

The Communicative Effects on the Interaction between the Verbal Aspectual Categories and Temporal Adverbials in Russian // Journal of Slavic linguistics. Vol.11. N.11. 2003. Pp. 199-215.

## **The Communicative Effects of the Interaction between the Verbal Aspectual Categories and Temporal Adverbials in Russian<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

In the context of the verbal aspectual forms referring to the situations which came to an end before the moment of speaking, the Russian adverbial *davno* 'long ago' is always the rheme of the sentence. The rhematic bias of *davno* is accounted for by the semantic parameter 'remote in time from the speaker'. Meanwhile, in the context of the verbal aspectual forms referring to the situations which persist up to and including the moment of speaking, *davno* is not obligatorily the rheme. Another semantic parameter which influences the theme-rheme structure is the meaning 'below the norm'. The parameter 'below the norm' determines the communicative function of the Russian adverbial *nedavno* 'recently': it is the rheme in the context of the verbal forms which refer to situations taking place over a long period of time. Thus, I hope to demonstrate that whether an adverbial belongs to the theme of a sentence or it can solely be the rheme may depend on the meaning of the verbal categories.

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The goal of this paper is to analyse the interaction of three semantic components of Russian sentences: the verbal categories of tense and aspect; the temporal adverbials *davno* 'long ago' and *nedavno* 'recently'; the inherent aspectual, i.e. semantic aspectual, properties of verbs, namely I single out a class of verbs which denote very long (extra-long) situations (*to live, to build a house*) in contrast to the verbs which denote comparatively short situations (*to eat*).

I will concentrate on the consequences of this interplay which are significant for the theme-rheme structure. I argue that the communicative roles of the adverbials *davno* 'long ago' and *nedavno* 'recently' are influenced by the tense and aspect of the verb. In other words, I hope to demonstrate that whether an adverbial belongs to the theme of a sentence or it can solely be the rheme may depend on the aspectual parameters of the verb. The words and constructions, which in the majority of contexts are the rhemes (themes), will be called below the words with rhematic (thematic) polarity.

In Section 1, the main notions and terms that concern the communicative structure of the sentence (Subsection 1.1) and the aspectual categories of the Russian verbs which are relevant to the analysis presented below (Subsection 1.2) are introduced and discussed.

In Section 2, I address specific communicative roles of the Russian adverbial *davno* in a variety of temporal and aspectual contexts. Subsection 2.1 demonstrates that certain meanings expressed by lexical items, besides *davno*, regularly display the same communicative properties, as *davno*.

Section 3 deals with the communicative roles of the Russian adverbial *nedavno* 'recently'.

In Section 4, I hope to explain why words and constructions with similar meanings can have different communicative parameters.

In Section 5, I provide a variety of standard contexts which violate the regularities discussed in Sections 2-4.

## **1. Notions and Terms**

Since my analysis concerns the interplay between the communicative structure of the sentence and the aspectual categories of verbs, I will outline very briefly the communicative and aspectual terminology to be employed below.

### **1.1. The Communicative Structure: Notions and Terms**

I use the terms 'theme' and 'rheme' to refer to the communicative structure of a statement, in spite of the fact that the terms 'topic' and 'focus' or 'topic' and 'comment' are more widely employed in linguistic literature, cf., for instance, Dahl 1974; Erteschik-Shir 1998, and references cited therein. I prefer the term 'rheme' because the term 'focus' is often used not only to refer to the focus of a sentence paradigmatically opposed to the topic, but also to refer to the focus of the contrast (Rooth 1985), or to the interrogative word (Kuno 1982), and, therefore, seems to be confusing.

I define the rheme as a component of the communicative structure which forms a speech act of a statement, i.e. conveys a certain illocutionary meaning. The rheme is marked by a certain (falling) tone. Reciprocally, the theme is the component of a statement which cannot form a statement as a speech act of a definite type. The theme attends the rheme and serves as the starting point of a speech act. There exist statements without a theme. Hence, the theme is a non-obligatory component of a statement. So, I presume that the speech act is a non-elementary entity, i.e. it can consist of both the illocutionary proper and the non-illocutionary proper communicative components. A statement, for instance, consists of the illocutionary proper component, namely the rheme, and the non-illocutionary proper component, the theme. Other types of speech acts, besides statements, – interrogatives and imperatives – can also comprise the illocutionary proper and the non-illocutionary communicative components. In the question *Where did John get acquainted to Mary?*, for instance, I distinguish the interrogative component *where did*, and the non-interrogative component *John get acquainted to Mary*. So, the communicative structure of a sentence, the 'theme-rheme structure' of a statement in particular, is viewed as a notion which refers to the illocutionary function of a sentence.

