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Means of Expressing an Inaccurate Measure of Liquid in Russian and English: Comparative and Translational Aspects

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Abstract

This paper provides insight into the means of expressing the category “measure” and its representation in modern Russian and English. The analysis is based on the examples of evaluative characteristics (inaccurate and/or inexact) of liquid measure. The English language has a wider range of different means of expressing this measure in comparison to the Russian language. This factor poses more difficulties for translators. The study shows how these difficulties can be resolved.

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1. Introduction

The analysis of language material of different cultures shows that in the process of self-comprehension a person with his “anthropocentric orientation” is put in the centre of not only a temporal worldview, but also in a spatial world which is embodied in any natural language. The quantitative assessment of reality is important for spatial orientation. In this regard, the question of how the human factor is reflected in the language is of great interest, especially when expressing the quantitative assessment of reality.

Precise quantity measures are crucial for scientific cognition. These measures are evaluated with the help of accurate devices, scales and approved units. Evaluative analogs rather than precise digital data are used in everyday

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life. Everyday perception "objectify" quantities, but does not calculate, evaluate, or measure them. Quantitative relations are interpreted and a constant attitude towards them is assumed by the speakers. The relations are based on the following procedures: 1) comparison between objects and their qualitative gradation; 2) comparison between their own sizes (compare: knee-high grass, the bush of my size) and their use as a means of measure (cubit, arshin, foot, inch); 3) measurement with the help of expedients (a glass of sugar, a bucket of water) (Ryabtseva, 2005, pp. 126-127).

Therefore the study of means of quantity expression in practical sense invariably leads researchers to linguistic units (words or constructions), which represent an approximate amount of solid, liquid or gas substances. An inaccurate evaluation of quantity is applicable for both specific objects and substances and for the phenomena of material and mental spheres expressed with the help of abstract nouns (see Zhukova, 2014). This article deals with the lexemes representing an inexact measure of liquids in the Russian and in the English languages.

2. Research Design

A comparative analysis of the Russian and English dictionaries (Ozhegov & Shvedova, 1999; Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 2002; Bol'shoj anglo-russkiy slovar' ABBYY Lingvo, 2011), as well as the Russian National Corpus (Natsionalnyj korpus russkogo jazyka) and the British National Corpus demonstrates that the Russian lexeme verbalizing the inexact measure corresponds to more than one English lexeme with the same meaning. This shows that the representatives of the Russian and English ethnicities had different perception of the world and estimated the quantitative side of objects using different words with the meanings of an inexact measure of liquids in their languages. On the other hand, a different number of cognitive classifiers in the minds of the Russian and English culture representatives and, correspondingly, a different number of lexemes to verbalize an inexact measure of liquids in Russian and English, cause definite problems when translating such words from Russian into English. What is more, there is no detailed analysis of semantics and combinability of the analysed lexemes in bilingual Russian-English dictionaries.

2.1. The peculiarities of semantics and co-occurrence of the lexeme "glotok" in the Russian language

The analysis of the examples taken from the Russian National Corpus (RNC) enabled to define the peculiarities of semantics and co-occurrence of the lexeme "glotok" in the Russian language. For example:

- (1) *Ja sam ne uveren, po tomu li adresu obratilsja, - ovetil Maxim i vnov' otpil **glotok vodki**, zakuril* (RNC). (Literally: "I am not sure myself whether I addressed the right person", Maxim answered and took a **swallow of vodka**, and started smoking).
- (2) *Predstavljaesh', ja sizhu pered kaminom, **glotok viski**, chitaju Bomarshe i podbrasyvaju poleshki, a?* (RNC). (Literally: Imagine, I am sitting in front of the fireplace, **with a glass** of whiskey, reading Bomarshe and throwing up logs, huh?).
- (3) *No i gostja ne zabyval, - kosil na menja glazom. Ja otpil **glotok piva*** (RNC). (Literally: But he didn't forget about the guest too – he looked at me asquint. I took a **sip of beer**).
- (4) *Guby u nejo dejstvitel'no peresohli, ona zahotela vypit' **glotok vody**, no stakan byl pust* (RNC). (Literally: Her lips really dried up, she wished for a **drink of water**, but the glass was empty).
- (5) *Varvara vytjanula iz stakana poslednij **glotok soka**, dlja chego ej prishlos' zakinut' golovu sovsem vysoko...* (RNC). (Literally: Varvara took the last **drop of juice**, for what she had to lift her head high up).

