

Russian Conjunctions: Two Types of Uncertainty

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1 Introduction

In addition to the disjunctive conjunctions *ili* ‘or’ and *ili ... ili...* ‘either... or...’; Russian, unlike English, also has two complex conjunctions that express uncertainty: *ne to ... ne to...* and *to li ... to li...* They are usually both translated as ‘either ... or...’, thus eliminating the explicit element of uncertainty as well as any semantic differences. The etymologically demonstrative *to* is stressed in both, *ne* is a negative particle and *li* is an interrogative particle that is usually used in indirect and rhetorical questions.

Sannikov [3] treats the two uncertainty conjunctions as synonymous, calls them conjunctions of “exterior similarity” and describes them as follows:

ne to X, ne to Y = the described entity has some exterior features of X and some exterior features of Y;
X is possible,
Y is possible,
something which is neither X nor Y is possible.

While I will show that the latter reading is possible, Sannikov himself asserts it is based on a general principle of uncertainty and illustrates it with (1), which would allow such an interpretation:

- (1) a. Ego familija — *ne to* Sëmin, *ne to* Senin.
His last-name *ne to* Semin *ne to* Senin
‘His last name is (something like) Semin or Senin.’
- b. Eto proizošlo *ne to* v XV, *ne to* v XVI veke.
This happened *ne to* in 15 *ne to* in 16 century
‘This happened maybe in 15th or in 16th century.’

Sannikov’s [2] own example (2) contradicts his postulate of “exterior similarity”, since in this case a stranger and the sun have to have something physically in common, which I believe they do not:

- (2) ... navstrečuidet s kem-to Čexov, zakryvaetsja gazetoj, **ne to ot**
towards goes with someone Chekhov covers with-newspaper *ne to* from
solnca, ne to ot ètogo kogo-to, iduščego rjadom s nim. (I. Bunin. OČexove)
sun *ne to* from this someone going next with him
‘Chekhov is approaching with somebody, he is shielding his head with
a newspaper from the sun or from this somebody who is walking on his side.’

Clearly, the difference in meaning has not been easy to establish, given that analysts either proclaim the complex conjunctions synonymous (e.g. Sannikov [2]) or attribute to them stylistic differences (<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/clavier.cierzniak/memorusse/mr/li/lito.htm>). Khegaj [1] according to Sannikov (1989: 130), who himself disagreed with that position, distinguished *ne to ... ne to...* as preferable for description of perceptibly accessible but uneven in their impression events, while *to li... to li...* according to Khegaj tends to describe an event for which the speaker lacks reliable information for identification. While I do not agree with this distinction, it is noteworthy that there have already been attempts to disambiguate this pair of conjunctions.

The goal of this paper is to establish the difference in meaning between *ne to p, ne to q* and *to li p, to li q*. In order to do this, whenever possible I will analyze minimal pairs that clearly distinguish the meaning between the two of them. Assuming the conjunctions have the same meaning elsewhere and using an inductive approach, I will look at examples that seem to imply the overlap of the meanings and disambiguate them using broader pragmatic context.

This article will deal only with these two complex conjunctions that express uncertainty, leaving aside the issue of disjunction related to *ili* 'or' and *ili ... ili...* 'either... or...', which were analyzed in Sannikov [2] and Sannikov [3].

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: 1. The meaning of the conjunctions and their semantic differences. 2. The nature of the relationship *p* vs. *q*. 3. Syntactic and discourse features.

2 Meaning of the Conjunctions

The reason that the meanings of both conjunctions have been so difficult to identify is because in most cases the substitution of *ne to* by *to li* and vice versa seems possible; both utterances would convey uncertainty. Since uncertainty itself has not been studied, one could not suspect that there may be more than one kind of it, particularly when examining examples without a larger context:

- (3) a. On to li xudožnik, to li poet. vs. On ne to xudožnik, ne to poet.

he *to li* artist *to li* poet. he *ne to* artist *ne to* poet
'He is either an artist or a poet.'

- b. On priedet to li segodnja, to li zavtra. vs. On priedet ne to segodnja, ne to zavtra.

he will-come *to li* today *to li* tomorrow. he will-come *ne to* today *ne to* tomorrow
'He will come either today or tomorrow.'

