

Russian *dostatočno* ‘enough’ vs. ‘fairly’ as an Example of a Type of Polysemy

Abstract

This paper is devoted to the sort of polysemy that develops in words with evaluative meanings. Evaluative adjectives easily become modifiers and tend to be used emotionally. Their strict sense is often violated in pragmatic discourse and they are open to many kinds of expressive, exaggerating and humoristic use. This may lead to changes in the proportions of their semantic structure; there may even be a change in the primary meaning, and the polysemy manifested in pragmatic use easily reveals possibilities of enantiosemy. The Russian adverb *dostatočno* ‘sufficiently, enough’ is taken as an illustrative example. The paper argues that most monolingual and bilingual dictionaries do not cover the range of the word’s meaning.

0. Introduction

Words of specific evaluation, such as ‘enough’ (i.e. ‘to a degree that is required for one purpose or another’), ‘reasonable’ (‘not too bad from somebody’s point of view’), ‘passable’ (‘for some purpose’), may develop into “neutral” or “absolute” modifiers (‘fair, quite’). In this paper the issue at stake is meaning expansion in evaluative words. They may undergo a semantic extension that makes their original meaning and the new one somehow contradictory. This is often neglected in dictionaries, simply because of the spontaneous nature of language change. As an illustration the case of the Russian adverb *dostatočno* is discussed in the following sections. I maintain that its use in the meaning ‘considerably’ is no less frequent than the original one ‘sufficiently’. They should be treated as separate meanings, because they are not mutually compatible.

The development of meaning we have in Russian *dostatočno*, from something that is normally qualified as ‘positive’ to a neutral quantitative intensifier, or vice versa, is not very rare. Similar examples could be provided from various languages. In Finnish, if we examine the treatment of the adjective *kohtuullinen* (‘reasonable, moderate, modest, fair, proper, decent, tolerable, passable’ etc.) in bilingual dictionaries, or in monolingual Finnish dictionaries, we find that the basic meaning implied by this word is something like ‘to a not too high degree’. During the last ten or twenty years the sense in which this word is most

commonly used has changed. The source of the evolution of the meaning can be found in the ambivalent original meaning 'enough but not too much' (very near to the famous Swedish *lagom* 'passable' etc.). Most occurrences in everyday speech attest the meaning 'fair(ly), quite, to a considerable degree'. One feels entitled to argue that the description of *kohtuullinen* in most dictionaries is no longer adequate.

In Swedish, *försvarlig* could be another case in point. Having originally meant only 'defensible, justifiable', it is currently used in the meaning 'quite, fair'. The question that arises when designing the relevant entries in a dictionary is how to reflect the semantic variation in the actual use of the words. In the case of the Swedish *försvarlig*, the lexicographic practice has taken care well enough of the changed reality – the change took place long ago. Changes in the use of the Finnish *kohtuullinen* are apparently too new to have been handled properly in the existing dictionaries (see Tommola 1996), but the problems with Russian *dostatočno* have obviously not been recognized adequately by all lexicographers even though they have existed for centuries.

1. Russian *dostatočno* 'sufficiently, enough'

In Russian, the adverb *dostatočno* 'sufficiently, enough' is very often used in the meaning 'to a considerable degree' or even 'very'. The word obviously underwent a semantic extension several centuries ago, and the new meaning has become very frequent, especially in formal speech. Consider the following examples:

- (1) [...]pokazanija psixologičeskix testov, prizvannyx opoznat' opredelennye čerty xaraktera i ličnosti, **dostatočno redko** sovpadajut s real'nymi projavlenijami v raznyx situacijax takix čert, kak dominantnost' [...]

(I. Pruss, "Bogatstvo individual'nosti", *Znanie – sila* 1987/2 17–19)

'[...] evidence from psychological tests called upon to identify certain characteristics and personality traits **very seldom** [lit. **rarely enough**] coincide with manifestations of such characteristics as dominance [...] in different situations [...]

- (2) Problem zdes', odnako, ešče **dostatočno mnogo**.

(R. Sagdeev, "Kosmičeskaja texnologija na zemnoj službe", *Texnika i nauka* 1986/3: 22–27)

'There are, however, **enough** [lit. **sufficiently many**] problems left.'