In addition, the crucial point is that the notion of 'communicative structure' should be distinguished from that of 'information structure' which is also widely used to apply to the theme-rheme (topic-focus) structure of a statement. The term 'communicative structure' is employed below to refer to the illocutionary meanings of a sentence, while the term 'information

structure' – rather to the notions of 'activation', or 'given' and 'new'. It is widely believed that, despite the fact that the exponents of, for instance, the given and the theme are very often, though not always, the same, the given and the theme, on the one hand, or the new and the rheme, on the other hand, represent different pairs of notions: the pair 'theme/rheme' refers to the structure of a speech act, while the pair 'given/new' rather refers to the states of mind of the interlocutors at a definite point of a discourse.

So, the given and the theme or the new and the rheme are conceptually different notions, let alone the fact that the theme-rheme and the given-new articulation can yield different results. To give an example of a rheme which definitely refers to discourse-old (given, activated) information: *I saw a beautiful coat and a fur-coat at a department store yesterday. After some consideration I decided to buy the fur coat.* In the second sentence, *fur coat* is a part of the rheme, despite the fact that it occurs in the previous sentence.

The notion of 'communicative contrast' is also employed below. The contrast presupposes 1) the existence of a set associated with a contrasted item and a choice made within this set; and 2) rejecting all possibilities other than the contrasted one<sup>2</sup>. The contrast is combinable with both themes and rhemes and with the communicative components of interrogatives and imperatives as well. The contrastive accents in contrastive themes or contrastive rhemes are more intensive than those of simple themes or rhemes, cf., for instance, Svetozarova 1982: 51 and references cited therein<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed definition of the contrast is given in Yanko 1999a: 35; 2001: 47.

<sup>3</sup> The contrast expressed by lexemes does not require that the constituents be intensive.

The crucial point here is that the notion of 'contrast' and the notion of 'contrastive focus' should be distinguished one from the other. There is a considerable body of literature that assumes that the term 'contrastive focus' can be used to denote any contrastive component, not only a contrastive focus, but a contrastive topic as well, and also contrastive components of interrogatives and imperatives. Hence, the term 'contrastive focus' seems to be misleading. I claim that the contrast is an autonomous linguistic parameter which can be combined with both the illocutionary proper and the non-illocutionary proper components of speech acts. Composition of the contrast with the illocutionary/non-illocutionary proper components gives contrastive components of speech acts: either contrastive rhemes (foci), or contrastive themes (topics)<sup>4</sup>, or contrastive components of interrogatives and imperatives<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.2. The Aspect: Notions and Terms

In discussing the meanings of verbal categories the following terms are used.

The term 'aorist' refers to past situations viewed in their completeness and without any obvious result at the moment of speaking:

(1) Konferencija            sostoyalas'            v Pariže            v 1997 godu

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<sup>4</sup> To give an example of a contrastive theme: *His NEW book is much better than the previous one.* Here, the word *new* is a contrastive theme; the fragment *is much better than the the previous one* is the rheme, while the remainder belongs to the theme.

<sup>5</sup> To give an example of contrastive components of an imperative: *Give a BONE to a dog, <not a flower>.* In this example, *a bone* is a contrastive component of the imperative, while in the

Conference<sub>NOM</sub>                      took place<sub>PFV.PAST</sub>                      in Paris                      in 1997  
year<sup>6</sup>

'The conference took place in Paris in 1997'.

Sentence (1) means that the conference is viewed by the speaker as an entire event which ended before the moment of speaking<sup>7</sup>.

The term 'past progressive' refers to situations which lasted during some period in the past and came to an end before the moment of speaking:

(2)    Konferencija proxodila                      s 20                      po 25                      ijul'a  
Conference    took place<sub>IPFV.PAST</sub>                      from 20<sup>th</sup>                      up to 25<sup>th</sup>                      of July

'The conference was being held from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July'.

Sentence (2) means that the conference started in the past, lasted for 6 days and ended before the moment of speaking<sup>8</sup>.

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sentence A *BONE* - give to a dog, <and a flower - to a policeman> the word a bone is a contrastive non-imperative component of the imperative sentence.

