Implementing delayed actions

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Introduction

This chapter describes a language-specific solution to a generic and likely universal interactional issue – how to show that the current utterance is occasioned by and should be understood by reference to something other than the immediately preceding talk. While the default way of connecting an utterance to a prior one is by placing it immediately after the targeted turn (Sacks 1987, 1995; Sacks *et al.* 1974), on occasion interlocutors find themselves in need of showing that their current turn is noncontiguous with what came just before. One common interactional task then is to connect the current utterance to some early talk, what Sacks refers to as “skip-connecting” (Sacks 1995: II, 349–351, 356–357).

Using the methodology of conversation analysis (CA) to examine Russian language conversations, this chapter focuses on one linguistic resource interlocutors can use to manage this interactional problem: the Russian discourse particle *-to*. An investigation of over sixty hours of recorded interactions between native Russian speakers demonstrates that this particle is deployed in order to index the delayed placement of the action implemented by the current turn-at-talk. The particle is typically placed after a word repeat that helps locate the target of the displaced action in prior talk.

The chapter starts with a cross-linguistic overview of several currently documented solutions to the problem of contiguity breaks in talk-in-interaction. Turning attention to Russian, I examine some contexts in which the particle *-to* is used, including delayed clarification requests and resumptions of previously closed or abandoned

courses of action. Further, I discuss whether the deployment of the particle relates to the topical organization of the unfolding talk or to the activities that are being accomplished through interaction. A number of interactional implications of marking a particular action as delayed are discussed, focusing on action implicativeness and topicality. Overall, the presented analysis contributes to our understanding of how actions are formed to reflect their positioning in ongoing interactional projects.

Ways of dealing with contiguity breaks

While ordinarily each turn at talk is understood as emerging from the immediately preceding context and as part of the ongoing activity (Sacks *et al.* 1974), on occasion, this contiguity may be broken. A break in contiguity may involve an interruption of the ongoing activity with a “side sequence” (Jefferson 1972) or a parenthetical comment, a misplaced introduction of a new interactional project (e.g., Schegloff and Sacks 1973), or a need to return to or redo some early part of the activity (e.g., Sacks 1995, vol. II). In these contexts, special techniques are used to convey to the interlocutors how the current turn is to be understood in relation to what has occurred prior to it. An overview of the existing literature suggests that discourse markers, prosodic features, and lexical tie-ins are among the most common devices that do this job cross-linguistically.¹

Discourse markers conveying to the addressees that an utterance should *not* be understood as emerging from an immediately preceding context are commonly referred to as misplacement or disjunction markers. English misplacement markers include “by the way” (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), “hey” (Levinson 1983: 313–315), “listen” (Jefferson 1972: 319; Sidnell 2007b), “look” (Sidnell 2007b), “now” (Aijmer 2002), “okay” (Beach 1993; Filipi and Wales 2003), and “oh” (Bolden 2006; Jefferson 1978), among others. Additionally, several discourse markers can be used specifically to convey the turn’s affinity to some earlier talk:² such as, English “anyway” (Ferrara 1997; Lenk 1995, 1998; Owen 1985; Takahara 1998), “so” (Bolden 2005, 2009; Howe 1991: 90–93; Jefferson, 1972: 319), “and” (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994; Local 2004), and “but” (Park 1997). A large array of pragmatic markers

that fulfill these functions has been identified in other languages as well (e.g., Mazeland and Huiskes 2001; Mori 1999; Park 1997, 1999; Sadler 2006).

There is significant cross-linguistic variation in the placement of these pragmatic markers within the turn (or, more accurately, the “turn constructional unit,” see Sacks *et al.* 1974). In English (and a number of other languages), misplacement is typically indicated at the beginning of the turn, which allows for an early projection of the turn’s role within the ongoing activity (Heritage 2002; Schegloff 1987b; Sidnell 2007b). Some other languages (such as Japanese and Korean), however, employ turn-medial and turn-final markers as well. This late placement allows for recasting of the turn’s function in the course of the turn’s construction (cf. Hayashi 2004). Russian pragmatic markers may occur in a variety of turn positions, with the delay marker *-to* always a post-positioned particle (as discussed below) occurring either turn-medially or turn-finally.

Aside from discourse markers, intonation appears to play a role in marking the turn’s place in the ongoing activity. For instance, variations in pitch, loudness, and tempo as well as a number of articulatory features may be used to show that a new course of action is being initiated (Couper-Kuhlen 2004; Levinson 1983: 313–315) or that some earlier line of talk is being continued (Local 2004). Additionally, lexical tie-ins, such as repetition or recycling of prior utterances, are robust ways of showing a connection between a particular turn and some earlier talk. Repetition may be used as a way of restarting a course of action (e.g., Jefferson 1972; Sacks 1995) as well as resuming a line of talk after an interruption (Jefferson 1972) or after a parenthetical insert (Wong 2000). All of these cues – discourse connectives, prosody, and lexical tie-ins – may be deployed in combination to clearly demarcate the structure of the unfolding talk (e.g., Local 2004).

The Russian discourse particle *-to*

This chapter describes one way in which delayed actions may be implemented in Russian talk-in-interaction: via the particle *-to* (pronounced as *ta*/[tə]). This particle has been the focus of considerable attention from Russian-language scholars due to its somewhat puzzling properties. One of the very few post-positioned particles in

Russian, it can be attached, it would appear, to almost any word.³ Prior studies have, almost exclusively, examined the particle from an information-processing perspective and focused on its cognitive rather than interactional functions.⁴ In these studies, the particle has been described as a marker of emphasis, contrast or theme. Thus, it has been found that the particle can be used to stress the importance of a particular word, phrase or statement (Rathmayr 1989; Vasilyeva 1972), to indicate presence of contrasting elements in discourse (Bonnot 1987; McCoy 2001; Vasilyeva 1972), or, alternatively, to mark old or known information or referent (i.e. “theme”) (Bitextin 1994; Bonnot 1987, 1990; McCoy 2001; Rathmayr 1989; Vasilyeva 1972). The last two descriptors have been argued to relate to the particle’s etymological roots in the Russian indexical pronoun *tot* “that” (Bonnot 1987, 1990; McCoy 2001; Vasilyeva 1972).

