

When a single word is enough: Norwegian compounds and their Russian counterparts*

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Abstract.

I undertake an empirical analysis of Norwegian compounds with special focus on those that correspond to single words in Russian that are not compounds. Although in many cases the Russian single words have the same meaning as the Norwegian compounds, we frequently encounter semantic shifts of two types, which I refer to as “hyponymy” and “metonymy”. I argue that hyponymy is the default option, but that metonymy is preferred for certain types of compounds, e.g. those where the head represents a part of the non-head (e.g. *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’) or the head denotes a quantity of the non-head (e.g. *melkedråpe* ‘drop of milk’). It is furthermore suggested that the choice between hyponymy and metonymy is motivated by the desire to minimize loss of information; while hyponymy normally involves a smaller loss of information, metonymy appears to minimize information loss for certain types of compounds. Finally, I relate my findings to the trade-off between informativeness and economy in language and hypothesize that this trade-off is treated differently in languages like Norwegian, where compounding is a central word-formation mechanism, and Russian, where compounding plays a more modest role in word-formation.

1. Introduction

Compounding is arguably the most important word-formation mechanism in Norwegian (Johannessen 2001), but Norwegian compounds do not necessarily correspond to compounds in Russian. As shown in (1), Russian compounds are only one out of five Russian constructions that serve as frequent counterparts to compounds in Norwegian:¹

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¹ Throughout the article, numbered examples of individual words are presented as follows. First, I give the Norwegian compound, then after a dash the corresponding word or construction in Russian, and finally an English gloss. In cases where a semantic shift occurs between Norwegian and Russian, English glosses are provided for both Norwegian compounds and their Russian counterparts.

- (1) a. Adjective + noun: *trehus – derevjannyj dom* ‘wooden house’, *skrivebord – pis’mennyj stol* ‘desk’, *gullfisk – zolotaja rybka* ‘goldfish’
 b. Noun + noun phrase in the genitive: *fysikklerer – učitel’ fiziki* ‘physics teacher’, *årstid – vremja goda* ‘season’, *sakkunnskap – znanie dela* ‘know-how’
 c. Noun + prepositional phrase: *studielån – kredit na učebu* ‘student loan’, *klaverspill – igra na pianino* ‘piano playing’, *gjestekammers – komnata dlja gostej* ‘guest room’
 d. Compound: *dampskip – paroxod* ‘steamboat’, *håndtrykk – rukopožatie* ‘handshake’, *blekksprut – os’minog* ‘octopus’
 e. Single word (not compound): *togstasjon – vokzal* ‘train station’, *kirkegård – kladbišče* ‘churchyard’, *fergemann – perevozčik* ‘ferryman’

In order to study the relationship between Norwegian compounds and their Russian counterparts empirically, I created a database from four works of fiction, two Norwegian novels with Russian translations and two Russian works with translations into Norwegian.² The database contains all Norwegian compound nouns and the corresponding Russian constructions in these texts, all in all 8,020 tokens representing 4,631 Norwegian lexemes and their Russian counterparts. The Norwegian entries in the database were lemmatized manually by using the alphabetizing function in the spreadsheet. Clearly, a database of this limited size involves certain problems. Since we are dealing with a small number of texts from one genre (fiction), it is obvious that the tendencies in my material do not necessarily reflect the situation in the language as a whole. Moreover, the data depend on the quality of a few translations; since translation is not an exact science, native speakers of Russian and Norwegian may in some cases prefer other solutions than those found in the translations under scrutiny in the present article. It would be conceivable to modify the dataset based on advice from native speakers, but I chose not to do this, because it would to some extent introduce an aspect of subjectivity to the study. In the future, I hope to be able to test the hypotheses advanced in the present study against a larger dataset that would be more representative of the Norwegian and Russian languages at large.

