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# **PREDICATE AGREEMENT WITH THE QUANTIFIER PHRASE WITH APPROXIMATE QUANTITY**

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**PREDICATE AGREEMENT WITH THE QUANTIFIER PHRASE  
WITH APPROXIMATE QUANTITY<sup>2</sup>**

This study deals with predicate agreement with quantifier phrases that contain mentioning of an indefinite or an approximate quantity. The author analyzes the frequency of occurrence for singular and plural predicates based on data from the Russian National Corpus during the period of 2000-2010 and investigates factors that influence the predicate choice. The author concludes that the singular agreement is typical in the concerned expressions and is determined mainly by the meaning of indefiniteness. There are several factors that favor plural predicates. Also, some restrictions of predicate variation are revealed.

Key words: Russian morphosyntax, predicate agreement, quantifier expressions, approximate meaning phrases.

JEL Classification: Z.

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## Introduction

Russian predicate agreement with quantifier phrases demonstrates fluctuation with regards to number: *Desjat studentov pisali/pisalo test* (*Ten people took the test*). The rules of Russian predicate agreement have been studied by many researchers (Suprun 1965, Skoblikova 1969, Graudina et al 1976, Corbett 1998, Golub 2008, Rozental 2010, etc.). They have revealed grammatical, semantic, lexical, communicative, and stylistic conditions that define predicate choice. Attempts to work out a hierarchy of such conditions were made by a series of researchers (Skoblikova 1969, Corbett 1998, Sannikov 2008). The agreement hierarchy suggested by Corbett deserves special attention. He discovered two major factors affecting predicate choice: animacy and precedence (Corbett 1998:10-12, Corbett and Krasovitsky et al 2009: 112). Further investigation of the factors influencing predicate choice and an analysis measuring their influence and interaction are needed.

Another subject of research concerns correspondence between predicate plurality and subject properties (Skoblikova 2005:177, 197-198). Statistical studies show that the plural agreement is more probable with the numeral phrase: the plural predicate occurs twice as often as the singular predicate (Kuvshinskaya 2012, Suprun 1965:559-561, 566; Graudina et al 1976:28-29; Golub 2008:372; Rozental 2010:259-261). Plural forms have a lower occurrence with phrases containing *bolshinstvo* (Kuvshinskaya 2011, Graudina et al 1976:27, Golub 2008:371-372, Rozental 2010:257-259). The predicate is more often singular with phrases signifying approximate quantity, such as those with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc. (Graudina et al 1976:29-30, Rozental 2010:262), and with phrases containing *neskolko* (Suprun 1965:562-566, Graudina et al 1976:28, Rozental 2010:262). Thus, there is a reason to believe that predicate agreement with different phrases can be explained by the definiteness or indefiniteness of subject. This factor is considered as constitutive by Skoblikova (1969:467-477), while Melchuk mentions the effect of definiteness or indefiniteness on the agreement (1985: 373).

Under these circumstances, it is necessary to investigate sentences mentioning approximate quantity. As it appears, these expressions have yet to be the subject of any special study, although they were analyzed together with other expressions containing a quantifier phrase (Graudina et al 1976, Rozental 2010, Suprun 1965).

This paper aims to analyze the modern usage of expressions with an indefinite quantity and try to clarify whether predicate choice is strongly restricted in these sentences, what factors favor the plural predicate (meaning the uncharacteristic form), and whether there is any difference of predicate choice between expressions with *neskolko* (*some*) and those with *okolo* (*about*), *bolee* (*more than*), *menee* (*less than*), *svyshe* (*more than*), etc.

We attempt to describe and compare agreement regularities in two types of expressions:

- 1) Those with a quantifier phrase containing the number *neskolko*
- 2) Those with a quantifier phrase containing *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc.

Consider the following examples: *okolo sta chelovek*, *svyshe pjatidesjati modelej*, *bolee dvadcati variantov*.

For this study, we have used data from the Russian National Corpus (RNC). We used a random sample for the period of 2000-2010. The analysis is based on expressions with the following types of subjects:

- A quantifier phrase containing the number *neskolko* – 426 instances, plus 21 additional instances for analyzing special cases.
- A quantifier phrase with an approximate quantity meaning – 1408 instances. There are different kinds of phrases, including *okolo* – 539, *bolee* – 375, *menee* – 186, *svyshe* – 195, *primerno* – 65, *priblizitelno* – 6, and with the precedence of a noun (*Na ostanovke stojalo chelovek pjat* – *At the bus station there were about five people*) – 42

## Preliminaries

1. These two types of expressions have some important differences:
  - a. Semantic: expressions with *neskolko* refer to an indefinite and moderate quantity, while expressions with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc., mean an approximate, but still more definite quantity – the subject denotes a concrete number.
  - b. Grammatical: phrases with *neskolko* include words in the nominative case, while phrases with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, and *svyshe* contain no words in the nominative case.
2. It is necessary to take into account context factors in order to understand the rules of predicate variation. But if in expressions the singular-to-plural agreement ratio is not equal, then it is difficult to understand the influence of the factors because we need to discuss the predicate form's comparatively high or low probability. For example, if the singular-to-plural agreement ratio is 1:4, but the singular noun in the quantifier phrase yields the singular predicate in 40% of the expressions, then this factors should be regarded as favorable for the singular agreement. So we should consider the relative likelihood of predicate choice, which can be compared to the average frequency of singular or plural agreement. In order to do this, we need an index of probability, which is evaluated by the formula:

$$K \text{ (index)} = \frac{X \text{ (percentage of predicate forms influenced by a given factor)}}{Y \text{ (average percentage of predicate forms)}}$$

