

# THE EGOCENTRIC SEMANTICS OF THE CONJUNCTIONS *A* AND *NO*

by  
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There is an extensive literature devoted to the semantics of the Russian conjunctions *A* and *NO* (see, in particular, Levin 1970, Kreidlin, Paducheva 1974, and Sannikov 1989). Indeed, some time ago the problem had been considered solved. However, two developments in the field of linguistics afford us the opportunity to review the given facts from a new perspective and to give them a more interesting interpretation.

One of these developments consists of the fact that the notion of the speaker was generalized to the notion of subject of consciousness. This generalization was necessary, on the one hand, for certain topics in linguistics (in particular, for the theory of deixis) and, on the other hand, for the theory of narrative. (Concerning the subject of consciousness see Banfield 1982, Paducheva 1990). Compare also the concept of the observer, the necessity of which Iu. D. Apresian demonstrates in a number of clear examples. Apresian (1986) argues that the observer, i.e., the subject of observation, is itself one manifestation of the subject of consciousness. It would appear that the concept of subject of consciousness can be adapted in describing essential aspects of the semantic juxtaposition of the conjunctions *A* and *NO*.

The second event was the publication of A. Wierzbicka's book (Wierzbicka 1992) with its chapter devoted to the Russian language. Wierzbicka considers the semantic component 'situation out of control' to be a characteristic component of Russian semantics. We will attempt to show here that the conjunction *A* – that purely Russian phenomenon, absent from other Slavic languages – includes this particular semantic component.

Below we will attempt to focus on the same semantic feature of the conjunction *A* which is linked to its egocentricity (its orientation toward the subject of consciousness), while bypassing other features – including those which, in principle, merit further study – such as, the unique link between the conjunction *A* and prosody, touched on by Kreidlin and Paducheva (1974).

Our analysis will proceed from the distinction of three basic meanings of the conjunction A which encompass the majority of its usages: A<sub>1</sub> noncorrespondence; A<sub>2</sub> juxtaposition; and A<sub>3</sub> linking (see Kreidlin, Paducheva 1974). Of these three meanings we will consider here only A<sub>1</sub>, the meaning of noncorrespondence. In our analysis of the conjunction NO, we will follow the work of Sannikov 1989. A number of examples have been taken from the works mentioned above.

The primary focus of our analysis is to reveal the semantic, grammatical and communicative relationships between the arguments X and Y within the arrangement of structures of the type 'X A Y' and 'X NO Y'.

In order to discuss the semantics of the conjunction A, it is appropriate to establish a framework of orientation based on formal tests. We will consider the following two:

Test I. The possibility of replacing A with NO.

Test II. The possibility of transposing the arguments X and Y in a sentence containing conjunctions A and NO.

To apply these tests – that is, to answer questions I (in which contexts is it possible to replace A with NO and vice versa) and II (in which contexts is it possible to transpose the arguments) – would constitute describing more or less all interesting elements of meaning for each of these conjunctions.

We will use as our point of departure the following list of example sentences with the conjunction type A<sub>1</sub> (the numbers in brackets refer to components explained further on):

- (A1) Скоро весна, а мороз становится все сильнее. <2a>  
'Soon it will be springtime, yet [A] the frost is <becoming> more severe.'<sup>1</sup>
- (A2) Я покушался на самоубийство, а меня не арестовывают ('Дядя Ваня')  
'I attempted suicide, but [A] they don't arrest me.' ('Uncle Vanya')
- (A3) Был ветер, а сгорел только один квартал.  
'There was a wind, yet [A] only one block burned.'

