Čut' (bylo) ne in Russian:
more than just negation

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A family of constructions with the particle *čut'* 'a few':

(1) *Чуть лишь звон внутрь уха войдет в ону пустоту,*
Как и не однажды поразит препонку ту.

'As soon as the sound enters...' (V. K. Trediakovsky)

(2) *Чуть синий ключ, журча, виется,*
Чуть дышет воздух аромат,
Возлюбленны сидят. (G. R. Deržavin)

'An azure spring curls a little... the scent of rose is'

(3) *В партере — черствые глупцы,*
И в ложах — **чуть ли не** *они же.* (A. A. Šiškov)

'There are narrow-minded fools in the stalls, and the **seemingly** the same stuff in the boxes.'

(4) *День весела, и ночь я, право, сплю спокойно:*
Так замуж кинуться **ничуть** *мне* **не** *пристойно.* (I. A. Krylov).

'By no means is it appropriate for me to marry.'

In our talk: *čut' ne* + *VP*_{PERF} / *čut' bylo ne* + *VP*_{PERF} 'nearly':

(5) *Эпиграмма на самого себя описывает, что Автор, при торжественном въезде Императора Павла I в Москву 1797 года, будучи Камер-Юнкером,* **чуть не упал** *с лошади и принужден был, оставя церемониальный марш, удалиться объезжими улицами в свой дом.* (D. I. Xvostov)

'The author... **nearly** fell from his horse.'

(6) *С испуга я зажмурился,*
Но вдруг открыл глаза
И **чуть было не втюрился,**
Такая ведь краса!.. (N. A. Nekrasov)
'...suddenly I opened the eyes and **nearly** fell in love...'

1. Towards the semantic representation

1.1. Čut' (bylo) ne as an aspectual marker

The meaning of *Čut' (bylo) ne* has at least two distinct semantic components:

- o 'the preliminary stage of the event took place' **(prospective)**
- o 'the event itself did not take place' **(negative)**

A preliminary stage is what usually surfaces in prospective consctructions:

FRENCH

(7)   *Malgré ce même exil qui va les écarter,*
        Ils font mille serments de ne se point quitter. (Racine, Phèdre)

'Despite the very exile which is going to divide them, they make thousands of vows not to leave each other.'

- o Kuteva (1998) introduces AVERTIVE — a cross-linguistic grammatical type denoting a preliminary stage that did not culminate with the event itself.
- o Avertive often evolve from prospectives-in-past: e.g. Bulgarian *щях да падна* 'I nearly fell' < OCS *xošt'ěaxъ* 'wanted; intended; PROSPECTIVE)
- o Russian lacks a specialized means to express prospective, but possesses a *bona fide* avertive construction — *čut' (bylo) ne.*

1.2. Čut' bylo ne as a focus particle

Čut' bylo ne requires the verb to **bear the focus** (either narrow or wide).

(8)   a. Луиза Миллер [чуть не покончила жизнь самоубийством] ₍FOC₎.

        'Luise Miller NEARLY COMMITTED SUICIDE.'

        b. { У нас много всего произошло... }а ещё [*чуть не покончила жизнь самоубийством Луиза Миллер*] ₍FOC₎.

        'Many things have happened, and also LUISE MILLER NEARLY COMMITTED SUICIDE.'

        c. * *Чуть не покончила жизнь самоубийством* [*Луиза Миллер*] ₍FOC₎.

        ('It is Luise Miller who nearly committed suicide.')

RNC: čut' ne + N$_{NOM}$ — except homonymical accusatives, three main subcases :

- o thetic clauses :

(9) *Как только я сел в кресло, электронный кондиционер дунул на меня так, что **чуть не оторвались уши**.* [Виктор Баранец. Генштаб без тайн. Книга 2 (1999)]

- o «expressive rheme inversion» (Padučeva 2008)

(10) *Надоела муравьишке такая езда. **Чуть было не укусил он** паука.* [Виталий Бианки. Как муравьишка домой спешил (1923-1957) // «Наука и жизнь», 2008]

- o VS (topical) comments to direct speech :

(11) *"В политотделе, за много вёрст от фронта мешками кровь проливал", — **чуть не бухнул** Данила, но вовремя воздержался.* [Виктор Астафьев. Пролетный гусь (2000)]

'— You have shed your blood in sacks in the political department office, far off the front — Danila nearly uttered.'

- ❖ Focus particles usually deal with sets of focus alternatives (Rooth 1985, Koenig 1991 and elsewh.) and tells something additional on them:

  - o *also* conveys that for all relevant alternatives, the proposition holds

  - o *only* says that for all relevant alternatives except the given the proposition does not hold

  - o what are the alternatives that *čut' (bylo) ne* deals with?