## General regularity of agreement

The RNC's data show that the singular and plural agreements are almost equally probable with quantifier phrase containing the word *neskolko*. Phrases with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc., have stronger preference for singular agreement: the singular predicate is chosen twice as frequently:

**Table 1. Predicate agreement with quantifier phrases containing *neskolko* or *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc.<sup>3</sup>**

Predicate number	Subject	
	<i>Neskolko</i>	<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, primerno, priblizitelno</i>
<b>Singular</b>	<b>56% (232)</b>	<b>67% (944)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>44% (180)</b>	<b>33% (464)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (412)</b>	<b>100% (1408)</b>

It is interesting to compare these data with the data given in Suprun (1965:566) and Graudina et al (1976:28-30) and derived from a body of Russian literary and journal texts written between 1960 and 1970.

According to Suprun, expressions with *neskolko* have singular agreement in two thirds of cases and plural in a third of all cases. As Graudina, Ickovich, and Katlinskaya provided, the singular agreement is seen in three quarters of cases cases (74.57% for singular versus 25.43% for plural).

Predicate agreement with phrases like “*okolo* milliona chelovek” is more likely singular (62.74%) than plural (37.26%) (Graudina et al 1976:29-30).

Thus, in modern speech the plural agreement with *neskolko* tends to be more common in comparison with 1960-1970. Agreement with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc., seems to not have changed. At the same time Rozental notes a tendency toward plural agreement with a quantifier

<sup>3</sup> In all tables, the data shown is in percentage points. The number of instances is indicated in brackets.

phrase, including phrases with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc. (Rozental 2010:262). The increase in plural agreement with *neskolko* must be a manifestation of the same tendency. However, we must take into account the fact that all the publishing during the period of 1960-1970, in contrast to modern publishing, was edited and corrected properly and therefore may not correctly represent real speech practice<sup>4</sup>.

The next question arising from the data is the reason for the obvious difference in the ratio of singular forms to plural forms in expressions with *neskolko* and in the expressions with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*. On the assumption that the definite or indefinite nature of the subject has an effect on the predicate choice, the highest possible percentage of singular agreement should be in expressions with *neskolko*, as they refer to an indefinite quantity, whereas phrases with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe* contain a number and quantity that are more precise:

- *Было опубликовано несколько статей на эту тему. – Было опубликовано около десяти статей на эту тему.*

*Bylo opublikovano neskolko statej na etu temu. - Bylo opublikovano okolo desjati statej na etu temu.*

*(A few articles on the problem were published).*

But it is evident that there are other factors besides indefiniteness that influence predicate choice.

First of all we, should specify the meaning of the singular predicate in the given types of expressions. The singular agreement is usually considered as a grammatical agreement (Rozental 2010:257). Undoubtedly, it is true for expressions with the noun *bolshinstvo*. The predicate repeats the subject forms and is singular neuter.

But is the agreement with a quantifier phrase the same? The numeral has neither gender nor number. “The singular agreement with numerals in Slavic has a very specific nature. This, in essence, is not the only number in the full sense of the word. The singular form of words that change in gender are invariably linked with the form of a neuter. The neuter singular predicate with numerals is, apparently, an expression of the fact that these words are outside the category of grammatical gender and number. The form of the singular is used in the function of neutral, not a number. Plural form is marked...,” as states Suprun. (1965:13). So the singular agreement with quantifier phrase containing *neskolko*, or *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, as well as with

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<sup>4</sup> The author wishes to thank the participants of the section “Stylistics: The dynamic processes in modern Russian and in fiction texts” of the XLI International Philological Conference in St. Petersburg, who suggested the influence of editorial correcting on the statistics results of 1960-1970.

quantifier phrases, like *bylo prodano pjatnadcat avtomobilej*, is not true full agreement, but grammatical neutralization, since the subject has no grammatical number and gender<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, there is a choice between semantic agreement (in plural) and neutral form (in singular). But it is unclear why the phrases with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe* agree with the neutral predicate more often.

It seems that the availability or lack of the Nominative case in the quantifier phrase is important. The Nominative form is present in phrases containing *neskolko*, as it marks the phrase as subject and serves as a reference point for the predicate. But there is no Nominative form in phrases containing *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe* and the predicate is governed by the whole phrase (*okolo desjati studentov*, *svyshe pjatidesjati rabot*). The statistics show a paradox: if a grammatical agreement is not possible, then the semantic agreement is labored. If the grammatical features of the subject are not determined, then the most reliable predicate choice is the neutral form – the verb in singular and neuter. Phrases with *neskolko* tend to be the Nominative of pronominal numeral; *neskolko* marks the group as the grammatical subject. So although *neskolko* has no grammatical gender and number, a semantic agreement (in plural) is likely.

