

# Chapter 22

## Wh-indefinites in Russian

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The goal of this paper is to chart the expanse of environments that license wh-indefinites in Russian. Primarily a descriptive endeavor, this study provides a more exhaustive empirical coverage of the phenomenon than what has heretofore been documented. Appearing in a proper subset of *nibud'*-licensing contexts, wh-indefinites require a clausebounded nonveridical operator and exhibit sensitivity to scalarity. The central analytical import concerns the dichotomy “clitic” vs. “non-clitic”. Instead of a rigid binary taxonomy, I endorse the view that there is a continuum clitic↔non-clitic, which accommodates elements of transitional flavor. Wh-indefinites are just such elements: not quite clitics proper, they are not full tonic forms either.

### 1 Introduction

Wh-indefinites have the morphological shape of a wh-word and the interpretation of an indefinite. A postverbal *kto* in a polar question (1a) functions as an indefinite pronoun in contrast to the sentence-initial one in (1b), interpreted as a wh-word.

- (1) a. Prišel kto? YN question  
came who.INDF  
'Did anybody come?'  
b. Kto prišel?  
who came  
'Who came?'



In addition to (1a), four other contexts in (2) reportedly enable licensing of wh-indefinites (examples (2a)–(2c) appear in Yanovich 2005, (2d) – in Hengeveld et al. 2018). However, it turns out that not all subjunctives tolerate wh-indefinites but only those that embed some negative component. Likewise, matrix negation is insufficient by itself: my informants deem (2d) degraded.<sup>1</sup>

- |     |    |   |                           |
|-----|----|---|---------------------------|
| (2) | a. | Esli kto            pridet, pozovi menja.<br>if    who.INDF comes call    me<br>'If anybody comes, call me.'  | Antecedent of conditional |
|     | b. | Možet, kto            prixodil.<br>maybe who.INDF came<br>'Maybe somebody came.'  | Modal adverbs             |
|     | c. | Petja zaper dver', čtoby    kto            ne vošel.<br>Petja locked door    that.SBJV who.INDF NEG entered<br>'Peter locked the door, lest somebody enter.'  | Subjunctive               |
|     | d. | ( <sup>?</sup> *) Ne    poxože, čto    Vasja kogo            uvidel.<br>NEG similar    that Vasja whom.INDF saw<br>'It does not look like Vasja saw anybody.' | Matrix negation           |

A wh-indefinite shares a requirement for a licenser with a (better studied) *nibud'*-indefinite. Neither is possible in past episodic declaratives like (3).

- (3) \* Včera    kto-nibud'    kto umer.  
yesterday who-*nibud'*    who.INDF died  
Intended: 'Yesterday someone died.'

*Nibud'*-indefinites are morphologically decomposable into a wh-element and an invariable suffix *-nibud'*: e.g., *kto-nidud'* 'who.NOM-*nibud'*', *čto-nidud'* 'what-*nibud'*', etc. Roughly, *-nibud'*-indefinites are eligible in nonveridical contexts (questions, conditionals, imperatives, in modal, future and iterative constructions, subjunctives of all flavors, under propositional attitude verbs like *doubt*, *hope*) as well as the scope and restriction of universal quantifiers (Fitzgibbons 2010, Padučeva 2016, Pereltsvaig 2008). In the next section I show that wh-indefinites appear in a proper subset of *nibud'*-environments and identify the conditions that impede or enable the licensing of wh-indefinites.

<sup>1</sup>Data are elicited from five informants on the scale 1–5. Judgments are presented in the following format: '\*' = 1, '?\*' = 2, '??' = 3, '?' = 4. In controversial cases, I provide all obtained values (e.g., \*/?\*). Positive data are mostly sourced from the national corpus (ruscorpora.ru) or found online. To keep the exposition unencumbered, I indicate the type of source instead of providing a long URL (specifics should be reconstructible via a reverse search). Angle brackets, i.e. '< >', are used to indicate elicited alternatives in the naturally occurring or reported examples.

Before diving in, two short asides are in order. First, a handful of constructions have been excluded from the present consideration on the grounds that the relevant *wh*-element does not fit the profile of a prototypical indefinite in an obvious way (or if its status is controversial). These include: (i) Modal-Existential configurations (MECs) like (4) and (ii) two subspecies of relatives in (5). On MECs, I refer the reader to Šimík (2017) for a concise literature overview on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Constructions like (5a) were first noted in Rudin (2007) for Bulgarian (see also Caponigro & Fălăuș 2022). Correlatives like (5b) (example provided by Reviewer 1) are discussed in Citko (2009) with antecedents in Izvorski (1996) (for a more general literature overview see Lin 2020).<sup>3</sup>

- (4) Mne est' čto gde počitat'.  
 to.me is what where to.read  
 'I have something to read.'
- (5) a. My otpravili, kto skol'ko naskreb.  
 we sent who how.much scraped.together  
 'We sent however much each scraped together.'
- b. Kto kogo uvidit (na večerinke), tot s tem i  
 who whom will.see at party that.one with that.one and  
 pozdorovaetsja.  
 will.greet  
 'Whoever sees whomever at the party will greet them.'

The second point concerns the shape of the indefinite itself. In Russian, it need not be a bare *wh*-word: complex expressions (i.e., *which X*, as in (6)) are admissible in all the licensing contexts catalogued in the ensuing sections.

- (6) Byt' možet zavtra kakoj ukazik sverxu spustjat i  
 to.be may tomorrow which.INDF edict from.above will.issue and  
 togda kotu pod xvost vse ego trudy (...)  
 then to.cat under tail all his labors  
 'It may well be that tomorrow they'll issue some edict from above and  
 then all his labors are for naught.' (S. Xabliev. *Povtornye ogni*. 2002)

<sup>2</sup>But see Šimík (2009) for arguments that *wh*-elements in MECs are (Hamblin) indefinites, after all.

<sup>3</sup>Belyaev & Haug (2020) defend the position that the *wh*-elements in these constructions owe their provenance to indefinites. Arsenijević (2009) treats the *wh*-elements in correlatives as "extreme non-specific expression(s)". It is worth pointing out that the latter two analyses view correlatives as subtypes of conditionals.

There are, however, gaps in terms of the membership in major ontological categories ('person', 'thing', 'time', 'place', 'manner', 'reason', etc., on which see Haspelmath 1997: 29–31, and references therein). In particular, reason and manner and categories (attempted in (7b) and (8b), respectively) prove to be unfit for bare indefinites but open to the *nibud'*-series (as attested by the (a)-examples).

- (7) a. Esli že počemu-nibud' emu nel'zja budet priexat' ko  
 if FOC why-*nibud'* to.him impossible will.be to.come at  
 vremeni moego priezda,...  
 time of.my arrival  
 'If it would be impossible for some reason for him to come by the  
 time of my arrival,...' (P. Tchaikovskii. Letters. 1884.)
- b. \*Esli emu počemu nel'zja budet priexat'...  
 if to.him why.INDF impossible will.be to.come  
 Intended: 'If for any reason it would be impossible for him to come...'
- (8) a. Možno èto kak-nibud' ispravit'?  
 possible this how-*nibud'* to.fix  
 'Is it possible to fix it in some way?' (beauty forum. 2023)
- b. \*Možno eto kak ispravit'?  
 possible this how.INDF to.fix  
 Intended: 'Is it possible to fix it in any way?'

