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Tautologies and contradictions: structure and interpretation

This study, comprising a series of articles written in **2015-2017**, is dedicated to tautologies and contradictions in Russian, such as *Friends are friends* or *Summer is not summer without going to the beach*. Although tautologies and contradictions in their direct meaning lack informative import, they are commonly used and easily interpreted in everyday conversations.

There is a considerable body of research where it is discussed how tautologies and contradictions are interpreted, how they should be translated from one language to another, in what ways context and lexical content influence their interpretation, cf. (Grice 1975; Levinson 1983; Wierzbicka 1987; Gibbs, McCarrell 1990; Escandell-Vidal 1990; Ward, Hirschberg 1991; Miki 1996; Bulygina, Shmelev 1997; Bulhof, Gimbel 2001; Paducheva 2004; Meibauer 2008; Rhodes 2009, Shemanaeva 2010, Iomdin 2013, 2017) for tautologies, and (Allan 1986; Escandell-Vidal 1991; Kamp & Partee 1995; Ripley 2011; Cobreros et al. 2012; Alxatib et al. 2013; Snider 2015, etc. However, quite a few issues remain unresolved, and some of them were addressed in the present study.

First I analyzed so-called *metalinguistic tautologies* – structures that refer to the use of a linguistic expression while other tautologies describe entities in the real world. Metalinguistic tautologies show that the speaker is employing a word or an expression in its common, straight meaning; therefore, they are most often used when context allows other possible interpretations of the linguistic expressions (such as euphemisation, irony, or hyperbole), and sometimes such alternatives are explicitly spelled out: *We are keeping it simple ... I want to eat means I want to eat... not take me to the restaurant.* The use of metalinguistic tautologies could help to find out what meanings of polysemous words are considered the most salient by speakers, just as tautologies of the 1st and 2nd classes are used to investigate stereotypical representations of objects and situations. Metalinguistic tautologies are established in Russian with patterns *X znachit X,* 'X means X', *X oznachaet X* 'X means X', *X eto X* 'X is X', and are distinguished from homonymous constructions by their semantic and pragmatic features, cf. (Vilinbakhova 2015).

Next pattern includes not one, but two pairs of repeated elements: *A book is a book and a film is a film*. In order to translate English term *coordinated tautologies* introduced in 2008 by J. Meibauer it was suggested to use Russian equivalent *sopostavitel'nye tavtologii*, as the most common syntactic form for this pattern in Russian is *X cop X, a* 'and, but' *Y cop Y* with conjunction *a* 'and, but', or *a sopostavleniya* 'contrastive *a*', described by Paducheva and Kreidlin (1974). This model can be used instead of other possible models *X cop X, no* 'but' *Y cop Y* and *X cop X, Y cop Y* with conjunction *no* 'but' and *conjunctionless link accordingly.* In Russian there are a few models of "simple" tautologies (*X est'* 'is' *X, X eto* 'this' *X, X znachit* 'means' *X,* etc.), and all of them can form complex coordinated tautologies. General meaning of coordinated tautologies is 'recognizing difference between to objects', and there are at least three shades of it: (1) the entities should be kept distinct in physical dimensions of time and space; (2) the entities should be kept distinct in the mind of interlocutors; (3) the entities are distinct in their role in communicative situation. Besides, it is argued that constructions like *Druzhba druzhboy, a sluzhba sluzhboy* 'Friendship is friendship, but business is business' with similar meaning also belong to the class of coordinated tautologies despite its structural difference, cf. (Vilinbakhova 2016a). The follow-up study taking into account the data from Spanish is presented in (Escandell-Vidal & Vilinbakhova 2018).

In the third article I make an attempt to investigate some aspects of use of tautologies in communication in order to understand why the speaker should opt for uttering tautologies and what communicative profit he gets for that. First, it is shown that the speaker can use tautologies as clichés with expressions "as they say", *etc.*, making his personal opinion look like a common wisdom of linguistic community. Second, the speaker can exploit the possibility of tautologies to appeal to mutual knowledge, making the hearer look as like-minded person, therefore the hearer's possible disagreement is regarded as a refusal of (expected) support and solidarity and requires more effort. Finally, the fact that the literal meaning of tautologies is undeniable helps the speaker escape of the responsibility of false implicature; defend his opinion using so-called *deep tautologies*; close the discussion whenever it is more convenient to him. At the same time, the addressee finds himself in the situation when his disagreement makes him look awkward as if he denies a well-known (folk) wisdom, or refuses to support the speaker, or argues with the undeniable truth, cf. (Vilinbakhova 2016b)

In our joint work with Mikhail Kopotev, cf. (Vilinbakhova & Kopotev 2017) we analyze Russian tautologies *X est' X* 'X is X' and *X eto X* 'X this is X'. We elaborate on the diachronic and synchronic analyses of the two constructions based on the data from the Russian National Corpus. The paper discusses (a) milestones in the development of these two tautologies in Russian (taking into account the pattern *X sut' X* 'X are X' that has completely disappeared); (b) frequency of different syntactic phrases used as the repeated element X (based on the Russian National Corpus data); (c) syntactic constraints on the phrases in both constructions; (d) semantic and pragmatic features of the two types of constructions. We argue that *X est' X* most often appeals to different components of X's meaning (i.e. its connotations), while *X eto X* expresses the subject's identity to itself, being a tautology in the Wittgensteinian sense.

The study in (Vilinbakhova 2017) is dedicated to contradictions A ≠ A in Russian, also known in literature as 'negated tautologies'. They are often viewed as derivations from equative tautologies A = A. Here I describe structural and semantic features of negated tautologies that are established in Russian with patterns *X ne X* 'X is not X', *X ne est' X* 'X is not X' and *X – eto ne X* 'X this is not X'. Such constructions show that the speaker is not able to use the corresponding tautology *X is X* because (a) the referent of a linguistic expression *X* does not belong to the category *x*; (b) characteristics of the referent of a linguistic expression *X* or an attitude towards it differ from the norm; (c) the linguistic expression *X* is not employed in its common, straight meaning. Besides, negated tautologies are compared to similar Russian constructions $S_{dat} + X ne X_2$ 'S$_{dat}$ + X is not X' and *X ne v X₂* 'X is not in X', and to tautologies *X est' X* 'X is X' and *X – eto X* 'X this is X'. The follow-up study taking into account the data from Spanish is presented in (Escandell-Vidal & Vilinbakhova forthcoming).

The findings are important both for theoretical linguistics, concretely, semantics and pragmatics, and for natural language processing tasks, specifically, RTE (recognizing textual entailment), i.e. establishing whether some text T entails a hypothesis test H, cf., for instance, (Bos & Markert 2005), and artificial intelligence, as apparent violations of compositionality yield additional meaning components introduced as an interpretive repair strategy.

The results of the study have been presented at international conferences Dialogue; New Developments in Linguistic Pragmatics (NDLP); International Conference on Intercultural Pragmatics and Communication (INPRA), International Pragmatics Conference (IPrA).