Another reason stems from the morphological and syntactical properties of *neskolko*. This quantifier (as well as *dva*, *tri*, *chetyre*) agrees with a noun in plural in all cases except Nominative and Accusative: *у нескольких человек, к нескольким письмам* (*u neskolkih chelovek, k neskolkim pismam*). So we cannot share Corbett's position and have to suppose that *neskolko* behaves not like singular nouns, but like adjectives (Corbett, Krasovitsky et al 2009:118). The predicate agreement with *neskolko* should resemble the agreement with phrases, containing *dva*, *tri*, *chetyre*: plural agreement should be favorable because of adjective-like behavior (Corbett, Krasovitsky et al 2009:118). The indefinite meaning of *neskolko* blocked the spread of plural agreement, but plural choice is rather likely (especially in comparison with phrases containing *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*).

Now we turn to factors that influence agreement.

## **Animacy**

Corbett considers animacy of a subject as a one of two main factors (together with word order) that influence predicate choice (Corbett 1998:10-11). The researcher notes that animacy triggers the plural predicate, while inanimacy triggers the singular form (Gorbachevich

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<sup>5</sup> Skoblikova calls an agreement without formal coordination a relative grammatical agreement [Skoblikova 2005: 176], while Corbett uses the term “syntactic” for description of this agreement [Corbett 1998:3].

1978:193, Golub 2008:371). We find the same regularity in expressions with *neskolko* and *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc.

**Table 2. The influence of animacy on predicate agreement**

Predicate form	<i>Neskolko</i>		<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe etc</i>	
	Animate	Inanimate	Animate	Inanimate
<b>Singular</b>	<b>30% (32)</b>	<b>63% (199)</b>	<b>47% (294)</b>	<b>83% (650)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>70% (74)</b>	<b>37% (118)</b>	<b>53% (327)</b>	<b>17% (137)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (106)</b>	<b>100% (317)</b>	<b>100% (621)</b>	<b>100% (787)</b>

The ratio of plural and singular forms in the expressions with *neskolko* and under conditions of animacy is opposite to the ratio under conditions of inanimacy (approximately 2:1).

The data on the influence of inanimacy on the predicate agreement in expressions with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, etc., are more striking than the data on the influence of animacy. But we should take into account the preference of singular agreement with these phrases, so the 53% of plural predicates under the condition of animacy show the tendency to the plural agreement. The index of probability for plural forms is 1:6.

The preference of singular agreement under the condition of inanimacy seems to be obvious (83% plural forms), but the index is 1:2.

## Word order

Word order influences predicate agreement. If the predicate precedes the subject (quantifier phrase), then it is more likely to take the singular form. If the predicate follows the subject, then the plural agreement is preferable (Graudina et al 1976:28, 30; Corbett 1998: 11). Corbett proves that precedence is one of the most influential factors that conditions predicate agreement (Corbett 1998: 11-12, Krasovitsky and Corbett 2009: 112).

The data of RNC proves this rule. The peculiar feature is that the “subject – predicate” order has a really dramatic effect on predicate agreement with the quantifier phrase containing *neskolko* and *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc. The index of plural forms is 2 for the expressions with *neskolko*, and 2.2 for *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*. The frequency of singular forms is very low and instances with singular agreement for the most part have inanimated subjects:

- *С начала космической эры более двадцати космических аппаратов работало в окрестности, в атмосфере и на поверхности планеты.* («Наука и жизнь», 2006).



*S nachala kosmicheskoj ery bolee dvadcati kosmicheskuj apparatov rabotalo v okrestnosti, v atmosphere I na poverhnosti planety. (Nauka i zizn, 2006).*

*(Since the beginning of the space era, more than twenty space vehicles have been working in the area, in the atmosphere, and on the surface of the planet.)*

There are isolated instances with animated subject and singular agreement, where animacy is also possible, but not typical:

- *Несколько сотен тысяч женщин сидело в лагерях именно по этой статье. (Людмила Улицкая. Казус Кукоцкого (Путешествие в седьмую сторону света) // «Новый Мир», 2000).*

*Neskolko soten tysjach zenshin sidelo v lagerjah imenno po etoj statje (Ludmila Ulitckaya. Kasus Kukotckogo/Novyj mir, 2000).*

*(Some hundreds of thousand of women were in prison camp with these same charges).*

However, the largest part of the sample with *neskolko* and *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe*, etc., and that have the precedence of predicate and the singular agreement is more likely in these instances, but the probability of singular forms is not so high as the probability of plural predicate with the “subject – predicate” order. The index of singular form is 1:2 for the expressions with *neskolko*, 1:1 for *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.*

- *В санях сидело несколько человек, и среди них мальчик в полушубке. («Новый Мир», 2000).*

*V sanjah sidelo neskolko chelovek I sredi nih malchik v polushubke. (Novyj mir, 2000).*

*(There were some people in the sledge, and among them there was a boy in a short fur coat).*

So we can say that the “subject – predicate” order noticeably restricts the predicate choice to the plural in considerable expressions. But the influence of “predicate – subject” order is less. Really, the precedence does not determine the predicate choice but produces conditions for relatively free predicate choice (the subject governs the predicate form to a lesser degree). At the same time, the predicate, obviously, is coordinated with the nearest form of the noun phrase, that is *neskolko* and *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe* etc and the numeral. This is a condition of words and word combinations with the singular agreement, so the singular form is more likely but not necessary. Plural agreement is also possible.

