

# Kakvo li e *li*: Interrogation and Focusing in Bulgarian

Catherine Rudin  
Wayne State College

Bulgarian *li* is traditionally recognized as an interrogative particle, and this is an accurate description of at least most instances of *li*. In (1), for example, its presence makes a declarative sentence into a yes-no question.

- (1) a. Trǎgvame.  
'We're leaving.'
- b. Trǎgvame li?  
'Are we leaving?'

However, *li* has other functions as well. In this article I demonstrate that *li* serves as a marker of focus and that its syntactic behavior is intimately linked to that of Focus constituents.

It is well known that *li* can occur in several positions. It can be suffixed to a verb, as in (2a-b), suffixed to a preverbal word or phrase, as in (2c-d), or placed at the end of a sentence or fragment, as in (2e-g). These positions correspond to differing scopes of interrogation, which in turn correspond to differences in focus (that is, differences in which part of the sentence is emphasized and non-presupposed). Roughly, utterance-final *li* questions and focuses the entire proposition as a unit, postverbal *li* questions and focuses the predicate, and preverbal *li* questions and focuses the constituent to which it is suffixed.

- (2) a. Kupi *li* knigata?  
'Did she buy the book?'
- b. Šteše *li* da kupi knigata?  
'Was she going to buy the book?'
- c. Knigata *li* šteše da kupi?  
'Was she going to buy THE BOOK?'

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- d. Skoro *li* šteše da kupi knjigata?  
'Was she going to buy the book SOON?'
- e. Šteše da kupi knjigata *li*?  
'Is it true, she was going to buy the book?'
- f. Dali šte kupi knjigata *li*?  
'(Are you asking) whether she'll buy the book?'
- g. Skoro *li*?  
'Soon?'

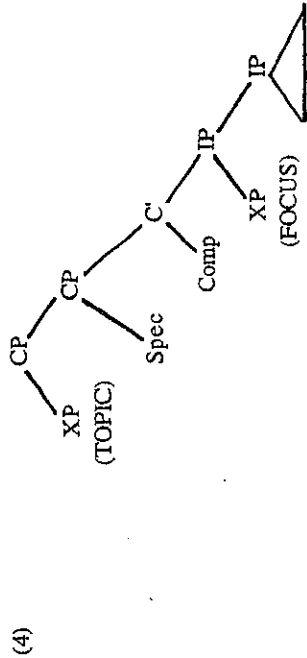
In (2a-b), it is the predicate, the act of buying the book, which is in question. There is no overt subject in these examples, but even if one were present it would be defocused: in *Tanja kupi li knjigata?* 'Did Tanja buy the book?' the question is not whether Tanja did something, but whether it was book-buying that she did. In (2c) the question is whether the object to be bought is the book; the fact that "she" was going to buy something is presupposed. Similarly in (2d) everything is presupposed except the time of the intended purchase. In (2e-g), in contrast, nothing is presupposed; these might be used, for example, to check whether one has correctly heard or interpreted the previous speaker's utterance.

As Scatton (1984:375) notes, it is a very common pattern in yes-no questions for the questioned element to be placed before the verb, with *li* suffixed to it, as in (2c-d). But it is not the case that all questions with a preverbal constituent place *li* after that constituent, nor indeed that a fronted constituent is always the questioned element. Both (3a) and (3b) are possible, each with a different focus of interrogation. In (3a), postverbal *li* once again questions the predicate (the suitcase-taking, here), while *Stefan* is presupposed. In (3b), with preverbal *li*, the opposite is true: the suitcase-taking is presupposed and *Stefan* is questioned.

- (3) a. Stefan vze *li* kufara?  
'Did Stefan take the suitcase?'
- b. Stefan *li* vze kufara?  
'Was it Stefan that took the suitcase?'

A central claim of this article is that whether or not *li* is suffixed to a preverbal phrase depends upon the Focus as opposed to Topic status of that

phrase; or, to look at it from a different point of view, preverbal *li* is a convenient diagnostic for Focus vs. Topic status of the constituent to which it is attached. I have argued elsewhere (Rudin 1986) that Bulgarian has two preverbal XP positions (positions where any phrase may occur), one preceding and one following Comp. These XP constituents are adjoined to CP and IP respectively, roughly as shown in (4):



The first (higher) of these two positions contains a discourse topic — a constituent which is usually presupposed, generally “old information,” and which is “what the sentence is about” in the sense that the rest of the sentence is a comment on it. This notion of topic corresponds fairly closely to that of Theme in Functional Sentence Perspective. The second (lower) of the two XP positions contains focused material — a constituent which is not presupposed and which is the most salient information given or requested by the sentence. Some linguists conflate the notions Topic and Focus. For instance, Leafgren in his recent work on clitic doubling (1990, 1991) uses the term *Topic* for both Topic and Focus constituents as well as for certain postverbal NPs that are pragmatically Topic-like though not in the syntactic Topic position. And in fact the two notions do have some similarities, both conceptually, in that both are constituents with specially marked discourse function, and syntactically, in that both involve fronting. However, it is useful to keep Topic and Focus distinct. Two clearly separate syntactic positions are involved in Bulgarian, and the functions associated with them are not identical. I will not discuss the functional status of postverbal constituents here, but restrict attention to the two preverbal positions in tree (4).

