RLMSEE-2020
The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment

RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN A CLOSELY RELATED (RUSSIAN-SLOVAK) LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The article deals with features that distinguish the Russian language when it is taught in a closely related linguistic environment. The differences primarily fall within such fields as vocabulary and lexical semantics. The author draws attention to the phenomena of interlingual homonyms, parallel formations, and etymologically common lexemes, which have developed different meanings in different Slavic languages, and to the stylistic inconsistencies of those phenomena. Thanks to the pragmatic and the linguistic and cultural focuses of comparative studies of Slavic languages, phenomena which are perceived as difficult by Slavs studying the Russian language include a wide range of vocabulary that differs not only in denotative, but also in connotative, cultural meaning. This concerns the expression of standards, stereotypes and perceptions that characterize a particular culture. The verbalization of the concept of судьба (fate) in the Russian language, as compared with the Slovak language, is an example that demonstrates the inadequacy of the conceptual perception of related lexemes in different Slavic cultural environments. In order to clarify, describe and study the semantic differences of genetically common lexemes, the author proposes an analysis of their syntagmatic and paradigmatic potential.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the status of the Russian language in Slovakia has changed: whereas before that period studying it in schools had been compulsory, in the late 20th - early 21st centuries, it received the status of a second foreign language. English, which became mandatory for study in Slovak schools since 2011, took the leading position. However, studying a second foreign language was also made compulsory in Slovakia, with students being able to choose between Russian, German, French or Italian (Korenkova et al., 2019, p. 176). Many school students started choosing Russian. Some sociolinguists attributed the high numbers of Russian language learners in Slovak schools to the fact that a second foreign language became mandatory (Rozboudova & Konecny, 2017), and Russian is easier to learn than others (Korychankova, 2016; Radkova, 2017). In 2016, as a result of the reform, the status of the second foreign language changed from compulsory to elective. In 2019, a new reform was carried out, according to which a foreign language cannot be compulsory, but only of the student's choosing: a student can freely choose one or two foreign languages out of the following six: English, Spanish, Italian, German, Russian or French (MINEDU, 2019). However, this has not led to a decrease in the number of Russian language learners. Today, 80,000 people are studying Russian in all schools in Slovakia (Kvapil, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

It is indisputable that Russian studied as a foreign language by native speakers of another Slavic language has its own linguodidactic features. The methodology of the Russian language as a foreign Slavic language, is based on comparative studies of the Russian and the native languages to a greater extent than in cases of non-closely related bilingualism. The native language makes a stronger influence on the acquisition of a closely related foreign language than in the case of unrelated languages. The proximity of the lexicons and grammar systems of the native and the studied (Russian) languages is characterized by the presence of a large number of particular formal and semantic differences, which leads to stronger interference than when Russian is studied by a Slavic audience (Markova, 2020). At the same time, the interference observed is not only phonetic, grammatical and derivational, but also semantic, stylistic and cultural, due to different cultural content, different cultural values, ideas, stereotypes and standards.

3. Research Questions

The so-called interlingual homonyms (accidentally coincident words of two languages that emerged in closely related languages due to the presence of common morphemic resources and have different meanings) are characterized not only by semantic, but also by linguistic and cultural differences. Examples include the Russian *давка* /ˈdavka/ 'pushing and shoving in the crowd' (from the verb *давить* /daˈvitʲ/ 'to push, to squeeze') and the Slovak *dávka* 'portion', 'dose', 'allowance', 'tax' (from the verb *dávat* 'to give'); the Russian *подводник* /podˈvodnik/ 'submariner', 'a specialist in underwater work', 'a seaman serving in the submarine fleet' (formed from the word combination *под водой* /pod voˈdoi/ 'under water')

