

Title: Are Russian “Dialogue” Particles Purely Pragmatic?

Author: Irina Levontina, Institute of Russian Language, Russian Academy of Sciences

The Russian language abounds in “dialogue” particles (*nu*, *-ka*, *da*, *zhe*, *ved'*, *-to*, etc.): they are numerous and variegated and they constantly occur in speech. Such particles are often viewed as purely pragmatic. They are claimed to have nothing to do with semantics and to feature an infinite variety of unpredictable pragmatic effects. However, they prove to be rich in content, and their behavior turns out to be semantically explicable.

It was found out, for example, that the situation of repeated request is linguistically relevant for Russian. If one repeats one's request in Russian, the insertion of a certain particle into the phrase is nearly obligatory. It could be the particles *nu*, *da* or *zhe*. Yet on looking closer at them, we observe different semantic and pragmatic effects produced by them in an utterance. A repeated request with *nu* means approximately the following: 'I have no new argument, but I want it very much and I shall not leave you alone until you do it'. Thus, a request with *nu* can be repeated over and over again; it is pronounced with a specific "begging" intonation and involves a certain amount of humiliation for the speaker. *Nu* thus presupposes a certain communicative strategy and suggests a sort of psychological self-portrait of the speaker. The particle *da* presents quite a different picture. A repeated request with *da* means: 'I know all you can say about the reasons for your refusal, and they are not important at all, you can't really want to start a discussion about such a trifle'. In this case the intonation would be "casual" (there is even a special kind of "unimportant" prosody or timbre). Such a request cannot be repeated many times, and it does not damage the speaker's dignity. The particle *zhe* cannot be used if one repeats one's request after a direct refusal; the request can only be repeated in case one did not have an answer. These effects do not mean, however, that the particles in question have a particular meaning that includes the component 'I ask you again.' It depends on the context. In a different type of context, these particles will have nothing in common, although their meanings remain the same. In my paper, I am going to show that pragmatic effects arousing in certain types of contexts can be explained on the basis of semantic definition of the particles.