While this research has significantly advanced our understanding of the particle’s functions, several factors have limited its scope. The researchers have almost exclusively relied on literary or invented examples in their analysis, and when natural speech was used, sentences (or very short segments) were usually examined in isolation from their interactional context. As a result, little could be concluded about the interactional functions of the particle aside from the general descriptors mentioned above. Specifically, even if we know that *-to* marks old information (or theme), the question remains why, in a particular context, the speaker would choose to mark something as “old information” given that such marking is optional (and rarely used). What interactional ends does this marking achieve? What are the constraints on the particle’s use? These questions can only be answered when interlocutors’ own orientations and understandings of the unfolding interaction are examined, and for that actual recorded talk-in-interaction is needed. My research into this particle’s use in casual conversation has suggested that it may be deployed strategically to achieve a variety of interactional ends that go beyond information-processing issues, such as to show the speaker’s concern for or interest in the addressee (Bolden 2003, 2005, 2008) or to propose a particular, interactionally driven, understanding of the relationship between the current utterance and prior talk (Bolden 2005). In this chapter, I focus on the discourse connective function of the particle (i.e. its

role in implementing delayed actions) and aim to specify the contexts of its deployment (and nondeployment). Comparison of the environments where the particle is used with those where it could have been used but wasn't allows for a clearer characterization of the particle's functions.

Contexts of *-to* use

The Russian particle *-to* can be deployed in a variety of environments. Of particular interest here are utterances that accomplish sequence-initial actions (such as questions, requests or invitations) that require the addressee to respond in a particular way (with an answer, acceptance or rejection, for example). In CA, these are known as first-pair parts of adjacency pair sequences (Sacks *et al.* 1974). As we will see, when the particle *-to* is deployed in such sequence-initiating turns, it suggests that the action implemented by the turn is, in some way, delayed. In other words, *-to*-marking indicates that the action launched by the current turn constructional unit is not, in the first instance, connected to the action embodied in the immediately preceding utterance, but to an earlier one. The location of the proper target of the current turn is typically indicated via a word repeat to which the particle attaches.

The distance between the *-to*-marked utterance and the course of action to which it returns (and which it advances) varies. On one end of the spectrum are *-to*-marked first pair parts that are only minimally removed from the utterance they return to (for example, less than one turn constructional unit away from the target). On the other end of the spectrum are *-to*-marked turns that return to activities that are several sequences or topics away.⁵ Several of these possibilities are discussed below.

Delayed clarification requests in storytelling episodes

One common environment for delayed actions is in storytellings. A story recipient may request a clarification of a prior part of the telling after the narrator has shifted to a new episode in the telling. These delayed clarification requests, formatted as interrogatives, typically contain a repeat of some element of the targeted part of the telling followed by the particle *-to*, thereby locating the

target of the clarification request. In this environment, the return to the prior narrative episode is typically short-lived: As soon as the question is addressed, the narrator returns to the topic that was suspended.

In Extract 1, a *-to*-marked utterance (at line 13) functions as a clarification question that invites the narrator to explain something about an earlier part of the telling. After the question is answered, the narrator reintroduces the topic that was temporarily abandoned. (See Appendix for Russian-specific transcription conventions.)

(1) Music Hall (from Kitaigorodskaja and Rosanova 1994).⁶ Tamara, a former ballerina, is apparently leafing through a photo-album and talking about the shows she performed in. Roza is an eight-year-old child. Two other people are also present.

(6:30)

01 R: *A eta shto t^o?zhe spektakl'*
PRT that what also play
This is also a play?

02 G: *Da/=*
yes

03 T: *=Da: >detachka/=eta b- ((squeek)) etat< nazyvalsja*
yes child this this called
Yes child/ this- this one was called

04 *"Leningr^ad pad dazhdë:m."/*
Leningrad under rain
"Leningrad in the rain"

05 T: *.h >Ty panima,esh</ vot eta Gastinyj dv^or tut byll*
you understand PRT that STORE-NAME here was
You see Gostinyj Dvor ((a shopping center)) was here

06 *.h Patom on [na-*
then he on
then he

07 R: *[(Prjama) na sce?nel*
right on stage
Right on the stage?

08 T: *a na avansce^:ne .h shël nastajaschij dosch./*
PRT on proscenium went real rain
and on the proscenium there was real rain

09 (1.5)

- 10 T: *B^yla sdelana tak/ eh: tam byli palozhen brez^ent*
 was made so there were put tarp
 It was made that way/ They put tarp there
- 11 *>i prosta lilsja dosch./*
 and simply poured rain
 and it was simply pouring/
- 12 *=M_y< ta byli [vse v kle-*
 we PRT were all in pla(stic)
 We were all wearing pla(stic)
- 13 R: → *[A kak zhe dosch ta tak/*
 PRT how PRT rain PRT so
 How did they make rain?
- 14 T: *↑A vot tak vot/ vada./*
 PRT PRT so PRT water
 Like this/ water
- 15 (0.5)
- 16 T: *Tak puskali ↓vod[u./*
 so let-out water
 They poured water
- 17 (R): *[(Mm)*
- 18 T: *A my: byli vse v kle↓ġ:nke./*
 PRT we were all in plastic-cloth
 We were all wearing plastic cloth
- 19 T: *.h I dvizh^enija on takie d- em-pastavil,/=*
 and movements he such choreographed
 And he choreographed movements that

