

# The Meaning and Cooccurrence of Russian NEMNOGO ‘a little’

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Нине Давидовне от ее далеких старых поклонников.

The Russian adverb NEMNOGO /n’imnóga/ ‘a little’ knows two major sets of uses.

• First, it functions as a quantitative adverb that has two senses:

1) ‘Small quantity of ...’: *nemnogo knig*, lit. ‘a-few of-books’, *nemnogo soli*, lit. ‘a-little of-salt’.

2) ‘Small distance/duration’: *Do doma ostavalos’ nemnogo*, lit. ‘Till home it-remained a-little’, *Segodnja my proexali nemnogo*, lit. ‘Today we covered a-little’ = ‘... a small distance’; *On nemnogo počital*, lit. ‘He read a-little [= a while]’, *Podoždi nemnogo!*, lit. ‘Wait a-little [= for a while]!’

• Second, it appears as a degree adverb: *Segodnja nemnogo teplee* ‘Today [it is] a little warmer’; *On nemnogo ustal* ‘He [is] a little tired’; *List’ja nemnogo poželteli*, lit. ‘Leaves became-yellow a little’; *Dver’ nemnogo skripit* ‘The-door creaks a little’. This NEMNOGO refers to the degree of a gradable property, state or process, that is, to its INTENSITY; it means that the intensity of ‘L’ is small.

In the present paper, only the degree adverb NEMNOGO is considered.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Uses of the Degree Adverb NEMNOGO

Most naturally, the degree adverb NEMNOGO appears with a comparative: *nemnogo veselee* ‘a little more joyful’/*nemnogo grustnee* ‘a little sadder’ or *nemnogo tjaželee* ‘a little heavier’/*nemnogo legče* ‘a little lighter’, etc. In this construction, NEMNOGO indicates that the intensity—or size—of the difference between two elements X and Y compared under the aspect P is small: ‘X is a little more P than Y’ ≡ ‘X is more P than Y [but] not by much.’ Thus, the meaning of NEMNOGO bears on the semanteme ‘*bolee*’ = ‘more’, which is the dominant element of the meaning of any comparative, so that we have:

|| *nemnogo boleee* ‘a little more’ ≡ ‘intensity of more is small’;

in other words, ‘a little more’ says that the difference implied by ‘more’ is small.

### Comments

1. The ungrammaticality of the English expression \**intensity of more* should not shock: it is in fact an expression of our semantic metalanguage, not of English. With recourse to the formalism of semantic networks, the representation looks less offensive: ‘intensity’–1→‘more’. We prefer, nevertheless, verbal formulations, no matter however clumsy, in order to facilitate the reading.

2. Whatever we say here about ‘more’ applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to its conversive ‘less’.

3. The semanteme ‘small’ is used here and below only as an indicator of a small, or low, value on a scale, in particular—as an indicator of low intensity. All other senses of SMALL (as in ‘small book’)

≡ 'book of small size', 'small child' ≡ 'child of small age', 'small accident' ≡ 'accident of small importance', etc.) are ignored.

The use of NEMNOGO in the construction with comparatives is not at all constrained: NEMNOGO combines with any comparative, linking semantically to the same semanteme 'more'. But in other constructions things are different: some combinations of NEMNOGO, for instance, with adjectives in the positive degree are quite natural, while some others are impossible. Cf.:

- (1)
- nemnogo pozdorovevšij* 'who became a little healthier' ~  
 \**nemnogo vyzdorovevšij*, lit. 'who became a little completely-recovered [from an illness]'
- nemnogo serdit* '[He is] a little angry' ~ \**nemnogo raz"jarën* '[He is] a little furious'
- nemnogo grustnyj* 'a little sad' ~ \**nemnogo vesëlyj* 'a little joyful'  
 (but *nemnogo veselee*)
- \**nemnogo lëgkij* 'a little light' ~ \**nemnogo tjažëlyj* 'a little heavy'  
 (but *nemnogo legče/tjaželee* 'a little lighter/heavier')

The same happens in the combinations of NEMNOGO with verbs and nouns: some phrases are OK, some are not. Therefore, we have to specify the conditions under which the degree adverb NEMNOGO can or cannot be used with a lexical unit L.

The analysis of various types of phrases with NEMNOGO shows that the problem of combinability of NEMNOGO with an L is reducible to the meaning of L: it is possible to specify this combinability by referring to some properties of 'L'. More specifically, 'L' must satisfy simultaneously the following two conditions:

1. GRADABILITY OF 'L'. 'L' must be gradable: it is possible to say something like *more/less L* (although not necessarily in a literal manner) or, in other words, to use L comparatively; namely, two instances of L can be distinguished such that one is 'more/less L' than the other. This means, in particular, that 'L' includes a semantic component which accepts the scale of intensity.<sup>2</sup> The violation of this condition in a phrase "NEMNOGO + L" leads to logical absurdity. Thus, \**nemnogo vyzdorovevšij* 'who became a little completely-recovered [from an illness]' is absurd, since *vyzdorovevšij* is not gradable: *vyzdorovevšij*, which is a participle of the perfective aspect, means 'who became recovered COMPLETELY'.

This condition is necessary, but not sufficient. Thus, the adjectives SERDIT '[He is] angry' and RAZ"JARËN '[He is] furious' are both gradable (the corresponding scale is 'intensity of emotion'): someone can be *boleë / meneë serdit* or *boleë/meneë raz"jarën*; but *nemnogo serdit* is quite normal, while \**nemnogo raz"jarën* is bad. The reason is that in the meaning of RAZ"JARËN the intensity of the emotion is characterized as 'very big', which clashes with the meaning '[the intensity of ... being] small' of NEMNOGO.

To account for such cases, we introduce the second necessary condition:

2. QUANTITATIVE NEUTRALITY OF 'L'. 'L' must not include a quantitative characterization of its intensity: the intensity must not be specified in 'L' as 'big' or 'small', that is, it should not be quantitatively bound. The violation of this condition leads either to logical contradiction or to logical tautology. This is the case of *\*nemnogo raz"jarën* 'a little furious'.

