

Russian syntactic phrasemes with full reduplication: a corpus study (Revised)

The paper considers Russian syntactic phrasemes with reduplication, an interesting linguistic phenomenon, sparsely represented in learner dictionaries and grammars, despite a recent growing coverage in theoretical linguistics (Wierzbicka 1987, Bulygina, Shmelev 1997, Krjuchkova 2004, Iomdin 2010, 2014, Gilyarova 2010, Israeli 2014). Corpora provide clues to their meaning, degree of their translatability, and the rules of their usage.

The paper presents a corpus study of one Russian construction with complete reduplication, namely a non-tautological construction consisting of a fully reduplicated adjective, noun, verb, adverb, or particle.

In writing, complete reduplication is usually marked by a hyphen (*belyj-belyj* ‘white-white’, *sidel-sidel* ‘was sitting-was sitting’, *da-da* ‘yes-yes’) or by a comma (*snega, snega* ‘snow-Pl, snow-Pl’, *govoril, govoril* ‘was talking, was talking’).

There are also different kinds of prosodically marked reduplication in oral speech, usually marked by a pause (/) and/or pitch change (↑↓): *Ivanov ↑/ Ivanov ↓ – nikogda tak ne sdelaet* ‘As for Ivanov (lit. Ivanov Ivanov), he would never do that’; *Rubashka belaja? Belaja ↓/ belaja ↓* (‘The shirt is white? Sure, white (lit. white white)’).

Different prosodical patterns and hence different punctuation characterize semantically different constructions.

The “hyphen” construction indicates that the reduplicated form is pronounced as one phonetic word, with a slightly stronger stress on the first part. Semantically, it primarily expresses intensified degree (and is therefore mostly used with adjectives), with certain modifications pertaining to different parts of speech.

The “comma” construction involves the intonation of “enumeration”, namely, equal stress and similar prosody on both parts of the construction. Its primary meaning is large quantity (hence it is mostly used with nouns), with appropriate modifications for verbs and other speech parts.

The “↑/ ↓” construction is a trademark sign of public official speeches. Prosodically, it involves raising the tone on the first part and lowering it on the second part of the construction, as well as a rather prolonged pause between the parts. Its pragmatic function is to bring particular emphatic weight on the message which is opened by this construction: cf. the following quote from Sergey Lavrov’s 2015 speech (Multimedia Corpus of RNC): **Глáвное** ↑/ **глáвное** ↓ – это расту́щая убеждё́нность/ в то́м числе и на За́паде/ что политический процесс неизбе́жен. [Ежегодная пресс-конференция С.В. Лаврова (2015)] ‘The most important thing (lit. the main thing / the main thing) is the growing conviction, also in the West, that the political process is inevitable.’

The “↓/ ↓” construction is an informal conversational marker of what may be termed “irritated confirmation”.

The primary focus of the paper is “hyphen” construction in its degree interpretation with adjectives. Brief examination of its other instantiations reveals that

- 1) with nouns, full “hyphen” reduplication is a) occasionally used to express the meaning of large quantity (normally marked by “comma” full reduplication): *Sornjaki-sornjaki povsjudu* ‘Weeds-weeds are everywhere’; b) used as vocative: *Devochka-devochka, kak tebjja zovut* ‘Girl-girl, what is your name?’;
- 2) with verbs, it marks a) long duration: *Shel-shel i prishel* ‘Walked-walked and came’, *Dumal-dumal, no nichego ne pridumal* ‘Was thinking-was thinking but thought of nothing’; b) strong stimulation in imperative: *Rabotaj-rabotaj* ‘Work-work’;
- 3) with particles, a) it emphasizes the meaning of the particle: *Da-da* ‘yes-yes’, *net-net* ‘no-no’, *konechno-konechno* ‘certainly-certainly’; b) in some cases, reduplicated particles are lexicalized as new meanings, e.g. *My tol’ko-tol’ko uspeli na poezd* ‘We just only (lit. only-only) made it to the train’.
- 4) with adverbs, reduplication interpretation depends on the semantic class of the adverb. Scalar adverbs behave as adjectives and produce a high degree interpretation (*tixo-tixo* ‘quietly-quietly’ ≈ ‘very quietly’). Certain other adverbs that allow reduplication display effects of lexicalization; e.g. *ele* ‘barely’ vs. *ele-ele* ‘barely-barely’. Single *ele* has two well-represented meanings: ‘with great difficulty’ (*On ele podnjaj tjazhelyj rjukzak* ‘He barely lifted a heavy backpack’) and ‘almost not’ (*ele zametnyj* ‘barely visible’). Reduplicated *ele-ele* demonstrates overwhelming preference of the first meaning: collocation *ele-ele zametnyj* forms only 0.4 per cent of its total usages, whereas the relative frequency of the collocate *ele zametnyj* to the total usages of *ele* is 7 per cent.

