

Title: A Corpus-informed Approach to Teaching Russian Predicative Number Agreement: From Implicit Learning to Explicit Instructions

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Abstract:

Russian predicate agreement with quantifiers (dva cheloveka “two people,” mnogo knig “many books”) lies on a complex hierarchy of several semantic and grammatical features including semantic type of quantifier, word order, animacy of the subject, and type of a predicate. The combination of both semantic and grammatical principles leads to variation in choice between Sg-Pl predicative forms (Kuvshinskaya 2017: 356).

Comprehensive grammar books of Russian usually mention the variation and other significant factors (Wade, Brian: 69). In teaching practice, the number agreement mostly belongs to implicit learning and this approach supports the idea of free choice between Sg and Pl predicative forms. Meanwhile the Russian learner corpus demonstrates a significant number of errors in predicative agreement with quantifiers.

This paper reports the results of corpus analysis comprised two categories of Advanced learners

- heritage bilinguals and L2-students with dominant Finnish or English languages. Four phenomena are common for all the learners regardless a dominant language:
- underproduction and syntactic failures with certain type of quantifiers, which are percentage expressions, neskolko “some,” skol'ko “how many/much,” stolko “so many/much”
- semantic agreement with collective nouns, e.g. zapad.SG vidyat.PL “the West (Western countries) see,” narod.SG zaimstvuyut.PL slova “population borrow words”
- plural forms in possessive and existential clauses, e.g. u menya byli-PL. mnogo problem “I had a lot of problems.”

With regard to these observations, the conference presentation will provide recommendations for teaching instructions including a list of collective nouns elicited from the Russian National Corpus, restrictions on number agreement in possessive constructions, and a few notes on language specific transfer phenomena.

Kuvshinskaya, Yulia M. Predicate agreement with quantifier phrases containing the words polovina or tret' and an approximative marker." *Russian Linguistics* 41.3 (2017): 355-373.

Wade, T., and Brian, L. (2011). *A Comprehensive Russian Grammar*. Ed. by David Gillespie.