and the Slovak *podvodník* 'swindler' (from *podvádět* 'to cheat', 'to swindle', cf. the Russian *подводить* /podvo`dit'/ 'to let someone down'); the Russian *мылиться* /`mylit'sya/ 'to lather the skin' and the Slovak *mýliť sa* 'to be wrong'; the Russian *погадать* /poga`dat'/ 'to tell fortunes', 'to tell the upcoming events by maps or other methods' and the Slovak *pohadať* 'to embroil' (Slovník Slovenského Jazyka, 1987); etc. However, as a rule, a random phonetic coincidence of similar lexemes in different Slavic languages leads to the fact that they do not intersect denotatively, as they correlate with different objects of reality. Therefore, their memorization does not cause difficulties for speakers of a closely related Slavic language, on the contrary, their similar sounding tends to seem funny and evokes positive emotions.

The situation with acquiring the semantics of related lexemes which have lost their etymological connection and have diverged semantically to varying degrees in the process of independent historical development is more complicated. These differences can be very various in nature: from those dealing with gender and aspect to enantiosemy and semantic incommensurability. Thus, the meanings of the following examples have nothing in common in the lexemes of the native and the studied Russian languages: the Russian *боднуть* /bod`nut'/ 'to butt (e.g. of cows)' and the Slovak *bodnuť* 'to prick, to bite, to sting'; the Russian *тычинка* /ty`chinka/ 'stamen' and the Slovak *tyčinka* 'stick (including bread or chocolate)', the Russian *точить* /to`chit'/ 'to sharpen' and the Slovak *točiť* 'to twist, to spin'; the Russian *крутой* /kru`toi/ 'steep (e.g. of a slope)', but also 'fashionable, rich, expensive (colloquial)' and the Slovak *krutý* 'cruel, fierce'; the Russian *явиться* /yavit'sya/ 'to come, to show up somewhere' and the Slovak *javiťsa* 'to seem' (Slovník Slovenského Jazyka, 1987), etc. The semantic differentiation of such lexemes causes great difficulties in memorizing and using them, the interference in this case is stable in nature and becomes the cause of numerous errors (Rozboudova et al., 2019, p. 95).

Parallel formations in the native and the studied Slavic languages also create an area of potential interference errors. Such formations result from the common corpus of root morphemes and derivational affixes and from the same type of derivational models (Petrukhina, 2018), e.g. the Russian *рассудок* /ras`sudok/ 'reason, mental activity' and the Slovak *rozsudok* 'verdict'; the Russian *погреб* /`pogreb/ 'cellar' and the Slovak *pohreb* 'funeral'; the Russian *снежинка* /sne`zhinka/ 'snowflake' and the Slovak *snežinka* 'snowdrop'; the Russian *зажить* /za`zhit'/ 'to start living' and the Slovak *zažiť* 'to experience, to undergo'; the Russian *банковать* /banko`vat'/ 'to put all money at stake' and the Slovak *bankovať (s kym)* 'to work with a bank', etc. Generally, the semantics of the common root makes such lexemes correlated with one denotative area or related denotative areas, which complicates their acquisition.

The facts of asymmetric semantic development are also observed in common borrowings in Slavic languages. The process of borrowing is often accompanied by Semantic shifts and deviation, which often causes mismatches in similar borrowings in terms of their semantics. In different Slavic languages, the borrowed word may develop different meanings, e.g. the Russian *дека* /`deka/ 'the body of a stringed musical instrument that serves to amplify sound' and the Slovak *deka* 'blanket, bedspread'; the Russian *фраер* /`fraer/ 'a person who does not belong to the criminal world, a stranger from the point of view of criminals (jargon)' and the Slovak *fraer* 'boyfriend', *fraerka* 'girlfriend' (Slovník Slovenského Jazyka, 1987).

Differential meanings of such correlates are often expressed in dissimilar syntagmatic potential of isomorphic lexemes in different languages. The syntagmatic links inherent in a word are known to be

included in the characteristics of its semantics. The boundaries of the lexico-semantic variant of a word are determined by a set of syntagms. From a linguodidactic point of view, difficulties in memorizing such lexemes disappear when the latter are presented in pairs in syntagmatic complexes that help to outline the differentiated semantics of genetically common words in the native and the target languages.

