

## Locative Inversion, Definiteness, and Free Word Order in Russian

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### 1.0 Introduction

In this paper, I examine Russian data in terms of definiteness versus indefiniteness and locative inversion. The latter is investigated in Bresnan (1994). She presents an analysis of locative inversion in English and Chichewa and discusses the restrictions on locative inversion in these languages. In particular, she shows that, in English, locative inversion is permitted with many intransitive verbs and passivized transitive verbs (taking into account the *by*-phrase restriction), but is disallowed with transitive verbs.

This generalization applies to Russian verbs as well. Interestingly enough, locative inversion in Russian seems to work in the same way as in English. Given the fact that Russian has free word order, violation of the restrictions stated by Bresnan does not result in strict ungrammaticality but the resultant structures are definitely marginal, marked, or require a special context.

However, locative inversion in Russian seems to have a special function (interpretation). Since Russian does not have a formal article, word order is used to convey the notion of definiteness versus indefiniteness. The hypothesis is that, in Russian, the NP position is tied to definiteness: NPs in preverbal position are usually interpreted as definite while NPs in postverbal position are usually interpreted as indefinite. This approach has been already proposed in the literature dealing with languages that have relatively free word order (Kramsky 1972, Revzina 1979, Nikolaeva 1979). Kramsky suggests that "[t]he free word order in Slavic languages makes possible the full use of functional sentence perspective for the aims of expressing the opposition determination vs. indetermination" (1972:191). I assume, following Kramsky (1972), that "the category of determinedness vs. indeterminedness, which is most frequently expressed just by the article, is a universal category and in many languages it is expressed just by non-formal means, the article in the usual sense of the word being absent in them" (1972:19).<sup>1</sup>

The notion of definiteness, however, requires clarification. As a starting point I adopt the definition proposed by Kramsky (1972:30): "By the term "determinedness" we understand the fact that nouns are classified according to whether the content expressed by the noun is clear and identifiable in a concrete way or not". This definition is vague and, therefore not very helpful. In the course of this paper, I will attempt to achieve a more precise formulation of definiteness.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, I present Bresnan's analysis of locative inversion in English and apply it to Russian examples. Second, I

<sup>1</sup> Kramsky (1972) proposes the term "determinedness" vs. "indeterminedness". In this paper I use the term "definiteness" vs. "indefiniteness" to refer to the same phenomenon.

analyze the two types of Russian NPs – inherently definite and inherently indefinite – with respect to locative inversion with intransitive and transitive verbs. I adopt Milsark's (1974) distinction between weak and strong quantifiers, as presented in Diesing (1992). According to his analysis, the inherently definite NPs include strong quantifiers (e.g. *every, all, most*), personal pronouns, demonstratives, and proper names. The inherently indefinite NPs include weak quantifiers (e.g. *some, few, many*) and numerals. If the hypothesis stated in the previous paragraph is correct, we expect that inherently definite NPs will occur mostly in preverbal position while inherently indefinite NPs will occur mostly in postverbal position. Indeed, the data below show the systematic correlation between the position of a NP in the sentence and its definite versus indefinite interpretation. However, I also present examples, which do not fall into this pattern. Finally, I present data from Czech (another Slavic language with free word order), again provided by Kramsky (1972). The position of a NP in the sentence is only one of three factors that determine interpretation of this NP as definite or indefinite. Two other crucial factors are stress and context.

## 2.0 Locative inversion in English (Bresnan 1994)

According to Bresnan, "locative inversion in English involves the preposing of a locative phrase before the verb and the postposing of the subject NP after the verb".<sup>2</sup> Examples (1)-(3) from Bresnan's paper illustrate this point:

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<sup>2</sup> Bresnan points out, following Emonds 1976, Green 1976, 1980, Bolinger 1971, 1977, and Birner 1992, that English also allows inversions of nonlocative phrases, "which are restricted to the verb *be*" (75):

(4) a. Especially worrisome to public health experts is the growing number of TB cases. (Adapted from Birner 1992:66-7)

b. Criticized often for drunkenness is John Smith. (Birner 1992:62)

The restriction to *be* in English is arguable. Emonds (1976:34ff) claims that inversions of participles and adjectives are restricted to *be* but inversions of prepositional phrases are not. However, this claim is falsified, in particular, by the example Bresnan adopts from Birner (1992:58) repeated here as (5a) (75):

(5) a. Coiled on the floor lay a one-hundred-and-fifty-foot length of braided nylon climbing rope three-eighths of an inch thick.

