Classification of Pereltsvaig’s suggested list of Russian idiomatic NPI’s

Barbara Partee with the help of colleagues and students

Suggested list from Asya Pereltsvaig (slightly shortened):

“Here’s a list of Russian idiomatic NPIs. They are of different degree of idiomaticity, though. Even though some sources give affirmative variants as well, I cannot use any of these in affirmative (in the idiomatic sense, that is). Note that most expressions contain objects which are obligatorily in the Genitive of negation. I include negation to make it sound good…”

Annotations April-May 2004 classifying them into 4 groups according to the judgments of various native speakers of Russian.

Class 1: A completely frozen idiom including the negative particle ne; cannot occur in any of the contexts listed for Classes 2, 3, 4.

Class 2: A strong negative polarity item, limited to clausemate negation, but not just a frozen idiom. Test: Can occur in negative sentences with subject Nikto. Nikto ne ______.

Class 3: An NPI that can occur not only in the Class 2 environment, but also in one or more of the following environments:

Я увидел, если он (хоть) (и) ______. (With no ne in the sentence)

(Я увидел, если он хоть комею даст.)

Он очень бы ______. (Он очень бы глазом моргнул.)

Class 4: Not an NPI at all in your dialect. Can also occur in simple negative past tense sentences. Example: Он сломил оружие.

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(Example numbers are from earlier list.)

CLASS 1: Completely frozen idiom including negation.

5. ne pokladaja ruk - not putting:GERUND hands:GEN - without resting (e.g., work hard) Class 1
6. dushi ne chajat’ v kom-to - soul:GEN not to-hope(?) - adore somebody Class 1
7. nog / zemli ne chujat’ pod soboj - legs:GEN / earth:GEN not to-feel underneath self – Class 1 or Class 2 –?!
8. ne pokladaja ruk - not putting:GERUND hands:GEN - without resting (e.g., work hard) Class 1
9. ne pokladaja ruk - not putting:GERUND hands:GEN - without resting (e.g., work hard) Class 1

CLASS 2: Clausemate negation only.

2. ne davat’ prexoda komu-nibud’ - not to-give passage:GEN to smb. - to hassle somebody Class 2
3. ne davat’ spuska (komu-to) - not to-give freedom(?):GEN - not to let go Class 2 (VB) Class 3
4. ne davat’ spuska (komu-to) - not to-give freedom(?):GEN - not to let go Class 2 (VB) Class 3

CLASS 3: Some disagreement or uncertainty.

1. ne morgnut’ glazom - not to-blink eye:INSTR - not to be affected (usually by something bad) Class 2 (EVP) or Class 3 (VBP)
2. ne podavat’ / pokazyvat’ vida - not to-give / show look:GEN - not to let know (about how one feels, etc.) Class 2 or possibly Class 3; some resistance to Class 2 (VB) Class 3
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(M.Kh.)

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CLASS 2 – almost Class 3. In positive contexts this suggests raising head in protest which is not the NPI meaning.

16c. ne skazat’ ni slova - not to say NI word:GEN - not to say a word (i.e., keep silent) with skazat’, Class 2 (VB), Class 3 (Marina Kh.)
19. ne delat’ vpadat’ v paniku – not to fall into a panic – Class 2 (VB)
20. ne delat’ / pokazyvat’ vida - not to-give / show look:GEN - not to let know (about how one feels, etc.) Class 2 or possibly Class 3; some resistance to Class 2 (VB) Class 3
20b. ne delat’ vpadat’ v paniku – not to fall into a panic – Class 2 (VB)
21. ne podavat’ / pokazyvat’ vida - not to-give / show look:GEN - not to let know (about how one feels, etc.) Class 2 or possibly Class 3; some resistance to Class 2 (VB) Class 3

BORDERLINE CLASS 2 – CLASS 3: some disagreement or uncertainty.

1. ne morgnut’ glazom - not to-blink eye:INSTR - not to be affected (usually by something bad) Class 2 (EVP) or Class 3 (VBP)
2. ne podavat’ / pokazyvat’ vida - not to-give / show look:GEN - not to let know (about how one feels, etc.) Class 2 or possibly Class 3; some resistance to Class 2 (VB) Class 3

Elena Osipenko: This is grammatical as Class 3 only with the addition of kakoe-nibud’: Ja ne dumaju, chto on imeet kakoe-nibud’ ponjatie o tom, chto proizoshlo.

Thanks to Elena Padacheva, Yakov Testelets, and Vladimir Borschov for jointly discovering the four classes in the course of our discussions, and for judgments and discussion about individual expressions. Thanks for further judgments and discussion from two of the students in my RGGU 2004 introduction to formal semantics: Marina Khoruzhenko and Elena Osipenko. I don’t know whether anyone has ever suggested grouping NPI idioms into Class 2 and Class 3 types like this before.
CLASS 3: Wider NPI.

3. ne udarit' palec (palec:INSTR) o palec - not to-stike finger:ACC (finger:INSTR) on finger:LOC - not to do anything to help  **Class 3 (all agree)**

16a. ne proronit' ni slova - not to-let-out NI word:GEN - not say a word (i.e., keep silent) with **proronit'; Class 3**

16b. ne govorit' ni slova - not to tell NI word:GEN - not say a word (i.e., keep silent)  **with govorit'; Class 3**

17. shaga ne sdelat' / stupit' - step:GEN not to-make / step - not to step a step  **Class 3**

18. ne da'ti ni grosha - not to-give NI grosh:GEN - not to give a red cent  **Class 2 (almost Class 3, except that grosh is too archaic)** Marina Kh. – **Class 3**, though slightly odd. Elena O: **Class 3**.

18a. ne dat' ni kopejki - not to-give NI kopeck:GEN - not to give a red cent  **Class 3**

21. ne vnushat' doverija - not to-inspire trust:GEN - be suspect  **Class 2 (VB) Class 3 (M.Kh.)**

27. ne podavat' ruki - not to-give/offer hand:GEN - not to be on speaking terms(?). **Class 3 (VB, M.Kh.), Class 4 (E.O.)** (E.O. note: But it’s not clear to what extent it keeps its idiomatic meaning in positive contexts.)

28. ne slozhit' oruzhija - not to-put-down arms:GEN - not to yield to the enemy  **Class 4**

30a. ne ustupit' ni na jotu - not to-yield NI for iota (letter of the Greek alphabet) - not to yield at all, not to go for a compromise  **Class 3 (E.O.)**

32. (To add to the list) Volos s ego golovy ne upadet.  **Class 3**.

CLASS 4: OK also in positive contexts: not an NPI.

25. ne davat' volju/voli rukam - not to-give freedom:ACC/GEN to hands - keep restrained from fist-fight  **Class 4 (VB, E.O.)**

26. ne slozhit' oruzhija - not to-put-down arms:GEN - not to yield to the enemy  **Class 4**

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(There is an earlier version of this document that includes a record of discussion with VBB, EVP, YGT in Wednesday seminar April 7. I am omitting that discussion from this version.)

Next challenge: Is there any identifiable semantic difference between Class 2 and Class 3 idioms? Or is this just a matter of degrees of frozenness? I’m wondering if the Class 3 ones are to any greater degree based on scalar implicatures involving minimal units. That’s the only semantic property I see so far as being possibly relevant. But it doesn’t seem to occur in all or only class 3 idioms.