*В многосторонних договорах участвуют несколько государств, принимающих взаимные обязательства. («Адвокат», 2003.09.01).*

*V mnogostoronnih dogovorah uchastvujut neskolko gosudarstv, primajushih vzaimnyje objazatelstva (Advokat, 2003.09.01).*

*(Several states take part in multi-lateral treaties that accept mutual obligations.)*

**Table 3. The influence of order on the predicate agreement**

Predicate form	<i>Neskolko</i>		<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe etc</i>	
	Precedence	Subject - predicate	Precedence	Subject - predicate
<b>Singular</b>	<b>69% (222)</b>	<b>12 (12%)</b>	<b>879 (76%)</b>	<b>66 (26 %)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>31% (101)</b>	<b>90 (88%)</b>	<b>271 (24 %)</b>	<b>192 (74 %)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (323)</b>	<b>100% (102)</b>	<b>100% (1150)</b>	<b>100% (258)</b>

### **Correlation of the RNC data with the agreement hierarchy**

The data of RNC in general agree with the agreement hierarchy (Corbett 1998: 11-12, Krasovitsky and Corbett 2009: 112). But expressions with *neskolko, okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.*, have some distinctive features:

**Table 4. Influence of animacy and word order on the predicate agreement with *neskolko***

Predicate form	Inanimate		Animate	
	Precedence	Subject – predicate	Precedence	Subject – predicate
<b>Singular</b>	<b>46% (195)</b>	<b>2% (8)</b>	<b>7% (28)</b>	<b>1% (3)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>15% (64)</b>	<b>12% (50)</b>	<b>7% (31)</b>	<b>10% (45)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>			

**Table 5. Influence of animacy and word order on predicate agreement with *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.***

	<b>Inanimate</b>		<b>Animate</b>	
<b>Predicate form</b>	Precedence	Subject – predicate	Precedence	Subject – predicate
<b>Singular</b>	<b>42% (596)</b>	<b>4% (51)</b>	<b>20% (278)</b>	<b>1% (20)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>6% (81)</b>	<b>4% (51)</b>	<b>13% (187)</b>	<b>10% (144)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>			

Probability of singular agreement can be shown by the scale<sup>6</sup>:

<Inanimate, precedence> – <animate, precedence> – <inanimate, “subject – predicate”>  
– <animate, “subject – predicate”>.

The likelihood of the singular predicate form decreases as we move from left to right along the scale.

This is relevant for all the considered expressions.

The probability of plural agreement is described by the scale:

*Neskolko*:

<Inanimate, precedence> – <inanimate, “subject – predicate”> — <animate, “subject – predicate”> – <animate, precedence>.

*Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe etc.*:

<Animate, precedence> – <animate, “subject – predicate”> – <inanimate, precedence> – <inanimate, “subject – predicate”>.

The likelihood of the plural predicate form decreases as we move from left to right along the scale.

The Corbett’s agreement hierarchy works well on the whole, but it does not work if there is precedence in the expressions. There is precedence and inanimacy in phrases with *neskolko*, because both types of agreement are likely in these cases. Obviously, precedence predominates in considered expressions. Instances with precedence makes up 75% of expressions with *neskolko*, and 81% of expressions with *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.* So the statistics lean towards precedence with singular or plural agreement.

Thus, we see that the general regularities of agreement, dependent from context factors, is limited by the typical context conditions of usage for particular phrases.

<sup>6</sup> The method of scale (hierarchy) is employed by Corbett [Corbett 1998:13, and other papers of Corbett].

On the whole, the singular agreement is conditioned first of all by word order: the singular predicate is used more if there is the precedence and the plural predicate is chosen if it follows the subject – quantifier phrase.

The plural agreement is more governed by animacy. Apparently the animacy as a labeled feature demands the labeled, not neutral predicate form of the plural. Expressions with *несколько* seem to be an exception: we see the plural agreement firstly in the instances with inanimates. But on the whole our data for *несколько* is much more often combined with the inanimated (the instances with inanimates are 75% of all the expressions with *несколько*). We probably need to check the results on a larger quantity of instances.

### Agreed attribute with the subject

Agreed attribute with the subject is usually considered as a factor that favors the plural agreement (Graudina et al 1976: 27, Gorbachevich 1978: 193, Rozental 2008: 258, Golub 2010: 371).

But the effect on predicate agreement depends on the position of the attribute – before or after the quantifier phrase. The agreed attribute that relates to the noun in the quantifier phrase has no influence on the predicate agreement, as the RNC data show.

The prepositive attribute to a phrase with *несколько* is always plural<sup>7</sup> and the predicate is only plural:

- ***Последние несколько сезонов жизни Малого театра провоцируют на размышления о какой-то качественно иной жизни одного из старейших русских театральных коллективов. («Театральная жизнь», 2004.06.28)***

*Poslednije neskolko sezonov zizni Malogo teatre provocirujut na razmyshlenija o kakoj-to kachestvenno inoj zizni odnogo is starejshih russkih teatralnyh kollektivov. (“Teatralnaya zizn”, 2004.06.28)*

*(The last seasons of Maly theater evoke reflection on a qualitatively different life of one of the oldest Russian theatre collectives.)*

- ***Ближайшие несколько дней внесли полную ясность в этот вопрос. (Борис Ефимов. Десять десятилетий (2000)).***

*Blizajshije neskolko dnejj vnesli polnuju jasnost v etot vopros (Boris Efimov. Desjat desjatiletij. (2000))*

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<sup>7</sup> The numeral *несколько* is declined as an adjective [Русская грамматика 80, п. 1379]. So it keeps some properties of adjectives and cannot lead the attribute. Thus the attribute agrees not with *несколько*, but with the entire phrase and mainly with the noun: «*следующие несколько страниц...*». The agreed attribute is plural (as the noun is plural).