Focusing on line 13, we can see that the particle *-to* is used in a turn of talk that functions as a clarification request, asking the recipient to expand on an earlier part of the narrative. More precisely, the question targets the rather startling announcement at line 8 (that there was “*nastajaschij dosch*”/“real rain” on the stage of the theater), which is then further upgraded at line 11 (“*prosta lilsja dosch*”/“it was pouring”) when no recipient uptake is forthcoming (line 9). Note that Roza’s question is delayed relative to the target utterances and is placed after Tamara has initiated a shift to a new episode (about what the actors were wearing – at line 12). The particle is attached to the noun “*dosch*”/“rain” – the repeated word from the targeted turn in the earlier part of the narrative – and serves to mark the current utterance as delayed

relative to where it should have been more appropriately launched, i.e. immediately following its target. After Tamara responds to the question (lines 14–16), she reintroduces the issue (line 18) that was interrupted by the *-to*-marked question.

While in the above case, the *-to*-marked turn implements an action that was only slightly delayed vis-à-vis its target, the particle *-to* may operate over larger distances as well. For example, in Extract 2, the *-to*-marked clarification request is several turn constructional units removed from the trouble source.

(2) Hunting (from Kitaigorodskaja and Rosanova 1994). Alex is telling a long story about his hunting trip to several family members. He has just told the others about how he spent the night in the forest.

(5:25)

- 01 A: *I patom pashël, / vrode ja prasnulsja, /*
and then went perhaps I woke-up
And then I went/ perhaps I woke up/
- 02 *rana gluxari zapeli/ eschë gdetä nachala*
early woodgrouses sang only somewhere early
Woodgrouses started singing early/ only after
- 03 *tret'eva/ uzhe uslyshal slyshu sch:ëlk/*
three already heard hear snap
two o'clock I already heard hear a snap
- 04 (1.0)
- 05 A: °*Duma° "Ux ty gospadi/ ne utra zh eschë."/*
think wow you god not morning PRT yet
I'm thinking "Wow gosh/ it's not morning yet"
- 06 (0.2)
- 07 A: *.h Ja eschë dumal minut tricat' sorak u menja est' /*
I still thought minutes thirty forty with me is
I thought I still had thirty forty minutes
- 08 *Slyshu schelcho, k/ i patom tishina. /*
hear snap and then silence
I hear a snap/ and then silence
- 09 (0.2)
- 10 A: °*Dumaju nu i° (.) prisni, las' / shto, li /*
think PRT and dreamed that PRT
I'm thinking maybe I dreamed it up
- 11 (0.2)

- 12 A: *Nu skarej kastër zatushi, ll vrode nedaleko, /*
 PRT faster fire extinguished perhaps not-far
 Right away I put the fire out, it seems close by
- 13 (0.5)
- 14 A: *tk*
- 15 (0.2)
- 16 A: *↑Stal padxadit' /*
 started come
 I started to come closer
- 17 (0.5)
- 18 B: → *A kto schëlknul ta? /*
 PRT who snapped PRT
 Who made the snap?
- 19 A: [*Gluxa:r' /* [*Vot tak|oj*] ((two finger snaps))
 woodgrouse PRT such
 A woodgrouse/ Like this ((two finger snaps))
- 20 V: [*(A:?) / Ani zhe [sch[ëlkajut /*
 they PRT snap
 They do make snaps
- 21 B: [*A:/ da/ |Hm-hm/*
 oh yes
- 22 (0.5)
- 23 A: *Vot takoj zvuk / ((finger snap))*
 PRT such sound
 It sounds like this ((finger snap))
- 24 (1.0)
- 25 A: *I vsë/ i tishina/*
 and all and silence
 And that's it/ Silence
- 26 (1.5)
- 27 A: *Nu vo:t/*
 PRT PRT
- 28 (1.0)
- 29 A: *Ja: padxadit' stal vizhu slyshu vrode on zape:, ll*
 I come began see hear perhaps he sang
 I started to come closer see hear it seems like it
 started to sing

Bella's question in line 18 requests clarification of an earlier part of the story, specifically Alex's mention of a snap he heard in the forest (in lines 3 and 8). The request contains the particle *-to* indicating its delayed position. The placement of the particle after the repeat of the problematic word "snap" (in its verb rather than nominal form) serves to locate the trouble source in the prior talk. Note that the recipients had multiple opportunities to request clarification (for example in lines 4, 9, 11, 13, and 15), but apparently waited for the teller to do so himself.⁷ After the shift to a new part of the telling has been accomplished (at line 16), the opportunity for the teller to explain himself passes, and one of the story recipients prompts the clarification, now from a late position. In a way similar to Extract 1, the *-to*-marked question suspends the narrative progression to a new part of telling, but after the question is answered (lines 19–25), the narrator returns to the point in the story where it was interdicted by the clarification request (line 29).

To summarize, *-to*-marked questions may be deployed to request a clarification of an earlier part of the ongoing telling. This prevents, for the time being, the teller's movement to a new episode. Such *-to*-marked first-pair part actions thus interrupt the progress of the ongoing line of talk.

Resuming a prior course of action

Aside from clarification requests, other actions may receive *-to*-marking when a speaker attempts to resume or reopen a course of action that has been closed or abandoned. In Extract 3, for example, a *-to*-marked question is used to return to an earlier request (to get the intended call recipient to the phone) after several activity shifts.

(3) NG1: call 12. Mura is talking to her teenaged grandson.
(0:50)

01 MUR: *Kto galodnyj/ Rafi galodnyj/*
 who hungry NAME hungry
 Who is hungry/ Rafi ((dog)) is hungry

02 (.)