Finally, I would be remiss not to point out the crosslinguistic ubiquity of wh-indefinites (Gärtner 2009), sometimes accommodated under the rubric of "indefinite" pronouns in the literature (Kratzer & Shimoyama 2017). A wh-indefinite is easy to spot (it looks just like a wh-word), but the environments that render it happy differ across languages: some, like Dutch (Postma 1994) or Pas-samaquoddy (Bruening 2007), do not impose licensing requirements; others, like Chinese, do (see, e.g., Bruening 2007, Lin 2014; a more recent theoretical debate is found in Chierchia & Liao 2015, Giannakidou & Lin 2016, Liu & Yang 2021). Then there is the question of how wh-words and wh-indefinites are related: whether their syncretism is a matter of homophony or homonymy is addressed in Bhat (2004). All of this is to say that there is a massive volume of scholarly output on the topic, which I cannot hope to address in any detail here. Mine is a case study of the licensing conditions of the Russian wh-indefinite.

## 2 Licensing contexts

The default licensing requirement for wh-indefinites is the configuration that enables “epistemic neutrality”, understood as Giannakidou’s “nonveridical equilibrium” defined in (9). Such “prototypical inquisitiveness”, i.e. genuine noncommitment of an epistemic agent to one of the polar values in the partitioned information state, arises in neutral Yes / No (YN) questions, conditionals, and under possibility modals (*might*).

- (9) An information state  $W$  is in nonveridical equilibrium iff  $W$  is partitioned into  $p$  and  $\neg p$ , and there is no bias towards  $p$  or  $\neg p$ .

(Giannakidou 2013: 121)

Equilibrium might be disrupted in a variety of ways: intonation, tags, adverbs, NPIs, etc. all tilt the balance, inducing the effect of speaker bias. For instance, although *John speaks English, doesn't he?* retains its nonveridical properties, it also supplies an inference that the proposition is true.

Generally speaking, while *-nibud'*-items are compatible with nearly all nonveridical contexts (whether biased or not), the conditions on wh-indefinites are more stringent. The “default” licenser must contribute to the representation consistent with epistemic neutrality (Section 2.1). But there are multiple ways to bypass this requirement: by introducing an extrapositional (epistemic) speech act adverb (Section 2.2), by integrating an explicit scale whose value is set to be “less than” the alternatives (Section 2.3), or by embedding the indefinite in the context of “high” negation (Section 2.4). The ensuing exposition is best construed as an empirical exercise, designed to fit the novel data into some general theoretical schemes. In other words, I am not necessarily making any analytical commitments – rather, I am using the existing theoretical apparatus to systematize the facts. Insofar as the proposals acquire an explicit shape (most notably in Section 2.4), I attempt no exhaustive treatment of the phenomena involved.

### 2.1 Default contexts

Wh-indefinites are robustly attested in conditional antecedents (10a) and embedded (or root) YN questions (10b). The affinity between conditionals and questions has been observed by multiple authors (for an overview and further references see Bhatt & Pancheva 2017). In fact, wh-indefinites turn up with admirable regularity in precisely these two contexts. Following standard practice, we may assume that the responsible licensing party here is a Q/conditional operator, merged in CP.

- (10) a. Esli kto / <kto-nibud'> pridet v futbolke, vygonju!  
 if who.INDF who-*nibud'* will.come in t-shirt kick.out  
 'If somebody shows up in a t-shirt, I'll kick them out!' (Twitter. 2019)
- b. ...proverjali, [smogut li kogo / <kogo-nibud'> obmanut']?  
 checked are.able Q whom.INDF whom-*nibud'* to.cheat  
 '(They) checked whether they would be able to hoodwink  
 somebody.' (M. Semenova. *Volkodav*. 2003)

From (11) and (12), we glean that wh-indefinites are unhappy in deontic contexts, independent of the quantificational strength of the modal – universal in (11a) or existential in (11b). They are, however, compatible with epistemic modality, provided that the modal is of a possibility (12a) rather than of a necessity (12b) variety.

- (11) a. Ty dolžen s'est' čto-nibud' / \*s'est' čto.  
 you must.M.SG to.eat what-*nibud'* to.eat what.INDF  
 '(I am not letting you out hungry). You must eat something.'
- b. Možeš' posmotret' čto-nibud' / ?\*posmotret' čto.  
 may.2.SG to.watch what-*nibud'* to.watch what.INDF  
 '(Because you behaved today), you may watch something.'
- (12) a. Razmery mogut komu / <komu-nibud'> i  
 dimensions may.3.PL to.whom.INDF to.whom-*nibud'* FOC  
 prigodit'sja.  
 to.be.of.use  
 '(I am sharing this information, because) the dimensions might be of  
 use to somebody.' (car forum. 2017)
- b. Lekcija dolžna ?\*/??kogo / kogo-nibud' zainteresovat'.  
 lecture must.F.SG whom.INDF whom-*nibud'* to.be.of.interest  
 'The lecture must be of interest to somebody (though there are no  
 guarantees of robust attendance).'

An enduring generalization that epistemics consistently outscope other sentential operators (including negation and root modals) formed the basis for formulating the analyses under which epistemics occupy a clause-peripheral position, high enough to take the widest scope (for various implementations see Butler 2003, Drubig 2001, Cormack & Smith 2002, a.o.).

If so, the patterns above conform to the following generalization. A wh-indefinite licenser must be merged in a position presumably related to the (split) C-domain, which houses interrogative, conditional and epistemic operators. But

there is a further semantic requirement necessary for convergence: given the contrast in (12), the operator must be compliant with epistemic neutrality. While the possibility modal ensures epistemic equilibrium, the necessity one coaxes a stronger statement – one that is biased towards *p*. A similar effect is detectable in future contexts like (13).

Predictive future in Giannakidou & Mari (2013) is likewise nonveridical (since the outcome of the future event is unknown), but positively biased (“probably”), since it “presupposes confidence [of the speaker] that the actual world to come is a *p* world” (119).

- (13) *Zavtra kto-nibud' / (\*kto) sdelaet obaldennoe kino [...].*  
 tomorrow who-*nibud'* who.INDF will.make exciting movie  
 ‘Tomorrow somebody will produce an exciting film.’ (kinometro.ru. 2012)

Clearly, universal epistemics and the future induce a similar effect: they appear to be too strong for *wh*-indefinites. In Giannakidou (and Mari)’s work this strength (to wit, bias) arises at the “not-at-issue” (presuppositional) level, defined as the speaker’s measure of the likelihood of the event/actual-world-to-come. Epistemic *must* and the future come with a default positive bias, which can be modified by speech act adverbs: *Maybe John will come* expresses less confidence in the occurrence of the future event than its adverb-less counterpart.

Tampering with the default bias in Russian yields the following results. A YN question with *razve*, an element strictly specialized for non-neutral questions in (14a), conveys negative bias (i.e., the speaker believes that nobody had doubts about Putin’s intentions). Likewise, in a future configuration (14b), the introduction of *avos* ‘perhaps, maybe’ weakens the statement enough to render the indefinite appropriate in this context.

- (14) a. *Razve kto somnevalsja, čto Putin ne ujdut na pensiju?*  
 really who.INDF doubted that Putin NEG leave on pension  
 ‘Did anybody really doubt that Putin wouldn’t retire?’ (dk.ru. 2020)  
 b. *\*(Avos') zavtra kto poučastvuet.*  
 maybe tomorrow who.INDF will.participate  
 ‘Maybe someone will participate tomorrow.’ (car forum. 2009)

Assuming a skeletal structure in (15), we may conclude that the indefinites are licensed by an element above TP – a high modal or an operator in SpecCP, but not by a root modal. Furthermore, this licenser must introduce epistemic equilibrium. In situations when it does not – i.e. when the default bias is skewed towards a positive proposition – a weakening adverbial, overriding the default bias, may

salvage the configuration (as demonstrated by the contrast between (13) and (14b)).