- c. Prošlo to li dva, to li tri goda. vs. Prošlo ne to dva, ne to tri goda.

passed *to li* two *to li* three years. passed *ne to* two *ne to* three years
'Either two or three years have passed.'

In order to observe the difference, it is best to examine minimal pairs where either the larger context suggests what kind of uncertainty the speaker is dealing with or the speaker/narrator himself/herself states the nature of the uncertainty. The semantic distinction can be best observed when examining utterances with antonymous propositions *p* and *q*.

And indeed synonymy of these two conjunctions is severely challenged by the fact that their occurrences are not even remotely equal in numbers. Google <12.VIII.2007> has seven examples of *ne to est' ne to net* and 17,700 of *to li est' to li net* 'either there is or there isn't'. One would expect a more even distribution in the case of absolute synonymy. We find a similarly although not as pronounced lopsided distribution for *ne to den' ne to noč'* and *to li den' to li noč'* 'either day or night' — 9:129, and for *ne to živ, ne to mertv* as opposed to *to li živ, to li mertv* 'either dead or alive' 3:45. The search for *to li X, to li ne X* and *ne to X ne to ne X* yielded even more stark results: I was able to find *ne to* only with forms of the verb *byt'* 'to be' — byl-4, bylo-4, byla-1 — as opposed to *to li* constructions: byl-196, bylo-1,440, byla-62. In addition, one finds *to li* with other verbs, such as *to li vernetsja, to li ne vernetsja* 'either he will return or he won't', *to li spit to li ne spit* 'either he is asleep or he isn't', and a few others, and some nouns, such as

son 'sleep, dream', *most* 'bridge'. Antonyms clearly favor the conjunction *to li*. This is precisely why examining this opposition is fruitful.

If we compare the first pair of antonyms, *day* and *night*, and follow what the narrators say, in (4a) even though it is daytime, it is impossible to tell whether it is day or night: because of the dark cloud day is like night, in other words, it is day-night.

- (4) a. I vot zatmilos' jasnoe solnyško tučej, i ne razobrat' stalo —
and now eclipsed clear sun by-dark-cloud and not to-discern became
ne to den', ne to noč', splošnaja tem'. (www.lib.ru/HIST/KUNGUROW/artluz.txt)
ne to day ne to night solid darkness

'And here the clear sun got covered with a dark cloud, and one could not tell whether it was day or night: absolute darkness.'

In (5a), where in reality the day and the night are equally dark, the speaker is not complaining about that fact but rather that he has no way of telling whether it is day or night because of the eight hour jet lag which disorients newly arrived people. He does not say that one is indistinguishable from the other, only that he cannot figure it out.

- (5) a. Vtoroe — poljarnaja noč', ...Prosypaeš'sja — i tupo soobražaeš', skol'ko
Second polar night you-wake-up and dumbly figure-out how-much
sejčas vremeni: to li šest' utra, to li večera, to li den', to li noč'.
now time to li six of-morning to li of-evening to li day to Vremja li night time
zdes' operežat moskovskoe na vosem' časov, i èto stanovitsja predmetom
here ahead Moscow-adj by eight hours and this becomes subject
dolgix mučenij dlja novičkov. (www.geocities.com/allness/SANIN5.html)
long sufferings for newcomers

'Second — the arctic night, ... One wakes up and tries to dumbly figure out what time it is, whether six in the morning or in the evening, whether day or night. The time difference between here and Moscow is eight hours and this is a source of long suffering for the newcomers.'

Comparing the second pair of antonyms, in (4b) the enigmatic smile is there and not there at the same time, more like that of Mona Lisa. The comparison with the Cheshire cat does not mean that now it is there and now it is gone, after all we are dealing with a real toy monkey, and no magic is involved, but the nature of its smile makes the author think of the Cheshire cat.

- (4) b. Prodavec salona Èl'vira берет v ruki bol'suju loxmatuju obez'janu s
seller of-salon Elvira takes in hands big disheveled monkey with
zagadočnoj ulybkoi Češirskogo kota — **ne to est', ne to net**.
enigmatic smile of-Cheshire cat *ne to* is *ne to* not.
(www.chrab.chel.su/archive/20-12-03/3/A132589.DOC.html)
'Elvira, the saleswoman of the salon, takes into her hands a disheveled monkey with an enigmatic smile of a Cheshire cat which either exists or doesn't.'