03 MUR: [*h*

- 04 IL: [I *papa galodnyj*]=Vs[e *galodnye*/
and daddy hungry all hungry
Daddy is hungry too/ Everybody is hungry
- 05 MUR: [I-
- 06 MUR: *I vse, galodnye*=A *mama gde*,/
and all hungry PRT mama where
Everybody is hungry?/ Where is mama
- 07 (0.5)
- 08 MUR: .*hh[h*
- 09 IL: [Mama *tut sidit/Smotrit na (karti-) na nas*
mama here sits looks at pictu- at us
Mama is sitting here/looking at the pictu- at us
- 10 *paka my galodnye*/
while we hungry
while we are hungry
- 11 MUR: .*hhh hab-heh-heh*
- 12 .*h[h*
- 13 IL: [Dat' tebe [*ma,mu*]/
give you mama
You want to talk to mama?
- 14 MUR: [I *ty to?zhe galodnyj/da*,/
and you also hungry yes
You are hungry too right?
- 15 IL: *Ne:/ ja uzhe kushaju*/
not I already eating
No I am eating already
- ((continue about dog's food, then some pictures, joking))
(3:20)
- 16 MUR: *Ty slu?shaesh menja/ ili net/h*
you listen me or not
Are you listening to me or not
- 17 IL: *Da da/ [slushaju*/
yes yes listen
Yes yes I am listening
- 18 MUR: [*Ah-bah ah-gah*,/
- 19 MUR: .*HHH Da*/
yes
- 20 (.)

- 21 MUR: *N[^]u ladna/*
PRT okay
Okay
- 22 (1.0)
- 23 MU: → *tk! Nu a mama ta vabshe e-m-n- (0.2) .h*
PRT PRT mama PRT generally
So can I ask mama
- 24 *m_Q,zhna- m_Q?zhna priglasit' k telefonul*
can can invite to phone
to the phone
- 25 (2.5)
- 26 IL: *Na Rus'/ Ty xochesh le?vaju ili pravujul*
take NAME you want left or right
Here you go Rus'/ You want the left or the right one
- 27 (1.8)
- 28 IL?: *Heh-heh-heh-heh* ((or off the phone))
- 29 MUR: *Ja xachu ma:mul*
I want mama
- 30 (1.0)
- 31 IL: *N(h)u i shto/ xatet' ne vredna/*
PRT and what want not hurtful
So what/ You can want all you want
- 32 MUR: *Huh-huh-huh-huh-huh-huh-huh-*

In line 6, Mura issues a pre-request (Schegloff 2006) to get Ilya's mother on the phone. Ilya indicates his mother's availability, thus, giving a "go-ahead" for the request that is now due from Mura (line 9). In the second-turn constructional unit (lines 9–10), however, Ilya starts joking about what is happening at home. Instead of launching the projected request, Mura laughs, and Ilya offers to pass the phone to his mother (line 13). Rather than replying to the offer, Mura continues to joke with Ilya (line 14), significantly expanding the conversation (omitted from the transcript). Several minutes later, Mura resurrects the request (lines 23–24). Her request is now formulated as a *-to*-marked interrogative (with *-to* attached to the repeat of "mama"). The deployment of the particle indicates its connection not to the immediately preceding talk but to a prior interactional project that was abandoned prior to completion.

In the above segment, *-to*-marking is deployed to reintroduce a pending course of action, but it may also be used to return to an interactional project that could have been considered closed. An example of this can be found in Extract 4 where one party (Zhenya) is questioning the addressee's purchase of a new car, using a *-to*-marked utterance to reopen her criticism of the purchase.

(4) RP call 14. Dina is on her way out of the house when Zhenya calls.

- 01 ZH: [Nu lladna/
PRT okay
Okay then
- 02 DI: [.h lZhen'ka/ [izvini/
NAME excuse
Zhenja I am sorry
- 03 ZH: [Ty savsem ischezla/
you completely disappeared
You've totally disappeared
- 04 DI: .h da ty znaesh chëta vchera, mashinu kupili/=
PRT you know something yesterday car bought
You know yesterday we bought a car
- 05 ZH: =D[a/ ja zna]ju
yes I know
- 06 DI: [Celyj den'-] (.) doma ne byla/=A sevodnja
entire day home not was PRT today
my idëm
we go
We weren't home the entire day/ and today we are
going
- 07 .hh eh- abmyvat' Mishkinu kupch(h)uju(h)/
wash NAME deed-of-purchase
to celebrate Misha's deed of purchase
- 08 ZH: Da,/ da/ [da/[()
yes yes yes
- 09 DI: [.h [Vot/ubegaem/ ja praspala/ ja usnula/
PRT running I overslept I fell-asleep
We are running out/ I overslept/ I fell asleep
- 10 (.)
- 11 ZH: [(Kakuju-)
what

- 12 DI: [Ja *utram chëta ochen' rana-*
I morning something very early
For some reason in the morning very early I-
- 13 ZH: *Kakuju mashinu vy kupili/ Kamu/*
what car you bought whom
What car did you buy/ for whom
- 14 DI: *Mne:/ Ve:n/*
me van
For me/ A van
- 15 ZH: *A/=U tebjä zh byla [novaja/ vrode byl/*
oh with you PRT was new seems PRT
Oh You had a new car I believe
- 16 DI: [t. .h
- 17 DI: *Nu net/ nu u menja zhe vot eta Santra Nisan/*
PRT no PRT with me PRT PRT that Centra Nissan
Well no/ I had a Centra Nissan/
- 18 *Malen'kaja/ Belaya/*
small white
A small one/ A white one
- 19 ZH: *Nu ana [zh nova[ja/*
PRT it PRT new
It was new
- 20 DI: [.hh [↑Nu my eë atdali↓ Mi:shke/
PRT we it gave NAME
We gave it to Misha
- 21 (.)
- 22 ZH: [°A:
oh
- 23 DI: [A on svaju pradal/
PRT he his sold
And he sold his
- 24 *i sdelal daun pejment pod nashu mashinu/*
and made down payment for our car
and made a down payment for our car
- 25 *a my emu raznicu zaplatili/<on sabiraet den'gi*
PRT we him difference paid he collects money
and we paid him the difference/he's collecting money
- 26 *na dom/ heb-[.hh*
for house
for the house