Thus, the respective Russian and Czech/Slovak isomorphic adjectives *слепой* /sle`poi/ and *slepý*, both meaning 'blind' are semantically and syntagmatically different. Namely, the Russian *слепой* fully corresponds to the Czech/Slovak *slepý* in its basic meaning 'deprived of vision' and in its figurative meaning 'devoid of critical vision of an object' (e.g., in the word combinations *слепая любовь* /sle`paya lyubov'/ – *slepá laska* 'blind love'). However, the Czech and Slovak adjective has also begun to refer to concepts that have the connotation 'deprived of something' (this transfer is based on the association 'deprived of vision' - 'deprived of something else'). As a result of this transfer, such collocations as *slepá ulička* 'blind alley' (in Russian: *глухой переулок* / glukhoi pereulok/, literally translates as "deaf alley"), *slepé okno* 'fixed window' (in Russian: *глухое окно* /glukhoe okno/, literally translates as "deaf window"), *slepá rana* 'dry shot' (Mokienko, & Wurm, 2002) (in Russian: *холостой выстрел* /kholostoi vystrel/, literally translates as "unmarried shot") became possible in these languages.

- The facts of stylistic differentiation of lexemes that are etymologically common in the native and the studied languages also present a cultural difficulty (Lukashanets, 2016). Analyzing the vocabulary of Slavic languages, we often come across the phenomenon when an etymologically common word is widely used and is stylistically neutral in one language while being a stylistically marked peripheral phenomenon that is used only under special circumstances in another language.

  In this group of Russian-Slovak polysemants, one can distinguish between the following categories: 1) Russian lexico-derivational archaisms: *старец* /`starets/ 'old man', *рыбарь* /ry`bar'/ 'fisherman', *зрак* /zrak/ 'vision' and the corresponding neutral Slovak words with the same meaning *starec, rybár, zrak*; 2) lexico-phonetic archaisms in the Russian language: *древо* /`drevo/ 'tree', *прах* /prakh/ 'ashes', *хлад* /khlad/ 'cold', *брег* /breg/ 'shore, coast', *врата* /vra`ta/ 'gates', *глас* /glas/ 'voice', *глава* /gla`va/ 'head', *брада* /bra`da/ 'beard', *власы* /vla`sy/ 'hair', *длань* /dlan'/ 'palm', *мраз* /mraz/ 'frost' and the corresponding neutral Slovak equivalents *drevo, prach, chlad, breh, vrata, hlas, hlava, brada, vlasy, dlaň, mráz*; 3) lexical archaisms in the Russian language: *витязь* /`vityaz'/ 'knight', *уста* /us`ta/ 'lips', *перст* /perst/ 'finger', *чело* /che`lo/ 'face', *очи* /`ochi/ 'eyes', *рамена* /rame`na/ 'shoulders', *перси* /per`si/ 'breasts', *рок* /rok/ 'fate', *година* /go`dina/ 'year', *поступь* /`postup'/ 'footfall, walk' and their neutral Slovak equivalents *vítěz, ústa, prst, čelo, oči, ramena, prs, rok, hodina, postup*; 4) semantic archaisms in Russian: *муж* /muzh/ 'husband' in the meaning of 'man', *час* /chas/ 'hour' in the meaning of 'time', *век* /vek/ 'century' in the meaning of 'age' and the Slovak words *muž, čas, věk* which are stylistically neutral.

  It is methodologically expedient to present such stylistically differentiated correlations in a context that demonstrates the features of their functioning, which is limited by a certain style of speech. The stylistically marked element should also be accompanied by a stylistically neutral unit expressing the meaning adequate to the semantics and stylistic characteristics of the

corresponding unit of the native language, e.g. the archaic Russian *уста* /us`ta/ 'lips' (neutral: *губы* /`guby/) – the neutral Czech *ústa* 'mouth'.

