

Concession in Russian: Semantics as a reflection of Rhetoric

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Abstract

The paper examines how the rhetorical functions of the “system-forming meaning” of concession determine its semantic properties. The paper suggests and motivates the definition of the core meaning of concession as reflected in the Russian conjunction *hotia* ‘although’. Further analysis reveals the major semantic modifications to this core meaning, namely, the ‘hypothetical’, ‘want’ and ‘quantity/degree’ modifications. The paper shows how they combine and interrelate in the meaning of Russian concessive words and constructions.

1 Credits

This paper was written with the financial support of the following grants: RF President grant for the leading scientific schools NSH-3205.2008.6, RHSF 07-04-00-202a for “System-forming meanings of Russian Language”, and the grant of the Program for Fundamental research of the Department of Humanities of the Russian Academy of Sciences «Russian culture in world history».

2 Introduction

Contemporary semantic theory offers many instruments of analyzing semantics in a systematic way. One of them is the notion of a system-forming meaning, introduced by Ju.D. Apresjan in (Apresjan, 2001; Apresjan, 2006). System-forming meaning is defined as “a meaning which constitutes part of many linguistic items of different nature (manifold form)... yet has consistent manifestations with regard to the rules of semantic interaction (projection rules)” (Apresjan 2006:52). Some examples of system-forming meanings include ‘to know’ and ‘to think’, which distinguish between *factuals* and *putatives* – two semantic categories comprised of linguistically diverse items which are nevertheless characterized by certain uniform properties. Some other system-forming meanings include ‘goal’, ‘cause’, ‘condition’ ‘quantity’, ‘degree’. In some ways the notion of system-forming meaning reminds of Wierzbicka’s semantic primitives – indeed, ‘to know’ and ‘to think’, as well as many other system-forming meanings suggested in (Apresjan, 2006:52), such as ‘to do’, ‘can’, ‘to be’, ‘one’ are included in the list of semantic primes (Wierzbicka, 1972). However, some other system-forming meanings are semantically more complex, e.g., ‘goal’, ‘moment’, ‘to begin’, ‘to stop’, and can be further decomposed into several components of the semantic primitives level.

‘Concession’ is also a system-forming meaning, expressed by numerous linguistic items, lexemes, constructions, phrasemes (*although, even though, despite, in spite of, yet, however, still, nevertheless, to concede, compromise, Try though he might, against all odds*, etc.), though one even more complex than ‘cause’, ‘condition’ or even ‘goal’ and therefore not as linguistically and typologically all-pervading or universal. Yet it is also one of the very important and central notions, both linguistically and cognitively. The cognitive operation “served” by the linguistic category of concession, is the perception of two facts as discordant, contradicting each other and, therefore, violating certain natural norms or expectations. When we say *Although it was warm outside, she put on a fir coat*, we logically link two separate facts and

thus perceive the existing state of affairs as abnormal, unexpected or unusual (the normal, expected situation would be to dress lightly in warm weather). In this sense concession is as important a category as ‘cause’ or ‘condition’ – though it is semantically more complex, as, unlike the latter two, it establishes not a natural link between two facts, but rather a “glitch” in those links. Semantically concession is usually defined in terms of condition (or, in some accounts, causality), combined with negation – ‘usually if X, Y; in this case, X and not-Y’ or ‘usually X results in Y; in this case, X and not-Y’ (Grevisse, 1969; Liapon, 1986; König, 1986; König, 1991; Morel, 1996; Khrakovskij, 1998]. However, this accounts only for the main body of concessives, such as *although*, *despite*, *in spite of*. As a systematic study shows, concession is related to certain other system-forming meanings, besides condition and negation, both on the contemporary and historical levels. Moreover, as will be shown below, these other semantic ties are motivated, given the rhetoric functions of concessives in an utterance. The current paper strives to analyze the lexical and grammatical category of concession systematically, in terms of system-forming meanings, and to show how several simpler system-forming meanings interact and combine to give rise to this more complex concept. Another goal of this paper is to bring together two approaches to analyzing concessives – one that may be called logical and another that may be called rhetorical.