- (15) [CP *Op*<sub>Q/Conditional</sub> [FP Mod<sub>Epis/Fut</sub> [ ... Mod<sub>root</sub> ... ]]]

As it turns out, however, the adverbial need not induce weaker bias. In the next section I demonstrate that speech act adverbs are legitimate licensors for wh-indefinites, independent of the direction of their bias.

## 2.2 Speech Act adverbs

Yanovich (2005), enlisting the paradigm in (16), concludes that wh-indefinites are not licensed by certain adverbs like *dolžno byt'* 'must be'.

- (16) a. *Možet*, {kto / ⟨✓kto-nibud'⟩} *prixodil*.  
           maybe who.INDF who-*nibud'* came.M  
           'Maybe someone came.'  
       b. *Dolžno byt'*, {\*kto / ⟨✓kto-nibud'⟩} *prixodil*.  
           must be who.INDF who-*nibud'* came.M  
           'It must be the case that someone came.' (Yanovich 2005)

Indeed, (16b) is bad, but a small adjustment in the word order, as in (17), renders the sentence perfectly natural if a bit quaint. I attribute this contrast to PF constraints to be discussed in Section 4. For now, it suffices to concede that an adverbial *dolžno byt'*, which, in contrast to the neutral *možet*, introduces a higher degree of speaker confidence, is in principle compatible with wh-indefinites.

- (17) *Dolžno byt'*, {*prixodil* / *prišel*} kto (raz takoj porjadok).  
           must be came.IPFV came.PFV who.INDF since such order  
           'Someone must've stopped by, given how clean the place is.'

Speech act modal adverbs (SpMAs) like *dolžno byt'* and *možet (byt')* are distinct from the agreeing modals encountered in (11) and (12): The former are adjuncts, the latter are integral to a proposition. SpMAs have an immutable form and appear in the environments with inflected verbs. Agreeing modals carry phi-features and take on the infinitive complements. Furthermore, SpMAs (*probably*, *perhaps*, *certainly*, etc.) are said to express subjective modality in contrast to objective modality, routinely encoded by modal adjectives (*[it is] probable*, *certain*, *possible*, etc.) (Ernst 2009, Krifka 2022, Wolf 2015, a.o.).<sup>4</sup> The basic intuition here

<sup>4</sup>Modal verbs are frequently ambiguous between the two (see, e.g., Papafragou 2006 and references therein).



is that SpMAs convey speakers' internal judgment of/commitment to the embedded proposition. This is opposed to some external (objective) assessment of the event's likelihood. There are also more tangible correlates of subjective modality: modal adverbs are deviant in non-assertive environments like (18a) and resist negation, as in (19a) (cf. the grammatical counterparts with agreeing modals in (b)). Krifka (2017, 2022) provisions a special syntactic position for SpMAs – one that is external to the core proposition: for him, objective epistemics are associated with TP (hence, proposition-internal, at-issue), while subjective ones relate to the Judgment Phrase, a position above TP (hence, proposition-external, relaying not-at-issue content).

- (18) a. \* *Pojdet li segodnja, {možet / dolžno byt'}, dožd'?*  
           will.go Q today       maybe must be rain  
           Intended: 'Will it (maybe, certainly) rain today?'  
       b. {*Možet / dolžen*} *li segodnja pojti dožd'?*  
           may.2.SG must.M.SG Q today to.go rain  
           'Might/ must it rain today?'  
       (19) a. {(\**Ne*) *možet / (\*Ne) dolžno byt'*}, *Ivan doma.*  
               NEG maybe NEG must be Ivan home  
               Intended: 'Ivan cannot be home.'  
           b. *Oni {ne mogu byt' / ne dolžny byt'} doma.*  
               they NEG may.2.PL to.be NEG must.PL to.be home  
               'It is not possible/probable that they are home.'

If (12b) externalizes objective modality and (17) subjective modality, then the requirement for a weaker speaker commitment only holds of the former. The basic insight here is that universal (objective) epistemics, future, and veridical past contexts are too strong for *wh*-indefinites. But when explicitly tempered at the illocutionary level, these three contexts become just fine for indefinites, as demonstrated by the trio in (20) for each environment, respectively. Note that "tempering" is equivalent to embedding any subjective modification. SpMAs in (20) range from weak (*vrjad li*) to neutral (*možet (byt')*) to strong (*očevidno, dolžno byt'*). As elements of epistemic/evidential/inferential flavor, they form a natural class.

- (20) a. <sup>(?)</sup> {*Vrjad li / edva li*} *segodnja gde dolžen pojti dožd'.*  
           hardly Q hardly Q today where.INDF must.M.SG to.go rain  
           'It is unlikely that it must rain somewhere today.'

- b. Gljadiš', komu i prigoditsja.  
 see.2.SG to.whom.INDF FOC will.be.of.use  
 'Perhaps, (it'll) be of use to someone.' (multiple sources)
- c. {Stalo byt' / očividno}, obidel ee kto (raz plačet).  
 come.to.be obviously hurt.PST her who.INDF since cries  
 'Evidently/obviously, someone hurt her, since she is crying.'

Finally, it should be noted that the licenser in the illocutionary domain must be of an epistemic variety, as no other speech act adverbs – discourse-oriented (*čestno*, *vkratce*) or evaluative (*k ščast'ju*, *uvy*) – are compatible with wh-indefinites (or *nibud'*-indefinites):

- (21) \*{K ščast'ju / uvy / čestno / vkratce}, prišel kto.  
 to fortune alas honestly briefly came who  
 Intended: 'Fortunately/alas/honestly/in brief, someone came.'

### 2.3 Role of the scale

The inaugural (2) would have us believe that subjunctives and matrix negation are licit licensers for wh-indefinites. This is not quite accurate. Desiderative and root subjunctives in (22), and negated factive verbs in (23), prove to be unfit for purpose.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, in the previously reported examples, the subjunctive (2c) imparts a meaning somewhat akin to English *lest*-clauses (to be discussed separately in Section 2.4), while negation in (2d) accompanies a matrix verb of the epistemic flavor.

- (22) a. \*Ja {xotel / dobivalsja} togo, čtoby kto priexal.  
 I wanted strove that that.SBJV who.INDF came  
 Intended: 'I wanted for (tried to get) somebody to come.'
- b. \*/?\*Ja by čto sejčas posmotrel.  
 I SBJV what.INDF now watched  
 Intended: 'I would watch something now.'
- (23) \*Ivan ne {podtverdil / znal}, čto prišel kto.  
 Ivan NEG confirmed knew that came who.INDF  
 Intended: 'Ivan didn't confirm / know that anybody came.'

<sup>5</sup>As an aside, *nibud'*-indefinites are perfect in (22) (though somewhat awkward in (23)).

In fact, matrix negation is not directly relevant – what matters is the type of the embedding predicate. As it turns out, *wh*-indefinites may be licensed under epistemic non-factives (*think*), emotives (*hope*), and dubitatives (*doubt*) – i.e., those verbs that in Romance are variable in selecting either subjunctive or indicative complements (Anand & Hacquard 2013, Farkas 1992); for arguments that they incorporate nonveridical components see Giannakidou & Mari (2016). Crucially, even in these contexts, *wh*-indefinites cannot simply appear “as is”: they are most natural in the presence of a scalar adverb *xot* ‘even, at least’.

