Blog on Socio-Political Vocabulary as a New Reference Tool

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to define the socio-political vocabulary, its peculiarities and lexicographic ways of its registration. On the basis of the previous lexicographic analysis of Russian and foreign dictionaries registering words of socio-political sphere (of over 40 reference books, monolingual (Russian and English) and bilingual (English-Russian) the general tendencies and traditions of such description are stated. The Russian user's survey proved the demand in bilingual dictionary of socio-political vocabulary with the Russian students learning English. The blog on such lexis will meet their requirements and expectations as it will provide the authentic texts in English and Russian, the vocabulary on the specified issue with detailed description (translation equivalent with additional comment on its semantics; cultural note; illustrative examples; collocations), message option and forum opportunities. The ideas are illustrated by examples. The blog is easily accessible by the students and involves them in the process of creation and updating.

Keywords: Socio-Political Vocabulary; Blog as a reference tool; bilingual dictionary

1. Introduction: Definition of Socio-Political Vocabulary

Socio-political vocabulary (SPV) is rather diverse and covers numerous spheres of both everyday and professional life. It has been in the focus of our research for over ten years already. In our thesis the following definition of SPV was worked out: lexical units denoting events/facts/developments/phenomena of socio-political life which represent peculiarities of social society and are not be regarded, interpreted and evaluated by the members of different societies identically.

There are some features important for understanding the SPV:

- it is a culturally and ideologically meaningful lexicon; the notions *gunman* and *боевик* used in the same news context have different meanings and connotations in English- and Russian speaking societies;
- the ideology issue is important; it is understood beyond the political concept as a science/unity of ideas in a general sense and as a framework that is "assumed to specifically organize and monitor one form of socially shared mental representation, in other words, the organized evaluative beliefs — traditionally called 'attitudes' — shared by social groups" (van Dijk, 1996);
- evaluation aspect is essential since the language of politics, as W. Safire truly states in the prolegomenon of the updated and expanded edition of *Safire's Political Dictionary* (2008), "*is a lexicon of conflict and drama, of fulsome praise and fierce ridicule, of emotional pleading and intellectual persuasion. Color and bite permeate a language designed to rally support, to blast opposition, and to mold the minds of multitudes*";
-peculiarities of valued words are stipulated mostly by their functioning and lexical environment and not solely by the structure of the semantic meaning; socio-political lexis are very dynamic and much dependant on the lexical and grammatical environment;
- it denote numerous everyday and professional communication spheres and is wider than LSP of politics; some examples of the vocabulary: *Federal Security Service; aerial bombardment; bomb blast; breakaway republic; collapse; bailout; tax evasion; stimulus plan marginalised; E-coli outbreak;* etc.
- it is widely and commonly used in mass media.

2. Main Tendencies of Russian and Foreign Lexicographic Schools in Registering SPV

Over forty reliable Russian and English reference books registering words of political and social life, have been analyzed and the main tendencies of Russian and foreign lexicographic schools have been distinguished (Manik, 2010; 2011).

American and British dictionaries (mostly monolingual learner's dictionaries designed for college or University students and teachers of Political Science or for people interested in politics) rather serve as a guide to the rich technical language of political science and to the actual operations of the American/British political systems. Their great advantage seems to be the double function feature: to be a dictionary and a text book. On the one hand, terms are listed alphabetically or sometimes by subject matter and a detailed descriptive definition is provided. There is minimum or sometimes zero lexicographic labels (both linguistic and functional). On the other hand, each definition is usually followed by some additional information, like a statement of its historical and/or contemporary significance to American/British government and the citizen. There also may be some sections on important agencies, cases and

statutes, reference to the political document, etc. The registered vocabulary is depicted through historical, cultural and social events and it reflects hi-tech development and new scientific discoveries. The vocabulary includes only terms of political sphere (government structure, agencies, functions; elections; international activity and negotiations; etc.), with a great number of metaphoric expressions, elliptic constructions, allusions from the politicians' speeches, debates.

Russian dictionaries registering LSP of politics are different types of dictionaries, mostly bilingual, designed for students, interpreters, journalists and other people concerned with politics and political science. There exist reference books providing: narrative and detailed description of the notions in Russian with English equivalent in brackets, on the one hand; both linguistic information (grammar, collocations, functional label, etc.) and extra-linguistic data, on the other hand. The material covers different subject areas (social, economic, political, etc. life), thus the corpus is very rich in terminological units.

According to the Russian user's needs and expectations questionnaire poll there are certain information categories that they want to get in a dictionary (cultural note, collocations) and there's no bilingual dictionary meeting all the requirements.

