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**RUSSIAN NEGATIVE
EXCLAMATIVES IN A CROSS-
LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

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RUSSIAN NEGATIVE EXCLAMATIVES IN A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE²

Relying upon the data of Russian and other languages, this paper discusses various types of negation in exclamatives. It argues that morphological negation is felicitous in exclamatives. However, sentential negation exhibits diversity. Its wide scope variety seems to be absolutely ungrammatical in all the languages under consideration. On the contrary, its narrow scope variety is subject to cross-linguistic variation: some languages exhibit the felicitousness of narrow scope readings in gradable adjectival and quantity exclamatives. Finally, expletive negation makes for a criterion of rhetorical exclamatives.

Key words: exclamatives, rhetorical exclamatives, negation, semantics, syntax

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1 Introduction

According to Michaelis (2001) among others, exclamatives express a speaker's surprise about an observed state of affairs that violates their expectations. They form a cross-linguistically stable group of grammatical structures, among which the most wide-spread and well-known are wh-exclamatives. See the English wh-exclamative in (1).

(1) *What a tasty cake she baked!*

Affirmative exclamatives (like (1)) have been extensively studied across languages: see English in Elliott (1974), Grimshaw (1979) and Rett (2008); German in Fries (1988) and Brandner (2010); the Scandinavian languages in Delsing (2010) and Jónsson (2010); French in Marandin (2008); Italian and Venetian in Portner and Zanuttini (2003); Catalan in Miró-Castroviejo (2006) and Vilalba (2001); Japanese in Ono (2006); Mandarin Chinese in Visan (2000); Hungarian in Lipták (2006); the North-Caucasian languages in Kalinina (2011); and the Austronesian languages in Kaufman (2010), Potsdam (2011), Moyse-Faurie (2011) among many others. However, negative exclamatives, i.e. exclamatives that contain a marker of negation, have been mostly ignored with few papers as an exception (Portner and Zanuttini 2000a, 2000b; Oda 2004, 2008 among others). The primary goal of this paper is to investigate the semantic and grammatical properties of Russian negative exclamatives, supporting our findings with the data of other languages. In doing so, we mainly base our study on the materials of the Russian National Corpus (further RNC).

This paper has the following structure. Section 2 points out the distinction between morphological and sentential types of negation in exclamatives cross-linguistically as well as in Russian. Section 3 discusses the wide and narrow scope types of sentential negation primarily in Russian exclamatives. Section 4 presents evidence from Russian and some other languages for the appropriateness of expletive sentential negation in exclamatives. Section 5 summarizes the main findings of the paper.

2 Morphological vs. sentential types of negation

By morphological negation, we primarily mean a negative marker (particle or affix) that form an antonym of a gradable adjective or adverb. The following examples from Japanese and Thai (as well as their English translations) illustrate that.

(2) Japanese

Kono hon wa nante omosiroku-nai n des-yoo!
this book TOP what interesting-NEG NMLZ COP-ADR.PRSM

‘What an uninteresting book this is!’

Oda (2008: 251)

(3) Thai (Central)

Nit máy sǔuay ʔaray kàràat nán!
Nit NEG nice what size that

‘What a non-beautiful girl Nit is!’

Oda (2004: 106)

Russian exhibits a similar pattern. The next adjectival and adverbial sentences exemplify that.

(4) Russian

a. *Kakaj-a ne-krasivaj-a istorij-a!*
what-NOM.SG.F NEG-pleasant-NOM.SG.F story-NOM.SG

‘What an unpleasant story!’

T. Okunevskaja (1998), RNC

b. *Aj kak ne-vežljivo!*
INTERJ how NEG-politely

‘Oh, how impolite!’

Yu. Družkov (1984), RNC

Typically, sentential negation is expressed with a negative particle that modifies the verb of a clause. Cross-linguistically, exclamatives are infelicitous with this type of negation, cf. (5)–(8) from Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish. All the examples are cited from Oda (2004: 106).