This sentence illustrates VP preposing. However, as Bresnan (1994:76) observes, the VP itself contains a participle with a locative/directional complement. If we omit the locative PP the sentence becomes ungrammatical but the participle omission does not affect its grammaticality. Besides, Bresnan points out that "the verbs that allow such phrasal inversions, like *come, sit, stand, and lie* select locative complements". For example, the verbs in (6) do not select specifically locative complements (Bresnan shows that, in fact, some of them reject locative complements: \**Three women seemed in the yard*):

(6) a. \*Gathered pointlessly in the yard seemed three women.

b. \*Busy at the lathes kept three women.

But if replace the verbs in (6) by verbs, which select locative complements, the sentences become grammatical:

(7) a. Gathered pointlessly in the yard stood three women.

b. Busy at the lathes sat three women.

- (1) a. A lamp was in the corner.
- b. In the corner was a lamp.
- (2) a. My friend Rose was sitting among the guests.
- b. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose.
- (3) a. The tax collector came back to the village.
- b. Back to the village came the tax collector.

Bresnan uses the term *locative* to refer to "a broad range of spatial locations, paths, or directions, and their extensions to some temporal and abstract locative domains" (75). As Bresnan shows, not all verbs can undergo locative inversion. She observes a number of constraints on inverting verbs in English.

### 2.1 Transitivity restriction

Bresnan observes that in English locative inversion cannot apply to transitive verbs. Her examples (10) and (11), repeated here as (4) and (5) illustrate this point:

- (4) a. My friend Rose seated my mother among the guests of honor.
- b. \*Among the guests of honor seated my mother my friend Rose.
- c. \*Among the guests of honor seated my friend Rose my mother.
- (5) a. A lucky hiker can find the reclusive lyrebird in this rainforest.
- b. \*In this rainforest can find the reclusive lyrebird a lucky hiker.
- c. \* In this rainforest can find a lucky hiker the reclusive lyrebird

### 2.2 Split intransitivity

Bresnan shows that locative inversion in English is allowed with intransitive verbs, however, it is not allowed with ALL intransitive verbs (Postal 1977:147). Intransitives split as to whether they allow it (Levin 1985). Bresnan's examples (13) and (17) are repeated here as (6) and (7):

- (6) a. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose.
- b. \* Among the guests was knitting my friend Rose.
- (7) a. On the corner was standing a woman.
- b. \* On the corner was drinking a woman.

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These data show that English has (at least) two types of inversion: locative inversion, which preposes non-PP locative/directional constituents (as in (5)) and inversion of nonlocative constituents, which is generally restricted to *be*. For the purposes of her study, Bresnan excludes the examples like (4).

Bresnan's explanation for these facts will follow directly, in the end of the section 2.3.

### 2.3 Passivized transitive verbs and the *by*-phrase restriction<sup>3</sup>

Bresnan shows that locative inversion is possible with passivized transitive verbs. However, there is a restriction against the expression of the *by*-phrase. The examples below illustrate this point (Bresnan's examples (18), (19) and (21)):

- (8) a. My mother was seated among the guests of honor.  
b. Among the guests of honor was seated my mother.
- (9) a. The reclusive lyrebird can be found in this rainforest.  
b. In this rainforest can be found the reclusive lyrebird.
- (10) a.?? Among the guests of honor was seated my mother by my friend Rose.  
b.?? In this rainforest can be found the reclusive lyrebird by a lucky hiker.

Bresnan (1994) proposes that these restrictions on locative inversion fall under the following generalization: "Locative inversion can occur just in case the subject can be predicated as the argument of which the location, change of location or direction expressed by the locative argument is predicated" (80). Thus, the intransitive verbs *be*, *sit* and *come* satisfy this requirement: they have a theme subject of which location, change of location or direction is predicated. This explains the fact that not all intransitive verbs can undergo locative inversion: the intransitive verbs like *knit* or *drink* do not predicate locations of their subjects. If a locative phrase occurs with these verbs, it is either an adjunct describing the location of the entire event or a locative predicated of a nonsubject argument (82). In both cases they do not satisfy Bresnan's generalization. Transitive verbs like *seat* or *find* predicate locations of their object arguments. However, when these verbs are passivized, the theme argument becomes a subject and locative inversion can apply. But when the *by*-phrase is introduced, a more prominent role than the theme is syntactically expressed and locative inversion cannot apply to these sentences (80).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bresnan's analysis of locative inversion with passive verbs shows that not all passives allow locative inversion in English. When the passive subject is an applied beneficiary or instrument argument, locative inversion is ungrammatical. However, these examples are difficult to find. One way English can create such passive subjects is through preposition incorporation into the verb (Bresnan 1982:79): *He needs to be spoken to*. For the purposes of my paper I restrict my comparative analysis to the four restrictions I have introduced so far.