It should be noted that the LSP of politics dictionaries contribute greatly to the user's understanding of the political life, the governmental structure, ways of governing the country, the powerbrokers' speeches (both explicit and implicit content), the news and Mass Media reports in general. That's why recently there've come out many political Russian dictionaries concerned with the explanation of the leading party policy, being pro-Putin editions, and opposing and criticizing the present head of the country and the ruling party (Manik, 2011). The detailed review and analysis was reported in the 18th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes, 2011.

3. LSP of Socio-Political Life in Educational Process: Idea of the Blog on SPV

It's a well-known fact that the command of the language is essential for effective communication and for carrying on useful analysis of basic problems. The latter is extremely important with the young generation to have a successful on-going community. And it may explain the learning-oriented approach of the lexicographers while compiling the LSP of politics dictionary.

LSP of politics dictionaries and LSP of socio-political life dictionaries are in the focus of the research. The latter register a wider vocabulary, add to political terms the business lexis, words of anti-terrorist movements, of ecology, medicine, social policy, etc. That's why they are of great help in the academic process when students are taught to follow the mass media reviews.

SPV is a significant part of the courses that the Russian students take up at the University because the Russian society is rather politically minded. Many people study English and follow both Russian and English-speaking news reviews, socialize and debate them in Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites. But they face many problems in understanding, translating and then discussing the news as, on the one hand, there are a lot of terminological words entering the news, and, on the other hand, there's cultural and ideological difference in the developments interpretation.

Since there's a problem with the reference book (English-Russian, Russian-English) to be recommended to the Russian students for the academic process there appeared an idea to create a blog being a new reference tool for Russian students studying English, in particular in practical classes of English in the English Philology Department, Ivanovo State University.

Last year there was an experimenting use of the class blog because it was believed that it would be an efficient way to communicate class expectations and to engage students in conversation with teachers/professors, with their fellow classmates, and with outside resources. The advantages of the blog allowed us to insist on, and track, 100 percent participation in course discussions, to provide links to timely articles and podcasts, and to invite experts into the conversation, all to create an environment where students not only experience the subject matter but also learn how to find credible sources for learning in the future.

The blog discussed is to be a textbook and a reference tool simultaneously. The students do need up-dated news reviews on particular topic/problem/event in Russian and English and also some bilingual glossary with the detailed comments on the meaning, usage, cultural notes and illustrations.

Traditionally the students are advised to work with the BBC News, CNN News and various Russian news agencies as they are expected to make a news review or a brief presentation on the breaking news or (inter)national development demonstrating their understanding and critical thinking abilities. The typical problems with the students are:
- lack of the vocabulary on the topic;
- misunderstanding or ignorance on the issues discussed (especially specific questions);
- consultation with only one source (either Russian or foreign).

The aim of the blog as a reference resource is: to facilitate learners in translating mass media reports from English into Russian and in understanding cultural and

ideological differences of the societies; to provide users with necessary SPV, its translation equivalents and required extra-linguistic information; to demonstrate illustration examples on the usage of SPV.

4. Structure of the Blog on SPV

The blog is structured according to the basic rules of social net blogs and theoretical rules of applied lexicography:

· Brief introduction indicating the aims, target users/readers, resources and explanation of the structure of every information block;

· Topic under discussion and some authentic texts in English and Russian, along with outlined words as essential vocabulary on the topic (there will be several topics like *the World Set Up; (Inter)National Organizations and Social Movements; Globalization and Integration Process; Social Problems of Today; Terrorism; Election Campaign; etc.* corresponding the currents developments in the world*)*. The texts/abstracts are selected according to the informational and vocabulary density. They are short and provide either the facts and statistics or the personal opinion of a politician/expert/powerbroker. Since they are edited, there is a reference on the original version for the students to be able to consult with it if necessary;

For example, there's a following text on terrorism:

Police probing a ***deadly blast*** outside the Delhi High Court on Wednesday have released two sketches based on descriptions of suspects from eyewitnesses and they are focused on leads that an Islamic ***extremist group carried out the attack***.

At least 11 people were killed Wednesday after a bomb inside a briefcase went off outside the Delhi High Court, India's home minister told lawmakers. The home minister's website said another 76 people were injured and officials fear ***the death toll*** will rise. It was the second explosion outside the court complex in four months.

"This is ***a cowardly act*** and we will never succumb to the pressure of terrorists," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said during a visit to Bangladesh. (New Delhi (CNN))

(http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/09/07/india.court.blast/index.html)

· Detailed entries of the words and word combination outlined in the text with the following information categories:

- additional comment on the lexical meaning of the key word within the definition/translation equivalent, in brackets, to explain the semantics of the notion and show the difference (if any) between the English and Russian concepts;

- cultural information in a separate paragraph as it turns out to be of vital importance in interpreting and understanding a word/word combination. It is essential in a bilingual dictionary as the translation stipulates the replacement of a source language word by a

target word in the translation language and its culture. This definition is worth mentioning, especially within the context of the dictionary of the socio-political vocabulary. We mean the translation of the ideologically coloured lexis reflecting the ideas and attitude to this phenomenon of the given society. Besides, it can be called an element of the *background knowledge* or *языковая компетенция* and it contributes to the success/failure of the translation/communication;

- illustrative verbal example carrying out a big notion explanation through the context of the entrée usage;

- collocations: the words and word combinations close in the meaning and used in similar contexts.