▪ Differences between the native and the studied Slavic languages can also relate to the conceptual content of lexemes. Most linguists consider lexical units the meanings of which make up the content of the national linguistic consciousness and form a "naive picture of the world" of native speaker as concepts. The latter form the concept sphere of a given language. In a narrower sense, concepts include semantic formations marked by linguistic and cultural specifics and in one way or another characterizing representatives of a certain ethnoculture (Markova, 2013). Thus, the Russian lexeme *судьба* /sud`ba/ 'fate' and the Slovak *sudba* can be conceptually perceived and interpreted differently in the Russian and the Slovak linguistic consciousness in view of its correlation with different semantic volumes in both languages. In Russian, its semantics are outlined by such synonyms as *доля* /`dolya/, *удел* /u`del/, *участь* /`uchast'/, *часть* /chast'/, *крест* /krest/, *рок* /rok/, *фатум* /`fatum/, *предначертание* /prednacher`tanie/, *предназначение* /prednazna`chenie/, *провидение* /pro`videnie/, *промысел* /`promysel/, *фортуна* /for`tuna/, *жребий* /`zhrebii/, *дорога* /do`roga/, *путь* /put'/, *росстань* /`rosstan'/. Each of the listed lexemes characterizes the analyzed concept at its end, objectifying not only the initial idea, but also the connotation – positive or negative. The Slovak language also has lexemes that are known as synonyms, e.g., *osud* 'fate', *predestinace* 'predetermination', *predeterminace* 'omen', *providence*, which are devoid of the connotative brightness of their Russian correlates.

Among the listed synonyms, it is the Slovak term *osud* that corresponds the most to the Russian *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' It can be used in such attributive combinations as *dramatický osud, neľahký osud, neradostný osud, nešťastný osud, tragický osud, trpký osud* (Slovník Slovenského Jazyka, 1987), the Russian equivalents of which are as follows: *драматическая судьба* /drama`ticheskaya sud'`ba/ 'dramatic fate', *нелегкая судьба* /ne`legkaya sud'`ba/ 'difficult fate', *нерадостная судьба* /ne`radostnaya sud'`ba/ 'unhappy fate', *несчастная судьба* /ne`schastnaya sud'`ba/ 'miserable fate', *трагическая судьба* /tra`gicheskaya sud'`ba/ 'tragic fate', *горькая судьба* /`gor'kaya sud'`ba/ 'bitter fate', etc. These set expressions transmit the semantic and the connotative (pejorative) adequacy of both the Russian *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' and the Slovak *osud*. The Slovak lexeme can be part of other set expressions confirming the perception of fate as something inevitable, unavoidable, most often tragic: *hra osudu* 'game of fate', *irónia osudu* 'irony of fate', *krutosť osudu* 'severity of fate', *neodvratnosť osudu* 'inevitability of fate', *ruka osudu* 'hand of fate', *úder osudu* 'blow of fate', *vôľa usudu* 'the will of fate', *čeliť osudu* 'to fight with fate', *vyhnúť sa osudu* 'to submit to fate', *pokúšať osud* 'to tempt fate', *predpovědať niečí osud* 'to predetermine fate', *spojiť svoj osud s niekým* 'to connect one's fate with someone' (Durco & Majchrakova, 2015). However, a comparison of the syntagmatic potential of the Russian *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' and the Slovak *osud* not only demonstrates the closeness of Russians and Slovaks as representatives of a single Slavic culture, but also indicates their cultural identity, which is expressed, e.g., in the specifically Slovak expressions *niesť si svoj osud* 'to bear one's own fate', *údel osudu* lit. 'the destiny of fate'

(Durco & Majchrakova, 2015). In this case, the Slovak *osud* is synonymous with the Rusian *крест* /krest/ 'cross', e.g. *нести свой крест* /nes`ti svoi krest/ 'to bear one's own cross', and with the Russian *удел* /u`del/ 'destiny'. The latter lexeme is equivalent to the semantic dominant *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' and cannot be combined with it. As for the lexeme *крест* /krest/ 'cross' in the meaning of 'fate', it refers to its specifically Russian explicators that are rooted in Evangelicalism, according to which every person bears his or own cross, that is, has some life difficulties of his or her own. Therefore, the Slovak *osud*, in contrast to the Russian *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' leans towards the negative pole of the ambivalent semantics of the Russian correlate.

