Marcin Grygiel / Laura A. Janda (eds.)

Slavic Linguistics in a Cognitive Framework

PETER LANG
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Introduction: New perspectives in the study of Slavic languages

Over the past several years, enthusiasm for Cognitive Linguistics has grown rapidly among Slavic linguists and Slavists who previously did not have easy access to linguistic literature written in English. A big impetus for the propagation of cognitive concepts and development of general interest in cognitive frameworks among linguists in Central and Eastern Europe was given by the 10th International Linguistics Conference organized in Poland in 2007 by Prof. Elżbieta Tabakowska. There are also regular conferences held under the auspices of Russian, Polish and Slavic Cognitive Linguistics Associations and Central European Cognitive Linguistics conferences taking place in Croatia which contribute to the popularization of cognitive approaches to Slavic linguistics and cognitive linguistic analysis in general.

The present volume is also proof that a progressive reorientation is taking place in the universities of Central and Eastern Europe, with cognitive linguistics gaining the upper hand. Hence there is a growing demand for cognitive linguistics publications, especially those focusing on Slavic data and preferably written in English. In this respect English offers much wider possibilities for dissemination of ideas and scientific debate, helping to bridge the gap between the Western and Eastern linguistic traditions.

The Slavic group of languages, with 315 million speakers and 13 main languages, is the fourth largest Indo-European sub-branch and one of the major language families of the world. It is also one of the most often studied and most written-about groups. Based on genetic relatedness, the Slavic language group is classified into three branches which also indicate their geographical distribution: the South Slavic branch, with two subgroups – Slovene-Croatian-Bosnian-Serbian-Montenegrin and Bulgarian-Macedonian; the West Slavic branch, with three subgroups – Czech-Slovak, Sorbian, and Lekhitic (Polish and related tongues); and the East Slavic branch, comprised of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian. Despite being relatively numerous, the Slavic languages are a closely-knit group due to shared lexicon and grammatical structure.

Within the Indo-European family of languages, Slavic has shown the strongest tendencies to preserve most of the inherited complicated nominal and verbal morphology: person, number, gender, case, tense, mood and aspect distinctions, while undergoing numerous phonological and phonetic changes. This is in contrast to languages such as English which lost most of their morphological categories.

On the whole, Slavic languages are synthetic and rely on inflection as the main method of differentiating grammatical meanings through the use of affixes as well as vowel and consonant alterations. Analytic markers are also present, but visible to a greater degree in nouns than in verbs because many functions of

the noun case endings may be taken over by prepositions. This method of analytic expression has led to the almost complete disappearance of the case system in Bulgarian and Macedonian and a slight reduction in the number of cases or their restricted use in other Slavic languages. In Slavic linguistics the grammatical category of case is a widely studied phenomenon and its analysis has yielded a large body of literature focusing not only on the evolution and distinctiveness of the various case forms but also on the meanings associated with individual cases.

Apart from cases and prepositions, another area attracting the attention of linguists studying Slavic languages is aspect. Unlike most other European languages with aspectual distinctions, Slavic marks aspect overtly on all verb forms. The most fundamental aspectual distinction is between perfective and imperfective. Essentially, the perfective aspect schematizes an event as a complete action, while the imperfective aspect presents it as an unfolding, repeated or habitual process. This distinction is widespread among languages of the world, but whereas other languages mark grammatical aspect within inflection (Romance) or by means of periphrastic constructions (English), Slavic languages mark aspect derivationally. As a result, each Slavic verb is inherently marked as either perfective or imperfective and functions as a separate lexical entry.

Moving beyond verbal and nominal categories, another long-standing problem in Slavic linguistics has been linearization and analysis of clitic systems. Clitics are lexical items that are characterized by the lack of prosodic accent or stress and tend to be incorporated into a single phonetic group or phrase with an autonomous stressed word. Slavic has a relatively free word order, but clitics exhibit very rigid positioning patterns. Many Slavists have tried to describe the distribution of clitics in various Slavic languages establishing differences in clitic placement, their types and possible inventory. A major point of theoretical contention concerning the analysis of Slavic clitics has been what role syntactic factors play and what role prosodic ones play, the general assumption being that semantic factors are irrelevant since clitics are devoid of lexical meaning.

It is generally assumed that the similarities among the various languages of the Slavic group indicate that as late as the seventh or eighth century AD they were practically identical. As a consequence, the Slavic languages constitute a more homogeneous group than the languages of some of the other branches and they are still to a large degree mutually comprehensible. This also makes Slavic quite unique and invites linguists to the treasure house of Slavic lexicology. Slavic is much less overlaid by foreign lexical borrowings than other languages and its rich vocabulary has preserved many archaic features. Lexicology is well developed as a named field of descriptive Slavic linguistics and the lexicons of

the Slavic languages have been intensively studied for over the last two centuries.