This approach's been worked out and described in our previous works in regards to a model dictionary of Socio-Political Vocabulary (Manik, 2001; Manik, 2010).

For example, the entry on ***deadly blast***:

This word combination is not registered in the English-Russian dictionaries, but the word combination *bomb blast* is usually translated as *взрывная волна (blast wave, explosion wave)*, though there's an entry *blast (=explosion)*.

Deadly blast – смертоносный взрыв (используется вместо *bomb blast,* чтобы подчеркнуть масштабность и трагические последствия взрыва)

(killing/dead explosion (used instead of bomb blast to underline the dimensions and tragic consequences of the explosion)

Interesting (!) (=cultural data)

Это словосочетание используется в связи с различными террористическими актами, когда от взрыва заложенной в общественном месте бомбы погибает много людей. Наиболее широкое применение получило после событий в Москве летом 1999 г., тогда в результате взрыва в переходе погибло около 300 человек.

(*This word combination is used while talking about various terrorist act, when a lot of people are injured and killed by the explosion of a bomb in the public place. It entered the active and wide use after the Moscow summer events of 1999 when over 300 people died of the underground passageway explosion).*

Illustrative examples

A bomb blast has rocked the Indian capital, New Delhi, killing nine and injuring at least 65 outside the city's High Court.The Harkat-ul-Jihad terror group has taken responsibility for the attack (http://rt.com/news/new-delhi-blast-india-975/)

"Terrorist attack" condemned as *deadly blast* hits Ankara (http://www.euronews.net/2011/09/20/three-dead-in-ankara-explosion/)

Collocations

bomb explosion - *Взрыв бомбы.*

Deadly bomb blast - *смертоносный взрыв бомбы*

Deadly explosion – *смертельный взрыв*

Powerful blast – *сильный взрыв*
Car bomb blast – *взрыв бомбы, заложенной в машине*
Delhi bomb blast – *взрыв в Дели*
Taliban suicide blast – *взрыв от талиба террориста-смертника*
To plan bomb blast – *планировать взрыв бомбы.*
The blast kills a great number of people – *взрыв убивает огромное количество людей*

In our view such description is a crucial issue in bilingual socio-political terminology management. It allows to represent specialized concepts so as to provide the user with an adequate understanding of their meaning as well as sufficient knowledge of their cultural, ideological colouring and message, appropriate usage.

· Message option to provide personal attitude/addition to the entry described. The students are supposed to write and share their comments and opinions prior the lesson or after the discussion in class. It allows to involve the students in the academic process and in the work of a lexicographer, when (s)he learns how to describe a word, emphasize the usage notes, etc. Besides a teacher can be asked a question any time apart from the lesson.

· Forum section on the additional vocabulary on the given topic. There may come out interesting illustration and usage examples, or some new collocations, or other updating on the issue. Besides the blog format may attract the users from other educational establishments or some experts in the sphere.

The blog also possess some multimedia contents, which will be presented in the given way: an entry will have an integrated flash audio and video player. That feature allows users to watch and listen to a piece of speech, news, report, parliamentary debates, etc. connected with the topic under discussion.

5. Conclusion

The blog, used in the academic process, seems to be a new reference tool with a dictionary element. It is also important to note that it is just a tool and not the objective itself. Blogs are not for everyone or for all classes and need to be made an integral part of the course design. However, as noted by Trammell and Ferdig (2004), the use of blogs as a learning tool seems to be low-cost with high-returns. While more research needs to be done as to how blogs can more effectively be used, it is a given that technology will continue to influence learning

Our experiences in using classroom blogs have been overwhelmingly positive. While students' acceptance of technology in the classroom requires its perceived usefulness and ease of use, students do tend to learn best when they need information that they can put to use immediately. Blogs are an effective and efficient method of allowing students to access information as it is needed and to make connections between explicit knowledge from textbooks and tacit knowledge gained

as students see how others can and are using the knowledge being shared. Blogs also introduce students to online learning communities so they can access and evaluate information, and construct new learning paradigms for themselves. Finally, effectively modeling ways to use blogs as a teaching, learning and reference tool is a useful skill for the students to have as they embark on their journey of life-long learning.

The work on compiling a real bilingual dictionary of SPV is in progress and it will take some more time. But even now the students may use the data collected and processed and take part in the lexicographic process themselves.

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