

FOUR TYPES OF ‘WHYS’ IN RUSSIAN*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Different languages employ different ways for asking a reason, one of which is use of wh-adjuncts whose interpretation is akin to English ‘why.’ English itself exhibits several different adjuncts for asking reasons (*why, how come, why the hell*) or purpose (*what for*) (1).

- (1) a. Why did John come?
b. How come you are here?
c. Why the hell did you never tell me about it?
d. What are you asking this for?

In French one can count at least 2 such elements *pourquoi, pour quelle raison*; in Italian 3 – *perchè, per quale ragione, come mai* and in German 5 – *warum, wieso, wofür, wass für, was*.

In this paper, I focus on four types of Russian ‘why’-elements which demonstrate common properties: (a) *počemu* - why (b) *začem* –why/what for (c) aggressively non-D-linked *kakogo čerta* – why the hell (d) and nominal adjunct wh-elements for asking a reason *čto/če/čego*

- (2) a. Počemu ty zadal etot vopros?
Why you asked this question
‘Why did you ask this question?’
b. Začem ty podnjaj ruku?
Why you raised hand
‘Why did you raise your hand?’
c. Kakogo čerta ty prišel?
Which hell you came
‘Why the hell did you come?’
d. Nu i čto ty prišel?
so and why you came
‘So, why did you come?’
e. Če ty molčiš?
Why you keep silence
‘Why are you not saying anything?’

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- f. Čego ty plačeš?
 Why you crying
 ‘Why are you crying?’

They can express both reason and purpose and show some similarities in distribution. The goal of this paper is to study Russian why-elements and to identify which features they share among themselves.

In order to investigate why-elements in Russian I follow the analysis proposed by Masao Ochi (2004) for distinguishing elements that appear alike.

2. POČEMU VS. ZAČEM

The Wh-adjuncts *počemu* and *začem*, being equivalent to English ‘why’, show similarity in their distribution but exhibit some semantic differences. Thus Tolkovyj Slovar’ Russkogo Jazyka (1992) gives the following definitions:

Počemu: *po kakoj pričine* (because of which reason), *vsledstvij čego* (because of what).

Začem: *s kakoj celju* (with what purpose), *dlja čego* (for what).

It is clear from the definitions that *počemu* wh-element is asking a reason, while *začem* - a purpose. Will this difference influence their distribution? Which similarities and differences do they exhibit?

2.1. Long-distance dependencies

In English, two wh-elements for asking reasons *why* and *how come* show differences in terms of whether they allow long-distance dependencies. As has been pointed out by Collins (1990), *why* allows long-distance dependencies, provided that there is no island, while *how come*, on the other hand, allows only local dependency.

- (3) a. Why did John say Mary left? (ambiguous)
 b. How come John said Mary left? (only matrix)

The strict locality of *how come* follows from the strict locality of the Head Movement constraint, which is assumed to be clause bound and, following Collins, *how come* is analyzed as an interrogative C head.

Notice that English *why*, on the other hand, can modify both embedded and matrix clauses (3a).

Now I would like to refer to Russian types of why, *počemu* and *začem*. Do they show differences the way *why* and *how come* do?

The data show that *počemu* and *začem*, as well as ‘other’¹ wh-elements, can modify both clauses: matrix - whenever a complementizer *čto* (that) is present as well as embedded clauses, when *čto* is absent. Examples (4b, 5b and 6b) illustrate a long-distance dependency while examples in (4a, 5a and 6a) show a local dependency.

¹ In this paper, I refer to wh-words other than ‘why’-wh-elements as ‘other’ wh-elements.