A few examples will substantiate the relevance of the two conditions.

### Condition 1: Gradability of 'L'

Consider sentences *Maša i Vanja soglasny (drug s drugom)* 'Masha and Vanya agree (with each other)' and *Maša i Vanja ne soglasny (drug s drugom)* 'Masha and Vanya disagree (with each other)'; the first one does not accept NEMNOGO, while the second one does:

(2) a. *\*Maša i Vanja nemnogo soglasny (drug s drugom)*.

vs.

b. *Maša i Vanja nemnogo ne soglasny (drug s drugom)*.

This contrast can be explained by the semantic structure of SOGLASNY '[to] agree':

*X i Y soglasny (drug s drugom)* 'X and Y agree (with each other)' ≡

'X and Y have the same opinion [on something], being aware of this'.

The meaning 'the same' is a semantic primitive (cf. Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994: 41), and it is not gradable. As a result, in (2a) NEMNOGO is impossible—in conformity with Condition 1. On the other hand, the meaning of the phrase NE SOGLASNY contains 'not the same', that is, 'different':<sup>3</sup>

*X i Y ne soglasny (drug s drugom)*

≡ 'X and Y disagree (with each other)' ≡ 'X and Y have different opinions, being aware of this'.

And 'different' is gradable: the intensity of the difference between two things can be bigger or smaller. That is why (2b) accepts NEMNOGO.

The same holds about the sentence (2c):

c. *Mnenija Maši i Vani rasxodjatsja* 'Masha's and Vanya's opinions diverge',

which is quasi-synonymous with *Maša i Vanja ne soglasny (drug s drugom)*; (2c) also readily admits NEMNOGO (since *mnenija X-a i Y-a rasxodjatsja* ≡ 'X's and Y's opinions are different'):

d. *Mnenija Maši i Vani nemnogo rasxodjatsja*.

Now, a slightly different example:

(3) a. *Èto emu nemnogo pomoglo zakončit' rabotu*  
'This helped him a little to finish [his] work'.

vs.

b. *\*Èto emu nemnogo pozvolilo zakončit' rabotu*  
'This allowed him a little to finish [his] work'.

The meaning of POMOČ '[to] help' includes '[to] facilitate' as the dominant semanteme, which in turn means '[to] make easier', and the comparative 'easier' brings in the gradable semanteme 'more'. As for POZVOLIT' '[to] enable' = 'make possible', this verb does not imply a scale: 'possible' is not gradable, and (3b) is semantically ill-formed, which again corresponds to Condition 1.

A similar contrast is found in the following pairs, where NEMNOGO is licensed by a comparative:

*nemnogo* OPOZDAT' '[to] be a little late' [= '[to] be a little later than expected'] ~

\**nemnogo* USPET' '[to] be a little on time';

*nemnogo* NEZDOROV '[He] is a little not.well' ≈ '[His] state of health is a little lower than the norm<sup>4</sup>] ~

\**nemnogo* ZDOROV '[He] is a little healthy' ≈ \*'[His] state of health corresponds a little to the norm<sup>5</sup>].

The bad cooccurrence in all the examples above illustrates logical absurdity.

### Condition 2: Quantitative Neutrality of 'L'

(4) a. *On nemnogo donžuan* 'He [is] a bit of a Don Juan'.

vs.

b. \**On nemnogo razvratnik* 'He [is] a bit of a lecher'.

The explanation of this contrast is straightforward: both DONŽUAN and RAZVRATNIK are gradable, but a DONŽUAN's womanizing is simply 'bigger than the average', while for RAZVRATNIK it is 'VERY MUCH bigger than the average'; therefore, the intensity of 'bigger' in 'lecher' cannot be characterized as 'small'. Similarly, one can say *nemnogo žulik* 'a bit of a crook', but not \**nemnogo podlec* 'a bit of a scoundrel': that is because a ŽULIK's moral level is 'lower than the norm', and for a PODLEC it is 'MUCH lower than the norm'. (4b) thus illustrates logical contradiction. (Both RAZVRATNIK and PODLEC include a semantic component ≈ 'strong condemnation by the speaker', which does not, however, seem relevant in our context.)

## 2. 'Threshold' Lexical Units

Conditions 1 and 2 preclude logically ill-formed combinations of semantemes; they do not, however, reject bad combinations of lexical units which are semantically admissible, i.e., which express logically well-formed combinations of semantemes. Thus, consider the cooccurrence of NEMNOGO with adjectives in the positive degree. Far from all such adjectives combine with NEMNOGO.

Let us first consider *positive/negative state* adjectives.

|  |     |   |
|--|-----|---|
| (5) * <i>nemnogo vesělyj</i> 'a little joyful'     | vs. | <i>nemnogo grustnyj</i> 'a little sad'              |
| * <i>nemnogo ènergičnyj</i> 'a little energetic'   | vs. | <i>nemnogo vjaljy</i> 'a little listless'           |
| * <i>nemnogo vnimatel'nyj</i> 'a little attentive' | vs. | <i>nemnogo rassejannyj</i> 'a little absent-minded' |

The contrast presented in (5) cannot be explained by Conditions 1 and 2, since both are satisfied: the adjectives denoting 'positive'/'negative' psychological/physiological states are gradable, and none of adjectives in (5) implies 'big' intensity; from the purely semantic viewpoint all phrases in (5) are well-formed. Therefore, the problem here is LEXICAL COOCCURRENCE: there must be something in

NEMNOGO and in the 'positive' member of the pair that prevents them from cooccurring. Here is our explanation.