The main instantiation of “hyphen” reduplication are scalar adjectives. The major semantic classes of scalar adjectives that favor reduplication are parameters (size, duration, etc.) and physical properties (temperature, texture, color, etc.): *bolshoj-bolshoj* ‘big-big’, *dolgiy-dolgiy* ‘long-long’, *xolodnyj-xolodnyj* ‘cold-cold’, *mjagkij-mjagkij* ‘soft-soft’, *chernyj-chernyj* ‘black-black’.

Reduplication in Russian color adjectives provides a curious reflection of certain typological semantic tendencies. The well-known study by Berlin and Kay “Basic Color Terms: their Universality and Evolution” (1969) suggests a hierarchy of colors ranging from the more basic to the more sophisticated, and orders languages according to the “stage” of color development that they reflect. If a language possesses only two color terms, they will be dark and light (Stage I), if there are three, the third will be red (Stage II), then green *or* yellow (III), then green *and* yellow (IV), then blue (V), brown (VI), purple, pink, orange, or gray (VII).

Absolute frequency of color terms in their “color” meaning in RNC closely parallels the hierarchy: *belyj* ‘white’ (66821), *chernyj* ‘black’ (66244), *krasnyj* ‘red’ (51507), *zelenyj* ‘green’ (24614), *sinij* ‘medium-to-dark-blue’ (18055), *zheltyj* ‘yellow’ (16155), *goluboj* ‘light-blue’ (14413), *korichnevyj* ‘brown’ (4186), *seryj* ‘gray’ (17833).

Basic color terms are more frequently reduplicated: 0,5 % of *belyj-belyj* among total “color” occurrences of *belyj*, 0,37 % of ‘black-black’, 0,27 % ‘light-blue’, 0,16 %

reduplicated ‘red’, ‘green’, ‘yellow’ and ‘gray’; no ‘brown-brown’. Interestingly, *sinij* allows most reduplication in Russian (1.2 %).

The more “basic” color terms are more scalar: intuitively, the degree of “lightness” or “darkness” is more measurable than the degree of “redness” or “blueness”. The more scalar an adjective, the easier it is to form a reduplicated form with the meaning of high degree. ‘White’ and ‘black’ also occur in the constructions of intensified reduplication with the prefix *pre* ‘overly’ and with comparative: *belyj-prebelyj* ‘white-overly-white’, *chernyj-prechernyj* ‘black-overly-black’, *belee belogo* ‘whiter than the white’, *chernee chernogo* ‘blackier than the black’.

The non-basic color terms, such as *fioletovyj* ‘purple’ or even *korichnevyj* ‘brown’ disallow reduplication both for semantic reasons (they are not truly scalar; they also lack comparative forms) and morphological reasons (they are too long).

The intermediate cases, such as ‘red’ or ‘green’, demonstrate the intermediate level of scalarity and reduplication (they all have comparative forms, but differing possibilities for intensified reduplication with *pre-* and no possibility for reduplication with comparative).

An interesting exception is *sinij* ‘medium to dark blue’ with its highest percentage of reduplication (possibly because it covers a range of shades). It also freely allows intensified reduplication with *pre-*: *sinij-presinij* ‘blue-overly-blue’.

Other reflections of Berlin-Kay hierarchy are found in constructions of comparison denoting color standards, such as ‘white as snow’ or ‘pitch-black’. The more basic a color term, the more frequent and diverse are its uses in the constructions of standard, a fact that possibly reflects the cognitive and cultural prominence of the corresponding colors: *belyj kak sneg/moloko/bumaga/polotno/saxar/kipen*, ... ‘white as snow/milk/paper/sugar/foam,..’, *chernyj kak smol’/ugol’/sazha/zhuk/voronovo krylo* ‘black as pitch/coal/soot/beetle/raven’s wing’, *krasnyj kak krov’/rak/ pion* ‘red as blood/crawfish/peony’, *sinij kak nochnoe nebo/vasil’ki* ‘dark blue as night sky/cornflower’, *goluboj kak nebo* ‘light blue as sky’, *zelenyj kak trava* ‘green as grass’, *zheltyj kak limon/jantar* ‘yellow as lemon/amber’.

All color terms of the I–V stages have standard reference comparisons; gray does too (*seryj kak mysh’/pepel* ‘gray as a mouse/ashes’). However, ‘brown’ practically does not occur in these constructions.

Data from the Russian-English parallel corpus reveals that semantic tendencies underlying linguistic usage are shared by these two languages (and possibly possess wider cross-linguistic universality): e.g., **absolutely brown* in English is as strange as **korichnevyj-korichnevyj* is in Russian. Yet the strategies involved in expressing the high

degree of color are language-specific: thus, the reduplication, so favored in Russian, is absent in English. Instead, English uses standard constructions and adverbial intensifiers typical for that language: 'spotlessly white snow', 'snow-white gazelle', 'deep blue sky', 'marvelously green little lawn', or else omits explicit color intensification altogether.