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TRANSLATING PREPOSITIONS FROM RUSSIAN LEGAL TEXTS INTO ENGLISH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CORRESPONDING INTERFERENCE ZONES FOR TEACHING PURPOSES

Abstract. Various aspects of prepositions translation have been primarily investigated in the framework of translation theory. Applied research is mostly focused on translating particular groups of prepositions against the background of plain language. Legal translation researchers have not yet comprehensively analysed peculiarities of translating Russian prepositions used in legal texts into English. The paper is an attempt to investigate the difficulties which Russian learners can encounter when translating prepositions from Russian commercial contracts into English. Methods employed include language typology comparison, continuous sampling technique, language corpus data analysis as applied to language error forecast and prevention. The material selected for analysis – Russian commercial contracts – is chosen in accordance with the principles of professionalism, globalization, specialisation as well as graduates' employment opportunities. The author develops a classification of prepositions drawing upon their structural, grammar and semantic functions in the texts of Russian commercial contracts. The findings reveal negative interference zones that can potentially cause preposition errors. Feasibility of the forecast is confirmed by the analysis of real learners' errors. The research concludes that modelling legal translation teaching which takes into account potential interference zones for students can contribute to shifting focus to problem zones while teaching, raising students' awareness, and therefore acting as propedeutics of the corresponding errors.

Keywords: legal translation, Russian-English translation, learners' preposition errors.

1. Introduction

Legal translation and various aspects related to its teaching have been extensively investigated (Campell, 2014; Cao, 2014; Károly, 2014; Kešicka, 2017; Matijašević, 2013; Way, 2016). However, a lot of problems related to interference, both internal and external, such as overgeneralization,

false cognates, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rules restriction, those stemming from the polysemous character of a word, cases of false literal translation and others have been investigated as applied to the theory of translation in general (Stepanova, 2018; Vlasenko, 2017), to a lesser extent to the theory and practice of Russian-English translation (Levitan, 2011) without focusing on these issues in terms of legal translation teaching. In books and articles on comparative typology of Russian and English (Arakin, 1979) one can find some glimpses on the differences and similarities between English and Russian systems of prepositions. We have found little concerning the specifics of prepositions usage in Russian and English legal texts both relying on traditional approaches and those employing natural language processing (NLP) methods. No pedagogical, didactic, or linguodidactic research on translation of prepositions from Russian into English in legal texts has been revealed.

2. Literature Review

In legal English and legal translation teaching literature prepositions have been analyzed in the context of common and individual translation difficulties of foreign language learners. Preposition errors are proved to be among the most frequent error types, which is revealed in various papers, although these publications mainly show general English statistics obtained by researchers themselves and data from error-annotated general English corpora (Chodorow et al., 2007, Tetreault and Chodorow, 2008). These studies concluded that, on the one hand, the form of prepositions does not tend to change as well as no new prepositions appear in a language. On the other hand, this part of speech has a variety of natural and contextual meanings, it can act as other parts of speech (nouns, adjectives etc.), or, incorporate two or more words. Simply put, prepositions are used to connect words in a sentence (mainly objects and other parts of the sentence) showing relationships of logic, sequence, space, time, order etc. They are therefore recognized as a part of speech which, due to its multidimensional uses, can cause various difficulties to foreign language learners. Few commentators have touched upon specific uses of prepositions in legal contexts, some of which may be stylistically predetermined, including *inter alia* archaic uses or language redundancy.

Obviously, there are substantial findings related to structural and semantic functions of Russian prepositions, as well as their classification, most of which are considered classical nowadays (Vinogradov, 1972). However,

no fundamental comparative analysis of Russian prepositions and those of other languages (mainly Western European) for teaching purposes has been conducted either in plain or legal language. A handful of FL studies have examined the features of Russian prepositions posing special challenges for foreigners but only in general English classrooms (Bychkov, 2016).

