

Some Slavic epistemic indefinites: Evidence for two new parameters of semantic microvariation

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The expression of modality is not limited to the verbal domain (Arregui et al. 2017); many languages express modality within the nominal domain through the use of epistemic indefinites (henceforth, EIs), a special class of indefinite determiners or pronouns that signal ignorance about a referent on the part of the speaker, thus conveying information about their epistemic state. Contrary to plain indefinites, this ignorance is conventionalized in EIs (Aloni and Port 2015), as shown in (1).

- (1) a. Somebody called, (namely John).
- b. Some client called, (# namely John).

Since ignorance is not conventionalized in a plain indefinite like *somebody*, it is easily cancellable and a *namely* continuation is felicitous, as in (1a); on the other hand, because ignorance is part of the inherent meaning of an EI like *some*, it is not cancellable and this kind of continuation is infelicitous, as in (1b).

Crosslinguistically, however, EIs vary in their additional properties and functions along a number of parameters established in the literature (see Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2015), which include the kind and degree of ignorance that they can be used to convey, as well as their compatibility with various identification methods, epistemic and deontic modals, and plurality. As a result, EIs are difficult to account for with a unified semantic theory; current analyses (see Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002; Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2003, 2010; Aloni and Port 2015) are rather language-specific or predict uniform behaviour for an EI regardless of context.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on the semantics of EIs in various languages that generally builds upon Haspelmath (1997)'s typological survey of the syntactic and semantics properties of indefinite pronouns, which includes: English *some* (Farkas 2003; Weir 2012), German *irgendein* (Aloni and Port 2013; Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002), Spanish *algún* (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2011, 2013, 2015), French *quelque* (Jayez and Tovena 2011), Italian *un qualche* (Aloni and Port 2013), and Romanian *vreun* (Farkas 2002, 2006; Fălăuş 2014).

Looking at EIs in Slavic languages, specifically Bulgarian *njakakäv*, Czech *nějaký* and *některý*, Polish *jakiś* and *któryś*, and Serbo-Croatian *neko*, I propose two new parameters of variation, namely restriction and unfamiliarity, which indicate that there is more semantic microvariation among EIs than previously described in the literature.

Specifically, some EIs like Czech *některý* and Polish *któryś* inherently limit the domain of potential referents to that of a contextually-known set (i.e., restriction); other EIs like Bulgarian *njakakäv* and Polish *jakiś*, when used in lieu of a plain indefinite, in certain contexts express an additional layer of unfamiliarity or lack of prior knowledge on top of the conventionalized ignorance conveyed by the EI (i.e., unfamiliarity).

Therefore, although all EIs share a conventionalized ignorance, the other functions and properties that they exhibit are subject to a more refined variation than previously accounted for in the literature; this additional data brings us one step closer to a general typology for this special class of indefinites.

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