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Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue

Homage to Sorin Stati

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RUSSIAN “CHASTICY” ARGUE IN DIALOGUES

ANNA BONOLA

1. *The status of Russian particles*

Russian has at its disposal many functional words with a so-called discursive function i.e. discourse markers (Nikolaeva 1985, Kobozeva 1991); as Kiseleva and Paillard noted (1998), they include either full words, for instance, adverbs (*dejstvitel'no*), adverbial phrases (*na samom dele*), nouns (*pravda*) or particles, i.e. clitics like *da*, *ved'*, *že*, *li...*

Particles have a special morpho-semantic status: they are formless words (i.e. words without morphology, unlike the parts of speech) and they are synsemantic too, i.e. they have no independent meaning, unlike the so-called full words, which can be formless but have an independent meaning, for instance *kakadu* (*parrot*), *kino* (*cinema*) etc.

In this communication I will deal only with those discourse markers that can be considered particles as well, which never modify their syntactic function.

On the other hand, we must note the fact that not all clitic-particles are discourse markers: we have, for instance, clitic-prepositions, whose function is very close to that of grammatical cases.

This first selection of particles among the existing discourse markers is not merely a way to restrict and simplify the object of our research. It reflects the fact that particles are a very special linguistic instrument in Russian: they are short, flexible, spread throughout the text in an almost unperceivable way, and they seem to have a vague, undefinable meaning.

This is a fact for both linguists and speakers as the following quotation from Gogol's short story “The coat” shows:¹

– А я вот к тебе, Петрович, того...
Нужно знать, что Акакий Акакиевич изъяснялся большею частью предложениями, наречиями и, наконец, такими частицами, которые решительно не имеют никакого значения. Если же дело было очень затруднительно, то он даже имел обыкновение совсем не оканчивать фразы, так что весьма часто, начавши речь словами: ‘Это, право, совершенно того...’ – а потом уже и ничего не было, и сам он позабывал, думая, что всё уже выговорил.

According to Gogol's quotation, particles are small, meaningless words. Nonetheless, the protagonist of Gogol's story, Akakij Akakevič, finds them very useful in difficult dialogical negotiations, when he needs to persuade the listener in an imperceptible way.

¹ Quoted in Rathmayr 1985: 11.

Gogol's words reflect the common perception of ordinary speakers, but linguists know that the apparent lack of meaning of particles hides a more complex issue. Šmelev supports this idea (2004: 4) when he says that these "tiny words" have been wrongly considered parasitic words, or packaging, that speakers use to fill in pauses or just to give rhythm to the speech. As a matter of fact, the content of particles isn't vague at all, it's just difficult to make it explicit, since it belongs to hidden layers of the text. In fact, the kind of particles we'll deal with have to do with cohesion, argumentation and with some pragmatic features, displaying the relationship between speaker and listener.

In order to point out their content, it may be useful to bring about a further restriction of the set of particles: the particles we are going to analyse are not mere interjections (like *ach*, *oj*). Particles as interjections, with a parenthetical position, convey the mood of the speaker in a rather clear way (for instance surprise – *o*, *oj* –, sorrow – *ach* –, hesitation – *ugu* etc). They have a so-called emotional expressive meaning (Šarounov 2006). Instead, the particles we are dealing with are something more: they build up textual cohesion. Considering this textual function, can we assume that particles are logical connectors? Particles may be connectors, indeed, but let us consider the difference between the following sentences, quoted in Rathmayr (1985):

- (1a) Из нашей школы только Галя пользуется настоящим успехом, *так как* Борячук, *как мы все знаем*, ещё недоразвита.
In our school only Galja is a good student, because (*tak kak*) Borjačuk, as we all know (*kak my vse znaem*), is still immature.
- (1b) Из нашей школы только Галя пользуется настоящим успехом. Борячук, *ведь*, ещё недоразвита.
In our school only Galja is a good student. Borjačuk, X (*ved'*), is still immature.

Both *tak kak* and *ved'*, from a logical point of view, indicate a cause and, from an argumentative point of view, indicate a motivation; in addition *ved'* indicates that this motivation belongs to the common ground of hearer and speaker. In sentence a) the same meaning is expressed by the parenthetical sentence *kak my vse znaem* (as we all know). Moreover, *ved'* is used to achieve the hearer's assent and this meaning in sentence a) is totally absent.