A synonym for the Russian word *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' in a negative context is the lexeme *рок* /rok/. Of all Slavic languages, Russian is the only one where this lexical unit lost its active use in a "temporal" sense. The lexeme preserved this meaning it in the Slovak language, where *rok* means 'year'. The Slovak language uses the Latin word *fatum* in the sense of the Russian *рок*, but the former lexeme is devoid of the negative connotation and the expression of its Russian correlate.

The Russian term *жребий* /`zhrebii/ 'lot' designates different kinds of fate, as evidenced by the syntagms *жалкий жребий* /`zhalkii `zhrebii/ 'a pitiful lot', *выпал трудный жребий* /`vypal `trudnyi `zhrebii/ 'to draw a hard lot' and *счастливый жребий* /schast`livyi `zhrebii/ 'a happy lot'. This lexical unit is known as *žreb* in the Slovak language, which is lexically and semantically closer to Russian than, e.g., the Czech language, where the corresponding lexeme lost this meaning.

The Russian lexemes *доля* /`dolya/, *удел* /u`del/ and *участь* /`uchast'/, which have developed the abstract meaning of 'fate' in the sense of 'the part allocated by the Almighty' on the basis of a metaphorical transfer, are motivationally, cognitively and connotatively close. Two of them, *доля* and *участь*, are consistently used with a negative connotation, which is expressed in their frequency syntagmatic links, cf.: *женская доля* /`zhenskaya `dolya/, *бабья доля* /`bab'ya `dolya/ '[heavy] women's burden', *сиротская доля* /si`rotskaya `dolya/ 'orphan's burden', *выпасть на чью-л. долю* /`vypast' na `dolyu/ 'to fall to the lot of someone', *тяжёлая участь* /tya`zhelaya `uchast'/, *горькая участь* /`gor'kaya `uchast'/ 'plight', *участь быть убитым* /`uchast' byt' u`bitym/ 'the destiny to be killed', *разделить чью-л. печальную участь* /razde`lit' pe`chal'nuyu `uchast'/ 'to share someone's plight', etc. However, antonymic combinations are also possible: *счастливая доля* /schast`livaya `dolya/, *счастливая участь* /schast`livaya `uchast'/ 'a happy lot'. The word *удел* /u`del/, which has become obsolete, is mostly encountered in bookish speech with a positive connotation in such expressions as *счастливый удел* / schast`livyi ud`el/ 'a happy destiny', *достаться в удел кому-н* / dos`tat'sya v u`del/ 'to fall to one's lot'. Of all words with this internal form, the Slovak language uses only *údel,* which has more neutral semantics: it can be happy, joyful, but also unhappy, hard.

The Russian linguistic consciousness also uses the lexemes *дорога* /do`roga/ 'road', *путь* /put'/ 'way', *распутье* /ras`put'e/ 'crossroads' as synonyms fot the word *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate. It is for a reason that in numerous Russian fairy tales the hero often finds himself at the crossroads of