- (4) a. Kogda on skazal, **čto** Alex pridet? (only matrix)
When he said that Alex come
‘When did he say that Alex was coming?’
b. Kogo ty dumaeš, John vstretil? (only embedded)
Whom you think John met
‘Who do you think John met?’
- (5) a. Počemu ty skazal, **čto** on uvolnjaetsja? (only matrix)
Why you said that he resigns
‘Why did you say that he was resigning?’
b. Počemu ty skazal, on uvolnjaetsja? (only embedded)
Why you said he resigns
‘Why did you say he was resigning?’
- (6) a. Začem ty skazal, **čto** on hočet so mnoj vstretitsja? (only matrix)
Why you said that he wants with me meet
‘Why did you say that he wanted to meet me?’
b. Začem ty skazal, on hočet so mnoj vstretitsja? (only embedded)
Why you said he wants with me meet
‘Why did you say he wanted to see me?’

Examples (4) through (6) show that presence of *čto* (that) changes the meaning of the sentence in that it does not allow ambiguous readings, while the absence of the complementizer forces the embedded clause reading for ‘other’ and ‘why’ wh-elements. In (5a) and (6a), the speaker asks for a reason for saying that he resigns, in (5b), or that he wants to meet me –, in (6b). It should be also pointed out that in (5b) and (6b), *začem* and *počemu* force echo readings. The following context makes this clearer:

A: Ja slyšal, čto Peter hočet vstretitsja s toboj čtoby obsudit problemy v Izraile.
I heard that peter wants to meet with you in order to discuss problems in Israel
‘I heard that Peter wants to meet with you to discuss the problems in Israel.’

B: Začem ty skazal, on hočet so mnoj vstretitsja?
Why you said he wants with me to meet
‘WHY did you say he wants to meet me?’
(B speaker is either surprised or thinking that he did not quite catch the purpose of the meeting)

2.2. Occurrence in multiple wh-questions

As is pointed out in Ochi (2004:2), English *why* and *how come* differ in their occurrence in multiple wh-questions as well: *why* can easily co-occur in multiple wh-questions, (7a), while *how come* cannot (7b).

- (7) a. Why did John eat what?
b. *How come John ate what?

In Russian, on the other hand, both *začem* and *počemu* can be used in multiple wh-questions, though the position why-elements occupy in the structure is different from the position occupied by ‘other’ wh-elements.

- (8) a. Kto kogo vstretil?
Who whom met
'Who met who?'
- b. Kto i začem prihodil?²
Who and why came
'Who came and why?'
- c. Čto i začem oni prinesli?
What and why they brought
'What did they bring and why?'

It seems that *počemu* and *začem* exhibit some common features with 'other' wh-elements and with English *why* (i.e. long distance dependencies, superiority effect) and do not follow the same paradigm as *why* and *how come*. It is worth looking at distribution of these elements with respect to other wh-words and see if they show Superiority-like effects. I will not refer to this issue here, I will leave it for further research: Instead, I would like to study other two types of 'whys' found in the language: *kakogo čerta* – 'why the hell' and nominal adjunct wh-elements *čto*, *če* and *čego*. Do they manifest the same restrictions as *počemu* and *začem* or do they have some features which bring them closer to English *how come*?

3. KAKOGO ČERTA (WHY THE HELL)

The data show that the wh-expression *kakogo čerta* exhibits features different from *počemu* and *začem* and manifests a common set relating to English *how come*, and an identical set to English *why the hell*.

It should be pointed out that it is impossible to get a reading in which *kakogo čerta* modifies embedded clauses.

- (9) a. Kakogo čerta ty skazal, čto Peter ne pridet? (only matrix)
Why the hell you said that Peter not come-FUT
'Why the hell did you say that Peter would not come?' (only matrix)
(possible answer: because I did not want to upset you)
- b. *Kakogo čerta ty skazal, ___ Peter ne pridet?
Why the hell you said ___ Peter not come
- c. Kakogo čerta ty prišel?
Why the hell you came
'Why the hell did you come?'

² I will not discuss here the nature of coordination 'i' (and), I just want to mention that native speakers require presence of 'i' in examples like (6 b, and c) or even the placement of *začem* and *počemu* in the end of the sentence.