- (3) Èto tože dostatočno dorogostojaščee rešenje. K tomu že gidrookis' urana nepročna, maloustojčiva k kislotam, [...]
 ("Uran iz morskoj vody", *Nauka i žizn'* 1986/5: 157–158)
 'This is also a **very expensive / quite an expensive** [lit. **an expensive enough**] solution.'
- (4) Pyli zdes' nakopilos' **dostatočno** za èto vremja, pyli i golubinogo pomëta.
 (Vasilij Aksënov, "Pora, moj drug, pora")
 'There had accumulated a lot [lit. **enough**] of dust in the meantime, dust and pigeons' excrements.'¹

It is characteristic of these examples that the adverb 'sufficiently' has been used to add information about the degree to which something exists or is available in a context where a large amount of this something cannot be regarded as desirable from the point of view of the speaker. There should not reasonably exist any standard of a required low frequency in occurrences of the fact referred to in (1); problems are hardly seen as appreciated resources to be longed for in (2); the speaker in (3) does not express his satisfaction at the expensiveness of the solution considered; and the plenty of dust does not make Aksënov's narrator happy in (4). In fact, some of the examples above could perhaps be translated into English by using *enough*. We have then, however, to do with an expressive phraseologism, whereas in Russian this use has nothing to do with expressiveness; moreover, it has become a dead cliché (cf. example 8 below).

2. *Dostatočno* in dictionaries

With 161 occurrences, the adverb *dostatočno* is among the 800 most frequent words in the dictionary of Zazorina (1979), and almost three times as frequent as the adjective *dostatočnyj* (56 occurrences) 'sufficient'. This kind of word count does not give any information about the frequency of different meanings of the words. The actual polysemy of the adverb is recognized in MAS (Shorter Academic Dictionary), and in the famous dictionary of Vladimir Dal' from the 19th century, but neglected in most other Russian dictionaries, notably in Ožegov (Ožegov, Švedova 1993). Because Ožegov has often been a model for bilingual Russian-foreign dictionaries, the extremely common "absolute" use of the adverb derived from a relational adjective (*dostatočnyj* 'sufficient') is scarcely registered at all, although this use is nothing new in the contemporary language. Similar semantic expansion can also be

detected in several other languages (English, Estonian, Finnish, German, Swedish). Nevertheless, it would not be correct to translate Russian *dostatočno* with the equivalents given in dictionaries (again, cf. example 8 below). Let us look up the relevant entries in some Russian monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.

2.1. Ožegov

Ožegov's standard Russian language dictionary (the new edition: Ožegov, Švedova 1993) does not elucidate the meaning 'considerably, to a considerable extent/degree' at all. The entry for the adjective *dostatočnyj* is arranged in five parts:

1. Udovletvorjajuščij potrebostjam, neobxodimym uslovijam. ('something that meets requirements, necessary conditions'); *Vpolne d. srok* 'a completely sufficient time, term'. *Dostatočno* (nareč.) *umen*. 'Sufficiently (adverb) clever'.
2. To že, čto zažitočnyj (razg.) ('same as prosperous' coll.); *Dostatočnaja sem'ja* 'A prosperous family'.
3. *dostatočno*, v znač. skaz., kogo-čego ili s neopr. O tom, čto projavljaetsja v neobxodimoj mere, imeetsja v nužnom količestve" ('used as a predicate, with Gen. or Infinitive'. 'Of something that is available or exists to necessary extent, in requisite amount'; *Sil ešče dostatočno* 'There's enough power left'. *Dostatočno slova, čtoby on poslušalsja* 'It'll suffice to say one word, and he'll obey'. *Dostatočno uvidet', čtoby ponjat'* 'It's enough to see [it] in order to understand'.
4. *dostatočno*, v znač. skaz., kogo-čego ili s neopr. Pora prekratit' delat' čto-n.; budet, xvatit ('used as a predicate, with Gen. or Infinitive'. 'It's time to stop doing something; that's enough, that'll do'); *Dostatočno boltovni (boltat')* 'That's enough of [your] chattering'.
5. *dostatočno*, čactica. To že, čto budet (vo 2 znač.) ('particle'. 'The same as *budet* (in the 2nd meaning 'that's enough').' *Zamolči! Dostatočno!* 'Shut up! That's enough!'

We have here, typically enough (!), in the second example of the use of *dostatočnyj* 'sufficient' in meaning 1., the adverb form followed by the short adjective *uměn* 'clever, wise'. As the examples are void of context, one cannot possibly give "correct" translations (that is one of the reasons why this kind of monolingual dictionaries should not be "automatically" converted to bilingual ones): with a good knowledge of living Russian usage the reader will recognize the polysemy of this example, and

perhaps think that the meaning ‘quite clever’ is the “preferred” reading. The mechanism of the meaning change is also quite easy to reconstruct here: if somebody is said to be ‘clever enough’ (to understand, to do, to know something etc.) it is not a long step to using this same collocation in other contexts, where the level of ‘cleverness’ is not explicitly compared with any standard;² moreover, the adverb is used precisely to point out a considerable degree of the quality.