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviations:

IMPR – Imperative

IPFV – Imperfective

INF – Infinitive

NEG – Negation

NOM – Nominative

PAST – Past

PFV – Perfective

PRES – Present

PTCP – Participle

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of 'aorist' is one of the two main meanings which the Russian Perfective aspect has in the Past tense. Another meaning of the Russian Past Perfective, namely, that of 'perfect', is exemplified by sentence (5) below.

<sup>8</sup> The meaning 'past progressive' is one of the meanings which the Russian Imperfective aspect has in the Past tense. Another meaning of the Russian Past Imperfective, namely, that of 'general factual', is exemplified by sentence (3) below.

The term 'general factual' refers to situations viewed as facts, i.e. as examples, or precedents of events:

(3) Ja      ezdil                      v      Pariž  
I<sub>NOM</sub>   travelled<sub>IPFV.PAST</sub>   in    Paris  
'I travelled to Paris'

Sentence (3) means that in my life I had a chance at least once (may be, more than once) to visit Paris. Since the Imperfective aspect in the Past tense denotes here a situation which proves to be a fact, it definitely means that an event took place and ended: at the moment of speaking it is viewed by the speaker as a part of his/her memory or experience. Similarly to the aorist and the past progressive, the general factual also denotes a situation which took place and terminated before the moment of speaking.

The term 'present progressive' refers to situations which are in progress at the moment of speaking:

(4) Konferencija proxodit                      vo      Dvorce  
kongressov  
Conference   is taking place<sub>IPFV.PRES</sub>           in    Palace      congress  
'The conference is taking place at the Palace of congresses'

Sentence (4) means that the conference began before the moment of speaking and by the moment of speaking it is still in progress.



The term 'perfect' refers to past situations which have an obvious result at the moment of speaking:

(5) On zasnul, <ne šumi >  
He<sub>NOM</sub> has fallen asleep<sub>PFV.PAST</sub> <not<sub>NEG</sub> make  
noise<sub>IMPR</sub> >

'He has fallen asleep, <be quiet>'

When a sentence like (5) occurs within a context which does not explicitly cancel the results of having been asleep<sup>9</sup>, it means that one fell asleep some time ago and is being asleep at the moment of speaking.

Strictly speaking, when sentence (5) is viewed irrespective of any context (for instance, without a context similar to the one given here in the angle brackets), it can have two meanings: that of the perfect with an obvious result of an action at the moment of speaking ('He has fallen asleep') and that of the aorist with no obvious results at the moment of speaking ('He fell asleep').

Consequently, the Past Perfective verbal form for most (not all) Russian verbs can denote either a situation which has some results of an action that occurred or a situation whose results are not obvious at the moment of speaking. This ambiguity can cause some difficulties in analyzing the parameters of temporal adverbials, because the first meaning refers to a situation which is connected with the moment of speaking, while the second

meaning refers to a situation which is not connected with the moment of speaking<sup>10</sup>. It is shown below in section 2 that a group of verbs can be singled out which in the Past tense of the Perfective aspect have only meaning of the aorist, i.e. they cannot have the perfect meaning. These unambiguous verbs can serve as a helpful context for analysing the parameters of the temporal adverbial *davno*. These verbs have the meaning of 'to happen': *proizojtj* 'to happen', *slučit's'a* 'to occur'.

For references concerning the definitions of aspectual meanings, the general factual as the most peculiar instance of the Russian Imperfective aspect in particular, cf. Maslov (1962: 24, 30; 1984: 17, 19-20); Comrie (1976: 12, 113), Glovinskaja (1982: 116-44; 1989: 83); Padučeva (1996: 19-23, 43-47, 61-65); Šatunovskij (1996: 321-33), and references cited therein.

## **2. *Davno* 'long ago; for a long time'**

The problem of the communicative properties of lexical items is widely addressed in the literature devoted to various so-called focus particles, cf. König 1991, and references cited therein; cf. also Ducrot 1973; Wilkinson 1993; Partee 1994: 364; Hajičová and Sgall 1996: 7; Dryer 1996: 492-94. It seems that the domain of communicatively dependent words is much broader than solely focus particles. Moreover, in Yanko (1999a: 36-38) I argue that most focus particles, like *only*, should be distinguished from the words, like *rarely*,

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<sup>9</sup> An example of a context which could cancel the result of an action expressed by the verb is this: *On bystro zasnul, no skoro prosnuls'a* 'He fell asleep very quickly but got up soon'.