- i. Kto prihodil i počemu?
Who came and why
'Who came and why?'
- ii. Čto oni prinesli i začem?
What they brought and why
'What did they bring and why?'

The examples in (9) show that the expression *kakogo čerta* can modify only the matrix clause as in (9a); moreover it requires the use of *čto* in the embedded clause, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (9b). This suggests that the presence of either a wh-element trace or a complementizer in a CP domain is crucial in Russian embedded clauses, since *kakogo čerta* cannot be base generated in an embedded clause and thus cannot leave a trace in [Spec, CP]. Therefore, the presence of a complementizer is required³. *Kakogo čerta* can also be used in matrix questions, as in (9c).

Furthermore, *kakogo čerta* (12a) as well as English *why the hell* (12b) can hardly if ever be used with other wh-elements, while *počemu* and *začem* can easily occur in multiple wh-questions (10).

- (10) Kto i začem prihodil?
Who and why came
‘Who came and why?’
- (11) Kogo kakogo čerta sjuda zaneslo?
Whom why the hell here brought
- (12) a. *Kto kakogo čerta interesovalsja mnoj?
Who why the hell was interested me
b. *Why the hell did you eat what?

Example (11) shows the co-occurrence of the expression with other wh-elements, but it seems to be more like some parenthetical expression than a wh-adjunct.

It is evident from the data presented above that Russian *kakogo čerta* and English *how come* and *why the hell* share the same set of restrictions: they are both clause-bound and cannot be used in multiple wh-elements (see Dikken and Giannakidou (2002) for discussion of English *why the hell*).

Now I will attend to yet another type of wh-phrase asking a ‘reason’.

4. NOMINAL ADJUNCT WH-ELEMENTS FOR ASKING ‘REASONS’

It has been noticed for several languages that a wh-element *what* can get the interpretation of ‘why’ (henceforth I will refer to *what*-‘why’ in the gloss as WHAT, in order to distinguish it from ‘what’-object). Ochi (2004) notices that this type of question is found in languages like German, Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian (Ochi, 2004:33) as well as in Russian.

- (13) Was schläfst du so lange? (German)
WHAT sleeps you so long
‘Why are you sleeping so long?’
- (14) Mit/miert ulsz itt? (Hungarian)
WHAT-acc/why sit-2sg here
‘Why are you sitting here?’
- (15) Zašto/Šta si ustao tako rano? (Serbo-Croatian)
Why/what have get up so early
‘Why did you get up so early?’

³ I should specify that a complementizer and a wh-element occupy different positions in the CP domain, but the presence of either of them is required.

- (16) Čto/če ty prišel? (Russian)
 WHAT you came
 ‘Why did you come?’

In Russian, one can distinguish a few nominal adjunct wh-elements for asking ‘reasons,’ for example: *čto*, *če*, *čego*. I will try to examine whether or not they have the same nature.

One of the questions that needs to be asked is whether or not this kind of ‘what’-question is a true question. Ochi (2004) points out that for many speakers ‘what’-why questions do not sound like true questions but more like rhetorical questions. In order to test the nature of nominal-why questions Ochi proposes to test wh-elements in the environment of a verb that selects an interrogative clause.

The data show that nominal-why can occur within the complement of a verb that selects an interrogative clause, though *čto* is less acceptable for some speakers than *če* and *čego*. This suggests an interrogative nature of nominal-why elements.

- (17) a. ? Ja sprosila ego *čto* on prišel (a on ne otvetil).
 I asked him WHAT he came but he not answered
 ‘I asked him why he came, but he did not answer.’
 b. Ja sprosila ego *če* on pripersja, i on obidelsja
 I asked him WHAT he came and he got offended
 ‘I asked him why he came, but he got offended.’
 c. Ja sprosila malenkiju devočku *čego* ona plačet, a ona ispugalas.
 I asked little girl WHAT she cries but she got scared
 ‘I asked a little girl why she was crying, but she got scared.’