As for desideratives, a substantial body of work provisions a comparative semantics for the subjunctive-embedding attitudes (Anand & Hacquard 2013, Heim 1992, Villalta 2000, 2008, a.o.). Though the proposals vary in details, it will suffice for my purposes that *want*-type predicates introduce a scale, which orders the proposition expressed by the complement relative to the contextually supplied alternatives. Applying this to the contexts in (22), one may surmise that *wh*-indefinites are sensitive to preference ordering: they are incompatible with the contexts where the proposition is ranked as more desirable than the alternatives. Interestingly, desideratives, just like the attitude-embedding predicates, become *wh*-indefinite-friendly upon the introduction of *xot*’.

To sum up, though both non-factives and subjunctives are nonveridical (and hence, potential licensors), this alone is not sufficient for the felicity of *wh*-indefinites – as we will see, these contexts become appropriate for indefinites if they incorporate a bottom-of-the-scale condition. Moreover, this amelioration procedure is also available in imperative and iterative contexts (which, in the absence of scalar adverbials, are likewise incompatible with *wh*-indefinites).

I begin with the attitude verbs. Since (23) established that matrix negation is not a licenser for *wh*-indefinites, I suggested that the relevant factor is the type of the embedding predicate. The latter claim is ostensibly contradicted by the datasets in (24) and (25): while there is some speaker variation, none of my informants find *wh*-indefinites under *think*, *doubt* or *hope* (whether negated or not) fully acceptable.

- (24) The weather is awful today. People will probably choose to stay in.
- a. {<sup>?</sup>\*Ne dumaju / <sup>??</sup>ne poxože}, čto pridet kto na  
       NEG think           NEG seems   that will.come who.INDF to  
       sobranie.  
       meeting  
       Intended: ‘{I don’t think that / It doesn’t look like} anybody will  
       show up to the meeting.’

- b. ?? Somnjevajus', što pridet kto na sobranie.  
 doubt that will.come who.INDF to meeting  
 Intended: 'I doubt anybody will show up to the meeting.'
- c. ?\*/?? Ne nadejus', što pridet kto na sobranie.  
 NEG hope that will.come who.INDF to meeting  
 Intended: 'I doubt anybody will show up to the meeting.'
- (25) The weather is delightful today. Surely, people will be inclined to get out.
- a. ?\*/?? {Dumaju / Poxože}, što pridet kto na sobranie.  
 think seems that will.come who.INDF to meeting  
 Intended: 'I think that / It looks like somebody will show up to the meeting.'
- b. ?\*/?? Ne somnjevajus', što pridet kto na sobranie.  
 NEG doubt that will.come who.INDF to meeting  
 Intended: 'I doubt anybody will show up to the meeting.'
- c. ?\*/?? Nadejus', što pridet kto na sobranie.  
 hope that will.come who.INDF to meeting  
 Intended: 'I don't doubt that somebody will show up to the meeting.'

Before I show how to improve (24) and (25), consider an apparent non-sequitur in (26), whose purpose will become clear in a moment. Though the imperatives provide a felicitous environment for *wh*-indefinites in a handful of Slavic languages and beyond (Haspelmath 1997), evidently they are not legitimate licensors for *wh*-indefinites in Russian. Kaufmann (2012) develops a modal semantics for imperatives, where *Eat your broccoli!* is roughly equivalent to *You must eat your broccoli*. For Condoravdi & Lauer (2012: 49), imperatives integrate the speaker's "preferential attitudes – including his wishes and desires", rendering the imperative operator broadly similar to *want*. If so, the ill-formedness of (26) with a bare *što* follows from the same principles that inhibit the appearance of *wh*-indefinites in either deontic contexts like (11) or desiderative contexts like (22).

- (26) Privezi {što / što-nibud'} iz Pariža!  
 bring.IMP what.INDF what-*nibud*' from Paris  
 'Bring [me] something from Paris!'

The reason for these detours is to do with a uniform procedure that converts all the listed bad contexts into good ones. To recap, the "bad" contexts for *wh*-indefinites include: (a) root/desiderative subjunctives in (22); (b) complements of affirmative and negated propositional attitude verbs, *think*, *doubt*, *hope* in (24)

and (25); (c) imperatives in (26). In all three environments, the degradedness disappears upon the introduction of a scalar adverb *xot* 'at least, even', which evinces two properties. First, its associate is obligatorily focalized (Haspelmath 1997). Second, *xot* is itself eligible only in non-assertive (i.e., nonveridical) situations. For example:

- (27) a. \*On xot' raz (ne) ezdil v Pariž.  
he even once NEG travelled to Paris  
Intended: 'He (hasn't) traveled to Paris at least/even once.'
- b. On xot' raz ezdil v Pariž?  
he even once travelled to Paris  
'Has he been to Paris even once?'

With this in place, observe a considerable transformation induced by *xot'* in all the iffy contexts (28): root and desiderative subjunctives in (28a)–(28b), the imperative in (28c), and the attitude predicate in (28d), all become quite natural when accompanied by *xot'*.

- (28) a. Ty by xot' raz komu peredaču snesla.  
you SBJV even once to.whom.INDF parcel brought  
'You could've taken a care package to someone at least once.'  
(R. Pal'. *Cvety večnosti*. 1990)
- b. My dobivali's togo, čtoby xot' stročku nam kto napisal.  
we tried that that.SBJV even line to.us who.INDF wrote  
'We tried to get somebody to respond to us at least once.'
- c. Ty xot' slovo komu napiši, bezdel'nik!  
you even word to.whom.INDF write.IMP laggard  
'Write at least a word to somebody, you laggard!'
- d. On s nadeždoj dumal, čto xot' raz ego kto uslyšit.  
he with hope thought that even once him who.INDF will.hear  
'He hoped that at least once someone will hear him.'

In fact, *xot'* need not be overt if the context is appropriate, as demonstrated by the *hope*-type predicate in (29).<sup>6</sup> In both cases of (29), the locative adverb *tam* is focalized, which ensures the identical interpretation of (29a) and (29b) even in the absence of an explicit *xot'*.

<sup>6</sup>The availability of the implicit *xot*' may be the source of speaker variation reported above, as well as the disagreement of my informants with the judgments recorded in Hengeveld et al. (2018). In fact, Reviewer 1 reports that in their judgment, wh-elements under *hope* are not possible whether with or without *xot*'.

- (29) Context: ‘It seems John is unlucky in his romantic pursuits. He never even had a date in our small town. But he’s moving to New York soon, ...’
- a. ✓/? Nadejus’, čto [tam] kogo vstretit.  
     hope that there who.INDF meets  
     ‘I hope he meets somebody there (at least).’
- b. ✓/? Nadejus’, čto xot’ [tam] kogo vstretit.  
     hope that even there who.INDF meets  
     ‘I hope he meets somebody there at least.’

Russian *xot’* works just like the Greek variable scale *esto* ‘even, at least’ (Giannakidou 2007). Giannakidou argues that *esto* carries a negative existential presupposition and a bottom-of-the-scale condition. Unlike other types of *even*, *esto* does not introduce the likelihood scale itself, but rather relies on the context to supply one.

The central take-away point here is sensitivity to scale: In potentially licensing environments, wh-indefinites are possible only in the presence of a scalar element which supplies a (contextual) bottom-of-the-scale condition. If so, iterative contexts with frequency adverbs such as (30) likewise comply with this “less than” requirement: wh-indefinites are only possible with negative frequency adverbs in contrast to their *nibud’*-cousins, which are fine with both, *rarely* and *frequently*.

