[N[N]] compounds in Russian: A growing family of constructions

Vsevolod Kapatsinski and Cynthia M. Vakareliyska
University of Oregon

Abstract

Modern Russian contains a significant number of right-headed compounds modeled on Germanic [N[N]] compounds and containing recently borrowed English or German stems. The present article argues that these compounds are a family of partially lexically-specific constructions. Quantitative corpus data from the restricted semantic domain consisting of names of food/drink establishments support this claim by showing that the [N[N]] structure is specifically associated with certain head nouns. The article discusses the relationship between these and related constructions, and suggests motivations for the partial productivity of [N[N]] constructions in Russian.

Keywords: Russian; compounding; syntactic borrowing; Construction Grammar; abstractness; collocations

1. Theoretical background

Construction Grammar proposes that knowledge of morphosyntax is a constructicon, i.e., a network of constructions, which are form-meaning pairings of various levels of size and specificity (see in particular Goldberg 1995, chaps. 1-3). These include the morphemes, words, and abstract sentence structures of traditional grammar. Crucially, however, constructions also include structures that are only partially lexically-specific, as, for example, ‘NP verb-TNS his way PP’ (e.g., he elbowed his way through the crowd) where his way is specified, and this sort of construction could be considered the most common and basic construction type (Goldberg 1995: 17-21; Bybee & Eddington 2006: 328). Examples include not only multiword constructions, which Bybee & Eddington (2006: 328) refer to as “big words with moveable parts” but also meaningful sublexical units like morphemes (Goldberg 1995: 4; but cf. Bybee & Eddington 2006: 327, fn.4), such as the English past tense suffix -ed, which selects for a preceding verb and can be represented on the form level as ‘VERB-ed’. Words can be considered partially lexically-specific constructions as well, in that they select for other words in the environment: for example, the verb drive selects for a driver and a vehicle; the English indefinite article form an selects for an immediately following vowel-initial noun.

Specific constructions are often thought of as having priority in processing over less specific constructions. Langacker (1987) and Nesset (2008) take this idea to its logical extreme in asserting that a more specific constructions always wins competition for selection against a more abstract one. On the other hand, Ambridge et al. (2012) take a more nuanced approach, by which a more specific construction is likely to win the competition for production because of a better fit with the message, but a more abstract construction that is not a good cue to the content of the message may nonetheless be selected for production over the specific construction because of its

1 Our companion article, Vakareliyska et al. (submitted), focuses on the productivity of [N[N]] constructions in Bulgarian and, to some extent Polish, and proposes a reason for their general absence from the Baltic languages.

2 The following abbreviations are used in the paper: A='adjective', N='Noun', NP='Noun Phrase', P='Preposition', PP='Prepositional Phrase', TNS='tense', ADJ='adjectival suffix', MASC='Masculine gender', FEM='Feminine gender', NEUT='Neuter gender', SG='singular', NOM='Nominative case', GEN='Genitive case', INSTR='Instrumental case', PREP='Prepositional case', brackets indicate constituent structure.
higher frequency (see Kapatsinski 2009 for an example). Constructionist approaches to language acquisition tend to assume that abstract syntactic constructions are acquired through gradual generalization over memorized instances of utterances (e.g., Ambridge et al. 2012; Bod 2009; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Langacker 1987; Tomasello 2003) or, in the case of a late-learned, largely written construction like the one we examine here, over memorized instances of written expressions. In these models, partially lexically-specific constructions emerge naturally on the way to more general and fully abstract constructions. The processing literature suggests that these more specific constructions are not forgotten as more abstract structures develop (Bybee & McClelland 2005) and that they may even have processing advantages because of their closer correspondence to the intended message (Ambridge et al. 2012) or because retrieval of frequent structures is faster than composition (see, for example, the papers in Nooteboom et al. 2002).

Given that abstract constructions are derived through abstraction from memorized utterances (or, in the case of late-acquired constructions, written sentences), such constructions cannot be directly borrowed (Doğruoǧlu & Backus 2007, 2009). Instead, what is borrowed are specific instances of constructions, from which general patterns are then induced through the same process that results in abstract constructions in first language acquisition. This account of borrowing predicts that as more and more instances of an abstract syntactic construction are borrowed into a language, the borrowing language is likely to develop a syntactic construction that will be growing more abstract as further instances of it enter the language, are borrowed but that is nonetheless more specific than the one in the donor language.