<sup>4</sup> Bresnan assumes a ranking of argument roles descending from agent to theme to locative and the ranking is represented by the left-to-right order of roles in an argument structure. The generalization can then be interpreted as stating that a theme subject must be the highest-ranked of the roles syntactically expressed, since there is none to its left in the argument structure. If a more

### 3.0 Locative inversion in Russian

In this section, I apply Bresnan's generalization to the Russian verbs. I show that Russian and English exhibit certain similarities with respect to locative inversion with intransitive, transitive and passivized transitive verbs. Following Bresnan, I consider the sentence where a locative phrase in the postverbal position appears to be associated with the basic structure. Bresnan does not state this explicitly. However, it follows from her analysis that locative inversion is an instance of movement, since as a result of locative inversion a locative phrase moves to the preverbal position. In order to prepose a locative phrase before the verb, we have to assume that it was originally generated in the postverbal position. This implies the presence of a basic structure and a derived structure. Depending on the type of the verb that the basic structure contains – intransitive, transitive or passivized transitive – locative inversion is allowed or not.

The following examples illustrate locative inversion in Russian:

- (11) a. Lampa bila v uglu.  
lamp-Nom was in corner  
'The lamp was in the corner'
- b. V uglu bila lampa.  
in corner was lamp-Nom  
'In the corner was a lamp'
- (12) a. Moya podruga Roza sidela sredi gostei.  
my friend Rose-Nom was sitting among guests  
'My friend Rose was sitting among the guests'
- b. Sredi gostei sidela moya podruga Roza.  
among guests was sitting my friend Rose-Nom  
'Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose'

These examples show that locative inversion in Russian and English has the same properties. It involves the preposing of a locative phrase before the verb and the postposing of the subject NP after the verb. Moreover, the restrictions on transitive verbs and expression of the *by*-phrase with passivized transitive verbs outlined above hold in Russian as well.

### 3.1 Transitivity restriction

The following examples (13) and (14) demonstrate the transitivity restriction on locative inversion in Russian. The (a) sentences represent the basic structure,

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prominent role than the theme is syntactically expressed, this generalization cannot be satisfied because the theme is no longer the leftmost in the argument structure (81).

while the (b) sentences represent the derived structure. The derived sentences are not as strictly ungrammatical as in English but they are definitely marked.

- (13) a. Moya podrugа Roza posadila moyu mat' sredi pochetnih gostei.  
my friend Rose-Nom. seated my mother-Acc. among guests of honor.  
'My friend Rose seated my mother among the guests of honor'
- b. ? Sredi pochetnih gostei posadila moyu mat' moya podrugа Roza.  
among guests of honor seated-fem my mother-Acc. my friend Rose-Nom.  
'Among the guests of honor seated my mother my friend Rose'
- c. ?? Sredi pochetnih gostei posadila moya podrugа Roza moyu mat'.  
among guests of honor seated-fem. my friend Rose-Nom. my mother-Acc.  
'Among the guests of honor seated my friend Rose my mother'
- (14) a. Maria postavila tarelku na stol.  
Maria-Nom. put-fem. plate-Acc. on table.  
'Maria put a plate on the table'
- b. ? Na stol postavila tarelku Maria.  
on table put-fem. plate-Acc. Maria-Nom.  
'On the table put a plate Maria'
- c. ?? Na stol postavila Maria tarelku.  
on table put-fem. Maria-Nom. plate-Acc.  
'On the table put Maria a plate'

I expect that the judgements regarding the examples marked (???) can vary from speaker to speaker. More than that, I am aware of the fact that, in Russian, the contexts in which these sentences sound natural can be easily constructed. However, what is crucial here is a contrast between the basic structure and the structure which has undergone locative inversion. The basic structure does not seem to require any particular context.

### 3.2 Split intransitivity

As we have seen from Bresnan's analysis not all intransitive verbs in English can be inverted. However, her analysis cannot be straightforwardly extended to the Russian examples. First I present the examples which seem to obey this restriction:

(15) a. Sredi pochetnih gostei sidela moya podrugа Roza.  
among guests of honor was sitting my friend Rose-Nom.  
'Among the guests of honor was sitting my friend Rose'

b.?? Sredi pochetnih gostei vyazala moya podrugа Roza.  
among guests of honor was knitting my friend Rose-Nom.  
'Among the guests of honor was knitting my friend Rose'

(16) a. Na uglu stoyala devushka.  
on corner was standing young girl-Nom.  
'On the corner was standing a girl'

b.?? Na uglu pila devushka.  
on corner was drinking young girl-Nom.  
'On the corner was drinking a young girl'