(5) Chinese (Mandarin)

**Tā bù shì duōme hǎo de yīge rén a!*
he NEG be how.much good PTCL one person EXCL

‘He cannot be called a nice person!’ (lit. ‘What a nice person he is not!’)

(6) Portuguese (Brazilian)

**Que* *pessoa* *legal* *que* *o* *João* *não* *é!*
what person nice COMP DEF Juan NEG be.PRS.3SG

‘Juan cannot be called a nice person!’ (lit. ‘What a nice person Juan is not!’)

(7) Spanish

a. **Que* *cuidad-a* *no* *estás!*
what attentive-F NEG be.2SG

‘How inattentive you are!’ (lit. ‘How attentive you are not!’)

b. **Que* *sorprès* *que* *no* *está* *el* *president!*
what surprise.PTCP.SG.M COMP NEG be.3SG DEF president

‘The president is not surprised!’ (lit. ‘How surprised the president is not!’)

(8) Turkish

**Ne* *hoş* *bir* *insan* *değil* *John!*
what nice INDF person NEG John

‘John cannot be called a nice person!’ (lit. ‘What a nice person John is not!’)

How to account for the inappropriateness of sentential negation in exclamatives? According to Oda (2004, 2008), a plausible explanation for this is that the scalar degree that exceeds the speaker’s expectations is undefined and, therefore, it cannot be negated. To illustrate, the affirmative exclamation *What a tall boy John is!* roughly means that the degree of John’s tallness is greater than the speaker thought; since the speaker’s expected degree is defined, the actual exceeding degree can be defined, as well. However, under the wide scope of negation, the negative exclamation *What a tall boy John isn’t!* does not specify the maximal degree of John not being a tall boy. Moreover, we also assume that even under the narrow scope of negation, by which a maximal degree is expected by the speaker and negated, we still do not arrive at a grammatical sentence. Therefore, presumably Oda (2004, 2008)’s explanation should be complemented with the following: the presupposition of exclamatives (i.e., the speaker’s expectations) cannot include a maximal scale degree; the latter can only constitute their assertion.

Remarkably, a similar phenomenon, coined by Toshiko Oda as a *negative island effect*, is found in comparatives, see also Rullmann (1995). In (9), the degree to which Bill is not tall is undefined.

(9) **John is taller than Bill isn't.*

Oda (2004: 104)

Furthermore, according to Elliott (1974) and Portner and Zanuttini (2003), exclaimatives cannot be embedded under negated matrix predicates (e.g., *it isn't amazing*).

(10) **It isn't amazing how very cute he is!*

Portner and Zanuttini (2003: 47)

Portner and Zanuttini (2003) propose the following explanation for that in terms of implicature. The implicature refers to a scale degree greater than the speaker has expected and arises only if there is positive polarity. Moreover, it cannot be cancelled, cf.: ?? *How very cute he is! – though he's not extremely cute*. Sentence (10) contains a marker of negation, which is a negative polarity item. Negative polarity blocks the implicature, which cannot be cancelled, and this leads to the ungrammaticality of the sentence. Interestingly, in questions we see an opposite effect, cf. (11). Here, the answer is positive (i.e., the polarity is positive); hence, the implicature arises and the sentence is grammatical.

(11) *Is it amazing how very cute he is?*

Portner and Zanuttini (2003: 47)

According to Oda (2008), negative *such/so*-sentences lack the exclamative reading, in contrast to their affirmative counterparts, cf. (12a)–(12b).

(12) a. *John is such a tall boy!*

b. *John isn't such a tall boy.*

Although *such/so*-sentences are typically viewed as a cross-linguistic syntactic variety of exclaimatives (cf. Michaelis 2001 among others), the exclamative status of Russian *takoj/tak-*equivalents is debatable. Krejdlin (1994) claims that they are exclaimatives due to their special

semantic and syntactic properties: they refer to maximal scale degrees and can be expressed with the structures that are only found in exclamative contexts. Accordingly, the pronouns *takoj* ‘such’, *tak* ‘so’ are what he calls exclamative pronouns (on a par with *kakoj* ‘what’ and *kak* ‘how’). However, from the prosodical standpoint (cf. Janko 2001, 2008), the pronouns *takoj*, *tak* are emphatic and, thus, the sentences that contain them are emphatic varieties of assertives (see also Zevakhina in press). Further evidence for Janko (2001, 2008)’s point of view comes from the fact that Russian, like English, allows for negative *takoj/tak*-sentences, whereas negative *kakoj/kak*-sentences seem to be ruled out. The next section thoroughly investigates the latter point.

