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Application of the National Russian Corpus in Teaching Russian and Polish-to-Russian Translation to Polish Students

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Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to introduce future ideas related to application of the National Russian Corpus (hereinafter referred to as the NRC) in teaching General Russian, Business Russian and Polish-to-Russian Translation to Polish students of Russian at the Institute of East-Slavonic Studies in the University of Opole, Poland. The rationale behind this presentation is an increasingly difficult access to contemporary Russian language teaching materials in Poland as well as the scarcity of monolingual dictionaries of contemporary Russian on the Polish market. Moreover, growing implementation of communicative and lexical approaches in Russian language teaching and resultant focus on teaching of real language used in day-to-day communication enhances the position of the NRC as a complementary tool in Russian language teaching in Poland.

The author postulates that the prerequisite for application of the NRC in Russian language teaching is the introductory course targeted at both instructors as well as students. Such a course should cover the rudiments of corpus linguistics and elucidate the characteristics and options available in the NRC when used as a concordancing agent and language teaching tool. It should focus, among others, on the following aspects: range of tagging, search options (exact search as well as lexico-grammatical search) and logical operators, structure and contents of the NRC). Since the existence of the NRC is not widely-known among Polish teachers of Russian, the idea of such introductory course appears to be *sine qua non* condition before putting the NRC into teaching practice.

The essential part of this presentation deals with case studies featuring practical exercises which illustrate potential application of the NRC in teaching General and Business Russian and Polish-to-Russian translation. Selected exercises included in the presentation are summarized below.

As for General and Business Russian teaching, the author postulates that the NRC may appear to be invaluable tool in development of professional (or specialist) vocabulary in full context (i.e. meeting the requirements of lexical approach). The students' task is the following one: 'Using lexico-grammatical search option, prepare a list of types of companies which operate on the Russian market. Try to provide functional Polish equivalents'. Students browse the NRC by

means of lexico-grammatical search where they key in the following combinations: adjective (A) + *предприятие* (N); adjective (A) + *компания* (N). The number of concordances displayed as results is exorbitant, namely over 12,000 and 15,000 contexts for *предприятие* and *компания*, respectively. Selected collocations are presented below:

a) *предприятие* - унитарное, совместное, полузакрытое, кооперативное; венчурное, казённое; малое, мелкое, крупное, сверхкрупное

b) *компания* - лизинговая, аутсорсинговая, инвестиционная, экспедиторская, экспорториентированная, частная, дочерняя, кэптивная, материнская, холдинговая, агентская, консультационная, зарубежная, оффшорная

The same procedure may be repeated when the exercise is retargeted at types of banks operating on the Russian market. Having completed the search, the students are asked to provide Polish equivalents of Russian expressions on the basis of available resources, such as Polish-Russian dictionaries, thematic dictionaries, internet websites and vertical portals devoted to relevant economic topics. Obviously enough, some of the expressions will overlap in both languages. Summing up, such an exercise enables the students to access up-to-date professional vocabulary as well as acquire it in full contextual environment. Moreover, the use of the NRC enriches lexicographic material available in dictionaries which is by definition limited to a handful of selected examples and concordances, if any.

In the case of General Russian teaching, the NRC may facilitate acquisition of grammatical relations between Russian verbs and the prepositions they govern. Moreover, the NRC may also provide the data on frequency of verbs, which is neglected in the majority of Russian dictionaries available on the Polish market. The advanced students' task is the following one: 'Using lexico-grammatical search option, determine the case of prepositional phrase which is governed by the following verbs belonging to the semantic field 'complaining about smth/dissatisfaction with smth': *жаловаться, сетовать, хныкать, роптать, брюзжать*. Find out which verb is the most frequently used and which one is the least frequently used. Using relevant search option, students key in the following combination: a verb (one of the above, e.g. *сетовать*) (V) + preposition (PR), and analyze displayed concordances in terms of sought-after government relations. Eventually, the students compare frequency data on the verbs in question.

The NRC may be successfully applied during practical classes in translation. In one of illustrative exercises, the students are preoccupied with translation of specialist text about information technologies (IT) into Russian. Scarcity of relevant thematic resources implies the use of the NRC as a reference tool whereby the search is narrowed down only to texts related to the topic of IT. The students task is thus to create the NRC subcorpus related to IT by using available meta-situational information (thematic tagging) the NRC has been equipped with. Only then is the search limited to 50 texts about IT which form the NRC subcorpus.

Eventually, the NRC may be used during practical classes in Polish-to-Russian translation. The rationale behind this exercise is the ambiguity and

limitation of lexicographic description in some monolingual dictionaries of Russian available to Polish students. The example illustrating this point are definitions of two semantically-related lexemes extracted from *Explanatory Dictionary of Russian Language* by S. Ozhegov and N. Shvedova [Ожегов С., Шведова Н. (2000) *Толковый Словарь русского языка. Москва: Русский язык. 4-е издание, дополненное*]:

a) *дизайнер* - художник-конструктор, специалист по дизайну

b) *декоратор* -

(1) художник, пишущий декорации, оформляющий сцену, съёмочную площадку

(2) специалист по декорированию помещений.

With the above ambiguity in mind, the students' task is the following one: 'What is the best Russian translation of the Polish expression *dekorator wnętrz* (En. *interior designer*)' Can you determine the difference in meaning on the basis of corpus data? What other adjectives collocate with the words *дизайнер* and *декоратор*? Having used lexico-grammatical search with relevant combination, the students discover that *интерьерный дизайнер* (not: *интерьерный декоратор*) is the best translation of the aforementioned Polish phrase. Moreover, on the basis of collocational data, students are able to determine semantic differences in the case of two Russian nouns as well as their frequency of occurrence in contemporary Russian:

a) *дизайнер* – (400 occurrences in 320 texts) *ландшафтный, парковый, садовый, интерьерный, графический, фэшн, кабинетный, промышленный, автомобильный*

b) *декоратор* – (41 occurrences in 32 texts) *оперный, театральный*

The exercises adduced above prove that the NRC may be widely used in Russian language teaching to Polish students, during both general and specialist courses of study.