The three syntactic constructions in (1a-c) will be analyzed in a forthcoming publication (Nessel 2018), and I also hope to come back to Russian compounds, which as suggested by the examples in (1d) sometimes are parallel with the Norwegian compounds (e.g. *rukopožatie* where *ruka* = *hånd* and *požatie* = *trykk*), but sometimes are not as in *os’minog*. In the present study, I zoom in on the examples in (1e), where a Norwegian compound corresponds to a single word.³ Do the Russian single words have the same meaning as the Norwegian compounds? What kinds of semantic shifts are attested? Is the choice between these types of shift motivated? The goal of the present study is to provide at least preliminary answers to these questions.

I use the term “compound” about words whose stem consists of more than one stem (Johannessen 2001). Thus, *kirkegård* ‘cemetery, churchyard’ is a compound since its stem consists of the two stems *kirk(e)* ‘church’ and *gård* ‘yard’, and the same holds for *togstasjon* ‘train station’, where the stem consists of *tog* ‘train’ and *stasjon* ‘station’.

² The analyzed texts are Erlend Loe’s *Naiv super*, Herbjørg Wassmo’s *Dinas bok*, Andrej Kurkov’s *Piknik na l’du*, and Ludmila Ulickaja’s *Medea i eë deti*. The database is available in the Tromsø Repository of Language and Linguistics (TROLLing, <https://doi.org/10.18710/0U0KN2>).

³ Notice that the category of “single word” contains a number of borrowed nouns, such as *vokzal* ‘train station’ (from the English toponym *Vauxhall*, Vasmer 1976: s v. *vogzál*).

For the purposes of the present study, the term “single word” is used in a broad sense so as to cover all one-word solutions that are not compounds. Thus, in the relevant sense both words with monomorphemic stems such as *vokzal* ‘train station’ and words where the stem contains one or more derivational affixes such as *kladbišče* ‘cemetery, church yard’ are labeled “single words”. In my database there are 1,690 Norwegian compounds (lexemes) that correspond to a single word – about 36% of all lemmas in the database. In terms of tokens, the proportion of compounds corresponding to single words is even higher: about 46% (3,691 tokens). Clearly, we are dealing with a widespread phenomenon that deserves our attention as linguists.

The contribution of the present study can be summarized as follows. First, in section 2, I show that in many cases the Russian single word has the same meaning as the Norwegian compound, whether the Russian word packages the information in one morpheme (e.g. *togstasjon* – *vokzal* ‘railway station’) or uses a root and a derivational affix (e.g. *kirkegård* – *kladbišče* ‘cemetery, churchyard’). Second, in sections 3-5 it is demonstrated that there is often a semantic shift between the Norwegian compound and its Russian counterpart, and that the semantic shifts are of two main types that I refer to as “hyponymy” and “metonymy”. Importantly, these semantic shifts are attested both in Russian originals and translations from Norwegian. Third, in section 6 I argue that the choice between hyponymy and metonymy is motivated by the Norwegian compound, although the choice is not fully predictable. I furthermore advance the Information Preservation Hypothesis, according to which a principle governing the choice between hyponymy and metonymy is the desire to minimize the loss of information. Finally, I propose that the trade-off between informativeness and economy in language may be sensitive to word-formation; my findings suggest that languages like Norwegian, where compounding is central in word-formation, prioritize informativeness, while languages like Russian, where compounding is a less central word-formation mechanism, give economy a higher priority. The findings are summarized in section 7.

Before we turn to the analysis, two points need clarification. First, the present study is not intended primarily as a contribution to translation studies, although my database is excerpted from translated works of fiction. However, I hope my contribution to the contrastive study of Norwegian and Russian will be of interest for specialists in translation studies, as well as to linguists interested in Norwegian and Russian.

A second point relates to the languages under scrutiny. My analysis concerns Norwegian and Russian, but it is likely that (some of) the points I will make also apply to other Germanic languages, especially Danish and Swedish. My conclusions may also be relevant for Slavic languages other than Russian, but in the following I will limit myself to discussing Russian and Norwegian.

