Truth in Slavic: a parallel corpus perspective

Words meaning 'true' and 'true' ("truth-words") often develop discursive functions along with their literal senses, such as the marking of intensification or concession (Kuteva et al. 2019, König 2006). The extensions of truth-words have been explained by Grice's (1975) conversational maxims of truth and relevance: since truthfulness is taken for granted, the explicit marking of truthfulness is redundant and often carries conversational implicatures (cf. Orr & Ariel 2021).

When it comes to Slavic languages, the Russian concepts *правда* and *истина* have been argued to be "cultural keywords" (Wierzbicka 2002) and *правда* has grammaticalized into a particle (*Ты придешь,* ***правда***? 'You're coming, **right**?), an adverb (*Она* ***правда*** *красивая* 'She's **really** beautiful') and a concessive conjunction (*Автобусы ходят,* ***правда*** *редко* 'The buses run, although rarely') (see Zimmerling 2024, Apresjan 2010 on concessive uses).

In this talk, we survey the variation in the functional extension of truth-words across Slavic, a perspective which hitherto remains largely unexplored. We use a parallel corpus (translations of The Master and Margarita by Bulgakov, available through the RNC), to investigate the uses of truth-words in 11 languages from all Slavic subgroups. We focus on a set of 85 contexts designed to give good coverage of the domain in question.

We then apply Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) to derive a semantic map of the domain (cf. Wälchli & Cysouw 2012, Croft & Poole 2008). Assuming that similar contexts are more likely to be expressed with the same form, we use translations into different languages of the same contexts to estimate their similarity. The distances between contexts are used to infer locations in a multidimensional space using MDS, giving a representation which can be semantically interpreted, i.e. a semantic map.

References

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RNC: Russian National Corpus. http://ruscorpora.ru