And in (5b) the uncertainty surrounds lack of knowledge about whether North Korea has or does not have nuclear weapons, it cannot be both at the same time.

- (5) b. Tak vot est' takaja škola mysli, čto u Iraka ne bylo jadernogo oružija —
so here is such school of-thought that at Iraq not was nuclear weapons
emu dostalos', po polnoj programme ot Ameriki. U Severnoj
to-him got along full program from America at North
Korei **to li est', to li net**, no možet byt', i vot vokrug nee krutjatsja,

Korea *to li* is *to li* not but may be and here around her swirl
vedutsja šestistoronnie peregovory, no vedut sebja s nej očen'
conducted six-sided negotiations but conduct self with her very
ostorožno. (<http://www.mideast.ru/show-4485-rus.html>)
carefully.

‘There is such a school of thought that Iraq had no nuclear weapons — it got full blast from America. North Korea maybe has it or maybe not, but it is possible and now everyone is tip-toeing around it conducting six party talks, but everyone is behaving very carefully.’

While in (4) the uncertainty makes the opposites *p* and *q* merge, in (5) extraneous factors such as jet lag and lack of knowledge make it impossible to discern whether it is *p* or *q*.

Another instance for comparison is where $p \sim q$. In examples (6) and (7) *p* and *q* are the numerals *three* and *four*, in other words close approximates.

- (6) Mekin ponjal, čto ne doexal do raboty **ne to tri, ne to četyre** ostanovki,
Mekin understood that not arrived till work *ne to* three *ne to* four stops
Matjugnulsja skvoz' zuby pro sebja, i ostervenelo polez v podošedšij
Cussed through teeth about self and furiously climbed in approached
nabuxšij avtobus. (www.phil.nnov.ru/mycase/mekin3.asp)
swollen bus ‘Mekin understood that he got off three or four stops before his work, cursed under his
breath to himself and started to force himself into a cramped bus.’

- (7) Maxačkala: opoznany **to li tri, to li četyre** trupa boevikov.
Makhachkala identified *to li* three *to li* four corpses of-militants
(www.grani.ru/Events/Terror/m.82980.html)
‘Makhachkala: three or four corpses of the militants have been identified.’

In (6) the protagonist Mekin got off the bus too early. It could be three stops too early or four stops, but it does not matter, it is equally inconvenient for him. In (7), which is the title of an article, it actually does matter how many bodies have been identified. The article first states that four out of five bodies have been identified, and then later after many details on identification techniques and difficulties it states that in reality two bodies out of five remain unidentified. In other words, with *ne to* we see again the morphing together of *p* and *q*, in this case because of the unimportance of the distinction, while with *to li* *p* and *q* remain distinct, however with uncertainty as to which one it really is.

In the case of the approximates, we also find much higher frequency of *to li* but in addition we can observe a wider range of *p* and *q* with *to li* compared to *ne to* (Google <14.VIII.2007>):

<i>to li 2 to li 3</i> — 466 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 3</i> — 207 tokens
<i>to li 2 to li 4</i> — 50 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 4</i> — 3 tokens
<i>to li 2 to li 5</i> — 5 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 5</i> — 0 tokens
<i>to li 2 to li 6</i> — 0 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 6</i> — 0 tokens
<i>to li 2 to li 7</i> — 2 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 7</i> — 0 tokens
<i>to li 2 to li 8</i> — 1 tokens	<i>ne to 2 ne to 8</i> — 0 tokens

The numeral *three* exhibits a similar spread. The *ne to* conjunction has a narrow range, only insofar as the confusion of *p* and *q* is possible.

Now let us examine yet another reason for using *ne to*. In (8) we are dealing with antonyms, but instead of morphing we find an entity which is neither *p* nor *q*, as in (1) above:

- (8) Rodila carica v noč' **ne to syna ne to doc'**; ne myšonka, ne ljagušku,
bornczarina in night *ne to* son *ne to* daughter not mouse not frog
a nevedomu zverjušku. (Puškin. Skazka o care Saltane)

but unknown animal ‘The czarina gave birth in the night to not quite a son or a daughter, not a mouse, nor a frog, but some unknown animal.’