Recall Bresnan's (1994:82) account for these facts: such noninverting intransitives like *knit* or *drink* do not predicate locations of their subjects. If a locative phrase occurs with these verbs, it is either an adjunct describing the location of the entire event or a locative predicated of a nonsubjects argument. In both cases they do not satisfy Bresnan's generalization. However, it seems that the Russian examples above sound odd because *among the guests of honor* is not a prototypical place to *knit*, and *on the corner* is not a prototypical place to *drink*. If we replace these locative phrases by more appropriate expressions, sometimes locative inversion becomes possible:

(17) a. Moya podrugа Roza vyazala na terrase.  
my friend Rose-Nom. was knitting on terrace  
'My friend Rose was knitting on the terrace'

b. Na terrase vyazala moya podrugа Roza.  
on terrace was knitting my friend Rose-Nom.  
'On the terrace was knitting my friend Rose'

In this case the locative phrase is predicated of the entire event but the sentence, nevertheless, is grammatical. However, I must admit that, although (18b) is better than (16b), it is worse than (17b):

(18) a. Devushka pila za stolikom v kafe.  
young girl-Nom was drinking at table in café  
'The young girl was drinking (sitting) at the table in a café'

- b. ? Za stolikom v kafe pila devushka.  
 at table in café was drinking young girl-*Nom*  
 'At the table in a café was drinking a young girl'

### 3.3 Passivized transitive verbs and the *by*-phrase restriction

With respect to passivized verbs and the *by*-phrase restriction, locative inversion in Russian behaves similarly to its English counterpart. Sentences which contain a passivized transitive verb but do not contain the *by*-phrase (NP in Instrumental case, the Russian counterpart of the English *by*-phrase) are better with respect to locative inversion than those in which the *by*-phrase is expressed.<sup>5</sup>

- (19) a. Moya mat' byla posazhena sredi pochetnih gostei.  
 my mother-*Nom.* was seated among guests of honor.  
 'My mother was seated among the guests of honor'
- b. (?)Sredi pochetnih gostei byla posazhena moya mat'.  
 among guests of honor was seated my mother-*Nom.*  
 'Among the guests of honor was seated my mother'
- c.?? Sredi pochetnih gostei byla posazhena moya mat' moei podrugoi Rozoi.  
 among guests of honor was seated my mother-*Nom.* my friend Roze-  
*Instr.*  
 'Among the guests of honor was seated my mother by my friend Rose'
- (20) a. Tarelka byla postavlena na stol.  
 plate-*Nom.* was put on table  
 'The plate was put on the table'
- b. (?)Na stol byla postavlena tarelka.  
 on table was put plate-*Nom.*  
 'On the table was put a plate'
- c.?? Na stol byla postavlena tarelka Mariei.  
 on table was put plate-*Nom.* Maria-*Instr.*  
 'On the table was placed a plate by Maria'

<sup>5</sup> The (b) sentences are less natural in Russian than their counterparts in English. This probably is due to the fact that Russian has quite a restrictive use of the passive; not all the verbs in Russian can be passivized. In many cases where English would use a passive sentence, Russian uses a sentence which contains an active verb with plural marker without expressing the subject, especially if this subject is unknown or irrelevant:

(i) Iz gorodskogo sada ubrali vse statui.  
 from municipal garden (they)removed-*pl* all statues-*Acc*  
 All the statues were removed from the municipal garden.

But the (c) examples are definitely worse.

To summarize, locative inversion in English and Russian seems to exhibit the same properties. The crucial point is that Russian has free word order but nonetheless seems to obey the restrictions that hold for English. This suggests that "free word order" does not mean that one can move anything anywhere and the resultant structure will always be grammatical.

#### 4.0 Locative inversion and inherently definite versus inherently indefinite NPs in Russian

As I have proposed in the Introduction, locative inversion in Russian seems to have a special function (interpretation). Russian seems to use word order, and locative inversion in particular, to express the opposition of definiteness versus indefiniteness. One way to check whether this hypothesis is correct is to apply locative inversion to sentences which contain inherently definite and inherently indefinite NPs. If the hypothesis is right, inherently definite NPs will "refuse" to move to the postverbal position while inherently indefinite NPs will obligatorily invert. Diesing (1992:59) describes the distinction between weak and strong quantifiers proposed by Milsark (1974). According to Milsark, weak quantifiers include determiners like *a, some, a few, many*, and numerals, while strong quantifiers include determiners like *the, every, all*, and *most*. Milsark observes that weak determiners can appear with a subject NP in there-insertion contexts, while strong determiners cannot. Example (4) provided by Diesing is repeated here as (21):

- (21) a. There is/are *a/some/a few/many/three* fly (flies) in my soup.  
b. \* There is/are *the/every/all/most* fly (flies) in my soup.

Diesing calls this "the definiteness effect". These examples show that weak determiners are indefinite, while strong determiners are definite.

#### 4.1 Intransitive verbs

If the prediction made by the hypothesis above is correct, inherently definite NPs should tend to appear in the preverbal position. When locative inversion applies and these NPs move to the postverbal position the resultant sentences, even though still acceptable, seem to require a special context.

- (22) a. *Ona/moya podruqa zhivet v Ierusalime.*  
*she/my friend-Nom. lives in Jerusalem*  
'She/my friend lives in Jerusalem'  
b. *Etot mal'chik zhivet v sosedney kvartire.*  
*this boy-Nom lives in neighbor's apartment*  
'This boy lives next door'

- c. Maria priehala v Moskvu.  
 Maria-*Nom* arrived in Moscow  
 'Maria arrived in Moscow'
- d. Kazhdiy shkol'nik/vse shkol'niki/bol'shinstvo shkol'nikov edet/ut  
 letom v derevnu.  
 every schoolchild/all schoolchildren/most schoolchildren go-*sg/pl*  
 in summer to village  
 'Every schoolchild/all schoolchildren/most schoolchildren go to a  
 village in summer'
- (23) a.?? V Ierusalime zhivet ona/moya podrugа.  
 in Jerusalem lives she/my friend-*Nom*  
 'In Jerusalem lives she/my friend'
- b.?? V sosedney kvartire zhivet etot mal'chik.  
 in neighbor's apartment lives this boy-*Nom*  
 'Next door lives this boy'
- c.?? V Moskvu priehala Maria.  
 in Moscow arrived Maria-*Nom*  
 'In Moscow arrived Maria'
- d. ? V derevnu edet/ut letom  
 kazhdiy shkol'nik/vse shkol'niki/bol'shinstvo shkol'nikov  
 to village go-*sg/pl* in summer  
 every schoolchild/all schoolchildren/most schoolchildren  
 'To village go in summer every schoolchild/all schoolchildren/most  
 schoolchildren'

The sentences in (23) are grammatical, however they seem to require a specific context. Normally, a native speaker would not use them in a situation when she needs simply to state the fact that somebody lives in Jerusalem or goes to a village. However, inherently indefinite NPs behave differently:

- (24) a. V zooparke zhivut neskol'ko/mnogo/pyat' drakonov  
 in zoo live-*pl* some/many/five dragons-*gen*.  
 'There are some/many/five dragons in the Zoo'
- b. ? Neskol'ko/mnogo/pyat' drakonov zhivut v zooparke.  
 Some/ many/five dragons-*gen*. live-*pl*. in zoo.  
 'Some/ many/five dragons live in the Zoo'

- (25) a. V Norvegii byl/shel/lezhal sneg.  
 in Norway was/went/lay snow-Nom.  
 'There was snow in Norway/It was snowing in Norway/Snow lay in Norway'
- b. ? Sneg byl/shel/lezhal v Norvegii.  
 snow-Nom. was/went/lay in Norway  
 'There was snow in Norway/It was snowing in Norway/Snow lay in Norway'
- (26) a. Na uglu stoyala devochka.  
 on corner was standing girl-Nom.  
 'On the corner was standing a girl'
- b. Devochka stoyala na uglu.  
 girl-Nom. was standing on corner  
 'The girl was standing on the corner'<sup>6</sup>

In (24a) the sentence represents the basic structure. This sentence would normally be used by a speaker to state the fact that there are (certain number of) dragons in the Zoo. But, when locative inversion applies and an inherently indefinite NP moves to the preverbal position, like in (b), the sentence sounds odd if uttered without an appropriate context, for example:

- (27) a. Ya znau, chto drakoni suschestvuyut - neskol'ko/mnogo/pyat' drakonov  
 zhivut v zooparke.  
 I know that dragons exist — some/ many/five dragons-  
 gen. live-pl. in zoo  
 'I know that dragons exist – some/many/five dragons live in the Zoo'

Example (25) deserves special comments. I consider *snow* to be inherently indefinite. For example, this noun cannot appear with a number of strong quantifiers or with possessive pronouns, though it can appear with demonstrative pronouns and with the strong quantifier *all*:

- (28) a. \*Kazhdiy sneg/\*moy sneg/?bol'shinstvo snega  
 'every snow/my snow/most snow'
- b. Etot sneg/ves' sneg  
 'this snow/all snow'

<sup>6</sup> I translate NPs inside the prepositional phrase as definite, for the sake of consistency. Here, I focus on the subject and object NPs so, for the purposes of this paper, this is not crucial.