The meaning of the 'negative' state adjectives (in the right-hand column of (5)) can be described, roughly speaking, as 'the intensity of the state is smaller than the norm', the norm being the neutral state. The 'positive' state, however, must be described as 'the intensity of the state is SUFFICIENTLY bigger than the norm'. There is no 'distance' between the norm and the negative state: a bit lower than the norm is already negative. But the norm and the positive state are separated by a distance—for a psychological/physiological state to be positive, its intensity must be SUFFICIENTLY bigger than the norm. In other words, the positive state begins not simply immediately after the norm, but only after a particular 'threshold;' cf. Fig. 1:

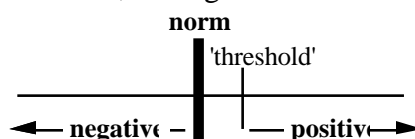


Figure 1

The negative emotional/physiological states have a comparative in their definition, and this comparative is relative to the norm ('smaller than the norm'), which is thus the point of reference: for GRUSTNYJ 'sad'/VJALYJ 'listless', the emotional/physiological tone of the person is lower than the norm, for RASSEJANNYJ 'absent-minded', the level of attention is lower than the norm, etc. The left-hand column adjectives also have a comparative in their meaning; however, here the point of reference is not the norm, but a conventional 'threshold'—an imaginary point in its positive part of the scale starting from which a speaker is ready to apply the 'positive' adjective, such as *vesělyj* 'joyful', *ènergičnyj* 'energetic' and *vnimatel'nyj* 'attentive'. Thus, VESĚLYJ 'joyful' ≡ 'the intensity of the emotional tone is SUFFICIENTLY bigger than the norm' ≡ 'the intensity of the emotional tone is not smaller than the threshold which is bigger than the norm'.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of 'sufficiently' in the meanings of 'positive state' lexical units [= LUs] clashes with the semanteme 'small' of NEMNOGO. Note that there is no logical contradiction:

- 'sufficiently' bears on the intensity of the difference between the given state and the norm;
- 'small' bears on the intensity of the difference between the given state and the 'threshold.'

Yet there is a psychological clash: it is difficult for a speaker to say that the intensity of a difference is 'sufficiently big' and 'small' at the same time, even if, in actual fact, these characteristics bear on two different differences.<sup>6</sup> (We return to this situation in Section 3, p. 00.)

A similar contrast is found in the following verbal pairs:

- (6) a. \**On mne nemnogo nraivitsja* 'I like him a little'.  
vs.  
*On mne nemnogo neprijaten* 'I dislike him a little'.

- b. \**Èto menja nemnogo raduet* 'This makes me a little joyful'.  
 vs.  
*Èto menja nemnogo ogorčacet* 'This makes me a little sad'.  
 c. \**Ona ego nemnogo uvažacet* 'She respects him a little'.  
 vs.  
*Ona ego nemnogo preziraet* 'She despises him a little'.

Again, the 'positive' states/attitudes refuse NEMNOGO, while the 'negative' ones admit it. The explanation is the same: the presence of 'sufficiently' in the definitions of the 'positive' verbs. Thus, 'X respects Y'  $\equiv$  'X believes that Y's value is SUFFICIENTLY bigger than the norm', and 'X despises Y'  $\equiv$  'X believes that Y's value is lower than the norm'.

Given that similar restrictions on the cooccurrence of the LUs with the meaning 'a little' exist in many (if not all) languages, we can think that they correspond to an important feature of human psychology:

|| People tend to perceive as negative anything that is at least a bit lower than the norm; while to perceive something as positive, they need this something to be NOTICEABLY bigger than the norm.

Consider now another type of 'threshold' adjectives: *parametric* adjectives.

- (7) \**nemnogo tjaželyj* 'a little heavy' vs. \**nemnogo lëgkij* 'a little light'  
 \**nemnogo širokij* 'a little broad' vs. \**nemnogo uzkiy* 'a little narrow'  
 \**nemnogo vysokij* 'a little high' vs. \**nemnogo nizkij* 'a little low'<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to (5)-(6), in (7) neither member of an antonymous pair accepts NEMNOGO. That is because both members of an antonymous pair of parametric adjectives involve a SUFFICIENT distance up and down from the norm, that is, both parametric antonyms are 'threshold' adjectives. Thus:

- 'heavy X'  $\equiv$  'X whose weight is sufficiently bigger than the norm for Xs'  
 'light X'  $\equiv$  'X whose weight is sufficiently smaller than the norm for Xs'

This state of affairs can be represented in Figure 2:

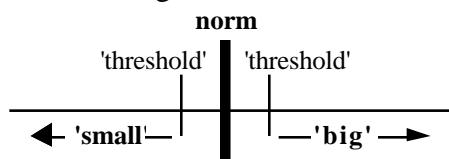


Figure 2

(here 'big' stands for the 'bigger' member of an antonymous pair, while 'small' stands for the 'smaller' one). Since the meaning of NEMNOGO psychologically clashes with 'sufficiently', parametric adjectives do not admit it.

This result requires sharpening the lexicographic definitions of parametric adjectives. Such adjectives are currently defined via the components 'bigger than the norm' and 'smaller than the norm'. The incompatibility with NEMNOGO shows that a more subtle formulation is needed: 'sufficiently bigger/smaller than the norm' (cf. Uryson 2000).

There is still another problem: after all, one can use NEMNOGO with a parametric adjective if the latter is in the short form, i.e., in the predicative role; cf.:

(8) a. *Zdes' nemnogo gluboko* 'Here it is a little too deep'.

vs.

*Zdes' nemnogo melko* 'Here, it is a little too shallow'.

b. *Sofa nemnogo široka* 'The sofa is a little too broad'.

vs.

*Sofa nemnogo uzka* 'The sofa is a little too narrow'.

As the glosses show, here the adjective A has the meaning 'too A'; this is corroborated by the possibility to include an additional actant (expressed as N<sub>dat</sub> or DLJA 'for' N<sub>gen</sub>), which is brought about by the semanteme 'too':

c. *Zdes' dlja nas nemnogo gluboko/melko* 'Here, it is a little too deep/too shallow for us'.

*Sofa mne nemnogo široka/uzka* 'The sofa is a little too broad/too narrow for me'.

SLIŠKOM implies a gradable difference, i.e., a comparative: 'too P for X to do Y' ≡ 'more P than necessary for X to do Y'. Therefore, NEMNOGO combines with SLIŠKOM 'too' (*Èto nemnogo sliškom gromko* 'This is a bit too loud'), and as a consequence, it combines with any adjective whose meaning includes 'too'.