The examples illustrate that the lexeme "glotok" may be combined with the nouns representing both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

The lexeme "glotok" can go together with some adjectives determining the size of a sip and therefore expresses a more precise volume of liquid. For example:

- (6) *On sdelał eshchjo odin **malen'kij glotok**, potom zadumchivo posmotrel skvoz' konjak na svet lampy* (RNC). (Literally: He made another **small sip**, and then thoughtfully looked through a glass of brandy at the light of the lamp).

- (7) *Vsjakij raz, kogda ego trevozhnaja mysl' podhodila k etomu mestu, on otkryval svoj portfel' i delal bol'shoj glotok iz fljagi* (RNC). (Literally: Every time his uneasy thought came to this point he opened his suitcase and took **a big swallow** from the flask).
- (8) – *Andrjuha delal smachnyj glotok dorogogo viski, zatjagivalsja terpkoy sigarkoj i prjamodushno spljovyval* (RNC). (Literally: Andrew made **a fruity gulp** of expensive whiskey, pulled at a harsh cigar and spat in an open-minded manner).
- (9) – *Ona tozhe boitsja, vsja drozhit, – rassudil dedushka i sdela melkij glotok* (RNC). (Literally: “She is afraid too, she is shivering”, considered grandfather and made **a small sip**).

There are several examples above with the adjectives “malen’kij”, “melkij”, “smachnyj”, “bol’shoj” and their synonyms that are used for showing the size of a sip in Russian.

In addition to the word collocations there is an individual diminutive lexeme “*glotochek*” formed with the help of a derivational suffix to express the meaning of “malen’kij glotok” in the Russian language. For example:

- (10) *Obradovannyj Andrej Nikolaevich bystren'ko prigotovil ljubimyj napitok, otpil glotochek, voshitilsja* (RNC). (Literally: Andrej Nikolaevich cheered up, he made quickly his favorite drink, took **a thimbleful**, and became delighted).
- (11) *Lish na donyshke ostalsja odin glotochek vody* (RNC). (Literally: Only at the bottom there was one **drop of water** left).

There is no specific lexeme in Russian to represent the meaning of “bol’shoj glotok (a big, large sip)”. The word collocations consisting of the lexeme “*glotok*” and adjectives with the meaning “bol’shoj (big, large)” are used in this case (7, 8).

As seen from the examples above (1-11) the lexeme “*glotok*” is used for expressing an inexact measure of liquids. The analysis of the Russian National Corpus shows that this lexeme can act as an adverbial modifier of manner demonstrating the way of drinking. For example:

- (12) *Starik melkimi glotkami pjot vtoruju porciju i, vypiv, otkidyvaetsja na podushki* (RNC). (Literally: The old man drinks the second portion **in small sips** and afterwards leans back against the pillows).
- (13) *Sasha dopil odnim glotkom chaj i vyshel na ulicu* (RNC). (Literally: Sasha **drank** his tea **in a gulp** and went outside).
- (14) *On opjat napolnil stakan i osushil ego v dva glotka* (RNC). (Literally: He filled up a glass again and emptied it **in two gulps**).
- (15) *Ja ne vyderzhal i srochno sdela sebe vtoruju kruzhu kofe. Vypil ejo bol'shimi zhadnymi glotkami* (RNC). (Literally: I couldn’t withstand and immediately made myself a second cup of coffee. I drank it **in greedy swallows**).

In this case the adjective “melkij” and the numeral “odin” indicate not the amount of the liquid people drank, but they characterize the manner of action, how the process of drinking proceeded.

It is worth emphasizing that the lexeme “*glotok*” may be used in a figurative meaning. For example:

- (16) *Etot film – kak glotok svezhego vozduha, kak etalon dobroty* (RNC). (Literally: This film is like **a gulp of fresh air**, like a standard of kindness).
- (17) *S odnoj storony, on dolzhen byt' rad, chto uznik vyjdet iz zatochenija, snova hlebnjet glotok svobody* (RNC). (Literally: On the one hand he should be glad that the prisoner will come out from the confinement and will have **a gulp of freedom**).

The conducted analysis allowed to ascertain that the Russian lexeme “*glotok*” can be used to express:

- an inexact measure of a liquid regardless of its consistence and character;
- more precise amount of a liquid in a combination with adjectives;
- the function of an adverbial modifier of manner indicating the way of drinking.

It was found that the lexeme “*glotok*” may be used in a figurative meaning.

In the Russian language there is a specific lexeme “*glotochek*” to represent the meaning of “malen’kij glotok (a little, tiny sip)”.