<sup>10</sup> In other words, the Russian Past tense of the Perfective aspect can have both the English Past Perfect and the English Past as its counterparts.

the latter being the word of rheme, or the word of focus, while the former – rather the word of contrast, than the word of rheme. I maintain that the word *only* is not the word of rheme because it can easily enter a theme, e.g.: *Only after Mao's death did Dan get an opportunity to fulfill his plans concerning China reformation*<sup>11</sup>. Here, *only after Mao's death* is the theme, and the remainder – the rheme of the analysed sentence. However, the communicative interpretation of the last sentence, given here in the written form, is not the only one. Meanwhile, the interpretation provided is sufficient to demonstrate that *only* does not always enter a rheme. Thus, I argue that the words like *only* and the words like *rarely* belong to different classes. In this paper, I address the words of the latter class. I call this class the words of rheme. My goal is to show that the Russian word *davno* is the rheme of the sentence, although not in all aspectual contexts, but only in some certain semantic types of them.

My point of departure for analysing the interaction between aspect and the temporal adverbial *davno* is a phenomenon pointed out by E.V. Padučeva (1997: 265). She noted that in the context of the general factual meaning of the Russian Imperfective aspect the adverbial *davno* is always the rheme of a sentence. In the following examples, I mark the accented word of the rheme (the rheme proper) with capital letters:

- |     |                      |                           |       |           |          |
|-----|----------------------|---------------------------|-------|-----------|----------|
| (6) | Vas'a                | prinimal                  | svojo | lekarstvo | DAVNO    |
|     | Vas'a <sub>NOM</sub> | took <sub>IPFV.PAST</sub> | his   | medicine  | long ago |

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<sup>11</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I give here English examples. Anyway, the distinction between the words of rheme (or the words of focus) and the words of contrast (generally called focus particles) is completely applicable to Russian and to most – likely, all – other languages.

'The fact of Vas'a's having taken his medicine was long ago'.

Naturally, *davno* is the rheme irrespective of its linear position in a sentence. In (6a), for instance, *davno* is the rheme (and is marked by a specific rhematic – falling – tone whose properties I do not discuss here<sup>12</sup>) in spite of the fact that it is not sentence-final. Meanwhile, sentences (6b-c), where *davno* is not the rheme, are ungrammatical.

(6a) Vas'a DAVNO      priginal      svojo lekarstvo  
Vas'a long ago      took<sub>IPFV.PAST</sub>      his      medicine

'The fact of Vas'a's having taken his medicine was long ago'

(6b) \*Vas'a davno      priginal      svojo LEKARSTVO  
Vas'a long ago      took      his      medicine

(6c) \*Davno      Vas'a priginal      svojo LEKARSTVO  
long ago      Vas'a took      his      medicine

The adverbial *nedavno* 'recently', in contrast, is not obligatorily the rheme in a similar context:

(7a) Vas'a nedavno      priginal      svojo LEKARSTVO

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<sup>12</sup> For details, see the description of the Russian prosody in the terminology of the Russian tradition, represented by the works of E.A.Bryzgunova (cf., for instance, *Russkaja grammatika* 1982: 97-122).

Vas'a recently took his medicine

'Not long ago the fact of Vas'a's having taken his medicine took place'

(7b) Nedavno Vas'a priginal svojo LEKARSTVO

Recently Vas'a took his medicine

'Not long ago the fact of Vas'a's having taken his medicine took place'

The contrast between *davno* and *nedavno* leads to an assumption that the rhematic polarity of *davno* in the context of the general factual stems from semantic co-ordination between *davno* and the general factual: both denote a situation remote in time from the moment of speaking. The adverbial *davno* denotes a past situation by definition, while a verb in the general factual meaning also refers to a past situation because this situation has proved to be a fact. If a situation is viewed as a fact it means that this situation has already terminated and nothing remains of it, except for memory and experience. Meanwhile, the semantics of remoteness from the speaker is more consistent with the communicative role of the rheme than with the communicative role of the theme, which serves as the starting point of a speech act. Hence, we may hypothesise that the general factual meaning is not the only context in which *davno* is obligatorily the rheme, because some other temporal and aspectual verb forms referring to the past and not related to the moment of speaking could provide a similar context for *davno*. We can verify this hypothesis by analysing sentences with *davno* in a variety of aspectual contexts. Consider sentences (8)-(11).

