Specificity in the System of Indefinite Pronouns in Russian

Fodor & Sag (1982) saw the concept of scopal and epistemic specificity as two sides of the same phenomenon. The subsequent literature, however, keeps these types of specificity mostly apart. I show on the basis of data from Russian indefinite pronouns that epistemic and scopal specificity have to be considered as different notions, which, however, are interrelated in the following way: scopally specific DPs can be epistemically specific or non-specific. For scopally non-specific DPs, the epistemic specificity is not defined.

Background. Traditionally, specificity has been observed in contexts with strong intentional operators such as the modal want. If the value of the indefinite is fixed independently of the domain of such an operator, the indefinite is interpreted as specific. If the value of indefinite is dependent on the domain of such an operator, the referent receives a non-specific interpretation. This type of specificity has been called *scopal specificity*. Fodor & Sag (1982) argue that in transparent contexts, indefinites are ambiguous in the same way as in contexts with strong intentional operators. Fodor and Sag characterize this ambiguity in the following way: under specific reading the speaker has a particular referent in mind, in the non-specific reading, in contrast, the speaker has no particular referent in mind. Since the type of specificity observed by Fodor and Sag concerns the epistemic state of the speaker, it was called *epistemic specificity*.

Main Claims. There is a debate in the literature about the question, if the two types of specificity are related to each other. On the Fodor and Sag’s account (1982) the two types of specificity are equal. Endriss (2006) points to the similar direction claiming that epistemic specificity holds with respect to some covert weak epistemic operator like believe and, hence, is just an instance of scopal specificity. In contrast, the discussion in Farkas (1996), Kamp & Bende-Farkas (2006), von Heusinger (2002) points to the necessity to take this two types of specificity apart as independent notions. I claim in light of this discussion on the basis of indefinite pronouns in Russian that the two types of specificity are different notions which, however, are related in the following way: epistemic specificity is a subpart of scopal specificity and only scopally specific indefinites can be epistemically specific or non-specific. While epistemically specific indefinites are related to the speaker, the epistemically non-specific indefinites can be related to another discourse individual.

Discussion. Russian is a language without articles but with some indefinite pronouns which can be used as determiners. I will discuss the distribution of three series of indefinite pronouns which are formed by a *wh*-word plus suffix -to, -nibud’ or the prefix koe- while the latter type of pronoun is often replaced by the indefinite pronoun *odin* ‘one’ for some stylistic reason. I will show how Russian overtly encodes the two types of specificity in the system of indefinite pronouns.

1. Scopal Specificity. The -nibud’-indefinite determiner may only appear when inside the c-command domain of an operator such as e.g. a modal, cf. (1). Since it is ungrammatical to use wh-nibud’ in a simple declarative sentence, it can be called *polarity determiner*.

(1) Igor’ hochet zhenit’sja na kakoj-nibud’ studentke.
Igor wants marry wh-nibud’ student
‘Igor wants to marry some [non-specific] student.’

In sentences with intentional operators, also the determiners wh-to and koe-wh/odin’ are possible. The division of labor between these determiners is as follows: wh-nibud’ is a marker of scopally non-specific DPs while the other determiners mark scopally specific DPs. The specific/non-specific interpretation can be indicated by the appropriate continuations, cf. (2) vs. (3).

(2) Igor’ hochet zhenit’sja na kakoj-to/koe-kakoj/odnoj studentke. SCOPALLY NON-SPECIFIC
Igor wants marry wh-to/ koe-wh/one student
‘Igor wants to marry some [non-specific] student.’

a. # Ee zovut Nina.
   ‘Her name is Nina.’

b. On poka ni s kem ne poznakomilsja.
   ‘He didn’t get to know anybody.’

(3) Igor’ hochet zhenit’sja na kakaj-to/koe-kakah/kakaj/odnoj studentke. SCOPALLY SPECIFIC
Igor wants marry wh-to/ koe-wh/one student
‘Igor wants to marry some [specific] student.’

a. Ok Ee zovut Nina.
   ‘Her name is Nina.’

b. # On poka ni s kem ne poznakomilsja.
   ‘He hasn’t get to know anybody.’
2. **Epistemic specificity** In transparent contexts, where, following Fodor & Sag (1982), the epistemic ambiguity specific/non-specific with indefinites is expected, the choice of the indefinite pronoun in Russian contributes to the disambiguation. The *koe*-series and the determiner *odin* ‘one’ indicate that the referent can be identified by the speaker, i.e., the speaker has a particular individual in mind, cf. (4). Thus, *koe*/*odin*-indefinite determiner encodes epistemic specificity.

(4) Igor vstretil *koe-kakju/odnu* studentku.  
*EPISTEMICALLY SPECIFIC*  
Igor met *wh-to/ koe-wh/one*’ student  
‘Igor met some [specific for the speaker] student.’

| a. | ok Ja ee znaju.  
| b. | # Ja ne znaju, kakuju studentku on imeet v vidu.  

On the other hand, the *to*-series indicate that the referent cannot be identified by the speaker (cf. also Haspelmath 2004: 45) and hence encodes epistemic non-specificity. In (5), the speaker does not know or has forgotten what student it was that Igor met. It is possible to interpret (5) in the way that the student is identifiable to Igor, i.e., the student is anchored to the discourse individual different from the speaker. However, in general there is no requirement for *to*-series that anybody possess identifying knowledge but only that the referent be in principle identifiable.

(5) Igor vstretil *kakju-to* studentku.  
*EPISTEMICALLY NON-SPECIFIC*  
Igor met *wh-to* student  
‘Igor met some [not specific for the speaker, but perhaps for Igor] student.’

| a. | # Ja ne znaju, kakuju studentku on imeet v vidu.  
| b. | # Igore ee znaet.  

To sum up, the system of indefinite pronouns in Russian encodes overtly the difference between the two types of specificity.

3. **The architecture.** As is shown in ex. (6) and (7), the epistemic and the scopal specificity can interact. In the context with strong intentional operator, a scopally specific indefinite DP can be epistemically specific as in (6) or non-specific as in (7). Similarly to transparent contexts, *koe*-series and *odin* indicate epistemic specificity, while *to*-series indicate epistemic non-specificity.

(6) Igor’ hochet zhenit’sja na *koe-kakoj/odnoj* studentke.  
*S-SPECIFIC, E-SPECIFIC*  
Igor wants marry *koe-wh/one*’ student  
‘Igor wants to marry some [specific] student.’

| a. | ok Ja ee znaju. My byli odnoklassnicy.  
| b. | # Ja ne znaju, kakuju studentku on imeet v vidu.  

(7) Igor’ hochet zhenit’sja na *kakoj-to* studentke.  
*S-SPECIFIC, E-NONSPECIFIC*  
Igor wants marry *wh-to* student  
‘Igor wants to marry some [specific] student.’

| a. | # Ja ne znaju, kakuju studentku on imeet v vidu.  
| b. | # Igore ee znaet.  

There is, however, no possibility to distinguish epistemic specificity within scopally non-specific DPs.

**Conclusion.** The overview of the distribution of indefinite pronouns in Russian suggests the following taxonomy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Scopally specific</th>
<th>Scopally non-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>epistemically specific</strong> (anchored to the speaker)</td>
<td><em>koe</em>-series, <em>odin</em></td>
<td><em>to</em>-series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>epistemically non-specific</strong> (lack of anchoring to the speaker)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>strong intentional operator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>transparent</td>
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