2.2. Dal’

The Dictionary of Living Russian language by Vladimir Dal’ (1880) gives the following description of the adverb: “dovol’no, ne malo, skol’ko nužno, dosyta” ‘fairly/enough, not little, as much as needed, to satiety’. Here two interesting things can be noted: first, two of the expressions (‘fairly’ and ‘not little’) confirm the existence of the absolute use as early as the 19th century; second, the first of the given equivalents (*dovol’no*) has followed a path of meaning change identical to that of *dostatočno*, dealt with in this paper. In Old Russian, the standard expression of ‘enough, sufficiently’ was precisely *dovol’no*. Consider (5):³

- (5) Jako simŭ vŭzgradiša cerkov’ i kelija, pokrovŭ že i most’, i eliko dovol’no vsemu monastyrju na potrebu.

(Patericon of the Cave Monastery)

‘With this the church and the cells, the roof and the floor were built, and as much as **sufficient** for the whole monastery’

But in Old Muscovite texts this word had already acquired another meaning, namely ‘quite, (quite) a lot’, e.g.:

- (6) I tako emu [velikomu knjazju Ivanu Vasil’eviču] otŭ boga proslavlenu i blagoden’stveno carstvujuču, darova že emu bogŭ i čadorodie **dovol’no**: [...]

(Book of degrees of the Imperial genealogy)

‘And so God let him [the Great Prince Ivan Vasil’evich] reign renowned and in prosperity, and gave him a lot [lit. **enough**] of children: [...]

- (7) [...] i blagonadež’no i zdravo priide vŭ monastyr’, i **dovol’no** molitvova, i [...](ibid.)

‘hopeful and healthy he came to the monastery, and prayed a while [lit. **enough**], and [...]

Finally, among the equivalents given by Dal' *ne malo* is worth consideration. It also means in contemporary Russian 'not little', i.e., 'a lot'. Here lies hidden the whole secret of the meaning evolution, because the meaning 'too little' as a possible implication of *malo* 'little' seems to be more often actualized in Russian than in many other languages (cf., however, the opposition of *little* and *a little* in English, or *wenig* and *ein wenig* in German, for example). Thus, the negation of 'too little' (i.e., 'not too little') precisely means 'enough'. The "absolute" quantification, then, is derived from the equation:

x : 'enough' = 'little' : 'too little';
x = 'much, a lot';

or as an adverb from:

x : 'enough' = 'to a considerably low extent' : 'not enough';
x = 'to a considerably high extent' = 'quite, very'.

2.3. MAS

In the so-called Shorter Academic Dictionary (MAS 1981–1984) the meaning in question is registered, not as an explicitly separate meaning of *dostatočno*, but as a variant of the first meaning of the adverb separated from the basic meaning by a double slash (//), and explained as "v značitel'noj stepeni" 'to a considerable degree'. As an example a quotation from the 19th-century writer Saltykov-Ščedrin is provided: "*Postarel on za èti vosem' let dostatočno*". Although expressions like English *enough* may sometimes get this meaning, we can hardly translate the quotation with equivalents of *dostatočno* in its primary meaning ('enough, sufficiently'), for example, into English (8a), German (8b), Swedish (8c), or Finnish (8d):

- (8) a. He had **grown considerably** / ?**sufficiently older** during those eight years.
b. In diesen acht Jahren war er ?**genug** / ?**genügend** / ?**ausreichend** / **erheblich älter geworden**.
c. På dessa åtta år hade han **åldrats ganska mycket** / ?**nog** / ?**tillräckligt**.
d. Noiden kahdeksan vuoden aikana hän oli **vanhentunut melkoisesti** / ?**riittävästi** / ?**tarpeeksi**.

It is important to note that, as a rule, in bilingual Russian dictionaries *dostatočno* has been discussed only in the meaning 'sufficiently, enough'.⁴ This is no wonder, because the other meaning has not been given the attention it deserves in most monolingual dictionaries, either.

3. 'Enough' in other languages

If I have problems, and I say that I have enough of them, I am supposed to be joking (see above). These kinds of humoristic or ironic expressions may easily become phraseological or lexicalized (and grammaticalized, cf. Bybee et al. 1994): more and more people acquire this (expressive or emotional) mode of expression, and this inevitably ends with the loss of the expressive effect, as we know from the dying metaphor stories. In sections 1 and 2 we have seen that, in Russian, the words for 'enough' tend successively to undergo a development in this direction. In what follows, I record the uses of words for 'enough' registered in dictionaries of some other languages.

3.1. German *genug* 'enough' = 'very, fairly'

In Duden (1983) we find *genug* explained, first, as "in zufriedenstellendem Mab; ausreichend; genügend", and second, when used in postposition after an adjective, as "ausreichend; genügend". In the latter meaning the following examples are given:

- (9) a. ... das alles ist **schlimm genug** (sehr schlimm)
 b. ... das ist **wenig genug** (ist recht wenig)

3.2. Swedish *nog* 'enough' = 'quite'

In the Swedish-Finnish dictionary in three volumes (Karlsson 1982–1987) the meaning of *nog* is also given under two headings: 1) "tillräckligt, i tillräcklig mängd, till fyllest", and 2) "tillräckligt, i tillräcklig l. hög grad, ganska o.d.". Here the "absolute" use is noted already in the description of the meaning ("hög grad" 'high degree', "ganska" 'quite'). Some of the relevant examples are the following:

- (10) a. ... A var **vänlig nog** att hjälpa mig.
 '... A was friendly enough to help me.'