We address this prediction in section three below, as it relates to nominal compounding, a type of syntactic structure that has grown in productivity recently in most of the Slavic languages, as a result of influence from Germanic languages, particularly English. Before we turn to this issue, however, in section two we introduce the \([\text{[N][N]}]\) construction and provide the evidence that the construction is growing in productivity under the influence of English: the new modifiers occurring in the construction are overwhelmingly recent borrowings from English. Section four discusses the possible grammatical and pragmatic reasons for the fact that the construction is growing in productivity; Section five examines the construction's relationship to earlier Russian constructions that likely have provided support for this increase in productivity.

2. Sources of modifiers and heads in Russian \([\text{[N][N]}]\)s: \([\text{N}_{\text{English}}|\text{N}_{\text{Russian}}]\)

\([\text{N}[\text{N}]]\) compounds are right-headed combinations of two nouns that themselves function as nouns. Russian \([\text{N}[\text{N}]]\)s are found in a number of semantic fields, including business (e.g., \textit{xolding kompanija} ‘holding company’\(^5\), \textit{piar-xod} ‘PR move’), politics and media (e.g. \textit{prezident-škola}, lit. ‘president school’ (a fictional institute for training presidential candidates), \textit{press-diskussija} ‘press discussion’, and \textit{Putin-šou}, lit. ‘Putin show’, a broadcast in which Vladimir Putin answers audience questions), music and entertainment (e.g. \textit{rok-kul'tura} ‘rock culture’, \textit{pank-greben} ‘punk ridge’ [of hair], \textit{kaver-versija} ‘cover version’, \textit{džaz-banda} ‘jazz band’, \textit{pop-tusovka} ‘pop insiders’, \textit{xit-parad} ‘hit parade’, \textit{lajting xudožnik} ‘lighting artist’\(^6\), new kinds of

---

A productive construction can be readily applied in production to produce new instances. Since we are only looking at new instances, growth in productivity is equivalent to growth in type frequency.

The double brackets here indicate the fact that the rightmost noun is the head of the compound: e.g., a \([\text{prezident-škola}]\) ‘president school’ in Russian is a kind of school, not a kind of president.

In Russian, \text{holding} is more commonly used on its own as a noun to mean ‘holding company’.

There is some variation in the Russian spelling of \([\text{N}[\text{N}]]\)s; hence the spellings of individual compounds are listed in Bukčina & Kalakuckaja’s 1998 dictionary. While they are normally spelled with a hyphen open spellings (as
 commercial establishments (e.g. tatu-biznes ‘tattoo business’, striptizklub ‘strip club’, ěskort-uslugi ‘escort service’), technology, computers and the Internet (e.g., IBM-sovmestivost (with ‘IBM’ here in Roman alphabet) ‘IBM compatibility’, sidi-vertka ‘CD player’, internet-magazin ‘Internet store’, web-priloženie ‘web application’, onlain-zavjaka ‘online application’), medicine and health (e.g., dans-terapija ‘dance therapy’), fashion (e.g., top-model ‘top model’),7 and sexuality (e.g., seks-bomba ‘sex bomb’, seks-men’sinstva ‘sexual orientation minorities’, or gey-propaganda ‘Gay propaganda’).

In addition to naming generic concepts, as in the examples above, [N[N]]’s are also commonly used as names for businesses and events, e.g., Žiraf-Šou ‘Giraffe Show’ (a circus performance), Art-Ovrag ‘Art Ravine’ (an artistic installation in a ravine), nogti-servis ‘Nail Service’ (a manicure salon), Švajz-Bank ‘Connection Bank’ Sad Servis ‘Garden Service’ (gardening supply center), Tonus-Klub ‘Tonus Club’ (an fitness club) and even Lipnja-Kovka ‘Lipnja Forge-Products’ (a metal crafts shop in the village of Lipnja), in which both nouns are native Russian words (see discussion below).8

In the vast majority of cases attested in dictionaries of new Russian words, the English head noun is replaced by a native equivalent, while the English modifier remains unchanged, without the addition of Russian adjectival and agreement suffixes. Instances in which the head noun is a recent English or other Western borrowing and the modifier is Russian (e.g., butylbol ‘bottleball’, bryk-dans (lit. ‘kick-dance’, word play on “breakdance”), xaljavstori ‘freebie story’, mentxauz ‘cop house’ (likely from German Haus) ) are rare both individually and as a class, and, based on our sample of dictionaries, are found only in youth slang: all these examples come from the 2004 dictionary of “substandard” Russian (Val’ter et al. 2004), and none is found in any of the dictionaries of media language (Beglova 2006, Katlinskaja 2008, Molokov & Kiselev 1996, Skljarevskaja et al. 1998). Some of these examples, including bryk-dans and butylbol, may in fact be not compounds but rather blends formed by playful analogy to existing words.

