
Avoiding referents with “irrelevant” indefinites

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Bulgarian features complex indefinites of the form *edi*+Wh-word+*si* (‘*edi*-Whs’) fitting within the broader cross-linguistic family of placeholders (Seraku 2023), i.e., the speaker avoids reproducing the target. Bulgarian *edi*-Whs are previously analyzed as purely reportative (Koev 2017), (1), or broader (Osenova 1999).

- (1) Ivan kaza če ima srešta s edi-koj si (Koev 2017)
Ivan said that has meeting with edi-who.M si
‘Ivan said that he is meeting **someone** (he said whom but I’m not)’

While previous works are empirically based on intuitions or examples from literary fiction, our study is the first to investigate the *edi*-Wh construction based on natural language data: we analyzed a random sample of 100 hits from the corpus of web speech SketchEngine BgTenTen21.

We found that: (i) *edi*-Whs are mostly (82%) used in environments already overtly marked as quotative or embedded (as is (1)) and when used on their own, they don’t license a reportative reading, unlike reportative markers; (ii) *edi*-Whs are not restricted to actual conversations but are predominantly (78%) used in hypothetical scenarios; (iii) they are not necessarily referential; (iv) they are often used in a broad negative context. Example (2) illustrates properties (i)–(iii).

- (2) naprimer vsjaka večer v edi-kolko si časa da
for.example each evening at edi-how.much si hour to
se vključvat konvektore...
REFL turn.on.3PL convectors.DEF
‘[All this can be automated,] for example, to turn on the convectors at **such and such** time’

Meaning. We propose that the main function of *edi*-Whs is to demote information and mark it as unimportant, which justifies the speaker’s avoidance of reproducing the target. Marking information as unimportant can also explain the prevalence of negative contexts where *edi*-Whs. Semantically, *edi*-Whs are embedded under a CONTENT function in the sense of Kratzer (2006) that is not restricted to quote environments. Pragmatically, *edi*-Whs cannot address the current QUD, which conveys their irrelevance and extension to negativity.

References: • Koev, T. (2017). Quotational indefinites. *NLLT* 35(2), 367–396 • Kratzer, A. (2006). Decomposing attitude verbs. *Talk at Hebrew University of Jerusalem* • Osenova, P. (1999). *Semantika i funkcionirane na neopredeliteľnite mestoimenija v balgarskia ezik. PhD dissertation, Uni Sofia.* • Seraku, T. (2023). Grammars for placeholders. *Glossa* 8(1).