

Epistemic and pragmatic functions of *ja ne znaju* ‘I don’t know’ in contemporary Russian

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Introduction

In contemporary Russian, the construction *ja ne znaju* ‘I don’t know’ seems to have interesting epistemic¹ and pragmatic functions when it occurs in certain syntactic environments. Knowledge disclaimers have been investigated in different languages and settings (Tsui 1991; Beach and Metzger 1997; Scheibmann 2000; Hutchby 2002; Potter 2004; Weatherall 2011; Helmer et al. 2016; Jager et al. 2016; Van der Meij et al. 2022). However, specific research on epistemic stance-taking in Russian has been scarce, in particular in what concerns knowledge disclaimers in this language². This paper aims to partially fill this gap in literature by examining the formal and informational features of *ja ne znaju* in a corpus of Russian radio interviews.

Ja ne znaju

The verb *znat* ‘to know’ is traditionally considered as a transitive verb taking two arguments, one for the knowing entity, the other for the matter known. Syntactically, *ja ne znaju* is a complement-taking predicate (CTP), that is a verbal predicate that takes a sentential predicate as a complement, evaluating its truth-value (Pietrandrea 2018). The complement is usually a complement clause, that can be introduced by *čto* ‘that’, or an infinitival VP.

<i>ja</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>
I	NEG	know.1SG. PRES

- 1 De Haan’s (2001, 201) definition of epistemicity as “the degree of confidence the speaker has in his or her statement” is adopted in this paper.
- 2 The few available works analyse the function of the construction *ja ne znaju* as a hesitation marker (Khan 2012), or the performative use of *ja znaju* ‘I know’ in the Russian rock music of the 1990’s (Konkina 2017).

Research conducted in a variety of languages, starting from the studies of Thompson and Mulac (1991), Thompson (2002), Kärkkäinen (2003), Keevallik (2006; 2011), Laury and Okamoto (2011), Maschler (2012), to the more recent special issues of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (Lindström et al. 2016) and *Folia Linguistica* (Grzech et al. 2020), have shown that in spontaneous speech negative epistemic predicates often appear without any complement. Frequently reduced morphophonologically and syntactically, they tend to grammaticalize into discourse markers, i.e. devices endowed with specific cognitive, interactional and metatextual functions (Maschler 2012; Pekarek Doehler 2016; Debras 2021). This tendency is in line with the process of bleaching toward pragmaticalization (Diewald 2011), a particular type of grammaticalization³ which has been documented for complement taking predicates, that are inclined to move into discourse markers or markers of epistemic stance (Pekarek Doehler 2011).

The verbs of the semantic field *to know* are particularly suitable for becoming discourse markers due to their semantics which refers to a shared knowledge between speaker and interlocutor. For this reason, they are used both in interactional functions, to control contact with the interlocutor, and to focus segments of information. It is thus essential to investigate the uses of *ja ne znaju* in discourse in order to find out for what purposes it is used beyond denying epistemic access, i.e. the fact that speakers manifest the possession of a certain knowledge.

The corpus is made up of 43 recordings of radio interviews broadcast on various programmes of the Russian radio channel *Echo Moskvy* between 2015 and 2021, for a total duration of 39 hours (173639 words)⁴. Throughout the corpus, 238 occurrences of the construction (subj)-negpred *znat'* were found. Of these, 176 (74%) were in the first person singular present, i.e. they consisted of the construction *ja ne znaju*, composed of the negative operator *ne* followed by the verb *znat'* in the present sin-

3 In this paper grammaticalization is understood as “the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions, and once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions” (Hopper and Traugott 2003, 18).

4 The Radio Ėcho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow) was a radio station based in Moscow. In March 2022, it was closed down by Roskomnadzor, the Russian state media watchdog, as a result of its coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The station used to post transcripts of many of its broadcasts, as well as audio and clips, on its website. The transcripts were not entirely faithful to the original audio files, but, with the sound track, they could be fixed to give a correct representation of the interviews.

gular tense, sometimes preceded by the first person pronoun *ja* (Table 1). These 176 occurrences of (*ja*) *ne znaju* make up the database of the present study (see table 1).

Table 1 *Ja ne znaju* tokens in the corpus

(sogg)-neg-pred znat'	(<i>ja</i>) <i>ne znaju</i>	<i>ja ne znaju</i> (with 1 st person pronoun)	<i>ne znaju</i> (without 1 st person pronoun)
238	176/238 74%	97/176 55%	79/176 45%

With regards to the syntactic features, table 2 shows how the 176 (*ja*) *ne znaju* occurrences are distributed according to the object complement. More than half of the tokens (58%) occur without any object complement, a third (33%) with a clause, and small percentages with a NP (5.6%), or a question word (3%) (see table 2).