Note that Russian admits the use of NEMNOGO with the long form of the adjective—of course still with the meaning 'too A':

d. *Sofa nemnogo širokaja/uzkaja (dlja nas)*

'The sofa is a little too broad/too narrow (for us)'.

e. *Oni kupili sofju, nemnogo širokiju/uzkiju dlja nas*

'They bought a sofa which was a little too broad/too narrow for us'.

### 3. The Semanteme 'a little' with 'Threshold' Lexical Units

As was shown, the adverb NEMNOGO does not combine with 'threshold' LUs, illustrated in (5)-(7). We have sketched a formal description of this fact: for such LUs, the difference between the actual value of the state/parameter and the norm is 'sufficiently big', and what is 'small' is the difference between the actual value of the state/parameter and the 'threshold.' Now we will elaborate on this explanation.

All 'threshold' LUs are gradable: a joyful person can be less or more joyful, and a heavy suitcase can be less or more heavy; therefore, a ready-made expression for big intensity and another one for small intensity of the corresponding state/parameter should be available in the language. Yet this is not the case: there is a standard expression for big intensity—OČEN' 'very', but no such standard expression for small intensity of a 'threshold' property; as we have seen, NEMNOGO, the first candidate for such a role, cannot be used with a positive or big 'threshold' LU. Why?

Let us consider again the schematic representation of the meaning of a 'threshold' LU  $L$ , where we have additionally indicated the zone in which the low degree of ' $L$ ' obtains, i.e., the 'a little' zone beginning at the 'threshold':

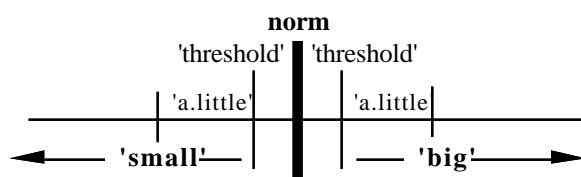


Figure 3

Suppose we want to characterize a 'threshold' LU by the semanteme 'a little', that is, we want to express the semantic configuration 'a little'  $\rightarrow$  ' $L$ '. Here, the semanteme 'a little' has to indicate that what is small is the intensity of the difference between the actual value of the property ' $L$ ' and the 'threshold,' starting from which the property can be designated as  $L$ . But to express such a semantic configuration is rather problematic for a 'naive' speaker, for at least three following reasons:

- The semanteme 'threshold' stands for a fairly involved meaning.
- The semantic configuration 'a little'  $\rightarrow$  ' $L$ ' is very complex, which becomes evident if we decompose the meaning of any 'threshold' LU. Let us illustrate with the adjective TJAŽĚLYJ 'heavy'.

(9)  $X$  *tjažělyj* 'X is heavy'  $\equiv$

'the weight of  $X$  is sufficiently bigger than the norm [of the weight for the class of  $X$ s]'  $\equiv$

'the weight of  $X$  is bigger than the norm, being equal to or bigger than a threshold that is bigger than the norm'.

Diagrammatically:

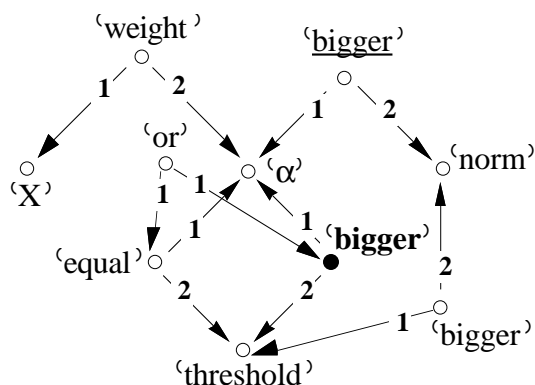


Figure 4

Semantic Decomposition of '*tjažělyj* [ $X$ ] = 'heavy [ $X$ ]'

In this decomposition, the semanteme 'bigger' occurs three times. The occurrence of 'bigger' which has to accept the semanteme 'a little' and which thus is the contact point between 'heavy [ $X$ ]' and 'a little' is boldfaced and the corresponding node is blackened. As is easily seen, this semanteme is, so to speak, blocked by two other 'bigger': one underlined, which is communicatively dominant in the definition, and the 'bigger' that relates 'norm' with 'threshold'. To express the



meaning ‘small intensity of heaviness’ the semanteme ‘a little’ must be linked to this ‘bigger’ of difficult access. Theoretically, this operation is possible, since the semantic configuration ‘small intensity of heaviness’ is well-formed. However, it is, as indicated above, very complex, which impedes the existence of some standard expressions for it.

- It is psychologically unnatural to speak of the semanteme ‘small’ whose scope is inside the semantic component ‘sufficiently big’. This combination of ‘small’ and ‘big’ is, as we have seen, only seemingly contradictory; yet it requires the use of such detractors as NO ‘but’ and XOTJA ‘although’ (*On vesělyj, no ne očēn´*, lit. ‘He is joyful, but not very’; *Čemodan tjažělyj/lěgkij, xotja i ne očēn´*, lit. ‘The suitcase is light/ heavy, although not very’), which demonstrates psychological unnaturalness of this combination.

We believe that it is these three factors that explain why language does not have a standard way to express such semantic configurations as ‘small intensity of heaviness’.

