basis of optional sampling of equivalent interrogative clauses of the general type in each of the contrasted tongues.

**Keywords:** interrogative pronoun, interrogative particle, inversion, language, language etalon, model, syntactic typology, typology, variety, word order.

**СТРУКТУРА ОБЩЕГО ВОПРОСА В ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ ЯЗЫКАХ**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

Статья посвящена сравнительному анализу вопросительного предложения общего типа в европейских языках (русском, польском, английском, немецком, французском, испанском, башкирском, турецком), что имеет важное значение для теории языка в целом и для синтаксической типологии в частности. Исследование проводится с целью установления общих и специфических компонентов структуры общего вопроса в сравниваемых языках. К таким компонентам относятся инверсия основного порядка слов, использование вопросительной частицы и/или вспомогательного глагола, а также позиция вопросительного местоимения. От варьирования этих компонентов зависит синтаксическая модель вопросительного предложения общего типа. В качестве языка-эталона используется идеальная модель без специальных средств построения вопроса. Включение таких средств в структуру вопросительного предложения конкретного языка приводит к определенной «напряженности» этой структуры. Гипотеза исследования состоит в предположении о зависимости синтаксической автономности слова от степени напряженности строя предложения. Принятая гипотеза проверяется с помощью произвольной выборки эквивалентных вопросительных предложений общего типа в каждом из языков сравнения.

**Ключевые слова:** вариативность, вопросительное местоимение, вопросительная частица, инверсия, модель, синтаксическая типология, словопорядок, типология, язык, язык-эталон.

**Introduction**

This study is conducted within the framework of linguistic typology that applies *the typological method* [10] to contrast language systems irrespective of their genetic or structural affinity. The aim of such a contrastive inquiry is revelation of *linguistic universals*, i.e. phenomena inherent in all natural tongues.

Admittedly, the modern stage of linguistics does not yet allow for conducting a large-scale research into all languages of the world. Normally, the researcher is usually limited to a small number of languages in order to establish the so-called *potential (possible) universals*. In so doing, the research is usually reduced to one level of language hierarchy. For example, on the basis of only 30 languages, J. Greenberg establishes 6 structures of the basic word order according to the arrangement of the major sentence members, such as “subject” (S), verb-predicate (V) and object (O) [13]. What makes them possible universals is their possibility to be extrapolated to all languages of the world.

Contrastive studies of the sentence level have long attracted the attention of scholars; a prominent place in these studies is occupied by the interrogative clause. It is accounted for, practically, by the role of questions in interpersonal communication and, theoretically, by the function of interrogative clauses to represent the category of questioning in communicative acts [3, P. 231].

Studies in interrogative clauses based on one concrete tongue are sufficiently covered in scholarly discourse (see, for instance, [2], [8], [12]), while contrastive studies occur infrequently (see, for instance [4], [6]). In the meantime, expanding research on interrogative structures in a number of languages is a real challenge and a major undertaking that contributes to the theory of cross-cultural communication and the theory of language.

### Methodology and data

In the course of linguistic evolution, syntax may change by transforming its archaic “quiet” sentence structure into a more “tense” type due to fixed word order [1, P. 20–25]. The fixed word order structure points to the analytical type in a language, while the archaic free word order structure denotes the synthetic type [5, P. 88–89].

The hypothesis of this study is based on the following assumption: the syntactic structure of the interrogative clause depends on the degree of word autonomy in a sentence. An inquiry into word autonomy based on the material of several languages shows this effect scaling down in the following way: (Polish, Turkish, Bashkir) → (Russian) → (Italian) → (German) → (French) → (English) [11]. It looks that the “quieter” the syntactic structure due to word autonomy, the less a language needs special devices to build a question. Unlike languages with “quiet” syntactic structure, languages with “tense” structure on account of fixed word order need such devices. Such a device may have the form of inversion of the major sentence members (S + V → V + S), or an interrogative particle, or an auxiliary verb. In a sentence, such a device may function either separately or in combination with other such devices.