2. No semantic shift

The examples with no semantic shift between the Norwegian compound and the corresponding single word in Russian are of three basic morphological types:

- (2) a. Monomorphemic stem (root) in Russian: *verdensrom* – *kosmos* ‘cosmos’, *hakkespett* – *djatel* ‘woodpecker’, *motorvei* – *šosse* ‘highway’, and *barnebarn* – *vnuk* ‘grandchild’

- b. Prefixed stem in Russian: *inngang* – *vxod* ‘entrance’, *utlegg* – *rasxod* ‘expenditure’, *grålysning* – *rassvet* ‘dawn’, and *øyekast* – *vzgljad* ‘glance’
 c. Suffixed stem in Russian: *tyngdekraft* – *tjagotenie* ‘gravity’, *øyenvipp* – *resnica* ‘eyelash’, *nyperose* – *šipovnik* ‘dog rose’, and *lerketre* – *listvennica* ‘larch tree’

In addition, combinations of (2b) and (2c) occur, i.e. cases where the word corresponding to a Norwegian compound contains both prefixes and suffixes. Examples include *svirebror* – *sobutyl’nik* ‘drinking companion’ and *underklær* – *podštanniki* ‘underwear’.

A monomorphemic stem (root) in (2a) is the least interesting type in the sense that a second language learner or a translator simply has to know that the Russian equivalent of a Norwegian compound such as *motorvei* ‘highway’ happens to be *šosse* with a monomorphemic stem. There appear not to be any generalizations to be made about this type apart from the general fact that Norwegian compounds frequently correspond to single words in Russian, and that there are many borrowings in type (2a).

A generalization about the type in (2b) is that Norwegian compounds where the first part of the stem is a preposition frequently correspond to prefixed stems in Russian, e.g. *inngang* – *vxod* ‘entrance’ and *utlegg* – *rasxod* ‘expenditure’ in (2b).⁴ On the face of it, these Norwegian and Russian words seem to have entirely parallel structures. However, it makes sense to analyze the Norwegian words as compounds since elements such as *inn* and *ut* can function as independent words (cf. *gå inn* ‘go inside’ and *gå ut* ‘go outside’). Russian prefixes are also related to independent words (prepositions), but there may be differences both in form and meaning, so prefixes cannot be analyzed as prepositions. For instance, the prefix *vy-* corresponds semantically to the formally different preposition *iz* (*vyxod iz partii* ‘exit from the party’), while the prefix *pro-* ‘through’ (*proxodit’* ‘go through’) does not correspond semantically to the homophonous preposition *pro* ‘about’ (*govorit’ pro svoju žizn’* ‘talk about one’s life’). However, no matter what kind of structure one assumes for the relevant words, the generalization that Norwegian compounds with prepositions often correspond to prefixed words in Russian is potentially useful for second language learners and translators. I hasten to add that although the generalization seems to hold from Norwegian to Russian, it does not work as well the other way. As shown by examples such as *grålysning* – *rassvet* ‘dawn’ and *øyekast* – *vzgljad* ‘glance’ in (2b) many Russian prefixed nouns do not correspond to compounds with prepositions in Norwegian.

With regard to the suffixed stems in (2c), it does not seem feasible to state any general rules, insofar as a large number of suffixes with a variety of meanings are relevant. Here are just a few:

- (3) a. (Male) person: *-nik* (*mellommann* – *posrednik* ‘mediator’, *straff-fange* – *katoržnik* ‘convict’)
 b. Female person: *-ka*, *-nica* (*finnejente* – *loparka* ‘Sami girl’, *kunstnerdame* – *xudožnica* ‘female artist’)

⁴ I follow Faarlund et al. (1997: 412) and analyze *inn* and *ut* as prepositions instead of adverbs. I will not discuss this question since it is tangential to my study. I furthermore will not discuss whether words like *vxod* and *rasxod* contain a zero suffix. For critique of zero morphemes, the reader is referred to Anderson 1992, Nessel 1998 and references therein.

- c. Instrument: *-nik, -tel'* (*lærebok – učebnik* ‘textbook’, *lyddemper – glušitel'* ‘muffler’)
- d. Place: *-išče, -nik* (*kirkegård – kladbišče* ‘cemetery, churchyard’, *hønsesus – kurjatnik* ‘hen house’)
- e. Offspring: *-ėnok* (*ulvunge – volčonok* ‘wolf cub’)
- f. Nationality: *-anin* (*engelskmann – angličanin* ‘Englishman’)

Second language learners of Russian need to acquire the meanings of the relevant suffixes – and in addition learn that they frequently correspond to Norwegian compounds.