The same is shown for German, Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian (Ochi, 2004:34)

- (18) a. Ich frage mich, was Hans so gestresst ist. (German)
 I ask myself WHAT Hans that stressed is
 ‘I wonder why Hans is so stressed.’
 b. Nem tudtuk hogy mit ulsz itt. (Hungarian)
 Not knew-1pl that WHAT sit-2sg here
 ‘We didn’t know why you’re sitting here.’
 c. Zanima me zašto/šta se Ivan pokunjio. (Serbo-Croatian)
 It-interests me why/WHAT self Ivan got-depressed
 ‘I would like to know why Ivan got depressed.’

Although, according to Ochi, the nominal-why element has a restriction in embedded contexts, i.e. it does not easily occur in the scope of factive predicates in German and Hungarian (19, 20), in Russian, on the other hand, *če* and *čego* can easily occur within the complement of a factive predicate while *čto* hardly occurs, if ever (21).

- (19) a. *Ich weiss was Hans so gestresst ist. (German)
 I know WHAT Hans that stressed is
 ‘I know why Hans is so stressed.’
 b. Ich weiss nicht was Hans so gestresst ist.
 I know not WHAT Hans that stressed is
 ‘I don’t know why Hans is so stressed’

- (20) a. *Tudtuk hogy mit ulsz itt. (Hungarian)
 knew-1pl that WHAT-acc sit-2sg here
 'We know why you are sitting here.'
 b. Nem tudtuk hogy mit ulsz itt.
 Not knew-1pl that WHAT-acc sit-2sg here
 'We don't know why you are sitting here.'
- (21) a. Ja znaju če/čego/*čto on prišel. (Russian)
 I know WHAT he came
 'I know why he came'
 b. Ja ne znaju če/čego/*čto on prišel.
 I not know WHAT he came
 'I do not know why he came'

It has also been noticed that nominal-why questions are mostly appropriate in a context when a speaker is irritated or annoyed with something (23), whereas wh-questions with *počemu* and *začem* are neutral (22).

- (22) Začem ty prišel (tebe čto-nibud nado?)
 Why you came (you anything need)
 'Why did you come, do you need anything?'
- (23) Če/čego prišel? (ja zhe tebe skazala, čto ne hoču tebjja videt!)
 WHAT came I you told that not want you see
 'Why the hell did you come? Have not I told you that I do not want to see you?!'

It should be pointed out that nominal-whys exhibit a number of features common to *začem* and *počemu* (as well as 'other' wh-elements). Firstly, they cannot modify embedded clauses when complementizer-*čto* occupies C in an embedded clause (24a); the interpretation is strictly clause-bound. Although they can easily manifest it when there is no *čto* (24b):

- (24) a. Če/čego ty dumaeš, čto on ego boitsja?
 WHAT you think that he him fears
 'Why do you think that he is afraid of him?'
- b. Če/čego ty dumaeš on ego boitsja?
 WHAT you think he him fears
 'Why do you think he is afraid of him?'

Secondly, *če* and *čego* can be used in multiple wh-questions (25), while *čto* cannot (26b), moreover it gets its initial wh-object interpretation (26a).

- (25) a. Kto i čego prišel?
 Who and WHAT came
 b. Kogda i če on zvonil?
 When and WHAT he called
- (26) a. Kto čto prines?
 Who what brought
 'Who brought what?'
- b. *Kto i čto prišel?
 Who and WHAT came

It should be specified that the nominal-why gets a ‘why’ interpretation when it is used with unergative verbs (27a), transitive verbs with an object (27b), unaccusative verbs (27c). Whenever it is used with a transitive verb without an object, the sentence lacks a subcategorized object and a wh-element, occupying an object position, has object reading (27d).

