

Negational intensifiers *ničut'* and *ničem* in Russian: a comparative corpus study

This paper discusses Russian negational intensifiers *ničut'* and *ničem* that can modify Adjectival and Adverbial Phrases (AdjP and AdvP) in the comparative degree (see [1] for a brief description of the comparative constructions in Russian). These intensifiers can be classified as Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) as they require a negative environment (see (1)-(2) with AdjPs and (3)-(4) with AdvPs). The data for the talk comes from Russian National Corpus ([2]), except for some additional examples (as (1)-(2) and (5)) included for the illustration of grammaticality.

In (1)-(4) one might observe constituent negation (C-Neg; see [3]) intensified by *ničut'* and *ničem*, which is opposed to standard (sentential) negation (S-Neg; see [4]). Following the paper [5], we use the diagnostic with an overt copula 'be' (see examples (5ab)) to prove the C-Neg status of the negation. The main argument is the location of the copula before the negative particle *ne* in C-Neg and after the particle in the case of S-Neg.

Being applied to comparative AdjPs and AdvPs, *ničut'* and *ničem* intensify the degree of a given feature. Typologically there also exist negational intensifiers of time frequency (e.g. *ever*, *never*). A possible classification of adverbial intensifiers was proposed for Hausa in [6].

For Russian NPIs were most exhaustively described by E. Paducheva ([7]), but the focus of her paper was put on the NPIs observed in the constructions with sentential negation, so *ničut'* and *ničem* were not mentioned. Our research provides new data on their behaviour and distribution in sentences with constituent negation with an emphasis on comparative AdjPs and AdvPs. Figure 1 shows the distribution of each intensifier for AdjPs and AdvPs within the first 200 occurrences in the corpus. As it can be seen, *ničem* has a considerable preference over the contexts with AdjPs whereas *ničut'* is distributed relatively equally between both types of phrases.

Another significant difference is related to the kind of lexemes which the intensifiers are able to combine with. Though at first glance one can suppose that *ničut'* and *ničem* are interchangeable (cf. (1) and (2)), they do not always behave as synonyms. Namely, there are numerous contexts where *ničem* is impossible whereas *ničut'* is considered grammatical (see (6ab)). The list of lexemes co-occurring with each intensifier will be provided in the talk.

As our data show, *ničut'* can always replace *ničem*, although some subtle differences in the semantics arise. The intensifier *ničem* tends to introduce a multifactorial evaluation. In (2) the comparison of the books is carried out according to several parameters (e.g. outlook, plot, quality of paper etc.). In the case of *ničut'*, however, the evaluation is a bit more straightforward: only the general impression of the book matters.

In the talk both syntactic differences and semantic constraints in the corpus distribution of the intensifiers will be discussed. The latter will be formulated with regard to the compositionality of the intensifiers' meaning, which originates from their inner morphological forms.

Examples and figures

(1) èta kniga **ničut'** *(ne) **xuže** toj
this book INTENS1 NEG worse that
'This book is not at all worse than that one.'

(2) èta kniga **ničem** *(ne) **xuže** toj
this book INTENS2 NEG worse that
'This book is not at all worse than that one.'

(3) <...> antibakterial'noe mylo zaščiščaet ot infekcij **ničut'**
antibacterial soap protects from infections INTENS1
*(ne) **lučše** obyčnogo
NEG better ordinary

'Antibacterial soap protects from infections not at all better than the ordinary one.'

(4) <...> ot atak terroristov my, uvy, zaščiščeny **ničem** *(ne)
from attacks terrorists we PTCL are.protected INTENS2 NEG

lučše čem SŠA
better than USA

‘We are protected from the terrorists’ attacks not at all better than the USA.’

- (5) a. èta kniga **budet ničut’** **ne** **xuže** toj
this book will INTENS1 NEG worse that
‘This book will not at all be worse than that one.’
- b. *èta kniga **ničut’** **ne** **budet xuže** toj
this book INTENS1 NEG will worse that
Exp: ‘This book will not at all be worse than that one.’
- (6) a. partii vznikali neredko, no isčezali **ničut’** **ne**
parties appeared not.rarely but vanished INTENS1 NEG
reže
more.rarely
‘Political parties appeared quite often, but vanished not at all less often.’
- b. *partii vznikali neredko, no isčezali **ničem** **ne**
parties appeared not.rarely but vanished INTENS2 NEG
reže
more.rarely
Exp: ‘Political parties appeared quite often, but vanished not at all less often.’

Figure 1. Distribution of the intensifiers with AdjPs and AdvPs

	ničut’	ničem
AdjP	93	193
AdvP	107	7

Abbreviations

INTENS1, 2 – intensifier 1, 2; NEG – negation; PTCL – particle.

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