- (30) a. Znakomyx u menja v Moskve mnogo [...], no ja redko  
     acquaintances at me in Moscow lots but I rarely  
     {kogo / ✓kogo-nibud’} vižu.  
     whom.INDF whom-*nibud’* see  
     ‘I’ve many acquaintances in Moscow, but I rarely see anybody.’  
     (M.Bulgakov. Letters.)
- b. Ona často {\*kogo / ✓kogo-nibud’} rugaet.  
     she frequently whom.INDF whom-*nibud’* chides  
     ‘She chides somebody frequently.’

Finally, I would be remiss not to point out one recurrent theme. In all the licensing contexts discussed so far, wh-indefinites exhibit sensitivity to their syntactic environments – in that the relevant licenser must be contained in the same clause as the licensee.

## 2.4 “High” negation

Yanovich’s subjunctive from (2c) belongs in the same semantic cluster as the examples in (31). I will refer to them as *LEST*-clauses. *LEST*-clauses are special,

because they freely admit negative concord items (*nikto*) as well as *nibud'*-indefinites (this alternation is treated in Padučeva 2016).

- (31) a. ... pribrala, čtoby {kto / <✓kto-nibud'> / <✓nikto>} ne  
 picked.up that.SBJV who.INDF who-*nibud'* *ni*.who NEG  
 podnjaj.  
 took  
 '(I deliberately) picked [it] up, lest somebody take it.'  
 (M. Bulgakov. *Master i Margarita*. 1928–40)
- b. Szadi, čtoby {kto / <✓kto-nibud'> / <✓nikto>} ne sbežal  
 behind that.SBJV who.INDF who-*nibud'* *ni*.who NEG ran.away  
 dorogoju, exali na konjax dva monaxa.  
 en.route rode on horses two monks  
 'Two monks were riding astride behind [them] lest someone make a  
 run for it en route.'  
 (Ju. German. *Rossija molodaja*. 1952)

The point of oddity is that *nibud'*-indefinites are not licensed by clausemate negation. Verbal negation in Slavic famously requires negative concord, as in (32).

- (32) \*{Kto-nibud' / ✓Nikto} ne sbežal dorogojū.  
 who-*nibud'* *ni*.who NEG ran.away en.route

Concerning the meaning differences induced by *kto-nibud'* vs. *nikto* in, e.g., (31a), Padučeva offers the paraphrases in (33) and accepts the two as logically equivalent. She argues that although *nibud'*-indefinites appear in the scope of “global” negation (as opposed to local negation in cases of *nikto*), they are licensed by a nonveridical clausal operator.

- (33) a. With *nikto*: I picked it up so that (it is the case that) nobody takes it.  
b. With *nibud'*: I picked it up so that it is not the case that somebody takes it.

In this specification for a negative outcome, LEST-clauses are akin (though not fully identical) to “apprehensive subjunctives” like (34). A handful of verbs, denoting surveillance/supervision/warning (*prismatrivat* ‘keep an eye’, *karaulit* ‘guard’, *bereč’sja* ‘beware, be safe’, *smotret* ‘watch (out)’) or psych states of an unpleasant nature (*bojat’sja* ‘be afraid’, *trevožit’sja* ‘be anxious’, *volnovat’sja* ‘be uneasy’), select a subjunctive clause headed by *kak* (*by*) (Nilsson 2012). In fact, the matrix verb may be altogether absent, in which case a bare *kak by*-clause (absolutely coherent as a stand-alone sentence) is understood as an implicit warning or expression of fear.

- (34) (Smotri / Bojus',) kak by {kto / (✓kto-nibud') / (✓nikto)}  
 watch.out.IMP / fear how SBJV who.INDF who-*nibud'* ni.who  
 telefon ne stibril v takoj tolpe!  
 phone NEG snatched in such crowd  
 'Watch out lest someone snatch your phone in this crowd./ I fear  
 someone might snatch your phone in this crowd.'

In addition to subjunctive morphology, LEST-clauses (31) and apprehensive subjunctives (34) also pattern alike in syntax – by requiring verbal negation and admitting NCIs as well as *nibud'*- and wh-indefinites.<sup>7</sup> Such similarity, in turn, suggests that the two constructions may be eligible for a uniform analysis.

Complements of fear verbs are said to contain “expletive negation” (EN), alleged to be devoid of polarity reversing semantics despite the compulsory realization of negation on the verb. The theoretical status of EN remains murky: there is no consensus on what *ne* in (34) actually does. Is it a semantically contentful element that moves to a high position within its clause to negate the evaluative mood (as in Abels 2005), or a mood marker licensed by nonveridicality (as in Yoon 2011), or a weak epistemic (as in Makri 2016), or simply a semantically empty exponent of morphosyntactic negation (as in Brown & Franks 1995)? My proposal is closer in spirit to Abels (2005) (and consistent with Padučeva’s 2016 insight on “global” vs. “local” negation). Suppose that there are multiple merge sites for negation available in Russian, as in (35). The lower one (NegP2) negates events and delimits the exclusive domain of negative concord. The higher one (NegP1), introduced in the illocutionary field above TP, does not license NCIs, but it is compatible with bare wh-indefinites. If so, (31) and (34) are ambiguous between the two structures – and hence, enable a seemingly free alternation of the indefinites and NCIs.

- (35) [ ... [NegP1 NEG ... [TP ... [NegP2 NEG [AspectP/vP ... ]]]]]

There are also constructions that are not ambiguous between the two negations, shown in (36) and (37). The former, featuring an *until*-clause, is standardly classified as another species of EN. The latter features expletive negation in a very literal sense – the negator here is a taboo word (*dick*, glossed as X.NEG). Neither construction tolerates NCIs.

<sup>7</sup>Contrary to the standard claim that NCIs do not embed under fear-predicates (e.g., Abels 2005, Brown & Franks 1995), many such examples are attested online. My informants likewise indicate that (34) with the NCI is perfectly on a par with the negative concord version of (31). See also Nilsson (2012) for further empirical adjudication.



- (36) Uvjazneš po samye stupitsy i zagoraeš, poka {kto /  
 stuck to very hubs and tan until who.INDF  
 < ✓kto-nibud' > / < \*nikto > } ne vytaščit.  
 who-*nibud'* ni.who NEG will.pull.out  
 'Your hubs get stuck and you hang out until somebody pulls you out.'  
 (O. Efremov. *Rybak primor'ja*. 2003)
- (37) Xuj {kto / kto-nibud' / < \*nikto > } prišel.  
 X.NEG who.INDF who-*nibud'* ni.who came  
 'It is not the case that anybody came.'  
 (Erschler 2023)

Per Abels, the matrix proposition and the *until*-clause in (36) cannot be true at the same time: One is either stuck, in which case the extricating event has not happened, or one is extricated, in which case they are no longer stuck. His proposal is that negation raises at LF to scope over the *poka*-clause, which precludes NCIs (as the licenser ceases to be sufficiently local). My amendment is that high negation merges directly in that position. Similarly, for X-negation in (37), Erschler (2023) argues that the negator sits in the Spec of the TP-external PolP that does not license NCIs.

The data are summarized in Table 1. I ascribed the alternation NCI ~ wh-indefinite in the first two entries to syntactic ambiguity stemming from the position of merge: The lower negation requires negative concord, the higher one supplies an appropriate context for wh-indefinites. Because the last two contexts do not tolerate NCIs, the negators in both instances must be introduced higher – above TP.