*(The next several days made this question absolutely clear).*

In all the instances, the predicate follows the quantifier phrase, but in the case of precedence the plural agreement holds true.

We can make an experimental change of order: *\*Полную ясность в этот вопрос внесли ближайшние несколько дней* (The form “внесло” (“vneslo”) is not permissible).

In this and other instances it is impossible to use singular agreement, so the prepositive attribute requires the plural predicate independently of word order.

The prepositive attribute cannot be used with *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.*

The postpositive attribute has no influence on predicate agreement with phrases containing *neskolko*.

With regard to expressions with *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.*, the postpositive attribute favors a few with plural agreement.

*В его работе приняли участие более трехсот человек, представлявших традиционные религиозные общины всех стран Содружества Независимых Государств.* («Журнал Московской патриархии», 2004.04.26).

*V ego rabote prinjali uchastie bole trekhsot celovek predstavljavshih tradicionnyje releglosnyje obshiny vseh stran Sodruzestva Nezavisimyh gosudarstv* (“Zurnal Moskovskoj patriarhii”, 2004.04.26).

*(More than 300 people took part in its work, representing traditional religious communities from all countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.)*

The data show that singular agreement is a little more likely if there is a postpositive agreed attribute to the quantifier phrase. But, taking into account that singular predicate is much more typical for these expressions, we can say that singular agreement is less frequent if there is an agreed attribute. The index for plural agreement is 1:4.

So, the prepositive attribute has no influence on predicate agreement with the quantifier phrase, containing an indefinite number and favoring the plural agreement with the quantifier phrase, containing a cardinal number.

**Table 6. The influence of the agreed adjective on the predicate choice**

	<i>Neskolko</i>		<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.</i>
<b>Predicate form</b>	<b>Prepositive adjective</b>	<b>Postpositive adjective</b>	<b>Postpositive adjective</b>
<b>Singular</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>56% (14)</b>	<b>54 % (20)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>100% (14)</b>	<b>44% (11)</b>	<b>46 % (17)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>14 (100%)</b>	<b>100% (25)</b>	<b>100% (37)</b>

## Predicate type

Researchers and authors of literacy manuals mention that some types of predicate condition predicate agreement. For example, the predicate in passive (especially with the passive participle) is mainly put in the singular (Gorbachevich 1978:193), but the plural is also possible in modern speech (Graudina et al 1976:30). The predicate containing an adjective or noun is put in the plural (Golub 2008:372, Rozental 2010: 259).

Corbett, referring to Comrie, suggests a “Predicate Hierarchy” for Slavic languages: “verb < participle < adjective < noun”. The likelihood of semantic (plural) agreement increases as we move from left to right (Corbett 1998: 16-17).

The RNC data confirm all the regularities mentioned above, but there are some other interesting relations between the type and number of predicate.

Firstly, the compound verbal predicate is more likely to take a plural form. The preference of plural for the compound verbal predicate was discovered in expressions with *bolshinstvo* (*bolshinstvo studentov zakonchili uchitsja*) and with quantifier phrase (*pjat komand mogli popast v final*) (Kuvshinskaya 2011, 2012). As for expressions with *neskolko*, the compound verbal predicate takes the plural form twice as frequently as the singular. In expressions with *okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.*, the compound verbal predicate is more frequently put in the plural. But, taking into account the preference of the singular agreement in these, expressions we should say that the compound verbal predicate evidently tends toward the plural.

Instances with the compound verbal predicate in singular there are mostly inanimate subjects and precedence of the predicate. The predicate in some such instances had specific meaning: existence or presence. The considerable part of the instances is notable for the subject is not coincided with the agent, so semantic agreement is difficult.

- *В 1 см3 воздуха может содержаться более 10 тысяч таких частиц.* (А. Колотилкин. Циклон особого значения // «Наука и жизнь», 2007).

V 1 cm<sup>3</sup> vozduha mozet sodierzatsja bolee 10 tysjach takih chastic (“Nauka I zizn”2007)

*(There can be more than 10 thousand such particles in 1 cm<sup>3</sup> of the air).*

- *...На их восстановление **может потребоваться около трех лет**, резюмирует г-жа Фокина. (<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2008/08/04/focus/366864.shtml>, 2008).*

*Na ih vosstanivlenije mozet potrebovatsja okolo treh let.*

*(It can take about 3 years to restore).*

Instances with a singular compound verbal predicate and animate subject belong to the official sphere and have a prescriptive character. As such there are only five such cases:

- *При операции слива должно присутствовать не **менее двух** человек обслуживающего персонала АГЗС. (Правила безопасности при эксплуатации автомобильных заправочных станций сжиженного газа (2003) // , 2003.03.04)/*

*Pri oreracii sliva dolžno prisutstvovat ne menea dvuh celovek obsluzivajushego personala (The rules of safety for the exploiting of the car filling station with liquefied gas// 2003.03.04)*

*(At least two members of the maintenance staff should be present during sink operation).*