- (27) a. *Čto/če/čego* ty smeješšja?
 WHAT you laughing
 ‘Why are you laughing?’
 b. *Čto/če/čego* ty dver zakryl?
 WHAT you door closed
 ‘Why did you close the door?’
 c. *Čto/če/čego* prišel ?
 WHAT came
 ‘Why did you come?’
 d. *Čto/če/čego* ty prines?
 What you brought
 ‘What did you bring?’

Basing on the data above, the nominal-why can be divided into two subtypes: 1) *če* and *čego* and 2) *čto*.

The first subtype behaves like *začem* and *počemu*.

a) They allow long-distance dependencies:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <i>Če/čego</i> ty dumaeš on ego boitsja?
WHAT you think he him fears
‘Why do you think he is afraid of him?’ | <i>Počemu/začem</i> ty skazal, on uvolnjaetsja?
Why you said he resigns
‘Why did you say he was resigning?’ |
|--|---|

b) They can occur in the environment of a verb that selects an interrogative clause, thus showing interrogative interpretation:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Ja sprosila ego <i>če/čego</i> on pripersja...
I asked him WHAT he came
‘I asked him why he came...’ | Ja sprosila ego <i>začem</i> on prišel?
I asked him WHAT he came
‘I asked him why he came?’ |
|--|---|

c) They can occur in the scope of factive predicates:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Ja znaju <i>če/čego</i> on prišel.
I know WHAT he came
‘I know why he came’ | Ja znaju <i>začem</i> on zdes.
I know why he here
‘I know why he is here?’ |
|---|--|

d) They can be used in multiple wh-questions:

Kogda i *če* on zvonil?
When and WHAT he called

Čto i počemu oni sprosili?
What and why they asked
‘What did they ask and why?’

The second type (*čto*), on the other hand, behaves like *kakogo čerta* in many respects.

a) It can occur in the environment of a verb that selects an interrogative clause (though it is less acceptable for some speakers), i.e. it has an interrogative interpretation:

?Ja sprosila ego *čto* on prišel
I asked him WHAT he came
‘I asked him why he came...’

?Ja sprosila ego *kakogo čerta* on prišel.
I asked him WHAT he came
‘I asked him why he came?’

b) Neither of them can occur in the scope of factive predicates:

*Ja znaju *čto* on prišel.
I know WHAT he came
‘I know why he came’

*Ja znaju *kakogo čerta* on zdes.
I know why the well he here
‘I know why he is here?’

c) They cannot be used in multiple wh-questions:

*Kogda i *čto* on zvonil?
When and WHAT he called

*Čto i kakogo čerta oni sprosili?
What and why the hell they asked
‘What did they ask and why?’

d) They cannot modify embedded clauses.

*Čto ty dumaeš on ego boitsja?
WHAT you think he him fears
‘Why do you think he is afraid of him?’

*Kakogo čerta ty skazal, Peter ne pridet?
Why the hell you said Peter not come
‘Why the hell you said that Peter would not come?’

The question that arises is whether or not *kakogo čerta* and *čto*-why can be treated as a wh-element or more like some kind of a complementizer. I will not address this issue here but will leave it for future research.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have studied 4 types of why-elements in Russian and showed that they share some features: they are clause bound when a complementizer occupies its position in an embedded clause, thus creating an island, and they allow long distance dependencies when this position is free (except *kakogo čerta* and *čto* which might be base generated in a matrix clause). All four types are interrogatively interpreted.

Data on nominal type of wh-questions asking a ‘reason’ can be divided into two subtypes: a) *če* and *čego*, which resemble *začem* and *počemu* and b) type *čto* which exhibits similar features with *kakogo čerta*.

To summarize:

	Začem	Počemu	Kakogo čerta	Nominal-wh	
				Čto	če/čego
Long-distance dependencies	Yes	yes	no	no	yes
Multiple wh-questions	Yes	yes	no	no	yes
Clause bound interpretation (with C in embedded clause)	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Occurrence in the scope of factive predicates	Yes	yes	no	no	yes
Interrogative interpretation	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

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