In (8), the speaker first identifies the child as not quite a son or a daughter and then gives additional specifications to point out that it is neither. Additionally, since this is a poem and has a trochaic meter, it forces a change of stress in *ne to*, making the first syllable *ne* stressed; using *to li* would not have violated the stress of the conjunction, since in *to li* the first syllable is stressed, and it would have fit the meter better. This additionally shows that there is a distinct difference between the meaning of *ne to* and *to li*. It also points to the fact that the entity in question may be neither p nor q when *ne to* is used.

The conjunction *ne to* can also mean that both p and q are possible, while no examples with *to li* of this nature have been found:

(9) a. **Ne to umnyj, ne to durak.** Možet byt', to i drugoe vmeste. (A. Arosev.

ne to smart *ne to* fool may be that and other together

Nedavnie dni. www.ruthenia.ru/sovlit/j/211.html)

‘Can’t tell: a smart person or a fool, or maybe both at once.’

b. «Samaja legkaja v mire lodka» publikovalas' kogda-to v detskix

most light inworld boat was-published once in children-adj

žurnalax, **ne to v “Murzilke”, ne to v “Pionere”, ne to v oboix.**

(Ju. Raxeeva. Magazines *ne to* in Murzilka *ne to* in Pioneer *ne to* in both

Polnyj absurd. ruscorpora.ru)

‘The lightest boat in the world’ was published some time ago in children’s magazines, maybe in *Murzilka* or maybe in *Pioneer*, or maybe in both.’

c. Govorili, čto v prošlom èto byla uvažajemaja persona, **ne to znamenitaja**

they-said thatin past this was respected person *ne to* famous

balerina, ne to žena kakogo-to krupnogo myslitelja. A možet byt', **i to, i drugoe.**

ballerina *ne to* wife some large thinker and may be and this and other.

(V. Tokareva. Koška na doroge)

‘They said that in the past she was a respectable person: either a famous ballerina or the wife of some great thinker, or maybe both.’

This additionally proves the possibility of morphing of p and q in the case of *ne to* to the point that they are both possible even if p and q are opposites, as in (9a). *To li* keeps p and q separate and despite the uncertainty does not allow the possibility of both of them occurring at the same time.

The instances in (3) as well as numerous cases of quasi-synonymy similar to (10), where the message in (10a) seems identical to (10b), could be explained as follows: in (10a) the viewer/speaker describes the boy’s action in the Rembrandt painting as writing or drawing, but it is impossible to tell which one it is and it is not important anyway. What is important is the general activity which involves a writing instrument and a surface on which some marks are being made; strictly speaking the boy’s outcome could be neither words nor drawings but some form of doodling or both words and drawings. In (10b) the same type of activity by Gogol is nonetheless identifiable theoretically because he was a writer and “half-artist”. And while it is impossible to tell which one it is, one cannot claim that this is immaterial to the viewer/speaker.

(10) a. Mal’čik v temnoj šapke sidit licom k zritelju za vysokim stolom i

Boy in dark hat sits facing to spectator behind high table and

ne to pišet, ne to risuet čto–to. (A. Veržbickij. Tvorčestvo Rembrandta.

ne to writes *ne to* draws something www.lib.ru/CULTURE/WERZHBICKIJ/rembrandt.txt)

‘A boy in a dark hat is sitting at the high table facing the audience and is either writing or drawing something.’

- b. Sredi proćix risunkov Źukovskogo, smešivavšego texniku pera i among other drawings of Zhukovsky who mixed technique of quill and karandaša, privlekaet izobraženie razvalin villy Mil's i Akva Paulina (1939) pencil attracts depiction of ruins of villa Mills and Aqua Paulina 1939, sredi kotoryx vtoroj “poluxudožnik” Gogol' **to li pišet, to li risuet** among which second half-artist Gogol *to li* writes *to li* draws čto—to. (V. Sirotinin. Lermontov v iskusstve ego vremeni. Something <http://www.pereplet.ru/text/sirotin04jan06.html>) ‘Among other drawings of Zhukovsky who mixed the techniques of pen and pencil a 1939 drawing of ruins of a villa Mills and Aqua Paulina draws attention. Another “half-artist” Gogol is depicted among the ruins where he is either writing or drawing something.’

To sum up: Both complex conjunctions *ne to ... ne to...* and *to li ... to li...* express the speaker's uncertainty as whether the entity in question is p or q, and in the case of *ne to... ne to...* the entity may be neither p nor q or both p and q at the same time.