Table 2 Distribution of *ja ne znaju* according to the syntactic category of object complement

OBJECT COMPLEMENT	N (%)		
Ø	102	58%	94%
Clause	58	33%	
question word	6	3%	
NP	10	5.6%	5.7%
Total	176		100%

Turning to the functional characteristics of the *ja ne znaju* construction according to the object complement, the investigation reveals that its uses with zero object complement perform the widest array of functions, from the full epistemic employment as a stance of ignorance and uncertainty, to the more pragmatic uses as an epistemic hedge, marker of reformulation (paraphrasing, correction, exemplification, clarification), device for topic-shift employed in order to avoid a face-threatening act, and marker of enumeration. The more epistemic functions are performed when *ja ne znaju* is followed by a question word or a NP, whereas the pragmatic functions drastically decline and practically disappear when the object complement is a question word (see table 3).

Epistemic stance of ignorance and uncertainty

We begin with the full epistemic employment of *ja ne znaju*, i.e. when it conveys the speakers' unwillingness or inability to express their epistem-

Table 3 Functions of *ja ne znaju* according to the object complement

Object Complement	Functions
Ø	epistemic stance of ignorance and uncertainty epistemic hedge marker of reformulation topic-shift, avoidance of a face-threatening act enumeration (in conjunction with preceding <i>tam</i>)
clause	epistemic stance of ignorance and uncertainty epistemic hedge marker of reformulation topic-shift, avoidance of a face-threatening act
question word	epistemic stance of ignorance and uncertainty
NP	epistemic stance of ignorance and uncertainty marker of reformulation (paraphrasing, correction, exemplification, clarification)

ic positioning with respect to what the discourse is about. This use can be found across all types of object complementation in contexts where through *ja ne znaju* speakers express their non-knowledge of the object

Example 1

<i>U</i>	<i>menja</i>	<i>dve</i>	<i>zamečatel'nyh</i>	<i>istorii</i>	<i>odna</i>	<i>naša</i>	<i>drugaja</i>
by	me	two	remarkable	stories	one	our	another
<i>zamorskaja i</i>		<i>obe</i>	<i>prekrasnye</i>	<i>odna</i>	<i>iniciativa</i>	<i>nakazyvat'</i>	<i>sažat'</i>
overseas	and	both	wonderful	one	initiative	to punish	to put
<i>v</i>	<i>tjur'mu</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>pjat'</i>	<i>let</i>	<i>za</i>	<i>traty</i>	<i>deputatov</i>
in	prison	on	five	years	for	spending	deputies
<i>i</i>	<i>gosčinovnikov</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>samopiar</i>				
and	government. officials	on	self-promotion				
- <i>Počemu</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>pjat'?</i>					
why	on	five					
- <i>Ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>						
NEG	I.know						
- <i>Počemu</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>15?</i>				
why	NEG	on	15				
- 15	èto	<i>znaete</i>	črezmerno	èto	<i>sliškom</i>		
15	this	you.	excessively	this	too.much		
		know					

- I have two wonderful stories. One is ours, the other is overseas. And both are wonderful. One is the initiative to punish, to put in prison deputies and government officials for five years for spending on self-promotion.

- Why five?

- I don't know.

- Why not for 15 years?

- 15, you know, it's a lot, it's too much

of speech, or an uncertainty due to the lack of the cognitive elements necessary to give a reliable assessment of the state of things described. Literal uses tend to appear turn-initially, at the beginning of a response to a question, or as fully responsive stand-alone turns, as is the case in the following example (1), in which the responder doesn't have enough knowledge to answer the question.