Cognitive Linguistics offers an enticing possibility to approach these time-honored problems from a fresh standpoint and view them in a new dimension. First of all, Cognitive Linguistics refutes the validity of purely formal, logical and algorithmic approaches to language, believing that language is primarily about meaning and studying form for its own sake misses the main point. The task of Cognitive Linguistics is to describe the structure of language in terms of its function and in this respect Cognitive Linguistics is not a break with, but a continuation of a long linguistic tradition focusing on the correlation between linguistic form and its usage.

Students taking an introductory course in linguistics are often taught that language is a means of communication. However, Cognitive Linguistics sees language in a much broader perspective. Language is more than a coding mechanism for sending and receiving messages. Language facilitates interaction with the world. In order to do so, language schematizes meaning. Linguistic meaning is never purely objective; it is instead processed by general cognitive mechanisms. As such, meaning very often turns out to be vague, stereotypical, changeable – in other words, very human.

Cognitive Linguistics is not a unified theory, but rather a large movement constituting an open forum for wide-ranging discussion. This is evident from the articles that appear in the present volume. The research area addressed herein covers a vast spectrum of different topics and reveals a range of theoretical models they follow. All the contributions in this volume, however, are Slavic-oriented and thoroughly grounded in the framework of Cognitive Linguistics.

We present the articles in three thematic sections representing fields of interest and simultaneously corresponding to levels of linguistic organization. The first section, Part I: *Cognitive approaches to grammar*, opens with Laura Janda's paper offering a comprehensive definition of completability as an important parameter in the description of the Russian aspect system, backed up by morphological, syntactic and semantic evidence. Russian aspect is also the subject of Stephen M. Dickey's article in which he applies Langacker's theory of subjectification to the analysis of Russian perfective aspect. Finally, a wider view on the interaction between aspect and modality in Slavic is offered by Dagmar Divjak who uses corpora and statistical techniques to find a variable which best predicts aspect choice in Polish modal constructions.

A number of articles in the present volume analyze Slavic case systems. Starting from the hypothesis that case forms represent symbolic units, Christoph Rosenbaum and Wolfgang Schulze analyze the 'semantic space' of the morphological case architecture in Slovak, paying particular attention to the category of animateness. Mirjam Fried focuses on the fine-grained affectedness distinctions expressed by Czech dative-marked nominals and presents the role of

pragmatic factors in motivating the dative of empathy. The Russian instrumental of comparison is discussed in Ekaterina Rakhilina and Elena Tribushinina's article, where they who propose a new integrated approach to instrumentals inspired by construction grammar. Construction grammar is also the inspiration for Marcin Grygiel's account of Serbian and other Slavic realizations of affirmation. Liljana Mitkovska's analysis of possessive-locative constructions in Macedonian expressed implicitly, without any special possessive marker, are the topic of the article that concludes this section.

Part II of the volume, entitled *Cognitive semantics*, includes contributions focused mainly on analysis of the Slavic lexical inventory. Nevertheless, the boundaries between semantics and syntax are to a large extent a matter of convention and the articles reflect this fact. Mario Brdar and Rita Brdar-Szabó explore cases of polysemy triggered by metonymy in their analysis of Slavic and Germanic vocabulary associated with the concepts WOOD and TREE. Diana Prodanović-Stankić presents the results of a corpus-based study of conceptual metaphors and metonymies in Serbian proverbs containing names of animals. The last article in this section, authored by Agnieszka Będkowska-Kopczyk, investigates emotions as causes of actions, illustrating this problem with Slovene and Polish prepositional expressions and cases.

The last section shows wider applications of Cognitive Linguistics in areas which still remain largely unexplored. Part III: *Cognitive discourse analysis and applied linguistics* includes a sample of studies exploring text, spoken discourse, communication and presenting applications of Cognitive Linguistics in translation studies and lexicography. The section starts with Andrej A. Kibrik's analysis of local discourse structure in a Russian corpus of narratives in which children and adolescents retell their night dreams. Metaphorical expressions are a theme in the article authored by Piotr Twardzisz, where Polish legal language is analyzed in the context of Polish-English translation. The volume ends with Danko Šipka's report on metaphor validation in highly polysemous structures in nonstandard Serbo-Croatian vocabulary from the author's *SerboCroatian – English Colloquial Dictionary*.

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Marcin Grygiel
Laura A. Janda