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Russian Discursive *chto-to* and *kak-to*: A Corpus-based Comparative Study

This paper presents the results of a comparative analysis of constructions with the Russian indefinite pronoun chto-to ‘something’ and indefinite adverb kak-to ‘somehow’ carried out on the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru) including its parallel subcorpora. It demonstrates that despite the semantic closeness of sentences including chto-to and kak-to as discourse markers (cf. Пойдем пить чай – Что-то/как-то не хочется; Надо велосипед починить, но все что-то/как-то руки не доходят), as well as a significant overlap of their English translation equivalents (somewhat, somehow, seem, look), these units present important functional and semantic dissimilarities. Namely, kak-to, used as an indicator of approximate nomination or as an additional marker of uncontrollability (cf. как-то подетски; как-то смутился; как-то не пришло в голову), preserves its syntactic status of an adverbial or verbal modifier. Meanwhile, the discursive chto-to loses its original syntactic properties of an indefinite pronoun and takes the proposition as a whole in its scope, cf. Мне что-то в этой истории не нравится vs.Что-то мне не нравится эта история. The discursive chto-to can break away from the predicate and occupy various positions in the sentence and often takes the position in the absolute beginning of the sentence, as well as the “Wackernagel position” after the first stressed word, typical for particles and discourse markers (cf. Я что-то сегодня не очень здоров). When chto-to and kak-to can appear in the same context, they express different attitudes. Thus, in Я как-то разлюбила сладкое the speaker doubts the accuracy of the chosen description of her inner state, while saying Я чтото разлюбила сладкое, she expresses her attitude (such as surprise, discomfort, or embarrassment) towards her own feelings. Thus, chto-to is a full-fledged discourse marker, while kak-to can be characterized as “weakly discursive.”