3 The nature of the relationship p vs. q

In the above examples we have seen p and q being opposites, and p and q being close approximates. It has been noted that in the case of close approximates, *ne to* tolerates a much smaller spread when dealing with numerals as compared to *to li*: while *ne to* tolerates a maximum spread of 2/4, *to li* tolerates up to 2/8. Similarly, the maximum spread for *three* was 3/6 for *ne to* and 3/9 for *to li*, and for *one* was 1/2 for *ne to* and 1/7 for *to li*. In other words, the level of approximation is closer for *ne to* than for *to li*. We find the same distribution for all numerals, including the higher numbers: *ne to* 20 goes as far as 200, while *to li* 20 goes as far as 1000; *ne to* 500 goes to 1000, while *to li* 500 goes to 2000.

We find a similar pattern in the lexicon. *To li* is able to combine entities that may have only one feature in common and that otherwise would not belong to the same class of nouns, as is the case in (11) where the speaker looks for some big number for a denominator or in (12) where the unifying quality for moonshine and spring is their ability to inebriate:

- (11) I delitsja ètot čislitel' na nekij znamenatel' iks — **to li nakoličestvo**

And divides this numerator by some denominator X *to li* by quantity **naroda** vstrane, **to li na dni v godu**, a možet, voobščè načislo, of-people in country *to li* by days in year and maybe in-general by number ktoromu ešče ne naznačili imja. (G. Ščerbakova. Armija ljubovnikov) to-which still not appointed name

‘And this numerator is divided by some denominator X, which is either a number of people in the country or the number of days in a year, or maybe some number which still has no name.’

- (12) i ne ponjat' bylo, čto bol'se xmelilo ix, **to li samogon, to li**

and not to-understand was what more inebriated them *to li* moonshine *to li* sama **vesna**. (www.chrab.chel.su/archive/20-04-01/3/A122690.DOC.html)

herself spring ‘and it was impossible to understand what gave the bigger high, the moonshine or spring itself.’

In neither (11) nor (12) would substitution with *ne to* be possible, nor could we envision the confusion or the merger of the population with the number of the days in the year. Confusion or morphing of *moonshine* with *spring* also does not seem plausible.

The same is true for other parts of speech. It is easy to see that ‘asking permission to do X’ and ‘informing of X’ are closer than ‘asking permission to do X’ and ‘objecting to Y’. We find the first pair with *ne to* in (13) and the second pair with *to li* in (14):

- (13) — Tak ja sxožu za uzlom, — **ne to prosil razrešenija, ne to stavil doč'**
 so I will-go for bundle *ne to* asked permission *ne to* put daughter
v izvestnost' Kulibin. (G. Ščerbakova. Armija ljubovnikov)
 in notoriety Kulibin ‘ “So I’ll go get the bundle,” it was not clear whether Kulibin was asking his
 daughter’s permission or whether he was informing her.’
- (14) Maxal rukami: **to li vozražal, to li prosil razrešenija** sročno vyjti iz zala
 waved hands *to li* objected *to li* asked permission urgently leave from hall
 po neobxodimosti. (www.gazeta-pravda.ru/pravda/pravda%20013.html)
 on necessity
 ‘He waved his hands: either he was objecting or urgently asking permission to go out due to
 nature’s call.’

Let us examine an apparent counter-example from Sannikov [2] where, as been stated earlier, there are actually no exterior similarities that Sannikov attributes to the conjunctions:

- (2) ... navstreču idet s kem-to Čexov, zakryvaetsja gazetoj, **ne to ot**
 towards goes with someone Chekhov covers with-newspaper *ne to* from
solnca, ne to ot ètogo kogo-to, iduščego rjadom s nim.
 sun *ne to* from this someone going next with him
 (I. Bunin. O Čexove) ‘Chekhov is approaching with somebody, he is shielding his head with a
 newspaper from the sun or from this somebody who is walking on his side.’