Ja ne znaju can have a more pragmatic function when it is used to indicate a downgrading of the speakers' commitment to the truth of the proposition. There are instances when, regardless of the real degree of the speakers' knowledge or opinion, it is used to avoid taking a position on issues that speakers do not wish to engage in, as in example (2), where the

Example 2

- <i>Kak</i>	<i>kak</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>nas</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>otečestvom?</i>
how	how	by	us	with	fatherland
- <i>Nu</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>patriarchu</i>	<i>vidnee</i>	
well	NEG	I.know	patriarch	more.visible	
- How is it with our Fatherland?					
- Well, I don't know the patriarch knows better					

Example 3

- <i>I</i>	<i>deneg</i>	<i>formal'no</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>ramkach</i>	<i>bjudžeta</i>	<i>deneg</i>	<i>net</i>
and	money	formally	in	confines	budget	money	NEG
<i>Možet</i>	<i>byt'</i>	<i>oni</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>est'</i>	<i>možet</i>	<i>byt'</i>	<i>ich</i>
may	be	they	and	is	may	be	them
<i>daže</i>	<i>očen'</i>	<i>mnogo</i>					
even	very	much					
- <i>Možet</i>	<i>byt'</i>	<i>oni</i>	<i>dlja</i>	<i>kogo-to</i>	<i>est'</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>dlja</i>
may	be	they	for	someone	is	but	for
<i>kogo-to</i>	<i>možet</i>	<i>byt'</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>net</i>			
someone	may	be	and	NEG			
- <i>Nu</i>	<i>dlja</i>	<i>kogo-to</i>	<i>est'</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>možet</i>	<i>oni</i>	
well	for	someone	is	yes	may	they	
<i>v</i>	<i>kakich-to</i>	<i>takich</i>	<i>jaščikach</i>	<i>ležat</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>košelečkach</i>	<i>ja</i>
in	some	such	drawers	lay	there	purses	I
<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>formal'no</i>	<i>esli</i>	<i>brat'</i>	<i>naš</i>	<i>bjudžet</i>
NEG	know	but	formally	if	take	our	budget
<i>to</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>treščit</i>	<i>po</i>	<i>švam</i>			
than	it	cracks	by	seams			

- And officially there is no money in the budget. Maybe there is. Maybe even lots of it.

- Maybe there is for someone. Maybe not for others.

- Well, for someone there is, yes. Maybe it is in some of these drawers there, purses. I don't know. But officially, if we take our budget, it is bursting at the seams.

respondent refuses to give his opinion about the general state of the ‘fatherland’, i.e. Russia, the interlocutor is expecting to receive.

Similarly, in example (3) *ja ne znaju* mitigates the illocutionary force of the utterance and smoothes the conversational interaction by downgrading the statement to a supposition about the real amount of money in the budget and who might have more than thought.

Epistemic hedge

The previous examples illustrate that *ja ne znaju* has several characteristics that might not be captured if we were to consider this construction only as an epistemic stance-marker. In many contexts *ja ne znaju* is used to moderate the force of an utterance or the certainty of its content (Neary-Sundquist 2013), inviting the listener to attribute a more indefinite meaning to the context it refers to. In this way it seems to function pragmatically as a hedge (Aijmer 1984; Hyland 1998; Weatherall 2011), given that it makes the context vague rather than specific and precise.

In example (4), *ja ne znaju* softens the harsh depiction of *p’janye ljudi* ‘drunk men’, smoothing the way to the next definition. We can also see how the construction reinforces its pragmatic function through the accumulation of other hedging elements, i.e. the indefinite modifier *kakie-to* and the adverb *tam* used as a mark of indefiniteness⁵.

The way in which *ja ne znaju* works towards downgrading the precision of the statement is also evident in example (5), where the speaker

Example 4

<i>I</i>	<i>vychodjat</i>	<i>na</i>	ěti	<i>akcii</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>kakie-to</i>	<i>tam</i>
and	go.out	to	these	actions	NEG	certain	there
<i>ja</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>p’janye</i>	<i>ljudi</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>otstalye</i>
I	NEG	know	drunk	people	NEG	I.know	backward
<i>ljudi</i>	<i>posmotrite</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>lica</i>	<i>vychodjaščich</i>	ěto	<i>vpolne</i>	<i>simpatičnaja</i>
people	look	to	faces	going.out	this	fully	nice
<i>molodež’</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>27-30</i>	<i>let</i>				
youth	there	<i>27-30</i>	years				

And attend these events not, I don’t know, drunk people, I don’t know, backward people, look at the faces of those who go out, they are quite nice young people about 27-30 years old

- 5 Research conducted by the author (Bocale 2018) has shown that the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic environments under which distal deictics such as *tam* can occur – hypothetical, counterfactual or otherwise modal, non-declarative, negative, indefinite, approximative, of continuation and enumeration, disjunctive, evidential – share the feature of epistemic uncertainty, which is the “semantic common denominator to all sub-modes of irrealis” (Givón 1995, 121).