three roads, which involves a choice, and this choice determines the fate of the hero. Their equivalent in Slovak is the word *cesta* 'road, way', which can also be used in the meaning 'life path'. However, the Russian expression *стоять на распутье* /sto`yat' na ras`put'e/ 'to stand at crossroads, to face a difficult choice' has no analogue in the Slovak culture and is transmitted by the Slovak *byt v rozpakoch* 'to be confused, perplexed'. Therefore, it is only in the Russian language that the word *дорога* /do`roga/ 'road' and its synonyms *распутье* /ras`put'e/, *росстань* /`rosstan'/ 'crossroads' were further semantically developed to become associated with the concept of *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate'. Thus, the semantic structure of the Russian concept of *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' is wider and deeper and is associated with other important concepts: *road, crossroads, choice*, which indicates that in the Russian linguistic consciousness, *судьба* /sud'`ba/ 'fate' reflects not only what is sent by God (and is inevitable, fatal), but it is also the choice of the person, the path he or she has opted for independently.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of language education is to prepare the student for meeting the needs of the modern European citizen and for living in a multilingual Europe with the use of all four types of speech activities (Šimášek, 2013). In accordance with the program, the purpose of the subject *Russian Language* is as follows: awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity not only in Europe and the world, but also in individual social environments. By means of understanding the importance of language for national culture, students should perceive linguistic differences, show tolerance to other cultures and navigate in a multicultural environment. In view of these requirements, the purpose of the study is to analyze the aspects of bilingual comparison of closely related languages (Russian and Slovak) that are most significant for understanding the differences between national linguistic cultures.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods are the comparative method, the cognitive analysis method, the component analysis method, the functional-semantic analysis, the statistical method.

6. Findings

The vocabulary of closely related languages is not only characterized by denotative differences. Thanks to the pragmatic, and the linguistic and cultural focuses of comparative studies of Slavic languages, a wide range of vocabulary differing not only in denotative, but also in connotative, cultural meaning, falls under the category of "false similarities". From the cultural point of view, this category can include all isomorphic lexemes that are semantically identical in both languages in denotative terms, but are semantically differentiated in their pragmatics, but also in linguistic and cultural terms, considering the meanings acquired in secondary naming, in phraseology.

A specific feature of the vocabulary of Slavic languages is that despite the frequent similarity of the primary, denotative meaning of the lexemes that form such languages, due to the close relationship of the latter, their lexemes are not always equivalent from the pragmatic point of view. This can be

explained by the fact that over the period of its independent existence, each Slavic people has developed its own ideas about the correlation of signs and phenomena of the surrounding world. On the one hand, the common referential component conditions the belonging of the representatives of the same phenomenon or feature in different Slavic languages to a common cultural code. On the other hand, the pragmatic component as a fact of secondary semiosis acts as a bearer of ethnocultural specificity. Therefore, standards in Slavic languages often demonstrate "conceptual universality" amid "formal linguistic national marking" (Melerovich & Mokienko, 2008, p. 260). This is how the common vocabulary of Slavic languages manifests the unity of the general and the particular, the international and the national, the universal and the specific.

Oftentimes, although the main meanings of lexemes in two closely related languages coincide, they differ in connotative extensions and ethnocultural content. This is reflected particularly clearly in secondary naming, including phraseology, and results in a cultural and connotative asymmetry of languages. This kind of divergence shows the originality of the vision of the surrounding world by different peoples, their different conceptualization of the surrounding reality, the peculiarities of associative connections and insights. Secondary names, more precisely, their figurative bases, often bear the stamp of ethnocultural specificity.

7. Conclusion

Thanks to the pragmatic, and the linguistic and cultural focuses of the comparative study of the native and the studied Slavic languages, a wide range of vocabulary, differing not only in denotative, but also in connotative, cultural meaning, is seen as part of difficult lexical phenomena. However, closely related vocabulary is not only a zone of interference in the study of a related Slavic language, it also has a great motivational and attractive force, demonstrating linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to its awareness, which is the purpose of the subject *Russian Language* in accordance with the program discussed above. Such a comparison helps students realize the uniqueness of their own language, pay more attention to their native language, see it in dynamics, understand the processes occurring in languages, come to acknowledge the importance of language for national culture, develop a tolerant attitude towards other cultures and the ability to navigate in a multicultural environment.

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