The Bulgarian Topic and Focus positions are differentiated by intonation, stress, and word order relative to complementizers and WH-

words (relative and interrogative pronouns). The pairs of sentences in (5a-b) and (5c-d) show that a fronted noun phrase (*knigata* in the examples here) may either precede or follow the complementizers *dali* and *če*. When it precedes it is a Topic, as indicated by the rather awkward 'as for' glosses in English, and would receive relatively low stress and flat intonation in speech. When it follows the complementizer it is a Focus, as indicated by the English cleft glosses, and would receive relatively strong stress and an intonation peak.

- (5) a. Knigata dali šte kupi?  
'Will she buy the book?'/As for the book, will she buy it?'
- b. Dali knigata šte kupi?  
'Will she buy the BOOK?'/Is it the book that she's going to buy?'
- c. Ne znaeh, knigata če šteše da kupi.  
'I didn't know that she was going to buy the book.'/'As for the book, I didn't know that she would buy it.'
- d. Ne znaeh, če knigata šteše da kupi.  
'I didn't know that she was going to buy the BOOK.'/'I didn't know that it was the book that she would buy.'

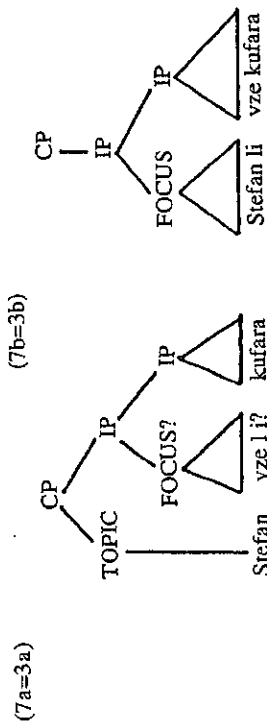
With WH-words, as a general rule no Focus phrase is possible: WH-words in Bulgarian are in Comp position, but incorporate a Focus feature, and thus discourage another Focus element. (See Rudin (1986) for a much more detailed discussion.) In the examples in (6) the fronted noun phrase *knigata* must precede the WH-word and functions as Topic.

- (6) a. Knigata koj e kupil?  
'Who bought the book?'
- b. \*Koj knigata e kupil?
- c. Lekarkata, knigata kojato e kupila ...  
'The doctor who bought the book ...'
- d. \*Lekarkata, kojato knigata e kupila ...

In addition, Topic and Focus differ with respect to yes-no interrogation with *li*: as we have seen, in (3a), repeated here with labeling, *Stefan* can only be Topic (probably presupposed, definitely non-stressed), while in (b) it can only be Focus (non-presupposed, would normally receive main sentence stress).

- (3) a. [<sub>Topic</sub> Stefan] vze li kufara?  
'Did Stefan take the suitcase?'
- b. [<sub>Focus</sub> Stefan] li vze kufara?  
'Was it Stefan that took the suitcase?'

Although there is no element in Comp in these examples to make it clear which position *Stefan* occupies in each sentence, the otherwise consistent correlation of function with position indicates that the structures of (3a) and (3b) are roughly (7a) and (7b), respectively.



Many details are omitted or glossed over in these tree diagrams: in particular, empty categories, including the traces of movement to Topic and Focus, are not shown. Tree (7a) suggests without argumentation that the finite verb with *li* attached may be moved to the syntactic Focus position. Other analyses of sentences with predicate focus are certainly possible. For instance, *li* might be generated in Comp, as a variant of the interrogative complementizer *dali*, and either incorporate a verb or other stressed word in the Vo to C<sup>o</sup> or "hop" onto a following verb or other stressed word in the predicate. An analysis along these lines is suggested by Rivero (1993). King (1993) proposes a similar treatment of Russian *li*. Regardless of the analysis of postverbal *li*, however, the basic point of this section is clear, namely, that a fronted NP with *li* suffixed to it is the syntactic as well as

pragmatic Focus, while the same fronted NP without the immediately following *li* is the Topic and is in syntactic Topic position.

Another set of examples, this time with a fronted object rather than subject as Topic/Focus, makes the same point:

- (8) a. Kafe šte pieš *li*?  
'Will you have some coffee?'  
b. Kafe šte pieš *li*?  
'Is it true you're going to drink coffee?'  
c. Kafe *li* šte pieš?  
'Is it coffee you're going to drink?'

