The scalar side of specific indefinites: Russian *-to* series

Studies on specific indefinites in general and Russian specific indefinite pronoun *–to* in particular are numerous and provide a good understanding of the nature of specificity and of a bunch of its syntactic, semantic and pragmatic effects. Influential formal approaches to specificity are developed in Farkas 1997, Kratzer 1998, 2003, Matthewson 1999, for Russian cf. Yanovich 2005. The analyses that successfully capture the data in a formal way are all built on the facts that reflect the core properties of indefinite pronouns uses, the data for Russian being mainly as in (0) with *–to* as a 'specific unknown' indefinite (in Haspelmath 1997 terminology). *–to* indefinites in Russian are treated as semantically analogous, though not equal, to *some* indefinites in English, having the possibility of widest scope (preferred) as well as narrow scope (this property is captured by analyzing it as a choice-functional variable – for *some* see Kratzer 1998 a.m.o., for *–to* – Yanovich 2005).

However, *-to*-pronouns have other uses in which they have different semantics and which at first glance are unrelated to those in (0). It could be considered accidental homonymy of *–to* marker – if Russian was the only language where indefiniteness marker exhibited this ambiguity, which is not the case. Thus trying to extend current analyses to new portions of data is an interesting task and a good challenge for the analyses in question.

1. Data. The 'non-indefinite wastebasket' of *–to* uses clearly includes two major groups: one dealing with 'minimality' and the other with 'depreciativity'. The former is illustrated in (1). An indefinite pronoun here indicates that half an hour is a very short time for writing a good paper. Importantly, we can't get the reading of a very <u>long</u> time whenever we use this construction with *-to*, even if we replace half an hour with a year and an excellent paper with a small letter. Even more importantly, *kakije-to* in (1) seems to bear no 'indefiniteness' of any kind at all (cf. Nikolaeva 1983).

The depreciative reading ('bad or unimportant person/thing', cf. Haspelmath 1997: 186-192) is shown in (2). There is no obvious way to derive this meaning from the 'indefinite' meaning of *–to*, either.

2. Analyses. Typologically, it's free-choice items that have depreciative readings while specific indefinites are rare in this function. The explanation says that the depreciative reading involves a pragmatic scale which is part of lexical meaning of FCIs, and specificity has nothing to do with scales (see Horn 2000 and Haspelmath 1997 for relevant discussion and Fauconnier 1975, Lee and Horn 1994, Israel 1996 etc. for scalar analyses of FCIs). Depreciative reading is acquired by turning the informativity scale into a scale in which members are ordered by speaker's attitude (member *n* is 'better' than *n-1*) – this happens when the informativity scale is uninterpretable due to the properties of the context.

But there are specific indefinites that do show depreciativity, as in (2). Haspelmath has a suggestion on this matter: "Indefinite pronouns are intrinsically uninformative … when speakers nevertheless use them in situations where they do not contribute any additional information, hearers are entitled to make additional inferences" (Hapelmath 1997: 187). Showing a way towards a more articulated explanation of depreciative Specific indefinites in terms of Gricean pragmatics (flouting the Quantity maxim, see Grice 1975), this suggestion itself rises a question: do specific indefinites and FCIs show the <u>same</u> depreciativity? Haspelmath talks about contextual reasons that force specific indefinites to shift their meaning, and these reasons resemble those that force FCIs to do the same. But do they result in the same semantics, or – speaking less metaphorically – does the specific depreciative involve a pragmatic scale?

3. Proposal. The 'minimal' reading of *–to* suggests that the answer to the

question above is 'yes'. (1) and (2) can be related by fixing the ordering parameter, which is a very easy and likely shift (I omit the technicalities here). Thus the depreciative readings of FCIs and specific indefinites are a single phenomenon, arising by related mechanisms. It involves a pragmatic scale of speaker's attitude towards the alternatives, on which the lower end is picked. Finally, we try save the general picture of *–to* semantics by developing an explicit account for 'indefinite'/depreciative ambiguity of *–to* on the basis of Gricean Quantity maxim.

Examples

(0) Každyj   mal'č'ik   č'ital **kakuju-to** iz   našix knig.
     every   boy   read   **which-IND** of   our   books
Every boy read one of our books.
(1. one book for all the boys, 2. different books for different boys)

(1) Za **kakije-to**   polč'asa   on   napisal   otlič'nuju statju.
     in **which-IND**   half.an.hour he   wrote   excellent   paper

In only half an hour he wrote an excellent paper

(2) Ee   muž   –   **kakoj-to**   uč'itel'.
     her   husband   **which-IND**   teacher
Her husband is just a teacher.

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