#### 4. The Semanteme ‘a little’ and the Lexical Function **AntiMagn**

To sum up: the semantic combinability of ‘nemnogo’ = ‘a little’ is much freer than lexico-syntactic combinability of the corresponding LUs. When examining this fact, it is important to indicate that the meaning ‘a little’ itself is very special: it corresponds to the lexical function [= LF] **AntiMagn**, so that the difficulties with its expressions have to be expected—as is typical for all LF-related meanings. Generally speaking, the cooccurrence of such ‘desintensifiers’ is covered by the listing of **AntiMagn**’s corresponding value elements under the lexical units involved:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>dosada</i> ) = <i>lěgkaja</i><br>annoyance      light     | <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>ranen</i> ) = <i>legko</i><br>wounded      lightly                             |
| <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>raznica</i> ) = <i>nebolšaja</i><br>difference      small | <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>pobedit´</i> ) = <i>s nebolšim perevesom</i><br>[to] win      with little edge |
| <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>spat´</i> ) = <i>čutko</i><br>[to] sleep      lightly     | <b>AntiMagn</b> ( <i>vina</i> ) = <i>prostitel´naja</i><br>guilt      pardonable                    |

We could simply list NEMNOGO as an element of the value of **AntiMagn** in the entries of the LUs  $L_i$  that accept it. However, we prefer to capture a useful generalization and avoid repeating NEMNOGO in thousands of lexical entries, since its cooccurrence can be stated in general semantic terms: as we have shown, it is sufficient to describe the meaning of NEMNOGO and that of all possible  $L_i$ , and then NEMNOGO will be admitted or rejected by simple rules of free lexical combinatorics. Therefore, we propose that NEMNOGO is one of standard expressions of **AntiMagn**, which should not be listed in the lexical entries of the arguments: it will be chosen by rules that we have presented above. Namely, NEMNOGO cannot be combined with ‘threshold’ LUs.

However, some value elements of **AntiMagn** can idiomatically express the difficult meaning ‘a little’ with ‘threshold’ LUs. Thus, ‘a little’→‘[to] sleep’ cannot be expressed as *\*nemnogo spat´* ‘[to] sleep a little’ [meaning ‘not very’], since SPAT´ is a ‘threshold’ LU (‘X is sleeping’  $\equiv$  ‘X is

resting with a SUFFICIENTLY BIG switching off of X's conscience'). However, Russian has a phraseologically bound expression for this semantic configuration: ČUTKO 'lightly'; this is an element of the value of **AntiMagn**. The same is true about many similar LUs:

|                          |                              |   |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| ‘a little’→‘[to] desire’ | * <i>nemnogo želat’</i> ,    | but <i>umerennoe želanie</i> ‘moderate wish’                          |
| ‘a little’→‘[to] win’    | * <i>nemnogo pobedit’</i> ,  | but <i>pobedit’ s nebol žim perevesom</i> ‘[to] win with little edge’ |
| ‘a little’→‘[to] wound’  | * <i>nemnogo ranit’</i> ,    | but <i>legko ranit’</i> ‘[to] wound lightly’                          |
| ‘a little’→‘yellow’      | * <i>nemnogo žělt(-yj)</i> , | but <i>želt+ovat(-yj)</i> ‘yellow-ish’                                |

In all these cases, the incompatibility of NEMNOGO with L is explained by the fact that L has the semanteme ‘threshold’ in its meaning, that is, ‘...sufficiently bigger than the neutral state...’, ..., and ‘... sufficiently close to the color of sun ...’.

## 5. The Meaning of the Degree Adverb NEMNOGO and Semantic Constraints vs. Semantic Restrictions

We can now propose a lexicographic definition of the degree adverb NEMNOGO in any construction NEMNOGO←L. It is actually the definition given at the beginning of the paper (for NEMNOGO with a comparative adjective) plus an additional condition needed to exclude the combinations with 'threshold' LUs.

NEMNOGO, degree adverb

|| ‘nemnogo L’ ≡ ‘the intensity of L is small’ | ‘L’ does not include the semanteme ‘threshold’.<sup>8</sup>

The first part of the definition (to the left of the vertical bar '|') is the *meaning* of NEMNOGO, i.e., its meaning in the strict sense of the term: the semanteme ‘nemnogo’. Formally:

‘nemnogo’-1→‘L’ ≡ ‘small’←2-‘intensity’-1→‘L’.

The structure of the semanteme ‘nemnogo’ controls its semantic cooccurrence: it is combinable with such semantemes that are allowed to be the 1st Sem-Actant of ‘intensity’ (i.e., with gradable semantemes) and whose intensity is not quantitatively specified (i.e., is not characterized as ‘big’ or ‘small’).

The second part of the definition (to the right of the vertical bar '|') is a *semantic restriction*, imposed on the meaning of the Deep-Syntactic governor of NEMNOGO. This restriction controls the cooccurrence of the lexeme NEMNOGO, namely it bars its combinations with a 'threshold' LUs. Since the concept of semantic restriction is very important and, at the same time, far from clear, it seems necessary to say a few words concerning it.

At least two types of semantic restrictions have to be distinguished: *semantic constraints* and *semantic conditions*.

1) A *semantic constraint on a Sem-actant* ‘L’ of the semanteme in question ‘L<sub>0</sub>’ is a requirement imposed on the semanteme which fills in the SemA ‘L’ of ‘L<sub>0</sub>’; this requirement is part of the semanteme ‘L<sub>0</sub>’ itself—it belongs to the signified of the corresponding sign L<sub>0</sub>. Thus, the Russian

adjective RUSYJ /rúsyj/ ‘light brown [of hair]’ can be applied only to nouns referring to hair: *RUSAJA golova* ‘head’ ⟨*ševeljura* ‘head of hair’, *prjad* ‘strand’, *kosa* ‘braid’, *boroda* ‘beard’, etc.). Therefore, we have for RUSYJ the following definition:

(10) ‘rusyj L’ = ‘light brown hair L’.

In (10), the semanteme ‘hair’ is a semantic constraint on ‘L’ (this is shown by smaller type). On the one hand, ‘hair’ is part of the meaning of RUSYJ: when you say or hear RUSYJ, even in isolation, you know that it is about hair. On the other hand, however, the semanteme ‘hair’ does not behave as all ‘genuine’ components of a meaning do: when ‘rusyj’ is introduced into a SemS, ‘hair’ does not go there—it simply controls the semantic ‘filling’ of ‘L’ (that is, only a meaning with the dominant node ‘hair’ or the meaning ‘hair’ itself is allowed to instantiate the variable ‘L’). Thus, *rusaja kosa* ‘light brown braid’ is represented in the SemS as ‘light brown’-1→‘braid’: the semantic constraint ‘hair’ allows ‘kosa’ = ‘braid’ as an instantiation of ‘L’, but does not appear itself in the SemS. Similarly, the verb [*to*] DRINK has a semantic constraint on its SemA 2: ‘liquid’ (what you drink is necessarily a liquid); the semanteme ‘liquid’ also belongs to the meaning ‘drink’, but it is not brought by it into the corresponding SemS.