Example 5

A	<i>est'</i>	<i>kakoj-to</i>	ne	znaju	<i>propisannyj</i>	<i>algoritm</i>	<i>nu</i>
and	is	certain	NEG	I.know	prescribed	algorithm	well
<i>uslovno</i>	<i>govorja</i>	<i>vy</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>vlasti</i>	<i>odin</i>	<i>srok</i>	<i>vy</i>
conditionally	speaking	you	by	power	one	term	you
<i>ešče</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>porjadke</i>	<i>Vy</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>vlasti</i>	<i>dva</i>	<i>sroka</i>
still	in	order	you	in	power	two	terms
<i>vot</i>	<i>uže</i>	<i>čto-to</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>tak</i>	<i>Tri</i>	<i>sroka</i>	<i>sovsem</i>
here	already	something	NEG	so	three	terms	quite
<i>uže</i>	<i>plocho</i>	<i>Nu</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>tak</i>	<i>dalee</i>	<i>Est'</i>	<i>gradacija</i>
already	bad	well	and	so	further	is	gradation
<i>v</i>	<i>kakoj</i>	<i>moment</i>	<i>ostanovit'sja nužno?</i>				
in	which	moment	to.stop	necessary			

And there is some, I don't know, a prescribed algorithm, well, relatively speaking, you are in power for one term, you are still in order. You have been in power for two terms - something is already wrong. Three terms - absolutely everything is bad. Well, and so on. Is there a gradation, at what point do you need to stop?

Example 6

A	èto	<i>chorošo</i>	<i>vot</i>	<i>takaja</i>	<i>indifferentnost'</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>takoe</i>
and	this	good	here	such	indifference	and	such
<i>narodnoe</i>	<i>dolgotерpenie?</i>	Èto	<i>pravil'no?</i>	Èto	<i>chorošo?</i>	<i>Nu</i>	<i>možet</i>
national	long.patience	this	right	this	good	well	may
<i>byt'</i>	<i>lučše</i>	<i>kogda</i>	<i>ljudi</i>	<i>pošli</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>načali</i>
be	better	when	people	went	COND	and	started
<i>by</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>dobivat'sja</i>	<i>ot</i>	<i>mestnych</i>
COND	there	I	NEG	know	obtain	from	local
<i>vlastej</i>	<i>ili</i>	<i>ot</i>	<i>pravitel'stva</i>	čtoby	<i>im</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>predpoložim</i>
authorities	or	from	government	that	them	there	we.suppose
<i>sdelali</i>	<i>kakie-to</i>	<i>bole</i>	<i>vygodnye</i>	<i>uslovija</i>	<i>dlja</i>	<i>togo</i>	čtoby
did	certain	more	favourable	conditions	for	that	that
<i>otkryt'</i>	<i>svoju</i>	<i>lavočku</i>	<i>ili</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>sozdat'</i>	<i>svoj</i>	<i>malen'kij</i>
open	own	shop	or	there	create	own	small
<i>biznes</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>sebj</i>	<i>nakonec</i>	<i>kormit'</i>	<i>vot</i>	<i>v</i>	ètich
business	and	oneself	finally	feed	here	in	these
<i>uslovjach</i>							
conditions							

And is it good such indifference and such people's long-suffering? Is it right? Is it good indeed? Well, maybe it would be better if people would go and start, I don't know, demanding local authorities or the government that they provide, for example, more favourable conditions in order to open their own shop or create their own small business and finally feed themselves in these conditions

wonders about the mechanisms, processes and arrangements that keep those in power at the top and secure. The hypothesis put forward of a 'prescribed algorithm' for determining the length of stay of political leaders

is somehow made less strong through the use of *ja ne znaju* with a mitigating function, i.e. as a means of downplaying the assertiveness of the statement.

In example (6), it serves as a means for the speaker of hedging the assertiveness of the utterance in a conditional context where she is wondering whether Russians should try to obtain from local authorities or the government more favourable conditions to open and run their business.

Interactional device with minimal or no residual epistemicity

Several *ja ne znaju* tokens testify to the fact that its uses in interactional conversation cannot be reduced to the functions of marking the epistemic position of the speaker or hedging, but are instrumental to the way in which participants sequentially organize their interaction. Helping to connect large segments of discourse, *ja ne znaju* can function as a marker of reformulation whenever speakers feel that their utterances need further elaboration, expansion or clarification in order to be understood.