3. Semantic shift: Redundancy and information packaging

The cases discussed in the previous section involve “automatic” relationships in the sense that a second language learner or translator has no real choice when s/he wishes to express concepts such as ‘textbook’. This concept is conventionally expressed by means of a compound in Norwegian (*lærebok*), but not in Russian (*učebnik*). The examples we will be concerned with in the following, on the other hand, are “non-automatic” and involve semantic shifts insofar as the corresponding words in the two languages have different meanings. In the following sentence, for example, the Russian translator could have used *sadovyj stolik* as a precise equivalent of *hagebord* ‘garden table’, but has instead chosen to use the single word *stolik* ‘table’:⁵

- (4) Hun slengte de nakne leggene på **hagebordet** og plystret en melodi han ikke kjente. (Wassmo)
Dina zadrala golye nogi na **stolik** i načala nasvistyvat’ neznakomuju emu melodiju.
‘She put her naked legs on the (**garden**) **table** and started whistling a melody that was unfamiliar to him.’

Arguably, avoidance of redundancy could be the motivation for the choice of *stolik* instead of *sadovyj stolik*, since in the relevant context it is clear that the event takes place in a garden. Hence, it could be argued that including the epithet *sadovyj* ‘garden’ would be redundant. However, the use of single words is not limited to contexts with redundancy:

- (5) Den siste dagen i Bergen kom de forbi et **plankegjerde**, der det hang plakater av alle slag. (Wassmo)
V poslednij den’ svoego prebyvanija v Bergene oni proxodili mimo **zabora**, kotoryj pestrel vsevozmožnymi ob’’javlenijami i afišami.
‘On the last they of their stay in Bergen they walked by a (**board**) **fence**, where there were posters of all kinds.’

There is nothing in the context that would suggest that the relevant fence was made of boards, so redundancy avoidance cannot explain why the translator has chosen the

⁵ Throughout the article, the examples in numbered sentences are organized as follows. First the Norwegian sentence is given, then the corresponding Russian sentence from the database, and finally an English translation of my own. For the convenience of the reader, the name of the author of each example is given in parentheses, and the relevant word is boldfaced in all three languages.

single word *zabor* ‘fence’ as the counterpart of the more informative Norwegian compound *plankegjerde* ‘board fence’. Unfortunately, it is far from trivial to estimate how often redundancy avoidance is a possible explanation because it is difficult to operationalize what exactly should be counted redundant. However, the mere existence of examples like (5) shows that redundancy avoidance cannot be the whole story.

Examples (4) and (5) both involve a single word in the Russian translation of a more informative Norwegian compound. Do we have examples where a more informative Norwegian compound occurs in translations the other way, i.e. in texts translated from Russian into Norwegian? The data in Table 1 suggest that the answer is “yes”. The table shows the number of examples with single words involving a semantic shift (column 2), the total number of compounds (column 3) and the proportion of single words per compound in percent (column 4). As shown, the percentage is somewhat higher in texts originally written in Norwegian, but although a chi-square test indicates statistical significance, the effect size is below the threshold of what is considered reportable. I conclude that there is no robust difference between translations from Norwegian and Russian.⁶ The upshot of this is that the use of single words with semantic shift cannot be explained as a translation strategy alone, whereby translators would omit information when they translate Norwegian compounds into Russian. If this were the whole story, we would not expect semantic shifts of the relevant type in translations into Norwegian. Instead, I suggest that we are dealing with a difference in information packaging between the two languages. It seems that Russian texts in some cases give the readers less information, regardless of whether the text is originally written in Russian or translated into Russian from Norwegian. We return to information packaging in section 6. However, first we need to consider the two most important types of semantic shift – hyponymy and metonymy. This is the topic of the next two sections.

	# examples with shift	# compounds	% examples with shift
Norwegian originals	671	4,194	16.0%
Russian originals	390	3,826	10.2%

Table 1. Proportion of examples (tokens) with semantic shift in translations in both directions.

