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Russian discourse markers that highlight the truth of the statements: a corpus-based semantic analysis

Marcadores del discurso en ruso que resaltan la certeza de las afirmaciones:
un análisis semántico basado en corpus

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Abstract: This research analyzes and compares two near-synonymous Russian discourse markers, *čto ni govori* ('whatever you say') and *i pravda* ('truly'), both used to verify the truthfulness of statements within their contexts. Despite their crucial role in communication, their analysis remains incomplete. Using data from monolingual and parallel corpora in the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and Sketch Engine, we identified the unique features of these discourse markers, highlighting both their similarities and differences. Our findings reveal distinctions in their usage across various discourse modes (dialogue, questions, and monologues), the presuppositions they carry, their positioning within statements, and their combinatorial properties. **Keywords:** discourse markers; *čto ni govori*; *i pravda*; pragmatics; modes of usage; presupposition.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza y compara dos marcadores rusos del discurso que son casi sinónimos, *čto ni govori* ('digas lo que digas') e *i pravda* ('de verdad'), los cuales se utilizan para verificar la veracidad de las afirmaciones en los contextos de uso. A pesar de su rol crucial en la comunicación, su análisis continúa siendo incompleto. A partir de datos de corpus monolingües y paralelos del Russian National Corpus y de Sketch Engine, identificamos tanto las similitudes como las diferencias. Los resultados revelan discrepancias en el uso por medio

de diferentes modos de discurso (diálogo, preguntas y monólogos), las presuposiciones que conllevan, la posición que ocupan dentro de los enunciados y sus propiedades combinatorias. **Palabras clave:** marcadores del discurso; *čto ni govori*; *i pravda*; pragmática; modos de uso; presuposición.

1. Introduction: aims and materials

Discourse markers resulting from the process of pragmaticalization undergo semantic, pragmatic, and sometimes syntactic changes. The linguistic element often becomes less salient or even entirely lost, with the focus shifting towards the pragmatic functions it serves. Understanding the distinctions between synonymous discourse markers presents particular challenges. This includes groups of markers aimed at verifying the truthfulness of statements within their scope.

The primary aim of this article is to identify the distinctive features of the use of two near-synonymous Russian discourse markers, *i pravda* (*и правда*, ‘truly’) and *čto ni govori* (*что ни говори*, ‘whatever you say’), which still need further investigation. The two constructions exhibit some overlap; thus, there are numerous instances where they are interchangeable. Cf. (1) and (1’).

- (1) Психиатров тогда еще не было. *И правда*, повезло Чаадаеву. Не было тогда психиатров, спецбольниц, сульфазина, галоперидола, укрутки.

There weren’t any psychiatrists at that time. And *it was true*, Chaadayev was lucky. There weren’t any psychiatrists, special hospitals, sulfazine, haloperidol, or rollups then. [Владимир Буковский. «И возвращается ветер...» (1978) | Vladimir Bukovsky. *To build the castle. My life as a dissenter* (Michael Scammell, 1979)]¹

- (1’) Психиатров тогда еще не было. *Что ни говори*, повезло Чаадаеву. Не было тогда психиатров, спецбольниц, сульфазина, галоперидола, укрутки.

There were no psychiatrists back then. *Whatever you say*², Chaadayev was lucky. There were no psychiatrists, specialized hospitals, sulphazine, haloperidol, or rollups then.

¹ Here and throughout, where a translator is indicated, the translations are sourced from the parallel corpora of the Russian National Corpus (RNC), and where no source is provided, they are the authors’ translations. In examples from the parallel corpora of the RNC and Sketch Engine, the original spelling is preserved.

² *Whatever you say* is a word-for-word translation of the expression *čto ni govori* and does not reflect the characteristic feature of impersonality inherent in this Russian expression.

Similarly, it is possible to substitute *čto ni govori* with *i pravda*. Cf. (2) and (2').

- (2) Вопрос, конечно, *что ни говори*, сложный. – Мне кажется, что любовник – просто попытка понять себя через другого человека. Своего рода живое зеркало. [Антон Пайкес. Кансер // «Волга», 2014]

The question, of course, *whatever one may say*, is complex. – I think that a lover is simply an attempt to understand oneself through another person.

- (2') Вопрос, конечно, *и правда*, сложный. – Мне кажется, что любовник – просто попытка понять себя через другого человека.

Of course, the question is *indeed* complex. – I think that a lover is simply an attempt to understand oneself through another person.

However, as we will observe, this is not universally applicable: the constructions are often not interchangeable, and this paper aims to refine the characterization of these discourse markers.