In example (7), the speaker is asserting that Russian police must have some form of information or intelligence on the participants to demonstrations and street-marches. The hypothesis that police use informants to spy on people who oppose the government by taking to the street and engaging in protest is further corroborated by paraphrasing the definition *sogljadataev* ‘eavesdroppers’ with *informatorov* ‘informants’.

Similarly, in example (8) the speaker is expressing her concern that the growth in the number of cars on the roads in Moscow has not been matched

Example 7

<i>Da</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>dumaju</i>	čto	<i>i</i>	<i>daže</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>bez</i>
but	I	think	that	and	even	and	without
<i>videokamer</i>	<i>policija</i>	<i>vladeet</i>	<i>informaciej</i>	<i>kto</i>	<i>byl</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>vot</i>
video.cameras	police	owns	information	who	was	on	here
ètich	<i>akcijach</i>	<i>navernjaka</i>	<i>ot</i>	<i>suščestvuet</i>	<i>sistema</i>	<i>kakich-to</i>	<i>očej</i>
these	actions	probably	from	exists	system	certain	eyes
<i>sogljadataev</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>znaju</i>	<i>informatorov</i>	<i>mne</i>	<i>trudno</i>	<i>skazat'</i>
eavesdroppers	I	NEG	know	informants	to.me	difficult	to.say
<i>ja</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>specialist</i>	<i>po</i>	ètoj	časti	<i>kotoraja</i>	<i>govorit</i>
I	NEG	specialist	by	this	part	which	says
<i>o</i>	<i>tom</i>	<i>vot</i>	ètot	čelovek	<i>byl</i>		
about	that	here	this	person	was		

But I think that even without video cameras, the police have information about who was at these events, probably there is a system of some kind of spies, I don't know informants, it's hard for me to say I'm not an expert in this area, which says that this person was

by an equivalent increase in the amount of cars manufactured in Russia, where the automobile industry has been severely affected by the economic downturn which has left the sector stuck in an old industry technology and lack of professional training and competence. She reformulates the idea that there is a dearth of *učitelej* 'teachers' in the car sector with *masterov* 'foremen', preceded by *ja ne znaju* prefaced by the irrealis marker *tam*.

In example (9), the speaker is arguing that Russian liberals should go back to the tradition of Russian liberalism which was represented by the Cadets and Herzen. In this context *ja ne znaju* is employed for self-correction by editing the previous utterance in an environment prefaced by the discourse markers *nu* 'well' and *tam* 'there'.

Several tokens of *ja ne znaju* reveal that the construction also performs a more specific text-structuring function as a device employed to manage textual progression. In turn-initial position in the sequential environment of a response to a question, it smoothes the transition between

Example 8

<i>Nu</i>	<i>probki</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>Moskve</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>vot</i>	<i>znaete</i>	<i>i</i>
well	jams	in	Moscow	yes	here	you.know	and
<i>v</i>	<i>drugich</i>	<i>gorodach</i>	<i>probki</i>	<i>vse</i>	<i>kupili</i>	<i>sebe</i>	<i>mašiny</i>
in	other	towns	jams	all	bought	REFL	cars
<i>i</i>	<i>vse</i>	<i>voobšče</i>	<i>šikarno</i>	<i>žily</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>otnositel'no ostal'nych</i>	
and	all	generally	chic	lived	well	relative	remaining
<i>vreměn</i>	<i>nikogo</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>volnovalo</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>ètot</i>	<i>moment</i>	<i>to</i>
times	nobody	NEG	worried	in	this	moment	that
čto	<i>v</i>	<i>Rossii</i>	<i>kak</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>isčezает</i>	<i>voobšče</i>	<i>proizvodstvo</i>
that	in	Russia	how	BY	disappear	generally	production
<i>kak</i>	<i>takovoe</i>	čto	<i>ne</i>	<i>učat</i>	<i>rabočich</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>net</i>
as	such	that	NEG	teach	workers	there	NEG
<i>učitelej</i>	<i>tam</i>	ja	ne	znaju	<i>masterov</i>	<i>oni</i>	<i>vse</i>
teachers	there	I	NEG	know	foremen	they	all
<i>kuda-to</i>	<i>isčezajut</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>kto-to</i>	<i>vymiraet</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>novye</i>	<i>ne</i>
somewhere	disappear	well	someone	dies	and	new	NEG
<i>prichodjat</i>	<i>net</i>	<i>professional'nogo</i>	<i>obrazovanija</i>	<i>tam</i>	<i>eščë</i>	<i>massy</i>	<i>veščej</i>
come	NEG	vocational	education	there	still	mass	things
<i>net</i>							
NEG							

Well, traffic jams in Moscow, right? You know? And in other cities there are traffic jams. Everyone bought a car for themselves and everyone generally lived chic, well, relative to all other times. Nobody was worried at that moment that in Russia, as it were, production as such was disappearing altogether? They don't teach workers there, there are no teachers, I don't know, masters, they all are disappearing somewhere... Well, someone dies, but new ones do not come. There is no vocational education, there are still a lot of things missing there.