The term “concession” itself (from *concessio*), which was introduced in Latin grammars reflects the *rhetorical* approach in which concession was viewed not as a meaning or a group of meanings verbalized in certain words and expressions, but rather as a special figure of speech. Thus, Diderot’s “Encyclopedie” gives the following definition to concession (Diderot: 804): “CONCESSION, s. f. figure de Rhétorique par laquelle l’orateur, sûr de la bonté de sa cause, semble accorder quelque chose à son adversaire, mais pour en tirer soi-même avantage, ou pour prévenir les incidens inutiles par lesquels on pourroit l’arrêter”.¹ As we can see, concession as a figure of speech in this account is not necessarily associated with the use of special lexical or grammatical means – linguistic concessives. On the other hand, in the contemporary linguistic thought concessives are treated as a distinct semantic and grammatical category, expressed by various syntactic and lexical means. Reflecting this new tendency, Grammaire Française 1967 defines the semantics of concession as a certain conflict which consists in “bringing together two facts which normally exclude one another”, as quoted after Morel (1996).

However, these two approaches do not contradict each other; in fact, quite the opposite is true: one can understand the semantics of concessives better if one looks at their rhetoric function in an utterance. Rhetorically, concession is a figure of speech, an instrument of advancing one’s own point of view in a subtle fashion. The speaker accomplishes that by seemingly acknowledging (to an extent) the right of the opponent in order to emphasize his/her own viewpoint more strongly. The more one concedes, the more one needs to win back. Rhetorically, using concessives is like saying to an opponent: “I admit that part or all of what you are saying might be true; but even in the case it is true, even if all of it is true, it does not change the situation; I still want to make a statement to the contrary, or a statement that would weaken your viewpoint, and I believe I am right”.

What are the main components of this rhetoric frame, if we analyze it semantically?

1) first of all, it is the condition – ‘if’; 2) next, it is the admittance of the opponent’s right. Admittance is a kind of agreement given against one’s wishes. The speaker admits something unwanted, yet wishes to advance his/her own point of view. Hence, the next important component – ‘want’; 3) another semantic component is ‘true’ – since the speaker acknowledges, to an extent, the truth of his/her opponent’s opinion; 4) there is also a component of ‘probability’, facts versus suppositions, as the speaker is willing to admit more than might actually be taking place at the moment – hence, the factual and putative components ‘is’ and ‘may’; 5) finally, there is a component of an overstatement; the speaker wants to make his/her point very strong, and (s)he adds this credibility and polemic strength by stating that even though *all* of what the opponent thinks might be true, this still does not change the situation. This triggers another semantic component – that of extreme ‘degree’ or ‘quantity’. The above semantic components are relevant for concessive words and constructions, both on the synchronic and diachronic levels.

Diachronically, many concessives evolved from linguistic items originally expressing admittance,

¹ “Concession: a figure of speech whereby the orator, sure of his own right, outwardly partly agrees with his opponent in order to gain advantage or to thwart unnecessary objections by which he could be stopped”.

agreement, truth, wish, degree, quantity. Consider, for example, the following Russian data: 1) concessive conjunctions *hotia* and *hot'* which are etymologically related to the verb *hotet'* 'want'; 2) concessive conjunction *pravda* which has rather recently evolved from the noun *pravda* 'truth'; 3) agreement particle *konechno* 'of course' in its concessive usage (*On, konechno, paren' neglupyy, no ochen' lenivyy* 'Granted, he isn't stupid, but he's excessively lazy'); 4) concessive conjunction *tol'ko* which evolved from the quantifier *tol'ko* 'only'; 5) concessive phrasemes *tol'ko by* and *lish' by* 'if only', which also come from the quantifier 'only'; 6) concessive phraseme *malo li* 'lit.: little whether' + *wh*-word (*Malo li chto emu v golovu vzbredet, nel'zia co vsem soglashat'sia* 'Whatever crazy idea might go into his head, you cannot agree with everything'); 7) probability modal *mozhet* 'may' in its concessive usage as a factual parenthetical word (*Ja, mozhet, tozhe kandidat nauk, a ne zadajus'* 'I am also a Ph.D., but I don't give myself airs').