The analysis draws on material from monolingual and parallel corpora of the Russian National Corpus (Main corpus, Media, Social networks, Spoken, English-Russian and Russian-English parallel corpora), as well as corpora from Sketch Engine (Russian Web 2017 [ruTenTen17] and Open Subtitles 2018 parallel). The number of occurrences found in the corpora we examined is provided in table 1.

Corpus	Occurrences	
	<i>čto ni govori</i>	<i>i pravda</i>
Russian Web 2017 [ruTenTen17]	3324	105224
OpenSubtitles 2018 parallel-Russian	72	12742
RNC Main corpus	694	4471
RNC Media	459	4903
RNC Social networks	80	3032
RNC Spoken	16	98
RNC parallel English-Russian, Russian-English	39	357
Total	4684	130829

Table 1. Total number of occurrences extracted from various corpora

The percentage of homonymy in the construction *i pravda* is 10 % or less, indicating it can be considered negligible for analysis. *I pravda* is dozens of times more frequent than *čto ni govori*, which may be explained by the broader semantic and pragmatic scope of *i pravda*. For more details, see section 3.

The research material was collected during the period from November 2023 to February 2024. The data was analyzed based on 300 occurrences that were automatically and randomly extracted by the software, in order to reduce the number of concordance lines while preserving the sample's representativeness.

The methodology relies on a corpus-based approach, which allows us to identify the distinctive features of the two discourse markers through a thorough analysis of their most common contexts of usage. Thus, this article contributes to developing empirical methods of semantic analysis.

The paper is structured as follows: following this introduction, section 2 summarizes the current state of research and describes the syntactic and semantic structures of the discourse markers. In section 3, we analyze the modes of usage of the discourse markers *i pravda* and *čto ni govori*. Finally, in section 4, we aim to capture the most important distinctive features of these two discourse markers.

2. Discourse markers *i pravda* (И ПРАВДА) and *čto ni govori* (ЧТО НИ ГОВОРИ): state-of-the-art

In Russian, there is a number of discourse markers aimed to verify the truthfulness of statements within their scope, such as *i pravda* ('true, indeed'), *čto ni govori* ('whatever you say'), *čestno/otkrovenno govorja* ('frankly speaking'), *pravda skazat'*, *po pravde skazat'* ('to tell the truth'), *na samom dele* ('in fact'), *v dejstvitel'nosti* ('in reality'), *prjamo skážem* ('frankly speaking'), etc³. Some of them are described in lexicographic sources (Lubensky, 2013), but many still need further investigation⁴. Among them there are *i pravda*, and *čto ni govori*.

The meaning of *čto ni govori* is described in both lexicographic sources and grammar books. The most comprehensive description is provided by Lubensky (2013: 101): "regardless of any contrary opinions and judgements that may

³ The synonymic markers *pravda* and *pravda skazat'* are analyzed in Zimmerling & Yanko (2023).

⁴ An example of a well-described discourse marker is *skážem tak* (let's put it this way), stemming from verbs of speech in Russian (Podlesskaja, 2024).

be voiced or held (the opinion and judgement that follows is the correct one)⁵. According to *Grammatika 80* (Švedova, 1980, 2: 593), the indisputability of the statement made in the main part is emphasized, even when the counterargument is highly persuasive or despite strong opposing factors. *Čto ni govori* is also examined in Dobrovol'skij & Shmelev (2018) from the point of view of its language-specificity. The analysis uses parallel corpora and focuses on various translation strategies and their correlation with language-specificity.

I pravda, as a rule, is not analyzed as an independent unit. In *Gramota.ru*, *i pravda* is defined as an introductory construction used to confirm or acknowledge the correctness of something said earlier. According to Onipenko (2014: 198-204), *i pravda* is considered a conjunction-modal expression, indicating agreement with a previously stated opinion often used to compare situations⁶.

The constructions *i pravda* and *čto ni govori* differ in their syntactic structures: *i pravda* consists of a conjunction, *i* (and), and a noun, *pravda* (truth), whose semantics as discourse markers has already been studied (Paillard, 2003), whereas *čto ni govori* is a dependent clause formed by the interrogative pronoun *čto* (what), the particle *ni* (neither) (their combination means 'whatever'), and the imperative form of the verb *govorit'* (to talk). Paillard's approach to characterizing discursive units draws from Culioli's (1991) theory, which posits that every word maintains semantic unity across its various uses. This approach enabled the description of various context-dependent uses of lexical units without necessitating the identification of distinct meanings.

As noted by Paillard (2003), when used as a discourse marker, *pravda* is indeclinable and is syntactically disconnected from its context. The meaning of *pravda* has two main facets: on one hand, its truthfulness corresponds to some referent in the real world, while on the other hand, the truthfulness of the utterance is comparable to the supposed truth of another utterance. Paillard's analysis of the discourse marker *pravda* does not extend to examining the semantics of the construction *i pravda* as a separate unit (Paillard, 2003: 28).

In the construction *čto ni govori*, *ni* plays the role of a pleonastic negation, whose real function is to intensify the statement. The focus of the construction lies on the indisputability of the main assertion, despite the persuasive nature of the counterargument or in defiance of opposing circumstances.

⁵ See also the brief mention of *čto ni govori* in Apresjan (2014, 2: 625) 'in spite of anything'.

⁶ Besides the expression *i pravda* the modal word *pravda* with a similar meaning exists. Cf. "On i právda nikogo ne agitiroval", and "On právda nikogo ne agitiroval", with the main sentence accent on *pravda* in both sentences, in contrast to the concessive word *pravda* in the sentence "On, pravda, nikogo ne agitiroval".

According to Švedova (1980), constructions of this kind are lexicalized forms, typically introductory, derived from more abstract constructions known as general-concessive. Typologically, they belong to the class of universal concessive conditionals (UCC), as defined by Haspelmath and König (1998).

In English, UCCs are characterized by the presence of free choice items like *-ever* (Vendler, 1967). The pleonastic or empty negation (here *ni*) in some languages expresses the same semantic primitive as the English *-ever* (Eilam, 2008). UCCs do not presuppose a concrete referent, as in standard concessive relations, but rather a class of events or opinions. Therefore, constructions like *čto ni govori* are inherently non-monological, as the speaker refers to an infinite number of opinions, hypotheses, and so forth. It is fixed in the lexical structure of this expression. However, the real use of *čto ni govori* is almost exclusively monological: quarrelling or arguing with imaginary opponents is very typical of monologues. A monologue is, first and foremost, an inner debate with imaginary, expected, or already perceived opinions of other people. This directly leads us to consider the modes of usage of the two discourse markers.

3. *I pravda* (и правда) and *čto ni govori* (что ни говори): modes of usage

Next, we will discuss the various modes of usage – in dialogue, questions, and monologue. Based on the data, it has become evident that the difference in the use of the two discourse markers manifests itself across different modes. In this paragraph dialogue (3.1), question (3.2), and monologue (3.3) will be examined in depth.

To start, it is evident that *i pravda* occurs in all three modes, whereas *čto ni govori* displays more restricted usage.

3.1 *Dialogue*

By dialogue, we mean the use of discourse markers in a responsive reply to the immediately preceding statement made by the interlocutor. In dialogue, the discursive construction *i pravda* not only amplifies the meaning of the statement but also has the potential to shape the statement itself, with the intention of expressing agreement with the interlocutor. Cf. (3).

- (3) / Вот дура! / Да ладно/ забей ты на это. / Меня бесит/ что у нее такой длинный язык. / Да/ язык у нее *и правда* длинный.

[Смеются] / А может нам про нее тоже что-нибудь наговорить? / Кому? / Валере! [Микродиалоги (2007)]

/She's such a fool!/ /Oh, come on, forget about it./ /It annoys me/ that she has such a long tongue. /Yeah, her tongue *really* is long. [Laughing] / Maybe we should gossip about her too? /To whom? /To Valerij!⁷

In (3), *i pravda* is closely tied to the opening *da*, which on its own may suffice for the speaker to express agreement, while *i pravda* further reinforces alignment with the interlocutor. Semantically, *i pravda* may seem redundant, but pragmatically, it is an almost essential component of the utterance and forms part of a positive politeness strategy.

The pragmatic function of *i pravda* is present also in (4), where it not only expresses agreement but also conveys sorrow for the situation.

- (4) [Бабушка, жен, 73, 1932, пенсионерка] Даа... А сколько стипендия-то? [Студентка, жен, 20, 1985, студентка] Да рублей 600 или около того... [Бабушка, жен, 73, 1932, пенсионерка] *И правда* / не прожить месяц... [Студентка, жен, 20, 1985, студентка] В Москве/ особенно... Вообще никак. [Разговор бабушки и внучки (2005)]

[Grandmother, female, 73, 1932, pensioner] Yeah... And how much is the scholarship? [Student, female, 20, 1985, student] Yeah, about 600 rubles or so... [Grandmother, female, 73, 1932, pensioner] *That's true*, can't live on that for a month... [Student, female, 20, 1985, student] Especially in Moscow... Absolutely impossible.

Unlike *što ni govori*, the discourse marker *i pravda* can also function as a syntactically independent clause. Cf. (5).

- (5) Он говорит гнусавым и хриплым голосом: – *И правда*. Чем возлюбленный твой лучше других мужчин, милая девушка! –

He speaks in a voice hoarse and snuffling: “*Yea, of a truth*. What is thy beloved more than other men, sweet maiden!” [А. И. Куприн. Суламифь (1907) | Alexandre Kuprin. Sulamith (Bernard Guilbert Guerne, 1928)].

⁷ In examples taken from the spoken corpus of the RNC, the original annotations, including symbols, have been preserved.

Separating *i pravda* with punctuation marks when it does not appear at the very beginning of a sentence seems to be semantically irrelevant and is solely due to the author's choice.

The construction *čto ni govori* is rarely employed in dialogue, as evidenced by only four instances found in the spoken corpus of the Russian National Corpus. Cf. (6).

- (6) [Вера, жен, 43, 1963, рабочий] Вот почему не сказать? И во всем вот так!..[Анна, жен, 42, 1964, фотограф] Да ладно/ не кипятись... *Что ни говорю/* а дети хорошие/ слава Богу!

[Vera, female, 43, 1963, worker] Why not? It's like this in everything!!
[Anna, female, 42, 1964, photographer] Oh come on, don't get worked up... *Whatever you say*, but the children are good, thank God!

In (6), Anna doesn't explicitly disagree with the interlocutor, Vera. Instead, she probably draws on something explicitly stated in previous utterances (which are not accessible to us), or she puts into words her own reflections on the subject, drawn from her inferences. This may subtly engage in a polemic with the interlocutor.

The polemic element holds true for all the other examples we found in the corpora. Since *čto ni govori* is not used as a reactive response to the statement made by the interlocutor, we consider that it is not used in a dialogue, according to our understanding.

3.2 Question

The function of *i pravda* in a question lies in the speaker's intention to verify a hypothesis regarding a certain state of affairs. Cf. (7).

- (7) [Федя (Владимир Ильин, муж, 47, 1947)] Мить/ ну ты меня понял. Будешь?
[Митя (Олег Меньшиков, муж, 34, 1960)] Нет. [Федя (Владимир Ильин, муж, 47, 1947)] А ты что/ *и правда* женат? [Митя (Олег Меньшиков, муж, 34, 1960)] Не женат. [Никита Михалков, Рустам Ибрагимбеков. Утомленные солнцем, к/ф (1994)]

[Fedya (Vladimir Ilyin, male, 47, 1947)] Mitya, you got me. Will you? [Mitya (Oleg Menshikov, male, 34, 1960)] No. [Fedya (Vladimir Ilyin, male, 47, 1947)] Are you *really* married? [Mitya (Oleg Menshikov, male, 34, 1960)] No, I'm not married. [Nikita Mikhalkov, Rustam Ibragimbekov. *Burnt by the Sun*, film (1994)]

In (7), the speaker not only verifies whether Mitja is married but also emphasizes, through *i pravda*, how unbelievable this is.

The comparison of *i pravda* and *čto ni govori* in interrogative sentences is fundamentally irrelevant, as *čto ni govori* does not occur in questions. *Čto ni govori* may occasionally appear within interrogative sentences, yet not for the purpose of testing a hypothesis, but rather as part of the speaker's assertion, essentially constituting a part of a monologue. Cf. (8).

- (8) А вы помните, кто первым вышел из состава СССР? Кто, в сущности, был первым «сепаратистом», нарушившим, *что ни говори*, территориальную целостность огромного многонационального государства — СССР? Правильно: наши союзные национальные республики. [Наталья Айрапетова. Кишинев и Тирасполь – равноправные партнеры // Независимая газета, 14.07.1998]

Do you remember who was the first to leave the USSR? Who, essentially, was the first “separatist,” violating, *whatever one might say*, the territorial integrity of the vast multinational state – the USSR? Right: our allied national republics.

In (8), *čto ni govori* emphasizes the speaker's viewpoint that his interpretation of the situation is valid. The question is part of a monologue rather than an open-ended dialogue where various viewpoints are considered. Besides, *čto ni govori* refers to “who violated territorial integrity”, and not to the question itself “Who, essentially, was the first ‘separatist?’”.

3.3 Monologue

In this context, the term *monologue*, like *dialogue* above, refers to a rather narrow scope of action, specifically a sequence of sentences within a coherent piece of text. In certain cases, it may also entail an extended speech within a dialogue. What's significant here is not necessarily whether the analyzed statements occur within a dialogue, but rather the lack of an immediate response to the interlocutor's statements. In other words, the speaker transitions from addressing the interlocutor to their own reflections, often using phrases like *i pravda* or *čto ni govori* as indicators of resolving their own doubts. Cf. (9) and (6).

- (9) [Генерал Епанчин (Юозас Будрайтис, муж, 61, 1940)] Разбираешься/ что ли? [Князь Мышкин (Федор Бондарчук, муж, 34, 1967)] Ну да/ я программист. Правда/ доктор Шнейдер мне не рекомендовал этим

заниматься/ потому что боялся/ что я от голода умру. *Я и правда* несколько раз в обмороки падал/ но компьютер не оставлял. [Роман Качанов мл., Эдуард Резник. Даун-хаус, к/ф (2001)]

[General Epanchin (Juozas Budraitis, male, 61, 1940)] Do you understand, by any chance? [Prince Myshkin (Fyodor Bondarchuk, male, 34, 1967)] Well, yes, I'm a programmer. True, Dr. Schneider didn't recommend it to me because he was afraid I would die of hunger. I *really* did faint a few times, but I didn't leave the computer.

Speaking of Schneider's concerns that Myškin might die of hunger, the speaker (Myškin) confirms the validity of these concerns, using *i pravda* and further providing the necessary argument.

A monologue is the only mode of usage in which both discourse markers are employed. Therefore, we will further examine the distinctive features of using these discourse markers in monologue mode.

4. Discourse markers *i pravda* (и правда) and *čto ni govori* (что ни говори): similarities and differences

In numerous instances, the discourse markers *i pravda* and *čto ni govori* exhibit interchangeability. Specifically, *i pravda* can be substituted with *čto ni govori*. Cf. (10) and (10').

(10) «Водка заговоренная. Будешь два дня ему по рюмке наливать, а на третий он не захочет». *И правда*, месяц не пил.

“The vodka is enchanted now. Give him a glass of it for two days in a row, on the third day, he won't want it anymore.” And it *really* did work – for a month, he didn't drink. [Светлана Алексиевич. Время секунд хэнд (2013) | Svetlana Alexievich. *Secondhand Time* (Bela Shayevich, 2016)]

(10') «Водка заговоренная. Будешь два дня ему по рюмке наливать, а на третий он не захочет». *Что ни говори*, месяц не пил.

The vodka is bewitched. You pour him a glass for two days, and on the third, he won't want it. *No matter what you say*, he hasn't been drinking for a month. Whatever you say, (the fact remains that) he hasn't been drinking for a month.

The replacement of *i pravda* with *čto ni govori* is rather possible and does not deviate from the speaker's primary communicative intention – to emphasize that the situation described in the statement (he didn't drink for a month)

did indeed occur. In the first case, the English translation with the discourse marker *really*, intensified by the auxiliary *did* with the verb *drink*, is adequate to the original text. In the second case, *whatever you say/no matter what you say* are suggested as translations of *čto ni govori*. This allows for preliminary considerations regarding the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic differences between *i pravda* and *čto ni govori*. These differences concern the presupposition of the statement.

The discourse marker *i pravda* indicates that up to the moment of speech, the speaker doubted the effectiveness of the treatment with the enchanted vodka, but at the moment of speaking, agrees that the doubts were unfounded. When replaced with *čto ni govori*, the focus shifts from the speaker's own doubts to the opinions of interlocutors. *Čto ni govori* suggests that there might have been other opinions regarding the correctness of the treatment, but it turned out to be effective.

This is also true when replacing *čto ni govori* with *i pravda*. Cf. (II) and (II').

- (II) Вспомним о коллективах авторов грамматик / составителей словарей / о благополучных / а также о неблагополучных коллективах. *Что ни говори* / коллектив – это всегда сложно. Коллективные формы работы у нас / по понятным причинам / пользуются особым вниманием. [О. Н Трубачев. Беседы о методологии научного труда. Беседа 1. Трактат о хорошей работе]

Let's recall the teams of grammar authors, dictionary compilers, both successful and unsuccessful. Working in a team is never easy, *no matter what*. Collective forms of work receive special attention here for obvious reasons.

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As in pairs (II) and (II'), replacing one discourse marker with another results in a shift in the communicative focus of the statement, a phenomenon explained by differences in their presuppositional-implicational meanings. By using *čto ni govori*, the speaker seems to dismiss potential objections.

However, by using *i pravda*, the speaker summarizes their own reflections on the topic.

Unlike the construction *čto ni govori*, *i pravda* cannot open a text. Since *i pravda* is more aligned with the search for the most accurate argument or explanation of the facts at hand, this discursive marker necessitates some prior context. This is another important distinguishing feature between the two expressions. Cf. (12).

- (12) *Что ни говори*, любезный друг, а мы подвигаемся вперед, я вижу это ясно и на моем термометре: почта из Москвы в Петербург, например, ходит теперь шесть раз в неделю, вместо двух; [...] [М. П. Погодин. Письмо о русских романах (1827)]

Say what you will, dear friend, but we are making progress; I can see it clearly on my thermometer: for example, the mail from Moscow to St. Petersburg now runs six times a week instead of two; [...]

Čto ni govori stands at the very beginning of the text. It is a journalistic, literary-critical work which, in form only, is addressed to a specific recipient. Both *čto ni govori* and the phrase *dear friend* are literary devices that frame a monologic journalistic text in the style of a personal letter. The construction *i pravda* would hardly be appropriate here. The point is that *čto ni govori* continues the unfolding of an already initiated argument, involving the defense of one's viewpoint in a discussion with an imagined opponent. As stated above, since *i pravda* is more oriented toward the search for the most accurate argument or explanation of existing facts, this discursive marker requires some preceding context.

Unlike in (12), in example (13), we are formally dealing not with the absolute beginning of the text but with the start of direct speech – the narrator's internal reflection. In this sense, we can also speak of the beginning of a distinct fragment of the text, which opens with the marker *čto ni govori*. Cf. (13).

- (13) Человек этот несомненно обладал значительной магнетической силой; действуя, конечно, непонятным для меня способом на мои нервы, он так ясно, так определенно возбудил во мне образ старика, о котором я думал, что мне, наконец, показалось, что я его вижу перед глазами... [...] «*Что ни говори*, – думал я, – я видел, своими глазами видел покойного моего гувернера!» [И. С. Тургенев. Странная история (1869)]

This man undoubtedly possessed a significant magnetic force; acting, of course, in a way that was incomprehensible to me, he so clearly, so distinctly, evoked in me the image of the old man I was thinking of that, in

the end, it seemed to me as if I saw him right before my eyes... [...] “*Whatever you say,*” I thought, “I saw it, I saw my late tutor with my own eyes!”

(13') «*И правда,* – думал я, – я видел, своими глазами видел покойного моего гувернера!»

“*Indeed,*” I thought, “I saw it, I saw my late tutor with my own eyes!”

If we were to replace *čto ni govori* with *i pravda* (13'), it would create the impression that this fragment was preceded by some prior internal consideration by the narrator regarding the likelihood of having seen his deceased tutor with his own eyes.

Subtle differences in the usage of *i pravda* and *čto ni govori* may affect not only the semantics (particularly their presuppositional component) but also the placement of the discourse marker within the statement. In (14) the interchange is feasible, yet adjusting the word order would enhance naturalness.

(14) Жизнь – наш лучший учитель, *что ни говори*. [«Мысли о славе не дают свободно дышать» // lenta.ru, 2017.03.30]

Life is our best teacher, no matter what you say.

(14') Жизнь *и правда* наш лучший учитель.

Indeed, life is our best teacher.

The final position of *čto ni govori*, as seen in example (14), is not typical of this discourse marker. More often, it appears at the beginning of the sentence. However, examples (14) and (14') draw attention to the positional constraints of the construction *i pravda*. This discourse marker notably avoids the final position.

In (15) and (15') *čto ni govori* can also be replaced by *i pravda*.

(15) *Что ни говори,* телевидение все же великое изобретение. [«Провокация – это наш хлеб насущный» // Парламентская газета, 2015.01.25]

Whatever you say, television is still a great invention.

(15') *И правда,* телевидение все же великое изобретение.

Indeed, television is still a great invention.

Sentences (15) and (15') can be translated into English in various ways. Cf. (16a-j) and (16'a-j).

- (16a) *Say what you will*, television is still a great invention.
- (16b) *Regardless of what you say*, television remains a great invention.
- (16c) *No matter what you say*, television is still a great invention.
- (16d) *No matter how you put it*, television is indeed a great invention.
- (16e) *However you phrase it*, television is truly a great invention.
- (16f) *In spite of what you say*, television is a great invention.
- (16g) *Whatever you say*, television is still a great invention.
- (16h) *Even if you disagree*, television is undeniably a great invention.
- (16i) *While opinions may differ*, television is unquestionably a great invention.
- (16j) *Notwithstanding your opinion*, television remains a great invention.
-
- (16'a) *Indeed*, television is truly a great invention.
- (16'b) *And truly*, television is a great invention.
- (16'c) *It's true*, television is still a remarkable invention.
- (16'd) *Yes, indeed*, television is undeniably a great invention.
- (16'e) *And in fact*, television remains a great invention.
- (16'f) *Truly*, television is still a magnificent invention.
- (16'g) *It is a fact that* television is a great invention.
- (16'h) *Yes, indeed*, television is genuinely a great invention.
- (16'i) *And indeed*, television is undoubtedly a great invention.
- (16'j) *Certainly*, television is still a remarkable invention.

What is important for our analysis is that, despite the individuality of each of the proposed translations, the polemical tendency inherent in (16) is present in all the translations (16a-j) and absent in (16'a-j), where the assertive tone predominates. In all versions (16a-j), the focus is on the speaker disagreeing with an opinion expressed earlier by the interlocutor or others, most often an imagined interlocutor rather than a real one. This is because sentence (16') is characterized not by presenting a counterargument in a real or imagined discussion but by the speaker overcoming their own doubts about the discussed situation and confirming that their assumption corresponds to reality.

Based on the examples provided above, one might think that replacing *čo ni govori* with *i pravda* is always possible, with only a slight difference

in emphasis in the statement due to the difference in the presupposition of these discourse markers. However, this is not the case. The corpora contain quite a few contexts in which such replacement is impossible. Partially, this is explained by semantic and syntactic constraints. Sometimes it is possible to rely on formal indicators. One such case is that if a clause containing the construction *čto ni govori* is introduced by the conjunction *no* (but), replacement with *i pravda* is undesirable, although possible. Cf. (17).

- (17) Ему это нравится и у него есть определённые способности, но всё равно, *что ни говори*, ребёнок есть ребёнок – устаёт. [Анна Велигжанина, Виталий Карюков . Татьяна Устинова: Все жду, когда я уже сделаюсь ягодкой! // Комсомольская правда, 2013.04.18]

He likes it and has certain abilities, but still, *whatever you say*, a child is a child – gets tired.

This formal constraint has a semantic character. The clause introduced by the conjunction *no* (but) usually contains a counterargument, which aligns well with the semantic properties of *čto ni govori*. In example (17), the polemical message of the statement is further supported by the grammatical phraseme *vse ravno* (*still, anyway*).

The polemical nature of the discourse marker *čto ni govori* is evident in the following syntactic context: if a clause immediately following the construction contains the conjunctions *a* (but), *no* (but), or *i* (and), the entire utterance is perceived as a reaction to some opinion with which the speaker disagrees. In this case, replacing *čto ni govori* with *i pravda* is possible only if the entire structure undergoes replacement: *čto ni govori, a*; *čto ni govori, no*; and *čto ni govori, i*. While the conjunction *i* (and) itself lacks an inherently adversative meaning, when combined with the construction *čto ni govori*, it is perceived as integral to the counterargument. Therefore, these conjunctions could be considered part of the discourse marker. Cf. (18-20) and (18'-20').

- (18) *Что ни говори*, а приятно видеть прогноз погоды без единого знака «минус». [Дмитрий Букевич. Новосибирцы, приготовьте солнцезащитные очки! // Комсомольская правда, 17.04.2011]

Say what you will, but it's pleasant to see a weather forecast without a single "minus" sign.

- (18') *И правда* приятно видеть прогноз погоды без единого знака «минус».

Really, it's pleasant to see a weather forecast without a single "minus" sign.

- (19) *Что ни говори*, но все-таки это так здорово, когда твои родные живут в той же стране, что и ты, и для встречи с ними не надо оформлять визы и пересекать границы. [Галина Сапожникова. Наши в Прибалтике: курс на Запад // Комсомольская правда, 26.03.2002]

Regardless of what you say, it's still so wonderful when your loved ones live in the same country as you, and you don't need visas and border crossings to meet with them.

- (19') *И правда* все-таки это так здорово, когда твои родные живут в той же стране, что и ты, и для встречи с ними не надо оформлять визы и пересекать границы.

Indeed, it's still so wonderful when your loved ones live in the same country as you, and you don't need visas and border crossings to meet with them.

- (20) *Что ни говори*, и многим нашим промышленникам близок заядлый «новый индустриализм» 45-го президента. [Юрий Лужков. Юрий Лужков написал статью о трампомании // Московский комсомолец, 16.01.2017]

Say what you will, but the fervent “new industrialism” of the 45th president resonates with many of our industrialists.

- (20') *И правда* многим нашим промышленникам близок заядлый «новый индустриализм» 45-го президента.

Truly, the fervent “new industrialism” of the 45th president resonates with many of our industrialists.

If in examples (18-20) we replace *что ни говори* with *и правда*, while keeping the conjunctions *а* (but), *но* (but), or *и* (and), the statements completely lose their meaning, since *и правда* lacks the polemical element in its semantics. Cf. (18''-20'').

- (18'') **И правда, а* приятно видеть прогноз погоды без единого знака «минус».

Really, but it's pleasant to see a weather forecast without a single “minus” sign.

- (19'') **И правда, но* все-таки это так здорово, когда твои родные живут в той же стране, что и ты, и для встречи с ними не надо оформлять визы и пересекать границы.

Indeed, but it's still so wonderful when your loved ones live in the same country as you, and you don't need visas and border crossings to meet with them.

(20') **И правда, и* многим нашим промышленникам близок заядлый «новый индустриализм» 45-го президента.

Truly, and the fervent “new industrialism” of the 45th president resonates with many of our industrialists.

Also important are purely formal constraints: since *i pravda* already contains the conjunction *i* (and) as a component, the direct cooccurrence with another conjunction, especially with *i* (and) is intuitively unacceptable. This explains why replacing *что ни говори* with *i pravda* is difficult in cases where the conjunction *i* (and) precedes *что ни говори*. Cf. (21).

(21) *И, что ни говори*, такую тенденцию можно только приветствовать. [Мария Перевошикова. Порвали три баяна // lenta.ru, 2016.07.14]

And, *say what you will*, such a trend can only be welcomed.

**И, и правда*, такую тенденцию можно только приветствовать.

And, *really*, such a trend can only be welcomed.

Similarly, in several cases, the discourse marker *i pravda* cannot be replaced by *что ни говори*. Cf. (22-23).

(22) Ковалев подтверждает, что в сентябре *и правда* зафиксировано небольшое снижение производства свинины, но по итогам девяти месяцев оно находится на уровне такого же периода прошлого года. [Россия может разрешить беспощинный ввоз говядины и свинины // Ведомости, 2021.11.07]

Kovalev confirms that in September, there was *indeed* a slight decrease in pork production, but over the course of nine months, it remains at the same level as the same period last year.

(23) Словом, ожидать от госпожи Захаровой в этот вечер можно было многого, но она *и правда* ограничилась телеграммой. [Евгения Милова, обозреватель “Ъ”. Навстречу второй волне // Коммерсант, 05.10.2020]

In short, one could have expected a lot from Mrs. Zaxarova this evening, but *indeed*, she limited herself to a telegram.

Examples (22) and (23) are interesting for two reasons. Firstly, they show that *i pravda* does not necessarily refer to the speaker's doubts, which they resolve in favour of the truthfulness of the proposition contained in the statement. Example (23) suggests that at some point the speaker doubted whether Zaxarova would limit herself to a telegram. However, in example (22), it is

unlikely that Kovalev (the opinion subject) had doubts about the fact of the decline in pork production. Rather, he appeals to the opinions of others who have expressed this idea. Importantly, he doesn't engage in debate with them but rather agrees. Apparently, this is the main reason why replacing *i pravda* with *čto ni govori* is not preferable. As noted above, *čto ni govori* introduces counterarguments, while the contexts of (22) and (23) do not imply polemics.

The analysis of examples suggests that the specificity of each of these discourse markers is largely determined by the mode of their usage (see more detailed discussion in section 3 above).

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to identify the distinctive features of the use of two near-synonymous Russian discourse markers, *i pravda* and *čto ni govori*. The analysis of corpus material allowed us to identify a number of similarities and differences. The first difference concerns the usage patterns of both discourse markers – *i pravda* is used in three modes – dialogue, question, and monologue, while *čto ni govori* is only used in monologue. Subtle differences in the usage of *i pravda* and *čto ni govori* may affect not only their semantics, particularly their presuppositional component, but also the placement of the discourse marker within the statement and combinatorial features.

This phenomenon finds semantic justification: *i pravda* in the question has such a different meaning that its semantic correspondence with *čto ni govori* would be impossible. As for *čto ni govori*, when used in dialogue, it serves not to affirm the veracity of the discussed facts, but rather to counter potential objections, whether real or imagined, as lacking in evidential support.

This paper also aims to contribute to the development of empirical methods by exploring practical approaches to handling large-scale data in linguistic research. By addressing challenges related to sampling and representativeness, we propose a method that moves toward refining empirical techniques, especially in the context of semantic analysis.

Working with large text corpora, we faced the challenge of creating limited-size samples that still maintain statistical representativeness, which is crucial for discussing experimental methods in semantic research.

The group of discourse markers aimed at verifying the truthfulness of statements within their scope is still not adequately studied. Given its importance in communication, further study and exploration are warranted, highlighting promising avenues for future research.

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