Affective uses of the ‘Tot eshjo N’ construction in Russian

This talk focusses on the affective uses of the tot eshjo N ‘that also/more N’ construction in Russian and links it with the existing work on expressive uses of demonstratives in other languages (Acton and Potts, to appear; Lakoff, 1974; Potts and Schwarz, 2010), as well as with the work on depreciative noun modifiers in Russian (Bronnikov, 2006, Bylinina, 2010).

Much like the demonstratives in other languages, tot esjo ‘that also/more’ has a purely deictic and an affective uses.

(1) Ta  eshjo  Olimpiada...
that.F.SG also/more Olympics
A PURELY DEICTIC USE: [In the context of Olimpics held in Russia] The speaker is referring to the Olympics’80 as opposed to Olympics’14
AN AFFECTIVE USE: The speaker believes that the Olympic Games he refers to are not up to standard

Interestingly, the affective impact of the construction tot esho N ‘that also/more N’ is determined not solely by the modifier tot esho ‘that also/more’, but by the expressive potential of the noun as well. If the noun has negative connotations, the construction as a whole is ambiguous:

(2) Petja  byl  tem  eshjo  banditom
Peter was that.M.SG.INSTR also/more mobster
INTERPRETATION I: The speaker intends to convey that Peter wasn’t much of a mobster (e.g., was a very kind and helping person)
INTERPRETATION II: The speaker intends to convey that Peter was the mobster of mobsters

If the noun has positive connotations, only one interpretation is available:

(3) Petja  byl  tem  eshjo  blagotvoritelem
Peter was that.M.SG.INSTR also/more benefactor
The speaker intends to convey that Peter wasn’t much of a benefactor

The talk will present an analysis of the interaction between the semantics of the modifier tot esho ‘that also/more’ and the semantics of the noun based on a corpus study.

References