As for research of prepositions in the framework of text and discourse analysis in corpus linguistics studies, those we can methodologically rely on are: corpus-based methods applied to contrastive analysis and translation (Granger et al., 2003); legal discourse (Bhatia, 2004; Blackwell, 2009) and sublanguages analysis (Heffer, 2005); phraseology in legal texts, specifically in contracts (Carvalho, 2007; Gózdź-Roszkowski, 2006), the usage of parallel legal texts for translation teaching purposes (Teubert, 2002; Zanettin, 2000). We also resorted to findings related to the distribution and functions of complex prepositions in EU law and Polish law against the background of plain language, employing corpus methodology (Biel, 2010, 2015; Monzó, 2008).

Traditionally, both theory and practice distinguishes between teaching non-authentic texts explaining general or specific concepts and notions of this or that legal system and authentic texts of legal documents. However, merely differentiating between these two types of texts is not enough to elaborate a legal translation course and, thus, it requires further investigation into this issue. In this respect, we employed an approach which manifests professional realism in the legal translation classroom (Biel, 2011). This approach ensures a legal translation course design embracing the most frequently translated branches of law. It is based on three main principles: professionalism, globalization and specialization, and takes into account further employment opportunities for law faculties' graduates (mostly freelance and in-house translators). The author of this approach (Biel, 2011) consulted The Languages National Training Organization's National Standards in Translating, the websites of the Institute of Translation and Interpretation, the American Translators Association, www.proz.com, and www.translationdirectory.com. To supplement the data obtained and to extend the scope of jurisdictions we also resorted to multinational law firms located in Russia and came to similar results and conclusions. According to the findings obtained contracts are mentioned by all those experts stipulated above and are ranked as the most frequently translated legal documents. Based on the findings we narrowed our investigation to commercial contracts as they are in high demand by potential employers and are frequently in need of being translated. As such they are included or should be included in uni-

versity legal translation courses. Moreover, texts of commercial contracts contain basic characteristics of legal texts as for style, syntax and collocations and are different from general texts on legal issues used for teaching purposes. Therefore, commercial contracts also comply with the recent trends of professionalism, globalization and specialization we referred to above.

The methodology adopted for this research consists in combination of corpus linguistics, discourse and error analysis approaches and methods which is a novelty against the background of investigating prepositions used in Russian commercial contracts for legal translation teaching purposes. It should be mentioned that in the paper we only analyze the aspects relevant to teaching Russian speaking learners to translate prepositions in question into English (their foreign language).

The research questions that guided the present study were as follows:

- RQ1. What are forms, structure, semantic and grammar features of prepositions used in Russian commercial contracts? How can these properties be revealed with the help of NLP methods?
- RQ2. How can prepositions specific to Russian commercial contracts revealed by means of applying NLP methods be classified?
- RQ3. What are potential negative interference zones as far as such prepositions usage is concerned for Russian students translating Russian commercial contracts into English (their foreign language)? How can these findings be confirmed empirically?

Thus, the present study aimed to address gaps in the literature by: applying qualitative and quantitative analyses to prepositions used in Russian commercial contracts; identifying grammar and semantic functions and forms of prepositions in such contexts; revealing and eliminating the homonymy; identifying zones of interference when translating from Russian into English by Russian speakers and their typical errors; providing for ways to apply the findings in the legal translation classroom as well as in legal translation research.

3. Methods and sources of research

3.1. Description of dataset

The texts of contracts we used for our study were extracted from The National Corpus of the Russian language. In general, the corpus includes 60 million words. The corpus provides for disambiguation and facilitates further amendments to the texts under analysis by morphological and

syntactic markings. Such markings indicate morphological structure and syntactic relationships in sentences. The syntactic analysis behind the corresponding marking is based on “Meaning-Text” model by Mel’chuk (1974) and Zholkovskiy and Mel’chuk (1967). The morphological standards used to mark parts of speech rely on «Grammar Dictionary of the Russian language» by Zaliznyak (2003) applied with the relevant adjustments to comply with the principle of universality. The structure of morphological information includes the following groups of labels:

- The lexeme the form of the word belongs to;
- The varieties of grammar characteristics of the lexeme;
- The word-building characteristics of the lexeme;
- Information, if relevant, concerning the nonstandard grammar of the form etc.