3 Sentential negation: wide vs. narrow scope

The next Russian wh-exclamative (13) with a sentential negation particle can be seen as felicitous if it refers to a particular car that Ivan did not buy. However, if interpreted as Ivan not buying any car at all, the sentence is absolutely invalid. We might infer from this that *kakoj*-exclamatives with a marker of sentential negation might have a narrow scope reading, whereas a wide scope reading is ruled out.

(13) Russian

Eh, kakuj-u (krasivuj-u) mašin-u Ivan ne kupi-l!
 INTERJ what-ACC.SG.F beautiful- ACC.SG.F car-ACC.SG Ivan NEG buy-PST.SG.M
 lit. ‘What a (beautiful) car Ivan did not buy!’

^{OK} Narrow scope reading: ‘There exists a particular (beautiful) car that Ivan did not buy.’¹

* Wide scope reading: ‘There does not exist a (beautiful) car that Ivan bought.’

Interestingly, an analogous wh-interrogative only has a narrow scope reading, cf. (14).

(14) Russian

Kakuj-u mašin-u Ivan ne kupi-l?
 what-ACC.SG.F car-ACC.SG Ivan NEG buy-PST.SG.M
 ‘What car didn’t Ivan buy?’

^{OK} Narrow scope reading: ‘Which particular car didn’t Ivan buy?’

¹ There might be a variation among native speakers’ judgments but we believe that this reading is not impossible and in this respect contrasts to the wide scope reading.

* Wide scope reading: ‘Is there a car that Ivan didn’t buy?’

If the negative marker has a narrow scope reading, *skol’ko*-exclamatives (‘how many/much’) are also felicitous; however, if it has a wide scope reading, they are inappropriate, cf. (15).

(15) Russian

Skol’k-ikh *ljud-ej* *ja* *ne* *smog* *spasti!*
how.many-GEN.PL people.GEN.PL I.NOM NEG can.PST.SG.M save

lit. ‘How many people I did not save!’

^{OK} Narrow scope reading: ‘There exists a particular set of people that the speaker did not save.’

* Wide scope reading: ‘There does not exist a particular set of people that the speaker saved.’

In Catalan, a narrow scope reading is also appropriate in gradable adjectival and quantity exclamative contexts, cf. (16a)–(16b).

(16) Catalan

a. *Quin* *pastís* *tan* *bo* *que* *no* *t’=has* *menjat!*
what cake so good that NEG you.OBL=AUX.2SG eat.PASS.PTCP

lit. ‘What a delicious cake you have not eaten!’

^{OK} Narrow scope reading: ‘There exists a particular cake that the addressee has not eaten.’

* Wide scope reading: ‘There does not exist a particular cake that the addressee has eaten.’

Castroviejo (2006: 178)

b. *Quants* *llibres* *que* *bo* *no* *llegit!*
what.PL book.PL that good NEG read.PASS.PTCP

lit. ‘How many books you haven’t read!’

^{OK} Narrow scope reading: ‘There exists a particular set of books that the addressee has not read.’

* Wide scope reading: ‘There does not exist a particular set of books that the addressee has read.’

Castroviejo (2006: 25)

Although Russian demonstrates felicitousness of all other types of wh-exclamatives in affirmative contexts (i.e., with wh-words *čto* ‘what’ (noun), *kto* ‘who’, *kak* ‘how’, *kakov* ‘what’ (adj.), *gde* ‘where’, *kogda* ‘when’ and some others, except for *začem* ‘what for’ and *počemu*

‘why’, cf. Zevakhina under review), their negative counterparts are inappropriate under a narrow or a wide scope of negation, cf. (17a)–(17g).

