

Russian spatial adverbs: corpus analysis

We suggest that linguistic properties of spatial words in Russian are to a large extent motivated by their pragmatic implicatures in their first, spatial meaning. We base our claims on the data extracted from the Russian National Corpus (RNC).

Semantic derivation displays the following difference between *blizkij* ‘close’ and *dalekij* ‘far’: in their temporal meaning, *blizkij* preferably refers to *budushchee* ‘future’ whereas *dalekij* is well-represented both with *proshloe* ‘past’ and *budushchee* ‘future’, although the former is more frequent. Thus, *blizkoe budushchee* and *blizkoe proshloe* are represented in RNC in more than 10:1 ratio, while the proportion of *dalekoe proshloe* and *dalekoe budushchee* in RNC is slightly more than 2:1. Interestingly, the expressions *dalekoe vremja*, *dalekie vremena* ‘lit.: far time, far times’ are almost universally interpreted in reference to the past. We suggest that the pragmatics of ‘close’ contains the implicature of possible future contact with the object and movement towards it – hence, the ‘future’ metaphoric extension. ‘Far’ can equally imply movement from or to the object, hence both temporal orientations. As for the relative dominance of the ‘far past’ over ‘far future’, it is motivated by our knowledge of the distant past as factual, and therefore more likely to be discussed.

‘Close’ and ‘far’ also display different morphosyntactic and collocational behavior. First, *blizko* ‘close’ can co-occur both with the preposition *k* ‘to, towards’ and *ot* ‘from’, but for *daleko* ‘far’ only the latter is possible: *blizko k domu* ‘lit.: close to home’, *blizko ot doma* ‘lit.: close from home’, *daleko ot doma* ‘far from home’, but not **daleko k domu* ‘lit.: far to home’. This is explained by the semantic and pragmatic properties of the spatial prepositions. *K* ‘to’ implies closeness, whether to the goal or to a certain location, and *ot* ‘from’ is neutral in this respect. Therefore, *k* occurs only with *blizko*, but *ot* with both. However, in the presence of a verb of coming, *blizko* can only allow preposition *k* before the name of the goal: *My podoshli blizko k domu* /**ot doma* ‘We came close to the house/ *from the house’.

There are adverbs that combine proximity and distance, such as *poodal* ‘at some distance’, *nepodaleku* ‘at not a very far distance’, *nevdaleke* ‘not far ahead’, *nedaleko* ‘not far’. They possess more complex pragmatics, and do not display morphosyntactic behavior entirely consistent with either ‘close’ or ‘far’ strategies.

Pragmatic implicatures can concern not only proximity and distance. Russian synonyms *blizko* ‘close’ and *rjadom* ‘near’ differ with respect to assessment: the former is neutral, while the latter implies convenience from the point of view of a potential user: *My zhivem rjadom, udobno xodit’ v gosti* ‘We live near (to each other), it is convenient to visit’. The human angle results in pragmatic shifts in the diminutive form *rjadyshkom* ‘close to each other, next to each other; lit. near-DIM’, which is normally used to refer to people sitting close, which makes them feel cozy and comfortable.