- (A4') Я вышел поздно, а путь был долог. <2a'>  
'I was late in departing, and [A] the journey was long.'
- (A4) Путь был долог, а я вышел поздно.  
'The journey was long, and [A] I was late in departing.'
- (A5) Маше хочется с кем-нибудь поговорить, а она живет одна. <2b>  
'Masha would be happy to talk with someone, but [A] she lives alone.'
- (A6') Маша пошла в кино, а квартира не убрана. <2b'>  
'Masha went to the movies, although [A] the apartment has not been tidied up.'
- (A6) Квартира не убрана, а Маша пошла в кино.  
'The apartment has not been tidied up yet [A] Masha went to the movies.'
- (A7) Накануне ночью грянул мороз <...>, а Тиверзин был одет по-осеннему ('Доктор Живаго') <2c>  
'The night before there had been a terrific frost <...>, but [A] Tiverzin was dressed for fall weather.' ('Doctor Zhivago')
- (A7') Тиверзин был одет по-осеннему, а накануне ночью грянул мороз.  
'Tiverzin was dressed for fall weather, yet [A] the night before there had been a terrific frost.'
- (A8) Накануне ночью грянул мороз, а Тиверзин оделся по-осеннему.  
'The night before there had been a terrific frost, yet [A] Tiverzin dressed himself for fall weather.'

#### Test 1. Replacing A with NO

An examination of examples (A1) through (A8) shows the following:

1. In the examples (A1) through (A3) the replacement of A with NO is possible without a detectable change in meaning.
2. In (A4'), (A6'), (A7) replacement is not possible; i.e., A is permissible within the context of the given X and Y, while NO is not.

3. Especially interesting are (A4), (A6) and (A8). Here it is possible to replace A with NO, but the replacement is accompanied by a specific change in meaning, the change in meaning being the same in all cases. What is this change in meaning? And why does such a change in meaning not occur in replacing A with NO in (A1) through (A3)?

Let us turn to a discussion of the conjunction A (in its sense of noncorrespondence) and NO.

The lexicographic definition of  $A_1$ : X  $A_1$  Y is as follows:

- 1) both X and Y take place (X and Y are situations in a broad sense of the term);
- 2) either a or b or c takes place:
  - a) from the fact that X, it follows that Y should not take place (or that something opposite to Y should take place); and, rarely, a', from the fact that Y, it follows that X should not take place;
  - b) from the fact that X, it follows that X' should take place, while Y contradicts X' or prevents X' from taking place<sup>2</sup> and, rarely, b', the opposite: from the fact that Y, it follows that Y' should take place, while X contradicts Y' or prevents Y' from taking place;
  - c) X and Y together lead to certain (undesirable) consequences;
- 3) X and Y are equally important;
- 4) the subject of consciousness (who realizes contradiction, entailment, etc.) is the speaker;
- 5) both X and Y are looked upon (by the subject of consciousness) from the same point in time.

Now it is clear that in relation to examples (A1) through (A8), above, conditions 2a) through 2c) hold true. E.g., for (A5), 2b) holds: if Masha desires to speak with someone (X), there should be a possibility of her speaking (X'); on the other hand, the fact that she lives alone (Y) prevents X'.

A comment is required with respect to component 2b). Most often the concomitant realization of conditions X and Y produces unpleasant results; however, this is not necessarily the case. Thus, the supposition of component 2b) can be weakened to the point of

component 2c) that 'X and Y together have brought about definitive results.' For example, in (A9) one need not infer unpleasant results.

- (A9) *День был жаркий, а мы поехали за город.*  
'The day was hot, and [A] we went out to the countryside.'

In such a context, where there is no clear evidence of unpleasant effects, there arises a sense of semantic incompleteness: the sentence itself is perceived as nothing more than background information and the listener expects a continuation – some sort of reaction to this coexistence of two assertions. For instance, in (A2) it is the reaction 'Странно!' 'It's strange!'; see below for a more detailed discussion of this problem. Thus, evidence of unpleasant results from the concomitant realization of X and Y is only an individual occurrence in a situation within which the conjunction A is contextually free – that is, when it does not appear semantically incomplete or informationally insufficient outside this context. In other words, if there are no obvious unpleasant effects of the concomitant realization of X and Y, then the exact nature of the ensuing results must be illustrated, or become evident from the context.