- ❖ *Stages* of the situation in Plungianian linear aspect framework:

(12) preliminary phase > **starting point** > internal phase > **endpoint** > resultant phase

The set of alternatives includes the stages which have already taken place. Each stage implies all the precedent ones:

- o preliminary

- o preliminary & starting

- o preliminary & starting & internal

- o …

Then every situation is a scale in a Neo-gricean sense (Horn 1984), and there arise Q-implicatures:

(13)   *He bought three cows* (>> impl.: 'and not more')

(14)   CHURCH SLAVONIC

   И даяху ему пити есмирнисмено вино (inner stage >> impl. : 'inner stage and not the end-point'; *imperfectum de conatu* case)

'And they gave_{IPF} him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.'

(15)   *I was about to fall!* ('preliminary stage' >> impl. : ''preliminary stage and nothing more'; prospective-into-avertive development)

- *čut' (bylo) ne* **prospective** and **negative** components fit into this pattern
- Is the negative component really an implicature?

1.2. The pragmatic status of negative component

Negative implicatures of prospectives-in-the-past can be cancelled or surpressed:

(16)   a*. I saw the vessel when it was about to sink — and it actually sank before my very eyes.*

   b*. Я видел этот корабль, когда он чуть не утонул — # и он утонул на моих глазах.*

(17)   *a. Когато   Милена   щеше   да улови   друга   улица*
        when   M.   want.IPF.3SG take.CONJ   other   street

тя   видя   на   желязната   чешма,   че   се миеха
she   see.AOR   prep   iron.DEF   water_pump   COMP   REFL wash.IPF.3PL

няколко   солдати... [Kuteva 1998 (72)]
several   soldier-PL

'When Milena was about to take another street, she saw that...'

   b*. # Когда Милена чуть не повернула на другую улицу, она увидела, что...*

- According to Kuteva (1998), the preliminary stage in (17) was followed with the event itself in due course

   → The negative component of *čut' (bylo) ne* is **neither cancellable** nor **calculable**

Can it be in assertion?

Ziegeler (2001) introduces a causal test for assertion: only assertions can serve as causes

(18)   ^{OK} *Everybody wore coats, and I noticed you, because you were wearing a **red jacket***

(19)   ^{OK} *Everybody was in green, and I noticed you, because you were wearing a **red jacket***

❖ *...red(x) & jacket(x)...* — both predicates are asserted

(20)   * *Lisa doesn't expect John to come, because **even John came***

❖ 'John is unlikely to come' is presupposed and thus cannot serve as a cause

(21)   ^{ok} *Он чуть не упал с двадцатиметровой скалы — и поэтому весь оставшийся день нервно покусывал губы.*

'He ***nearly fell*** from a twenty-meter high rock, and that's why he was biting lips the rest of the day.' ⊃ 'He was in a preliminary stage of falling from a rock, so he was nervous.'

(22)   *#Его чуть не выгнали из университета за то, что он подделал подпись, поэтому он такой радостный.*

'He was nearly thrown away from the university for forging a signature, that's why he is'⊅ 'He was not thrown away and that's why he was glad'

→ In causal clauses with *čut' (bylo) ne*, only PROSP, but not NEG can be a cause.

Interaction with negation :

(23)   *A : — Вася чуть не расплакался на приёме у декана.*

       B : — Неправда!

'Vasya nearly wept in the dean's office. — It's false!'

Possible entailments: ^{OK} 'He did not even show that he was dissapointed'
                              # 'Actually, he did cry'

→ General negation seems to deny only the PROSP, but not NEG.

- NEG seems to survive under negation (and other non-veridical operators), thus behaving like a presupposition

- It can be due to some other reasons:

  - an internal stage implies that a preliminary stage has taken place: (if *Vasya is reading*, it must have been a period of time when *he was about to read*)

  - thus the absence of a preliminary stage implies the absence of an internal stage (if *Vasya* has never been *about to read*, he never *was reading*)

Negative component is:

- o calculable (fits the Q-implicature pattern)
- o not cancellable
- o survives under negation (due to pure logical reasons)

→ a presupposition?

→ a conventional(ized) implicature (in the sense of Karttunen & Peters 1979)?

2. One more component

(24)   *Суп чуть не сварился.*

('The soup nearly got ready.')

(25)   ^{???/*} Мы **чуть не продолжили разговор**.

('We almost continued the talk.')

(26)   *Я взял в руки полотенце и # **чуть было не вытер им голову**, но почему-то не стал и пошёл с мокрой головой.*

'I took a towel and was going to wipe my head, but did not do it for some reason and went away, my head remaining wet.'

- o *Čut' (bylo) ne* is infelicitous in contexts of a highly expectable, or supposed by a usual scenario event.
- o When the same event is interpreted as somehow illicit, the construction becomes more acceptable:

(27)   ^{OK} *В комнату вошёл Иван Петрович. Мы **чуть не продолжили разговор**, как вдруг вовремя вспомнили, что он камбоджийский шпион.*

'Ivan Petrovitch entered the room. We were about to continue our talk, but suddenly realized that he was a Cambodian spy.'