4. Semantic shift: Hyponymy

For the purposes of the present study it is sufficiently precise to say that a hyponym is a word that denotes a subtype of another word (but see e.g. Lyons 1977:291-295 and Cruse 1986:88-92 for discussion). Thus, in (4) *hagebord* ‘garden table’ is a hyponym of *bord* ‘table’ since a garden table is a type of table, and in (5) *plankegjerde* ‘board fence’ is a hyponym of *gjerde* ‘fence’ since a board fence is a type of fence. I will use the term “hyponym” to refer to superordinate terms such as *bord* and *gjerde*. What we

⁶ A chi-squared test ($X^2 = 45.155$, $df = 1$) gave $p\text{-value} = 1.8204e-11$, which indicates statistical significance. Cramer’s V-value = 0.071, which shows that the effect size is below the threshold for what is considered reportable (King & Minium 2008: 327–329).

see in (4) and (5) is that the Russian single word is semantically equivalent to the hypernym of the Norwegian compound since the Russian texts use *stolik* ‘table’ and *zabor* ‘fence’ instead of more precise terms. I will refer to this type of semantic shift as “hyponymy” – the relationship between a hyponym (the Norwegian compound) and a hypernym (the corresponding single word in Russian).

Hyponymy is by far the most common type of semantic shift in my database. Of the 1,061 Norwegian compounds (tokens) corresponding to a Russian single word with semantic shift, 592 (56%) involve hyponymy. Here are a few illustrative examples:

- (6) a. *vodkaflaske* ‘vodka bottle’ – *butylka* ‘bottle’
- b. *elvebredd* ‘river bank’ – *bereg* ‘bank’
- c. *kjøpmannsenke* ‘merchant’s widow’ – *vdova* ‘widow’
- d. *isbjørn* ‘polar bear’ – *medved* ‘bear’
- e. *felespiller* ‘fiddler’ – *paren* ‘guy’
- f. *farmor* ‘paternal grandmother’ – *babuška* ‘grandmother’

Examples (6a-d) show the most widespread pattern, whereby the Russian single word is the equivalent of the second part of the Norwegian compound, e.g. *flaske* ‘bottle’ in *vodkaflaske* ‘vodka bottle’. The second part determines the morphosyntactic properties (e.g. grammatical gender) of the compound as a whole and is therefore considered the head of the compound (Faarlund et al. 1997:61-63, see also Nettet 2016:93-95 for discussion). Accordingly, in (6a-d) we can say that we have “head-identical” hyponymy.

Examples (6e-f) illustrate the much less common pattern where hyponymy is not head-identical. In (6e), the Russian single word *paren* ‘guy’ does not correspond to the head *spiller* ‘player’ of the Norwegian compound *felespiller* ‘fiddler’. Instead the Russian word *paren* ‘guy’ is a semantically much more general term – but still a hypernym of *fiddler*. Kinship terms like the one in (6f) represent a special case. Russian does not have a simple term corresponding directly to *farmor* ‘paternal grandmother’, and instead we find the hypernym *babuška* ‘grandmother’, which is used about both paternal and maternal grandmothers.

In all the cases of hyponymy discussed so far, the Norwegian compound is the more specific term. While this is the most widespread pattern, there are also examples in my database where the Russian term is more specific than the corresponding Norwegian compound:

- (7) a. *brennevin* ‘hard liquor’ – *vodka* ‘vodka’
- b. *adelsmann* ‘nobleman’ – *graf* ‘count’
- c. *brikkespill* ‘board game’ – *šaxmaty* ‘chess’
- d. *barnebarn* ‘grandchild’ – *vnučka* ‘granddaughter’

Only 45 examples (tokens) are of the type in (7), whereas 547 tokens are of the type in (6), so it is clear that the general tendency is for a Norwegian term to be more specific than a corresponding single word in Russian.