We should note that in this type of explication of the meaning of  $A_1$  (noncorrespondence) the meaning of  $A_2$  (juxtaposition) need not be seen as separate: the meaning of  $A_2$  arising in contexts of the type *Береги платье снову, а честь — с молодю* ('Take care of your dress from the time it is new, and [A] your honor – from [early] youth') can be presented as an individual occurrence of the meaning of  $A_1$ , whereby the consequence of the juxtaposition of two facts (or, in the given case, of two suggestions) can be described as meaning: 'in this sense as well they are compatible.'

Sannikov 1989 concludes that the components 2a) through 2c) diverge from the norm; cf. Vol'f 1985, p.19, concerning the generally positive orientation of the norm as it is reflected in language: from this we have the anomaly of the negative. As a whole, however, components 2a) through 2c) should be characterized not as anomaly but as a particular combination of two situations in which a third situation is implicit. Specifically, this can be a awareness of anomalous circumstances (from the speaker's point of view); but, with equal results, the defined result of the first two situations can be this third situation – which is most often, but not necessarily,

unpleasant. The abnormality of the combination of the two situations – X and Y – can only consist in the condition that the third situation is implicit in it.

### *Lexicographic Definition of NO*

Following the work of Sannikov 1989, we will examine the general meaning of NO and two separate meanings arising in the context of certain X and Y combinations.

The general meaning of X NO Y is as follows:

- 1) X takes place and Y takes place;
- 2.1) a static case; i.e., X and Y are static situations: from the fact that X, it generally follows that X' should take place, while the fact that Y contradicts or prevents X';
- 2.2) a dynamic case; i.e., X and Y are events: from the fact that X, it generally follows that Y should not have taken place;
- 3) the fact that Y takes place is more important than the fact that X takes place;

### Examples:

- (NO1) Его фамилия Вернер, но он русский.  
'His name is Werner, but [NO] he's Russian.'
- (NO2) Хотел поехать на юг, но денег нет.  
'I wanted to go to the South, but [NO] I have no money.'

Contextual meaning 1: NO of a supposition. X NO Y occurs as follows:

- 1) X takes place, and Y takes place;
- 2) a static case: from the fact that X it generally follows that the world in which X takes place is attributed a positive value (X'), while the fact that Y contradicts this presupposition.
- 2') rarely, the opposite is true: from the fact that X, it follows that the world in which X takes place is attributed a negative value (X'), while the fact that Y contradicts this supposition.

- 3) the fact that Y takes place is more important than the fact that X takes place.

### Examples:

- (NO3) Лариса проста, но очень милая старушка.  
'Larisa is simple, but [NO] a very nice old woman.'
- (NO4) Рано задумал ты жениться, но невеста твоя мне нравится.  
'You've made up your mind too soon to marry, but [NO] I do like your bride.'

Contextual meaning 2: NO of an anomalous course of events:

- 1) X took place (at moment  $t_i$ ) and Y took place (at  $t_j < t_i$ );
- 2) a dynamic case: during a normal course of events, given the fact that X has taken place, Y should not have taken place;
- 3) the fact that Y has taken place is more important than the fact that X has taken place;
- 4) there is a subject of consciousness responsible for the anomalous course of events (more specifically, for the decision which caused the given course of events).

### Examples:

- (NO5) Мне предложили, но я отказался.  
'They made me an offer, but [NO] I refused.'
- (NO6) Я отсутствовал долго, но она меня не забыла.  
'I was absent for a long time, but [NO] she didn't forget me.'
- (NO7) Он звал, но я не поехала.  
'He called for me, but [NO] I didn't go.'
- (NO8) Цыган раздобыть не удалось, но она не растерялась.  
'She was unsuccessful in trying to procure the gypsies, but [NO] she didn't lose heart.'
- (NO2) Я покушался на убийство, но меня не арестовали.  
'I attempted suicide, but [NO] they didn't arrest me.'