- b. ... ett ordspråk vars innebörd man **lätt nog** fattar.
'a proverb the meaning of which one easily enough understands'
- c. ett exempel som är **lärorikt nog**.
'an example that is instructive enough'⁵

3.3. English *enough* 'fairly, especially'

In the English semi-bilingual dictionary PASSWORD (1993, 1995) one of the two uses registered for the adverb *enough* is illustrated by the examples in (11):

- (11) a. She's pretty **enough**, but not beautiful.
- b. Oddly **enough**, it isn't raining.

In the Finnish and Estonian versions of PASSWORD the equivalents given for *enough* in this use are *kyllä* and *küll*, respectively. These particles in both languages are related to adverbs in different case forms (Finnish *kyllin*, *kylliksi*; Estonian *küllalt*) meaning 'enough'.⁶

In the Collins COBUILD (1987) dictionary we find the clearest distinction of the two uses that appeared in (11a) and (11b). The first one corresponds to the sense of 'fairly': "if you say that someone or something is 'sincere enough' or 'common enough', you are saying that although you admit that something or someone is sincere or common, you are not prepared to state just how sincere or common they actually are".

- (12) a. She sounded **sincere enough**, but I couldn't take any chances...
- b. That's a **common enough** experience...
- c. That would suit Godley **well enough**.

The second use is explained as an expression "to comment on a piece of information" and to say that something is, for instance, "especially odd, strange, or interesting", e.g.:

- (13) a. **Oddly enough**, I do believe you..
- b. **Funnily enough**, old people seem to love bingo...
- c. I think, **interestingly enough**, America is now dependent on Africa for 40% of its oil imports.

3.4. Finnish

Example (14) shows that a similar development is on its way in Finnish, as well:

- (14) Jos OBL otetaan käyttöön, adverbiaalien joukkoon jäisi enää erilaisia vapaita määritteitä eli adjunkteja – sellaisenaan vielä **tarpeeksi** heterogeeninen joukko sekín.

(Anneli Pajunen, "Adverbiaali ja komplementti". Abstract of paper submitted to "Kielitieteen päivät", Helsinki 1996.)

'If [the term] OBL is employed, adverbials would comprise only various free modifiers viz. adjuncts – as such still a **sufficiently** heterogeneous group'.

3.5. Estonian

To conclude, it can be noted that adverbs meaning 'enough' are often used to form idiomatic expressions, like the Estonian equivalents of 'old' and 'representative' in (14) (Õim 1991):

- (15) a. **küllalt** aastaid turjal
 'old' [lit. 'enough years on the (scruff of the) neck']
 b. **küllalt** hõlmav
 'representative' [lit. 'enough comprising/covering']

4. Conclusion

Even though Russian makes exceptionally extensive use of *dostatočno* 'sufficiently, enough' as a simply intensifying adverb in the meaning 'fairly, quite, very', a semantic development similar to this can be observed in several other languages as well. The seemingly idiosyncratic use of the adverb in Russian is rather a matter of degree than of quality. But as a lexicographic task, a separate meaning is motivated in the case of Russian, but not in the case of, for example, Finnish, where a similar use remains merely an occasional discourse function.

Notes

1. Examples (1) through (3) are derived from the Uppsala Russian Text Corpus, example (4) from the corpus published by George Fowler of Indiana University. Both corpora are made available for research by UHLCS – the University of Helsinki Language Corpus Server, a service provided by the Department of General Linguistics, University of Helsinki, Finland, and administered by the Research Unit for Multilingual Language Technology affiliated with the department.
2. Cf., however, Lyons' (1974) argument that any qualifying statement is a comparison.
3. All the Old Russian (Old East Slavonic) examples are quoted from Stender-Petersen's (1954) anthology, compiled for use in literary studies; therefore the orthography does not follow any principle of documentary exactness.
4. I have checked some Russian-English, Russian-German, Russian-Swedish, and Russian-Finnish dictionaries. There is some hope that this neglect will soon be corrected in the new edition of the Russian-Finnish dictionary (Kuusinen, Ollikainen 1963), which has had several reprintings since 1963 but has so far remained unchanged.
5. It can be noted that none of these examples is rendered into Finnish with literal equivalents meaning 'enough'. The devices used in Finnish include *hyvinkin* ('well' + the pragmatic particle *-kin*), *varsin* 'quite', *niin* 'so'.
6. In Finnish (rather formal) discourse, *kyllä* is also the standard confirming answer to yes-no questions.

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