(17) Russian

- a. **Čto* *ty* *ne* *prinjos!*
 what you NEG bring.PST.SG.M
 lit. ‘What you did not bring!’
- b. **Kogo* *on* *ne* *vstreti-!*
 who.ACC he NEG pick_up-PST.SG.M
 lit. ‘Whom he did not pick up!’
- c. **Kak* *bystro* *ty* *ne* *bega-eš!*
 how quickly you NEG run-PRS.2SG
 lit. ‘How quickly you don’t run!’
- d. **Kak* *ty* *ne* *bega-eš!*
 how you NEG run-PRS.2SG
 lit. ‘How you don’t run!’
- e. **Gde* *že* *ja* *ne* *byl!*
 where PTCL I.NOM NEG be.PST.SG.M
 lit. ‘Where I was not!’
- f. **Kogda* *on* *ne* *priekha-!*
 when he NEG come-PST.SG.M
 lit. ‘When he didn’t come!’
- g. **Kakov-ym* *ne* *byl* *etot* *načal’nik!*
 what-INS.SG.M NEG be.PST.SG.M this.NOM.SG.M chief.NOM.SG
 lit. ‘What a boss he was not!’

It seems that all such sentences are impossible even under a narrow scope of negation. Consider example (17a). Under a narrow scope of negation, it presupposes that the speaker expected the addressee to bring a particular thing regarded as highly unusual and the addressee did not do that.

This interpretation is sorted out since the maximal degree cannot be presupposed. However, due to the fact that narrow scope readings of negation in Russian and Catalan exclamatives with gradable adjectives or quantity wh-phrases are not implausible, the presupposition of the maximal degree seems to be a parameter of cross-linguistic variation rather than a language universal. Moreover, its grammaticality status hinges upon a construction: exclamatives with gradable adjectives or quantity wh-phrases might allow for them in a concrete language, whereas other wh-exclamative contexts are impossible in the very same language. Importantly, both constructions seem to be wide-spread strategies of wh-exclamatives witnessed cross-linguistically (cf. Zevakhina 2012, Zevakhina under review).

Gradable adverbial contexts (see an affirmative counterpart of (17c) – *Kak bystro ty begaeš!* ‘How fast you run!’) constitute another well-known cross-linguistic strategy; however, it is impossible in negative wh-exclamatives. Therefore, we tentatively conclude that wh-exclamatives are felicitous in contexts under a narrow scope of sentential negation only if they are (i) qualitatively or quantitatively gradable and (ii) have a referent salient in the context. Adverbial and other types of wh-exclamatives lack these two properties and, therefore, are infelicitous in a negative exclamative environment. Further cross-linguistic research is needed to confirm or reject this hypothesis.

Be that as it may, sentential negation is felicitous in wh-exclamatives if it functions as an expletive. The next section discusses this.

4 Expletive sentential negation

According to Portner and Zanuttini (2000a, 2000b), sentential negation is felicitous in exclamatives only if it is expletive². The following examples – from the Paduan dialect of Venetian and from Spanish – illustrate that.

(18) Venetian (Paduan dialect)

No ga-lo magnà tuto!
 NEG AUX.3SG-he eat-PASS.PTCP everything

‘Did he really eat everything!’ (lit. ‘He did not eat everything!’)

Portner, Zanuttini (2000a: 206)

² Expletive negation is possible not only in exclamatives. The next French example illustrates its use in an assertive context.

Il est plus riche que vous ne pensez!
 he be.PRS.3SG more rich COMP you NEG think.2PL
 ‘He is richer than he seems.’

(19) Spanish

No es listo el tío!
NEG be.PRS.2SG smart that guy

‘Boy, that guy is smart!’ (lit. ‘That guy is not smart!’)

