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# Connecting Information and Discourse Structure Levels through “Kontrast:” Evidence from Colloquial Russian Particles –*TO*, *ŽE*, and *VED*’

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**ABSTRACT.** The notion of *kontrast*, or the ability of certain linguistic expressions to generate a set of alternatives, originally proposed by Vallduví and Vilkuna (1998) as a clause-level concept, is re-analyzed here as connecting the level of information packaging in the clause and the level of discourse structure in the following way: *kontrast* is encoded at the clausal level but has repercussions for discourse structure. This claim is supported by evidence from the distribution properties of three colloquial Russian particles –*TO*, *ŽE*, and *VED*’ which are analyzed as unambiguous markers of *kontrast*. Both the placement of these particles at the clausal level and their role in discourse are viewed as consequences of the type of the *kontrast* set and the cognitive status of information marked by each particle. <sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

The notion of *kontrast*, introduced in Vallduví and Vilkuna (1998, V&V hereafter), establishes a conceptual distinction between two notions that have been conflated in the literature by the term of *focus*: one is *rheme*, a concept which, in opposition with *theme*, belongs to the domain of information packaging (Chafe 1976 inter alia) and the other is what the authors label as *kontrast*, the notion covering quantificational phenomena of a more formal semantic nature (Rooth 1985, 1992, Krifka 1991-92, etc.). V&V use the term *kontrast*

as a cover term for several operator-like interpretations of focus that one finds in the literature: identificational foci, exhaustiveness foci, contrastive foci, contrastive topics, and also interrogative wh-words,

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Until recently, only descriptive analyses were available for this group of particles and particles *-to*, *že*, and *ved'* were labeled “emphatic,” “contrastive,” “intensifying,” “expressive,” “emotional,” “strengthening,” “enunciative,” etc., with further classification of context-dependent multiple meanings or functions for each particle (see Vasilyeva 1972, collection of articles in three volumes of *Les Particules Enonciatives en Russe Contemporain*, etc.) However, descriptive approaches to these particles have proved inadequate and a search for an underlying meaning of (some of) these particles has been initiated in the following works: Bitextin (1994), Parrott (1997), Bonnot and Kodzasov (1998), Feldman (forthcoming). However, these early studies in the “unifying” direction have their limitations: they are either based on a single framework and/or choose to deal with unifying a single aspect of the particle(s), such as discourse role or cognitive status of information marked.

In the previous analyses, the placement rules of these particles at the clausal level made reference to either the position of the particle with respect to a prosodically prominent element or to some information structure construct as ‘theme-rheme’, ‘topic-focus’, etc. However, no comprehensive semantic explanation has been offered for explaining what the prosodic marking is used for and what the relationship between prosody and information packaging at the clausal level is. Similarly, the discourse role of these particles has been analyzed as giving rise to multiple implicatures and inference patterns and thus contributing to the cohesion and coherence of discourse.

In this paper it will be shown that such properties of these particles as their position in the clause and their role in discourse are consequences of their two essential properties as *k*-markers:

1. the type of set it marks and the type of membership within this set;
2. the cognitive status of the referents marked by it.

Below, these 3 particles will be given a unifying analysis which integrates the following current frameworks: the theory of “kontrast” (V&V); cognitive statuses of referents in discourse (Yokoyama 1986, Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski 1993); information packaging on the clausal level (Vallduví 1992); and hierarchical organization of discourse (Büring 2000<sup>4</sup>).

The data come from a variety of colloquial Russian texts, such as Protassova’s corpus of the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 2000) and Zemskaja and Kapnadze (1978). The structure of the paper is the following: in the next three sections, the contrastive properties and their consequences will be discussed for each particle individually, with particle *-to* given a more detailed analysis than particles *že* and *ved'*. The final section summarizes the findings with respect to what the analysis of these three particles as *k*-markers reveals about the role of *kontrast* at the clausal and discourse levels.

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<sup>4</sup>For similar proposals see Kanerva and Gabriele (1995), van Kuppevelt (1995, 1996a,b), and Roberts (1996).

## 2 K-Marker *-TO*

I will first discuss two essential properties of *-to*: the type of set and the cognitive status of information marked by it. Then I will demonstrate how these essential properties determine the position of *-to* in the clause and its role in discourse.