Example 9

Čem	bystree	ruskie	liberaly	budut	voschodit'	k	tradicii
than	faster	Russian	liberals	they.will	go.back	to	tradition
russskogo	liberalizma	k	kadetskoy	tradicii	nu	Gercena	ja
Russian	liberalism	to	Cadet	tradition	well	Herzen	I
ne	sčitaju	liberalom	Gercen	byl	radikalom	v	celom
NEG	consider	liberal	Herzen	was	radical	in	whole
nu	ne	znaju	tam	k	časti	dekabristskogo	dviženija
well	NEG	I.know	there	to	part	Decembrist	movement
čem	bystree	oni	vspomnjat				
than	faster	they	will.remember				

The faster Russian liberals go back to the tradition of Russian liberalism to the Cadet tradition, well, I don't consider Herzen a liberal Herzen was a radical in general, I don't know, to part of the Decembrist movement, the faster they remember

turns by indexing an orientation to the upcoming turn as departing from a straight confirmation to a polar question. In this environment, *ja ne znaju* prefaces a 'non-conforming response' (Raymond 2003; Heritage 2015; Pekarek Doehler 2022), or a 'prefatory epistemic disclaimer' (Schegloff 1996), that is its use alerts the interlocutor that the turn will depart both from the grammatical constraints of the question, and the agenda that it expresses. In this function it is sometimes preceded or immediately followed by the particle *nu* 'well', which is specialised in prefacing responses that are misaligned vis-à-vis the initiating action (Bolden 2018). In example 10, the discussion has been evolving around the chronic failure of opposition leaders to realize their aims and create a viable alliance. *Ja ne znaju* here serves as a general alert to the recipient about the non-straightforwardness of the upcoming answer.

Conversely, in turn-final position in responses to questions, such as in example (11), *ja ne znaju* acts as a turn-exit device in a moment when such exit is not justified by conditional relevance, i.e. at a time when the next normatively envisaged action has not yet been performed and the turn is pragmatically incomplete.

Another functional property of *ja ne znaju* which was identified in the corpus is its employment to steer away from topics which might lead to disagreement. It is thus part of a move to prevent possible face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson 1978; 1987) between the interlocutors. Example (12) may serve as an illustration. Here used in turn-initial position, *ja ne znaju* serves as a weak denial marker to show the speaker's disagreement in a context where the use of *net* 'no' would signal a much stronger overt non-agreement.

Example 10

- Oni	ètogo	ne	ponimajut	ja	imeju	v	vidu
They	this	NEG	understand	I	have	in	sight
oppozicionnyh	liderov?						
opposition	leaders?						
- Ja	ne	znaju	nu	ja	ničego	ne	slyšu
I	NEG	know	well	I	nothing	NEG	hear
ljudi	ne	reagirujut	uže	ni	na	čto	ni
people	NEG	react	already	NEG	to	what	NEG
na	povyšenie	cen	na	neft'	ni	na	poniženie
to	increase	prices	of	oil	NEG	to	decrease
rublja							
ruble							

- They don't understand this I mean opposition leaders?

- I don't know. Well, I haven't heard anything. People no longer react to anything - neither to the increase in oil prices, nor to the fall of the ruble.

In example (13) we see how *ja ne znaju* enables the speaker to show positive concern for the addressees' face in the interaction by closing down on a sequence which might lead to disagreement. Such a complete change of topic could jeopardize the coherence of the discourse under way. By using *ja ne znaju* the speaker signals that this switch takes place in a cooperative way.