Andueza and Gitiérrez-Rexach (2010: 24)

Sentence (18) is felicitous in the context when usually a child eats not well but at the moment of speech he ate everything and the speaker perceives that as unexpected. Sentence (19) is appropriate in the context where the speaker did not expect the person to be smart. Remarkably, the literal meanings of the sentences are the opposite: e.g., in (19), the speaker literally says that the person is not smart, whereas in fact, he is smart.

Andueza and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2010) call exclamatives with expletive negation *rhetorical exclamatives*. The idea is that the speaker expresses an emotive attitude toward an observed state of affairs that appears to be the opposite of the one expected. In this respect, rhetorical exclamatives are similar to polar exclamatives witnessed, e.g., in German.

(20) German

Hat der doch glatt getanzt!
AUC.3SG DF.NOM.SG PTCL PTCL dance.PASS.PTCP

‘(I am shocked) that he danced!’

Grosz (2011: 43)

In both sorts of exclamatives, scales consist of two polar degrees – one is expected and the other is real and surprising. However, as stated above, rhetorical exclamatives have propositions opposed to what is really meant. Polar exclamatives, on the contrary, express a literal meaning of a proposition.

Similarly, Basque demonstrates the expletive negation particle *ez* and the particle *bada*³.

(21) Basque

Sinetsi ere! Bidart detektibe-a bera ez zen, bada!
believe even Bidart detective-DEF himself NEG be.PST PTCL

³ The meaning of the latter, according to de Rijk (2008), varies from context to context but generally corresponds to Spanish *pues*, French *alors* and English *then*.

‘Unbelievable! Was it really detective Bidart!’

de Rijk (2008: 622)

Remarkably, all these examples do not have *wh*-words. In this respect, they differ from another variety of rhetorical exclamatives – expletive negation *wh*-exclamatives, which we call *rhetorical wh-exclamatives*, respectively. Formally, they employ *wh*-words and semantically, they refer to all (or almost all) the elements of a contextually given set. Consider the following examples from the Paduan dialect of Venetian.

(22) Venetian (Paduan dialect)

- a. *Chi no invitarisse-lo par parere importante!*
who NEG invite.SBJV-he PTCL seem.INF important

‘What people he would invite in order to seem important!’

(Portner, Zanuttini 2000a: 205)

- b. *Cossa no ghe dise-lo!*
what NEG he.OBL say.SBJV-he

‘He is telling him everything!’ (lit. ‘What a great deal of things he is telling him!’)

(Portner, Zanuttini 2000a: 205)

Sentence (22a) has an interpretation that the person would invite all the relevant people to look important. Sentence (22b) means that the person tells his addressee everything from a contextually determined set of issues.

Russian also demonstrates a felicitous use of expletive sentential negation in all sorts of *wh*-exclamatives, except for exclamatives with *počemu* ‘why’ and *začem* ‘what for’. Interestingly, the exclamatives might contain the particle *tol’ko*, which does not change the meaning of a sentence and can be omitted. Below we present original examples found in RNC and their counterparts with or without the particle *tol’ko*, respectively.

(23) Russian

- a. *Kako-j mal’čičk-a ne bredi-t tsirk-om!*
what-NOM.SG.M boy-NOM.SG NEG crazy_about-PRS.3SG circus-INS.SG

‘Every boy is crazy about the circus!’ (lit. ‘What boy is not crazy about the circus!’)

G. Žženov (2002), RNC

a'. *Kakoj tol'ko mal'čiška ne bredit tsirkom!*

b. *Kto iz pisatel-ej ne pol'zovajsja metafor-oj!*
who from writer-GEN.PL NEG use.PST.SG.M metaphor-INS.SG.F

'Every writer uses a metaphor!' (lit. 'What writer has not used a metaphor!')

V. Kataev (1975–1977), RNC

b'. *Kto tol'ko iz pisatelej ne pol'zovajsja metaforoj!*

c. *Kak tut ne porazmysljat' o slučajnost-i!*
how here NEG think.INF about incident-LOC.SG

'This is the case to think about an incident!' (lit. 'How not to think about an incident!')