2.2. The lexemes verbalizing an inexact measure of liquids in the English language

The analysis of the examples of imaginative and journalistic literature from the British National Corpus (BNC) allowed to consider the peculiarities of the use of the lexemes expressing an inexact measure of liquid in the English language. For example:

- (18) Connor took a long **swig of beer** (glotok piva) and wiped his mouth before replying (BNC).
- (19) Yanto took a long **swig of cider** (glotok sidra), then closed his eyes and leaned back against the tree trunk with a sign of contentment (BNC).
- (20) I took a **swig of wine** (glotok vina) and collapsed on to the bed fully dressed (BNC).

As seen from the examples taken from the British National Corpus, the lexeme “swig” is used exceptionally with nouns expressing alcoholic beverages.

The examples with lexemes “swallow” and “drop” should be also examined:

- (21) He took a large **swallow of pastis** (glotok pastisa), and looked at his watch pointedly (BNC).
- (22) He put the phone down, intending to call again, and stretched out on the bed with the last **swallow of his bourbon** (glotok burbona) (BNC).
- (23) The Koran tells me never to drink a **drop of wine** (glotok vina) (BNC).
- (24) When we are rehearsing and recording he never touches a **drop of alcohol** (glotok alkogolja) (BNC).

The analysis of the examples from the British National Corpus enables to draw a conclusion that the lexemes “drop” and “swallow” are more frequently used with nouns expressing alcoholic drinks. Nevertheless, the examples with the noun “water” for the lexeme “drop” were found out, but they occur less frequently. For example:

- (25) When it reaches the bottom, it enters a small **drop of water** (glotok vody) that has been secreted by the surrounding tissues of the cone (BNC).

The research proved that the lexemes “sip”, “suck” and “drink” have a wider combinability and are used with nouns expressing alcohol drinks as well as soft drinks. For example:

- (26) He took a **sip of wine** (glotok vina) and then withdrew a small folded sheet of paper from inside the back cover of the phrase book (BNC).
- (27) He tried a **sip of tea** (glotok chaja) and winced as the hot liquid scalded his tongue (BNC).
- (28) He took a **suck of juice** (glotok soka) and continued his story (BNC).
- (29) Sitting in the dining room, Jack had a **suck of brandy** (glotok brendi) from his glass (BNC).
- (30) I wouldn't ask him for a **drink of water** (glotok vody) if I were dying of thirst (BNC).
- (31) Kenneth grinned, took a **drink of his whisky and water** (glotok viski i vody) (BNC).

As seen from examples 18-31, in English the noun verbalizing a liquid substance, with which one or another lexeme expressing the meaning of “glotok” is combined, defines the choice of the lexeme with the meaning “glotok”.

The analysis of the material from the British National Corpus showed that the English lexemes with the meaning “glotok” can be combined with the adjectives specifying the size of the sip. For example:

- (32) Let me give you a **little drop of scotch** (malen'kij glotok skotcha) (BNC).
- (33) He took a **large sip of his sherry** (bol'shoj glotok heresa) and refused the soup (BNC).
- (34) Thiercelin took a **tiny sip** (malen'kij glotok) and replaced his glass on the corner of the dressing-table (BNC).
- (35) Colonel Windsor refilled it, and Tubby took a **large swallow** (bol'shoj glotok) before gathering himself together to reply (BNC).
- (36) I tipped it into my mouth, a **long swallow** (bol'shoj glotok) felt it burn fiercely all the way down (BNC).
- (37) He took a **deep swallow** (bol'shoj glotok) and closed his eyes as the liquid burned its way down (BNC).
- (38) She took a **long drink** (bol'shoj glotok) of her tea and then continued, ‘Anyway, she'll go before long, never fear (BNC).
- (39) Hans raised his eyebrows, then took a **deep swig** (bol'shoj glotok) of the brandy (BNC).
- (40) I picked up the bottle beside me and took another **long swig** (bol'shoj glotok) (BNC).

The examples above demonstrate combinations of nouns and adjectives. These combinations are generally more fixed and closed in English. They are used as syntactic patterns to express the meanings of “bol'shoj glotok (a big, large sip)” and “malen'kij glotok (a little, tiny sip)”. The examples also illustrate that these adjectives may

concretize the size of a sip expressed with the help of lexemes “sip”, “swallow”, “drop”, “swig”.

This category of word combination “noun + adjective” frequently used in English embraces a lot of examples of collocations with the meanings of “big (little) sip (drop, swallow, swig)”.