With *li* at the end of the sentence two interpretations are possible. In (8a) *kafe* has low stress and relatively low, flat pitch, while the verb is stressed (indicated by upper case). This is a normal invitation or offer; the topic is coffee, and the focus is on whether or not the other person will drink some. With a different intonation contour, without significant stress or pitch rise on *pieš*, as in (8b), the focus of interrogation is taken as being the truth of the entire proposition. When *li* follows *kafe*, there is only one interpretation: *kafe* must be the focus and must bear the main sentence stress. The structure of (8a) is the same as (7a), and that of (8c) is (7b).

A fronted constituent with *li* is frequently contrastive, and an explicit alternative may be given; this is behavior typical of a focused element, not a Topic. Example (9) is from a novel:

- (9) Do garderoba *li* da iziñea, ili da napravi poračkaia si?  
(Guljaški:75)  
'Should he run to the check-room, or should he order?'

An example that initially appears puzzling is the common formula for asking for something in a store. For instance, walking into a shop and asking for swimming goggles, one says (10a), not (10b).

- (10) a. Očila za pluvane imate *li*?  
'Do you have swimming goggles?' ('As for swimming goggles, do you have any?')

- b. Očila za pluvane *li* imate?  
'Do you have swimming goggles?' ('Is it swimming goggles that you have?')

At first glance it seems that the goggles should be the focus of the request; they are certainly not a canonical Topic, being indefinite, non-specific, and apparently not presupposed (at least not by both parties to the conversation, since the salesperson does not know in advance what the customer wants). So why does *li* not cliticize onto the noun phrase? The answer is that in fact *očila za pluvane* is Topic, not Focus; the focus of interrogation is not the desired object per se, but the issue of its availability. If it has been established that the store does have something, but it is unknown what, then (10b), with *očila za pluvane* as Focus, becomes a reasonable question.

When two constituents precede the verb, the first one is Topic, and the second one Focus. (It is marginally possible in some circumstances to have two Focus or two Topic phrases, but this is unusual and I will not discuss it here.) The examples in (11) show that in a sentence with both Focus and Topic constituents, only the second one can comfortably serve as host to *li*. ("T" marks Topic, "F" marks Focus):

- (11) a. Ivan kupil *li* e kafeto?  
'Did Ivan buy the coffee?'  
b. Ivan [F kafeto *li*] e kupil?  
c. \*[T Ivan *li*] kafeto e kupil?  
d. Kafeto [F Ivan *li*] e kupil?  
e. \*[T Kafeto *li*] Ivan e kupil?

Such examples provide especially strong evidence that *li* is associated with the syntactic Focus position, not simply pragmatic focus. Sentences like (11c) and (11e) are impossible regardless of stress, intonation, or context. Another, more literary example of the same type is given in (12). Two phrases (not including the conjunction) precede the verb in this sentence, and as expected *li* cliticizes onto the second of them, which is interpreted as the Focus.

- (12) Ami [T zemnata hubost] [F djavolska li] e?  
 'But is earthly beauty wicked?' (Em. Stanev, quoted in  
 Tilkov *et al.* 1982)

Attaching *li* to the Topic phrase produces a thoroughly ungrammatical sentence, as predicted:

- (13) \*Ami [T/F zemnata hubost li] [F djavolska ] e?

The immediately following *li* forces the hearer or reader to interpret *zemnata hubost* as Focus — but this is impossible, as the Focus position is filled by *djavolska*. The ungrammaticality of (13) clearly results from the conflict of the Focus-marking nature of *li* with its non-Focus position in this sentence.

To sum up thus far, *li* can occur as an enclitic to a preverbal Focus constituent, to a verb, or to an entire utterance, but never to a Topic (nor to an individual postverbal constituent (*cf.* (2e)). As a broad generalization, it seems *li* is always suffixed to a pragmatically focused element, and with the possible exception of verbs and whole utterances, that element is always the syntactic Focus as well, in the sense that it occupies the position marked "Focus" in tree (4). If it is true, as suggested in (7a) above, that verbs with suffixed *li* are moved to Focus just as other focused constituents are, then it may even be the case that *li* always cliticizes onto the syntactic Focus position. In the rest of this article I present a few extensions of this idea, and also a few apparent problems or exceptions.

One extension is the use of *li* with WH-words, as in the title of this article. A few more examples with WH-word + *li* or WH- + *li* + *ne* from contemporary novels are given in (14). In this construction we see the focus-marking function of *li* in pure form. It has no interrogative meaning here, interrogation being independently marked by the WH-word.

- (14) a. Koga *li* šte si imame i nie svoj dom! (Velickov/140)  
 'When will we also get our own home?'  
 b. Beše naprikazval kakvi *li* ne čudesii. (Guljaški/115)  
 'He had told about who knows what wonders.'

- c. Pri kakvi *li* vrački i znaheri ne ja vodili. (Mantov/20)  
 'What kind of quacks and soothsayers didn't they take her to.'

Some Bulgarian grammarians have recognized that *li* in the WH- + *li* or WH- + *li* + *ne* construction has an emphasizing function. For instance, Čolakova (1958) states that *li* in WH- + *li* + (*ne*) is an "intensifier," and Dogramadžieva (1968) calls it a "strengtheners." Others, including Andrejčin (1978), Mladenov (1979), and Tilkov *et al.* (1982), point out that WH + *li* questions are often rhetorical; focusing the WH-word has the effect of producing a "wondering" or "unanswerable" question, very much like the effect of WH + *ever* in English.

Another type of construction in which the focusing function of *li* can be clearly seen is that shown in (15), where *li* indicates "prolonged action" (Čolakova). Here the activity is emphasized by focusing and repeating the verb. There is no interrogative meaning present; the function of *li* is entirely emphatic.

- (15) a. Vāri *li* vāri čekrāka. (cited by Čolakova)  
 'She kept on spinning and spinning.'  
 b. No mislite lejtat *li*, lejtat vāv formata na meči.  
 (Zarev/131)  
 'But the thoughts fly and fly in the form of dreams.'

Although it may not be immediately obvious, the use of *li* in phrases like *edva li* 'hardly' and *edva li ne* 'almost; barely not,' as in (16), can also be seen as evidence for its focusing function. Discussing the parallel construction in Russian, Payne (1985:239) points out that the occurrence of "inherently negative adverbs" like *edva* with an interrogative particle (*li*) makes good sense given that negation, like interrogation, "crosslinguistically tends to associate with the focused elements in a sentence" (232).

- (16) a. *Edva li* imaše njakoj v seloto da spi. (Kirilov/14)  
 'There was hardly anyone sleeping in the village.'  
 b. Generala *edva li ne* izpadna v isterija. (Karaivanov/130)  
 'The general nearly went into hysterics.'

The use of *li* in a construction like (17), where it means 'if' or 'when,' is probably also related to its focusing function: the predicate of the clause containing *li* is focused. In (18), where the phrase *kato će li* has a similar meaning, a focusing function for *li* is much less clear, but it is possible that there may be some connection, at least historically, between this usage and the usual usage of *li* to mark Focus.

- (17) Po princip toj nikoga ne se usmihvaše, žuriraše *li* izložba v provincija.  
'In principle he never smiled, if he was judging a show in the provinces.'

- (18) Šumāt na bosite i kraka *kato će li* nikoga ne beše se pojavjaval.  
'It was as if the sound of her bare feet had never been.'  
(Guljaški/22)

Another case in which it appears questionable at first glance that *li* is marking Focus occurs with stressed clitics in negatives, as in (19).

- (19) Ne *te li* e strah?  
'Aren't you afraid?'

One clearly does not want to say *te* is focused here. However, the problem is only superficial. If *li* is attached to a verb complex that includes elements other than the verb itself, such as object clitics, it automatically cliticizes onto the first stressed element within the verb complex. Since *te* is the first stressed word in the verb complex in (19), *li* cliticizes onto it, but it semantically focuses the entire verb complex, that is, the predicate, as expected. In the positive counterpart of sentence (19), the same automatic placement of *li* after the first stressed element of the verb complex results in *li* cliticized onto a different part of the predicate:

- (20) Strah *li* *te* e?  
'Are you afraid?'

Although *li* may not absolutely always serve to mark Focus, it does seem clear that it nearly always has such a function, not only in *wh + li* or other specific constructions, but even when it appears in its normal "question

particle" guise. And this is not at all a surprising combination of functions. A focusing question particle occurs in other languages as well. The Latin examples in (21), from Sadock and Zwicky (1985), are one such instance.

- (21) a. Estne puer bonus?  
'Is the boy good?'  
b. Puerne bonus est?  
'Is it the boy who is good?'  
c. Bonusne puer est?  
'Is it good that the boy is?'

In fact, a particle that attaches to the questioned (*i.e.*, focused) element of a question is rather common crosslinguistically. It makes considerable sense for a particle with this function to broaden its usage to include other focus contexts as well, as it has in Bulgarian.

If it is true that *li* always attaches to a focused element, either the phrase in syntactic Focus position or another focused constituent (a WH-word or V), then the focusing function of *li* is more basic than its questioning one, since it is not always interrogative. Rather than being purely a question marker, *li* is in fact a (usually interrogative) Focus marker.

And even if it is true only that preverbal *li* always attaches to syntactic Focus rather than syntactic Topic constituents, this fact is still a useful diagnostic tool for syntactic analysis, since it provides one more way of distinguishing Focus from Topic.

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