Synchronically, the semantic components of 'condition', 'want', 'extreme quantity/degree', 'correspondence to reality', 'probability', 'agreement', in different combinations, form the semantic core of concessive words, as well as various semantic additions to it, which constitute the more marginal parts of the semantic field of concession. Below is the semantic analysis of Russian concessives, lexemes, phrasemes and constructions. Because of space limitations, we are unable to consider the entire corpus of concessive data, yet what is presented below gives a fairly representative account of the how this field is semantically organized.

3 The semantic core of concession

Below is the semantic analysis of Russian concessives, lexemes, phrasemes and constructions. In Russian, the semantic core of concession is expressed by the conjunction *hotia* 'although'. It embodies the concessive meaning in its purest, without any additional semantic components. Even its closest synonym *xot'* 'although' has an additional stylistic component – it belongs to the colloquial register. Another close synonym of *hotia*, the preposition *nesmotria na* 'in spite of', is somewhat stronger than *hotia* and thus more limited in the range of available contexts. Therefore, we will consider *hotia* and then show how its meaning becomes enriched and complicated by additional components in the meanings of other Russian concessives. There are two semantic approaches to analyzing concessive meaning – either through the combination of causality and negation (Liapon, 1986; König, 1991; Uryson, 2003), or through the combination of condition and negation (Grevisse, 1969; König, 1986; Morel, 1996; Khrakovskij, 1998)². Consider, e.g., the following definitions of the English conjunction *although* in König (1986) and (1991):

- (1) *although p, not q*

'a. p and not-q;

b. if p, usually q'

- (2) *not (q because p) = (not-q) although p*

This house is no less comfortable because it dispenses with air-conditioning = This house is no less comfortable although it dispenses with air-conditioning.

As we can see from definition in (2), in König's analysis *because* under wide-scope negation equals *although* under narrow-scope negation; it means that the situation P, introduced in the concessive part, is a "failed reason" for not-Q, one that turned out to be insufficient to thwart Q. Of these two definitions, the "if"-based one appears to be semantically more justified. In fact, the following definition for *hotia* 'although' is suggested (V. Apresjan, 2006:631).

² A definition of the Russian *hotia* 'although', which does not subscribe either to the conditional or to the causal account is given in (Iordanskaya, Mel'čuk, 2007:481), where *hotia* is analyzed as the antonym of *raz* 'since' and is given the following definition: *Hotia Q, P* 'pri naliczii fakta Q fakt P <proiznesenie vyskazyvaniia P> javliaetsja neestestvennym' ('in the presence of fact Q, fact P <pronouncing the utterance P> is not natural'). Thus, the relation between the two facts is seen not in terms of a failed dependence, but in terms of co-existence.

(3) *Hotia P, Q (Hotia on byl bolen [P], on poshel na rabotu [Q] 'Although he was ill, he went to work')*
=

'P is taking place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place'.

First of all, it is important to clarify the component 'speaker thinks'; it means that concession contains a reference to certain universal tendencies according to which the co-existence of P and Q is strange. However, these tendencies exist "in the eye of the beholder", they are not necessarily objective. In this respect, 'concession' is different from 'condition' or 'cause' which do not contain such implications. Compare the following pair of examples, correct (4) VS. the pragmatically inappropriate (5):