### 2.1 Type of Set Marked by *-TO*

Particle *-to* marks a set of sets of related propositions (equivalently, a set of questions) which is generated by introducing alternatives to a kontrastive element within the *link* and a kontrastive element within the *rheme*. Consider an example from CHILDES:

- (1) [Varja and her mother are looking at a picture of a dog who put her paw on a bear. They first discuss the dog, then start talking about the bear. Varja gets distracted by taking a scoop into her hand. Mother says:]

U tebj<sup>a</sup>-**TO** sovok, a čto u medvedj<sup>a</sup> v lape? (CHILDES, *séance 2*)

At you-**TO** scoop but what at bear in paw

YOU(-**TO**) have a SCOOP, but what does the BEAR have in his paw?

The information structure of the (English version of the) utterance containing *-to* is shown in (2). Below it, in (3), a generalized structure of the utterance with *-to* is given:

- (2) [<sub>+K/Link</sub> You] (-**TO**) have [<sub>+K/Rheme</sub> a scoop] ...

- (3) [<sub>+K/Link</sub> A]-**TO** has property [<sub>+K/Rheme</sub> *x*]

The default case for (3) is when the kontrastive (element within the) link *A* belongs to a set of entities:  $M_1 = \{A, B, C, \dots\}$  and the kontrastive (element within the) rheme *x* belongs to a set of properties:  $M_2 = \{x, y, z, \dots\}$ .<sup>5</sup> Thus, the proposition **x(A)** marked with *-TO* makes the hearer generate a set  $M_3$ , shown in three alternative ways in (4/5/6). In (4), the set  $M_3$  is represented as a set of sets of propositions, in (5) the same set is shown as a set of questions (following Hamblin 1958/1973 and Karttunen 1977), and in (6) the set  $M_3$  marked by *-to* is shown graphically:

<sup>5</sup>However, a more marked (i.e., less frequent) scenario is also possible: i.e., when the contrast set for links is a set of properties, while the set of alternatives to the rheme consists of entities, as in (i):

- (i) [Varja can't stop running. Mother is asking: who is the one running?]

Nu [<sub>+K/Rheme</sub> kto] [<sub>+K/Link</sub> begaet]-**TO**? (CHILDES, *séance 2*)

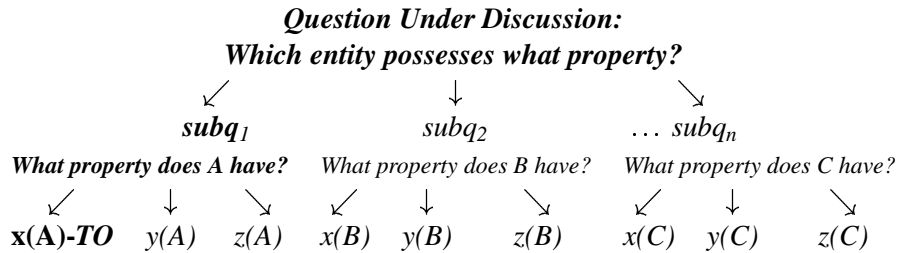
Well who is-running-**TO**

As for somebody running(-**TO**), who is doing this?

$$(4) M_3 = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \mathbf{x(A)}, y(A), z(A), \dots \}; \\ \{ x(B), y(B), z(B), \dots \}; \\ \{ x(C), y(C), z(C), \dots \}; \dots \end{array} \right\}$$

$$(5) M_3 = \{ \mathbf{What is true of A?}; \text{What is true of B?}; \text{What is true of C?}; \dots \}$$

(6) The set of sets of propositions (or, a set of questions)  $M_3$  marked by **-TO**:



So, the primary function of *-to* is a marker of a set of sets of propositions which is generated by introducing alternatives to the kontrastive link and the kontrastive rheme. While for the proposition containing *-to* the truth value is asserted, it is not the case with the alternative propositions: they are only made salient with the help of *-to*.

## 2.2 Cognitive Status of Referents Marked by **-TO**

Particle *-to* marks information (estimated by the speaker to be) known to the hearer but not activated in the hearer's mind at the time of the utterance.<sup>6</sup>

How can the speaker assume that the information is also known to the hearer? The speaker can safely assume that the hearer also knows the information if this information is shared through: code (language, culture), encyclopedic knowledge, deixis, or common experience (for more detail, see Yokoyama 1986). The example in (7) illustrates a speech situation where the source of the speaker's assumption about the proposition marked by *-to* being located in the hearer's knowledge set is deixis, while in (8) it comes from common experience:

(7) [A to B, after a long silence, on the top of a mountain before dawn]

Tišina-**TO** kakaja! (Vasilyeva 1972:68)  
 Quietness-**TO** what

'How quiet it is!' or:  
 'As for the state of quietness(-**TO**), how quiet it is!'  
 (Vasilyeva's translation: How wonderfully quiet!)