(8) Eto slučilos' s Vasey DAVNO  
this<sub>NOM</sub> happened<sub>PFV.PAST</sub> with Vas'a long ago  
'It happened to Vas' a long ago'

(9) Eto proisxodilo v našem gorode DAVNO  
this held<sub>IPFV.PAST</sub> in our town long ago  
'It was happening in our town long ago'

(10) On davno SPIT  
He long ago sleep<sub>IPFV.PRES</sub>  
'He has been sleeping for a long time'

(11) On davno ZASNUL  
He long ago sleep<sub>PFV.PAST</sub>  
'He has fallen asleep long ago and is asleep at the moment of speaking,  
i.e. he has been sleeping for a long time'

Sentence (8) displays the aorist meaning of the verb, while sentence (9) – the past progressive meaning. Consequently, sentences (8), (9) and sentence (6), which, as we have noted above, displays the general factual meaning of the Imperfective aspect, denote situations prior to the moment of speaking. However, sentence (10) displays the present progressive meaning, while sentence (11) – the perfect meaning of the Perfective aspect. These two

sentences denote situations that persist up to and including the moment of speaking. Thus, the analysis of sentences (6) and (8)-(11) demonstrates that if some situation held long ago and came to an end, as in examples (6), (8) and (9), the adverbial *davno* can solely be the rheme of the sentence. However, if a situation began before the moment of speaking and is continuing at the moment of speaking, as in examples (10) and (11), *davno* can be not solely the rheme, but a component of a theme as well.

The question would then arise as to whether there are any ambiguous instances of aspectual forms: if some aspectual form can denote either a situation that persists up to and including the moment of speaking or a situation that took place and ended before the moment of speaking, then it means that there are no reliable means to distinguish between the rhematic bias of *davno*, at least within this aspectual word form.

As we have already mentioned in section 1.2, an ambiguous aspectual form is the Perfective aspect in the Past tense, because most Russian verbs in the Past Perfective can denote both the meaning of the perfect and the meaning of the aorist. Meanwhile, the meaning of the perfect, which denotes a situation in the past whose results are still valid at the moment of speaking (cf., for instance, one of the meanings of the Russian word form *zasnul* 'fell asleep before the moment of speaking and is asleep at the moment of speaking') inevitably neutralises the specific rhematic polarity of *davno*: in the context of the perfect meaning of the verb *davno* is not obligatorily the rheme.

Recognizing a class of verbs which in most contexts have only the meaning of the aorist helps to overcome this obstacle. (The context in which

these words acquire the perfect meaning is limited to the cases of contrast<sup>13</sup>). This class is represented by the Perfective verbs with the meaning of that something occurs, happens or takes place: *slučít's'a* 'to occur', *proizojti* 'to happen', *vyjti* 'to have a chance to happen', *imet' mesto* 'to take place', *prikl'učít's'a* 'to happen'. In most contexts when in the Past tense Perfective these verbs denote situations that happened and about the consequences of which nothing is communicated by the speaker. These verbs could be called the 'aoristic' verbs. I used one of these verbs in the example (8) above to exclude possible in the case of any other verb of a different semantic category the meaning of the perfect. Hence, the additional result of the analysis fulfilled is that a semantic category of verbs which do not have the meaning of the perfect is singled out.

To conclude, the rhematic polarity of *davno* is accounted for by the semantics of temporal distance between the narrated event and the time of speaking.

There is another communicative idiosyncrasy of *davno*: it is never the theme<sup>14</sup>. This phenomenon was also observed by E. V. Padučeva (1997: 265). It is another manifestation of the meaning of temporal distance between the narrated event and the speaker: what is distant from the speaker cannot be

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<sup>13</sup> A violating effect is the communicative contrast which can provide the aoristic verbs with the perfective meaning: *Smotri, to, čego my tak bojalis, deystvitel'no PROIZOŠLO* 'Look, you can see that what we were afraid so very much of took place, indeed'. Here, the verb *proizošlo* 'happened' is the contrastive rheme of the sentence. It means that one can see the results of an event that was expected with fear and really took place. The contrast is a strong violating context which overrides the semantic and, as it will be demonstrated below in section 4, the communicative regularities.

