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APPROXIMATION AND SUPPOSITION

Abstract. This article compares exponents of approximation (expressions like Russian *около*, *примерно*, *приблизительно*, *более*, *свыше*) and the words expressing supposition (for example Russian *скорее всего*, *наверное*, *возможно*). These words are often confused in research, in particular researchers often mention exponents of supposition in case of exponents of approximation. Such approach arouses some objections.

The author intends to demonstrate in this article a notional difference between approximation and supposition, therefore the difference between exponents of these two notions. This difference could be described by specifying different attitude of approximation and supposition to the notion of knowledge. Supposition implies speaker's ignorance of the exact number, while approximation does not mean such ignorance. The article offers examples proving this point of view.

Keywords: approximation, supposition, Russian.

Approximation as a notional category with a wide range of different ways of expression in natural languages has been described in many publications, such as: Wierzbicka (1991) (for Polish and English languages), Супрун (1962) (for Russian), Мельчук (1985) (for Russian), Grochowski (1997) (for Polish) and Duškin (2009) (for Polish and Russian). Despite such an impressive amount of researches attempting to describe approximation as a notional category, another important question remains open that requires additional consideration.

One of the most complicated and still unsolved tasks while describing the category of approximation is its separation from the category of supposition. Exponents of these two categories are often mixed up in research of different authors.

For example, in one work by Suprun written in 1962 among examples of approximation exponents expressing an approximate number "without a nuance of limit", there could be found both expressions *примерно*, *приблизительно*, *с*, *около* and following modal words: *должно быть*, *может быть*, *пожалуй*, *кажется*[1] (Супрун 1962, p. 10).

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[1] Suprun quotes these words as examples, so one could suppose that the complete list would include other modal expressions meaning doubts, suppositions of the speaker, for example *наверное.*

The reason why supposition exponents are found among the exponents of approximation could be the fact that the difference between these two notions is not clearly determined. Notional difference between the two sentences: *Пришло примерно 20 человек* and *Пришло наверное 20 человек* is intuitively perceptible, yet the essence of this difference seems not to be so evident. This difference needs to be precisely defined and described. We shall try to accomplish this task in this article.

The article is based on Russian language material, yet it stays of general theoretical character so far as the research exposed in it has been carried out "from content to form". The presented method of separation of the two notions - those of supposition and approximation — could be applied not only to Russian, but also to other languages, considering the fact that it describes and defines first of all two contents, possible to be expressed in every language in certain way.

The mechanism of approximation needs such definition which would take into account its explicit notional distinctions from the mechanism of supposition, otherwise the sphere of approximation would have rather fuzzy bounds, and intuitively grounded absence in it of such expressions as *наверное*, *возможно* could look disputable.

The main difference between approximation and supposition could be found in the character of their relation to the notion of knowledge.[2] All exponents of supposition imply, **that** speaker does not know, whether the state of affairs mentioned in the sentence is taking place. They signalize other mental states of speaker than knowledge (Koseska-Toszewa, Maldžieva, Penčev 1996, p. 63), (Maldžieva 2003, p. 11, 15–22, 54 etc.). This feature could be considered as one of constitutive traits of supposition exponents as a class.

For example, saying:

Пете возможно/ наверное/ предположительно/ скорее всего 20 лет.

speaker informs, that he **does not know** how old Peter is (is he indeed 20 or not), as well as in each case of separate presumptive expression, he announces some other additional information.

Connection of approximation with the notion of knowledge is completely different.

Approximation could be defined in the following way:

Instead of one point speaker refers to a segment of arithmetic range (set of points). One of the points of this segment corresponds to the determinable number, but speaker does not inform which point it is (for example, *без малого 50* '... 47 or 48 or 49')[3]. Approximation exponents select segments in different ways, and the components of segment selection are basic components of their meaning.

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[2] It is worth to notice that knowledge is most likely a semantically elementary notion; many researchers use the expression *to know that* (*знать, что*, Pol. *wiedzieć, że*), connected to it, as the central element of explications of other mental predicates (Danielewiczowa 2002, p. 75–76).

[3] The segment could be selected in the following ways:

Approximation described in this way can not be identified with lack of knowledge of the exact number. Approximation can certainly result from such lack of knowledge, but not always. The fact that speaker **does not inform** of the point in arithmetic range (informs of a segment), does not mean, that he **does not know** this point. (Although on the other hand, he may be ignorant about it.)

First let us illustrate the situation when speaker uses approximate numerical definition, **knowing** the exact one (knowing the point.)

Let us imagine the following situation. John reads a paper at conference on US economics. In this paper he quotes the exact amount of penalties, paid by Microsoft Company in 2009 (this amount is written in the text read by John). In the written text, for example, it is *3.034.500.025 долларов 34 цента*. This definition is very long (verbose), complicated to be pronounced by the speaker and apprehended by the audience (*три миллиарда тридцать четыре миллиона пятьсот тысяч двадцать пять долларов тридцать четыре цента*). Instead of reading the exact definition as a whole, John gives an approximate definition of this amount, informing the audience briefly: *около трех миллиардов долларов*. In other words, in this example John **knows the amount**, sees its exact definition and even can read it to the audience, but he gives an approximate definition because of its being form is three times shorter than the exact one.

It is possible to quote the following examples, which demonstrate that approximation (information about a segment) is not necessarily consequence of speaker's ignorance about the point:

> *Вещество еревто вырабатывается из коры березы, его концентрация в пасте составляет где-то около десяти процентов (если быть точным — 9,9%)* [Инна Щепеткова. На каком тюбике остановиться // "Семейный доктор", 2002.10.15]
>
> *В целом по России свыше 4 тыс. рублей в месяц имеет в среднем около половины населения (48,7%)* [Уровень жизни и еревкономическое развитие региона // "Вопросы статистики", 2004.08.26]

As follows from these examples, sometimes speaker can specify the approximate number, quoting the exact one (in case he knows this exact number).

On the other hand, there are situations when speaker is able to define the number only approximately, and can not define it exactly, due to the fact he really does not know the point.

Finally, it should be noticed that approximations are possible not only concerning exact numbers, but also concerning approximate numbers. In later case speaker

— by setting the lower boundary of the segment exclusively (e.g. Rus. *свыше*) or inclusively (e.g. Rus. *не меньше*)

— by setting the upper boundary of the segment exclusively (e.g. Rus. *без малого, менее*) or inclusively (e.g. Rus. *не больше*)

— by setting both boundaries of the segment (e.g. *20-30*)

— by setting the centre of the segment (e.g. Rus. *около*).

For a broader account on approximation and ways of its expression in Russian see Duškin (2009).

presents a segment containing the point, which corresponds to the number to define, but he only acts supposively. He does not know whether this point is really in the given segment or not.

Compare:

Прошло, наверное, около часа [...] [Юрий Буйда. Город палачей // «Знамя», 2003]

Их выводы звучат поразительно: если сейчас на земном шаре насчитывается более 180 государств, то к концу XXI века их будет, возможно, около 900. [Владимир Молчанов, Консуеревло Сегура. И дольше века... (1999-2003)]

[...] *на улицах Москвы предположительно около 50 тыс. детей, в Санкт-Петербурге — около 16 тыс.* [Они о нас (2002) // «Коммерсантъ-Власть», 2002.02.26]

In other words, supposition and approximation are not the same. Suppositions concerning approximate number are possible.

Concluding, the difference between the exponents of approximation and those of supposition can be described in the following way. Speaking about the number to be defined while using exponents of supposition (*Их было наверное 5*) speaker informs, that he does not know the exact definition of this number (a point in arithmetic range). In case when the number is defined by exponents of approximation, this information is not communicated (compare *Их было около 5 миллионов (а точнее 5200350)*). Using an approximate definition, speaker can both know and not know the exact number. In most cases exponents of approximation carry no information about knowledge/ignorance of speaker concerning the exact definition of the number.

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