Example 11

- Èto	kotorych	pod	tanki	zasovyvali	vot	èto?	
this	those	under	tanks	thrust	here	this?	
- Ja	otvetit'	ne	v	sostojanii	no	to	čto
I	answer	NEG	in	condition	but	that	what
delo	absolutno	ne	v	èkonomike	Penzenskoj	oblasti	èto
matter	absolutely	NEG	in	economy	Penza	region	this
ja	mogu	otvetstvenno govorit'	to	čto	u	nego	
I	can	responsibly say	that	what	by	him	
tam	promyšlennyj	rost	vse	bole	ili	menee	ničego
there	industrial	growth	all	more	or	less	nothing
no	skazite	a	kogda	u	nas	sažali	gubernatorov
but	you.tell	but	when	by	us	plant	governors
za	èkonomiku?	Pokažite	mne	takoe	ja	ne	znaju
for	economy	you.show	me	such	I	NEG	know

- These are the ones they pushed under the tanks, are they...?

- I am not able to answer, but the fact that the matter is absolutely not in the economy of the Penza region that I can responsibly say that when he was in charge there was industrial growth there, everything was more or less, but tell me, when were the governors imprisoned because of the economy? Show me I don't know

Example 12

- Mne	kažetsja	Ksenja	smožet	sformulirovat'	publičnuju	povestku	liberal'nogo
to.me	it.seems	Ksenja	will.be.able	to.formulate	public	agenda	liberal
kapitalizma	v	Rossii	bole	vnjatno	čem	mnogie	iz
capitalism	in	Russia	more	clearly	than	many	from
tech	kto	na	èto	pretenduet			
those	who	on	this	claim			
- Nu	i	menee	neprijatno	dlja	Kremlja	možet	byt'
well	and	less	unpleasant	for	Cremlin	may	be
ona	bole	udobnyj	kandidat	ili	net		
she	more	convenient	candidate	or	not		
- Ne	znaju	vot	ja	tut	slyšal	na	Ècho
NEG	know	here	I	here	heard	on	Ècho
Moskvy	Belkovskij	vystupal	Stas	po-moemy	v	programme	2017
Moskvy	Belkovskij	spoke	Stas	in.my.	in	programme	2017
				opinion			
gde	on	govorit	o	tom	čto	on	davno
where	he	speaks	about	that	that	he	long
družiti	s	Kseniej	Sobčak	i	gotov	ej	pomogat'
is.friends	with	Ksenja	Sobčak	and	ready	her	help
ja	dumaju	čto	u	neě	možet	složiti'sja	komanda
I	think	that	by	her	may	form	team
očen'	sil'nyh	intellektualov					
very	strong	intellectuals					

- It seems to me that Ksenja will be able to formulate the public agenda of liberal capitalism in Russia more clearly than many of those who claim it.

- Well, maybe in a way less unpleasant for the Kremlin. Is she a more suitable candidate or not? – I don't know. Here I heard Belkovskij, Stas I believe, speak on Echo of Moscow in a 2017 programme where he said that he had been friends with Ksenja Sobchak for a long time and was ready to help her. I think that she can put together a team of very strong intellectuals

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Russian	liberalism	to	Cadet	tradition	well	Herzen	I
ne	sčitaju	liberalom	Gercen	byl	radikalom	v	celom
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well	NEG	I.know	there	to	part	Decembrist	movement
čem	bystree	oni	vspomnjat				
than	faster	they	will.remember				

The faster Russian liberals go back to the tradition of Russian liberalism to the Cadet tradition, well, I don't consider Herzen a liberal Herzen was a radical in general, I don't know, to part of the Decembrist movement, the faster they remember

Finally, *ja ne znaju*, here again in combination with the irrealis marker *tam* 'there', appears to have the function of enumeration. Such an exam-

Example 13

- Delo	v	tom	čto	vse	ravno	tak	ili
fact	in	that	what	all	equally	so	or
inače	nanositsja	udar	po	dumajušče	časti	našegoobščestva	
differently	applies	blow	by	thinking	part	our	society
- Ona	malen'kaja	vse	men'se	i	men'se		
she	small	all	less	and	less		
- Na	moj	vzgljad	problema	imenno	v	ètom	i
on	my	sight	problem	exactly	in	this	and
kto	stoit	za	ètim	ne	znaju	Vot	ja
who	stands	behind	this	NEG	know	here	I
posmotrel	nedavno	velikolepnyj	fil'm	pokazyvajut	čto	sejčas	nužno
watched	recently	excellent	film	they.show	that	now	necessary
sdelat'	pereryv						
to.do	break						
- Sekundočku							
one.second							

- The fact is that anyway, one way or another, a blow is dealt to the thinking part of our society

- It's getting smaller and smaller

- In my opinion, this is the problem. And I don't know who is behind this. I recently watched a great film. They show that now we need to take a break.