5. Semantic shift: Metonymy

Metonymy can be defined as a cognitive process where a conceptual entity gives mental access to another conceptual entity within the same domain (Radden & Kövecses 1999:21). Some researchers find the notion of “domain” unclear, and instead define the relationship between the two conceptual entities in terms of contiguity (Peirsman & Geeraerts 2006).⁷ An example is *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’, for which the corresponding single word *cerkov* ‘church’ is attested in my database. The church floor and the church both belong to the spatial domain and there is a contiguity relation between them since the church floor is part of the church. Here are examples of five well attested types of metonymy in my database:

- (8) a. Part-whole: *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’ – *cerkov* ‘church’, *bjørkenever* ‘birch bark’ – *bereza* ‘birch’, *hesterygg* ‘horse’s back’ – *lošad* ‘horse’
 b. Quantity-quantified: *melkedråpe* ‘drop of milk’ – *moloko* ‘milk’, *pølsebit* ‘piece of sausage’ – *sardel’ka* ‘sausage’, *vedkubbe* ‘log of firewood’ – *drova* ‘firewood’
 c. Container-content: *vinglass* ‘wine glass’ – *vino* ‘wine’, *hermetikkboks* ‘can’ – *konservy* ‘canned goods’, *fraukjeller* ‘manure yard’ – *nečistoty* ‘dirt’
 d. Location-located: *ospeli* ‘hill with aspens’ – *osina* ‘aspen’, *krambodgutt* ‘shop assistant’ – *lavka* ‘shop’, *handelshus* ‘trade house’ – *torgovlja* ‘trade’
 e. Material-product: *glassdør* ‘glass door’ – *steklo* ‘glass’, *jernskrap* ‘scrap iron’ – *železo* ‘iron’, *keramikktting* ‘ceramic object’ – *keramika* ‘ceramics’
 f. Participant-relation: *seifiske* ‘pollock fishing’ – *sajda* ‘pollock’, *skjeggvekst* ‘beard growth’ – *boroda* ‘beard’, *syrinduft* ‘smell of lilac’ – *siren* ‘lilac’
 g. Adjacency: *kirkegård* ‘cemetery’ – *cerkov* ‘kirke’, *veikant* ‘edge of road’ – *doroga* ‘road’, *bekkefar* ‘creek bed’ – *ručej* ‘creek’
 h. Institution/location-animate: *hovedhus* ‘main building’ – *xozjain* ‘host, landlord’, *nabogård* ‘neighboring farm’ – *sosed* ‘neighbor’, *vitenskapsakademi* ‘academy of sciences’ – *akademik* ‘member of academy of sciences’
 i. Temporal metonymy: *bryllupsdag* ‘wedding day’ – *svad’ba* ‘wedding’, *dagslys* ‘daylight’ – *den* ‘day’, *uår* ‘year with crop failure’ – *neurožaj* ‘crop failure’

Peirsman and Geeraerts (2006:280) consider part-whole relations prototypical examples of metonymy, and in my database they are the most frequent type with 101 tokens. Closely related is the quantity-quantified type in (8b), which comprises 22 tokens in the database. Container-content, another classic example of metonymy, is represented by 30 examples. The categories of location-located and material-product contain 21 examples each, while participant-relation is more frequent with 49 tokens. For adjacency I have 28 tokens, for Institution/location-animate 14, and for temporal metonymy 19 tokens. In addition, there are several miscellaneous types of metonymy, so all in all I have 391 examples (tokens) of metonymy, which is considerably less than the 592 examples of hyponymy in the database.

As mentioned in the previous section, for hyponymy the typical pattern is that the Russian single word corresponds to the head (second part) of the Norwegian

⁷ It is worth mentioning that hyponymy is sometimes regarded as a type of metonymy (see e.g. Peirsman & Geeraerts 2006: 277). However, since in my database hyponymy is much more frequent than (any other type of) metonymy, it is useful to treat hyponymy as a separate category.

compound. For metonymy, the typical pattern is that the Russian word corresponds to the *non-head* (first part) of the compound. Thus, in (8a) *cerkov* ‘church’ is the Russian equivalent of *kirke* ‘church’ which is the non-head of the compound *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’. However, there are examples where this simple relationship is not in place. A case in point is *kjøkkenhage* ‘kitchen garden’ which is attested as the translation of *grjadka* ‘vegetable patch’. There is arguably a part-whole relationship between a vegetable patch and kitchen garden, but the Russian word is not an equivalent of the non-head *kjøkken* ‘kitchen’ of the Norwegian compound.