Table 1: Distribution of wh-indefinites and NCIs

	NCIs	wh-indefinites
LEST-clauses	✓	✓
apprehensive subjunctives	✓	✓
<i>until</i> -clauses	✗	✓
X-NEG	✗	✓

It should be noted that I do not envision a fixed position for “high negation” – indeed, its behavior in various contexts is consistent with multiple merge sites in the illocutionary domain. Since considerations of space prevent me from dealing with this topic in any coherent detail, I confine myself to a bare bones sketch of

the proposal, leaving the details of implementation or, indeed, a comprehensive justification for future endeavors. Assume the structure in (38), adopted from Krifka (2022), where ActP is the locus of assertions (•) or questions (?), ComP is the domain of the speaker's social commitments to the proposition, and the already familiar J(udgment)P is the province of subjective epistemic attitudes. For explicitness, I also assume that ComP can be headed by a null bouletic element (alternatively, one may posit an independent projection, representing bouletic attitudes of the speaker as in, e.g., Sode & Truckenbrodt 2018).

- (38) [ActP [Act<sup>0</sup> •][ComP [Com<sub>BOUL</sub>] [JP ...[TP ...]]]]

Given the above, I suggest that X.NEG and “global” negation in LEST-clauses apply at the level of ActP, which furthermore must contain an assertorial operator to render it consistent with Erschler's observation that X.NEG is impossible in questions (39).

- (39) \*Xren on xodil na rabotu?  
 X.NEG he went to work  
 Intended: ‘Did he not go to work?’

On the other hand, in apprehensive subjunctives under *kak by* and *until*-clauses, negation appears lower – at the level of ComP or TP. That the NEG of a LEST-clause is distinct from the NEG of an apprehensive subjunctive/*until*-clause is confirmed by (40): X.NEG can replace *ne* in a LEST-clause (40a) but not the lower *ne* of the two EN contexts in (40b) and (40c).

- (40) a. ..., čtoby xren kto sbežal doroguju, ...  
           that.SBJV X.NEG who.INDF ran.away en.route  
           ‘... so that it is not the case that somebody escapes en route, ...’  
   b. \*Bojus', kak by xren kto telefon stibril.  
       fear how SBJV X.NEG who.INDF phone snatched  
       Intended: ‘I don't want for anybody to steal the phone.’  
   c. \*... poka xren kto vytaščit.  
       until X.NEG who.INDF will.pull.out  
       Intended: ‘... until someone pulls (us) out.’

The exposition is undeniably terse here, but the essential insight should be reasonably clear: Wh-indefinites are licensed by a negative operator, residing in the illocutionary domain. This distinguishes wh-indefinites from NCIs, whose felicity is predicated on the presence of a proposition-internal operator.

### 3 Intermediate summary

Wh-indefinites are possible in polar interrogatives (neutral or biased), conditionals (indicative or hypothetical) and under existential epistemic modals. While the future, episodic past and modal environments (with universal epistemics) are “too strong”, they can be made compatible with wh-indefinites by manipulating subjective modality (i.e., by merging an epistemic speech act adverbial). Desiderative and root subjunctives, attitude predicates, iterative contexts and imperatives likewise create “potentially licensing” contexts – only in these situations, the felicity of wh-indefinites is parasitic on the presence of a scalar adverb (encoding a bottom-of-the-scale condition). Finally, wh-indefinites are happy under high (illocutionary) negation.

The lessons here are two. First, there are no contexts that license wh-indefinites to the exclusion of *nibud'*-indefinites. In fact, the requirements of the latter are substantially less stringent: *nibud'*-indefinites are perfectly acceptable with no additional conditions in desiderative, future, iterative, etc. contexts. In the interest of full disclosure, consider also (41), which shows that in contrast to wh-indefinites, *nibud'*-indefinites are fine in both the scope and the restriction of a universal.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, wh-indefinites are routinely banned in universally quantified contexts, independent of the quantifier's syntactic role (subject or object), its surface position or, indeed, its type (*vse* ‘all’, *oba* ‘both’, *každyj* ‘each’ are all deviant with wh-indefinites). Furthermore, my informants are reluctant to accept wh-indefinites even when a quantifier is embedded in an otherwise wh-indefinite-friendly environment, such as a polar interrogative in (42).

- (41) a. *Každyj* {/\**čto* / *čto-nibud'*} *slyšal o korole Arture.*  
 each what.INDF what-*nibud'* heard of king Arthur  
 ‘Everybody heard something about king Arthur.’  
 (bookstore blurb, modified)
- b. *Každyj, kto* {/\**komu* / *komu-nibud'*} *zaviduet,*  
 each who.REL to.whom.INDF to.whom-*nibud'* envies  
*obladaet nizkoj samoocennoj.*  
 possesses low self-esteem  
 Intended: ‘Everyone who envies somebody has low self-esteem.’
- (42) *Razve vse studenty* {\*/?*čto* / *čto-nibud'*} *pročitali?*  
 really all students what.INDF what-*nibud'* read  
 ‘Didn’t all students read something?’

<sup>8</sup>I refer the reader to Padučeva (2007), Pereltsvaig (2008) for discussion of Russian *nibud'*-indefinites in quantified contexts.

The second point concerns a recurrent locality issue. The felicitous contexts require a clausemate licenser of the relevant kind – adverbs aside, all other environments feature an operator associated with the C-domain. For instance, in (43), with the operator in the superordinate clause, *wh*-indefinites are unacceptable.

- (43) a. Razve on govoril, čto {\*kto / kto-nibud'} sdal ěkzamen?  
           really he said that who.INDF who-*nibud'* passed exam  
           'Didn't he say that someone passed the exam?'  
       b. Esli najti v Rossii čeloveka, kotoryj {(\*čto) / čto-nibud'}  
           if to.find in Russia person who what.INDF what-*nibud'*  
           sdelal v pol'zu UNSO, to ...  
           did for benefit UNSO  
           'If one were to find a person who did something to benefit UNSO,  
           then [he might be prosecuted].' (gazeta.ru. 2014)

This locality constraint is intuitively logical. While both local and distant licensors require full morphological specification, the medial one enables the spell-out of a bare indefinite, provided the environment is sufficiently negative. In other words, we may conceive of the polarity-sensitive pronouns as a hierarchy of sorts, i.e. *kto-nibud'* » *kto(-nibud')* » *nikto*, where *nibud'* is compatible with (almost any) nonveridical operator (medial or distant), *ni*-items are required under a local antiveridical operator, and *wh*-indefinites are somewhat in the middle – possible in a subset of nonveridical environments in close proximity to their licenser. This “intermediate” (and morphologically sterile) status also correlates with certain PF-related effects to be discussed in the next section.

## 4 Syntax-PF interactions

That *wh*-indefinites are crosslinguistically de-focalized is not a revelation (e.g., Haida 2008, Hengeveld et al. 2022). Hengeveld et al. (2022), in fact, state the requirement as a biconditional: *wh*-elements (“quexistentials” in Hengeveld et al.’s terminology) are obligatorily focalized in their interrogative interpretation; in their existential incarnation, on the other hand, they are never focalized.<sup>9</sup> What I will attempt to show here is that Russian *wh*-indefinites are not simply unable to bear contrastive focus: indeed, they are considerably fussier in selecting surface positions than other indefinites. The basic observation is that in addition

<sup>9</sup>Reviewer 2 points out that the first clause of this biconditional is falsified by Czech (see Šimík 2010) and perhaps Slovenian (Mišmaš 2017).

to resisting contrastive focus, *wh*-indefinites prefer to be adjacent to the element that realizes the main sentential stress. This property, along with a preference for clustering in a specific order as well as resistance to coordination, render them akin to clitics.