The last example should be compared with (A<sub>2</sub>): (NO<sub>2</sub>) means 'they decided thus,' whereby 'they' are the subject of consciousness.

V. Z. Sannikov convincingly establishes component 3) in the meaning of the conjunctions A and NO. Illustrative of this is how Sannikov incorporates his evaluations into NO:

- (4) а. Рано задумал ты жениться, но невеста твоя мне нравится =  
 'You've made up your mind too soon to marry, but [NO] I do like your bride' =  
 'To marry too soon (X): this is bad.'  
 'I like your bride (Y): this is good.'

The general conclusion: 'It's all right to marry' since Y is more important;

- б. Невеста твоя мне нравится, но женился ты задумал рано =  
 'I like your bride, but [NO] you've made up your mind too soon to marry' =

The general conclusion: 'It would be better not to marry.'

Now let us see how we develop a solution to test I (i.e., when is it possible and when is it impossible to replace A with NO) with the help of the above explications of A and NO; see cases 1 through 3, above.

1. Why in (A1) through (A3) is the replacement of A with NO possible with virtually no change of meaning?

The reason is that here component 2a of the explication of conjunction A is realized, under which circumstances the meanings of A and NO coincide, as one can easily observe.

2. Why is it not possible to replace A with NO in (A4'), (A6'), and (A7)?

In (A4) and (A6), components 2a' and 2b', respectively, are realized, both of which are characterized by a process of inversion (in relation to 2a and 2b): because of Y, it follows that X should not be. This type of interrelationship between arguments X and Y is allowed by conjunction A, but not by conjunction NO. In (A7) it is impossible to replace A with NO because in this case component 2c is realized, which treats components X and Y as symmetrical – meaning that it is also the type of component which is not comparable in terms of the explication of NO.

3. In examples (A4), (A6), and (A8), what is distinctive in the structure of Y is that it contains both a verb of action and a subject, which, generally speaking, could control the beginning of the situation Y; this particular subject is responsible for the anomalous course of events. Within the context of argument Y, which contains this type of internal structure, the conjunction NO signifies that an anomalous course of events was the result of a conscious choice (corresponding to the intentions) of this particular subject; see component 4 in the explication of NO in an anomalous course of events. The following meaning arises: 'The subject could be the causer of the situation which would be a normal reaction to that which has the position X; and, in this case, Y would not take place; but the subject took a different course of action, which led to Y.' Cf. the example from *Russkaia grammatika* 1980: (A10) 'Стояла зима, но я гулял в пиджаке'. 'It was wintertime, but I went about in a light coat' (Shaliapin).

In contrast, the conjunction A ignores the presence of the subject in situation Y, which could have controlled the beginning or non-beginning of situation Y within the context of X, which already has its place. The conjunction A expresses the abnormality of such an arrangement, when both X and Y have a place; however, it does not present the beginning (or presence) of situation Y as a result of the subject's *conscious* choice to ignore the very stimulus which proceeds from X.

The implicit subject of consciousness, revealed in a sentence with the conjunction NO in the context of an anomalous course of events (see component 4), manifests itself in a variety of ways.

The concept of the subject of consciousness arose in connection with the analytic study of the narrative text as a substitute for the speaker who is absent in the narrative text (see Paducheva 1990). Where the figure of the speaker plays a role in the interpretation of the linguistic element (with the semantics of egocentricity) within the speech domain, the speaker's equivalent in narrative can be either the narrator or the hero, who serves as the focus of the author's empathy. Both can enter into the role of subject of consciousness, which requires one or another egocentric element of language.

The difference between the conjunctions A and NO consists in the fact that with the conjunction NO, it is the subject of component Y that takes on the role of the subject who recognizes the abnormality of the co-occurrence of X and Y; whereas in the case of

the conjunction A, only the speaker recognizes the abnormality of the co-occurrence of X and Y (of course, we are speaking here of those sentences in which Y contains a subject).

