

Towards a typology of bare indefinites: Russian and Thai

In this paper which is a part of a wider cross-linguistic research on bare indefinites I will discuss some properties of bare indefinites in Russian and Thai.

In contrast to canonical indefinite pronouns which based mainly on interrogatives of the corresponding ontological category (like English 'what' for THING or 'where' for PLACE) or on generic nouns like 'person' or 'thing' by the addition of an indefiniteness marker [Haspelmath 1997], bare indefinites (or "bare interrogatives") are formally identical to interrogative pronouns of the corresponding ontological category.

There are languages where bare indefinites occur only in some of core nine functions proposed by Haspelmath whereas in other functions marked indefinites are used, that is their distributions do not intersect.

On the other hand, in some languages where interrogative-derived indefinites are normally used bare indefinites occur in some of functions also.

Here only those pronouns are of interest, which can occur in the contexts where corresponding marked indefinite pronouns are used. And in the current work I would like to discuss the status of bare indefinites in two languages which use in some both interrogative-derived marked and bare indefinites. I argue that bare indefinites in other languages independently of their areal and genetic relationship have similar properties.

Although usage of bare indefinites optionally to marked forms is often considered as a feature of colloquial speech [Kuz'mina 1989, Yanko 1977, Haspelmath 1997], bare forms are not just colloquial forms of corresponding "full" indefinites with an indefiniteness marker since they may not be used in any of core function of indefinites if we consider a particular language.

Consider the following examples from Russian:

(1) Esli **kto-nibud'**/^{OK}**kto** pozvonit, skazhi, chto
menja net.

if who-INDEF/who will_call say that I:GEN no

If anybody calls, say I am not at home.

(2) **Kto-to/*kto** prihodil.

who-INDEF came

Somebody came.

Interestingly, although bare indefinites are identical to interrogatives, ambiguity is always avoided. And the indefiniteness meaning is contributed to a statement in this case by some other elements.

I argue that in indefinite statements bare indefinites are used not referentially but rather their main function is to introduce an entity of a certain knowledge category in sense of epistememes of Mushin [Mushin 1995].

It may happen when not the properties of a referent are important, but rather the ontological category it belongs to.

Interestingly, even in not related languages the same situation may be observed, for example in Thai.

(3) khǎw jàag cà? phób khraj thīi maa càag myaŋ thaj

he want FUT meet who that come from country Thai

He wants to meet someone who comes from Thailand.

The present work is devoted to analysis of differences and similarities in distribution and functioning of bare interrogatives in two not related genetically or geographically languages.

References

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