Wh-indefinites in Nepali

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0 Background and Preliminaries

- Indo-Aryan language spoken in Nepal

- SOV language with *wh*-in-situ

  (1) a. Sita-le   momo khay-i.
           Sita-ERG momo eat.PST-F
           'Sita ate momos.'

       b. Sita-le **ke** khay-i?
           Sita-ERG what eat.PST-F
           'What did Sita eat?'

       c. **Ko-le**   kera   khay-o?
           who-ERG banana eat.PST-M
           'Who ate a banana?'

- Morphologically ergative, various case/adpositional markers appear postnominally. These markers appear on *wh*-words if they would appear in corresponding declarative sentences.

  (2) a. Mina-le **Hari-lai** dekhy-i.
           Mina-ERG Hari-LAI see.PST-F
           'Mina saw Hari.'

       b. Hari-le **ko-lai**   dekhy-o?
           Hari-ERG who-LAI see.PST-M
           'Who did Hari see?'

  (3) a. Ram(-le) **Sita-sangga** boly-o.
           Ram-ERG Sita-OBL   talk.PST-M
           'Ram talked to Sita.'

       b. Mina **ko-sangga** boly-i?
           Mina who-OBL   talk.PST-F
           'Who did Mina talk to?'

1   *Wh*-words and *Wh*-indefinites

English	*Wh*-word	*Wh*-indef
who	*ko*	*kohi*
	kas	*kasai*
what	*ke*	*kehi*
where	*kaha*	*kahi*
which	*kun*	*kunai*
when	*kahile*	*kahile*
why	*kina*	*kina*
whose	*kas-ko*	<GAP>
how	*kasari*	<GAP>

Table 1: *Wh*-words and *wh*-indefinites in Nepali. (<GAP> indicates an elicitation gap.)

- Some *wh*-indefinites are formed by adding some kind of suffix to the *wh*-word

(4) a. Hari-le **ke** dekhyo?
         Hari-ERG what saw.M
         'What did Hari see?'

     b. Hari-le **kehi** dekhyo.
         Hari-ERG something saw.M
         'Hari saw something.'

(5) a. Hari-le **kas**-lai dekhyo?
         Hari-ERG who-LAI saw.M
         'Who did Hari see?'

     b. Hari-le **kasai**-lai dekhyo.
         Hari-ERG somebody-LAI saw.M
         'Hari saw somebody.'

(6) a. **Kun** keto royo?
         which boy cried.M
         'Which boy cried?'

     b. **Kunai** keta-le tyo biralo dekhyo.
         some boys-ERG that cat saw.M
         'Some boy saw that cat.'

- In negative sentences, these *wh*-indefinites are ambiguous between a negative existential or a plain existential meaning.

(7) [Kohi-sangga] Mina [kohi-sangga] bolina.
     somebody-OBL Mina somebody-OBL talked.NEG
     'Mina didn't talk to **anyone**.'   *(More salient)* $\neg > \exists$
     'Mina didn't talk to **someone**.' $\exists > \neg$

- To disambiguate in favor of the negative existential ($\neg > \exists$) reading, *pani*[1] is inserted after the *wh*-indefinite (Compare with (4b)). The resulting phrase appears to be an NPI.

  (8) Hari-le **kohi**   **pani** (dekhena/*dekhyo).
       Hari-ERG somebody PANI saw.NEG/saw.PST.M
       'Hari didn't see anybody.'

- To disambiguate in favor of the other reading ($\exists > \neg$), the *wh*-indefinite is reduplicated. This is the same strategy used in forming plural *wh*-words.

  (9) Mina **kohi kohi-sangga** bolina.
       Mina sb.   sb.-OBL   talked.NEG
       'Mina didn't talk to someone.'

  (10) Mina **ko   ko-sangga** bolyi.
       Mina who who-OBL   talked.F
       'Who all did Mina talk to?'

Sent. Polarity	*wh*-indef	+ *pani*	reduplicated
Positive	Existential	Ungrammatical	<GAP> (but see below)
Negative	Ambiguous	$\neg > \exists$	$\exists > \neg$

- A few are bare indefinites. I don't have as much data on these, but they show similar behavior as the derived indefinites (in the places where I've checked).

  (11) Mina **kahile** runche?
       Mina when   cries.F

       'When does Mina cry?'

       'Mina sometimes cries.'   <GAP>

  (12) Mina **kahile** (**pani**) rudine.
       Mina when   PANI   cries.NEG

       'Mina never cries.' $\neg > \exists$

       'Mina sometimes doesn't cry.'<GAP>

- Reduplicated *kahile* is unambiguously a *wh*-indefinite.

  (13) Mina **kahile kahile** runche.
       Hari when   when   cries.F
       'Mina sometimes cries.'

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[1]Which might mean 'also':

(1) Ma (pani) janchu.
     I   also   going
     'I'm (also) going.'