- 27 ZH: [Nu eta ja nichevo ne
PRT that I nothing not
Well I don't
- 28 *panim^aj[u/(no vobschem) karoche-*
understand but generally shorter
understand any of this/ (but generally) simply
- 29 DI: [↑Nu ja tebe vsë rasskazhu
PRT I you all will-tell
I'll tell you all
- 30 [*padrob* [↓*na/*
detailed
in detail
- 31 ZH: [Nu- [*Karoche gavarja on pradal svoj ve?n*
PRT shorter speaking he sold his van
shto li/
PRT PRT
In other words he sold his van
- 32 DI: *Ne v-u nevo [ne ven/=u nevo dzhip/*
not v with him not van with him jeep
Not v- He didn't have a van/ He had a jeep
- 33 ZH: [*Dzhip dzhip dzhip*
jeep jeep jeep
- 34 DI: *Ab-[ba/*
- 35 ZH: [*Prada,l/*
sold
- 36 DI: *Ab-ha/ [Ab-*
- 37 ZH: [*A::/ Zhalka/*
oh sorry
Oh that's too bad
- 38 DI: *N^u emu ne zhalka/*
PRT him not sorry
He's not sorry
- 39 *=on garit on nachal u nevo sypaca/*
he says he began with him fall
He says it started to fall apart
- 40 *patixon'[ku/*
slowly
- 41 ZH: [*A/ Pa[njatna/*
oh understood
Oh I see

- 42 DI: [.*hh* *Vot*=
PRT
- 43 ZH: → *Jasna*=*[a chevo*<
clear and what
- 44 DI: [*I on* *↑xarasho ochen' vygadna pradal*/
and he well very profitably sold
And he sold it very profitably
- 45 *my dazhe ne azhidali*/
we even not expected
we didn't even expect it
- 46 ZH: → *A zachem tebe ven ta*/
PRT why you van PRT
What do you need a van for
- 47 (0.2)
- 48 DI: *Nu nam n^u:zhen/ On-mne takoj ven ↓zdaravenyj*
PRT us needed it not such van huge
We need one / It's not so huge
(end of tape))

In the beginning of this segment, two competing action trajectories are under way. Dina is attempting to close the conversation (line 2) while Zhenya complains about having not heard from Dina (line 3). Dina's response to the complaint incorporates a news-telling – she was busy buying a new car (line 4) – as she attempts to shift the conversation back to the conversation closing trajectory (see line 9). In line 13, however, Zhenya poses a question meant to expand the conversation rather than to close it.⁸ The question consists of two parts: “What kind of car? For whom?” Dina's response in line 14 contains two corresponding parts (the car is for Dina; it's a van). These two parts become the objects of Zhenya's criticism in the subsequently unfolding sequence. In lines 15, Zhenya challenges the necessity of the new car for Dina. After a prolonged discussion that gradually moves away from Zhenya's initial challenge, she renews the challenge in line 46 by addressing the second part of Dina's response (the car is a van). This time, Zhenya's objection is in the form of a *-to*-marked question, with the particle attached to the word repeat “van” (from line 14).

The question in line 46 advances the course of action embodied not in the immediately preceding talk but earlier in the conversation. The immediately preceding talk deals with the details of the purchase, a matter (which may be treated as being) only

marginally related to the challenge introduced in line 15. In fact, the question is unresponsive to the immediately prior talk, sequentially deleting (Schegloff 1987a) Dina's assessment of the situation in lines 44–45. Thus, the particle *-to* functions to mark both the sequential displacement of the question from the line of talk it advances and the break of continuity with regards to the immediately preceding activity.

To summarize, the particle *-to* can be used in first pair parts that accomplish actions delayed by reference to the ongoing interactional projects, such as story tellings, requests or criticisms. We have observed that *-to*-marked first-pair parts are not directly responsive to the immediately preceding utterances but link back to something that occurred earlier in the conversation. The use of this delay marker is thus indicative of the speaker's understanding of the relationship between the action implemented by the current turn constructional unit and the conversation so far. In what follows, I discuss the nature of the connection between the *-to*-marked utterance and the line of talk it is meant to advance.

Old topics or delayed actions?

In the analysis presented up to this point, I have used the terms “course of action,” “topic,” or “line of talk” more or less interchangeably to describe the connection between the *-to*-marked utterance and the prior talk it links to. We have seen that *-to*-marked turn constructional units connect to what might be described as a pre-prior topic (something that was talked about before a topical shift) or a pre-prior course of action (an activity that was pursued before a shift). We will see, however, that these characterizations are not interchangeable and that a difference between “topic” and “action trajectory” is crucial in describing the particle's usage.

The notion of topic has been subject to numerous analyses and critical evaluations by discourse analysts of many persuasions (for a review see, for example, Brown and Yule 1983). The most significant analytic problems associated with the notion concern difficulties in determining what the topic of a particular segment of discourse *is* and how shifts from one topic to another

are achieved (e.g., Holt and Drew 2005; Schegloff 1990). In spite of the difficulties one faces when dealing with the notion of “topic,” the idea that topicality is central to our understanding of discourse structure persists. Thus, topicality continues to be the major resource by reference to which many discourse-level phenomena – such as coherence, discourse markers, reference, and the like – are analyzed.