The conjunction A ignores the presence of a conscious subject: even if the grammatical subject in Y is 'я' ['I'], as in (A4), the conjunction A treats this subject as incomplete; the action appears as an event which has happened to the subject. Thus, in (A4), for example, the conjunction A, as it influences the meaning of the argument Y, creates a sense of being 'нечаянно' 'fortuitous,' 'не подумав' 'without thinking,' 'зазевавшись' 'unawares,' and the like. The speaker sees him/herself retrospectively from the outside and as though with a certain amount of surprise. Meanwhile, the conjunction NO in this context would mean 'I consciously diverted the events from their natural course.' Thus, the semantics of the Russian conjunction A supports Wierzbicka 1992, insofar as the idea of not being in control is the favorite semantic component in the semantic repertoire of the Russian language.

If the subject in Y is third person, then the sentence allows for interpretation within the narrative domain; see examples (NO7) and (NO9). In addition, NO creates empathy towards this subject; the sentence enters into a context which is characterized as free indirect discourse. The narrative is perceived as proceeding from the hero; the narration is understood as the hero's internal speech:

- (NO6) Квартира была не убрана, но Маша пошла в кино.  
'The apartment hadn't been tidied up, but [NO] Masha went to the movies.'
- (NO8) Накануне ночью грянул мороз, но Тиверзин оделся по-осеннему.  
'On the night before there had been a terrific frost <...>, but [NO] Tiverzin dressed himself for fall weather.'

Meanwhile, the conjunction A, which in speech is interpreted in relation to the speaker (the speaker assumes the role of the subject of consciousness), in a narrative domain marks the presence of the narrator. Accordingly, there is a subject of consciousness in example (A8) other than the subject of sentence Y.

We should note that the word *накануне* ('the night before') immediately marks example (A8) as belonging to a narrative regime. In order for (A8) to be understood within a speech regime, *накануне*

(the night before) must be replaced by *вчера* (yesterday). In such a sentence,

- (A8') Вчера ночью грянул мороз, а он оделся по-осеннему.  
'Last night there was a terrific frost, yet [A] he's dressed for fall weather.'

we clearly recognize that the speaker assumes the role of subject of consciousness – it is the speaker who realizes the incongruity of the combination of situations X and Y. This egocentricity of the conjunction explains the oft noted fact that the conjunction A tends toward conversational speech. The conjunction NO is not restricted in this way.

It remains to comment on component 3 in our explications of A and NO: NO differentiates arguments X and Y in order of their importance (Y is more important than X); see Sannikov 1989. A, on the other hand, treats X and Y as qualitatively equal. Therefore, in the text after a sentence with the conjunction NO, narrative development continues along the line of Y, whereas conjunction A appears when the preceding and (or) following lines demand an immediate focus on both components – X and Y (see Karlson 1988: 297); cf. in (A11) the typical usage of A in the context of 'странно' 'it's strange' and 'значит' '[that] means':

- (A11) *Войницкий*. Странно. Я покушался на самубийство, а меня не арестовывают, не отдают под суд. Значит, считают меня сумасшедшим. (Чехов. 'Дядя Ваня')  
*Voinitsky*. 'Strange. I attempted suicide, but [A] they don't arrest me, they don't put me on trial. That means they consider me mad.' (Chekhov. *Uncle Vanya*)
- (A12) Всегда они так: позовут, а сами не готовы. (Т. Толстая)  
'It's always like that: they call you, but [A] they themselves aren't ready.'
- (A13) а. Люди проходят мимо, но он их не замечает. Он ждет.  
'People pass by, but [NO] he doesn't notice them. He's waiting.'  
б. Я проходила мимо, а ты даже не заметил. Обидно.  
'I walked by, and [A] you didn't even notice. What an insult.'