Thus, the most natural position of *snow* is after the verb. The (b) example is marked. It is perfectly grammatical but a native speaker would not use it in case she simply needs to state the fact that it was snowing in Norway. This sentence seems to be more appropriate as an answer to a question like “Where was it snowing last year?”. Notice also that in Russian, nouns, which denote states of nature – *snow, rain, wind, cold*, etc. – usually follow the verb. This is also true about nouns like *winter, morning*, etc:

- (29) a. Shel dozhd’/Dul veter/Bilo holodno.  
 went rain/blew wind/was cold  
 ‘It was raining/It was windy/ It was cold’
- b. \* Dozhd’ shel’/?veter dul’/?holodno bilo  
 rain went/blew wind/cold was  
 ‘It was raining/It was windy/ It was cold’
- (30) a. Prishla zima/nastupilo utro  
 came winter/came morning  
 ‘Winter arrived/Morning came’
- b. ? Zima prishla’/?Utro nastupilo  
 winter came/morning came  
 ‘Winter arrived/Morning came’

Example (26) contains a NP which is neither inherently definite nor indefinite. Such NPs can usually appear with both, inherently definite and inherently indefinite determiners. Since, in this case, the NP is not preceded by any determiner, one possible way to indicate whether this is *a girl* or *the girl* is through word order. Thus, the (a) sentence seems to be more appropriate in a situation where this NP is introduced for the first time and the most natural interpretation would be indefinite – *a girl*. Meanwhile, the (b) sentence presupposes that a listener is already familiar with the NP and here the most natural interpretation would be definite – *the girl*.

So far, the data introduced above are consistent with the hypothesis that the position of NP in Russian is tied to definiteness. Additional support for this analysis comes from Burzio’s theory of unaccusativity (1986). Intransitive verbs, which take a locative phrase as a complement, are usually unaccusatives – like the verbs in (22) – (27).<sup>7</sup> According to the theory of unaccusativity, such verbs assign

<sup>7</sup> The only exception is (22d), which is translated into English as *go*. However, I am not sure about its status in Russian. This is an activity verb whose literary translation would be something like *go by train or car* or using any other means of transportation. This verb can be used with inanimate subjects like *train, car, bicycle*, etc. But it cannot be used with all animate subjects: for example, the sentence *sobaka/mladenetz edet v derevnu* “the dog/baby goes to a village” sounds odd.

only one  $\theta$ -role to their only argument – direct object, which originates in the post-verbal position. Since Russian does not require the subject position to be filled the direct object does not move to the preverbal position, but stays in its original place. When a locative phrase comes into play it occupies the free, preverbal position. However, when there is a necessity to indicate the definiteness versus indefiniteness of a NP, one of the options available to a language without articles is to use word order. Given the assumption that Russian NPs which appear preverbally, receive a definite interpretation, we have the following situation: if a NP is inherently indefinite (the examples in (22) – (25)) the preposing of such NPs before the verb results in a marked sentence, which requires a special context. If an NP is neutral with respect to definiteness, that is, has neither definiteness nor indefiniteness inherent to it (the example in (26)) but can receive both definite and indefinite interpretation depending on the circumstances, locative inversion is optional and does not seem to affect the grammaticality of the sentence.

Russian, however, provides serious counterexamples to this hypothesis. For instance, there are unaccusative verbs, which prefer to have their argument on the subject position:

(31) a. Babuska spit.  
 grandma-Nom sleep  
 'The grandma is sleeping'

b. ? Spit babushka.  
 sleep grandma-Nom  
 'A grandma is sleeping'

(32) a. Reka zamerzla.  
 river-Nom froze  
 'The river froze'

b. ? Zamerzla reka.  
 froze river-Nom  
 'A river froze'

(33) a. Voda vskipela.  
 water-Nom boiled  
 'The water boiled'

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Certainly, we are able to understand what it means, but there is a more natural way to convey this meaning: The dog/baby is taken to a village. Thus, on the one hand this verb can be used with inanimate subjects but on the other hand it entails certain degree of consciousness/volition. I cannot say that its only argument is pure object.

- b. ? Vskipela voda.  
boiled water-*Nom*  
'Water boiled'
- (34) a. Morozhenoe rastayalo.  
ice-cream-*Nom* melted  
'The ice-cream melted'
- b. ? Rastayalo morozhenoe.  
melted ice-cream-*Nom*  
'Ice-cream melted'

In examples (31) – (34), the arguments of the verbs are underlying objects. At this stage I have nothing to say about example (31). This sentence contains a concrete noun, not preceded by any element which would indicate its definiteness vs. indefiniteness. So, there is no reason why, being an object of the verb *spat* (sleep), it cannot stay in the postverbal position. But I propose a possible explanation from the area of compositional semantics for the examples (32) – (34). Our knowledge of the world suggests that talking about the events denoted by these sentences a speaker usually means a particular river or certain amount of water in a particular pan, rather than all possible sources of water in the world. The same is true about the ice-cream; we understand that a speaker's utterance refers to a particular unit of ice-cream, rather than ice-cream in general. But this explanation is quite vague. One can argue, for example, that any act of speech presupposes the speaker's acquaintance with the object of speech (grandma, river, water, ice-cream, in our case). It is clear that, in order to account for these facts we need, at least, a much more elaborate theory of definiteness which is obviously beyond the scope of this paper.