(4) *It is strange to get so upset because of a card loss*

(5) *It is strange to get so upset despite a card loss*

The causal conjunction *because* does not contain a reference to the speaker's opinion; therefore, the phrase is grammatical. The concessive preposition *despite* contains a reference to the speaker's opinion that there is a general tendency according to which people get upset when they lose money at cards. Therefore, the phrase contains *two* conflicting speaker's opinions – one in the assertion, that it is *strange* to get upset after a money loss, and another in the presupposition, that it is *normal* to get upset after a money loss (introduced into the utterance by the preposition *despite*). Another point in need of clarification in the definition of *hotia* is the use of semantic components 'something like P', 'something like Q' rather than referring directly to the situations P and Q, which are taking place. However, often the interdependence exists not between P and not-Q, but between some other situations whose existence can be somehow deduced from the existence of P and Q; cf.:

(6) *Hotia my s nim kazhdoe voskresen'je p'jem vmeste vodku, v dolg ia u nego poprosit' ne mogu*
'Although we drink vodka together every Sunday, I can't ask to borrow money from him'

Obviously here, the tendency to which the speaker is implicitly referring is not 'If we drink vodka every Sunday, usually I can ask to borrow money' but rather a more general one 'If people are friends, usually they can expect help from one another'. In this sentence, the existence of friendship is deduced from drinking together, and the borrowing of money is viewed as a particular instance of help. As concerns the component 'if', rather than 'because' in the definition, let us consider the following examples to prove the former is preferable:

(7) *Although he achieved fairly good marks at Harvard [P], he is definitely not an academic type [Q]*

(8) *Although the forecast was bad [P], the day turned out to be sunny [Q]*

If we try to analyze these examples in terms of failed causality, we will get semantically implausible interpretations such as 'Achieving good marks could, but didn't lead to the fact that he is an academic type'; 'A bad forecast could, but didn't lead to the fact that the weather was bad'. The conditional account, on the contrary, produces natural interpretations 'If one achieves good grades, it is natural to expect that person to be an academic type'; 'If the forecast is bad, it is natural to expect bad weather'. Consider also the following Russian example, where causality analysis fails to provide a semantically and pragmatically plausible interpretation:

(9) *Hotia ego familija Ivanov, on ne russkij*
'Although his last name is Ivanov, he's not Russian'

Likewise, the fact that one's last name is Ivanov does not *lead* to the fact when one is Russian; the dependence here is conditional, not causal: "If one's last name is Ivanov, it is natural to expect such a person to be Russian".

3.1 Modifications to the semantic core of 'concession'

The basic semantic core of concession can be modified to give rise to many more concessive items. These modifications take place in the form of adding semantic components related to the following system-forming meanings: 'may' (hypothetical character of situations); 'quantity/degree'; 'want'. Another mechanism of modifying the core concessive meaning is conversion, which gives rise to a whole large class of concessives (traditionally considered contrastives) – such as *vse-taki*, *vse zhe*, *vse ravno*, *tem ne menee* 'still', 'nevertheless', 'and yet'. In fact, these words describe the same situation as the traditional concessives like *although*, only from a different perspective. Cf. (10) VS. (11)

(10) *My poshli guliat', hotia shel dozhd'*

'We went for a walk [Q] although it was raining [P]'

(11) *Shel dozhd', no my vse-taki poshli guliat'*

'It was raining [P], yet we went for a walk [Q]'

These words differ from the prototype of concession in the following: in the semantic formula 'P is taking place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place' they, unlike the traditional concessives *hotia* 'although' and *nesmotria na* 'despite', introduce the situation Q. However, semantically, they are not different from the traditional concessives³. Conversion is semantically the most trivial of modifications; below are considered semantic additions to the core concessive meaning, along the above-mentioned semantic lines - 'may' (hypothetical character); 'quantity/degree'; 'want'.

