

# Verbless exclamatives in Russian: Evidence from Usage Data



**Anna Vishenkova & Natalia Zevakhina**  
National Research University Higher School of Economics  
annaramon59@gmail.com natalia.zevakhina@gmail.com



## Introduction

Distinction between *exclamations* and *exclamatives*: both convey the speaker's attitude towards some state of affairs which usually violates the speaker's expectations.

- (1) *It has stopped raining!* — exclamation
- (2) *What a beautiful evening!* — exclamative

**Exclamations**: a speech act with an illocutionary force of expressivity.

**Exclamatives** = exclamation + scalarity: the real degree  $d_1$  of some property  $P$  of the object  $x$  exceeds the degree  $d_2$  of  $P$  expected by the speaker, and the speaker surprises to this fact.

### Criteria for detecting an exclamative in Russian

- scalar: surprisingly high degree on a given scale;
- lexical-syntactic: one-to-one correspondence between a syntactic structure and an expressive speech act;
- prosodic: special intonation construction IK-5 (in terms of Bryzgunova (1980)).

### Theoretical prerequisites

Reduced, verbless or 'exclamatives without predicates'? We prefer to call the phenomenon 'predicateless exclamatives', because 1) in many contexts an elided part cannot be recovered; 2) the problem of the copula. For other terms see Siemund (2015), Nouwen and Chernilovskaya 2012, 2015).

### Exclamative wh-constructions in Russian: schemas

Predicate	Kakoj	Čto za	Skol'ko	Do čego	Kak	Skol'	Naskol'ko
	NP	NP	NP in Gen	NP	{mnogo/malo} 'a lot/little' + NP in Gen	NP in Genitive	AdvP
✗	APNP	APNP		full form of an AP (in an attributive position)	AdvP (including ellipsis of adverbs, where on the surface we see <i>kak</i> + verb)	full form of an AP (in an attributive position)	
				AdvP		{mnogo / malo} + NP in Gen	
				PredP	PredP	PredP	PredP
✓	NP + [NP in a predicate position / full form of an AP in a predicate position]				brief form of an AP (in a predicate position)	brief form of an AP (in a predicate position)	brief form of an AP (in a predicate position)
				VP		VP	comparative form of [an AP in a predicate position / AdvP / PredP] / VP

Table 1: Possible schemas of wh-exclamatives in Russian

### Predicateless *kakoj*-exclamatives

- A. *Kakoj* + NP!
  1. *Kakoj večer!*  
what evening!  
'What an evening!'
- B. *Kakoj* + AP NP!
  2. *Kakoj zam'čatel'nij večer!*  
what wonderful evening  
'What a wonderful evening!'
- C. *Kakoj* particle NP!
  3. *Kakoj tam zam'čatel'nij večer!*  
what there wonderful evening  
'What a wonderful evening is there!'
- D. *Kakoe* (particle) NP/VP/AP/AdvP/NumP!
  4. *Kakoe tam vse!*  
what there all  
lit. 'No one is there'

	No verb	With verb
<i>kakoj</i> + NP	1574	94
<i>kakoj</i> + AP NP	4533*	312
<b>Total</b>	<b>6107</b>	<b>406</b>

Table 2: Distribution of *kakoj*-exclamatives  
\* We managed to download only 1895 instances from the RNC sample

See Siemund (2015) who showed that in English around 80% of *what*-exclamatives and 47% of *how*-exclamatives are reduced (relying upon the data from British National Corpora (BNC))

### Scalarity of nouns and adjectives

Nouns in <i>kakoj</i> + NP	Amount	Nouns in <i>kakoj</i> + APNP	Amount
<i>užas</i> 'horror'	118	<i>čelovek</i> 'person'	35
<i>prelest</i> 'charm'	67	<i>mal'čik</i> 'boy'	30
<i>sčast'je</i> 'fortune'	46	<i>den'</i> 'day'	25
<i>pozor</i> 'shame', <i>gadost'</i> 'disgust'	27	<i>noč'</i> 'night'	21
<i>košmar</i> 'nightmare', <i>glupost'</i> 'nonsense'	25	<i>mysl'</i> 'idea', <i>ženščina</i> 'woman'	17
<i>čuš</i> 'nonsense'	24	<i>pogoda</i> 'weather', <i>vešč'</i> 'thing'	16
<i>čepuha</i> 'nonsense', <i>radost'</i> 'joy', <i>krasota</i> 'beauty'	18	<i>slovo</i> 'word', <i>ljudi</i> 'people'	15