Summing up, sentence a) is longer and more explicit, whereas sentence b) is shorter, it conveys the speaker's attitude towards the hearer, is more implicit and, as a consequence, activates more inferences. In a) the propositional content is dominant, in sentence b) we have many pragmatic additions.

This fact shows us that the particles we want to consider on the one hand are not just modal markers like interjections, but, on the other hand, they are not just logical connectors. They can be both and may be something more.

In order to understand their function, we have to adopt a complete textual approach, such as in the Congruity Theory by Rigotti (2005).

According to Rigotti (2005: 77-78):

the meaning of an utterance coincides with its intended effects, that is to say, with the change that it brings about in the context – [...] Pragmatic and semantic structures at all levels of a text are respondent to such a task. This is why we see the text as deeply pervaded by subtle but strong *logical* ties. The coherence of a text, and indeed its *meaningfulness*, can be accounted for if we represent the text as a hierarchy of predicate-argument relations holding between the text sequences at different levels and connecting each sequence to the whole text.

This kind of textual predicates are called *connective* predicates. According to this vision, the *particles* we are dealing with are:

1. *linguistic expression of connective predicates*, in which semantic and pragmatic components are both present. Their function is “to link directly or indirectly the action accomplished by the utterance to the action accomplished by the whole of the text, and thus to the change that it is supposed to produce” (Rigotti 2005: 82)².
2. Furthermore, the particles we are going to analyse *indicate an argumentative connective predicate*, that is to say, they are used in texts where the speaker is trying to persuade through argumentation, i.e. is trying “to cause somebody else to let him/herself be convinced by the given argument” (Rocci 2005, 99).
3. Finally, as these particles indicate connective predicates in argumentative texts, they occur mainly in *dialogues*, or *soliloquies*.

For all these reasons I will call dialogical-argumentative particles those very particles that perform the functions we have just described.

In my opinion, the main dialogical-argumentative particles in Russian are: *ved'*, *že*, *nu*, *da*, *razve*, *neuželi*, *taki*, *vot*.

As it is impossible to analyse them all, I will consider the particles *ved'*, *že*, since in these the dialogical-argumentative function is dominant (unlike other particles in the list, like *vot* or *nu*, where, sometimes, the deictic or modal function prevail).

2. *Ved'*

- (2) Пора ложиться. (U2). *Ved'* тебе завтра рано вставать (U1).
It's time you went to sleep (U2). VED' you'll have to get up early tomorrow morning (U1). (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

Ved' introduces an utterance (U1) justifying a previous speech act (U2). U1 (you'll

² Insofar particles express connective predicates, they also contribute to the text coherence: “The text *as a whole* is coherent if – regarded as a casual chain – it is congruent with its communicative goal. That is, in other words, if it is adequate to produce the intended effect on the hearer at the illocutionary level. In Congruity Theory this *adequacy*, or *congruency* is interpreted in terms of presupposition that the connective predicate dominating the whole text imposes to its arguments” (Rigotti 2005: 103-104).

have to get up early tomorrow) conveys the reason for the order given in U2 (It's time you went to sleep). From a logical point of view, in U2 we have the consequence of a cause conveyed in U1, which explains why the first Utterance has been numbered as 2, and the second as 1.

So *ved'* orders the text in such a way that U1 (reason or cause) follows U2 (act of speech or consequence); therefore the reason is given later as though the speaker thought that Utterance U2 had not been clear enough or had not been accepted by the hearer, or could be difficult to accept.

Moreover, *ved'* justifies and gives reasons for the previous speech act by introducing information which may sound new, but which is actually part of the shared ground which the speaker reminds the hearer of (both of them know perfectly well that the day after it will be necessary to get up early). In fact *ved'* derives from the Russian verb *vedat'*, which means *to know*.

The fact that the presupposition of *ved'* is common ground is proved by the following example:

- (3a) Я сегодня в час ночи проснулся. (U2) В Москве *ведь* как раз в это время утро, а я ещё не перестроился на местное время (U1).
Так и не заснул до утра. (Rathmayr 1985)
Tonight I woke up at one (U2). At that time *VED'* in Moscow it is already morning and I couldn't get used to the local time, so I couldn't sleep any longer (U1).

Indeed *ved'* cannot be used in an example like this:

- (3b) Я сегодня в час ночи проснулся (U2). *Меня *ведь* разбудил телефон и не заснул до самого утра (U1).
Tonight I woke up at one (U2). *The phone *VED'* rang and I couldn't sleep any longer (U1).