3.2 Modification of 'hypothetical character'

The semantic core of concession is factual, that is, situations P and Q are actually taking place, as reflected in the definition 'P is taking place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place'. However, the components 'P is taking place' and 'Q is taking place' can be modified. Let us consider the concessive conjunction *pust'* 'let' in phrases like

(12) *Pust' veter, pust' buria, ja nichego ne ispugajus'*

'Let there be wind, let there be storm, I will not be afraid of anything'

(13) *Pust' prosit, pust' umoliaet, ja ego vse ravno ne proshchu*

'Let him ask, let him implore, I will not forgive him'

As can be seen from these examples, *pust'* (same as its close colloquial synonym *puskaj* 'let') in contrast to the factual *hotia*, refers to prospective and hypothetical situations. The following definition is proposed for *pust'* and *puskaj*:

(14) *pust' <puskaj> P, Q (Pust' ugrozhaet [P], ja ne pojdu na etu aferu [Q] 'Let him threaten me, I will not get involved in this racket'; Pust' on luchshij uchenik v klasse [P], u nego net tvorcheskogo*

³ Here, and elsewhere we speak about the primary meaning of the words *hotia*, *vse-taki* etc.; most of them have other meanings, sometimes quite numerous (as the conjunction *hot'*); yet unless specified otherwise, it is the primary concessive meaning that we consider.

myslenija [Q] ‘He might be the best student in class, he lacks creativity’) = ‘The speaker admits that P might be taking place now or might take place in the future; the speaker thinks that Q is taking place or will take place in the future; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place’

Interestingly, the modification along the lines of hypothetical situations frequently “invites” the semantic addition of degree; the hypothetical situations are often also characterized by extremeness – the situations tend to be of enormous proportions:

- (15) *Puskaj ja umru pod zaborom kak pios, / Pust' zhizn' menia v zemliu vtoptala, / - Ja veriu: to Bog menia snegom zanios, / To buria menia celovala!* (A.Blok, Poets)
‘Let me die in the gutter like a dog/ Let life tramp me into the ground/ I believe – it was God Who covered me with snow/ It was the storm that has kissed me’

This semantic property is corroborated by the co-occurrence properties of these conjunctions: *pust'* and *puskaj* tend to co-occur with verbs denoting “extreme” or destructive actions and happenings, such as *to kill*, *to die* etc. (*Pust' ja umru* ‘Even if I die’; *Puskaj menia ub'jut* ‘Let them kill me’), as well as with nouns denoting big quantity and adjectives denoting high degree (*Pust' xot' million mne predlozhat* ‘Even if they offer me a million’, *Puskaj on samyj luchshij specialist* ‘Even if he is the best specialist’). This is true not only of *pust'* and *puskaj*, but also of other concessives that contain the “hypothetical” modification, namely, *hot'*, *hot' by*, *hotia by*, *dazhe esli*, *pust' dazhe* ‘even if’, *tol'ko by*, *lish' by* ‘if only’, *esli uzh ne...to* ‘if not, then’, *po krajnej mere*, *hot'*, *hotia by* ‘at least’. In some of these concessive items hypothetical situations are of enormous proportions, in some they are just the opposite – practically negligible, yet there is always a kind of extremeness, a kind of polarity present. This is a not an unexpected extension of meaning: after all, if a situation is hypothetical, it is natural to explore it to the extreme and consider if things might be different should this situation be taking place in a very large or a very small degree. Or perhaps, the extension of meaning is induced the other way round: hyperbole and litotes belong to the hypothetical world rather than the world of reality, therefore, when they appear in reference to some situations, these situations automatically revert to the hypothetical status.

Below is the analysis of other “hypothetical” concessives. Some of the above-listed concessives will be considered in the next two sections, under the ‘quantity/degree’ or ‘want’ headings, depending on which modification is more crucial to their meaning: e.g. the items *tol'ko by*, *hot' by*, *lish' by* which, although they also contain the ‘hypothetical’ and ‘degree’ components, are mostly centered around the ‘want’ constituent. On the other hand, *hotia by*, *hot'*⁴, *po krajnej mere*, although they also point both to the ‘hypothetical’ and ‘want’ modifications, are mostly about ‘quantity/degree’. Consider the following examples with concessive items meaning ‘even if’ (synonymous to *pust'* and *puskaj*), where hypothetical character of the situations is combined with a hyperbole:

- (16) *Nichego ne skazhu, hot' rezh'te menia*
‘I will not say anything even if you cut me to pieces’
- (17) *Pust' dazhe v tiur'mu menia posadiat, ja ne postuplius' svoimi principami*
‘Even if they put me to jail, I won’t give up my principles’
- (18) *Dazhe esli luchshego мастера prishliut, on s etim remontom ne spravitsia*
‘Even if they send the best craftsman, he won’t be able to manage these repairs’

⁴ Most of the items considered are polysemous, that is why they appear under more than one heading; *hot'*, for example, has eight meanings, four of which are concessive.