Table 3: Distribution of nouns in *kakoj*+NP and *kakoj*+APNP exclamatives

- For *kakoj* + NP! the most frequently used nouns are evaluative and scalar;
- For *kakoj* + APNP! the most frequently used nouns neither evaluative nor scalar, but the adjectives are (see table 4).

Adjectives in <i>kakoj</i> + APNP	Amount	Adjectives in <i>kakoj</i> + APNP (contd.)	Amount
<i>strannyj</i> 'strange'	66	<i>žalkij</i> 'poor'	14
<i>prekrasnyj</i> 'nice'	64	<i>neožidannyj</i> 'sudden'	12
<i>užasnyj</i> 'horrorful'	50	<i>milyj</i> 'nice'	12
<i>čudnyj</i> 'wonderful'	40	<i>dikij</i> 'fantastic'	12
<i>krasivyj</i> 'beautiful'	40	<i>prijatnyj</i> 'pleasant'	10
<i>čudesnyj</i> 'wonderful'	36	<i>očarovatel'nyj</i> 'charming'	10
<i>udivitel'nyj</i> 'wonderful'	29	<i>neobyknovennyj</i> 'unusual'	10

Table 4: Distribution of adjectives *kakoj*+APNP exclamatives

### Morphosyntax of *kakoj*-exclamatives

- Nominative is the most frequent grammatical case (1516 instances from 1518 for *kakoj* + APNP!; 1635 instances from 1696 for *kakoj* + NP!);
- Genitive and Instrumental are used in idiomatic expressions: e.g., *Kakogo djavola* (Gen)! 'Damn!', *Kakimi sud'bami* (Instr)! 'How did you get here?'

### Goals of the paper

- determine which wh-constructions in Russian are wh-exclamatives relying upon the criteria formulated in the literature;
- determine wh-exclamatives without predicates (i.e., wh-exclamatives which lack the predicate position);
- point out exclamative-only wh-constructions;
- study the phenomenon closely related to reduced exclamatives in Russian.

### Methods and Materials

- Main corpus of Russian National Corpora (RNC; www.ruscorpora.ru)
- 8 wh-words: *do čego*, *kak*, *kakoj*, *kakov\**, *naskol'ko*, *skol'*, *skol'ko*, *čto za\*\**
- 7102 constructions manually classified
- query example: wh-word (CAPITAL, FIRST) at a distance from 1 to 3 before <!> (BEXCL)
- a small research on intonation (PRAAT pitch analysis; 3 men, 2 women, aged from 24 to 65)

\* Always in predicative position  
\*\* After Podlesskaya (2007)

### Predicateless exclamation constructions in Russian

1. Comparative constructions (with complementisers *kak* 'like', *kak budto* 'as if / as though', *kak by* 'as if / as though', *kak esli by* 'as if / as though'). Prosodically, they are exclamatives, semantically they are exclamations (do not have scalar interpretations).
  1. *A porjadok! Kak u baryšni!*  
and order like PREP young.lady  
'Everything is kept in good order. As if a young lady keeps!'
2. Rhetorical exclamations: *kak* 'how' functions as a wh-word + opposite meaning of the whole expression:
  1. *Kak ne stydno!*  
how NEG shame  
'You ought to be ashamed!'
3. 'Communicatives' (in terms of Sharonov (1996, 2009)) short ungrammatical dialogue replicas; broad class of constructions; can also be rhetorical exclamations and wh-exclamatives
  1. *Kak eto! Kak že!* 'How can it be!', 'Of course!'
  2. *Kak eto P!*, where P is a full or partial citation of the hearer's utterance:  
A: *Začem?* B: *Kak eto začem? Ja dolžen prinjat' mery.*  
A: what.for B: how this what.for? I need take.INF measures  
'A: What for? B: Why do you ask "what for"? I need to take steps [in this matter].'