In (13a) the second sentence is an explication of component Y; in (13b) the second sentence is a comment on the combination of X and Y taken as a whole.

In contrast to that of the conjunction A, the fact that in the semantics of NO (as an indicator of an anomalous course of events) the subject of argument Y, ignoring stimuli ensuing from X, holds a fully legitimate function, manifests itself in a differentiation between the ways in which A and NO relate to the idea of time. The temporal relations between X and Y afford a different sense with the use of NO than they do with A. Thus, the phrase

(NO9) Наукануне ночью грянул мороз, но Тиверзин оделся по-осеннему  
'The night before there was a terrific frost, but [NO] Tiverzin dressed for fall weather'

is understood solely to mean that Tiverzin chose his clothing AFTER the cold snap had occurred. Indeed, only under such a condition could he prove himself as the subject controlling the course of events. At the same time, phrase (A8), with the conjunction A, allows for a different perspective on the situation: that his choice of clothing occurred at some point before the frost (both events – the arrival of the frost and the choice of clothing – are perceived from the same point in time; see component 5 in the explication of A. We should note that in Pasternak's text, this is the case (Tiverzin could not prove himself as the subject who consciously ignores stimuli ensuing from X):

Тиверзин пришел домой на третий день продрогший, невыспавшийся, небритый. Накануне ночью грянул мороз, небывалый для таких чисел < . . . > а Тиверзин был одет по-осеннему.  
'Tiverzin arrived home three days later chilled to the bone, fatigued from lack of sleep, unshaven. The night before there had been a terrific frost, unheard of for that time of the season < . . . >, yet [A] Tiverzin was dressed for fall weather.'

### Test II. Transposing Arguments X and Y

From the explications offered we should also note the distinction between the conjunctions A and NO from the perspective of the possibility of transposing arguments X and Y.

In a sentence with the conjunction NO, it is always impossible to transpose the arguments, for one or several of the following reasons:

1. The relationship of a given order in a sentence with NO is always unidirectional: due to the fact that X, it follows that Y should not take place.
2. The correlation in terms of importance always acts upon Y (i.e., on the second component), so that the transposition of components will change the correlation.
3. In a situation with NO of evaluation, the transposition will mean a change in the evaluation.
4. In a situation with NO indicating an anomalous course of events, the arguments X and Y are differentiated in time, so that the transposition will be accompanied by a change in temporal relations.

In a situation with the conjunction A, a transposition of arguments is sometimes possible, and sometimes not – a condition fully predicted by the analysis offered above.

If the argument Y is causally dependent on X (i.e., condition 2a or condition 2b of the explication of conjunction A is realized when  $A \approx NO$ ), then a transposition is not possible, just as it would be impossible in the case of NO; see (A1) through (A3).

However, a transposition of arguments can become possible with the insertion of 'ведь' ('indeed, after all, even'):

(A3) ==> Сгорел только один квартал, а ведь был ветер!  
'Only one block burned, while [A] there was even a wind!'

If, conversely, X is causally dependent on Y (i.e., condition 2a' or condition 2b' of the explication of A is realized), then a transposition of arguments is possible (providing there are no other factors to consider – anaphora, etc.); in such a case, (A4)  $\approx$  (A4').

If test 2c is realized, then a transposition is possible; see (A7) and (A7').

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### Notes

1. No single English word reflects all the nuances of the Russian conjunctions. For this reason, Russian examples with the same conjunction are glossed with different English conjunctions. For clarity, the Russian conjunction is indicated in square brackets in the English translations. (Tr. note – J.F.)
2. X' is semantically connected with X – e.g., it may be X but with a different modality. The same is true with regard to Y' and Y, below. The actant X' and its corresponding component 2b were substantiated in Levin 1970 (applicable to the discussion of the conjunction NO). Cf. a discussion of tertium comparationis in Karlson 1986.

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