Utterance (3b) is wrong because the hearer cannot know that the phone rang (therefore *ved'* doesn't refer to a common ground); instead (3a) is correct because both speaker and hearer are aware of the time zones.

So, the particle *ved'* carries a connective predicate similar to the verbal predicate *justify*, and imposes on its arguments the following presuppositions:

1. U2: speech act.
2. U1: Argument which justifies the speech act U2.
3. Speaker: s/he assumes to have been misunderstood or not accepted; s/he needs to argue in order to make the message clearer or to persuade the hearer.
4. Hearer: s/he may not /or pretends not to remember the common ground the speaker is referring to, and so s/he may not understand or may not agree on what is said.

5. X: the presupposition of the argument in favour of U2 is based on common ground.

As we can see, the reasons expressed in U1 seem to justify U2 either clarifying or persuading. This is a consequence of the fact that *ved'* can justify different kinds of speech acts. We are going to analyse some of them.

A) Assertion:

(4)

– Позвольте, товарищ генерал, – сказал Крымов. – Толстой в Отечественной войне не участвовал (U2).

– То есть как это “не участвовал”? – спросил генерал.

– Да очень просто, не участвовал, – проговорил Крымов. – Толстой ведь не родился, когда шла война с Наполеоном (U1). (В. Гроссман)

– Excuse me companion General – Krymov said – Tolstoj didn't take part in the war against Napoleon. (U2)

– What do you mean “he didn't take part in it”? – the General asked.

– It's easy, he just didn't take part in it – Krymov said – Tolstoj, *VED'*, hadn't been born yet at the time of the war against Napoleon (U1).

(V. Grossman)

In U1, in order to justify the assertion, *ved'* introduces an explanation about the logical-causal relationship between U2 (Tolstoj didn't take part in the war against Napoleon = consequence) and U1 (Tolstoj hadn't been born yet at the time of the war against Napoleon = cause). In an assertive context the propositional content is dominant, and usually it indicates a cause-effect relationship between events.

We must observe the position of *ved'*: when *ved'* refers to an assertion (4), that is when we justify U2 by giving an explanation, it usually comes second and it could be replaced by the causal conjunction *potomu-čto*, as we saw in examples 1a and 1b; nonetheless, the pragmatic effect of communication will change.

B) Order or request

Ved' can introduce an argument to justify the reasonableness of an order or a request. In this case it comes first and it has a clearer pronunciation.

(5)

Мама, дай-ка мне двойной мед и масло (U2), я *ведь* утром проспала (U1). (В. Гроссман)

Mum, give me a double ration of honey and butter (U2). *VED'*, this morning I overslept (U1). (V. Grossman)

C) Reproach/objection

(6)

– Чего это ты в сапогах ходишь? (U2) – спросил он. – Жарко ведь (U1). (В. Пелевин)

– Why are you wearing a pair of boots (U2) – he asked. *VED'* it's hot (U1). (V. Pelevin)

(7)

– Зачем ты ему отдал деньги (U2) – обманет ведь (U1)!

Why did you give him some money? (U2) – *VED'*, he will cheat you (U1). (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

(8)

– Ты что форточку открыл (U2) – ребенка ведь простудишь (U1)!

Why have you opened the window? (U2) – *VED'*, the child will get a cold (U1)! (V. Grossman)

In this case it would be impossible to replace *ved'* with the cause conjunction *potomu-čto*. This proves that *ved'* doesn't justify the propositional content of U2 but the speech act performed by it. In fact, it would be possible to use *potomu-čto* if we made the speech act explicit in a sentence like: "I tell you this because...".

In some more complex examples, *ved'* refers to an implicit reproach or objection. In this case we have only U1.

Let's consider the dialogue between a young woman, asking for the residence permit, and the apparatchik who should give her the document:

(9)

– Вызов нужен, – сказал он. – Без вызова не пропишу.

– Я *ведь* работаю в военном учреждении (U1), – сказала Женя.

– По вашим справкам этого не видно. (В. Гроссман)

– You need a formal invitation – he said. I can't give you the permit without an invitation.

– *VED'*, I work in a military Institution (U1) – said Ženja.

– There is no reference to it in your documents (V. Grossman).

In this case *ved'* reminds the hearer of common ground (Ženja does work in a military Institution) which justifies her implicit objection: "It is not necessary for me to have an invitation".