⁵ This concerns *hot'* in the meaning of ‘at least’; there is another *hot'*, in phrase (16), which means ‘even if’ and is mostly centered around the ‘hypothetical’ modification.

- (19) *Esli i golodat' budu, vse ravno svoboda vazhnee*
 'Even if I have to starve, freedom is still more important'
- (20) *Hotia by i kvartiru prishlos' prodat', a s dolgami rasplatit'sia nado*
 'Even if it's necessary to sell the apartment, debts must be paid'
- (21) *Da hot' by tam potop byl, mne nado na vstrechu*
 'Even if there were a flood there, I'll have to go to the meeting'

Pust' dazhe, dazhe esli, esli i, hotia by, hot' by have similar meanings, which are explicated as follows:

- (22) *Pust' dazhe* <*dazhe esli, esli i, by, hot' by*> P, Q = 'The speaker admits that a very considerable P might be taking place now or might take place in the future; the speaker thinks that Q is taking place or will take place in the future; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place'

Like *pust'* and *puskaj*, these expressions tend to co-occur with the denotations of extreme and destructive actions and events, with big quantity nouns and high degree adjectives; cf. the phrases above. The concessive conjunction *hot'* (not in its primary meaning of 'although', but in the meaning of 'even if') is semantically close to them, it also contains the 'hypothetical' and 'quantity/degree' modifications, yet it usually describes the impossibility to achieve the desired situation despite one's considerable efforts:

- (23) *Hot' darom otдавaj, nikto u tebia etu mashinu ne voz'met*
 'Even if you give it out for free, nobody will take this car'
- (24) *Hot' na koleniakh umoliaj, on tebe ne pomozhet*
 'Even if you implore him on your knees, he won't help you'

Hence, the following definition is proposed for *hot'* in this meaning:

- (25) *Hot' P, Q* = 'The speaker is sure that even if a very considerable P takes place, the desired Q will not take place; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place'

Usually combined with a verb in the imperative, *hot'*, like the above-described concessives, also co-occurs with verbs meaning destruction, as well as expressions denoting great quantity or high degree, often phraseological: *hot' umri* 'even if die', *hot' veshajsia* 'even if hang oneself', *hot' semi piadej vo lbu* 'even if wise as Solomon'. *Hot'* itself forms a number of phrasemes with a rhetorical hyperbole, meaning 'whatever one does, the goal will not be achieved' (English phrasemes 'not for toffee', 'can't for the life of me'): *hot' rezh'* 'even cut', *hot' ubej* 'even kill', *hot' zarezh'* 'even stab', *hot' tresni* 'even hit'. Cf. also *hot' kol na golove teshi* 'even pole on head char' with the meaning 'X can't understand something for the life of X'.

3.3 Modification of 'want'

One more modification to the semantic core of concession is that of 'want' and, like that of 'degree', it is often combined with the 'hypothetical' modification. Again, this is something to be expected: after all, a *desired* situation is usually one which has not yet been attained; thus, it is *hypothetical* rather than *factual*. Likewise, 'want' is frequently accompanied by 'quantity/degree' modification: one can *strongly* wish something to happen, one can be prepared to give up *anything* for the desired object, one can be satisfied with a *small* part of what is desired, etc. Considering the core concessive meaning 'P is taking place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that if something like P is taking place, usually something like