In different languages, the interrogative structure tension varies, and one may measure the degree of this variation by “weighing” question-building devices cf., for instance, the interrogative particles in Russian, Polish and English: *часто ли этот сотрудник опаздывает на работу?* = *czy ten pracownik często spóźnia się do pracy?* = *does this employee often come late for work?* These clauses seem, *prima facie*, equivalent semantically and by way of syntactic tension, but such is not the case. The Russian particle *ли* is quite optional; it is emotively charged with uncertainty and may occur anywhere in the sentence; cf.: *опаздывает ли этот сотрудник на работу? этот ли сотрудник часто опаздывает на работу? всегда ли этот сотрудник опаздывает на работу?* (change of meaning in accordance with the functional perspective). Its Polish equivalent *czy* is not quite optional, as it may be dropped in colloquial speech (cf.: *czy chcesz się ze mną ożenić?* = *chcesz się ze mną ożenić?* “do you want to marry me?”), but this particle is less autonomous as compared to its Russian counterpart. The English auxiliary *do/does* is obligatory.

Owing to the increasing relevance of the analytical element in an interrogative structure, cross-linguistic tension scales up in the following way from left to right: Russian → Polish → English. With the Russian particle accepted as the minimal etalon of tension (1), its counterparts in the contrasted languages equal (2) in Polish and (3) in English.

Thus, it is expedient to apply a *language-etalon* [9, P. 95] as “the ideal structure”, *in aliis verbis*, a yardstick to measure all the objects contrasted. In this study, such an etalon is Russian, as it can do without any question-building devices.

The linguistic material under analysis includes interrogative syntactic structures in a number of European languages: the Russian language (R.L.), the Polish language (P.L.), the English language (E.L.), the German language (G.L.), the French language (F.L.), the Spanish language (S.L.), the Bashkir language (B.L.) and the Turkish language (T.L.) (all in all 8 languages). These languages represent the Indo-European linguistic family in three groups (Slavic, Germanic and Romance), as well as the Turkic family, each group being presented as a pair of representatives (R.L. + P.L.; E.L. + G.L.; F.L. + S.L.; B.L. + T.L.).

This method of selecting linguistic material is both representative and compact enough to establish probable universals based on the general type of interrogative clauses in genetically and structurally variegated linguistic systems.

### The results of the study

Traditional English grammar distinguishes 4 types of interrogative structures: general, special, alternative and disjunctive [14, P. 179]. Yet, it seems more logical to admit only two types: *the general* and *the special questions*, with subtypes representing these major types.

**The major subtype** of the general question is traced back to an appropriate affirmative clause as its semantic basis.

Cf. the following equivalent clauses with actional verbs in the contrasted languages: R.L. *этот сотрудник часто опаздывает на работу* → *(разве) этот сотрудник часто опаздывает на работу?* = P.L. *ten pracownik często spóźnia się do pracy* → *czy ten pracownik często spóźnia się do pracy?* = E.L. *this employee often comes late for work* → *does this employee often come late for work?* = G.L. *dieser Mitarbeiter kommt oft zu spät zur Arbeit* → *kommt dieser Mitarbeiter oft zu spät zur Arbeit* = F.L. *cet employé est souvent en retard au travail* → *cet employé est-il souvent en retard au travail?* = S.L. *este empleado a menudo llega tarde al trabajo* → *¿este empleado llega tarde a menudo al trabajo?* = B.L. *был хезмәткәр йыш кына эшкә һуңлай* → *был хезмәткәр йыш кына эшкә һуңлаймы* = T.L. *bu çalışan genellikle işe geç kalmaktadır* → *bu çalışan işe sık sık geç mi kalıyor?*

Cf. the following equivalent clauses with stative verbs in the contrasted languages: R.L. *вы сердитесь на меня?* = P.L. *czy pan jest na mnie zły?* = E.L. *are you angry with me?* = G.L. *sind Sie wütend auf mich?* = F.L. *êtes-vous en colère contre moi?* = S.L. *¿estás enojado conmigo?* = B.L. *һез миңә асылуанығызмы?* = T.L. *bana kızıyor musunuz?*

**The peripheral subtype** of the general question is represented by two variants:

- 1) *negative-interrogative questions*;
- 2) *disjunctive-interrogative questions*.

*The negative-interrogative question* is traced back to an appropriate negative utterance as its semantic basis; it may change its pragmatic component: R.L. *этот человек не бездарен* → *не бездарен ли этот человек?* Pragmatically, this question suggests lack of talent of the person in question. The Russian particle *разве* / *неужели* complicates the question by the connotations of mistrust, uncertainty, doubt, surprise, bewilderment [7, P. 390].