- o (27a—b) : the first (unlike the second) strongly implies that to marry the hearer was an extraordinary event

(28)   a. — *Я ведь на тебе **чуть было не женился** тогда, после Барвихи.* [Ирина Муравьева. Мещанин во дворянстве (1994)]

'The fact is that I **nearly (čbn)** married you after Barvikha'

b. — *Я ведь на тебе **почти женился** тогда, после Барвихи.*

'The fact is that I **nearly (počti)** married you after Barvikha'

- o Thus, the construction has one more component — that of unpredictability / unlikelihood / undesirability of the event. As it projects out of non-veridical operators, it is probably a presupposition:

(29) *Даже если бы он **чуть не умер** у нас в больнице, то и тогда бы у вас не было поводов обвинять главврача!*

'Even if he had nearly died in our hospital, you wouldn't have had any reason to accuse the head physician!' ⊃ 'For a human to die in a hospital is undesirable'

Presuppositions of the kind ☐ ¬ ('necessarily not'), conveying different types of unlikelihood and unexpectedness are not infrequent; however, they seem to vary regarding the modal base of the necessity operator (in view of what P is unlikely):

(30) *Вдруг подул сильный ветер. Канатоходец **чуть не упал.***

(31) *# Вдруг подул сильный ветер. Канатоходец **даже упал.***

Situations favoured by *čut' (bylo) ne* seem to violate the *stereotypical* modal base, falling out of the normal course of events (somewhat similar to Sannikov's (1989) analysis of Russian *no)*. We should refer to this presupposition as to the **adversative** component.

2.1. Adversativity: some statistics

- o Twenty most frequent verbs in *čut' ne* construction (according to the RNC trigrams):

упал, заплакал, убил, умер, забыл, вскрикнул, погиб, задохнулся, свалился, попал, сбил, сказал, выронил, закричал, потерял, утонул, уронил, подавился, задушил, расплакался

- o Twenty verbs with the largest portion of *čut' ne* uses relative to the overall amount of tokens

описался, стошнило, подавился, утоп, задохся, сверзился, задохнулся, выронил, передрались, завалил, разревелся, задушил, сшиб, подрались, загрызли, расплакался, вывихнул, угробил, захлебнулся, протаранил

- o Twenty verbs most attracted to the construction according to collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch, Gries 2003) :

глагол	общая частота форм претерита	частота чуть не + V	P-value точного теста Фишера
упал	15731	321	1,36E-278
заплакал	5091	188	7,64E-210
убил	10912	166	1,21E-123
задохнулся	761	78	8,65E-123
выронил	632	62	1,10E-96
вскрикнул	3470	92	3,25E-90
сказал	310234	63	5,05E-87
стал	224449	31	1,46E-74
сбил	1906	66	1,24E-72
умер	22042	159	3,48E-72
свалился	2610	71	9,88E-71
подавился	308	40	4,66E-68
забыл	20234	140	1,57E-61
задушил	508	40	5,37E-59
расплакался	613	37	2,45E-50
утонул	1472	43	9,22E-45
сшиб	409	30	1,07E-43
подрались	418	30	2,08E-43
погиб	9906	82	4,47E-42
уронил	1779	43	2,52E-41

o Twenty verbs least attracted to the construction according to collostructional analysis :

глагол	общая частота форм претерита	частота чуть не + V	P-value точного теста Фишера
вылез	2876	3	1
выдал	4202	4	1
выиграл	3408	3	1
переехал	3450	3	1
кончилось	11126	13	0,88815
хватило	5207	6	0,83872

выпустил	4850	6	0,829582
обнял	4544	4	0,825142
продал	3855	3	0,808575
разошлись	3711	3	0,806037
дошло	11078	11	0,777919
засмеялся	10936	11	0,777487
уснул	2553	3	0,770888
довело	2365	3	0,755966
проиграл	2341	3	0,754207
арестовал	2331	3	0,753485
сбросил	2306	3	0,751712
пустил	4917	4	0,671884
бросился	14889	19	0,62617
свернул	3014	4	0,594927

NB : The same trend (but different in several details) in Kuznecova & Rakhilina's (2015) analysis of Russian причина + N$_{GEN}$ constructions: **причина счастья* vs. ^{OK} *причина несчастья*; "sudden unexpected disasters".

3. Conclusions

Three components in *čut' (bylo) ne* meaning:

o preliminary stage of P took place   (prospective)   **asserted**
o P itself did not take place   (negative)   **presupposed / implicated**
o P break the normal course of events (adversative)   **presupposed**

❖ How could such a complicated structure have emerged?