not-Q is taking place', there are two components which the modification of 'want' can affect. Namely, the situation Q can be viewed as desirable, and the fact that it might take place can be conjectured as a certain victory over the unfavorable circumstances, often at the expense of letting the undesirable situation P to take place. There are several classes of concessives which incorporate the 'want' modification. One class, which is perhaps the most representative, can be grouped under the heading 'if only'. It includes such items as *hot' by*, *tol'ko by*, *lish' by* 'if only'; cf. *Hot' by uspet'* 'Let me be on time'; *Tol'ko by on prishel* 'Let him come'; *Lish' by ona byla zdorova, ostal'noe nevazhno* 'If only she were healthy, the rest doesn't matter'. Of these three, *hot' by* is a "truncated" concessive because it is mostly used to express pure wish rather than concession, although concessive usage is also possible; cf. the relatively much higher frequency of optative phrases like *Hot' by otdohnut' nakonec!* 'If only I could finally have some rest' in comparison to concessive phrases like *Hot' by ne meshal* [P], *esli uzh pomoch' ne mozhes'* [Q] 'You could at least stop pestering me if you cannot be of help'⁶. The following definition is proposed for *hot' by*:

- (26) *Hot' by P* 'The speaker wants P; perhaps the speaker wants a greater Q but thinking that Q cannot be had, (s)he says (s)he wants to have P'.

Tol'ko by and *lish' by* can also be used as optatives, yet they are somewhat more typical in concessive usages⁷:

- (27) *Ej samoj nichego ne nuzhno, tol'ko by deti byli v poriadke*
'She doesn't require anything so long as her children are OK'

- (28) *On gotov na liubuju podlost', lish' by otomstit'*
'He's ready to commit any kind of foul trick in order to get revenge'

The following definition is proposed for *tol'ko by* and *lish' by*:

- (29) *Pust' Q, tol'ko by <lish' by> P* 'Let there be Q, if only P' = 'The speaker wants P very much; thinking that the desired P might be accompanied by an undesirable Q, the speaker says (s)he is ready for Q to take place and wants P to take place'

Another class of concessives affected by the 'want' modification is represented by particles which can be grouped under the semantic heading 'at least': *hot'*, *hotia by*, *po krajnej mere*. These represent a scale, both in terms of the wish's intensity and the quantificational characteristics of the desired object/situation. The lower the demands, the stronger the wish. Thus, the particle *hot'*, which implies very low hopes on the part of the experiencer and the readiness to be satisfied with the least available resources, also points to the strongest desire: *Podari mne hot' mgnovenie schast'ja!* 'Give me at least one moment of happiness'; *Hot' na minutu ostav' menia v pokoe* 'Leave me alone at least for one minute'. It usually co-occurs with denotations of small quantity or even negative polarity items: *hot' mgnovenie* 'at least an instant', *hot' glotok vody* 'at least one gulp of water', *hot' na jotu sochuvstivija* 'at least a jot of sympathy', *hot' na gramm ponimaniia* 'at least an ounce of understanding', etc. *Hotia by* occupies the intermediate position, and can be used to voice minimalistic, as well as reasonable requests. *Po krajnej mere* is the least emotionally loaded item and implies a certain sufficient minimum of resources rather than their smallest possible amount. It can be used not only in requests, but also in demands: *Vy dolzhny po krajnej mere obespechivat' bezopasnost' uchashchihsia* 'You must at least guarantee the students' safety'; cf. the impossibility of this phrase with the particle *hot'*: **Vy dolzhny hot' obespechivat'*

⁶ According to the data from the Russian National Corpus, approximately one phrase out of fifty in which *hot'* is used in this meaning, is concessive, with the rest being optative.