The plural agreement of the compound verbal predicate seems to be conditioned by the property of modal or phrasal verbs, which supposes that the agent has freedom of action, affords to do or not to do, or to begin or to finish something. So the subject shows properties of a living being. This is the reason that the action of inanimate subjects in expressions with a compound verbal predicate is represented by metaphor:

- *«**Всего несколько фондов смогут соответствовать** этому требованию....*  
*(<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2009/11/25/finance/444003.shtml>, 2009)*

*Vsego neskolko fondov smogut sootvetstvovat etomu trebovaniju...*

*(Only some funds will be able to meet this requirement...)*

- *Однако **принести прибыль** своим создателями **смогли не более десяти произведений**. (<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2010/12/29/media/562949979484706.shtml>, 2010).*

*Odnako prinesti pribyl svoim sozdateljam smogli ne bolee chem desjat proizvedenij.*

*(But less than ten works could make profit for their authors).*

One more unusual feature of predicate agreement in concerned expressions is the singular form of predicate–adjective. The question is that the main part of these adjectives is in short form and takes the singular (*izvestno, nuzno*):

- На сегодняшний день наиболее **известно около пятнадцати** сортов плесневелых сыров. ( «Мир & Дом. Residence», 2004.04.15).

*Na segodnjashnij den izvestno okolo pjatnadcati plesnevelyh syrov (Mir&Dom& Residence», 2004.04.15).*

*(There are about 15 moldy sorts of cheese known today).*

**Table 7. The predicate type and the predicate agreement<sup>8</sup>**

Predicate form	<i>Neskolko</i>					<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe etc</i>				
	V	CV	Part	Adj	Noun	V	CV	Part	Adj	Noun
<b>Singular</b>										
<b>Plural</b>	<b>59%</b> <b>(193)</b>	<b>27%</b> <b>(6)</b>	<b>59%</b> <b>(33)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>65%</b> <b>(668)</b>	<b>47%</b> <b>(23)</b>	<b>81%</b> <b>(228)</b>	<b>77%</b> <b>(23)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>41%</b> <b>(133)</b>	<b>73%</b> <b>(16)</b>	<b>41%</b> <b>(23)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>35 %</b> <b>(361)</b>	<b>53%</b> <b>(26)</b>	<b>19 %</b> <b>(54)</b>	<b>23%</b> <b>(7)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(18)</b>
<b>Predicate form</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(326)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(22)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(56)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(1029)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(49)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(282)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(30)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(18)</b>

## Lexical meaning of the predicate

The predicate agreement depends on the meaning of the predicate. Firstly, there are some predicates which usually appear in the singular: for example *prihoditjsja* (Melchuk 1985: 373), verbs that refer to existence, and presence (Rozental 2010:261). Corbett, referring to Robblee, suggests a hierarchy of predicate based on individuation. According to the predicate hierarchy, the singular agreement is typical of the verbs *byt*, *proishodit*, while the plural is for agentive verbs (Corbett 1998: 21-22). The problem of probability and frequency of plural or singular predicate agreement demands special analysis of every verb that is used as a predicate. The RNC data show that there are several verbs that take the singular:

<sup>8</sup> The abbreviation in the table 7: V – verbal predicate, CV – compound verbal predicate, Part – participle predicate, Adj - adjective predicate, Noun – noun predicate.



**Table 8. Lexical meaning of predicate and predicate agreement**

	<i>Neskolko</i>		<i>Okolo, bolee, menea, svyshe, etc.</i>	
	Predicate form		Predicate form	
Predicate	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Sushestvovat	13	0	17	6
Imetsja	4	0	6	0
Byt	61	2	30	0
Ostatsja, ostavatsja	9	0	23	1
Naschityvatsja	1	0	69	0
Trebovatsja, potrebovatsja	6	0	20	0
Nuzno, neobkhodimo	0	0	15	0
Prihoditsja	1	0	18	1

As the table demonstrates, these predicates cannot take the plural or be put in the plural in isolated instances. They usually take the singular, and instances with such predicates represent a considerable part of data. The plural form is admissible in most instances (except expressions with predicate *estj* – the third-person singular of *byt*), but the plural agreement of these predicates is either rare or not registered statistically.

- *Принимая во внимание неожиданное изменение, нам **потребуется несколько дней** для оценки ситуации.* (<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2009/11/25/industry/444145.shtml>, 2009).

*Prinimaja vo vnimanije neozidannoje izmenenije, nam potrebujetsja neskolko dnej dlja ocenki situacii* (<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2009/11/25/industry/444145.shtml>, 2009).

*(Taking into account the unexpected dramatic change, it'll take some days for us to estimate the situation).*

- *Существовало несколько технологий изготовления топоров...* («Наука и жизнь», 2009)  
*Suschestvovalo neskolko tekhnologij izgotovlenija toporov* («*Nauka i zizn*», 2009).

*(There were some techniques for making bench axes).*

- *В отряде насчитывалось около ста человек.* («Солдат удачи», 2004.01.14).

*V otrjade naschityvalos okolo sta chelovek* («*Soldat udachi*», 2004.01.14).