Semantic constraints can thus be checked at the level of Semantic Structure—although they are not present there: in order to verify whether they are satisfied the dictionary must be used. The violation of a semantic constraint represents a semantic anomaly: the resulting meaning—e.g., \*‘rusye glaza’, \*‘the intensity of a leg’, etc.—is ill-formed and should be discarded before lexicalization. (These two semantic anomalies illustrate two different types of anomaly: linguistic and logical, see below.) Semantic constraints have to be distinguished from other types of semantic ‘restrictors,’ which do not entail semantic ill-formedness. Consider, for instance, the semantic component ‘X having power over Y and assuming that Y will do what X asks Y to do’ in the definition of [*to*] ORDER [as in ‘*Stop immediately!—he ordered*’]. Crucially, it is not a semantic constraint: it reflects a specific situation, indicating particular relations between the SemAs X and Y. If instead of *he ordered* I say—in the same circumstances—*he implored*, the resulting meaning is perfectly well-formed, but wrong.

2) A *semantic condition on a DSynt-actant/on the DSynt-governor* is a requirement imposed on the meaning of the LU L which is a DSynt-actant or the DSynt-governor of  $L_0$ ; this requirement belongs to the syntactics of  $L_0$ . Since a semantic condition is not included into the semanteme ‘ $L_0$ ’, it is not accessible at the semantic level.

Semantic constraints control SEMANTIC COOCCURRENCE: the semanteme configurations \*‘rusye glaza’ = ‘light brown eyes’ or \*‘rusyj sviter’ = ‘light brown sweater’ are ill-formed. A semantic constraint refers to the dominant, or generic, semanteme in the meaning that fills in the SemA variable ‘L’ or to this meaning as a whole.

Semantic conditions control LEXICAL cooccurrence: the semanteme configuration ‘nemnogo vesělyj’ = ‘a little joyful’ is well-formed, but its lexical expression *\*nemnogo vesělyj* is ungrammatical. A semantic condition refers to a semanteme which is (deeply) embedded in the concerned meaning—as, for instance, the semanteme ‘threshold’ (mentioned in the semantic condition of NEMNOGO) is in the meaning ‘L’; cf. Figure 4, p. 00.

Under our approach, then, the semantic configuration ‘nemnogo’→‘L’ is well-formed, even if ‘L’ is a ‘threshold’ meaning, while a phrase *\*NEMNOGO←L* where L is a ‘threshold’ LU is not (*\*nemnogo vesělyj*): producing such a phrase is a linguistic mistake. In this way, we account for the important distinction drawn by Ju. Apresjan (1978 [1995: 598-621] and 1990) between a LOGICAL and a LINGUISTIC anomaly. (Cf. his example of well-formed semantic configuration ‘vsegda’→‘ne’ = ‘always’→‘not’, which corresponds, in most cases, to an ungrammatical lexical configuration *\*VSEGDA NE+ V* [correct expression: *NIKOGDA NE + V* ‘never not V’]: Apresjan 1978 [1995: 602].) More specifically, following Apresjan, we propose to distinguish LANGUAGE-RELATED, or SEMANTIC, LOGICAL mistakes vs. (PURELY) LINGUISTIC mistakes.

Semantic logical mistakes involve ill-formed SemSs and consist in one of logical anomalies. More precisely, a semantic logical mistake can be:

- either an absurdity, as in *\*‘nemnogo’-1→‘mėrtvyj’* = ‘a little dead’, *\*‘intensity’-1→‘leg’*, *\*‘green’-1→‘ideas’*, etc.;
- or a contradiction, as in *\*‘nemnogo’-1→‘raz"jarěn’* = ‘a little furious’, *\*‘exceedingly’-1→‘warm [tea]’*, etc.

Formally, a semantic logical mistake is produced by violating a semantic constraint of a GENERAL NATURE—when the forbidden configuration is described in terms of broad semantic classes, i.e., by using ‘semantic labels,’ or universal taxonomic semantemes, such as ‘physical object’, ‘state’, ‘property’, ‘event’, etc.

Semantic logical mistakes are a subclass of extralinguistic mistakes, which characterize ill-formed SemSs and include mistakes due to poor arithmetic (*\*‘five of three girls’*), poor use of real world knowledge (*\*‘John crawled into the bottle’*), poor interpretation of cognitive postulates (*\*‘The door was close to the shoes’*), etc.

Linguistic mistakes can involve a representation of any level; they are subdivided according to the level at which the mistake can be pinpointed (semantic mistakes: ill-formed Sem-Representations; lexico-syntactic mistakes: ill-formed Synt-Representations; morphological mistakes: ill-formed Morph-Representations; etc.). Here only the semantic and syntactic level linguistic mistakes are mentioned; we do not touch, either, upon the important distinction between relative and absolute linguistic mistakes, established in Apresjan 1978 [1995: 601].

- A SEMANTIC linguistic mistake may involve an ill-formed semanteme configuration due to the violation of a semantic constraint that does not produce a logical anomaly: for instance, *\*‘rusye*

glaza' = 'light-brown eyes' or \*'karije volosy' = 'brown hair' [the adjective KARIJ means 'brown [of eyes]'] and cooccurs only with the noun GLAZA 'eyes']. This happens when the semantic constraint is stated in QUITE SPECIFIC TERMS—a rather narrow semantic subclass. (Note the difference in perception: \*'the intensity of his leg' is an absurdity, which is impossible to interpret naturally; while \*'rusyj sviter' is not absurd: it means 'light brown sweater', but is bad because the meaning 'rusyj' can characterize only meanings whose dominant semanteme is 'hair'.) There are of course other varieties of semantic linguistic mistakes as well.