CA has dealt with the notion of topic quite differently. First, instead of focusing on determining what the topic of a stretch of interaction might be, conversation analysts have investigated practices for doing topic talk (i.e. ways of talking on a topic) and for managing topic transitions (Button and Casey 1984, 1985, 1988/9; Drew and Holt 1998; Holt and Drew 2005; Maynard 1980; Sacks 1995). Moreover, within CA, it has been argued that topic may not be the central concept that organizes talk-in-interaction; rather, topic talk is one kind of activity, among many others, that interlocutors may conduct in talk-in-interaction (Schegloff 1990, 2006). For example, Schegloff (1990) argues that analysts’ preoccupation with what discourse is about distracts from or obscures what participants are doing in their talk. Since talk-in-interaction is a fundamental way in which social actions are accomplished, Schegloff proposes that coherence of a stretch of talk-in-interaction (and thus its structure) is better analyzed by reference to the organization of action.

The analysis of the particle *-to*’s usage contributes to the debate over the status of topic as an analytic tool for studying talk-in-interaction. My examination of data suggests that participants’ use of this particle shows their orientation not to what they talk *about* (i.e. the topic of the conversation) but, in the first place, to what they *do* in or with the talk (i.e. the action organization). In other words, the deployment of the particle is action rather than topic-sensitive. In my data, the particle is *not* used on utterances that simply reference an old topic while launching a new course of action. On the other hand, the particle *is* deployed on utterances that advance old courses of action even when they are, seemingly, topically disjunctive.

To illustrate the first case, let us return to Extract 4. Here we find an example of an apparently delayed question that does not contain the particle *-to* (line 13).

(5) Extracted from segment (4) (RP call 14)

- 01 ZH: [Nu lladna/
PRT okay
Okay then
- 02 DI: [.h |Zhen'ka/ [izvini/
NAME excuse
Zhenja I am sorry
- 03 ZH: [Ty savsem ischezla/
you completely disappeared
You've totally disappeared
- 04 DI: .h da ty znaesh chëta vchera, mashinu kupili=
PRT you know something yesterday car bought
You know yesterday we bought a car
- 05 ZH: =D[a/ ja zna]ju
yes I know
- 06 DI: [Celyj den'-] (.) doma ne byla/=A sevodnja
entire day home not was PRT today
my idëm
we go
We weren't home the entire day/ and today we are
going
- 07 .hh eh- abmyvat' Mishkinu kupch(h)uju(h)/
wash NAME deed-of-purchase
to celebrate Misha's deed of purchase
- 08 ZH: Da,/ da/ [da/[()
yes yes yes
- 09 DI: [.h [Vot/ubegaem/ ja praspala/ ja usnula/
PRT running I overslept I fell-asleep
We are running out/ I overslept/ I fell asleep
- 10 (.)
- 11 ZH: [(Kakuju-)
what
- 12 DI: [Ja utram chëta ochen' rana-
I morning something very early
For some reason in the morning very early I-
- 13 ZH: → Kakuju mashinu vy kupili/ Kamul/
what car you bought whom
What car did you buy/ for whom

- 14 DI: *Mne:/ Ve:n/*
me van
For me/ A van
- 15 ZH: *A/=U tebjā zh byla [novaja/ vrode by/*
oh with you PRT was new seems PRT
Oh You had a new car I believe
- ((several lines omitted))
- 44 DI: *[I on ↑xarasho ochen' vygadna pradal/*
and he well very profitably sold
And he sold it very profitably
- 45 *my dazhe ne azhidalil/*
we even not expected
we didn't even expect it
- 46 ZH: *A zachem tebe ven ta/*
PRT why you van PRT
What do you need a van for
- 47 (0.2)
- 48 DI: *Nu nam n^u:zhen/ On-mne takoj ven ↓zdaravenyj*
PRT us needed it not such van huge
We need one / It's not so huge

Focusing on line 13, we can note that Zhenya's unmarked question appears in an "environment of possible relevant occurrence" (Schegloff, 1993, 1996b) for *-to*-marking. First, the question refers to the topic (Dina's purchase of a new car) previously raised (see line 4) and then moved away from (lines 6–12). In fact, Zhenya uses the words "*kupili mashinu*" ("bought a car") from Dina's turn in line 4 – a common practice for resuming a prior topic. Furthermore, the question blocks the new topic (and trajectory of action) Dina embarks on (i.e. terminating the conversation). Additionally, the question in line 13 is the second attempt to launch the question (which makes this attempt delayed): In line 11, Zhenya apparently attempts to pose the same question but abandons it due to overlap. (Oftentimes, subsequent attempts at raising a question, especially those that resulted from overlap, are marked with *-to* to indicate that the question is mispositioned or delayed.)

So, why is the question in line 13 *not -to*-marked while the question in line 46 is (as seen earlier)? It appears that in order to understand the difference, we need to look not only at what each question

is “about,” but what each one is “doing” in its particular sequential and action environment. From the action-trajectory perspective, these two questions function quite differently. While both block the preceding activity, the unmarked question in line 13 launches a new, different course of action while the marked question in line 46 advances an old one. Specifically, note that when Dina first introduces the car purchase (line 4), it is done as an account in response to Zhenya’s complaint in line 3. The unmarked question in line 13 takes a very different stance with regards to this prior sequence. Instead of being part of the complaint sequence, it initiates topic talk about Dina’s car – treating the telling embedded in Dina’s earlier account as news. On the other hand, the marked question in line 46 returns to and advances the course of action they were already engaged in (i.e. challenging Dina’s purchase).