Another minor pattern is one in which both the modifier and the head noun are native Russian words, or at least non-recent borrowings from other languages, and not translations of English forms: e.g. babuškaotbojnik ‘car bumper’, lit. ‘grandma-bumper’; bomž-paket ‘Ramen noodles packet’, lit. ‘hobo-pack’; gopstop-komitet ‘street-robbber gang’, lit. ‘thug-stop committee’; gop-kompanija ‘thug company’; šaxid-taksi ‘unlicenced taxi’ (lit. ‘suicide-bomber taxi’); urd-patriot ‘for-show patriot’, lit. ‘hurrah patriot’, and the earlier-cited example Lipnja-kovka ‘Lipnja forgery’. This pattern, however, is restricted to slang and business names.9

---

7 On top as a head noun and as the first component of closed compounds in Bulgarian such as topadvokat ‘top lawyer’ and topgenčeto ‘top cop’, see, for example, Kolarova 2006: 78-79 and Vakareliyska et al. (submitted).
8 These examples are from businesses in Nižnij Novgorod, a major city of more than a million inhabitants four hundred kilometers east of Moscow (Žiraf-Šou, Nogti-Servis, Švajz-Bank), Vyksa, a small city of about sixty thousand (Art-Ovrag, Sad Servis) in the south of the Nižnij Novgorod region, and, in the case of Lipnja-Kovka, a village near Vyksa, suggesting that the construction has spread into the rural areas. They were collected by the first author by observing signs and advertisements on the streets.
9 A possible exception to this restriction is the pair of forms pravozaščitnik ‘human rights advocate’, lit. ‘right-defender’, and pravosoznanie ‘awareness of the law’, lit. ‘law consciousness’ (the Russian noun pravo means both ‘(legal) right’ and ‘law’). Both are older formations, attested in Ušakov (1989). However, they may actually have been formed using the older N-o-N construction: that is, the final Neut Nom Sg desinence -o of the first noun may be perceived as fulfilling the requirement for the Slavic -o- infix for compound words (e.g., anglo-russkij slovar’ ‘English-Russian dictionary’).
It is also possible to juxtapose two English nouns productively into a novel, Russian-only combination, but this pattern too appears to be largely restricted to youth slang, with all but the last two examples below appearing only in Val'ter et al.'s (2004) dictionary of “substandard” borrowings: gošoj ‘political march’, lit. ‘go show’; daunklub ‘boring meeting/event’, lit. ‘down club’; karmen ‘long-distance truck driver’ lit. ‘car man’; bjutimejker ‘stylist’, lit. ‘beauty maker’; tatumejker ‘tattoo artist’, lit. ‘tattoo maker’, xit-mejker ‘producer or writer of hits’ lit. ‘hit maker’; fak-sejšn ‘fuck session’; klipmejker, ‘creator of YouTube-type video clip’ lit. ‘clip maker’; brejn-ring ‘brain ring’ (a TV game show title).

3. Corpus study: Evidence for partial lexical specificity

So far we have spoken of “[N[N]]” as if it is a unitary entity. The aim of this section is to provide empirical evidence for the claim that, at least with respect to production, this is not the case, and that we should be speaking instead of a family of constructions, for which the term “[N[N]]” is the most abstract description.

A group of older borrowings serve as head nouns and license the use of the [N[N]] construction with Russian modifier nouns in the names of business establishments: these include bar ‘bar’, klub ‘club’, and servis ‘service’. The use of the Russian-English [N[N]] construction in establishment names is generally meant to convey a Western, cosmopolitan, urban cachet, which is deemed more important for some types of establishments than for others.10