⁷ According to the data from the Russian National Corpus, approximately one third of the examples reflects optative usage, with two thirds being concessive.

bezopasnost' uchashchihsia. The following definitions are suggested for these items (the varying part is in bold):

- (29) *Hot' P* 'Thinking that the desired Q is impossible, the speaker or the subject **wants** a **very small** P from the same class of situations as Q'
- (30) *Hotia byt P* 'Thinking that the desired Q is impossible, the speaker or the subject **is ready to be satisfied** with a **small** P from the same class of situations as Q'
- (31) *Po krajnej mere P* 'Thinking that the desired Q is impossible, the speaker or the subject **accepts** a **smaller** P from the same class of situations as Q'

The smallest degree and the strongest desire also trigger the least probable situation: while *hotia by* and *po krajnej mere* can be used in past contexts, where P is a fact, for *hot'* such usage is restricted; it is mostly used with imperatives, in contexts of request: *Hot' kusok hleba podaj!* 'Give me at least a piece of bread!'.⁸

3.4 Modification of quantity/degree

As noted above, the modification of 'quantity/degree' often accompanies 'hypothetical' and 'want' modifications. It is difficult to say which is primary in each case. Certainly, it is not difficult to give meaning to the fact that situations characterized by extremely large or small quantity/extremely high or low degree are often hypothetical; after all, extreme situations are not as frequent in everyday life as average ones, therefore when they are mentioned, it is usually in the hypothetical, rather than factual, context. However, there are items where the 'quantity/degree' modification is not necessarily accompanied by 'hypothetical' or 'want' modifications. One of such items is the syntactic construction consisting of a *k*-pronoun⁸ (*wh*-word) + negative particle. This pragmatically "pessimistic" construction implies that despite numerous circumstances P conducive to the situation Q, it did not take or will not take place; cf.

- (32) *Kak on ni staralsia, a nichego u nego ne vyshlo*
'Try though he might, he didn't succeed'
- (33) *K kakim advokatam on ni obratitsia, delo on vse ravno proigraet*
'Whatever attorneys he'll solicit, he'll nevertheless lose the case'

A syntactic construction very close in meaning to *wh*-word+*ni* is *pri vsem P* 'with all P' ('all P notwithstanding'). It also implies that despite all the circumstances in favor of Q, it did not or will not take place; cf.

- (34) *Pri vseh svoih nesomnennyh dostoinstvah, on ne podhodit na etu dolzhnost'*
'All his indisputable qualities notwithstanding, he's not suited for this post'.

The following definition is proposed for *k*-pronoun + *ni...* and *pri vsem P* constructions:

- (35) *Kak ni P, not-Q; pri vsem P, not-Q* 'a very considerable P is taking place; Q is not taking place; the speaker thinks that usually when something like P is taking place, something like Q is taking place'.

Compared to the core concessive meaning 'P is taking place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that if

⁸Such pronouns as *chto* 'what', *skol'ko* 'how much', etc., though they do not formally start with *-k* are considered *k*-pronouns, in the same vein as the notion of *wh*-word is extended to such items as *how*.

something like P is taking place, usually something like not-Q is taking place', this definition has the reverse distribution of negation. It reflects the fact that these constructions are inherently negative: despite many efforts aimed at Q, Q is not taking place. It is reflected in their co-occurrence properties, namely that sentences containing these constructions in the subordinate clause usually contain negation in the main clause. There is one more phraseme, namely *nesmotria ni na chto* 'against all odds', 'through thick and thin', 'no matter what', 'in spite of everything'. While the constructions *kak ni P* and *pri vsem P* are pragmatically "pessimistic", *nesmotria ni na chto* is "optimistic". Namely, it means that despite considerable obstacles, situation Q did take or is taking place. Though that is not obligatory, this phraseme often also refers to a great *wish* to achieve the desired situation. Thus, some of the typical contexts for this phraseme are *dobit'sia svoego nesmotria ni na chto* 'to achieve what one wants against all the odds', *verit' nesmotria ni na chto* 'to believe despite everything', *pobedit' nesmotria ni na chto* 'to win against all odds'. The valency P, that of an obstacle, is permanently filled in this phraseme with *ni na chto*, so only the valency Q, that of a situation, is free. The following definition is proposed for *nesmotria ni na chto*:

(36) *Q, nesmotria ni na chto* 'a very considerable P took place; Q is taking place; the speaker thinks that usually when something like P is taking place, something like not-Q is taking place'.

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