So, a return to a prior topic alone does not warrant *-to*-marking. In addition, the question has to advance a previously launched trajectory of action. Additional evidence for the argument that the particle *-to* is used to mark an utterance as participating in old courses of action rather than reopening old topics comes from cases where the particle is used in turns at talk that are not obviously topically connected. We have seen that the particle *-to* typically attaches to word repeats that help locate what the current utterance is meant to connect to. Yet, repetition – a common mark of topical contiguity – is not a required feature of *-to*-marked utterances. As seen in Extract 6 below, the particle may be used on utterances that do not contain word repeats (and thus are not obviously topically linked to something prior) when they advance a course of action that has been closed or otherwise moved away from.

(6) PF call 8. Misha and Dima are trying to arrange for Dima to bring his car over for a paint job. The arrangements are complicated by the fact that Misha’s garage door is broken and needs to be fixed.

(2:00)

- 01 DI: [Da/ To'st' (esl) ty [sevodnja večerom ne
yes that is if you today evening not
Yes/ So if you are not done by tonight
- 02 *sdelaesh to zavtra [tozhe ne tem zanimal'sja=*
will-do then tomorrow also not anything deal
then tomorrow you won't deal with

- 03 MI: [h h h h h h
- 04 DI: =*zanimaca ne budesh./=*
will-deal not will
anything either
- 05 MI: =*[Ab::*
- 06 DI: =*[(ty) budesh pradalzhat' garazh^om zanimaca_*
you will continue garage deal
You'll continue dealing with the garage
- 07 MI: *Ne:t/ pachemu/ Ja magu destvitel'na magu i*
No Why I can really can and
No/ Why/ Actually I can deal with both
- 08 *garazhom i mash^inoj zanimaca/*
garage and car deal
the garage and the car/

=Magu utram zavtra do valeb^ola sdelat'!
can morning tomorrow before volleyball do
I can finish the garage tomorrow morning
before the volleyball
- 09 *garazh/=da/ ved' t^ozhe tak mozhet byt'/.hA-eh:*
do garage yes PRT also so may be
right/ It may work out that way
- 10 *Ty mne skazhi vam mashina kagda nuzhna ta' / vabschel*
you me tell you car when needed PRT generally
Tell me when do you need the car in general
- 11 (0.2)
- 12 DI: *[Nu:: v panedel'nik utram?/*
PRT in Monday morning
Well on Monday morning
- 13 MI: *[.hh hh*
- 14 MI: *D-da/ A do etava ne nuzhna/ da?/*
yes and before that not needed right
Yes/ Before that you don't need it right
- 15 (0.8)
- 16 DI: *Nu v smysle:[eh:()*
PRT in meaning
Well meaning
- 17 MI: *[Nu v smysle sevodnja vecheram vy*
RPT in meaning today evening you
Meaning tonight you can do

- 35 <A *va skol'ka pridēte ne znaetel*
 PRT at when come not know
 When you are coming in – that you don't know
- 36 (1.0)
- 37 DI: *Da/ va skol'ka pridēm my ne znaem/*
 yes at when come we not know
 Right/ We don't know when we are coming in/
- 38 *mozhet byt' i pozna/*
 may be and late
 It can be late

Dima and Misha are trying to set a time for Dima to bring the car over to be painted. By the end of the sequence in line 27, they agree that Dima will bring the car the next day and that Misha will confirm the time by calling. Line 27 closes the sequence that implements the arrangements-making, creating a clear potential for conversation closure (which follows soon after the presented segment). Instead of closing the conversation, however, Misha poses another question (line 29). This question is, at first sight, unrelated to what has transpired so far (e.g., it is not about Dima's car, Misha's garage, or their weekend plans). It does not return to any particular topic that has been raised, nor is the particle attached to a word repeat. So why is the question *-to*-marked? The difference between the notions of "topic" and "action" seems to be, again, in point here. While the question is not "about" anything that has been discussed earlier, it is clearly related to the activity the parties are engaged in – making arrangements (in particular, the time Misha can get in touch with Dima in the morning or the time he can expect to get Dima's car). When we take into account the course of action in which the question participates, the *-to*-marking does not appear unusual as it extends, from a somewhat delayed position (after the closure of the activity), the course of action the parties were engaged in.

To summarize, we have examined a segment of interaction where a question about an old topic served to advance a new action (Extract 5) and a segment where a question about a seemingly new topic served as a vehicle for reopening an old course of action (Extract 6). The differential use of the particle *-to* in the two cases argues for characterizing the interactional job this particle does as dealing with contiguity breaks across activities rather than across topics (unless, of course, topic talk *is* the activity participants are

engaged in). This finding supports prior conversation analytic work that shows that talk-in-interaction is organized not by reference to topics but by reference to courses of action implemented in talk, with topic talk being but one such form of action.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined a particular way of implementing delayed actions in Russian conversation. We have seen that the particle *-to* may be deployed to demonstrate that the action of the current turn is delayed. Some of the contexts of *-to* use include delayed clarification requests and resumptions of previously closed or abandoned action trajectories. The analysis suggests that this discourse particle helps parse the ongoing stream of interaction by instructing the interlocutor to understand the current turn by reference to some earlier, not immediately preceding talk.¹⁰

We have also seen that interlocutors follow the ongoing conversation not in terms of topics that are being discussed but in terms of courses of action that are being carried out. This orientation to action (rather than topic) is visible in the differential usage of the particle *-to* in turns of talk that are meant to implement delayed actions rather than simply resurrect old referents or topics. Prior conversation analytic research has described a variety of other discourse-level phenomena, including discourse markers, in terms of their participation in action trajectories rather than topics. For example, Heritage and Sorjonen (1994) have shown that “and”-prefacing connects sequences, that may be topically disjointed, into larger courses of action. Raymond (2004) has described the use of the free-standing discourse marker “so” for prompting sequentially relevant next actions, no matter what their topical focus might be. In other languages, Mazeland and Huiskes (2001), for example, have found that the Dutch equivalent of the connective “but” is employed with turns that resume previously abandoned courses of action. The work presented here extends this line of research to the study of Russian and provides additional support for the (universal) relevance of action for the organization of talk-in-interaction.

