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Title: From Norwegian to Russian: Contrasting Compounds

Abstract:

One striking difference between Germanic and Slavic languages concerns the abundance of compounding in Germanic and its relative scarcity in Slavic. Although this is well known, contrastive studies of compounding in Germanic and Slavic are few and far between. The present paper seeks to fill this knowledge gap through an empirical study of Norwegian, a language notorious for its compounds such as bilselger ‘car salesman’ and nattbord ‘nightstand’ and their Russian equivalents. As opposed to English, Norwegian orthography optimizes the identification of compounds. It is argued that Russian has a rich inventory of constructions corresponding to Norwegian compounds, and that detailed empirical investigations are required to shed light on this complex topic.

It has been hypothesized (Mezhevich^[1] 2002) that head nouns assigning a semantic role to their non-head argument yield genitive constructions in Russian, e.g. prodavec mašin for bilselger ‘car salesman’, where selger ‘salesman’ assigns the role PATIENT to the non-head noun bil ‘car’. Heads that do not assign semantic roles, on the other hand, are hypothesized to yield adjective + noun constructions, as in nočnoj stolik for nattbord ‘nightstand’.

In order to test this hypothesis, a database was created of all compounds from six novels and their translations (three in each direction). While preliminary results suggest that the hypothesis cited above is on the right track, two amendments seem necessary. First, the database shows that Russian has a richer inventory of equivalents than the two constructions mentioned above, ranging from simplex nouns to constructions with prepositions. Second, in the database there are numerous examples with the Russian genitive construction that do not involve nouns assigning semantic roles to arguments. These findings indicate that the Germanic-Slavic correspondences are more complex than previously assumed.

Mezhevich, I.^[1](2002): English Compounds and Russian Relational Adjectives. NWLC 2002.