

Title: When *my* Does Not Translate as *мой*: Teaching Possessive Constructions in Russian  
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Among the many lexical and grammatical differences between Russian and English, the use and more specifically the omission of possessive pronouns has been little studied (Timberlake 2004; Ioffe 1985; Yokoyama & Klenin 1976). While English uses possessive pronouns with high frequency (e.g., I left my pen in your car), Russian has a variety of ways to express the same meaning: 1) possessive pronouns (*мой / твой – Я оставил мою ручку в твоей машине* [grammatical, if artificial]); 2) reflexive pronoun (*свой - Я оставил свою ручку в твоей машине*); 3) the null possessive (*Я оставил ручку в твоей машине, and Я оставил ручку в машине*, especially when context makes clear that there are two people—one connected with the pen and the other connected with the car); 4) other syntactic structures (*Я оставил мою/свою/∅ ручку у тебя в машине*). To elucidate the relative frequency of these possessive structures and parameters of usage in narrative texts, the researcher compared a contemporary Russian short story with a published English translation, and an English short story with a published Russian translation. The comparisons revealed interesting patterns of usage: the  $\emptyset$  possessive and alternative syntactic constructions account for well over half of all cases where English uses an explicit possessive.

In the presentation I will describe the methodology for comparing texts, provide examples of usage patterns, and consider the implications of these findings for teaching Russian: specifically, how to get students to notice the absence of possessives; how to help them link explicit and null possessive pronouns with their antecedents; and how to identify for teachers with what lexical-grammatical constructions the differences in usage are likely to be more salient for language learners.

- Ioffe, S. (1985). *The pronoun 'svoj' in the Russian language*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington.
- Timberlake, A. (2004). *A reference grammar of Russian*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Yokoyama, O. T., & Klenin, E. (1976). "The semantics of 'optional rules': Russian personal and reflexive possessives." In L. Matejka (Ed.), *Sound, sign, and meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague linguistic circle* (Michigan Slavic Contributions 6)(pp. 249-70). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.