- Wait a second

ple is (14), where it's use by the speaker anticipates that she is suggesting several different sites where dangerous books should be stored.

Conclusions

The analysis conducted on the corpus has revealed that *ja ne znaju* operates in discourse not only as an epistemic statement of uncertainty, but as a device endowed with several other functional features. Considering *ja*

Example 14

Pavel	Nikolaevič	pro	drugoe	pro	drugoe	choču	u
Pavel	Nikolaevič	about	other	about	other	I.want	by
vas	sprosit'	potomu čto	vot	vy	govorite	čto	vse
you	ask	because	here	you	say	that	everything
ravno	nužno	kak-to	ograničivat'	special'ny	imi tam	ja	ne
equally	necessary	somehow	limit	special	there	I	NEG
znaju	izdaniyami	ili	special'ny	imi bibliotekami	naučnymi	krugami	i
know	publications	or	special	libraries	scientific	circles	and
tak	dalee						
so	further						

Pavel Nikolaevič, about something else. I want to ask you about something else. Because you say that it is necessary to somehow limit it with special, I don't know, publications or special libraries, scientific circles, and so on

ne znaju merely as an epistemic stance marker would miss the other major pragmatic and interactional functions that the construction performs in discourse.

Results confirm the findings of other studies on similar constructions in other languages (Lindström and Karlsson 2016; Maschler 2017) by showing that the functioning of the construction is sensitive to the syntactic category of its object complement. When followed by zero object complement, *ja ne znaju* performs the widest possible range of functions, from disclaiming epistemic access to more pragmatic uses as an epistemic hedge and a marker of reformulation, topic-shift and enumeration. More epistemic functions are featured when the construction occurs followed by a question word or a NP, whereas the pragmatic functions seem to increase in instances lacking an object complement.

Literal uses are more frequently found turn-initially, at the beginning of a response to a question, or as stand-alone turns. Conversely, in turn-final position in responses to questions, *ja ne znaju* can act as a turn-exit device in a moment when such exit is not motivated by conditional relevance. The construction can thus perform more specific text-structuring functions as a device employed to manage textual progression. In many contexts *ja ne znaju* is also used to modify the force of an utterance or of a speech act, that is it functions pragmatically as a hedge that lowers the speakers' commitment to what they say in their turns.

The investigation suggests that *ja ne znaju* has undergone a process of pragmaticalization as a fixed expression used for interactional purposes such as elaborating the turn or organizing the transition between turns. The construction shows loss of epistemic value, semantic bleaching and pragmatic strengthening, which are all typical features of pragmaticalization (Norde and Beijering 2014). The pragmaticalization process does not involve a total loss of referential meaning, but a co-optation for interactional purposes. This confirms research on similar constructions in other languages where the pragmaticalization process has not resulted in the disappearance of the epistemic value, nor of the clausal use of the construction (Pekarek Doehler 2016).

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Epistemic and pragmatic functions of *ja ne znaju* 'I don't know' in contemporary Russian

This paper presents the structural and functional features of the Russian construction *ja ne znaju* 'I don't know'. This construction seems to have interesting epistemic and pragmatic functions when it occurs in specific syntactic contexts in contemporary Russian speech. Specifically, the different structural contexts in which *ja ne znaju* occurs will be classified with the aim of attributing a precise functional value to each of them. The analysis will focus on the pragmatic and functional aspects, starting from the relationship that seems to exist between formal characteristics and the information side.

Keywords: *pcomplement-taking* predicates; epistemic stance; hedging; text-structuring devices

Epistemične in pragmatične funkcije besedne zveze *ja ne znaju* (»jaz ne vem«) v sodobni ruščini

V prispevku so predstavljene strukturne in funkcionalne lastnosti ruske konstrukcije *ja ne znaju* 'ne vem'. Zdi se, da ima ta konstrukcija zanimive epistemične in pragmatične funkcije, kadar se pojavlja v določenih skladenjskih kontekstih v sodobnem ruskem govoru. Natančneje, analizirali in razvrstili smo različne strukture, v katerih se *ja ne znaju* pojavlja, in vsaki od njih določili natančno funkcionalno vrednost. Analiza se osredotoča na pragmatične in funkcionalne vidike, začenši z razmerjem, ki naj bi obstajal med formalnimi značilnostmi in informacijsko platjo.

Ključne besede: povedki s prilastki; epistemična drža; *hedging*; sredstva za strukturiranje besedila