- A LEXICO-SYNTACTIC linguistic mistake may involve an ill-formed phrase (more precisely, an ill-formed syntactic structure) that expresses a well-formed semanteme configuration. In turn, it can be due to a violation of a semantic condition (\*NEMNOGO←VEŠĚLYJ) or to a violation of a cooccurrence restriction (\*SVETLO-KORIČNEVYE←VOLOSJ 'light brown hair' [correct expression: RUSYE←VOLOSJ]). These two subtypes of lexico-syntactic mistakes can be called, respectively, SEMANTICALLY CONDITIONED mistakes and COOCCURRENCE-CONDITIONED mistakes.

Note that treating the semanteme configurations \*'rusye glaza' vs. 'nemnogo veselyj' in two different ways corresponds to Apresjan's idea (1990: 60, 1995: 624): the deeper the semantic element responsible for anomaly is embedded the 'more linguistic' this anomaly seems to be. In \*'rusye glaza' the semantic element creating the anomaly—'eyes'—is, so to speak, immediately visible: it corresponds to the whole meaning of the Sem-actant of 'rusyj'. In contrast, in 'nemnogo veselyj' such an element—'threshold'—is deeply embedded in the meaning of 'veselyj' and thus much less visible. Correspondingly, \*'rusye glaza' represents a semantic linguistic mistake, while \*'nemnogo veselyj' is a semantically-conditioned lexico-syntactic linguistic mistake; it is closer to the surface and in this sense it is more linguistic.

## 6. A Few Case Studies

To illustrate the applicability of our description, we will add several non-trivial examples.

(11) *Kotlety nemnogo podgoreli* 'The patties got a little burnt'.

PODGORET' '[to] get burnt [food]' ≡

'food X becomes damaged in the process of cooking such that X's surface becomes charred'; '[to be] damaged' is of course gradable, and the degree of damage is not characterized in PODGORET' quantitatively; moreover, PODGORET' is not a 'threshold' LU, because even the smallest charring of X's surface allows for the use of PODGORET'. Therefore, its combination with the degree adverb NEMNOGO is possible.

(12) *Kran nemnogo tečët* 'The faucet is leaking a little'. ≡ 'The faucet lets pass a little water'.

Is this a case of the quantitative NEMNOGO? We do not think so: the quantity of water that a leaky faucet lets pass characterizes the intensity of the leak (cf. *sil'no tečët*, lit. 'leaks strongly'). The same case is represented in *Ot okna nemnogo duet*, lit. 'From the window, it is drafting a little'

(small quantity of air), *Razvaliny nemnogo dymilis* ‘The ruins smoked a little’ (small quantity of smoke), etc.: in all such sentences, NEMNOGO signals ‘small intensity’ (of the draft, of smoking, etc.).

In sentence (13):

(13) *Èta setka nemnogo zaščiščaet ot komarov*

‘This net protects a little against mosquitoes’. ≡ ‘This net stops a few mosquitoes’.—

the small quantity (of mosquitoes turned away by the net) corresponds again to ‘small intensity’ (of protection), as well as in *On nemnogo posedel* ‘He became a little gray’. ≡ ‘He got a few gray hairs’, *On nemnogo zaikaetsja* ‘He stutters a little’, etc.

Sentence (14):

(14) *On nemnogo kartavit* ‘He pronounces his *r*’s closer to /χ/ a little’.—

illustrates the same case: ‘nemnogo’ bears on the intensity of a comparative: ‘closer to /χ/ than normal’.

In (15) we see again the degree adverb NEMNOGO:

(15) *On nemnogo otstal ot nas/On nemnogo vperedu nas*

‘He fell a little behind us’/‘He is a little ahead of us’.

*X is behind/ahead of Y* ≡ ‘There is a difference between the locations of X and Y such that ...’; ‘nemnogo’ bears on the intensity of this difference.

Finally, we consider two more complex cases involving adjectives.

(16) *Rubaška nemnogo grjaznaja* ⟨\*čistaja⟩ ‘[The] shirt [is] a little dirty ⟨\*clean⟩’.

*Grjaznyj* ≡ ‘which contains more dirt than the norm’, and *čistyj* ≡ ‘which contains sufficiently less dirt than the norm’. Consequently, *nemnogo grjaznyj* means ‘which contains a little more dirt than the norm’ (≈ ‘which contains small amount of dirt’). The combination of NEMNOGO with *čistyj* is precluded by the threshold character of the latter (reflected by the component ‘sufficiently’).

(17) *Rubaška nemnogo vlažnaja* ⟨\*mokraja, \*suxaja⟩ ‘[The] shirt [is] a little wet ⟨lit. \*quite wet, \*dry⟩’.

*Vlažnyj* ≡ ‘which has on itself more liquid than the norm—such that the liquid can be still absorbed’, *mokryj* ≡ ‘which has on itself sufficiently more liquid than the norm—such that the liquid cannot be absorbed’,

and *suxoj* ≡ ‘which does not have liquid on itself’.

The phrase *nemnogo vlažnyj* then means ‘which contains on itself a little liquid more than the norm—such that the liquid can be still absorbed’; \**nemnogo mokryj* is excluded by the threshold character of *mokryj*; \**nemnogo suxoj* is semantically ill-formed, since *suxoj* is not gradable (cf. \**očen’ suxaja rubaška* ‘\*very dry shirt’, while *očen’ vlažnaja rubaška* ‘very wet shirt’ and *očen’ mokraja rubaška* ‘very-very wet shirt’ are both possible).<sup>9</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

Five general lessons can be drawn from this study:

1. Semantic components in a lexicographic definition are of different nature: some correspond to the meaning proper and some are semantic restrictions on actants or governors (known also as *selectional restrictions*). This division has been well known for quite a while; what is a relative novelty is the distinction of two major types of semantic restrictions:

- A *semantic constraint* of a LU L targets the DOMINANT semanteme in the meaning of a Sem-actant of L and thus controls semanteme cooccurrence; it is part of the signified of L.
- A *semantic condition* of a LU L targets a semanteme (DEEPLY) EMBEDDED in the meaning of a DSynt-actant or the governor of L and thus controls lexeme cooccurrence; it is part of the syntactics of L.