As we have seen, the Russian particle of delay *-to* is a post-positioned marker that occurs in turn-medial or turn-final positions. This placement provides for a retroactive characterization

(or re-characterization) of the current utterance as advancing an old course of action, which is quite different from many other pragmatic markers (in English, for example) that pre-characterize the relationship of the upcoming utterance to the prior talk. While in principle such late characterization could create problems in turn transition (cf. Fox *et al.* 1996; Hayashi 2003), as the recipient waits for the post-positioned marker to clarify the utterance's relationship to prior talk, my examination of the data has provided little evidence for turn transition problems (such as delays) beyond those that fall within the operations of sequence and preference organizations (e.g., Schegloff 2006). Recipients' ability to respond in a timely manner may have to do with the fact that much of what the utterance does may already be available through its other compositional features (especially, repeats¹¹), with the particle being an additional – but perhaps not crucial – resource for dealing with contiguity breaks.¹²

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Appendix

The transcripts are based on conversation analytic transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson. Instead of the standard ways in which unit-boundary intonation is transcribed in English, the following modifications to the conventions are made to account for the particulars of Russian intonation:

- , ? placed after the syllable carrying the distinct intonation contour (comma or questioning intonation) that will be actualized at the unit boundary.
- / unit boundary. If no intonation symbol (such as , ?) is placed in the preceding unit, it marks default, somewhat falling pitch contour.
- ./ marks final pitch drop that is larger than the default, unmarked pitch drop.

Additional intonation symbols

w^ord marks a distinct pitch peak on the following syllable or vowel (higher than underline and shorter than ↑arrow) .

wǒrd marks a dip in pitch on the following stressed vowel (as opposed to the common rise on the stressed vowel)

The chapter uses a unique transliteration system that was designed to transcribe Russian language materials in the conversation analytic tradition. Table 11.1 shows the correspondences between the employed system (in the “Transcript” columns) and other standard ways of representing Russian: Russian Cyrillic alphabet, Library of Congress transliteration symbols (without diacritics), and standard international phonetic alphabet (IPA) symbols. The first line of the transcript represents Russian data using the conventions shown in Table 11.1. The second line is a word-for-word translation into English (PRT stands for “particle”). The third line is idiomatic translation (with minimal information on sound production).

Table 11.1 *Transcription symbols*

Correspondences between Russian Cyrillic alphabet, Library of Congress (LoC) Cyrillic transliteration conventions, the IPA, and the symbols used in the transcripts

Cyrillic	LoC	IPA	Transcript	Cyrillic	LoC	IPA	Transcript
а	a	a	a	с	s	s	s
б	b	b	b	т	t	t	t
в	v	v	v	у	u	u	u
г	g	g	g	ф	f	f	f
д	d	d	d	х	kh	x	x
е	e	jɛ/ɛ	e	ц	ts	ts	c
ё	e	jə/ə	ë	ч	ch	tʃʲ	ch
ж	zh	ʒ	zh	ш	sh	ʃ	sh
з	z	z	z	щ	shch	ʃʲ	sch
и	i	i	i	ъ			”
й	i	j	j	ы	e	ɨ	y
к	k	k	k	ь	,	ɨ	,
л	l	l	l	э	y	ɛ	e
м	m	m	m	ю	iu	ʲu	ju
н	n	n	n	я	ia	ʲa	ja
о	o	o	o	а/о		ə	a
				(unstressed)			
п	p	p	p	р (dialectal)		ɣ	gh
р	r	r	r	nonstandard reduced			˘
				deleted sound(s)			

Notes

- 1 There are also ways of showing that the current turn is a continuation of the speaker's prior turn-constructural unit that was interjected by some intervening talk. The resource is to build the current turn as a grammatical continuation of the prior and, thereby, sequentially delete the intervening talk (e.g., for Korean, see, Kim 1999b; for English, Lerner 1989).
- 2 A distinction is often made between whether the current turn unproblematically *continues* an earlier course of action or *resumes* it in such a way as to deal with the problem. Different techniques may be used depending on the kind of connection displayed by the turn.
- 3 The particle *-to* is produced as an unstressed syllable of the preceding word.
- 4 Heingartner's (1996) study of the particle *-to* is from a sociolinguistic perspective. A comprehensive review of several information-processing approaches to discourse relevant to the study of *-to* and some other Russian particles can be found in McCoy (2001). For a complete review of literature on *-to*, see Bolden (2005).
- 5 Additionally, *-to*-marking may be used to invoke participants' prior conversations (Bolden 2003, 2005, 2008).
- 6 This and other similarly marked excerpts are from the audiotape that came with the book by Kitaigorodskaja and Rozanova (1994), but all included segments have been retranscribed.
- 7 This trajectory might be related to the preference for self-repair over other-initiated repair (Schegloff *et al.* 1977).
- 8 A reader may note that this question is delayed and should, therefore, be marked with *-to*. Why it is left unmarked is discussed in detail below (as Extract 5).
- 9 The particle *-to* in this utterance serves to connect the current turn to a prior attempt (not shown) to launch this course of action, which is consistent with the argument developed here.
- 10 The use of "repeat + particle" as a practice for dealing with contiguity breaks may not be limited to Russian. For example, Korean, a language where post-positioned particles are widely used, may well deploy similar resources for showing resumption (K.-E. Yoon, personal communication, August 2, 2007).
- 11 Interestingly, in Extract 6, where repetition is not used to locate the target, there is a very substantial delay before the response is provided, a delay that does not seem to be related to the kind of action being performed (i.e. preference organization).
- 12 Additionally, in many instances, the particle *-to* occurs turn medially, prior to the possible completion point, which allows for an earlier projection.

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