Cf. the following negative-interrogative equivalents: R.L. *наш труд не напрасен* → *не напрасен ли наш труд?* = P.L. *nasza praca nie jest daremna* → *czy nasza praca nie jest daremna?* = E.L. *our work is not in vain* → *isn't our work in vain?* =

G.L. *unsere Arbeit ist nicht umsonst* → *ist unsere Arbeit nicht umsonst?* = F.L. *notre travail n'est pas vain* → *notre travail n'est-il pas vain?* = S.L. *nuestro trabajo no es en vano* → *¿no es en vano nuestro trabajo?* = B.L. *беззөң хөзмөт юкка түгөл* → *беззөң хөзмөт юкка түгөлме?* = T.L. *işimiz boşuna değil* → *işimiz boşuna değil mi?*

With a verb of volition as predicate, this type of question may express genuine or ironic politeness: R.L. *не угодно ли Вам сразиться со мной?* = P.L. *czy chciałbyś ze mną walczyć?* = E.L. *would you mind fighting me?* = G.L. *wollen Sie mich nicht bekämpfen?* = F.L. *voulez-vous me battre?* = S.L. *¿quieres pelear conmigo?* = B.L. *минөң менән көрөшергә теләмәйхөзөзмө?* = T.L. *benimle savařmak ister misiniz?*

The *disjunctive-interrogative question* contains affirmation or negation in the initial part of the utterance and inquiry in the final part to verify this affirmation or negation; this is marked by a pause or a comma. The whole sentence becomes either *affirmatively imperative* or *affirmatively exclamatory*.

Cf. the following **affirmatively imperative** equivalents: R.L. *вы выполните свое обещание, не так ли?* = P.L. *pan dotrzyma obietnicy, prawda?* = E.L. *you'll fulfill your promise, won't you?* = G.L. *du erfüllst dein Versprechen, oder?* = F.L. *vous tenez votre promesse, n'est-ce pas?* = S.L. *cumplirás tu promesa, ¿verdad?* = B.L. *вэгэзэгээзе үтэйхөзөзмө, шулай бум?* = T.L. *sözünüzü yerine getiriyorsunuz, değil mi?*

Cf. the following **affirmatively exclamatory** equivalents: R.L. *какая прекрасная погода, не правда ли?* = P.L. *jaka piękna pogoda, prawda?* = E.L. *it is fine weather, isn't it?* = G.L. *was für ein schönes Wetter, nicht wahr?* = F.L. *quel beau temps, n'est-ce pas?* = S.L. *qué hermoso clima, ¿no?* = B.L. *хундэй матур хауа торшоо, шулай бум?* = T.L. *hava ne güzel, değil mi?*

It would be wrong to presume that this type of a question is typical of English only, because it is English that is characterized by strict regularity in framing two variants of such a question:

- 1) affirmation at the beginning and interrogation at the end;
- 2) negation at the beginning and interrogation at the end.

No regular structural pattern may serve a diagnostic criterion for this question type. What is diagnostic is a pragmatic model expressed by a judgement followed by a brief question demanding either affirmation or negation. Such a model with affirmation or negation in the main part is universal, at least in the languages of contrast.

Cf. the following equivalent questions with affirmation in the main part: R.L. *вы работаете в полиции, не правда ли? / не так ли? / разве не так? / так ведь? / верно? / да?* = P.L. *pan pracuje w policji, prawda?* = E.L. *you work for the police, don't you?* = G.L. *sie arbeiten für die Polizei, nicht wahr?* = F.L. *vous travaillez pour la police, n'est-ce pas?* = S.L. *trabaja en la policia, ¿no?* = B.L. *хөз полицияла эшлэйхөзөзмө, шулай бум?* = T.L. *polis için çalışıyorsunuz, değil mi?*

Cf. the following equivalent questions with negation in the main part: R.L. *вы не работаете в полиции, так ведь? / верно? / да?* = P.L. *pan nie pracuje w policji, prawda?* = E.L. *you don't work for the police, do you?* = G.L. *sie arbeiten nicht für die Polizei, oder?* = F.L. *vous ne travaillez pas pour la police, n'est-ce pas?* = S.L. *no trabajas en la policia, ¿verdad?* = B.L. *хөз полицияла эшлэмэйхөзөзмө, шулай бум?* = T.L. *polis için çalışmıyorsunuz, değil mi?*

There is one more type of interrogative structures – *the alternative type* – that stands in between the general and the special questions. It is based on asking a participant of a situation to choose one of the two alternatives. On the one hand, it stands closer to the general question owing to its syntactic pattern, on the other hand, it stands closer to the special question owing to the concrete answer it demands.