Sentential stress here is understood as in Yokoyama (1987), who argues that there are two basic types of intonation in Russian: Type 1 (neutral) and Type 2 (“expressive”), shown in (44a) and (44b), respectively. Type 1 entails an iterating sequence of intonational phrases with LH contour, accompanied by a downstep. The “new information” (or, in more familiar terms, an element bearing information focus) comes at the end with a falling (HL) contour, which basically corresponds to a neutral declarative sentence with falling intonation. This is demonstrated in (45a).<sup>10</sup> Obviously, “new information” need not be restricted to a single lexical item – an entire constituent may function in this manner. In Type 2 (45b), the fronted constituent (*doždiček*) realizes sentential stress, defined as the “stress which marks the knowledge item that would occur in utterance-final position, were the same sentence to be uttered with intonation Type 1 instead” (Yokoyama 1987: 191). Its properties are twofold: (i) It is the last intonational center of the utterance, and (ii) No rising tones can follow it. Abstracting away from the pitch details, ‘↘’ will be used to indicate Type 1 intonation, ‘\*’ (and small caps) to mark Type 2 intonation, and ‘|’ to identify phonological phrase boundaries (call it  $\pi P$ ).

- (44) a. Nad Krakovom nakrapyval doždiček.  
           over Krakow   drizzled   rain  
           ‘The rain was drizzling over Krakow.’  
       b. Nad Krakovom DOŽDIČEK nakrapyval.  
           over Krakow   rain       drizzled
- (45) a. Nad Krakovom | nakrapyval | doždiček.  
           LH           |<sup>!</sup> LH       | HL (↘)  
       b. Nad Krakovom | DOŽDIČEK nakrapyval.  
           LH           | HL (\*)

Yokoyama (1987) also shows that indefinite pronouns are ineligible to realize the final HL under neutral Type 1 intonation. Instead, the intonational core shifts to a “fully specified” constituent. In the case of (46), it is the verb. While the indefinite is ineligible to serve as the default intonational pivot here, it can be pronounced with the contrastive (Type 2) contour.

<sup>10</sup>This representation is borrowed from King (1993).

- (46) Pojdemte kuda-nibud'. (Type 1 with indefinites)  
 lets.go where-*nibud'* (↘)  
 'Let's go somewhere.'

With these preliminaries in place, consider Yanovich's (2005) data in (47) again (repeated from (16)). Earlier it was established that a modal adverb like *dolžno byt'* is a legitimate licenser for wh-indefinites after all, provided its licensee complies with certain word order restrictions.

- (47) a. Možet, {kto} prixodil {kto}.  
 maybe who.INDF came.M who.INDF  
 'Maybe someone came.'  
 b. Dolžno byt', {\*kto} prixodil {kto}.  
 must be who.INDF came.M who.INDF  
 'It must be the case that someone came.'

Focusing here on the intransitive verbs, consider the subject position permutations with *dolžno byt'*. A neutral sequence in (48a) requires a postverbal subject, which takes on the default Type 1 accentuation. On the other hand, (48b) is marked: now, the scrambled (contrastively focused) subject carries Type 2 sentential stress.

- (48) a. Dolžno byt', | umerla | koroleva.  
 must be | died | queen (↘)  
 'The queen must've died.'  
 b. Dolžno byt', | KOROLEVA umerla.

\*

On the other hand, the *nibud'*-indefinite in (49) can be placed either before or after the verb – but in either case *umer* serves as the default prosodic center of its prosodic phrase, i.e. both (49a) and (49b) display the Type 1 pattern, where the intonational pivot shifts along with the verb. The Type 2 scheme, found in (48b), is difficult to get for *nibud'*-indefinites. For whatever reason, in these contexts the *nibud'*-item resists contrastive focalization.

- (49) a. Dolžno byt', | umer kto-nibud'.  
 must be | died who-*nibud'* (↘)  
 'Somebody must've died.'  
 b. Dolžno byt', | kto-nibud' umer.  
 must be who-*nibud'* died (↘)

Finally, consider (50). The sentence is parsed into two  $\pi$ Ps. Immediately excluded are instances like (50c) with the Type 2 (contrastive focus) intonation. The two incarnations of Type 1 prosody in (50a) and (50b) correspond to (49a) and (49b), respectively. I ascribe the deviance of (50b) to the convergence of two factors: the indefinite sits in the  $\pi$ P-initial position to the left of the element realizing default declarative prosody.

- (50) a. Dolžno byt', | prixodil kto.  
HL (↘)  
b. ?\*Dolžno byt', | kto prixodil.  
HL (↘)  
c. \*Dolžno byt', | kto prixodil.  
\*

Taken independently, these two contingencies are no impediment for wh-indefinites. For instance, *možet* in (51) does not require a prosodic boundary after itself, which, in turn, ensures that the indefinite is not stranded in the initial position. In this situation, the indefinite can be left- or right-adjacent to the default prosodic host. Note that a heavier constituent – like *možet byt’* in (52) – is tougher to integrate into the utterance: with a pause after the adverbial, the indefinite feels awkward in the preverbal slot.

- (51) a. Možet, umer kto.  
maybe died who.INDF (↘)  
b. Možet, kto umer.  
maybe who.INDF died (↘)
- (52) <sup>\*/??</sup>Možet byt', | kto prišel.  
may be who.INDF came (↘)  
Intended: 'Maybe someone came.'

Conversely, (53) shows that a *wh*-indefinite may appear in the utterance-initial position but only if its host carries a non-default intonational contour, as is the case in the polar interrogative context schematized in (53b).

- (53) a. Kto PRIŠEL?  
who.INDF came  
'Did somebody come?'
- b. Kto PRIŠEL?
- \*

The analytical payoff here is this. Wh-indefinites can appear neither in the positions of information focus (like other indefinites) nor in the positions of contrastive focus (unlike other indefinites). Additionally, they must obey certain added restrictions, which curb their presence in the  $\pi$ P-initial positions. These two properties suggest that the elements in question are of a special nature. In the remainder of this section I identify a few additional quirks of wh-indefinites that attest to their clitic-like qualities.

First, multiple wh-indefinites are possible in principle. In such situations, the indefinites prefer the sequence NOM >> DAT/ACC >> adjuncts. Violations are perceived to be non-lethal – certainly not on the level of ordering infractions in languages with pronominal clitics, yet my informants are consistent in their dislike for the alternative orders. Examples are found in (54).

- (54) a. Videl li {kto kogo / ?kogo kto} včera?  
           saw Q who.INDF whom.INDF whom.INDF who.INDF yesterday  
           ‘Did someone see anybody yesterday?’  
       b. Kak by {kto gde / ?/? gde kto} ne  
           how SBJV who.INDF where.INDF where.INDF who.INDF NEG  
           zastrjal!  
           get.stuck  
           ‘(I am afraid) someone might get stuck somewhere.’

Second, multiple wh-indefinites tend to form a cluster, as demonstrated by an embedded YN question in (55) and a conditional in (56). Under the most natural reading, in the deviant examples, the verbs (i.e., *razboltal* and *rasskažet*) form the prosodic core in the relevant intonational domains. The oddity of (55a) and (56a) follows from the non-adjacency of one of the indefinites to its (verbal, in this case) host. There are, however, strategies that improve split clusters. For instance, if *Ivan* from (56a) receives contrastive focus in the manner of (57), the sentence becomes rather natural. In other words, while the default configuration is one in which the indefinites form a bundle, split clusters are possible if the indefinites in question are adjacent to the appropriate host.