<sup>6</sup>Since all three particles are capable of marking information which is, in speaker's estimation, currently activated in the hearer's mind or inferable from information located there, I am primarily concerned with cognitive statuses that are located further away from the information which is at the center of the speaker's and the hearer's attention at the moment of the utterance.

- (8) [Varja practices pulling laces through holes. After several other activities, Mother says:]

Oj, slushaj, a my s toboj [ +K/Link chernen'kij]-**TO** shnurochek  
 Oh listen but we with you black-**TO** lace-*DIM*  
 [+K/Rheme tak ni razu eshche i ne prodevali ], da?  
 so not once yet even NEG pulled-through, yes

(CHILDES, séance 5)

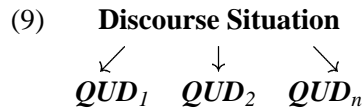
‘Oh, listen, as for the BLACK(-**TO**) lace, you and I haven’t pulled it through yet even once, right?’

To summarize the essential properties of *-to* as a k-marker: with respect to the type of set marked, *-to* marks a set of sets of propositions which differ from each other in the values of the kontrastive link and the kontrastive rheme. With respect to cognitive status of information marked by *-to*, this information is assumed by the speaker to be known to the hearer but not activated in the hearer’s mind at the time of the utterance. In the next subsection I will demonstrate that these two essential properties of *-to* determine its position in the clause and its role in discourse.

### 2.3 Consequences: Position in the Clause and Role in Discourse

The position of *-to* in the clause is best analyzed with respect to the element marked [+kontrast]. Thus, *-to* is an enclitic to the kontrastive element within the *link*. This is a direct consequence of its kontrastive properties: first, the kontrast on the *link* value results in a set of sets of propositions (cf. similar treatment of “contrastive topics” in Büring 2000, etc.); second, the cognitive status of information marked by *-to* — known to the hearer but not activated in the hearer’s mind — is more compatible with the function of the *link* than the *rheme*.

The role of *-to* at the discourse level is also a consequence of being a marker of a set of questions (equivalently, a set of sets of propositions).<sup>7</sup> In a discourse tree, as in (9), any question under discussion (QUD) can be constrained by k-marker *-to* in the way as shown in (6):



<sup>7</sup>Another consequence of the kontrastive nature of *-to* is its multiple implicatures proposed in the literature. Since *-to* is a marker of a set of sets of propositions, it also marks contrast and emphasis, functions as a theme/topic marker or a marker of contrastive topics, implies plurality, etc. The following implicatures are consequences of its second essential property—a marker of information (assumed by speaker to be) known to hearer but not activated in discourse yet: a marker of unexpectedness in addressing a topic; the fact that it adds a tone of familiarity, conversational spontaneity, intimacy, etc.

To summarize, the notion of *kontrast* is the core semantic meaning of particle *-to*: by analyzing it as a marker of a set of sets of propositions (equivalently, a set of questions) and as marking referents known to the hearer but not currently activated, its position in the clause and its role in discourse are accounted for.

### 3 K-Marker *ŽE*

K-marker *že* differs from *-to* in both the type of set and cognitive status of information marked and, accordingly, its other important properties (position in the clause, role in discourse, etc.) are also different from those exhibited by *-to*. However, as with *-to*, *kontrastiveness* is the core semantic meaning of this particle and determines its distribution.

#### 3.1 Type of Set Marked by *ŽE*

Particle *že* marks a set of propositions which differ from each other in the value of (at least) one term. The *kontrast* set for *že* contains members which are mutually exclusive: if one proposition is true, the other one(s) is/are false. Thus, the relationship among the members of the *že* set often involves (binary) opposition, contradiction, or negation. The *kontrast* set marked by *že* is generalized in (10) and illustrated with a sample of naturally occurring data in (11):

(10) **The *kontrast* set marked by *ŽE*:**

$M = \{ X, X' \}$ , where  $X = \neg X'$

(*X* is true if and only if *X'* is false)

(11) [Varja notices a fly on the windowsill and asks her mother to kill it]

VAR: Ona muxa, muxa.