Cf. the following equivalent questions in the languages of contrast: R.L. *ты хочешь купить дом или арендовать его?* = P.L. *chcesz kupić dom lub go wynająć?* = E.L. *do you want to buy or to rent a house?* = G.L. *willst du ein Haus kaufen oder es mieten?* = F.L. *tu veux acheter une maison ou la louer?* = S.L. *¿quieres comprar una casa o alquilarla?* = B.L. *йорт хатын алырғамы, эллэ уны куртымға алырғамы?* = T.L. *bir ev satın almak mı yoksa kiralamak mı?*

Contrastive analysis allows to distinguish common and specific question-building devices. These devices vary according to the degree of fixed word order depending on:

- 1) variety of such devices;
- 2) location of interrogative particles that may be *in principio* (“at the beginning”) or *in fine* (“at the end”) of the clause.

In Russian with its fully free word order, the general question may or may not include the interrogative particle *ли*, as it is optional, as well as the optional particles *разве* and *неужели* localized *in principio* to express emotion (surprise, incredulity, indignation, etc.). Unlike intonation, the question structure does not change as compared to an appropriate affirmative clause: R.L. *(ты) хочешь исправлять свои ошибки* → *(ты) хочешь исправлять свои ошибки?*

In Polish with its relatively free word order, the general question may be built by means of the standard particle *czy in principio*: *czy starasz się poprawiać swoje błędy?* “do you want to correct your mistakes?” Like in Russian, the particle may be dropped, only the intonation changes; the question retains its structure of the affirmative clause: P.L. *(ty) chcesz poprawiać swoje błędy* “you want to correct your errors” → *(ty) chcesz poprawiać swoje błędy?* “do you want to correct your errors?”

In English with its fully strict word order, the general question is built by means of the analytical structure [V-aux + S + V-inf] that includes the auxiliary verb (V-aux), subject (S), the infinitive verb (V-inf): *does the boy want to play football?*

In German with its relatively strict word order, the set-up of the general question requires inversion of the main sentence members: G.L. *wir gehen zum Mittagessen ins Restaurant* “we are going to the restaurant to have dinner” → *gehen wir zum Mittagessen ins Restaurant?* With a compound verbal predicate its variable part stands *in principio*, while its invariable part is placed *in fine*: *sie sind gerade ins Restaurant gekommen* “they have just come to the restaurant” → *sind sie gerade ins Restaurant gekommen?* “have they come to the restaurant yet?”

In French with its relatively strict word order, the general question may be built by two patterns:

- 1) by means of an interrogative particle (*est-ce que*) *in principio*; the word order of the affirmative clause is retained: *est-ce que tu veux acheter un nouvel ordinateur?* “do you want to buy a new computer?”;
- 2) by means of inversion of the main members of the clause, inversion being either simple (with a pronominal subject): *lit-il le journal?* “is he reading a newspaper?”, or compound (with a substantive subject); in compound inversion the subject *in*

*principio* is reiterated after the predicate as a personal unstressed pronoun: *les nôtres sont-ils venus?* «have ours (“our people”) come?».

In Spanish with its relatively strict word order, the structure of the general question requires inversion of the main sentence members, like in German:  $\{(tú) \text{ vives en Madrid}\}$  “you live in Madrid” →  $\{\text{¿vives (tú) en Madrid?}\}$ ; the *in principio* location takes place either with a simple verb or with the variable part of a compound verbal predicate: *(el) quiere comprar una pelota* “he wants to buy a ball” → *¿quiere (el) comprar una pelota?* “does he want to buy a ball?”

In Bashkir the structure of the general question requires an interrogative suffix-morpheme represented by a variety of allomorphs *-мы/-ме/-мо/-мө* that may be joined to any sentence member, for example the verb: *(һин) хаталарығыңны төзәтергә тырышаһыңмы?* “are you trying to correct your mistakes?”; this structure retains the word order ([S + O + V] typical of agglutinative tongues).