M. Šiškin (2009), RNC

c'. *Kak tut tol'ko ne porazmysljat' o slučajnosti!*

d. *Gde ne byva-l ja!*
where NEG be-PST-SG.M I.NOM

'I was everywhere!' (lit. 'Where I was not!')

I. Turgenev (1856), RNC

d'. *Gde tol'ko ne byval ja!*

e. *Čto tol'ko ne pisa-l-i o Tesl-e žurnalist-y!*
what PTCL NEG write-PST-PL about Tesla-LOC journalist-NOM.PL

'What things journalists wrote about Tesla!'

lit. 'What the journalists did not write about Tesla!'

N. Galkina (2003), RNC

e'. *Čto ne pisali o Tesle žurnalisty!*

f. *Kogda ne zakhodi-l ja v
when NEG come_in-PST.SG.M I.NOM in
moj-u ljubimuj-u konditerskuj-u po
my-ACC.SG favorite-ACC.SG sweet_shop-ACC.SG along
dorog-e na rabot-u!
way-LOC.SG to work-ACC.SG*

'Was there a day I passed my favorite sweet-shop on my way to work!'

lit. 'When I did not come to my favorite sweet shop on my way to work!'

f. *Kogda tol'ko ne zakhodil ja v moju ljubimuju konditerskiju po doroge na rabotu!*

Eilam (2009) suggests that sentences with expletive negation are semantically different from those without it. In (24a), the speaker expresses an emotive attitude toward yesterday's extraordinary experience, whereas (24b) focuses on that they did many, if not all, important unusual things.

(24) Hebrew

a. *Ma asi-ti etmol!*
what do.PST-1SG yesterday

'What things I did yesterday!' (lit. 'What I did yesterday!')

(Eilam 2009: 49)

b. *Ma lo asi-ti etmol!*
what NEG do.PST-1SG yesterday

'I did everything yesterday!' (lit. 'What I did not do yesterday!')

(Eilam 2009: 49)

Similarly, in Russian, the sentence (23e) means that the journalists wrote about Tesla a lot of highly unbelievable things from the speaker's viewpoint, whereas its counterpart without expletive negation (i.e., *Čto pisali o Tesle žurnalisty!* 'What things the journalists wrote about Tesla!') means that the journalists wrote something extraordinary about Tesla. However, languages demonstrate variation in how semantically distinct expletive and non-expletive wh-exclamatives are. To illustrate, the following German sentences (25a) and (25b) have meanings quite different from the Hebrew and Russian examples considered above. Both mean that the speaker does a lot of different things. However, if (25a) focuses on the small amount of things the speaker still has to do, (25b) focuses on that the speaker has already done a lot.

(25) German

a. *Was du nicht alles machst!*
what you NEG everything do.PRS.2SG

'Do you really do this all!' (lit. 'You does not do everything!')

Meibauer (1990), cited from Portner, Zanuttini (2000a: 211)

b. *Was du alles machst!*
 what you everything do.PRS.2SG

‘Do you really do this all!’ (lit. ‘You do everything!’)

Meibauer (1990), cited from Portner, Zanuttini (2000a: 211)

Generally, we agree that semantically sentences with and without expletive negation are not identical. However, we strongly believe that in terms of Portner and Zanuttini (2000a), expletive negation constructions, like their non-expletive counterparts, exhibit semantic properties of exclamatives: they are decomposed into scale degrees ranging from more to less expected. Indeed, consider (22b). According to Portner and Zanuttini (2000a: 211), “this sentence implicates that he told him all sorts of unexpected things; whatever he didn’t tell him must be so unlikely or implausible that it hardly deserves consideration”. That generally being true, we suggest that expletive negation constructions are rhetorical wh-exclamatives and, parallel to rhetorical wh-interrogatives, they share some features with assertions. As a matter of fact, the maximal degree they refer to covers a whole contextually given set: e.g., Russian *kto (tol’ko) ne* means ‘everyone’, *čto (tol’ko) ne* means ‘everything’, *kak (tol’ko) ne* means ‘in all ways’, *gde (tol’ko) ne* means ‘everywhere’, *kogda (tol’ko) ne* means ‘every time’, etc. To put it differently, unlike affirmative wh-exclamatives, rhetorical wh-exclamatives exhibit a specified maximal scale degree.

