(In)definiteness in Russian bare nouns: evidence from presentational contexts

Introduction The three argument introducing operations, ι , \exists and nom, are supposed to be sufficient to denote any NP in any language. Article-less languages do not have special morphology for them, therefore their nominals are usually ambiguous between definite and indefinite. This study addresses this ambiguity of bare nouns in Russian. I investigate uniqueness as one of the two core ingredients of definiteness, and I am focusing on the interpretation of bare nouns in presentational contexts, which are least likely to invoke definiteness. I provide experimental evidence for Russian bare singulars (SG) being interpreted uniquely, and Russian bare plurals (PL) being interpreted maximally. I support my claim by testing English data as well, and I show that Russian bare nouns align with English definite NPs rather than with English indefinite NPs. Thus, my results fully support the theory proposed by Dayal (2004), and contradict the oppositive view that Russian bare NPs are born indefinite and derive uniqueness as a pragmatic presupposition (Šimík&Demian 2020, Borik et al. 2019, Borik et al. 2020, Seres&Borik 2021). I suggest that Russian bare arguments are always introduced by a null argument-forming operator realized as nom/ι . Their indefinite readings occur in focus-marked positions, and arise because the Foc operator attaches below D hosting ι/σ , which results in \exists -closure.

The experiment The goal was to determine whether Russian bare nouns are unique/maximal in presentational contexts, and to compare them to English definite and indefinite NPs. The participants (n = 30 for each language) judged the acceptability of a text stimulus for a visual stimulus. The visual stimuli manipulated uniqueness/maximality of the referent, its number, and its prominence in the picture/video (see Table 1). The study consisted of two sub-experiments: E1 investigating subject NPs and E2 investigating object NPs; E2 only used video stimuli to avoid pluractionality. Textual stimuli manipulated syntactic position of the NP (subject vs. object), its number and, for English, definiteness (1–4).

Results Russian bare nouns pattern together with English definite nouns, both in SG and PL and both in subject and object position (Figure 1). The difference in their distributions is statistically insignificant (linear mixed-effects model; p>0.05). Another important result for Russian is that in subject position, a bare SG can refer to a non-unique but prominent individual. In English DEF.SG subjects, the prominence effect is significantly weaker.

Analysis The striking similarity between Russian bare NPs and English definite NPs in presentational contexts is a strong evidence in favor of Dayal's theory. I adopt the view that Russian bare nouns in argument positions are DPs with a null head D (Lyutikova 2018 ao). I further propose that this null head contains an null proform-like operator ARG that may be realized as nom/ι , reflecting the hierarchy proposed by Dayal: $\{nom, \iota\} > \exists$. Contexts where Russian bare NPs do receive an indefinite reading can be restricted to three cases: introduction by a focus operator (5), post-verbal focus (6), or intonation focus (7). I further follow Schwarzschild (1999) in postulating a Foc node in the LF of F-marked (accented) phrases. But crucially, I propose that in Russian, Foc is placed below D (8). If the DP is focus-marked, it gets existentially closed before D0 is merged. This results in an indefinite reading. F-marked constituents adjoin to ν P and non-F-marked constituents adjoin to TP, as proposed in Baylin (2012). Importantly, focused nominals in focus contexts determined above still project up to the DP level in most cases.

Conclusion I showed that Russian bare NPs are unique and maximal in presentational contexts and proposed that in all cases, Russian bare arguments are introduced with a null operator ARG realized as nom/ι but never as \exists . The indefinite readings are restricted to focus-marked contexts, and can be handled by introducing a Foc operator below D. In this way, my data supports the hierarchy proposed by Dayal: $\{nom, \iota\} > \exists$.

Selected references Borik et al (2019). Interplay between position and interpretation: an experimental study of Russian bare plurals. • Borik et al. (2020). Preverbal (in)definites in Russian: an experimental study • Dayal (2004). Number marking and (in)definiteness in kind terms • Lyutikova (2018). Struktura imennoj gruppy v bezartiklevom yazyke. • Šimík & Demian (2020). Definiteness, uniqueness, and maximality in languages with and without articles • Seres & Borik (2021). Definiteness in the absence of uniqueness: The case of Russian.

- (1) E1, Russian version
 - a. **Devočka** igraet na skripke. play.PRS.3SG on violin girl 'The/A girl is playing the violin.'
 - b. **Devočki** igrajut na skripke. girls playprs.3pl on violin 'The girls are playing the violin.'
- (2) E1, English version
 - a. The girl is playing the violin.
 - b. A girl is playing the violin.
 - c. The girls are playing the violin.
 - d. Girls are playing the violin.
- dal intervju. ^{OK}**Drugoj direktor**... (5) Direktor našej školy director our.GEN school.GEN gave interview another
 - 'A director of our school gave an interview. Another director... (talked on the radio).' (Seres&Borik 2021)
- (6) V komnatu zašla **ženščina**. in room entered woman
 - 'A woman entered the room.' (ι -reading impossible without intonation pitch)
- (7) DEVOČKA vyigrala sorevnovanie.
 - winned competition
 - 'It is a girl that winned in the competition.'

Table 1: Description of visual stimuli in E1 and E2.

Pictures in E1	Videos in E2	Parameters
P1: There is only one girl, and she is playing the violin.	V1: A woman enters the scene with one bag, puts it on the table, and leaves.	+UNIQ, SG
P2: There are many girls, the one in the center is playing the violin, the others are playing other instruments.	V2: A woman enters the scene with five bags, leaves one of them on the table, and leaves with the rest.	-UNIQ, +PROM, SG
P3: There are many girls, one of them is playing the violin and stays in the back, the others are playing other instruments.	V3: A woman enters the scene with five bags, leaves one of them on the table, the other one on the floor, and leaves with the rest.	-UNIQ, -PROM, SG
P4: There are four girls, all of them are playing violins.	V4: A woman enters the scene with five bags, leaves all of them on the table, and leaves.	+MAX, PL
P5: There are five girls, two of them are playing violins, others are playing other instruments	V5: A woman enters the scene with five bags, leaves two of them on the table, two of them on the floor, and leaves with the rest.	-MAX, PL

(3) E2, Russian version

- a. Devuška postavila paket na stol. woman put.PFV.PST.SG.F bag on table. 'The woman puts the/a bag on the table.'
- b. Devuška postavila paket-y na stol. woman put.PFV.PST.SG.F bag-PL on table. 'The woman puts the bags/bags on the table.'
- (4) E2, English version
 - a. The woman put the bag on the table.
 - b. The woman put a bag on the table.
 - c. The woman put the bags on the table.
 - d. The woman put bags on the table.
 - Intonation focus director

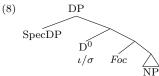
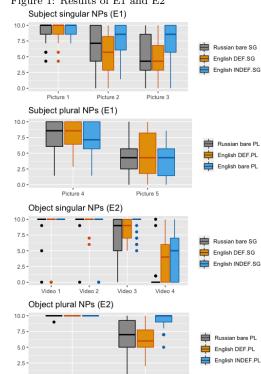


Figure 1: Results of E1 and E2



Video 5