### A problem of predicatives

In exclamative constructions with *kak*, *skol'*, *naskol'ko* and *do čego* an *o*-item can be: 1) an adjective (brief form, neuter gender); 2) an adverb; 3) a predicative:

- (1) *Do čego/naskol'ko krasiv-o!* 'How beautiful!' — adjective
- (2) *Kak dalek-o!* 'How far!' — adverb
- (3) *Kak mne legk-o!* 'How easy (it is) for me!' — predicative

- Morphosyntactically, predicatives are indeclinable; take a predicate position in a clause; take Dative NPs (the most reliable test), infinitives or subordinate clauses as their syntactic arguments;
- The major group of *o*-items in exclamatives are analysed as predicatives;
- Adverbial interpretations are possible for structures containing *o*-items of time (*rano* 'early') and space (*daleko* 'far') (see Sichinava (2011)); for repeated structures with elided verbs; in constructions with verbs of evaluation in terms of 'good – bad' (to sing, to dance, etc.), or with verbs evaluated in terms of intensity (e.g. to love, to hate, etc.):

- (4) *Kak krasivo Maša pojot! Kak krasivo!*  
how beautifully Masha sings how beautifully  
'How beautifully Masha sings! How beautifully [she does]!'

- For *kak*-exclamatives 1802 instances from 1965 (92% from our set) contain PredP, brief form of an AP (predicate position) or a VP (we expected a reversed result).

### Exclamative-only constructions

*Kakoj mal'čik milyj/#?* How nice he is!  
what boy nice vs. #How nice is he?  
*Kakoj večer!/?* What an evening!  
what evening vs. Which evening?

Exclamative-only with predicates	Exclamative-only without predicates
{ <i>skol' / do čego / kak</i> } + brief form of an AP; <i>do čego</i> + full form of an AP in a predicate position; { <i>skol' / kak / do čego</i> } + PredP; { <i>skol' / do čego</i> } + VP;	{ <i>kakoj* / skol' / do čego</i> } + APNP (AP in an attributive position); <i>kakoj</i> + AP (ellipsis of an NP); { <i>skol' / do čego</i> } + AdvP; <i>do čego</i> + NP; { <i>kak mnogo / kak malo / skol' mnogo / skol' malo</i> } + NP in Genitive; { <i>skol'ko / skol'</i> } + NP in Genitive (with abstract and nouns)

Table 5: Possible exclamative-only constructions with and without predicates in Russian

\*In some contexts *kakoj* + APNP can be used as questions (e.g. as a request to repeat a question)

### Conclusion

- Prosodic criterion is not reliable > IK-5 does not necessarily indicate exclamatives => the role of intonation in exclamations and exclamatives?;
- Russian exhibits several syntactic strategies of wh-exclamatives that do not rely upon the use of a given wh-word — the strategies involving 8 different wh-words overlap each other;
- the amount of exclamative strategies without predicates is smaller than the amount of strategies with predicates;
- wh-word + {NP / NP in Genitive} prefer the use without PredPs, whereas wh-word + {AP / AdvP / PredP / VP} prefer the use with PredPs;
- wh-exclamatives without predicates are mostly exclamative-only.

### References

- Sharonov, Igor, A. 2009. Kommunikativny i metody ih opisaniya [Communicatives and methods of their description]. Computational linguistics and intellectual technologies 2009, pp. 543-547.
- Sharonov, Igor A. 1996. Kommunikativny kak funkcional'nyj klass i kak ob'ekt leksikograficheskogo opisaniya [Communicatives as a functional class and as an object of lexicographic description]. Russistika segodnja 2, pp. 89-112.
- Sichinava, Dmitry V. 2011. Narechie [Adverb]. In Corpus Russian Grammar (http://rusgram.ru/).
- Bryzgunova, E.A. 1980. In *Russkaya Grammatika* [Russian Grammar]. Moscow: Nauka.
- Siemund, P. 2015. *Studies in Language*, 39:3, 698-728.

This article is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE).