

# THE FUNCTION OF MITIGATION IN SPOKEN LANGUAGE. THE ANALYSIS OF “TAK SKAZAT’” (RUSSIAN) AND “DICIAMO” (ITALIAN)

ELIZAVETA KHACHATURYAN

*University of Oslo*

## ABSTRACT

The present article is dedicated to the analysis of one Italian and one Russian discourse marker (DM), both of which are formed with the verbum dicendi *skazat’/dire* (“to say”): *tak skazat’* (“so to say”) and *diciamo* (“let’s say”).

## [1] INTRODUCTION

The present article is dedicated to the analysis of one Italian and one Russian discourse marker (DM)<sup>1</sup>, both of which are formed with the verbum dicendi *skazat’/dire* (“to say”): *tak skazat’* (“so to say”) and *diciamo* (“let’s say”).

Both words appear frequently in spoken language. In Italian a formal equivalent of *tak skazat’* exists – *per così dire* (*per* is the preposition “for,” *così* = *tak* or “so,” *dire* = *skazat’*, or “to say”), but it is characteristic of the written language. At the same time, Russian has the word *skažem* (1<sup>st</sup> person plural of the verb *skazat’*), which occurs less frequently in spoken language compared to *diciamo*. Moreover, in spite of their formal equivalence, these expressions appear in different contexts in Russian and Italian: *diciamo* does not correspond to *skažem*, and *tak skazat’* does not correspond to *per così dire*. This is very typical of DMs: in spite of their formal similarities, their semantics and functions often vary considerably.<sup>2</sup>

The verb “to say” is in many different languages at the foundation of DMs that regulate communication. The description and analysis of these markers, which seem to be similar but in fact operate differently, can help us, on the one hand, to arrive at general formulas about universal functions that regulate communication and, on the other hand, to identify essential forms that carry out the same

[1] We will not discuss here the properties of these expressions which allow to us to classify them as discourse markers (for a detailed typology of discourse markers see Paillard, 2009).

[2] The same phenomenon can be illustrated by other examples: *vidiš’* (in Russian) – *vedi* (in Italian) – *tu vois* (in French); *poslušaj* (in Russian) – *senti* (in Italian) – *écoute* (in French) (Khachaturian 2005); *veramente* – *vraiment* (Khachaturyan & Vladimirska 2010), *infine* – *enfin* (Rossari 1994). All these elements have the same form but often very different contexts of use.

function in different languages. These results will be useful for understanding second-language acquisition and translation. Moreover, the present analysis will illustrate several theoretical problems concerning the semantics of DMs, their use in spoken language, and the semantics of words traditionally called “semantic primitives” – for example, the verb “to say.”

### [1.1] *Definition of discourse markers*

At present, there are two main tendencies in studies on DMs which also represent two main methodological and theoretical approaches to their description: the functional-pragmatic approach and the formal-syntactic or formal-semantic approach. This analysis is based on the formal-semantic approach as elaborated by a French semantic school which takes as its point of departure the ideas of A. Culioli (*théorie de l'énonciation*).

According to this approach, DMs are considered to be a class of words (together with, for example, nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) with their own formal and semantic properties. “A DM is a word which defines the discursive status of the sequence *p* corresponding to its scope. In forming the scope of the DM, the sequence *p* stands for a particular way to say a state of affairs *Z*.” (Franckel & Paillard 2008, 255) This means that every DM has its own semantics that can be deduced through the analysis of contexts of use and formulated in terms of which kind of discourse status is given to the scope *p*. In the present description, my purpose will be to formulate the semantics of *tak skazat'* and *diciamo*.

### [1.2] “Empty words” in spoken language

*Tak skazat'* and *diciamo* occur so frequently in spoken language that they are often considered “empty words”.

Usually, the analysis of “empty words” in spoken language raises the problems of grammaticalization, semantic weakening, and pragmatic enrichment (see i.e. Andersen (2000)). The functions distinguished for these words are often very similar: they are used to fill in pauses, indicate hesitation, an inexact or mitigate/attenuate nomination, or to allow the speaker the time to search for a word. However, in reality, the words in different languages with the same function are not equivalent and could not be used in the same context, not even as translations of one another.

The definitions given to *tak skazat'* and *diciamo* are very similar: both are used to attenuate statements.

Ožegov's *Slovar' russkogo jazyka*: *tak skazat'* употребляется как оговорка, смягчающая решительность какого-нибудь утверждения (*tak skazat'* is used like a slip of the tongue, mitigating the resoluteness/absoluteness of a statement).

Evgenieva's dictionary (MAC): *tak skazat'* употребляется для смягчения формулировки, для указания на неточность сказанного (*tak skazat'* is used to mitigate the formulation or to show the inexactitude of what is said).

Sabatini & Coletti's dictionary: *diciamo* è usato nel parlato come riempitivo o come segnale di correzione di un dato (*diciamo* is used in spoken language as a filler or a mark of correction for dates)

Bazzanella (1995): *diciamo* segnalatore di incertezza o di difficoltà di formulazione, [...], segnale "di attenuazione, o di "cortesìa" (a signal of incertitude or of difficulties in formulating, a mark of attenuation or of politeness),

Hölker (2003): "Diciamo als Mitigator": Ausdrucksbesonderheiten, Korrekturen (*diciamo* as a mitigator, mark of particular expression, mark of correction).

In the definitions above, almost the same terms are used to describe both words: inexactitude, mitigation, correction. However, we will see below that the contexts of use are often different. My next aim will be to describe the function of mitigation by analyzing the underlying mechanism upon which it is based in the case of *tak skazat'* and *diciamo*.

## [2] TAK SKAZAT'

In all contexts where *tak skazat'* is used, the main problem that arises with this marker is "how to name" the given reality or which words to use. The chosen word or expression – the scope *p* of *tak skazat'* – has a specific discourse status as announced by *tak skazat'*. Three types of context can be distinguished based on the different status of the scope in the context. We will see afterwards that the role of *tak skazat'* has similar features in all contexts of use.

### [2.1] Case 1: Detached use

A priori, *p*, the scope of *tak skazat'*, could be considered adequate to denote the given situation. But *tak skazat'* marks the speaker's<sup>3</sup> distance from what is being said and suggests that for her/him *p* is not an appropriate denomination of the reality *R*. In the examples below, this detachment of the speaker is discussed in the context that follows.<sup>4</sup>

[3] I will refer to the one who pronounces the phrase with the analyzed DM as "the speaker," and "the hearer" will refer to his/her interlocutor.

[4] In this analysis I used the Tübingen Russian Corpora and the Russian National Corpus.

- (1) И помог он вам? – Не помог – сам все сделал. Когда я два дня спустя после работы к нему поехала, как мы условились, рецензия была готова – напечатана в двух экземплярах, все честь по чести. Я его благодарить, а он головой покачал и сказал: Не надо, Валя, это я в своих интересах, чтобы нам с вами сегодня не работать, а шампанское пить . . . – И глаза у него были в тот момент необыкновенные – грустные и какие-то сияющие, я таких ни у кого еще не видела. Наверное, в тот момент я в него и влюбилась. Что ж, я – человек решительный. Прямо при нем сняла трубку и позвонила домой, что буду ночевать у подруги. – Любовь с первого взгляда, так сказать . . . – Это что, ирония? (А. Стругацкий)

. . . and did he help you? – He didn't only help me, but he did everything himself. When I went to him, as arranged, two days later after work, the review was ready – printed in duplicate. Everything is just as it should be. I thanked him but he shook his head and said: "There is no need to thank me, Valya. I did it in my own interest so that we don't have to work today but can just drink champagne . . ." and, in that moment, his eyes were extraordinary – sad and yet sort of shining, such as I have never seen in a person before. I probably fell in love with him at that very moment. Well, I am a decisive person. Right in front of him, I picked up the phone and called home to say that I would be staying with a friend that night. – Love at first sight, *ТАК СКАЗАТ'* . . . – What's that, irony? (A. Strugatskij)

In (1), the situation described in the previous context can be tagged as "ljubov's pervogo vzgljada" (love at first sight) (*p*). But here the speaker does not share this tag: *p* is introduced by *tak skazat'*. It causes the reaction of the hearer (*What's that: irony?*) who perceives the disengagement of the speaker and interprets it as an ironic comment: *ironija* (irony).

- (2) Брат Потапова в прошлом году арестован и осужден за вредительство, он находился в связи с консулом одной из враждебных держав и получал задания от иностранной разведки. Во всем этом он сознался. Вот вам вторая и, так сказать, неожиданная сторона бригадира Потапова. Вы всего этого, конечно, не знали, – улыбнулся он. – Про брата знал, – сказал я неожиданно для самого себя. (Ю. Домбровский)

"Potapov's brother was arrested last year and convicted of sabotage. He was connected with the consul of one of the hostile states and received his instructions from the foreign secret service. He confessed everything. So here is a second – and, *ТАК СКАЗАТ'*, unexpected – side to your foreman Potapov. You, of course, knew nothing about all this", he smiled. "I knew about his brother", I found myself saying unexpectedly. (Ju. Dombrovskij)

In (2), the speaker defines the facts from Potapov's life as part of a "neožidannaja storona" (unexpected side) and adds: "of course, you knew nothing about it." In other words, the interlocutor presumes that this side of Potapov is unexpected to the first person narrator (the hearer), whereas he himself, as an experienced secret service official, did suspect something (as is indeed verified in this novel by Ju. Dombrovskij). The secret service officer uses *tak skazat'* to distance himself from what he is saying.

## [2.2] Case 2: Conventional use

In this case, the term *p a priori* is not appropriate to denominate the situation. By contrast, *tak skazat'* indicates that *p* can be considered as a kind of figurative denomination of *R*: there is something similar between the described situation and the situation usually denominated by this word.

- (3) Пусть вас не обманывает его должность. Он фигура, величина, три, а то и все четыре ромба, больше, чем его начальники в Канске, потому и форму не надевает. Был, между прочим, за границей, а попал сюда. Боюсь, он наш будущий, так сказать, коллега или сотоварищ. А может, и обратно выскочит, все зависит от каких-то высших, нам с вами неизвестных обстоятельств. (А. Рыбаков)

You shouldn't be fooled by his position. He is a prominent figure, a big name, three or four rhombs more than his superior in Kansk – that is why he doesn't wear a uniform. He was abroad, by the way, but then turned up here. I fear he will be our future, *TAK SKAZAT'*, colleague or associate. But maybe he will jump out back – it all depends on some higher circumstances, unknown to us. (A. Rybakov)

The word *kollega* (colleague) indicates someone who works together with others. In (3), since it is a political prisoner who is speaking, the denomination "colleague" is not entirely adequate: the second word "sotovarišč" (associate, fellow, inmate) fits better.

- (4) (о дедовщине в армии) . . . На вторую ночь нас начали по одному поднимать и, так сказать, знакомиться . . . На следующий день у меня заметили синяк . . . (газета «Коммерсант»)

(regarding violence against young conscripts in the army) . . . the second night they started to wake us up one by one and, *TAK SKAZAT'*, make our acquaintance. The following day they noticed my bruise . . . (newspaper "Kommersant")

In (4) the combination “*tak skazat’*, *znakomit’sja*” (*tak skazat’*, make our acquaintance) indicates that there is something specific in this act of getting acquainted. Indeed, talking about violence in the army, the expression “to make smb’s acquaintance” (i.e., to beat someone up!) is not completely adequate. Still, the expression can be interpreted as a particular way to describe the situation.

### [2.3] Case 3: Quotation

In this case the detachment of the speaker can be explained by the status of the quotation itself: *tak skazat’* marks the words of another in the text of the speaker.

- (5) – Не надо без мужа ходить по ресторанам, – начал Костя, – можно нарваться на неприятности. Будь ты со мной, к тебе бы никто не пристал, пошла без меня, вот и наравалась. – До тебя, – ответила Варя, – когда у меня не было, так сказать, мужа, ко мне никто не приставал, никто меня не оскорблял. Эта особа оскорбила меня именно потому, что я была твоей женой, и посчитала меня тоже шлюхой. – Она психопатка, – возразил Костя, – она больная . . . (А. Рыбаков)

“You shouldn’t go to restaurants *without your husband*”, began Kostya “you may run into trouble. If you had been with me, nobody would have bothered you but you went without me and look what happened”. “Before you were around”, Varya answered “when I didn’t have, *ТАК SKAZAT’*, a husband, nobody bothered me, nobody insulted me. This individual insulted me precisely because I am your wife, even made me out to be a whore. “She’s mad”, retorted Kostya “she’s sick”. (A. Rybakov)

In (5) the speaker repeats the term *muž* (husband [italics are mine – E.K.]), which the other speaker had used to refer to himself, and marks her distance from the given tag through *tak skazat’* (her discovery that he was officially married to another woman makes the distance doubly apparent). So, for the female speaker the word introduced by *tak skazat’* is inadequate to describe the reality: the strangeness (to her) of Kostya’s word choice is marked through the use of *tak skazat’*. Example (6) illustrates the point more fully.

- (6) – Вот уж никогда бы не подумал, – пробормотал я, – что у Хинкуса есть друзья, которые согласны разделить с ним его одиночество. Хотя . . . почему бы и нет? Пуркуа па, так сказать . . . (бр. Стругацкие)

“I would never have thought”, I muttered “that Hinkus has any friends, who are prepared to share his solitude. Although . . . why not?” *Pourquoi pas*, *ТАК SKAZAT’* . . . (Strugatsky brothers)

In (6), there is a formal reason for not attributing the highlighted words and their interpretation to the speaker: they are foreign words for which the speaker does not assume responsibility.

#### [2.4] Tak skazat': *Summing up*

We can notice that all three types of context have some general features that can be considered a core (invariant) meaning of *tak skazat'*. It could be formulated in following way: *tak skazat' p* means that the words *p* used to say *R* are not completely adequate to speak about the world *R*. The speaker does not share the responsibility for what he is saying and marks by *tak skazat'* the “space of the words” – a kind of zone free from the speaker’s engagement in what s/he is saying.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to notice that in the majority of contexts with *tak skazat'* it is possible to use inverted commas (or they are used by the author) – a typographic mark that indicates the “plurivocity of words” and “the infinity of interpretations” (Authuer-Revuz 1995, 141).

#### [2.5] Tak skazat' in spoken language

*Tak skazat'* has the same role in spoken language: it marks the incompatibility of the contextualized words with the context itself and indicates the disengagement of the speaker. In spoken language the incompatibility of *p* is often based on switching to another register. It explains the properties (typical for *tak skazat'*) of “poorly organized” discourse and the role of *tak skazat'* as an interrupting or correcting marker. Actually, it is the scope of *tak skazat'* that does not fit the context (not only for semantic, but also for syntactic or stylistic reasons) and as such interrupts/breaks the development of discourse.

Since the context in spoken language has less stable characteristics, in comparison to written texts, more formal criteria should be used to distinguish the uses of *tak skazat'*: these criteria should be first of all the description of prosodic features. In the present contrastive analysis, whose main purpose is to compare *tak skazat'* and *diciamo*, it will suffice to illustrate the use of *tak skazat'* in the spoken language by means of the following examples.

- (7) [Бунич, муж] Да / но / тем не менее вот этот проект создания торгово-развлекательного центра на Красной площади под . . . ээ . . . ТАК СКАЗАТЬ вместо музеев он существует и кроме того там . . . ээ . . . какие-то люди руют . . . ээ . . . ямы / какие-то подкапываются под Красную площадь. [Программа «Диалог с Андреем Буничем» на телеканале РБК (2006)]

(Bunič, male) Yes . . . but . . . nevertheless, take the project to create a re-

[5] The paradox is that disengagement can be also interpreted as engagement in a negative sense ((1) is a good illustration of this).

tail centre in Red Square under ... hm ... TAK SKAZAT' instead of museums it exists and moreover ... hm ... some people dig holes there / some dig under Red Square. (Programme "Dialogue with Andrey Bunič" on the TV channel RBK)

In (7), the beginning of the phrase is interrupted by the word combination "vmesto muzeev" (instead of museums), which is adequate to describe the situation but can be considered too colloquial, or syntactically inappropriate: the name of the project could be "the creation of a retail and entertainment centre" but not "vmesto muzeev," so it is very improbable that in the formal definition the word "muzej" (museum) is present. The expression used by the speaker "vmesto muzeev" could be considered an unofficial definition of what is happening.

In (8), the speaker tries to say something difficult using simple words incommensurate with the style of the lecture. This simplification inappropriate to the situation explains the majority of the "lecturer's *tak skazat'*."

- (8) [Н.К., муж] Повторяю / есть / значит / такое заболевание / как / значит / э / значит [нрзб] синдром / когда в случае заболевания мужской организм начинает перерождаться в женский / а женский в мужской / без каких бы то ни было / вот / ТАК СКАЗАТЬ / внешних толчков / эффектов внешней среды. [Лекция о мозге (2006)]

(NK, male) I repeat / there is / sort of / such a disease / as/ sort of / hm / sort of (incomprehensive) syndrome / when, in the event of illness, the male organism starts to re-develop into a female / the female into a male / without any / ТАК СКАЗАТЬ / external stimulus / effects of the environment (Lecture about the brain, 2006)

The opposite situation is also common: the speaker uses a term characteristic of "high style." This is often typical of quotations, as in (9),(10), where the scope of *tak skazat'* includes the expression "prizvany okhranjat" (9) and the word "vni-maju" (10), which are more refined in comparison to the colloquial style of the rest of the text.

- (9) [Пясецкий, муж, 1925] Вот / допустим / приказ был такой / поскольку немцы оказывают сопротивление / вот / но танковые колонны / невзирая на это / должны идти вперед / а мы были / ТАК СКАЗАТЬ / призваны охранять эти танковые колонны. [радиопередача, 2005]

(Pjasetckij, male, 1925). Here / let us suppose / there was such an order / as soon as Germans put up resistance / here / but the tank convoys /in



spite of this / must move forward/ and we were / ТАК SKAZAT' / called up to protect these tank convoys. (Radio programme, 2005)

- (10) [No. 1, муж] Давайте все-таки вернемся к теме классической музыки. Хотя / конечно / мы не так далеки / тема / действительно / актуальная / но давайте поближе / господи! Евгений Львович / Ваше мнение ... [Nr. 6, ?] Я вот сижу / слушаю / внимаю / ТАК СКАЗАТЬ / и ... дивлюсь. Дивлюсь потому / что мы забыли о самом важном факторе / влияющем на формирование личности / и имя ему / семья. Семья / друзья мои! Семья! [Программа «Большие» на телеканале ТВЦ (2006)]

(Nr. 1, male) Let us however revert to the subject of classical music. Though / of course / we are not too far / the subject / really / is topical / but let us come closer / gentlemen! Evgenij L'vovič / your opinion ... (Nr. 6, ?) I am sitting here / listening / paying close attention / ТАК SKAZAT' / and ... marvelling. Marvelling because / we forgot the most important factor that influences the formation of personality / namely / the family. Family / my friends! Family! ("Grown-ups" programme on TVC (2006)

### [3] DICIAMO

The contexts in which *diciamo* appears have to do with the same problem of denomination: how to name and speak about a situation *R*. *Diciamo p* (like *tak skazat'*) means that the words *p* used to say *R* are not completely adequate to speak about the world *R*. The scope *p* of *diciamo* can also be marked by inverted commas. Three contexts of use can be distinguished.<sup>6</sup>

#### [3.1] Case 1: Figurative denomination

The word introduced by *diciamo* is not the word normally used to speak about *R*: this means that *p* is used for another situation *R'*. However, there is something similar between both situations that allows the same word to be used.

- (11) Proposte di assoluzione non ce ne saranno molte, ma – ha anticipato il rappresentante dell' accusa – non mancheranno richieste di condanna a pene miti per quegli imputati, "DICIAMO di serie C", che *hanno finito per aderire all' organizzazione per delinquere di don Raffaele Cutolo per paura, alcuni addirittura lasciandosi affiliare in carcere per non rimanere tagliati fuori, per tutelare la propria incolumità, perché costretti a scegliere*: o con quelli della Nuova camorra organizzata o contro di loro.

There won't be many proposals for acquittal – anticipated the representa-

[6] In this analysis I used the Repubblica Corpus, LIP, C-oral-Rom.

tive for the prosecution – but there won't be any lack of proposals for light sentences for those defendants – DICIAMO of the bottom league – who, for fear, have ended up being part of don Raffaele Cutolo's delinquency organisation, some even letting themselves be signed up in prison so as not to be left out and to safeguard their own safety because they have to choose; or with the new organised Camorra or against them.

The expression “di serie C” (of the bottom league) is used to denote the less important and less well-known soccer teams in the Italian championship. It is the less important and the less famous league. In (11), the expression “di serie C” is used to refer to the defendants in the Camorra process. The context that follows [my italics – E.K.] describes the defendants (considered neither famous nor important) of this group and in this way motivates the figurative use of the expression “di serie C.”

The same explanation can be given to the following example (12):

- (12) Se Alain Juppé dovesse dimettersi, voi preferireste un uomo come Philippe Séguin, neogollista, DICIAMO, di sinistra? Il presidente dell'Assemblea, nemico del trattato di Maastricht, è andato a dialogare coi ferrovieri e a distribuire pacche sulle loro spalle. (Il Corriere della Sera)

If Alain Juppé were to resign, would you prefer someone like Philippe Séguin, a neo-Gaullist, DICIAMO, and left-wing? The president of the (National) Assembly and enemy of the Treaty of Maastricht, went to talk with the railway workers and give them pats on their backs.

The tag “di sinistra” (left-wing) would normally be considered the opposite of the preceding one – “neogollista” (neo-Gaullist) –referring to a right-wing party. However, it has to be interpreted in the context of this first definition, and in this case it becomes a particular denomination of a less radical group.

### [3.2] Case 2: Ambiguous denomination

The scope *p* a priori is adequate to say *R*. If *diciamo* is removed nothing disturbs the acceptance of *p*. But *p* can have different interpretations according to the context, and both (or more than one interpretation) must be considered in the case of *diciamo p*. *Diciamo* marks the problematic status of *p*: it is an ambiguous denomination of *R*.

- (13) Per parte nostra vorremmo esprimere un' impressione (che, ovviamente, potrebbe anche essere sbagliata). L' impressione è questa: la Chiesa italiana va a Loreto per la “riconciliazione”, ma sembra andarci già con un peccato (DICIAMO tentazione) di orgoglio: quello di voler fare bella figura

di fronte alla società italiana, di cui essa stessa è parte.

On our part, we would like to convey an impression (which obviously could be wrong). Our impression is the following: the Italian Church goes to Loreto for “reconciliation”, but it seems to go there already with the sin (DICIAMO temptation) of proudness; as if they want to look good in the eyes of the Italian society to which the Church itself belongs.

According to Sabatini & Coletti, the word “tentazione” (temptation) can be interpreted as either a desire reproachable from a moral point of view or a simple desire (cf. *La tentazione di rubare* “the temptation to steal,” and *ho la tentazione di raggiungerli con il primo treno*, “I am tempted to join you with the first train”). In (13) both meanings of the word should be taken into consideration.

- (14) Poiché cinema e Tv non sempre si possono distinguere come dimostra il fuori concorso che giovedì prossimo chiuderà il festival dopo le premiazioni : Siete meravigliosi di Giuseppe Bertolucci con Roberto Benigni, ripresa del suo show dello scorso anno che è dunque insieme cinema, teatro e tv (lo ha prodotto la Rai, ma non lo ha ancora mandato in onda per problemi, DICIAMO, lessicali).

Cinema and television are not always distinguishable as seen from the “out-of-competition” that will close the festival after the prize-giving next Thursday: Siete meravigliosi by Giuseppe Bertolucci starring Roberto Benigni, taken from his previous year’s show and so is at the same time cinema, theatre and television (produced by RAI but still not aired for *diciamo* lexical problems).

In (14), “lessicale” (lexical) can be something that belongs to the lexis in general, or something connected with the use of the words (cf. *Sistema lessicale* “lexical system” – errore lessicale “lexical mistake”). This ambiguous interpretation is kept by *diciamo*.

In (15), in the context that follows the nomination “capolavoro” (masterpiece), two properties of the book defined as “capolavoro” are introduced, but one of them does not fit the book in question, since it was “never read.” That’s why the definition “capolavoro” is problematic.

- (15) Infine, per rimanere dalle parti dell’India, ci sarebbe un libro scritto una sessantina di anni fa, DICIAMO un capolavoro: *Passaggio in India*, di E.M. Forster, molto citato e letto mai. Consigliamo di comprarlo prima che arrivi il film: così uno può seguire meglio la storia.

Finally, always on the India theme, there is a book written about sixty years ago; DICIAMO a masterpiece, *A Passage to India*, by E. M. Forster, quoted often and never read. We suggest that you buy it before the film gets here so you will be able to follow the story better.

[3.3] *Case 3: Another possibility*

The term that corresponds to the scope *p* of *diciamo* is the interpretation or explanation of what is said in the previous context, but it could be considered as such only in this concrete situation. Often, *p* takes the form of an exact, singular and/or objective denomination (i.e. numbers or names), while the first denomination has a subjective character.

- (16) Dante, mi sembra, è oggi voce morta per i giovani e per i meno giovani, DICIAMO per i quarantenni; forse parla ancora ai cinquantenni e oltre, che si sono avvicinati a lui in epoche eroiche, quando cercavamo nel sapere parole definitive [. . .]

It seems to me that Dante in our day is a dead voice for the young as well as the less young DICIAMO for the forty-year-olds; maybe he is only talking to people fifty years old and more [. . .]

In (16), “i meno giovani” (the less young) – can be interpreted in different ways depending on the situation, but also on the speaker, “i quarantenni” (the forty-year-olds) – is an explanation appropriate in this concrete situation from the point of view of the speaker.

The same interpretation can be given to (17): *p* explains what “pochissime” (very few; the absolute superlative form of the adjective “poco”) means in this context, but that does not mean that “mille su ventimila” (one thousand to twenty thousand) is the exact number: it is simply used to give a concrete illustration of the word “pochissime”.

- (17) E fa anche una statistica, cifre alla mano, delle “vere” donne francesi dei suoi tempi. Erano pochissime: DICIAMO, mille su ventimila prese in considerazione. Dice che devono essere oggetti gradevoli, ben vestiti, spirituali . . .

And he presents also the statistical data, with numbers at hand, of the “true” French women of his day. They are very few: DICIAMO one thousand to twenty thousand that were considered. He says that they have to be pretty subjects, well dressed, spiritual . . .

[3.4] *Diciamo: Summing up*

So, *diciamo p* (like *tak skazat'*) indicates that the words *p* used to say *R* are not completely adequate to speak about the world *R*. But, in contrast to *tak skazat'*, *diciamo* introduces a somehow individual denomination. The speaker tries to involve the hearer (through the form of the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural) and invites him to accept conventionally and/or provisionally what is said.

This difference between the two words is very well illustrated by the last use (case 3 for both words): *diciamo* introduces an individual interpretation of what is said before; *tak skazat'* accompanies a quotation or the words of another for which the speaker does not assume responsibility.

The other two uses of *diciamo* and *tak skazat'* are very similar. But at the same time the form of the scope is different: *diciamo* introduces a metaphorical (in case 1) or an ambiguous (in case 2) denomination, while the scope of *tak skazat'* is often a generalized denomination or an idiomatic expression.

[3.5] *Diciamo in spoken language*

In spoken language, the similar contexts of use of *diciamo* can be distinguished.

- (18) Senta colonello // un'ultima domanda // sia l'onorevole Bertinotti / sia / l'onorevole Buttiglione / da posizioni politiche molto diverse / vi hanno espresso / la loro simpatia / e i loro auguri // voi / vi sentite / appoggiati / dalla classe politica italiana? – beh / come sono andate le cose / DICIAMO / in questi giorni / sì / prima ci sentivamo un po' abbandonati / per tutte le problematiche / che ci sono state // parti / non parti // forse sì // forse no // vediamo // ecco / questi sono stati i nostri problemi

The last question colonel / both the Member of Parliament Bertinotti and the Member of Parliament Buttiglione / from different political positions / expressed their sympathy and best wishes // do you feel supported by Italian politics? / – well / what was happening / diciamo / in those days / yes / in the beginning we felt ourselves a little bit abandoned / because of all the problems / that we had / you have to leave / you don't need to leave // probably yes / probably no / we'll see / so / these were our problems

- (19) l'investimento risale a / millenovecen // duemila . . . duemila // – duemila // quindi praticamente / lei s'è beccato tutto il periodo / DICIAMO / di massimo splendore dei mercati finanziari

the investment dates by / nineteen . . . // two thousand . . . two thousand // two thousand // it means that / you picked up the whole period / DICIAMO / of the highest grandeur of the financial market

In (18), the scope of *diciamo* is the speaker's personal reinterpretation of the question: "vi sentite appoggiati dalla classe politica" (do you feel supported) as "come sono andate le cose" (what was happening). In (19), *p* is an individual, a subjective characterization of the period.

[4] *tak skazat'* – *diciamo*: ANALOGIES AND DIFFERENCES

As we have seen *diciamo* and *tak skazat'* have several common features which can be defined as typical of mitigation/attenuation. Both:

- participate in the denomination: marking *p* as adequate or not to say *R*
- take into account others' possibilities of saying *R*
- take into account possible interpretations of *p*, i.e., other  $R^n$  that could be said by *p*.

At the same time, the attenuation/mitigation that stays in the definition of both DMs can have different interpretations. For both words it is based upon not assuming responsibility. But in case of *tak skazat'* this "non-assumption of responsibility" is an active removal of responsibility: the speaker disengages from what s/he is saying and leaves the words to perform on their own. In case of *diciamo* "non-assumption of responsibility" means "sharing it with the audience."

It is interesting to compare the words of the same form: *diciamo* and *skažem*, on the one hand, and *tak skazat'* and *per così dire*, on the other hand.

The DM *skažem*, in contrast to *diciamo*, is not involved in the process of denomination. It marks that the scope *p* could be adequate to say the situation *R* ("state of affairs") and proposes *p* as a point of departure for the development of the context that follows.

- (20) Почему крестьянство поддержало революцию в центральных губерниях и не поддержало на окраинах, скажем, в Сибири? В центральных губерниях мужик видел помещика, дворянина, а в Сибири их не было. А когда появился дворянин Колчак, тогда сибирский мужик поддержал революцию. (А. Рыбаков)

Why did the peasantry support the revolution in the central provinces but not in the outlying districts, SKAŽEM, in Siberia? In the central provinces the mužik (peasant) could see the landowner, the nobleman, but in Siberia there were none. And when the nobleman Kolčak appeared there, then the Siberian mužik supported the revolution. (A. Rybakov)

The form *per così dire* is used in the written language and is very unusual in spoken language. In this case, the attention is focused on the ambiguous status of the

words that can be both adequate and inadequate to say *R*. In contrast, *tak skazat'* (as we have seen) shows the disengagement of the speaker based on the possibility of different interpretations of the words.

- (21) Quest'opera di 'salvataggio' è da un lato resa più agevole dall'impressionante ricchezza della stampa italiana all'estero (. . .), e da una crescente attenzione nei confronti di testimonianze di tipo diaristico-autobiografico; dall'altro è penalizzata – PER COSÌ DIRE – dall'assenza di opere singole tali da venire assunte a simbolo rappresentativo di quella grande storia collettiva.

This last-minute 'rescue operation' is, on one hand, made easier by the impressionable wealth of the foreign Italian press (. . .) and by growing attention aimed at diarist-autobiographical like stories. On the other hand, it is penalised – PER COSÌ DIRE – by the absence of single works able to be considered emblematic of such a great collective history.

[5] THE VERBS *skazat'* – *dire*: CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

I will argue in the last part of this paper that the differences between DMs could be explained by the semantic differences between the DMs' lexemes of origin.

The hypothesis concerning this link between the semantics of a discourse element and the form from which it derives was formulated in the theory of Culioli (1990, 2002); Culioli & Normand (2005) and was illustrated in different studies (i.e., Franckel & Paillard (2008); Paillard (1998, 2001, 2002, 2009); Khachatourian (2006); Khachaturyan (2008); Vladimirska (2008)).

In this paper I will analyze only a few contexts that can illustrate the semantic differences between the seemingly similar verbs *skazat'* and *dire* ("to say").

The Italian verb in several contexts synonymous with the verb *pensare* ("to think"). But it is impossible to use the Russian verb *skazat'* in the following examples:

- (22) a. E dire che: E dire che non ha ancora 20 anni!  
Dire INF that: And dire INF that he is even not 20 years old! (*litt.*)
- b. Chi l'avrebbe detto!  
Who dire PAST CONDITIONAL this! (*litt.*)
- c. Si direbbe: Fa bel tempo. Si direbbe l'estate.  
Si IMPERS PRONOUN dire PRESENT CONDITIONAL: The whether is nice. Si direbbe the summer. (*litt.*)

The idea of the exteriorization of thoughts via words is important for the Italian verb, while the Russian verb is focused on the interpretation that the hearer will give to the words in this concrete situation (see this argument in more detail in

Khachatourian (2006)). Both verbs in similar contexts will have different interpretations. E.g., the negation with the verb *dire* – “senza dire niente” (without saying anything) – can be glossed as “without ‘vocalising’ / without giving a voice to thoughts, actions, events”. The situation is often on the order of: “smb knew smth but did not say it.” This interpretation can be illustrated by the following three examples [my italics – E.K.].

- (23) E ho coinvolto un altro dei miei miti, Hugo Pratt. Fa un commissario straniero che arriva, guarda, *capisce tutto* e se ne va SENZA DIRE NIENTE. Ha capito che i delitti non sono roba sua, è roba da psicanalista bravo. (La Repubblica)

So I introduced one of my others myths, Hugo Pratt. He is a foreign commissary who arrives, looks, understands everything and goes away SENZA DIRE NIENTE (without saying anything). He has understood that these crimes are not for him, but for an experienced psychoanalyst.

- (24) Era ... strano. Dopo l'orrore, mi riempiva di gentilezze. Entrando alla dacia avevo guardato un albero di limoni. *Solo uno sguardo*, SENZA DIRE NIENTE: e subito mi fa trovare una cesta di limoni in tavola. (id.)

It was ... strange. After the horror that we survived, he was very kind to me. When I entered the dacha, I looked at the lemon tree. Only looked at it, SENZA DIRE NIENTE (without saying anything): and immediately he sent a basket of lemons to my table.

- (25) *Una scuderia decide* di montare un motore di 3500, 4000, 5000 cc anziché di 3000 cc come da regolamento e così facendo vince alla grande SENZA DIRE NIENTE *al pilota*. (id.)

The team decides to put a motor of 3500, 4000, 5000 cc instead of 3000 cc established by the rules, and in this way the team wins SENZA DIRE NIENTE (without saying anything) to the pilot.

In (23), the eventual (“failed”) speaker understands everything and goes away without saying what he has understood. In (24), the communication is based on glances that transmit the desire without words. In (25), the pilot is not warned about the changes made to the motor.

The Russian verb in the negative construction (*ni slova ne skazav*<sup>7</sup> “without saying a word”) is used in a situation where there is a hearer who is waiting for

[7] The form of the construction is also interesting: usually there is the word “slovo” (“a word”), and less often “ničego” (“nothing”) is used.



the words of the eventual speaker (as in (26)). The hearer is often introduced by a negative pronoun: “nikomu” (“to nobody”).

- (26) Случайно оказавшись зимой на берегу Десны, Алеша заметил, что в воду упал маленький мальчик (. . .). Алеша не только вытащил малыша на берег, сделал ему искусственное дыхание, но и остановил милицйскую машину, проезжавшую по шоссе, довез Валеру до больницы, а сам никому больше ни слова не сказав, отправился домой. (Огонек, 1997, 05)

Finding himself by chance on the bank of the Desna river in winter, Alyosha noticed a little boy fall into the water (. . .) Alyosha not only dragged the small child onto the bank and gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation but also stopped a passing police car, took Valera to hospital and left for home NI SLOVA NE SKAZAV (without saying a word) to anyone. (Ogonyok, 1997, 05)

We can compare with the construction containing the aspectual pair of *skazat'* (perfective form) the verb *govorit'* (imperfective form). The negative construction with *govorit'* will be interpreted as “keeping silence,” as in (27), where any hearer is present.

- (27) . . . молодой человек, не глядя ни вправо, ни влево, поднялся в свой двадцатый номер, бросил слуге фуражку и шпагу, а на расспросы лишь качнул головой. Привычный Маса понимающе поклонился и проворно расстелил на полу соломенную циновку. Куцию шпажонку почтительно обернул шелком и положил на шифонер, сам же, ни слова не говоря, вышел в коридор и встал спиной к двери в позе грозного бога Фудоме, повелителя пламени. (В. Акунин)

. . . the young man, without looking right or left, went upstairs to his room, number 20, threw his service cap and sword to the servant and just shook his head in answer to questions. Masa, being accustomed to it, bowed to him knowingly and quickly spread out the straw mat on the floor. He respectfully wrapped the short sword in the silk and put it on top of the wardrobe, then, NI SLOVA NE GOVORJA (without saying a word), went out into the corridor and stood there with his back against the door in a pose of the menacing god Fudome, tribe sovereign. (B. Akunin)

The participation of the active hearer in the context with *skazat'* can be also illustrated by another example. The constructions like *skaži/skazal pravdu* (tell me the truth/(he) told the truth) are usually followed by the comments of the speaker

(who will become the hearer) who knows the truth, so he can judge whether what will be said (or was said) is the truth or not.

- (28) – Значит, никто не пробежал? – спросила Алиса. Она уже поняла, что никто не пробежал. Иначе бы этот тихий уголок переполошился. – Нет, – сказала молоденькая мама в широких брюках. – А они должны побежать? СКАЖИ ПРАВДУ, тогда я отвезу малыша домой. Детям нельзя волноваться. (К. Булычев)

– So, nobody ran by? – asked Alice. She already realised that nobody had run by, otherwise this place would not be so quiet. – No, – said the very young mother in wide trousers. – And should they have run by? SKAŽI PRAVDU (Tell me the truth), and then I'll drive the child home. Children should never be made to worry. (K. Bulyčev)

The construction with the word *novost'* ("news") has a similar property: it is often followed by the interpretation given from the point of view of the hearer, as in (29), where it is clear that the news is unpleasant for the hearer.

- (29) Не сердись, Миколя. Но СКАЖУ ТЕБЕ НЕПРИЯТНУЮ НОВОСТЬ . . . – Он сразу изменился в лице.

Don't be angry, Mikolya. But SKAŽU TEBE NEPRIJATNUJU NOVOST' (I'll tell you the unpleasant news) . . . He immediately changed his countenance

## [6] CONCLUSION

In this article I have described two DMs, *tak skazat'* and *diciamo*, which occur quite frequently in spoken language and are often considered to be "empty words." Traditionally, in the written language, both markers are designated as mitigating/attenuating elements in the text. We have seen, however, that the function of mitigation, although in both cases it actually corresponds to the "non-assumption of responsibility," is based on different principles: *tak skazat'* marks the disengagement of the speaker from what is said, while *diciamo* indicates the union with the hearer that allows for shared responsibility. These differences could be explained not only by the form of the two DMs, but also by the different semantics of the verbs *skazat'* and *dire*. Both markers retain their semantics in spoken language. The idea of the non-assumption of responsibility brings us to the general problem which concerns the meaning of words and plurivocity (various interpretations) of the same word.

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## AUTHOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Elizaveta Khachaturyan  
Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages  
University of Oslo  
Norway  
[elizaveta.khachaturyan@ilos.uio.no](mailto:elizaveta.khachaturyan@ilos.uio.no)