There is a freestanding lexeme “*thimbleful*” used to express the meaning of “little sip (drop, swallow, swig)” in the English language. This lexeme corresponds to the Russian lexeme “*glotochek*”, and it may be used with nouns representing any liquid in the same way as the Russian lexeme. For example:

(41) *With the usual peasant hospitality they offered me a little saucer of quince jam and a thimbleful of raki (glotochek raki) as well as the glass of cistern water I requested (BNC).*

(42) *She accepted a thimbleful (glotochek) reluctantly; today had to be clear-head day (BNC).*

In English there is a separate lexeme “*gulp*” to express the meaning “*bol’shoj glotok* (a big, large sip)”. It can be used with nouns verbalizing different kinds of liquids. For example:

(43) *I took a gulp (bol’shoj glotok) of beer (BNC).*

(44) *I was still wide awake an hour later so took a gulp (bol’shoj glotok) of wine to help me sleep (BNC).*

It should be emphasized that the lexemes with the meaning “*glotok*” in the English language may express not only an inexact measure of liquid but they can also be used as an adverbial modifier of manner describing the way of drinking. For example:

(45) *A large mug of tea vanished in a single gulp (zalpom; odnim glotkom), then the man and woman moved out of sight (www.macmillandictionary.com).*

(46) *He snatched her glass of rum and drank it in one gulp (odnim glotkom) (BNC).*

(47) *He lifted his glass to his lips, draining it at a gulp (zalpom) (BNC).*

(48) *Thought you'd never stop gassing,' growled Billy and downed a third of his pint in one swallow (odnim glotkom) (BNC).*

(49) *We drank in long, greedy swallows (bol’shimi, zhadnymi glotkami) (www.oxforddictionaries.com).*

Consequently, the analysis revealed that the lexemes “*gulp*” and “*swallow*” may be used as an adverbial modifier of manner. Other English lexemes with the meaning “*glotok*” analysed are not used in this function.

It is worth emphasizing that solely the lexeme “*gulp*” is used for expressing a figurative meaning. For example:

(50) *I took a gulp of air (glotok vozduha) and pushed him off (BNC).*

(51) *Then, taking a gulp of air (glotok vozduha), she leaned into the car and pressed his eyelids shut with the forefinger and thumb of her right hand, shuddering as the icy coldness of his flesh communicated itself to her (www.dictionary.cambridge.com).*

In this paper much of the discussion assumes the general conclusions about the correspondence between the English lexeme “*sip*” and the Russian lexeme “*glotok*”, because they can express an inexact measure of any kind of liquids regardless of their consistence and character, act as adverbial modifiers of manner and can be used with the adjectives specifying the size of “*glotok*”. However, in contrast to the corresponding Russian lexeme the English lexeme “*sip*” is not used in a figurative meaning.

3. Conclusion

The contrastive and comparative analyses of the peculiarities of semantics and co-occurrence of the Russian lexeme “*glotok*” and a lexical group with the same meaning in English (ref. 1-51) attempts to suggest some strategies of translation of the Russian lexemes into the English language:

The lexeme “*glotok*” is translated into English as:

- the lexemes “*sip*” and “*suck*” – to verbalize an inexact measure of any liquids regardless of their composition and character;
- the lexeme “*drink*” – to render an inaccurate measure of water;
- the lexemes “*drop*” and “*swallow*” – to express an inexact measure of alcohol and water;
- the lexeme “*swig*” – to represent an inexact measure of alcoholic beverages;

The lexeme “*glotok*” in combination with the adjectives expressing the meaning of “*bol’shoj (big, large)*” is translated into English as:

- an individual lexeme “*gulp*” that collocates with the nouns verbalizing different kinds of liquids;

- the lexemes “*drink*”, “*swallow*”, “*sip*” and “*drop*” with the adjectives representing the meaning of “*bol’shoj*” (“*long*”, “*deep*”, “*large*”).

The lexeme “*glotochek*” is translated into English as:

- a separate lexeme “*thimbleful*” that is used with nouns verbalizing different kinds of liquids;
- the lexemes “*drink*”, “*swallow*”, “*sip*” and “*drop*” in combination with adjectives “*small*”, “*little*” etc.

The lexeme “*glotok*” as an adverbial modifier of manner is translated into English as the lexemes “*gulp*” and “*swallow*”. The quantitative analysis showed the higher frequency of usage of the lexeme “*gulp*” in this function.

The lexeme “*glotok*” in a figurative meaning is translated into English as the lexeme “*gulp*”.

Translating the word “*glotok*” is a difficult task. The problem for the translator is that there are differences in the representation of lexemes meaning an inexact measure of liquid in the compared languages. It should be taken into consideration that the suggested translation strategies involve a detailed analysis of the context and the revealed semantics of lexical items. Moreover, co-occurrence of some important peculiarities of these lexemes should be also accounted.

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