Possible source: *čut' ne + N* construction, which now sounds a bit archaic

(32)   *И недавно зять его, имения и дел и **чуть не Академии** наследник, отозвался в разговоре о произведении российских студентов: Разве-де нам десять Ломоносовых надобно?* [М. В. Ломоносов. 1758-1759 Записка о необходимости преобразования Академии Наук (1758-1759)]

9

'Recently his son-in-law, the heir of his property, business and almost of the Academy of Sciences...'
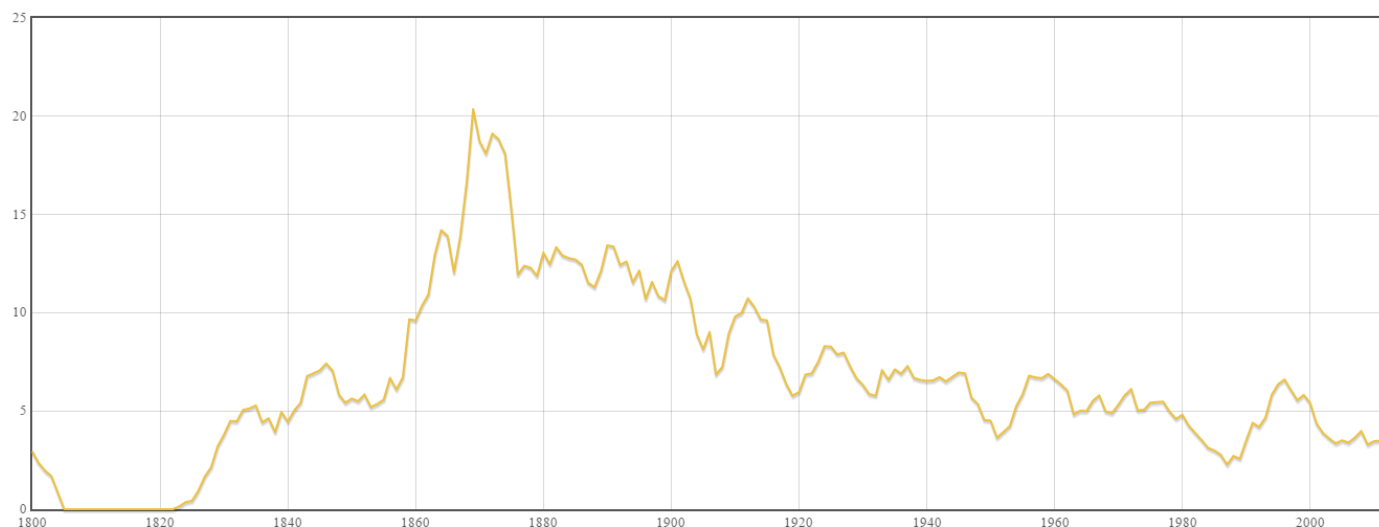
Čut' ne + N : distribution over years

Both *čut' ne + V* and *čut' ne + N* (as well as just *čut' + Adj*) is attested in the written sources as early as XVII century; *čut' bylo ne* appears only in the XVIII century

(33) *А хлѣбныхъ запасовъ на тѣхъ клячнѣхъ въ полки посылать отнюдь нельзя, потому что онѣ* **чуть живы** *и насилу бродятъ* (DOR database, 1660).

'... they are **barely alive**'

(34) Да он же архимарит, приехав в Калязин, почал монастырской чин разорять, пьяных старух всех разгонял, и **чють** он архимарит **монастырь не запустошил** (DOR database, 2nd half of XVII)

'...that archimandrite has **nearly ruined** the cloister'

(earlier < *čuti* 'to feel'; Sreznevsky (1912) mentions some uses of this verb with a meaning 'maybe even':

(35) ѡставлю же гл͠ати заоутренаа даже и до ꙁ͡ часа, чюти же, и до і͠го часа

❖ Is this cluster stable typologically?

It seems to be. Kuteva (1998) mentions a component of "uncontrollability" which often comes together with the avertive gram.

In Tundra Nenets, an avertive verb (which like a general negative verb hosts inflectional morphology, while the main verb is in the connegative mood) bears the same adversativity presuppositions:

(36) TUNDRA NENETS

myaq-myi	*tyukonh*	***xəča-dəmh***	*myar-q*
tent-POSS.1SG	there	AVERT-1SG	put-CONNEG

'I have almost put my tent on this place' ⊃ 'It is really not a very good place to put tents on it'

However, it is not necessary for an avertive construction; in Moksha, the synthetic avertive doesn't bear the adversative presupposition:

(37) MOKSHA

mon	mol'-**əkšn'ə**-n'	t'azə	mašinasə
I	go-AVRT-PST	there-ILL	car-IN

1. 'I nearly went here by car (having completely forgotten that it is illicit)'

2. 'I was going to went here by car (but it got broken).'

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