<sup>14</sup> In sentences with the sentence-initial *davno*, *davno* is not the theme but a fragment of the rheme. Thus, in *Davno ne prixodil Ippolit* 'Hippolytus has not been visiting us for a long time' the sentence-initial *davno* is not the theme and cannot bear a specific rising tone followed by



the starting point of an utterance – the theme. Moreover, as it has already been demonstrated, when sustained by the verbal form *davno* is not only non-thematic, but also obligatorily rhematic.

Traditionally, it is said that the Russian word *davno* has two meanings, cf. Kačalova, Izrailevič (1959: 390), Padučeva (1997: 257-64). These meanings are treated as equivalents to the English *long ago* (cf. examples (6), (8)-(9)) and *for a long time* (cf. examples (10)-(11)). The first of the two meanings refers to the situations which held a long time ago and ended, the second one refers to the situations which began long ago and persist to the moment of speaking. I maintain that the meaning of *davno* is entire and that the difference between two uses is manifested in Russian by the aspectual parameters of the verbs.

The meaning of the Russian word *davno* can be defined as follows: '*Davno* refers the beginning of the situation to some distant temporal point before the moment of speaking'. Hence, in the context of aspectual forms which denote a situation which took place and ended before the moment of speaking *davno* has the meaning of 'long ago': the total meaning is then that 'the situation started long ago and terminated in due time before the moment of speaking'. Meanwhile, in the aspectual contexts denoting situations which began before the moment of speaking and persist up to and including the moment of speaking, *davno* has the meaning of 'for a long time': the total meaning is then that 'a situation started long ago before the moment of speaking and is still taking place at the moment of speaking, i.e. that the situation under consideration has been taking place for a long time'.

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a pause as in a similar sentence with *nedavno*: *Nedavno prixodil Ippolit* 'Recently, Hippolytus

## 2.1. Adverbials with rhematic polarity

To demonstrate that *davno* is not the only adverbial with rhematic polarity, we can address another pair of adverbials that have a similar semantic opposition and the same communicative distinction as *davno* and *nedavno*, namely the Russian antonymous adverbials *daleko* 'far' and *nedaleko* 'not far, close':

(12) Nedaleko    ots'uda                    raspoložen    AEROPORT  
Not far                    from here    located<sub>PTCP</sub>    airport  
'Not far from here, an airport is located'

(13) \*Daleko    ots'uda                    raspoložen    AEROPORT  
Far                    from here    located                    airport

(14) Aeroport    raspoložen    DALEKO    ots'uda  
airport                    located                    far                    from here  
'The airport is located far from this place'

It should be noted that the opposition *daleko* vs. *nedaleko*, in contrast to *davno* vs. *nedavno*, does not require that the aspectual form be taken into account

because *daleko* and *nedaleko* concern the spatial distance and not the temporal one.

Sentences (12)-(14) with *daleko/nedaleko* display similar communicative properties as those of the sentences with *davno/nedavno*. Examples with *davno/nedavno* and *daleko/nedaleko* show that 'remoteness from the speaker' tends to be embodied in the rheme. The peculiarity of *davno* in contrast to *daleko* consists in the fact that *davno* is obligatorily the rheme of a sentence only if semantically sustained by appropriate forms of tense and aspect.

Remoteness from the speaker is not the only factor that influences the theme-rheme structure of the sentence. A rhematising effect also stems from the meaning of 'deviation from the norm', particularly the meaning 'less than the norm', while the meaning 'above the norm' – at least in some cases – seems to include observing the norm and does not exhibit a pronounced rhematising effect<sup>15</sup>. The Russian adverbial *redko* 'rarely', for instance, is almost always the rheme of the sentence<sup>16</sup>, while *často* 'often' can be also the theme<sup>17</sup>. Similar properties are exhibited by the pair of adverbials *mnogo* 'much, many' and *malo* 'few', of which only *malo* has a rhematic polarity, cf. Bulygina and Shmelev (1990). Thus, 'above the norm' is conceptualised in Russian as more normal than 'less than the norm'. We will get back to the

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<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, lexemes whose definitions include the component 'above the norm' split into different classes which behave differently. The meaning of 'too above the norm', for instance, does not presume observing the norm. A variety of deontic and hedonistic values connected with the notion of 'norm' can set up different classes of lexemes which denote various types of deviation from the norm.

<sup>16</sup> Regular exceptions, when it is not the rheme, are listed below in section 5.