MOT: Muxa, muxa, da.

VAR: Ubit', ubit' ee!

MOT: Ona zhe uzhe ubita.

(*CHILDES, séance 4*)

VAR: It's a fly, a fly.

MOT: A fly, a fly, yes.

VAR: Kill, kill it!

MOT: It (*že*) is already killed.

*Gloss:*

Ona zhe [<sub>+K</sub> uzhe ubita].

she *že* already killed (participle).

'(But) it (*že*) is already killed.'

In (11), mother's utterance with *že* corrects the presupposition of Varja's previous utterance *Kill it!*, i.e., *The fly is alive*. The members of the *kontrast* set marked by *že* are mutually exclusive: it is impossible for the fly to be alive (presupposition

of Varja's utterance) and to be already killed (mother's utterance containing *že*) at the same time.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2 Cognitive Status of Referents Marked by *ŽE*

Particle *že* marks the membership set, one member of which is activated in the hearer's mind at the time of the utterance, while the other (incompatible) member is viewed by the speaker as though it is (or should have been) known to the hearer and should have been activated at this time.

For example, in (11), the activated member of the set is *The fly is alive* (presupposition of *Kill, kill it!*). The other member of the set (is treated by the speaker as though it) should be known to the hearer and, therefore, should be activated — i.e., in the speaker's estimation, there are enough visual cues for the hearer to make the correct conclusion (*The fly is already dead*).

Now let us consider some consequences of the essential properties of *že* as a k-marker.

### 3.3 Consequences: Position in the Clause and Role in Discourse

The placement of particle *že* can be defined with respect to the kontrastive element, which is a propositional term (usually within the *rheme*). The condition of mutual exclusiveness (or binary opposition) on the set marked by *že* makes this particle a good candidate of marking rhematic kontrasts, especially cases of kontrastive

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<sup>8</sup>An interesting case is the use of *že* with wh-words. This case is somewhat cumbersome for the present analysis: how in the world can the kontrast set be mutually exclusive with wh-words? It seems that there is a way out of this paradox: *že* with wh-words is used to indicate that from the speaker's point of view, the set of possible answers is empty of reasonable alternatives (and is now open to unreasonable alternatives). While the set of possible answers is empty of reasonable alternatives for the speaker, it might not be so for the hearer: the speaker expects the hearer to provide an answer (which is probably not so unreasonable from the hearer's point of view). An example, recorded in a home setting, is provided in (i):

- (i) [Father puts away his son's library books and tells him that mother took them back to the library (which she did not do). The boy asks mother if she indeed took them back. She says 'no'. He then says (in the presence of both parents):]

U kogo *že* mne togda sprosit'?'  
'Who (*že*) (in the world/the hell . . . ) should I ask then?'

In (i), from the speaker's point of view, the set of reasonable answers (individuals who can provide an answer) is exhausted or empty; the child now throws the ball to the parents who might be able to provide an alternative explanation, which at this point in discourse is viewed by the child as an unexpected/non-predictable/unreasonable alternative. However, the answer to the child's question is indeed known to the parent(s) who opted not to reveal it to him. It seems that an explanation along these lines would bring us as close to the mutually exclusive set as we could possibly get with wh-words.

*verum foci*<sup>9</sup> — i.e., kontrast not on the lexical meaning of the verb but on some verbal inflectional category, such as tense, aspect, etc. It is possible to translate utterances containing *že* as cases of rhematic polarity of *verum focus*; for example, alternative translations for the utterance with *že* in (11) are *It [=the fly] IS already killed* or *It is ALREADY killed*.

The role of *že* in discourse is also a consequence of its kontrastive properties: *že* refers back to a salient element or some unresolved (from the speaker's viewpoint) question in the discourse or discourse situation.<sup>10</sup>

To summarize, by analyzing particle *že* as a marker of a set of mutually exclusive propositions and as a marker of information which is related through the set relationship to information that is activated in discourse, its distributional properties at the clausal and discourse levels are largely accounted for.

## 4 K-Marker *VED'*

Etymologically, particle *ved'* is a form of the verb *vedat'* 'to know', from which it has inherited factivity.

