Noun multidimensionality and gradability through the prism of the ‘*tot eshjo N*’ construction in Russian

This talk focusses on the affective uses of the previously unanalyzed *tot eshjo N* construction in Russian. The construction consists of a distal demonstrative *tot ‘that’*, a modifier *eshjo* that I tentatively gloss as ‘more’ and an N-slot that can be filled with a proper name, a common noun, or a noun phrase. The *tot eshjo N* ‘that more N’ construction has a temporal use and an affective use:

(1)    
\[ Ta \text{ that.f.sg} \text{ eshjo more} Olimpiada... \]  
\[ \text{A TEMPORAL USE: [In the context of the Olympic Games held in Russia]} \]  
\[ \text{The speaker is referring to the 1980 Olympics as opposed to the 2014 Olympics} \]  
\[ \text{AN AFFECTIVE USE: The speaker believes that the Olympic Games he refers to are not up to standard} \]

The affective impact of the construction *tot eshjo N* ‘that more N’ is determined not solely by the modifier *tot eshjo ‘that more’, but by the expressive potential of the noun as well. If the noun is multidimensional, with positive and negative properties associated with it, the construction as a whole is ambiguous:

(2)    
\[ Moskva – ta \text{ that.f.sg} \text{ eshjo derevnja} \]  
\[ \text{Moscow that.f.sg more village} \]  
\[ \text{INTERPRETATION I: ‘Moscow is very much a village with respect to a particular negative property/properties of villages, e.g., gossipy people, dirty streets, *fresh air’} \]  
\[ \text{INTERPRETATION II: ‘Moscow is hardly a village with respect to a particular positive property/properties of villages, e.g., fresh air, scenic views’} \]

With certain nouns only one of the interpretations is available:

(3)    
\[ Petja byl \text{ that.m.sg.instr} \text{ eshjo blagotvoritelem} \]  
\[ \text{Peter was that.m.sg.instr more benefactor} \]  
\[ \text{Peter wasn’t much of a benefactor} \]

(4)    
\[ Petja byl \text{ that.m.sg.instr} \text{ eshjo idiotom} \]  
\[ \text{Peter was that.m.sg.instr more idiot} \]  
\[ \text{Peter was a total idiot} \]

Drawing on the existing work on gradable predicate semantics and multidimensionality (e.g., Matushansky, 2002; Morzycki, 2010; Sassoon, 2012), I propose an analysis of the construction that derives the pattern in (2–4) from the interaction between the semantics of the modifier *tot eshjo ‘that more’ and the graded meaning of the dimensions associated with particular nouns. The descriptive part of the analysis is based on the relevant subcorpus of
the Russian National Corpus (http://www.ruscorpora.ru/en/).

References