We used data from the main sub-corpus, which consists of contemporary written non-fiction texts subdivided into genres, subgenres and types of texts corresponding to each genre and/or subgenre. The subcorpus we used contains 70574 texts, which constitutes 56% of all the written texts of the whole corpus and limited our search to Russian contemporary commercial contracts. The chosen subcorpus does not provide for parallel English texts. We considered this contracts collection to be the most reliable out of many other corpora. Moreover, no other publicly available corpora containing parallel texts of Russian and English commercial contracts that could be treated as statistically representative were found.

3.2. Methods

To extract prepositions from the texts of Russian commercial contracts available in The National Corpus of the Russian language we applied continuous sampling technique. After filtering the low-frequency prepositions the number of prepositions analyzed shrank by almost 9%. It should be noted, that the number of prepositions also reduced after discarding those that the corpus wrongly recognized as prepositions (particles, nouns, participles, adverbs etc.). At the initial stage we also found cases of homonymy which were later also discarded, as automatic filtering of cases with homonymy was not always reliable (although, as mentioned above, the corpus we used provides for such an option).

Although the number of prepositions we revealed after preliminary analysis is higher, in our study we mostly focused on 24 prepositions as well as cases they are used with. This approach is pursued by most studies on prepositions correction in the foreign language classroom. The justification is that implications would not be more useful if one also included

the insufficient number of all actual prepositions error cases. The average number of prepositions analysed and discussed in such research is approximately 10–14 prepositions (De Felice and Pulman, 2008, Gamon et al., 2008, Han et al., 2010), which is also consistent with our study. Apart from that, this approach is also applicable to our research as we referred to texts of commercial contracts solely, which are known to be of limited, mostly repetitive vocabulary.

To substantiate our conclusions as for the interference zones we also tested students' translations of commercial contracts from Russian into English and identified errors we forecast on the basis of typological differences of the Russian and English languages. In total, we analyzed 10 types of commercial contracts, 53 students' translations thereof from Russian into English.

Findings and Discussion

3.3. Distribution of prepositions in Russian commercial contracts and analysis of their functions

The sub-corpus we used included 63 documents (commercial contracts), 6513 sentences, 87907 words. The total number of prepositions analyzed is 10428. Below we provide prepositions from commercial contracts and indicate the corresponding frequency (table 1).

Table 1
The frequency of prepositions in the texts of Russian commercial contracts

Word forms	Number of entries	Word forms	Number of entries
В (lit: 'in')	3297	Кроме (lit: 'except')	20
На (lit: 'on')	1043	Вследствие (lit: 'due to')	18
По (lit: 'on, along')	996	Прежде (lit: 'before')	16
С (lit: 'with')	975	Перед (lit: 'before')	16
За (lit: 'for')	483	Над (lit: 'above')	14
От (lit: 'from')	432	Ко (lit: 'by')	13
К (lit: 'by')	421	Соответственно (lit: 'correspondingly')	11
При (lit: 'at')	261	Сверх (lit: 'in excess of, above')	10
Из (lit: 'from, of')	252	Выше (lit: 'above, over')	10

Word forms	Number of entries	Word forms	Number of entries
До (lit: 'till')	175	Вне (lit: 'outside, beyond')	9
Со (lit: 'with')	134	Посредством (lit: 'by means of')	8
Об (lit: 'about')	124	Помимо (lit: 'except')	6
Во (lit: 'in')	82	Исключая (lit: 'excluding')	5
Без (lit: 'without')	73	Из-за (lit: 'due to, because of')	5
Путем (lit: 'by')	62	Относительно (lit: 'in relation to')	4
У (lit: 'at')	59	Внутри (lit: 'inside, within')	4
Под (lit: 'under')	45		
Включая (lit: 'including')	45		
Согласно (lit: 'in accordance with')	39		
Через (lit: 'through, by')	36		
Против (lit: 'against')	26		
Ниже (lit: 'below')	20		

Frequency of the remaining prepositions constitutes from 3 to 1. These prepositions are as follows (table 2):

Table 2

Prepositions with the lowest frequency

Обо (lit: 'about')
Вперед (lit: 'before')
Соразмерно (lit: 'equally')
Вместо (lit: 'instead of')
Свыше (lit: 'above, in excess of')
Напротив (lit: 'opposite')
Накануне (lit: 'on the eve')
Мимо (lit: 'past')
Вслед (lit: 'following')
Вопреки (lit: 'against')
Внизу (lit: 'below')
Вдоль (lit: 'along')
Ради (lit: 'for the sake of')

For the purposes of classifying prepositions used in Russian commercial contracts extracted from the corpus described above we used the terminology and classification developed by V. Vinogradov (1972). The majority of functions of prepositions described by V. Vinogradov can also be traced in these contracts. However, we have not revealed (or the percentage of their usage was not representative) some categories such as those denoting modal relationships, the relationships of internal content, those of internal dependence and approximate measure.