In Turkish the structure of the general question requires an interrogative particle represented by a variety of forms *(-mı / -mi / -mu / -mü)* that may be joined to any sentence member, for example the verb: *hatalarını düzeltmeye mi çalışıyorsun?* “do you try to correct your mistakes?” (literally: “mistakes + your + try + {question particle} + to correct + you”).

In terms of componential analysis each meaningful question-building device may be regarded as a differential seme (DS) which may combine other such semes to compose a model (a pattern) of the interrogative structure inherent in a particular language. DS stands for a semantic invariant represented by its variants as semantic components (SC) in various types of oppositions. For example, DS “inversion of affirmative structure” in contrasting English and Russian shows a binary opposition: SC 1 «+» (E.L.) ↔ SM 2 «-» (R.L.), while contrasting English and French shows a privative opposition: SC 1 «+» (E.L.) ↔ SC 2 «+» (F.L.); this seme is neutralized in French due to a variety of models; cf. the various French ways of expressing the meaning of the sentence “are you going to the cinema?”: F.L. a) *est-ce que tu vas au cinéma?* b) *eu vas au cinéma?* c) *vas-tu au cinéma?*

Ranking semes according to their significance in the linguistic system, it stands to reason to rank grammatical semes (like inversion, or auxiliary verbs) higher than lexical ones (like particles).

The table below shows distribution of DS to structure the general question in the languages of contrast (see table).

Table 1 - Structural patterns of the general question in the languages of contrast

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semes	interrogative particle	inversion of the affirmative word order	auxiliary verb	variety of models
R.L.	+ –	–	–	2
P.L.	+–	–	–	2
E.L.	–	+	+	1
G.L.	–	+	–	1
F.L.	+–	+–	–	4
S.L.	–	+	–	1
B.L.	+	–	–	1
T.L.	+	–	–	1

In the table, the index (+ or –) shows presence or absence of a particular pattern to build the general question; the index (+–) shows variation of models, i.e. linguistic ambivalence in relation to a particular pattern due to its optional or recurrent character.

The structure of the general question falls into 5 models each represented by the languages of contrast in the following way:

- 1) R.L., P.L.;
- 2) B.L., T.L.;
- 3) G.L., S.L.;
- 4) F.L.;
- 5) E.L.

This distribution of the contrasted languages may be extrapolated to other languages which opt for one of the established variants in the way similar to the basic word order patterns established by J. Greenberg (SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV, OVS). Thus, contrasting equivalent structures in the Norwegian language (N.L.), the Italian language (I.L.) and the Czech language (C.L.), it becomes evident that Czech is in the same group as Russian and Polish (group 1), as their interrogative structures are of the “quietest” nature, while Norwegian and Italian opt for a tenser syntactic structure, like German and Spanish (group 3); cf. the following equivalent examples: (R.L. *ты получаешь экономическую помощь?*) = N.L. *får du økonomisk hjelp?* = I.L. *ricevi assistenza economica? / ricevi aiuto economico?* = C.L. *dostaneš ekonomickou pomoc?*

### Conclusion

To summarize, one may conclude the following:

1. The distinguished syntactic models are regarded as variants of the syntactic structure of the general question to represent probable universals that may be extrapolated to other languages.

2. The contrastive analysis shows the following levels of decreasing autonomy of the word: *the first level* is occupied by the Slavic languages with the only question-building device (interrogative particle) that is quite optional in Russian and not quite so in Polish owing to a tenser syntactic structure in the latter language; *the second level* is occupied by the Turkic languages on account of the obligatory interrogative element; *the third level* is occupied by German and Spanish on account of the obligatory inversion of the basic word order; *the fourth level* is occupied by French with its diversified system of building questions that includes optional interrogative particles, direct and indirect word order; *the fifth level* is occupied by English with obligatory auxiliary verbs and inversion of the main members of the clause. Thus, the contrasted tongues may be lined up as follows by way of increasing fixity in the word order: (Russian, Polish) → (Bashkir, Turkish) → (German, Spanish) → (French) → (English).

3. The hypothesis related to the dependence of the question structure on the word autonomy degree is verified through the contrastive analysis: languages with a low autonomy ranking are liable to apply special question-building devices which increase syntactic structure density.

4. The degree of syntactic structure density does not affect variation of linguistic models; the contrasted languages may be ranked as follows, with model variation diminishing from left to right: 4 (F.L.) → 2 (R.L., P.L.) → 1 (E.L., G.L., S.L., B.L., T.L.).

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