Another type of examples is founded in Nikolaeva (1979). She presents the examples of Russian from Pospelov (1970), who considers four options:

- (35) a. Poezd **prishel**.  
train-*Nom* arrived  
'The train arrived'
- b. Poezd **prishel**.  
train-*Nom* arrived  
'A train arrived'
- (36) a. Prishel **poezd**.  
arrived train  
'A train arrived'

- b. Prishel poezd.  
arrived train  
'The train arrived'

Notice, that the word that appears in **bold** is supposed to be stressed: (38a) is a notification of arrival; (38b) informs that the train arrived and not what we were waiting for; (39a) simply states the fact that a train arrived – not any special train; (39b) announces that the train that we are waiting for has eventually arrived. Nikolaeva cites these examples to support the claim that in Russian, depending on the meaning of the sentence, the heavy stress falls on the “assertive elements”, while reduced stress falls on the “presuppositional elements”.<sup>8</sup> This distinction helps to identify or differentiate NPs in the text (121). Notice, however, that the position of NP also matters: Nikolaeva points out that Pospelov emphasizes the indefiniteness of the NP in the examples (38b) and (39a) – a NP is interpreted as indefinite when it is stressed. When a NP is stressed it becomes even more indefinite when locative inversion applies – that is, when this NP is moved to the postverbal position (122).<sup>9</sup> Thus, in Russian, the stress also plays the crucial role in indicating definiteness versus indefiniteness.

#### 4.2 Transitive verbs

Transitive verbs pose a problem for the hypothesis that, in Russian, the NP position is tied to definiteness. The major difficulty for this analysis stems from the fact that transitive verbs have two arguments. This means that both argument positions – subject and object – are occupied. So, in the case of two definite or two indefinite NPs, it is not clear how definiteness versus indefiniteness can be indicated using the word order. There are four options available: <definite, indefinite>, <indefinite, definite>, <definite, definite>, <indefinite, indefinite>. Consider these four variants in Russian:

- (37) a. Roza razbila kakuu-to vazuu. (definite – proper name; indefinite – weak quantifier)  
Rose-Nom. broke a/some vase-Acc.  
'Rose broke a vase'
- b. ?? Kakuu-to vasu razbila Roza.  
a/some vase-Acc. broke Rose-Nom.  
'Rose broke a vase'

<sup>8</sup> According to Nikolaeva (1979), the familiar, definite elements in theory are connected to those which linguistics of that time called “presuppositional elements” while the new – with “assertive elements”.

<sup>9</sup> Notice, that Pospelov (1970) refers to the degree of definiteness. Apparently in Russian a NP can be more or less definite depending on what means are applied to indicate it. Under this view the most definite interpretation a NP receives when it is (a) appears in the preverbal position; (b) is unstressed; (c) is put in a definite context.

- (38) a. Eto okno                      razbil kakoi-to shkol'nik. (definite – demonstrative  
 pronoun;  
 indefinite – weak quantifier)  
 this window-Acc.      broke a/some schoolchild-Nom.  
 'This window was broken by a schoolchild'
- b. ? Kakoi-to shkol'nik                      razbil eto okno  
 a/some schoolchild-Nom. broke this window-Acc.  
 'A schoolchild broke this window'
- (39) a. Etot shkol'nik                      razbil eto okno. (def.–demonstr. pronouns)  
 this schoolchild-Nom. broke this window-Acc.  
 'This schoolchild broke this window'
- b. ?? Eto okno                      razbil etot shkol'nik  
 this window-Acc. broke this schoolchild-Nom.  
 'This window was broken by this child'
- (40) a. Kakoi-to shkol'nik                      razbil kakuu-to vazuu. (indef.–weak quantifiers)  
 a/some schoolchild-Nom. broke a/some vase-Acc.  
 'A schoolchild broke a vase'
- b. ?? Kakuu-to vazuu razbil kakoi-to shkol'nik  
 a/some vase-Acc. broke a/some schoolchild-Nom.  
 'A vase was broken by a schoolchild'