- (55) a. \*? (Ja ne znaju,) razboltal li komu Ivan čto, no vse  
           I NEG know blabbed Q to.whom.INDF Ivan what.INDF but all  
           uže znajut naš sekret.  
           already know our secret  
           Intended: ‘I don’t know if Ivan blabbed something to someone, but everybody already knows our secret.’



- b. Ja ne znaju, razboltal li komu čto Ivan, ...  
 I NEG know blabbed Q to.whom.INDF what.INDF Ivan
- (56) a. ?? Esli komu Ivan čto rasskažet, ja budu v jarosti.  
 if to.whom.INDF Ivan what.INDF will.tell I will.be in fury  
 Intended: 'If Ivan tells anybody anything, I will be furious.'
- b. Esli Ivan komu čto rasskažet, ...  
 if Ivan to.whom.INDF what.INDF will.tell
- (57) ✓ Esli komu IVAN čto rasskažet, ...  
 \*

The third property requires a small digression. It is a well-established fact that multiple *wh*-phrases can be coordinated in Russian in the manner of (58a) (e.g., Gribanova 2009). The other cases in (58) are, perhaps, less famous (data are due to Paperno 2012). Paperno shows that the conjuncts in such configurations must be of the same type (i.e., indefinite+indefinite, universal+universal, etc.), cf. a mismatched indefinite+universal in (59).

- (58) a. Kto i kogo videl?  
 who and who saw  
 'Who saw whom?'
- b. Nikto i nikogo ne pobedil.  
*ni*-who and *ni*-whom NEG defeated  
 'Nobody defeated anybody.'
- c. Ponjal li kto-nibud' i čto-nibud'?  
 understood Q who-*nibud'* and what-*nibud'*  
 'Did anybody understand anything?'
- (59) \* Ponjal li kto-nibud' i vse?  
 understood Q who-*nibud'* and everything  
 Intended: 'Did anybody understand everything?'

The phenomenon of hybrid coordination is poorly understood (and I have nothing to add about the syntax of these structures). But whatever the mechanism, it is clearly unavailable to *wh*-indefinites: the pattern in (60) corroborates that *wh*-indefinites are not fantastic when coordinated, whereas in the absence of the coordinator (61), they are well-formed. One alternative (with a precedent in the literature) is to attribute their resistance to coordination to PF reasons.

- (60) a. *\*/??* Možet, on komu i što privezet iz Pariža.  
           maybe he to.whom.INDF and what.INDF will.bring from Paris  
           Intended: ‘Maybe somebody will bring something from Paris.’  
       b. *\*/??* Esli on komu i što privezet,...  
           if he to.whom.INDF and what.INDF will.bring  
           Intended: ‘If he brings anything for anybody,...’
- (61) a. Možet, on komu što privezet iz Pariža.  
       b. Esli on komu što privezet,...

Said precedent is found in Stepanov & Moussaoui (2020), who argue that in Lebanese Arabic, *fu* ‘what’ evinces clitic-like properties – one of which, they suggest, is resistance to coordination, as shown in (62) (this also holds of the French *que* ‘what’).

- (62) a. \*fu w min bta-ʔref b-hal-balad?  
 what and who 2.SG-know in-this-country  
 ‘What and who(m) do you know in this country?’  
 b. Amta w kif ʔam t-rooḥ-o ʔa-l-masbaḥ?  
 when and how PROG 2-going-PL to-the-swimming.pool  
 ‘When and how are you going to the swimming pool?’  
 (Lebanese Arabic)

Needless to say, coordinating “real” clitics (e.g., Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) pronominal clitics in (63)) is out of the question. Though the violations in (60) are not nearly as bad as in BCS (63), my informants are consistent in assigning the value  $\leq 3$  (out of 5) to the coordinated indefinites.

- (63) \*Poklonila sam mu i ga.  
 gifted am him and it  
 Intended: 'I gifted it to him.' (BCS)

All of this is to say that although coordination should not be taken as the sole diagnostic of clitic-hood, when combined with earlier observations on the dependent prosodic status of *wh*-indefinites, it may prove to be of explanatory value.<sup>11</sup> Considering also that the mechanism is available to all types of quantified elements in Russian, the baseline assumption would situate *wh*-indefinites

<sup>11</sup>See Citko (2013) and references therein for a discussion of syntactic factors involved in deriving non-standard coordination dependencies.

within the same array of elements that are amenable to coordination in principle. Their outlier behavior is hence best accommodated by appealing to their peculiar prosodic status.

In short, the contention here is that *wh*-indefinites are reminiscent of (albeit not fully tantamount to) clitics. They require adjacency to a prosodic host, but show flexibility in alignment (left or right). They form clusters which can nevertheless be broken under the right conditions. Within clusters, they tend to appear in a particular order, the violations of which are merely dispreferred (rather than fully unacceptable). Finally, unlike other quantified elements, they are far from ideal when coordinated. All of these properties, in turn, suggest that the binary division into clitic vs. non-clitic is too rigid. There must be room to accommodate items like *wh*-indefinites, which are not quite clitics proper but neither are they tonic forms. In other words, clitic↔non-clitic represents a scale, with elements occupying various intermediate positions within this continuum.<sup>12</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

*Wh*-indefinites are “not quite” elements: not quite clitics, they require a weakly negative context, created by a clausebounded operator. They can always be replaced with *nibud'*-indefinites, but not *vice versa*. This “in-between” status correlates with bare morphology: while very local (antiveridical) and superordinate (nonveridical) operators call for full morphological specification (*ni-* or *nibud'*, respectively), the medial ones admit such morphologically deficient elements under certain circumstances. Though I have attempted to catalog what these circumstances are, it would be obviously desirable to uncover a unifying semantic mechanism that ensures the felicity of *wh*-indefinites in all the contexts from Section 2. Dwelling on the topic of further desideratum, it would be productive to establish specific phonetic correlates that underlie the weak prosodic status of non-polar elements within the clitic–non-clitic continuum.

With these caveats aside, the basic findings are as follows. First, *wh*-indefinites are possible in a proper subset of *nibud'*-indefinites. Encountered most frequently in polar interrogatives, in conditional antecedents, and under weak epistemic verbs, they can also be introduced in desiderative/root subjunctives, imperatives, iterative and future contexts, as well as under strong epistemics and attitude predicates. However, all the latter (“non-standard”) contexts require further modification to render the indefinites happy – either a (subjective) epistemic or a

<sup>12</sup>Reviewer 1 points out that this property renders them rather akin to weak pronouns in the sense of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999)

scalar adverb. Second, Russian *wh*-indefinites occupy a peculiar PF niche: not only do they resist contrastive focalization (a well-established fact), they evince additional properties consistent with the typical behavior of clitics. Said properties include their preference for clustering (and a specific order within the clusters), their selectivity of hosts, and their inability to coordinate.

## Abbreviations

2	second person	PFV	perfective
3	third person	PL	plural
FOC	focus	PST	past
IMP	imperative	PROG	progressive
INDF	indefinite	Q	question marker
IPFV	imperfective	REL	relative
M	masculine	SBJV	subjunctive
NEG	negation	SG	singular

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the audience of FDSL 15 as well as the two reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

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