

Presenters: Irina Mikaelian, Pennsylvania State University, Anna Zalizniak, Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences

Title: Russian *A* Viewed through the Prism of Parallel Corpora

Abstract:

The conjunction *a* is one of the most investigated Russian words, cf. Levin 1970; Kreidlin, Paducheva 1974; Fougeron 1987, 2004; Nikolaeva 1997, Sannikov 1989, Yanko 1990, Yokoyama 1990, Paducheva 1997; Inkova-Manzotti 2001; Malchukov 2004, Uryson 2011, Mikaelian, Zalizniak 2005, and others. Nevertheless, it still challenges both scholars and teachers of Russian. Our study aims at refining our understanding of the semantics and functional properties of *a* using data collected from the Russian National Corpus, specifically its Russian-English, Russian-French, and Russian-Italian parallel subcorpora, as well as the Cross-linguistic Database of Connectives (Inkova 2017).

This conjunction possesses language-specific features of two different natures. On the one hand, *a* is specialized as a connective linking two clauses with parallel syntactic and informational structures, for example, *Отец инженер, а мать врач; Все засмеялись, а Ваня заплакал*. Such structures convey the idea of **weak or strong contrast** deriving from the meaning of the juxtaposed clauses. We claim that *a* is grammaticalized in this function insofar as its use in these contexts is both quasi-obligatory and (almost) empty semantically.

On the other hand, *a* can convey the idea of **inconsistency** between two states of affairs bringing forth subjective attitudes of the speaker/narrator, cf. *Октябрь, а солнце что твой август*. This highly subjective character of *a* distinguishes it from the adversative conjunction *но*. The target languages (English, French, and Italian) lack a conventional means to convey this idea.

Parallel corpus analysis helps describe what is specific about the Russian *a* compared to Western European languages in more accurate terms than was possible in pre-corpora studies. In particular, we will present and interpret quantitative data regarding the distribution of its translation equivalents in English, French, and Italian. We will also look at the translation stimuli that lead to the use of *A* in texts translated from these languages into Russian.