Another difference of prepositions in contrasts as opposed to general English is the usage of cases with prepositions, the cases used in commercial contracts are limited. Although we stipulate all cases revealed those with high frequency are: accusative, genitive, prepositional ones. The remaining cases have different degree of frequency depending on a particular preposition.

1. Spatial relationships (“к” + dative, “по” + dative, accusative, prepositional, “под” + accusative, instrumental, “над” + instrumental, prepositional, “через” + accusative, “на” + accusative, “за” + accusative, “о” + accusative, prepositional, “в” + accusative, prepositional, “от” + genitive, “у” + genitive, accusative, “до” + genitive, “между” + genitive, instrumental, “из” + instrumental, “из-за” + genitive).

2. Temporal relationships (“до” + genitive; “от” + genitive, “после” + genitive; “с” + genitive; “к” – dative; “по” + dative, accusative, “в” + accusative, prepositional; “за” + accusative, instrumental; “на” + accusative, prepositional; “под” + accusative; “через” + accusative; “между” + instrumental; “перед” + instrumental; “о” + accusative, prepositional; “при” + prepositional and others). Unlike general Russian texts, in the texts of commercial contracts we identified approximately equal number of temporal and spatial prepositions.

3. Comitative relationships (“с” + instrumental; “при” + prepositional: “с участием”, “совместно с”, “при участии”, “в сопровождении”).

4. Ablative relationships (“от” + genitive; “вместо” + genitive; “без” + genitive; “кроме” + genitive; “с” (“со”) + genitive; “сверх” + genitive; “против” + genitive; “вопреки” + dative; “в” + prepositional; “при” + prepositional and some others: (“денежные средства), полученные от”, “вместо оплаты”, “без участия”, “сверх регулярных выплат”, “иск против”, “в отличие от”, “при разграничении”).

5. Transgressive relationships (“за” + accusative; “из” + genitive; “в” + accusative: “переход из ... в ...”).

6. Inchoative-finitive relationships (“по” + accusative).

7. Quantitative relationships (“в” + accusative; “на” + accusative and others: “в размере”, “в объеме”, “по одной акции (каждому акционеру)”).

8. Distributive relationships (“по” + dative; “по” + accusative; “на” + accusative and others).

9. Limiting relationships (“по” + dative).

10. Possessive relationships (“у” + genitive; “с” + instrumental; “при” + prepositional: “с правом собственности”, “с приложением”).

11. Genetic relationships (“из” + genitive; “от” + genitive: “из числа (миноритарных акционеров)”, “один из (акционеров)”, “от суммы (начисленных процентов)”).

12. Comparative relationships (“против” + genitive; “наподобие” + genitive; “на” + accusative; “по” + dative; “с” + accusative; “в” + accusative; “под” + accusative: “по отношению”, “по сравнению”, “в отличие от”).

13. Purpose-oriented relationships (“на” + dative, accusative; “в” + accusative; “по” + accusative; “к” + dative; “для” + genitive; “за” + instrumental, “с” + instrumental: “в целях”, “с целью”, “нацеленный на”, “направленный на”).

15. Causal relationships (“за” + accusative, instrumental; “под” + instrumental; “о” + dative; “к” + dative; “с” + genitive; “благодаря” + dative; “из” + genitive; “из-за” + genitive; “от” + genitive; “для” + genitive; “в” + accusative, prepositional; “на” + accusative, prepositional: “в силу”, “по причине”, “вследствие”, “ввиду”, “благодаря”).

16. Instrumental relationships (“при” + prepositional; “путем”, “посредством” + genitive: “при помощи”, “посредством предоставления”, “путем оплаты”).