*(The detachment counted about 100 persons).*

- *До начала большой войны оставалось около двадцати месяцев.* («Звезда», 2002)  
Do nachala bolshoj vojny ostavalos okolo dvadcati mesjacev («Zvezda», 2002)

(There were about 20 months left before the beginning of the big war)

- *На территории республики имеется более 8 тысяч рек.* («Геоинформатика», 2003.09.17).  
Na territorii respubliky imeetsja bolee 8 tysjach rek («Geoinformatika», 2003.09.17).

(There are more than 8 thousand rivers in the republic.)

- *Иначе говоря, среди пожилых людей на два ответа в поддержку реформ приходится не менее трех ответов против.* («Неприкосновенный запас», 2002.05.15).

Inach govorja, sredi pozilyh ljudej na dva otveta v podderzku reform prihoditsja ne menea treh otvetov protiv («Neprikosnovennyj zasap», 2002.05.15).

(In other words, every two responses in support of reforms are matched by no less than three responses against).

The reasons for the singular agreement of the predicates in question seem to be as follows:

1. The meaning of a verb or adjective: Modal, existence, presence, quantity (*naschityvatsja*), and expense (*ostatsja*, *ostavatsja*, *prihoditsja*, *uhodit na*, *hvatat*). The predicates that refer to expense usually combine with a subject with the meaning of time, distance, a sum of money, etc. So the meaning of the expression is often specific (see the next part).

2. The semantic-syntactic features of adjectives and of many of these verbs: The agent does not coincide with grammatical subject (*trebovatsja*, *ostavatsja hvatat*, *imetsja*, *naschityvatsja*, *nuzno*). So, the plural (semantic) agreement is more difficult and the singular one (grammatical neutralization) is preferable.

It should be said that other predicates, which presume the absence of a subject-agent coincidence, can take the plural form:

- *Меня интересуют те несколько дней... между письмом и спектаклем.* (Вера Белоусова. *Второй выстрел* (2000)).

*Menja interesujut te neskolko dnej... mezdu pismom i spektaklem* (Vera Belousova. *Vtoroj vystrel* (2000)).

*(I am interested in these several days... between the letter and the show).*

- *В штаб-квартире компании в Калифорнии установлены более пяти тысяч компьютеров... («Управление персоналом», 2004.11.15).*

*V shtab-kvartire kompanii v Kalifornii ustanovleny bolee pjati tysjach kompjuterov («Upravlenije personalom», 2004.11.15).*

*(There were more than five thousands computers placed in the headquarters of the company in California)*

So the combination of two conditions – the meaning and the syntactic valencies of predicate – is important for agreement choice. The predicates that satisfy these conditions usually take the singular (*trebovatsja, ostavatsja, hvatat, imetsja, naschityvatsja, nuzno*), while predicates that correspond with only one condition take the plural form (*byt, sushestvovat*, most passive participles, etc.). The meaning seems to have more influence on the agreement than the number of valencies.

The predicates *ostatsja* and *prihoditsja* appeared plural in isolated instances and the plural agreement evidently conditioned by animacy of the subject:

- *У нее был когда-то американский муж, и от него остались не менее двух, а может быть, и более сыновей.* (Эдуард Лимонов. Книга воды (2002)).

*U nee byl kogda-to amerikanskij muz I ot nego ostalos ne menea dvuh, a mozet byt, i bolee synovej. (Eduard Limonov. Kniga vody (2002)).*

*(Once she had an American husband and there were no less than two sons left after him – or maybe more).*

- *При этом в производстве одежды и туалетных принадлежностей на каждого хозяина приходились в среднем менее двух рабочих... («Неприкосновенный запас», 2009)*

*Pri etom v proizvodstve odezdy na kazdого hozjauna prihodilis v srednem menea dvuh rabochih («Neprikosnovennyj zapas», 2009)*

*(At the same time every owner , in the garments industry is matched with less than two workers).*

## The meaning of the whole expression

Manuals recommend using the singular predicate agreement in statements regarding age, time, expenses, distribution, and capacity (Rozenal 2010:260, Golub 2008:373). The RNC data show that in such cases there is only singular agreement with the quantifier phrase that means indefinite quantity.

**Table 9. Influence of the sentence semantics on the predicate number.**

	<i>Neskolko</i>		<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe, etc.</i>	
Meaning of expression	Predicate form		Predicate form	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Age	0	0	17	0
Lasting of the time	18	0	89	0
Expenses, distribution, capacity	6	0	15	0

- *С тех пор прошло более ста лет.* («Наука и жизнь», 2009).

*S teh por porshlo bole sta let* («Nauka i zizn», 2009).

*(More than 100 years have passed since then).*

- *Ему тогда было около семидесяти лет, он жил с женой в деревушке Старая Вениха, в 15 км от райцентра.* («Бельские Просторы», 2010)

*Jemu togda bylo okolo semidesjati let* («Belskije prostory», 2010)

*(He was about 70 years old at the time).*

- *На преодоление сложного склона ушло около четырех часов.* («Солдат удачи», 2004.01.14).

*Na preodolenije sloznogo sklona ushlo okolo chetyreh chasov* («Soldat udachi», 2004.01.14).

*(It took about four hours to overcome the complicated mountainside.)*

- *Около ста тысяч рублей ушло на матпомощь работникам обл администрации...* («Известия», 2001.07.18)

*Okolo sta rublej ushlo na matpomosh rabotnikam obladministracii* («Izvestia», 2001.07.18).

*(About 100 rubles were spent on welfare for the staff of the regional administration).*

- *В бачок помещается около пяти литров сметаны.* («Сельская новь», 2003.11.11).

