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Phrasal lexemes and reduction strategies in Russian

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Russian is a language with a very rich lexeme-formation system. Besides strictly morphological mechanisms (derivation and compounding), the Russian language also displays a wide number of so-called "lexical phrases" (Booij 2009) or "phrasal lexemes" (Masini 2009). Phrasal lexemes are constructions that have a phrasal structure, but a lexical nature. These constructions are attested in a number of languages and can belong to different word classes. If we restrict our investigation to phrasal nouns, we can identify at least the patterns in (1) for Russian (cf. Benigni & Masini 2009).

(1) a. Adj+N   *pečatnaja mašina*   printing.NOM.F machine.NOM.F 'typewriter'
    b. N+Prep+N   *očki dlja zrenija*   eyes for sight.GEN   'eyeglasses'
    c. X+Conj+X   *plot' i krov'*   flesh and blood   'flesh and blood'
    d. N+N$_{GEN}$ *zal ožidanija*   room waiting.GEN   'waiting room'

These phrasal units have a unitary semantics and are structurally cohesive. Indeed, generally, they cannot undergo paradigmatic commutability (2) and they cannot be internally modified (3) (modification may have scope on the whole expression only).

(2) a. *sportivnyi zal*   lit. sport$_{Adj}$ hall   'gymnasium'
    b. **sportivnaja komnata*   lit. sport$_{Adj}$ room
(3) a. *zal ožidanija*   lit. room waiting.GEN   'waiting room'
    b. **zal dlinnogo ožidanija*   lit. room long.GEN waiting.GEN

It is worth noting that, in Russian, phrasal lexemes can be formally distinguished from compounds, since:

  i. they display regular agreement and inflection on both elements (1a);
  ii. they make use of relational elements which do not generally occur in compounds, i.e. prepositions (1b) and conjunctions (1c);
  iii. they display internal case government (1d).

These are phrase-like properties that are normally banned by genuinely morphological formations such as compounds (at least in Russian). However, the third property (iii) is also shared by a subclass of so-called "stump compounds" (cfr. Molinsky 1973, Comrie & Stone 1978, Billings 1998). Stump compounds are compounds formed either by two truncated forms (4a) (also called "clippings") or by a truncated form plus a full form (4b). In this second group we may find expressions with internal case government like (4c), in which the first element (*zav*) is a stump, i.e. the truncated form of *zavedujuščij* 'boss, manager', whereas the second element is a wordform inflected by instrumental case (*klub-om* 'club-INSTR').

(4) a. *socstrach* 'social insurance' <   *social'naja strachovka* 'social insurance'
    b. *stengazeta* 'wall newspaper' <   *stennaja gazeta*   'wall newspaper'
    c. *zavklubom* 'club manager'   <   *zavedujuščij klubom*   'club manager'

Now, if we have a closer look at the sources of stump compounds, we realize that, more often than not, they are not simple phrases but phrasal nouns (especially of the Adj+N type). Stump compounds therefore seem to be a special device to "package" a phrasal structure, which is however lexical in nature, into a morphological, word-level structure. More interestingly, stump compounds do not seem to be the sole "packaging" device of this sort in Russian. Apparently, the examples in (5)-(6) illustrate some other possible kinds of "reduction" strategies that have a phrasal lexeme as input, and more precisely: truncation of the first constituent plus suffixation – e.g. by means of *-ka* (5a) and *-ik* (5b) – and simple truncation of the first constituent (6).

(5) a. *neržavejka* 'stainless steel' < *neržavejuščaja stal'* 'stainless steel'
     b. *mobil'nik* 'mobile phone' < *mobil'nyj telefon* 'mobile phone'
(6) *nal* 'cash money' < *naličnye den'gi* 'cash money'

In our poster presentation, we provide an overview of Russian phrasal nouns, especially the Adj+N type, which seems to be the most widespread. Secondly, we explore the various "reduction" strategies mentioned above and show which of them can be regarded as constructions that take a phrasal lexeme as input. Finally, we discuss the theoretical consequences of these findings.

References
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