

The Contribution of Corpora to the Investigation of Cross-Linguistic Equivalence in Phraseology: A Contrastive Analysis of Russian and Italian Idioms

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Abstract : The long tradition of contrastive idiom research has essentially been focusing on three domains: the comparison of structural types of idioms (e.g. verbal idioms, idioms with noun-phrase structure, etc.), the description of idioms belonging to the same thematic groups (Sachgruppen), the identification of different types of cross-linguistic equivalents (i.e. full equivalents, partial equivalents, phraseological parallels, non-equivalents). The diastatic, diachronic and diatopic aspects of the compared idioms, as well as their syntactic, pragmatic and semantic properties, have been rather ignored. Corpora (both monolingual and parallel) give the opportunity to investigate the actual use of correlating idioms in authentic texts of L1 and L2. Adopting the corpus-based approach, it is possible to draw attention to the frequency of occurrence of idioms, their syntactic embedding, their potential syntactic transformations (e.g., nominalization, passivization, relativization, etc.), their combinatorial possibilities, the variations of their lexical structure, their connotations in terms of stylistic markedness or register. This paper aims to present the results of a contrastive analysis of Russian and Italian idioms referring to the concepts of 'beginning' and 'end', that has been carried out by using the Russian National Corpus and the 'La Repubblica' corpus. Beyond the digital corpora, bilingual dictionaries, like Skvorcova - Majzel', Dobrovol'skaja, Kovalev, Čerdanceva, as well as monolingual resources, have been consulted. The study has shown that many of the idioms that have been traditionally indicated as cross-linguistic equivalents on bilingual dictionaries cannot be considered correspondents. The findings demonstrate that even those idioms, that are formally identical in Russian and Italian and are presumably derived from the same source (e.g., conceptual metaphor, Bible, classical mythology, World literature), exhibit differences regarding usage. The ultimate purpose of this article is to highlight that it is necessary to review and improve the existing bilingual dictionaries considering the empirical data collected in corpora. The materials gathered in this research can contribute to this sense.

Keywords : corpora, cross-linguistic equivalence, idioms, Italian, Russian

Conference Title : ICCSCL 2019 : International Conference on Corpus Studies in Contrastive Linguistics

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : March 28-29, 2019