D) Question

The function of *ved'* in questions is very complex. Rathmayr says that "particles in questions express the speaker's attitude towards the presupposition and/or the hearer" (Rathmayr: 1985, 133).

In the following examples *ved'* seems to remind the hearer of a presupposition of U2, belonging to the common ground of both hearer and speaker:

(10)

Мне об этом сообщил Иван Иванович (U2). Вы ведь его знаете (U1 presupposition)?

It was I.I. who told me this. (U2) (*VED'*) You know him (U1 presupposition)? (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

- (11)
 У Маши завтра день рождения (U2). Ты ведь ее поздравил (U1
 presupposition)?
 Tomorrow it will be Maša's birthday (U2). *VED'* You'll wish her best
 wishes (U1 presupposition)? (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

In example (12) *ved'* occurs in exclamatives. Here the argumentative function (justification) is in the background and *ved'* just conveys the fact that the speaker suddenly realized something he had forgotten. Argument X (supposed common ground) is dominant.

- (12)
 – Ой ведь на лекцию опаздываю!
 Oh, *VED'* I'm late for my lesson! (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

3. *Že*

Let us now analyze our second particle *že*. Apparently its argumentative-dialogical function is very similar to *ved'* insofar as *že* emphasises given information, which is at the same time an argument for the previous speech act.

- (13)
 Куда ты собираешься идти (U2)? У тебя же температура (U1)!
 Where are you going (U2)? You have *ŽE* a temperature (U1)!
 (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

As there seems to be a close similarity with *ved'*, let us compare these two particles:

- (14a)
 Что ты лежишь (U2)! Петя же приехал (U1)! Тебя что ли это не
 касается!
 Why are you lying down? Petja *ŽE* arrived! Don't you care?
 (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

- (14b)
 Что ты лежишь (U2)! *Ведь* Петя приехал (U1)! Тебя что ли это не
 касается!
 Why are you lying down? Petja *VED'* arrived! Don't you care?
 (Kiseleva & Paillard 1998)

In (14a) the reproof is sustained by the argument that Petja has arrived and the interlocutor knows it, and should therefore react in an appropriate way. The given information to which he refers is something evident to both speakers. Instead, in (14b), the reproof is justified by the speaker by remembering given information which has been momentarily forgotten by the hearer. (14b) is undoubtedly more polite, less peremptory, and indicates the speaker's need to justify his own speech act (reproof); by using *že*, on the other hand, the speaker does not justify U2, but reiterates the reproof indicating the reason for it, thus reproving the hearer twice.

The way in which *že* is used in argumentation is thus more categoric (indeed, the particle is often defined as “reinforcing”) and explains or justifies less; more precisely we can say that while *vedʹ* is used to argue through justification, *že* argues by reiterating and thus intensifying the conflict with the interlocutor or at least expressing a certain impatience on the part of the speaker. Considering this difference, the causal link between U2 and U1 is of secondary importance, such that *že* is unlikely to be used in assertive contexts in which it emerges that *vedʹ* and the causal connector *potomu-čto* are almost synonymous (see eg. 1).

To confirm what has been said, the tendency to use *že* in negative contexts and *vedʹ* in positive contexts can be pointed out:

(15a)

- Наташа не умеет писать.
- Странно, ей *же* уже 8 лет.
- Nataša doesn't know how to write.
- That's strange, she is already 8. (Rathmayr: 1985, 274)

(15b)

- Наташа умеет писать.
- Естественно, ей *ведь* уже 7 лет.
- Nataša knows how to write.
- Of course she can, she's already 7 years old. (Rathmayr: 1985, 274)

Let's sum up the connective expressed by *že* indicating its arguments and conditions:

1. U2: speech act;
2. U1: = argument in favour of the speech act realised in U2 by referring to evidence; U2 precedes U1;
3. Speaker: reiterates and insists
4. Receiver: it is presumed that s/he remembers what is given and does not want to draw the due conclusions.
5. X: presupposition: the argument on the side of U2 is based on the evidence that it is reiterated to the listener.

4. Conclusion

If we compare the predicates conveyed by *vedʹ* and *že* it emerges clearly that the difference between these two particles concerns the characteristics imposed on the arguments more than the argumentative structure.

The concept of connective predicate turns out to be an excellent means of explaining the semantics of the dialogic-argumentative particles in Russian and opens the way to their future reclassification.

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