6. Hyponymy vs. metonymy: The Information Preservation Hypothesis

Is it possible to predict the choice between hyponymy and metonymy? Not fully, I will argue, but it is possible to state some generalizations. In particular, I will propose what I call the “Information Preservation Hypothesis”.

Since hyponymy is the most widespread pattern, my strategy will be to consider hyponymy the default that is chosen when there are no reasons to prefer metonymy. In other words, the challenge is to identify circumstances where metonymy is used despite the general preference of hyponymy.⁸

Let us first consider the part-whole metonymies illustrated in (8a) above. Here we are dealing with a type of compound where the head is a part of the non-head. For instance, *golv* ‘floor’, which is the head of the compound *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’, is part of the non-head *kirke* ‘church’:

- (9) Han skulle stå på **kirkegolvet** side om side med denne Stine, lappetyende som hadde født en lausunge. (Wassmo)
 Emu pridetsja stojat’ v **cerkvi** bok o bok s ètoj loparskoj devkoj, kotoraja rodila nezakonnoogo rebenka.
 ‘He would have to stand on the **church floor**/in the **church** next to Stine, a Sami servant who had given birth to an illegitimate child.’

While it would be possible to render *kirkegolv* precisely in Russian, say, as *pol cerkvi*, the translator has avoided this more cumbersome option and preferred the simple *cerkov* ‘church’. The alternative strategy of hyponymy, which would yield *pol* ‘floor’ instead, would not be felicitous. Indeed, the point is not that the event in (8) is located on a floor. What is important is that the sentence describes something that the character in the novel would find objectionable in church. We can state the generalization for part-whole compounds that a single word corresponding to the non-head is frequently used in Russian.

As an illustration of this generalization, consider the two words *loftsgang* ‘corridor in the attic’ and *loftstrapp* ‘staircase leading to the attic’. In the former, the corridor is part of the attic, and since we are dealing with a part-whole relation, we would expect metonymy to be a viable option in Russian. This is borne out by the facts; in the

⁸ Notice that the term “default” is used in a number of different ways in linguistics (Fraser & Corbett 1997, Corbett 2006: 148). In the present study, the term has the meaning “normal case”, i.e. what applies when no blocking information is available.

Russian translation of Wassmo's novel *Dinas bok* we find *čerdak* 'attic'. In the case of *loftstrapp*, we are not dealing with a part-whole relation, since a staircase leading up to the attic is strictly speaking not part of the attic. Translating *loftstrapp* as *čerdak* would be misleading, and Wassmo's Russian translator instead uses *lestnica* 'staircase', which is an example of hyponymy, not metonymy.

Although the part-whole generalization represents a frequent pattern, we are not dealing with a categorical rule. A good illustration is *ffjelltopp* 'mountain peak', which in the Russian translation of Wassmo's novel is rendered as *veršina* 'peak' (hyponymy) twice and *gora* 'mountain' (metonymy) once. Both translations seem adequate since it is equally informative to refer to the topographical formation in question as a 'peak' and a 'mountain'.

The related type of quantity-quantified metonymy in (8b) also illustrates the relevance of informativeness. It would indeed be possible to use *kaplja* 'drop' as the Russian counterpart of *melkedråpe* 'drop of milk'. However, more important than the quantity is the quality, i.e. that we are dealing with milk, and accordingly we find *moloko* 'milk' corresponding to *melkedråpe* in the Russian translation of Wassmo's novel. It is worth mentioning that we find the same pattern in translations from Norwegian to Russian. For instance, in the Norwegian translation of Kurkov's *Piknik na l'du* we find the compound *snørdråpe* 'drop of snot' corresponding to *sopli* 'snot' in the Russian original.

Here is a general hypothesis that seeks to capture the importance of informativeness:

(10) Information Preservation Hypothesis:

When using a single word for a Norwegian compound, minimize the loss of information.