At first glance it may seem that the sun and a total stranger have nothing in common at all, except that one may want to stay away from either. However, the larger context gives us a very different picture. Example (2) comes from Bunin’s memoirs, from a chapter entitled “Gor’kij” which begins with Gorky’s death and an introductory sentence proclaiming a “strange friendship” between Bunin and Gorky that lasted two decades:

- (2') A poznamilis' my s Gor'kim vesnoj 99-go goda. Priezžaju v Jaltu,
 and met we with Gorky in-spring of-99 year I-arrive in Yalta
 idu, kak-to po naberežnoj i vižu: navstreču idet s kem-to
 I-go once along embankment and I-see towards goes with someone
 Čexov, zakryvaetsja gazetoj, **ne to ot solnca, ne to ot ètogo**
 Chekhov covers with-newspaper *ne to* from sun *ne to* from this
kogo-to, iduščego rjadom s nim, čto-to basom gudjaščego i vse
 someone going next with him something in-bass humming and all
 vremena razmaxivajuščego rukami iz svoej krylatki. Zdorovajus' s
 time waving arms from his cape I-say-hello with
 Čexovym, on govorit: «Poznamom'tes', Gor'kij.» (I. Bunin. Glavy iz
 Chekhov he says meet Gorky «Vospominanij». Gor'kij.
http://www.geocities.com/plt_2000plt_us/zuvit/zuv-2.html)
 ‘I met Gorky in the spring of 1899. I arrived in Yalta. Once I was walking along the embankment
 and saw Chekhov walking towards me with someone. Chekhov was shielding himself either from
 the sun or from this someone who was speaking in bass and all the time gesturing from under his
 cape. I said hello to Chekhov and he said, “Please meet Gorky.”’

Even before Chekhov says “Please meet Gorky” the reader already knows who this stranger is because of the introductory sentence. Yet, at the moment of Gorky’s death in 1936 and at the time Bunin was writing his posthumous memoirs, Gorky was arguably the most important literary figure in Russia, a person of

unusual magnitude whose importance went beyond literary fame. Knowing this, one can easily equate Gorky with the Sun in retrospect, particularly after his death (when the sun has set, to extend the metaphor).

Example (2') demonstrates that when dealing with expository prose, one should not equate p and q literally, but instead see the metaphoric connection. The same is true for the following examples (15) from The Russian National Corpus. In (15a) the cat proclaiming to be feeding fish is obviously near the fish in question, and *the gold fish* are the reflection in the cat's eyes. In this capacity they are hardly distinguishable from *the sparks* in the eyes. In (15b) *the sail* and *the torpedo*, while both related to maritime activities, are not compared to one another in the real world but as metaphors of a hairstyle, in which case one would be hard-pressed to specify the differences:

- (15) a. Ja kormlju rybok, — otvetil kot, kak ni v čem ne byvalo, i vglazax
I feed fish answered cat as not in whatnot happened and in eyes
u nego sverknuli **ne to iskorki, ne to zolotye rybki**. (V. Postnikov. Tima i kot)
at him sparked *ne to sparks ne togold fish*
“I am feeding little fish”, answered the cat, as if nothing had happened, and in its eyes were flashing sparks or gold fish.’
- b. I pričeska u nee, ja by skazal, strannaja: **ne to parus, ne to minonosec**.
and hairdo at her I would say strange *ne to sail ne to torpedo* (L. Izmajlov. Otstan'te)
‘And her hairstyle was, I would say, strange: *a sail, or a torpedo*.’

Combining p and q that have no common elements creates a comic effect such as the oft-repeated quote from the work of 19th century satirist Saltykov-Ščedrin “Kul'turnye ljudi” (“Cultured people”):

- (16) a. Čego-to xotelos': **ne to konstitucii, ne to sevrjužiny sxrenom**,
something wanted *ne to constitution ne to sturgeonwith horseradish*
ne to kogo-nibud' obodrat'. (Saltykov-Ščedrin. Kul'turnye ljudi)
ne to someone skin
‘I felt like something: either a constitution, or some sturgeon with horseradish or to skin somebody.’

The comic effect comes from combining items that cannot be combined, since they do not have any features that would link them together. This is proven by the fact that while Google <12.VIII.2007> has 873 examples of this quote and paraphrases with *ne to*, it also has 479 examples of paraphrases with *to li*, thus showing that unlike *moonshine* and *spring*, that both may have the ability of giving a person a high, the constitution and a dish of sturgeon have no features in common.