As for the Russian reason wh-word *počemu* ‘why’, it is used in contexts where negation is not expletive. Remarkably, it can be used both with and without the particle *tol’ko*. *Počemu*-sentences are rhetorical wh-interrogatives rather than rhetorical wh-exclamatives, merely because they do not have the meaning ‘for all the reasons’. Being a semantic variety of rhetorical questions (cf. Rohde 2006), they imply ignorance answers (i.e., *don’t know*). Interestingly, cross-linguistically, affirmative exclamatives with the wh-words of the meaning ‘why’ also seem to be impossible (see Zevakhina 2012, under review).

The goal wh-word *začem* ‘what for’ is inappropriate in expletive negation sentences. Moreover, being neither appropriate in sentences with non-expletive sentential negation, it is felicitous in their affirmative counterparts, cf. (26a)–(26c’), respectively. Affirmative sentences are instances of rhetorical questions.

(26) Russian

a. *Počemu tol’ko on menja s soboj ne vzja-l!*
 why PTCL he I.ACC with self NEG take-PST.SG.M

‘Why on earth hadn’t he taken me with him!’

Kriminal’naja khronika (2003), RNC

a’. *Počemu on menja s soboj **ne** vzjal!*

b. *Začem tol’ko ja na tom urok-e*
what.for PTCL I.NOM at that.LOC.SG lesson-LOC.SG
zanimalsja postoronn-im del-om!
do-PST.SG.M irrelevant-INS.SG.M work-INS.SG

‘Why was I doing something irrelevant at that lesson!’

V. Medvedev (1957), RNC

b’ *Začem ja na tom uroke zanimalsja postoronnim delom!*

c. **Začem tol’ko on menja s soboj **ne** vzjal!*

c’. **Začem on menja s soboj **ne** vzjal!*

The idea that expletive negation constructions are rhetorical exclamatives is not accepted by everybody. Eilam (2009) suggests that such constructions are rhetorical questions. He supports his statement with the observation that, in contrast to exclamatives, such constructions can serve as answers to questions. Since this statement is claimed to be universal, consider the following Russian examples.

(27) Russian

A: *Kto včera priezža-l?*
who yesterday come-PST.SG.M

‘Who came yesterday?’

B: *Kto tol’ko **ne** priezža-l!*
who yesterday NEG come-PST.SG.M

‘Everybody came!’ (lit. ‘Who did not come!’)

C: **O, kto priezža-l!*
INTERJ who come-PST.SG.M

‘Oh, the people who came!’ (lit. ‘Oh, who came!’)

We do not agree with this. C's answer cannot be a direct answer to the question; however, intuitively, it can serve as an indirect answer. The same goes for B's reply; it is felicitous only as an indirect answer rather than as a direct one.

5 Conclusion

Relying on the data of Russian and some other languages, the main findings of the paper are as follows. To begin with, the morphological type of negation (i.e., negated gradable adjectives or adverbs) is felicitous in wh-exclamatives, whereas the appropriateness of sentential negation is subject to variation. Furthermore, sentential negation as a wide scope operator seems to be absolutely ungrammatical in exclamatives across languages, whereas its narrow scope readings appear to be felicitous at least in some languages and only in gradable adjectival and quantity exclamative constructions. Finally, an expletive variety of sentential negation is grammatical in rhetorical exclamatives, among which rhetorical wh-exclamatives are further distinguished.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
ADR	addressive
AUX	auxiliary
COMP	complementiser
COP	copula
DEF	definite
EXCL	exclamative
F	feminine
GEN	genitive
INDF	indefinite
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
INTERJ	interjection
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NEG	negation
NMLZ	nominalisation

NOM	nominative
OBL	oblique
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PRS	present
PRSM	presumptive
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
SBJV	subjunctive
SG	singular
TOP	topic

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Resources

Russian National Corpus – <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/en/index.html> (in English)

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