2. The ill-formedness of a semanteme configuration can be not only formal (unsaturated actant slots, etc.), encyclopedic (in the broadest sense) or logical (absurd or contradictory), but also language-dependent: incompatibility of particular semantemes, which is reflected by their semantic constraints.

3. The compatibility of a LU L with NEMNOGO is a reliable test for establishing components of the lexicographic definition of L. Namely, the possibility of the phrase NEMNOGO←L indicates the gradability of 'L'; it pushes one to look for the presence of a scale-admitting component, which often (although not always) is a comparative, since the comparative is the prototypical target for NEMNOGO. On the other hand, the incompatibility of a gradable L with NEMNOGO suggests the existence in the meaning of L either of a quantitative characterization (which leads to a contradiction) or of a 'threshold'; both must be reflected in the definition of L.

4. The members of an antonymous pair of positive/negative state adjectives are asymmetric with respect to the presence of 'threshold' in their definitions: the 'negative' adjective does not have it, while the 'positive' one does. At the same time, parametric adjectives show symmetry in this respect: both antonyms include the semanteme 'threshold'.

5. The notion of 'threshold' turns out to be relevant to many lexical meanings. For instance, a parametric adjective can be used to name the corresponding property only if the property reaches a certain threshold. At the same time, this semantic component is not easily detectable: it seems to be a 'sokrovennyj smysl' (roughly, 'hidden meaning'), to which the present volume is dedicated.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> (p. 00) The adverb NEMNOGO possesses interesting communicative and rhetorical properties: when stressed, it participates in a statement of the existence of a quantified set or of a quantified manifestation of a property (in contrast to MALO 'little', which presupposes the existence and asserts only the quantification); it can be used to 'attenuate' a statement, etc. (see, e.g., Ducrot 1970 and Buylgina & Šmelëv 1997: 200-207). The present paper completely ignores these aspects of NEMNOGO.

<sup>2</sup> (p. 00) Gradability as applied to linguistic meanings has been under the scrutiny for quite some time, beginning with classical work by Sapir (1944); the literature is huge and cannot be reviewed here. N.D. Arutjunova (1988: 231-233, 245-251) has also paid a tribute to this topic, discussing the concept of gradable *vs.* punctual meanings. Without entering into theoretical problems of gradability, we will limit ourselves to the following remark that is directly relevant to our exposition.

How can one formally establish the fact that a given semanteme accepts a particular scale?

The proposed answer is as follows:

|| The semantic description of the name of a scale must include, along with the corresponding semanteme, a semantic constraint on its semantic actant **1**, that is, on the entity or fact characterized by this scale.

For instance:

‘size(physical object X ; Y)’

‘duration(process or activity X ; Y)’

‘intensity(physical phenomenon, psychological/physiological state, property, parameter or difference X ; Y)’

The semantic constraints are underlined. Thus, the Sem-actant **1** of ‘size’ must be a semanteme whose dominant element is ‘physical object’, etc. Let it be emphasized that the semantic constraint given here for the SemA **1** [= X] of ‘intensity’ is approximate (not all physical phenomena, psychological/physiological states or properties can be characterized by intensity); sharpening them constitutes a special task.

For more on semantic constraints, see Section **5**, p. 00.



<sup>3</sup> (p. 00) There is an interesting technical problem: how to link the configuration ‘not’→‘the same’ to the equivalent semanteme ‘different’. (Thanks to E. Savvina for drawing our attention to it.)

<sup>4</sup> (p. 00) In accordance with the current viewpoint (e.g., Arutjunova 1988: 234-243, Apresjan 2000: XXXI), the semanteme ‘norm’ is interpreted as ‘value corresponding to the average’ (roughly speaking, physical norms) or as ‘value corresponding to the idealized model’ (= ‘as it should be’; ethical, pragmatic, esthetic, etc.—that is, axiological—norms). To these interpretations, we add a third one: as ‘value corresponding to the neutral state’ (e.g., emotional tone norm).

<sup>5</sup> (p. 00) The idea of a threshold is implicitly present in the lexicographic definitions proposed in Uryson 2000: 250 (*vysokij* ‘tall [man]’ ≡ ‘whose height is MUCH bigger than the average’).

<sup>6</sup> (p. 00) Cf. the remark by Ju. Apresjan (1974: 86) that the combination *\*nemnogo xorošij* ‘a little good’ is bad because *xorošij* implies the ‘completeness of the property,’ while NEMNOGO affirms the ‘incompleteness.’ We think that the component ‘sufficiently’ reflects formally what Apresjan meant by ‘completeness of the property.’ This component is decomposable itself: ‘sufficiently higher/lower’ = ‘higher/lower such that the difference is equal or higher than a threshold ...’. In other words, we look here at a ‘threshold’ over/below the norm that must be crossed for the corresponding adjective to be applicable.

<sup>7</sup> (p. 00) All these expressions are grammatical if used with a different meaning: ‘a little TOO heavy’; etc.; see below, the discussion of (8).

<sup>8</sup> (p. 00) Note that when combined with the adverb XOTJA BY/XOT’ ‘at least’, NEMNOGO is admitted even by the threshold lexemes: — *Bud’ xot’ nemnogo vnimatelen* ‘Be at least a little attentive’.

<sup>9</sup> (p. 00) As indicated by L. Iomdin, one can say *Palatka byla nemnogo mokraja* ‘The tent was a little quite wet’; this means, however, that the tent was quite wet but in some places only—not an important part of its surface was covered by liquid (cf. *\*Nosovoj platok byl nemnogo mokryj* ‘The handkerchief was a little quite wet’, because the surface of a handkerchief is rather small). In a possible combination of NEMNOGO with MOKRYJ the adverb bears semantically on the ‘quantity’ of the surface affected, not on the quantity of liquid.

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