Example (37a) does not seem to provide any difficulties. A proper name, which is inherently definite, appears in the preverbal position, while a noun *vazu* preceded by a weak quantifier occupies the postverbal position. The example in (37b) is a marked sentence. It is appropriate in a situation when there are several vases were broken and one of them (we do not which one) was broken by Rose. Again, (38a) is consistent with my hypothesis: a noun *okno*, preceded by a demonstrative pronoun *eto*, appears in the preverbal position while a noun *shkol'nik*, preceded by a weak quantifier *kakoi-to*, appears in the postverbal position. However, (38b), even though less natural than (38a), sounds better than (37b). This leads to the idea of a hierarchy of weak and strong determiners. In fact, Diesing presents Ioup's (1975) discussion of the factors that determine relative quantifier scope. Ioup notes that the various quantifiers differ in relative scope preferences. She presents this in the form of hierarchy. The leftmost elements in the hierarchy show the greatest preference for wider scope, and the rightmost elements show the greatest preferences for narrower scope:

loup's hierarchy (1975:64):

each > every > all > most > many > several > some > a few

According to this hierarchy, determiners differ in their degree of definiteness versus indefiniteness. Let us assume this property of determiners to be universal. If, in Russian, proper names occupy the leftmost position, while demonstrative pronouns *etot/tot* (this/that) occupy the next position to the right, we can explain why (38b) is better than (37b). Since proper names are "more definite" than demonstrative pronouns, their appearance in the postverbal position is less natural.

However, when we have both the preverbal and postverbal positions occupied by NPs, which have the same degree of definiteness, the SVO word order seems to be preferred. In (39) both NPs are definite – they are both preceded by the same demonstrative pronoun and consequently have the same degree of definiteness. In this case, inversion results in a sentence which requires a particular context. It could be appropriate in the case where the conversation is about the window and we are eager to find out who has broken it. The same is true about (40); here, both NPs possess the same degree of indefiniteness. Example (40a) represents the basic structure whereas the inverted sentence in (40b) is marked.

### 5 The Czech data

Here, I present the examples from Czech provided by Kramsky (1972). His examples seem to support the hypothesis that the NP position is tied to definiteness. However, when he discusses examples based on transitive verbs, the same problem arises. Whether a NP in the preverbal position should be interpreted as definite or indefinite cannot be concluded from the word order alone.

- (41) a. *Kniha je na stole.*  
book-Nom. is on table  
The book is on the table.
- b. *Na stole je kniha.*  
on table is book-Nom.  
On the table [there] is a book-Nom.
- (42) a. *Mlada divka rozbila vazu.*  
young girl-Nom. broke vase-Acc.  
The young girl broke a vase.
- b. *Vazu rozbila mlada divka*  
vase-Acc. broken young girl-Nom.  
The vase was broken by a young girl.

Kramsky points out that "though in the first case the expression *mlada divka* is the theme, it is not quite certain whether it implies determinedness or indeterminatedness. Here, the preceding context will be decisive; if the young girl is already spoken of in a preceding sentence then, in (24), a certain young girl is concerned and we should translate the sentence in English as *The young girl broke a vase*. In this case the word *vazu* (a vase-ACC) implies indeterminatedness. In the second sentence, however, the word *vazu* explicitly implies determinedness as it is a theme whereas the expression *mlada divka* belongs to the rheme and implies indeterminatedness" (44).

Kramsky concludes that these examples show that, in Czech, there is a certain relation between the category of definiteness versus indefiniteness and the functional sentence perspective unless the influence of context appears. He assumes the similar relation in other languages which do not have a formal article but have free word order.

## **6 Conclusion**

The data above suggest that there is a certain relation between the position of a NP and its interpretation as definite or indefinite. This means that the original hypothesis stated in the beginning of the paper is not completely wrong. Languages which do not possess a formal article but have free word order use free word order to indicate definiteness or indefiniteness. However, as the Russian data show, stress also can be used to convey this notion – the familiar elements, which have been already introduced, are usually unstressed whereas the new, unfamiliar elements are usually stressed. Furthermore, as we saw from the Czech examples, context appears to play an important role in the NP interpretation as definite versus indefinite. Thus, there are three major ways being discussed so far to indicate the definiteness or indefiniteness of a NP. It is not clear, however, how these ways relate to each other. Whether the three of them can be applied arbitrarily to any structure, whether they have certain distribution and whether there are any restrictions on application of any or all of them are questions for further research. Particularly, as I have already mentioned, in order to draw a more precise picture of how definiteness and indefiniteness works in languages without determiners we need a more elaborate theory of definiteness itself.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Martha McGinnis for her patience and extremely useful comments and suggestions on this paper, especially, for pointing out to me the distinction between inherently definite and inherently indefinite NPs.

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