In order to analyze the patterns of use of [N[N]]s in Russian establishment names, we extracted business establishment names from allcafe.info, a food/drink establishment directory for Moscow (N=5152) and St. Petersburg (N=6710), the only cities for which an extensive directory of more than a hundred business names is available. We restricted the sample to names that contained a head noun indicating the type of business,11 and excluded instances where the entire compound could have been borrowed from English (e.g., Rok klub ‘rock club’) and where the modifier was an established “prefixoid” according to Panov (1971), e.g., Aeroklub ‘aeroclub’. We also eliminated names that were intended to sound similar to an existing word or phrase for comedic effect (e.g., SamoBar ‘self-service bar’, lit. ‘self-bar’, which sounds like samovar (lit. ‘self-boil’)). This process left only instances of productive [N[N]] construction use with Russian modifier nouns, AN constructions, and [[N][N]-Gen] equivalents (e.g., Dom kukera ‘Cooker House’, lit. ‘House of the Cooker’; Oxotničij Klub ‘Hunter Club’, lit. ‘Hunters’-Adj Club’).

The results by head noun are shown in Table 1 below. Fisher exact tests show that the earlier-borrowed head nouns bar ‘bar’, klub ‘club’, and kafe ‘café’ attract [N[N]]s more than the etymologically Russian head noun dvor ‘yard, court’ does (Fisher exact test, p<.00001). Similarly, Germanic xaus ‘house’ and xoll ‘hall’, when borrowed into Russian, always occur as head nouns in [N[N]]s, while the Russian equivalents dom and zal never do (the difference in [N[N]] use rates is statistically reliable, Fisher exact test, p=.0000001).12 Thus, the [N[N]]

10 Note also the title of the leading newspaper Kommersant-Daily ‘Trader-Daily’, a blend of pre-Revolutionary spelling (Коммерсантъ with the obsolete word-final hard-consonant sign ъ) and Roman characters into an [N[N]] construction.

11 We included only compounds in which the head noun was part of the name and not a descriptor: e.g., Vyborg Bar and Vrungel’-Bar, but not Bar “Vyborg”.

12 Cf. also Kočubej Palas ‘Kochubei Palace’ vs. Dvorec knjazja Kočubeja (lit. ‘Palace of Prince Kochubei’) where the name of the establishment with the English head noun palace is an [N[N]], while the one with the Russian equivalent dvorec is a [[N][N]-Gen] construction.
construction in this domain appears to be restricted to certain head nouns, forming partially lexically-specific collocations (see Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003 and Colleman 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Counts and proportions of [N[N]] vs. non-[N[N]] equivalents from allcafe.info grouped by head noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[N[N]]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is some evidence (at least for establishment names) that the native Russian head nouns can actively repel the [N[N]] construction: the use of even established modifier nouns sounds awkward when used together with native Russian or earlier-borrowed head nouns as establishment names. For instance, ?džaz-zal ‘jazz hall’ and ?rokr-traktir ‘rock pub’ are awkward at best and unattested, whereas head nouns commonly associated with [N[N]]s can license the use of native modifier nouns, as in bard-kafe “Gnezdo Gluxarja” ‘Bard Café “Grouse nest”’ (lit. ‘Bard Café “Nest of the Grouse”’). While in the establishment name domain head nouns appear to have a stronger effect on [N[N]] use than modifier nouns, the borrowed modifier art ‘art’, which is perhaps even more well-established in Russian as a prefixoid, appears to be acceptable with any head noun, including native nouns and non-Western borrowings (e.g. attested art-čajxana ‘art teahouse’, art-kryša ‘art roof’, and art-ovrag ‘art ravine’).

4. Explaining the increase in productivity of [N\_{\text{English}}] [N\_{\text{Russian}}]

The loanblend strategy\(^{15}\) taken by native Russian speakers in adapting English compounds raises three questions. First, why do native Russian speakers, and native speakers of most other Slavic languages (see Vakareliyska et al., submitted), tend to translate the head noun instead of adopting the entire English phrase? Second, why do they tend not to translate the modifier? And finally, why do they not translate the entire English [N[N]] or replace it with a more established native construction? While in this paper we focus on Russian in particular, the explanations that we present here may apply also to other Slavic languages that have adopted the loanblend [N[N]] construction.