17. Deliberative relationships (“о” + prepositional; “на” + accusative: “соглашение о воздержании от действий”).

18. Relationships of substitution (“в” + prepositional; “в качестве”).

3.4. The potential preposition error zones

One of the most frequent interference zones causing errors when translating from Russian into English is government, mainly with verbs. The most frequent cases are those when a Russian verb is followed by a preposition and its equivalent in English is not and vice versa. In Russian: «убедиться в», whereas in English: “to ensure something”.

Another case when in Russian both the verb and the noun have the same preposition, while in English there are instances when the noun retains the preposition and the verb does not. Such as “to influence something”

and “to have influence on” (the analogues in Russian are: “влиять на”, “влияние на”).

Russian prepositions are placed next to the parts of sentences they refer to, commonly – after a verb and before a noun. English provides for instances when prepositions can be placed further from the word they refer to, especially in enumeration patterns. The learners tend to keep to the same word order as in Russian.

Overgeneralization is a frequent issue, for example, when Russian synonyms have the same government, but in English most of them are similar and one or two of them are used with a different preposition. The most common example is “право на”, “вещное право на”, “право собственности на”, while in English “interest” is used with “in” unlike “title” and “right”, which are used with “to”.

Other zones of frequent errors are those when prepositions are used with the objective cases of nouns, pronouns, substantive adjectives and numerals. With the objective cases of nouns these prepositions are followed mostly by the genitive, dative, instrumental and prepositional cases (“в отношении к”, “в связи с”, “согласно”, “по мере”, “в части”, “с помощью”, “в пользу”, “в силу”, “в виду”, “вследствие”, “по причине”, “в лице”). Their grammar functions are limited by the lexical meaning of the nouns that form the phrase; indirect transitive relationships of the verb; morphological indicators of syntactic relations of the verb.

Frequency of errors is sometimes higher while denoting particular relationships because these relationships are more common than others. Here are the most frequently used cases with particular prepositions. The most frequent prepositions used with the genitive case are used to denote alienation, deprivation, absence, approximation, proximity. The most frequent meanings with the dative case are: direction, attitude to something. The accusative case mostly denotes direct relation, referral to an object. The instrumental case – accompaniment, subordination. The prepositional case – static position, temporal meaning of succession. The most common prepositions and cases used with them are: “по” + the accusative, dative, prepositional cases; “с” + the genitive, accusative, instrumental cases; “на” + the accusative, prepositional cases; “в” + the accusative, prepositional cases; “о” + the accusative case; “за”, “под” + the accusative, instrumental cases. Additionally, these are adverbial prepositions denoting adverbial meaning: “вне”, “внутри”, “напротив”, “около”, “после”, “прежде”, “против”, “среди” (in combination with the genitive case). Moreover, such cases include prepositions related to adverbs of quality used with the genitive and dative cases: “сопропорционально”, “согласно”, “соответственно”.

Other most frequently confused prepositions are those with the noun “purpose” (“for/in/on the purpose”). When denoting temporal relationships the most frequently confused prepositions are: “during”, “for”, “on”, “in”, “at”. Out of simple prepositions following verbs and nouns “in” and “into” are usually confused, e.g. “enter in force”.

There are cases when prepositions coincide with other parts of speech (conjunctions, adverbs, particles, adjectives, participles). For example, the preposition “в случае” and the conjunction “в случае если”, the latter, as a rule, introduces the corresponding clause.

When translating vocabulary denoting quantitative relationships (amounts of money, payments), prepositions “at”, “on”, “in” are often confused, e.g. “at/in the amount/number”, “to/in the extent”, “in/by cash”, “in/by/with the credit card”, “in/by dollars, pounds” etc. Similarly, it refers to spatial prepositions which indicate a place where something is located: “at”, “on”, “in”.

When prepositions are used in a phrase, contexts sometimes provide similar combinations, where only the case is different, then such instances can also act as zones of possible errors: “в силу чего-то”, “быть в силе”, “оставаться в силе”.

There are instances when a preposition which is not an exact equivalent of the one in Russian is preferred as the more exact one can be erroneous, in the opinion of a student, such as “during” (to denote temporal relationships) and “because of” (to denote causal relationships). Students refer to this compensation tactics to avoid errors.