Another similar quote comes from a collection of anecdotes about the former world champion chessplayer Bobby Fischer:

- (16) b. — Ja kak raz sejčas zanjat ètoj problemoj i ne znaju, čto delat', —
I exactly now occupied this problem and not know what to-do
doveritel'no skazal Fišer. — **To li kupit' poderžannuju mašinu, to li ženit'sja**.
trustingly said Fischer *to li to-buy used car to li marry*
(http://www.peoples.ru/sport/chees_player/fischer/facts.html)
‘“I am thinking about this problem right now and I don't know what to do, whether to buy a second-hand car or to get married,” said Fischer in a trusting way.’

While getting married and buying a used car do have in common the feature of financial expenditure, which is more than the dish of sturgeon and the constitution did, their unification nonetheless creates a comic effect.

To recapitulate, p and q must be elements of the same set and they must have at least one unifying feature to be linked by the conjunction *to li... to li...* If p and q are opposites or close synonyms they can be linked either by *to li ... to li...* and *ne to... ne to...* The conjunction *to li ... to li...* allows a much larger

lexical or numerical spread of *p* and *q* than the conjunction *ne to... ne to...* A lack of unifying features or using an inappropriate unifying feature causes a comic effect.

4 Syntactic and Discourse Features

In addition to the semantic distinction between the conjunctions, there are also distinctions pertaining to the type of information that is conveyed. These distinctions can be of various types:

First, if there is a built-in question (e.g. an indirect question), dilemma, or mystery, we encounter only the conjunction *to li*; the etymology of *li* as an interrogatory particle must play its role as a semantic component. For example, a Google <15.V.2007> search for “ostalos' zagadkoj to li” (‘it remained a mystery whether’) yielded a hundred examples, while “ostalos' zagadkoj ne to” yielded none (Russian National Corpus did not have a single example for “ostalos' zagadkoj”):

- (17) Čto imenno on izobražal, tak i **ostaslos' zagadkoj — to li kitajskuju**
 what namely he depicted so and remained mystery *to li* Chinese
gimnastiku taj-či, to li boevoj tanec s veerom.
 gymnastics Tai Chi *to li* battle dance with fan
 (ezhe.ru/pravda/archive/15012006.html)
 ‘What exactly he was performing remained a mystery, Chinese Tai chi exercises or a military Fan Dance.’

Second, the uncertainty clause cannot be part of the theme (the old information), but can only be part of the rheme (the new information), which in Russian is typically at the end of the sentence or utterance in written text, while orally it can be represented by rising intonation. In addition to (12), where the subject with *to li* follows the predicate *xmelilo*, we find similar word order in (18), where the subject *to li bol' to li obida* ‘either pain or offense’ follow the predicate *styla* ‘froze’:

- (18) Ona smejalas' mne v lico, no v glubine ee glaz styla **to li bol', to li obida**,
 she laughed to-me in face but in depth her eyes froze *to li* pain *to li* offense
 to li na menja, to li na Kulibina. (G. Ščerbakova. Armija ljubovnikov)
to li on me *to li* on Kulibin
 ‘She laughed into my face but in the depth of her eyes there froze either pain or offense either at me or at Kulibin.’

In rare instances where we would find an uncertain subject preceding the predicate, the whole utterance serves as an explanation of the previous statement. In (19) the whole sentence beginning with *to li* is the rheme for the previous two sentences:

- (19) i peterskie sem'i začastuju bezdetny. Otčego — ne mne sudit'. **To li**
 and Piter-adj. families often childless why not for-me to-judge *to li*
klimat, to li nasledstvennost', to li priroda pytaetsja takim obrazom sokratit'
 climate *to li* heredity *to li* nature tries this way to-reduce
 poterjavšee ènergiju žizni pogolov'e. (naklon.info/texts/trah/piter.htm)
 lost energy of-life headcount
 ‘and St. Petersburg families are often childless. It is not for me to judge why this is so. Either climate, or heredity, or nature is trying this way to reduce the population that has lost its zest for life.’

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated a difference in meaning between the complex conjunctions *ne to ... ne to* and *to li ... to li*. *Ne to... ne to...* means the merger or morphing of *p* and *q*, while *to li* keeps

p and q distinct. In the case of *ne to...*, the uncertain entity may also be neither p nor q or both. This merger or morphing of p and q with *ne to...* is helped by the fact that they are semantically closer than in the case of *to li...*, and the numerical spread of p and q is more limited with *ne to...* as compared to the cases with *to li*.

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