It is important to notice that although the hypothesis takes Norwegian compounds as its point of departure, it is not restricted to translations from Norwegian into Russian. As we have just seen, the same patterns are found in translations in both directions.

In this article, we have seen three strategies in action, all of which relate to the hypothesis in (10). If there is a single word in Russian with the same meaning as a Norwegian compound, such a word can be used with no loss of information, as we have seen in the section on no semantic shift (section 2). However, if for some reason a precise equivalent is not used, two strategies remain. As shown in section 3, hyponymy is the normal case. I suggest that this is because normally hyponymy (using a hypernym instead of a hyponym) involves a minimal loss of information. However, as we have seen in the present section, sometimes metonymy involves a smaller loss of information than hyponymy. Cases of this type include the part-whole and quantity-quantified relations explored above. Whether the approach can be extended to all types of metonymy explored in section 5 remains an open question that is beyond the scope of the present study and will be left for future research.

The hypothesis in (10) is based on translations in both directions between Norwegian and Russian. Does it apply to translated texts only, or is the hypothesis pointing us toward a more general relationship between information packaging and word-formation? I have stated the Information Preservation Hypothesis as an imperative to clarify that it is a subcase of the celebrated Gricean maxim of quantity:

“Make your contribution as informative as is required” (Grice 1975:45). The question now arises as to why informativeness is not always maximized. The answer may be that there is a trade-off between informativeness (the maxim of quantity) and economy (the maxim of manner: “Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)”, Grice 1975:46). In other words, strategies involving less information (hyponymy and metonymy) may be preferable if a precise equivalent would appear cumbersome or long-winded. While the trade-off between informativeness and economy is well-known, in the present context it is interesting to notice that the trade-off seems to be treated differently in different languages, as was alluded to in section 3 above. The finding of the present study that Norwegian compounds frequently correspond to less informative, but more economical single words in Russian suggests that languages like Norwegian where compounding is a central word-formation mechanism prioritize informativeness, while languages like Russian where compounding is less central may give higher priority to economy.⁹ This is a suggestion that deserves attention in future research.

7. Conclusions and questions for future research

The present study is an empirical investigation of Norwegian compounds that correspond to what I refer to as “single words” in Russian, i.e. single words that are not compounds. The following conclusions can be drawn. First, it has been shown that in some cases, the Russian single words have the same meaning as the corresponding compound in Norwegian, but that in many instances we have semantic shifts. Second, I have argued that hyponymy is the default type of semantic shift, but that metonymy is preferred for certain kinds of Norwegian compounds, in particular those where the head is a part of the non-head (e.g. *kirkegolv* ‘church floor’) and the head denotes a quantity of the non-head (e.g. *melkedråpe* ‘drop of milk’). Third, I have suggested that the choice between hyponymy and metonymy depends on information loss; hyponymy normally involves the loss of less information, but metonymy is preferred in those cases where it involves a smaller information loss than hyponymy. Finally, I have related my findings to the trade-off between informativeness and economy and hypothesized that this trade-off is treated differently in languages like Norwegian, where compounding is a central word-formation mechanism, and Russian, where compounding is less central in the word-formation.

A number of questions are left open for future research. First of all, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between metonymy and information loss in more detail: does the approach sketched in the present study extend to all types of metonymy? Second, the hypothesis that the trade-off between informativeness and economy works differently in Norwegian and Russian needs to be tested against a larger body of data. Finally, it would be interesting to find out to what extent the conclusions drawn in the present study apply to Germanic and Slavic languages in general, not just to

⁹ To say that compounding is a less central word-formation mechanism in Russian than Norwegian does not mean that compounding is unproductive in Russian. However, while compounding shows some degree of productivity in Russian, derivational prefixes and suffixes play a more central role in the word-formation. In Norwegian, on the other hand, compounding is ubiquitous, whereas derivational prefixes and suffixes are of more limited importance. For a more detailed comparison of compounding in Russian and Norwegian, see Nessel and Sokolova (to appear).

Norwegian and Russian. However, while future research may provide more definite answers, the present study strongly suggests that empirical investigations of Norwegian compounds and their Russian counterparts represent a fruitful endeavor.

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