### 4.1 Type of Set Marked by *VED'*

Similarly to *že*, particle *ved'* marks a set of propositions which differ from each other in the value of at least one term. However, there are important differences between them: for *ved'* the set membership is restricted to propositions which have illocutionary force of assertions (while *že* does not have this restriction). Also, the members of the set are not mutually exclusive (as in the case of *že*) but rather supplementary; when *ved'* does express contradiction, it is more of the 'yes, but ...' type.

The examples in (12-13) illustrate that the difference between *že* and *ved'* comes (partially) from the difference between a mutually exclusive set (*že*) and a supplementary set (*ved'*):

- (12) [Varja and Grandmother are looking at a picture of birds standing on the ground. Varja believes that the birds have fallen down. Grandmother corrects Varja: since they are standing and not lying down, they have not fallen down:]  
\*VAR: Èta pit'ki.

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<sup>9</sup>Thanks to Enric Vallduví for pointing this out.

<sup>10</sup>Multiple implicatures associated with *že* at the discourse level can also be viewed as following from its two essential properties. Since *že* is a marker of a restricted set, containing mutually exclusive propositions, it is subsequently a marker of contrast, a marker of emphasis, a marker of contrastive focus, a marker of contrastive topic, it adds a tone of an indisputable argument and is perceived as a verbal attack on hearer, etc. From being a marker of activated information which is to a large extent known to the hearer, it follows that *že* can also be analyzed as a marker of a reference point in the activated domain of reference, as being perceived to be a verbal attack on hearer, as adding a tone of an indisputable and irrefutable argument, and conveying emotions of irritation, annoyance, and impatience, etc.



%eng: These are birds.  
 \*VAR: Upai.  
 %eng: Fell down.  
 \*GPP: Oni ne upali.  
 %eng: They did not fall down.  
 \*GPP: Pochemu **zhe** ty dumaesh', chto oni upali.  
 %eng: Why do you think, that they fell down.  
 \*GPP: Odná stoit na penechke, drugaja stoit na zemle, a tret'ja stoit na zemle szadi penechka.  
 %eng: One is standing on a little stump, the second is standing on the ground, and the third is standing on the ground behind the stump.  
 \*GPP: Vot tak, szadi penechka.  
 %eng: That way, behind the stump.  
 \*GPP: A pochemu ty dumaesh', chto oni upali, oni **zh** ne lezhat, oni stojat.  
 %eng: And why do you think, that they fell down, they are not lying, but standing.  
 \*GPP: Kogda kto-nibud' upadet, on lezhit.  
 %eng: When somebody falls, he lies down. (CHILDES, séance 3)

GPP: Pochemu **zhe** ty dumaesh', chto oni upali.  
 'Why (**že**) in the world do you think that they fell down.'

GPP: A pochemu ty dumaesh', chto oni upali, oni **zh** ne lezhat, oni stojat.  
 'And why do you think that they fell down, they (**že**) are not lying down, they are standing.'

In (12), *že* marks a set containing mutually exclusive members (thus it conveys emotions of contradiction, correction, and is perceived as a 'verbal attack on the hearer'): Varja believes that *The birds fell down* (since they are standing on the ground and not flying), while the Grandmother refutes that by saying that *The birds did not fall down* (since they are standing and not lying down). Later, this argument is brought to a mediator, Varja's mother (Katja). In presenting the gist of the argument to Katja, the Grandmother uses *ved'* and not *že* (since no opposition is expected from an adult who knows the lexical meaning of *upali* 'fell down'):

(13) [Grandmother re-tells the argument about the "fallen" birds to the mother]

Vot ona govorit, chto èti ptichki upali, a ja schitaju, chto  
 PART she says, that these birds-DIM fell-down, and I think that  
 oni [+K ne upali ], oni [+K stojat **ved'** na nozhkax ].  
 they NEG fell-down, they are-standing **ved'** on feet-DIM  
 (CHILDES, séance 3)

'So she says that these little birds fell down and I think that they did not fall down, they are standing, (*ved'*) you know, on their feet.'

So, in (13) *ved'* marks a supplementary set, the members of which are synonyms rather than antonyms (thus, it constitutes an 'extension in logic' and not 'a verbal attack'): {*The birds did not fall down; The birds are standing on their feet*}.