With regard to why native Slavic speakers avoid the English head nouns in English [N[N]]s, we suggest as the main reason the availability of native translation equivalents. As shown in many psycholinguistic studies (for example, Kroll & Stewart 1994, Talamas et al. 1999, Menenit, 2006, Dimitropuolou et al. 2011), low-proficiency L2 speakers automatically translate L2 nouns they encounter into the L1 whenever there is a translation equivalent in L1. Since English [N[N]’s are not typically borrowed and used by bilinguals highly proficient in English (English knowledge and exposure are still rather limited in the Slavic-speaking countries, and there is little direct language contact with native English-speaking communities there), English

13 ‘Bard music’ (bardovskaja muzyka) is a Russia-specific musical genre, Bard is a general term for a singer-songwriter, especially one who writes thought-provoking texts.
14 The first two are from allcafe.info; the last was found on street signs in Vyksa.
15 The term loanblend for something that is part-calque and part-loanword is introduced in Haugen (1950).
head nouns are thus very likely to be translated into the native language when they are first perceived by a borrowing speaker.\(^{16}\)

On the other hand, the English modifier noun often has no translation equivalent, but must be derived through productive morphophonological and morpho-orthographic processes rather than being retrieved from the lexicon. This process is made difficult by the multiplicity of competing alternatives that are similar in strength and lower in range of uses than the original English [N[N]] construction: these include the derivation of adjectives through attachment of the Slavic derivational suffixes -sk-, -ov-, or -n-, which are conditioned by semantic and phonological properties of noun bases in a complex non-deterministic manner; or the use of \([N](P)N\)-Oblique] constructions.\(^{17}\) Rather than engaging in a complex process of deriving a native form from the English modifier noun, it may be easier simply to borrow the English modifier form (see Kapatsinski 2010a, 2010b for data suggesting that Russian speakers stop nativizing recent borrowings specifically in situations where the native Russian grammar features multiple competing generalizations; see also Albright 2008 on a computational model that predicts gap formation, i.e., avoidance of both alternatives, specifically in cases when the alternatives are strong and equal competitors).

In some [N[N]]s, the use of the original English modifier noun with a Russian head noun can express a semantic relationship between the parts of the compound that is difficult to express by other constructions and also allows for some semantic non-compositionality (see discussion in Vakareliyska et al., submitted). For instance, a striphizklub ‘strip club’ is only loosely speaking a klub, which, unmodified, would mean a night club, and it is also not quite the same as klub so striphizom ‘club with stripping’, since the latter term would suggest that the business is a normal kind of club that happens to have stripping, rather than suggesting that stripping is the main attraction of the establishment. The [N[N]] construction Oxta Centr (‘Okhta Center’) the name of the new headquarters of the Russian gas monopoly GazProm, which is slated to be built in St.

\(^{16}\) A reviewer suggests that the reason why English head nouns are translated into Russian rather than borrowed may be that the head noun must be inflected so that the compound can be parsed syntactically, and while native Russian nouns contain the necessary inflectional morphemes to allow this, some English words resist inflection because they do not end in a consonant like most Russian masculine nouns or in a schwa or [a] like most Russian feminine nouns. We believe that the answer is more complex, however, because borrowed nouns that do not correspond morphophonemically to Russian nouns, like, for example, sou ‘show’, can in fact be borrowed if there is no existing Russian word perceived to be a translation equivalent and are simply left uninflected] Even verbs can be borrowed despite the need to assign them stem extensions and inflectional suffixes, e.g., ‘to book’ becomes bukat’ or bučit’ (Kapatsinski 2010b). The role for the availability of translation equivalents is also strongly suggested by the high rate of borrowing (as opposed to single-word codeswitching, as defined in Poplack, 2012) by Russian emigrants, who 1) may not as readily think of a translation equivalent due to lexical access issues (see Linck et al. 2009, for evidence that immersion in an L2 makes L1 lexical access harder), and 2) may be more sensitive to the semantic connotations of the English word that are not shared with the Russian near-synonym. In the US, one often hears Russian immigrants producing sentences consisting almost entirely of English words borrowed and morphophonologically adapted to Russian, as in Nastajuši mne dva paunda xèma, požalujsta. (‘Slice me two pounds of ham, please.’) instead of the Russian equivalent Nareže mne dva funga vetčiny, požalujsta (corresponding stems underlined). Note that the borrowed items here are fully morphophonologically adapted to the borrowing language, showing that they are true borrowings, and not code-switches into English (Poplack 2012); see also Budzhak-Jones (1998) for quantitative evidence for the dominance of borrowing over single-word codeswitching in Ukrainian-English bilinguals in Canada. Thus when translation equivalents become less available due to immersion in an L2 (Linck et al. 2009), Russian speakers show no aversion to borrowing nouns and adapting them to Russian morphophonology.