When non-compound simple prepositions such as: в (во), на, по, к (ко), о (об), для, при, из, до, с (со), у, под, над, за, от, без, сверх, вне, are used in prepositional phrases, idiomatic expressions, compound prepositions, complex prepositions, fixed combinations (such as: “в отношении”, “в целях”, “со стороны”, “за счет”), as well as pair prepositions (“из-за”) they have more specific, less varied meanings which reduces likelihood of errors. Furthermore, out of simple monosyllabic prepositions, those that retain their lexical meanings such as “для”, “к”, “без” cause fewer errors, as in this case they have little to do with the verb aspect.

Polysyllabic prepositions have fewer direct equivalents in the English language (между, кроме, путем, включая, согласно, через, против, вследствие, прежде, перед, соответственно, выше, ниже, посредством, помимо, исключая, из-за, относительно, внутри, соразмерно, вместо, свыше, около, напротив, накануне) than simple ones; as well as denominative prepositions, or verbal prepositions (“исключая”, “включая”). Therefore, the frequency of errors with such prepositions is lower.

Students also make fewer errors when the temporal and spatial relationships of prepositions are not interrupted by indirect transferred meaning of the verb. In case of synonymic complex prepositions, a frequent cause of errors is when students confuse prepositions used in similar phrases (common errors: “regarding with”, “in respect with”, “in accordance to”, “according with” (“в отношении”).

As it was already mentioned above, to confirm our conclusions regarding interference zones we analyzed students’ translations of prepositions in commercial contracts from Russian into English. We did not specifically focus on the distribution of types of errors: whether omissions, commissions or replacements. These are predetermined by Russian-English typological differences, we revealed approximately equal number of omissions and commissions, however, the number of replacements was overwhelming.

Coincidences account for 83–85%, the remaining errors include inter alia those with low frequency prepositions, misspelled prepositions, cases when the whole Russian syntactic pattern was changed when translating and there was no scope left for a preposition to be used. Moreover, there were some other “technical” causes of errors, as well as those caused by individual specific difficulties. All such errors were discarded and not subjected to further analysis.

The results tend to suggest that if negative interference zones are revealed prior to teaching a legal translation course (where more than 83–85% of students’ errors can be foreseen), applying certain methods of teaching a high percentage of errors can be prevented and the remaining ones can be treated (corrected) more effectively than in the traditional classroom. The results obtained can also be integrated into coursebooks on Russian-English legal translation and used in further research on error prevention in legal translation.

4. Conclusions

In this paper we investigated how vast data from a national corpus (The National Corpus of the Russian Language) can be used to identify prepositions in specific contexts (commercial contracts) for teaching purposes. The paper proves that NLP-based language models can be a valuable tool in assisting teachers and students by providing prompt feedback on certain aspects of language, in our case – sublanguage of commercial contracts. The novelty of the investigation is multiple. Firstly, by the moment we started our research we had not revealed any publications stipulating the

use and nature of prepositions in such a narrow area as Russian commercial contracts, apart from very generalized observations. Specifically, we revealed the exact forms, structure, semantic and grammar features, including cases such prepositions are used with and classified these prepositions. Secondly, the study identified potential negative interference zones as far as prepositions usage is concerned for Russian students translating Russian commercial contracts into English (their foreign language). Such zones were revealed by means of comparative analysis of semantic and grammar features and functions of Russian and English prepositions. Thirdly, to empirically substantiate the zones revealed we analyzed real errors students make when translating Russian commercial contracts into English and compared the findings to the preliminary revealed interference zones. The comparison results let us claim that more than 83–85% of errors coincided with the preliminary identified instances which proves relevance of such research and its practical value.

The results obtained can be used for the purposes of teaching legal Russian, in particular Russian contract law to non-native learners of the Russian legal language. Furthermore, taking into account the discussion concerning potential interference zones legal translation trainers and methodologists can develop techniques to be incorporated into legal translation teaching practice both to be used in the classroom and by autonomous language learners. The actual errors identified can be used to create an error-annotated corpus which can act as an invaluable source of typical errors of Russian learners for teachers, students and researchers.

Dataset

The National Corpus of the Russian language. Available at: <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/>, accessed 15.06.2018

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