*V bachok pomecshaetsja okolo pjati litrov smetany.* («Selskaya nov», 2003.11.11).

*(This jar can hold about five liters of sour cream).*

- *«Выпускники экономических вузов остаются самыми популярными — на их долю приходится свыше 50 процентов спроса.* («Известия», 2002.04.11)

*Vypuskniki ekonomicheskikh vuzov ostajutsja samymi populjarnymi – na ih dolju prihoditsja svyshe 50% sprosa.* («Izvestia», 2002.04.11).

*(Graduating students of economics colleges remain the most popular, comprising 50% of total demand).*

- ... *На плотину пошло около пяти миллионов кубометров бетона...* («Бизнес-журнал», 2004.01.22)

*Na plotinu poshlo okolo pjati millionov kubometrov betona* («Biznes-jurnal», 2004.01.22).

*(About five millions cubic meters of concrete were spent on the dam).*

## Register

The RNC data show that singular agreement predominates in such registers as fiction and electronic communication. It often occurs in educational and academic prose, but it is less likely in mass media. The ratio of singular to plural agreement in publicist texts is close to the average for the expressions with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc. The singular and plural predicate agreement with phrases containing *neskolko* are equally probable in news articles. But, taking into account the average likelihood of singular or plural agreement, we should conclude that the plural agreement is somewhat more preferable: The index for plural is 1:14.

The unexpected result is that the predominant plural choice in formal and business situations. In expressions with *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, and *svyshe*, the index for plural is 1:6. In expressions with *neskolko*, the ratio of predicate choice is close to average. It was revealed that there is a tendency to the plural predicate to agree with other types of quantifier phrases (with *bolshinstvo* and with numerals, for example *desjat studentov*) (Kuvshinskaya 2011, 2012).

These results let us revise the assertion that the singular predicate agreement is typical for fiction and formal registers, while the plural is for informal speech (Graudina et al. 1976:30, Golub 2008:373). This statement is true in the scientific and educational spheres, but this is not the case for formal and business speech – only for informal speech.

It seems that the predominance of plural agreement in official and business contexts accounted for the tendency toward the precision and clarity of presentation in these sphere. So a

semantic (plural) agreement is preferable. In any case, the neutralization of grammatical meaning (singular agreement) is undesirable.

With regard to fiction and electronic communication, it is worth noting that there are plenty of expressions that are clichés and carry information about age and time. Such expressions demand plural agreement. Moreover, it may be suggested that the neutralization of grammatical meaning should be convenient because electronic communication and informal speech, which comprises the considerable part of fiction instances, are disposed to using clichés and to neutralizing grammatical meanings, such as the expanse of Nominative to the positions of objective cases in informal speech (Lapteva 2003).

**Table 10. Speech situation and predicate agreement**

	<i>Neskolko</i>					<i>Okolo, bolee, menee, svyshe etc</i>				
<b>Predicate form</b>	Formal, business	Scientific, educational	Publicist	Electronic communication	Fiction	Formal, business	Scientific, educational	Publicist	Electronic communication	Fiction
<b>Singular</b>	<b>59%</b> <b>(13)</b>	<b>88%</b> <b>(134)</b>	<b>50%</b> <b>(127)</b>	<b>88%</b> <b>(28)</b>	<b>88%</b> <b>(46)</b>	<b>46 %)</b> <b>(11</b>	<b>68 %</b> <b>(133)</b>	<b>65 %</b> <b>(639</b>	4	<b>81 %</b> <b>(146)</b>
<b>Plural</b>	<b>41%</b> <b>(9)</b>	<b>12%</b> <b>(18)</b>	<b>50%</b> <b>(128)</b>	<b>12%</b> <b>(5)</b>	<b>12 %</b> <b>(36)</b>	<b>54 %</b> <b>(13)</b>	<b>32%</b> <b>(63)</b>	<b>35 %</b> <b>(347</b>		<b>19 %</b> <b>(35)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(22)</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(152)</b>	<b>100 %</b> <b>(255)</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>(52)</b>	100% (24)	100% (196)	100 % (986)		100 % (181)

## Conclusion

Predicate agreement with quantifier phrases that have an indefinite (approximate) quantity in contemporary Russian speech is more likely to be singular. It firstly depends on the indefinite meaning, and secondly on the grammatical properties of quantifier phrases. The singular agreement is more often in the expression with the words *okolo*, *bolee*, *menee*, *svyshe*, etc. The morphological and syntactical properties of *neskolko* define a fair degree of probability for plural agreement, too.

The variation of predicate forms is limited by:

- The prepositive-agreed attribute (only plural agreement)
- The meaning of the predicate and the meaning of the expression. The singular agreement is chosen if the expression is set (information about age, time, expenses, distribution, etc.). Some individual predicates take only the singular agreement.

This study shows that it is necessary to take into account the typical combination of contextual factors and the preferable type of predicate agreement. These characters restrict influence on the agreement for other important factors.

Considering the fact that singular agreement is more likely for the expressions concerned, special interest attaches to the conditions of plural choice. These conditions are:

- animacy
- a word order following “subject – predicate”
- an agreed attribute in the Nominative case
- some predicate types (compound verbal, compound with noun or with adjective)
- some registers (formal, business, publicist speech).

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