<sup>17</sup> The rhematic polarity of *redko* in contrast to *davno* is indifferent to the aspectual form of the verb because the semantics of *redko* does not refer to the moment of speaking. Rather, the rhematic polarity of *redko* stems from some other semantic reasons, namely, from the meaning of 'few, less than the norm'.

deviation from the norm and its rhematising effect when discussing the communicative function of the adverbial *nedavno* in section 3.

### 3. *Nedavno* 'recently'

The adverbial *nedavno* 'recently' has its own communicative properties which also correlate with tense and aspect of the verb. The communicative function of *nedavno* depends not only on the tense and aspect of a verb but also on the inherent semantic category of the verb: if a verb denotes a situation taking place over a very long period (e.g., being expressed by the constructions *to live*, *to build a house*) and appears in the meaning of the present progressive, the adverbial *nedavno* must be the rheme:

(15) On živet v našem dome NEDAVNO  
He<sub>NOM</sub> lives<sub>SIPFV.PRES</sub> in our house recently  
'He has been living in our house only for a short time'

(15a) \*On nedavno živet v našem DOME  
He recently lives in our house

Thus, *nedavno* is obligatorily the rheme when the situation being described is normally very long, such as *žit* 'to live' or *stroit' dom* 'to build a house', because *nedavno* is inconsistent with an event that takes place over a

long period of time. It is noteworthy that the adverbial *davno* is, on the contrary, not obligatorily a rheme in the context similar to (15a), cf. (15b):

(15b) On    davno        živet        v        našem        DOME  
         He    long ago      lives<sub>IPFV.PRES</sub>    in        our        house  
         'He has been living in our house for a long time'

The rhematic bias of *nedavno* is displayed solely in the context of very long actions in the present progressive, while the forms with the perfect meaning of the same verbs eliminate the communicative idiosyncrasy of *nedavno*. It is but natural: in the perfect meaning, when an action has terminated and its result is obvious, a new period of time begins. It is a period of time, in which the result of the described action is taking effect. Since the duration of the result is indeterminate in regard to any possible norm, *nedavno* is not obligatorily the rheme. Consider the pair of sentences (16) and (17) with *nedavno*. In sentence (16) the construction *stroit' dom* 'to build a house', which denotes a relatively long action, appears in the Imperfective aspect in its progressive meaning, while in (17) the verb *stroit'* 'to build' appears in the Perfective aspect *postroit'* with the perfect meaning 'to have built'. Sentence (16) demands that *nedavno* be rhematic, while in (17) *nedavno* is a fragment of a theme:

(16) On    stroit        dom    NEDAVNO  
         He    build<sub>IPFV.PRES</sub>    house recently

'He has been building a house for quite a short time'

- (17) On    *nedavno*    *postroil*    DOM  
He    recently    *build*<sub>PFV.PRES</sub>    house  
'Recently he has built a house'

Thus, *nedavno* is obligatorily rhematised in a paradoxical context, which is absolutely natural for the phenomenon of rhematisation. The verb denotes an inherently long action or situation and appears in its progressive form. It contradicts *nedavno* which means that the situation has been taking place for a short time.

#### **4. *Davno* 'long ago' and *davnym-davno* 'ages ago'**

The communicative behaviour of the two adverbials with very similar meanings *davno* and *davnym-davno* 'ages ago' demonstrates that the correlation between lexical meanings and communicative functions is not straightforward. The question would arise as to why *davno* and *davnym-davno* have different communicative functions. Contrasting *davno* to *davnym-davno* evidences that *davnym-davno* has a specific introductory function (cf. Apres'an 1988) and tends to be the theme of a sentence. Meanwhile, *davno* cannot be a theme. Therefore, *davnym-davno* is a classical start of a sentence, despite its meaning of 'distant from the speaker'. I maintain that *davnym-davno* holds some additional component of meaning which changes the communicative

function of *davnym-davno* in comparison with *davno*. This additional meaning is the existential quantifier which tends, as is generally accepted, to enter the theme of a sentence, cf., for instance, Pađučeva 1974: 87-88. Thus, the sentence type *Davnym-davno P* can be defined as follows:

*Davnym-davno P*  $\cong$  'There exists an event P such that the temporal point at which P takes place was long before the moment of speaking'

In contrast to the sentence type *Davnym-davno P*, the tentative definition of the sentence type *P davno* can be defined as follows:

*P davno*  $\cong$  'The temporal point at which the event P takes place was long before the moment of speaking'

Similarly, the rhematic adverbial *redko* 'rarely' has a partner with a similar meaning *izredka* 'rarely, sometimes' which, likewise *davnym-davno*, is not obligatorily a rheme:

- (18) *Izredka*      *k nam prixodit*      *VAS'A*  
rarely          to us   *come*<sub>IPFV.PRES</sub>   *Vas'a*  
'Sometimes Vas'a comes to see us'

The tentative definition of *Izredka P* sounds as follows:

*Izredka P*  $\cong$  'There exist events P such that the temporal points at which P take place are not frequent'

Meanwhile, the sentence type *P redko* has a slightly different definition:

*P redko*  $\cong$  'The temporal points at which the events P take place are not frequent'

A similar – "existential" – explanation could be applied to the communicative distinctions between the Russian rhematic word *malo* 'few' and neutral *neskol'ko* 'a few' or *nemnogo* 'few'; concerning the Russian words *malo* and *neskol'ko* see Bulygina and Shmelev 1990, the French *peut* and *un peut* see Ducrot 1973.

To conclude, the meaning of the existential quantifier, which enters the definitions of *davnym-davno*, *kogda-to davno* 'once long ago'<sup>18</sup>, *izredka* and *neskol'ko*, neutralises the rhematising power of the lexical meanings expressed by the words with close semantics *davno*, *redko* and *malo*.

## 5. Violating contexts

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<sup>18</sup> About *kogda-to davno* cf. my thesis Yanko 1999b: 51. Barbara Partee (in personal communication) also has noticed that the communicative properties of *davnym-davno* are shared by *kogda-to davno*.



Tendencies displayed by the words with rhematic polarity (as well as the words with thematic polarity<sup>19</sup>, not discussed in the present paper) can be violated by some phenomena common to all sets of words with asymmetrical communicative function. I describe some of such phenomena for a reader not to consider examples, in which *davno* or *redko* either are not rhemes (as in examples (19) and (20) below) or do not bear a specific (falling) rhematic tone (as in example (21)), as disconfirming the basic hypothesis.

The most common context that overrides the rhematic effect of the words like *redko* or *davno* is the contrast. In sentence (19), for example, *redko* is not the rheme because (19) contains the contrastive constituent *kino* 'cinema':

(19) Vas'a tol'ko v KINO xodit redko, <a v teatr – každuju nedel'u>  
 Vas'a only to cinema go seldom, <while to theatre – every week>

'It is to the cinema where Vas'a goes rarely, while to the theatre he goes every week'

In the last sentence (19) the contrastive constituent *kino* is a contrastive rheme. In sentences with contrastive themes the neutralising function of contrast is no less effective. In sentence (20), which contains a contrastive theme *kino*, the word form *redko* is also not the rheme, nevertheless the sentence does not lose grammaticality:

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<sup>19</sup> To give an example of items with thematic polarity: Engl. *latterly*; *nowadays*; *if*-clauses (cf.

- (20) Esli on redko xodit v kino, eto ne beda,  
 If he rarely goes to the cinema it is not a problem  
 <a esli on redko xodit v shkolu, eto men'a ogorchaet>  
 'If he rarely goes to the cinema, it is not a great problem, <but if he  
 rarely goes to school, it upsets me>'

Another significant overriding context is represented by sentences consisting solely of rhemes. In such sentences the accent-bearers obey some rules which are irrespective of the individual communicative properties of words; about the choice of accent-bearers see Yanko (1999a: 40-45). In sentence (21), for instance, the accent-bearer is not *redko* because (21) is not divided into a theme and a rheme<sup>20</sup>:

- (21) <– Počemu ty takoj grustnyj?> – MAŠA redko prihodit  
 <– Why are you looking so glum?> – MAŠA rarely come  
 ' – Why are you looking so glum? – Masha comes rarely'

The last comment to be made here concerns contexts where rhemes consist of more than one syntactic constituent and where words like *davno* or *redko* are non-final in the linear order of a syntactically composite rheme. In such circumstances, words like *davno* or *redko* lose their peculiar rhematic (falling) tone, though they remain part of the rheme. Thus, in sentence (22)

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Haiman (1978)); Rus. *teper'* 'now'.

<sup>20</sup> I do not concentrate here on the sentences which consist solely of rhemes. There has been an extensive literature on this topic over the past years, cf., for instance, Hatcher 1956; Schmerling 1974; Kovtunova 1976: 180; Sasse 1987, 1995 and references cited therein.



meaning of 'recently' and (2) the verbs which refer to very long actions in progress.

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