## 4.2 Cognitive Status of Referents Marked by *VED'*

Similarly to *-to*, particle *ved'* marks information known to the hearer but not activated in the hearer's mind at the time of the utterance. The difference between *že* and *ved'* comes (partially) from the difference in the cognitive status of information marked. Consider example (14) from Zemskaja and Kapanadze (1978: 52-53; glosses and translation added):

- (14) [Two retired ballet dancers had previously talked about what great actors they used to work with in their youth. Later, one of them realizes that they forgot to mention two of the most famous actors (Čirkov and Čerkasov) and reminds her friend about that]

A: Kogda my s toboj govorili o mjuzik-holle, my govorili: ax kakie byli aktery!  
'When you and I talked about the music hall, we were saying "Oh what actors were there!"'

My s toboj *ved'* ne skazali, čto tam byl Čirkov, tam byl  
We with you *ved'* NEG said that there was Čirkov, there was  
Čerkasov!...  
Čerkasov  
'You know, we did not say that there was Čirkov there, there was Čerkasov there!..'

B: [overlapping with the end of the preceding utterance]  
Da gospodi! Čerka-a-sov, Čirko-o-v...  
'Oh, my god! Čerka-a-sov, Čirko-o-v...'

In (14), *ved'* marks information known to both the speaker and the hearer which is not activated in the hearer's mind at the moment: talking about what great actors were in the theater at the time when both of the interlocutors worked there, they forgot to mention two most famous actors.

## 4.3 Consequences:

### Position in the Clause and Role in Discourse

Similarly to the other two particles, the position of *ved'* in the clause is best defined with respect to the kontrastive element: it is either a proclitic or an enclitic to such element.

The discourse role of *ved'* is determined by the type of set it marks: being a marker of a supplementary set, it relates members of the set to each other by building a super-question above them.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Also, multiple implicatures of *ved'* can be treated as consequences of its kontrastiveness: since *ved'* is a marker of a (supplementary) set of propositions (assertions), it is a marker of contrast, a marker of emphasis, an assertion marker, etc. Since *ved'* (like *-to*) is a marker of information that is

	<i>-TO</i>	<i>ŽE</i>	<i>VED'</i>
<b>ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES:</b>			
<b>Type of set marked</b>	A set of sets of propositions (= a set of questions); requires two [+K] elements: in the <i>link</i> and the <i>rheme</i>	A set of mutually exclusive propositions which differ in the value of at least one [+K] element	A supplementary set of propositions which differ in the value of at least one [+K] element
<b>Cognitive status of referents</b>	<i>Familiar</i> to the hearer but <i>not activated</i> in his/her mind	One member: <i>in focus</i> or <i>activated</i> ; the other member: (treated as) <i>familiar</i> and <i>activated</i>	Same as for <i>-TO</i>
<b>CONSEQUENCES:</b>			
<b>Position in a clause</b>	Enclitic to [+K] element, usually <i>link</i>	Enclitic to [+K] element	Proclitic or enclitic to [+K] element
<b>Role in discourse</b>	Generates a set of sub-questions (sisters dominated by the same QUD); partially answers QUD and makes salient the other sub-questions.	Refers back to salient element or some unresolved question in the previous discourse	Generates a set by building a super-question above the members of the set

Table 11.1: Comparing Kontrastive Markers *-TO*, *ŽE*, and *VED'*

To summarize: *ved'* has been observed to share certain properties with *že* and other properties with *-to*. By addressing the questions of what type of set and what cognitive status of information each of these particles marks, their differences and similarities are explained.

## 5 Conclusion

The notion of kontrast has been found to be a core semantic meaning of such lexical items as particles *-to*, *že*, and *ved'*: these lexemes are analyzed as unambiguous markers of kontrast. The core semantic meaning of each of these particles has been found to encompass two issues: the type of set and the cognitive status of referents marked by each of these particles. Among important properties of these particles, which are nevertheless treated as consequences of their essential kontrastive properties, are the placement of the particles at the clausal level and their role in the organization of discourse. Their distribution properties and the choice of particles in a particular context is also motivated by the differences in their kontrastive

assumed by speaker to be known to hearer but not activated yet, it is a marker of unexpectedness in addressing a topic, a marker of encyclopedic knowledge, and it is perceived as a (polite) reminder, etc.

nature. The findings are summarized in Table 4.3.

The example of these three colloquial Russian particles suggests that the notion of *kontrast* has applications beyond the level of the clause to serve as a construct which connects the levels of clausal and discourse structure.

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