Petersburg, could instead be called Centr na Okte ‘Center at Okhta’ but the headquarters are not a center in the conventional meaning of the word, since the Russian term centr usually means a complex hosting multiple related businesses. Thus using the [N[N]] construction here allows avoidance of the interpretation that this is a usual business complex that happens to be located in the St. Petersburg district Okhta, and instead leaves open the possibility that this entity is not a center in the normal sense of the term. Similarly, the [N[N]] šaxid-taksi ‘unlicenced taxi’ (lit. ‘suicide-bomber taxi’) is presumably not a taxi used, driven or owned by actual suicide bombers, as the native constructions taksi šaxida ‘taxi (of a) suicide bomber-Gen’ or šaxidskoe taksi ‘suicide.bomber.ADJ.NEUT.SG.NOM taxi’ would suggest, but rather a taxi that one should not get into unless one is suicidal. As Booij (2009) points out for Dutch, a word can be used productively in a compound to mean something different from what it means independently. For instance, in Dutch, hoofd ‘head’ is used productively to mean ‘main’ in compounds (like hoofdbureau ‘main/head office’) but not outside of compounds. Similarly, the word kanker ‘cancer’ can serve as an intensifier in compounds, as in kanker-school ‘bloody school’. Thus embedding a noun into a compound sends the listener a signal that the noun may not be used in its default sense. A partially lexically-specific construction like Dutch [kanker[N]] can then be free to develop its own consistent meaning similar to that of kanker, but not necessarily identical to it.

In Russian, the [N[N]] construction also appears to have developed a distinct connotation: that is, it is not pragmatically synonymous with some other Russian construction (in accordance with the No Synonymy Principle, Goldberg 1995). The [N[N]] pattern appears to be perceived by Russians as urban, cosmopolitan and modern, as exemplified by its use in establishment names, as discussed above. One might also mention the lyrics by the country singer Igor Rasterjaev contrasting the authentic Russian villager to the not-quite-Russian city youth: naplevat' im na èmo-kul'turu ‘and they would spit on emo-culture’ (Rasterjaev, I. 2011, “Kombajnery”).

The [N[N]] pattern is not entirely new to native Russian speakers. In works specifically addressing the great influx of English [N[N]] ‘s, there is widespread agreement that the construction has a number of native precursors (documented by Reformatskij 1937, 1955, and Panov 1971). Thus, Petrušina (2010: 431) writes that “the rapid growth of compound neologisms with borrowed element, and their transfer into the category of everyday lexemes, is explained… [in part] by their basis in native Russian models of compound nouns” (our translation; see also Janurik 2010, Kim 2009, Marinova 2010).

5. The extended family: Related constructions

There are a number of somewhat established Russian constructions that on the surface look like [N[N]] ‘s. Panov (1971) groups them together into a class of analytic adjectives and mentions the following as productive (the boundaries between the classes are of course flexible and uncertain):

1) the native Russian modifier лже-‘false-', equivalent to ‘pseudo-' as in лженеваука ‘pseudoscience’, cf. лживый ‘lying’; these compounds are sometimes spelled with a dash like [N[N]] ‘s.

18 This point also finds support from the acceptability rating study by Patton (1999), who found that most established [N[N]]s are rated as perfectly acceptable by native speakers and are in fact more acceptable than AN or [N[N-Gen]] alternatives. [What does he mean by ‘established’?]
2) the native Russian modifiers čudo- ‘wonder’, as in čudo-маšina ‘wonder-car’, and gore-
‘grief’, as in gore-izobretatel’ ‘grief-inventor’ (one who constantly fails in his or her
attempts to invent something), which achieved popularity in the 1960s but have not
expanded beyond a few compound nouns (Panov 1971: 243; one might also mention
зверь-машина ‘beast machine’, a complimentary term for a vehicle).
pseudo- ‘pseudo’, press- ‘press’, and ěrzac- ‘ersatz’, which differ from the less fused
[N[N]] examples in that they are spelled as closed compounds without a hyphen (with the
exception of ěks- ‘ex-’ as in ěks-presidential. These may have been borrowed directly from
English as (separable) prefixoids, or they may have been generalized from borrowed
nouns that contained them.
4) clipped adjectives like elektro- ‘electro’, tele- ‘tele’, sport- ‘sport’ (from the adjective
sportivnyj), gor- ‘city’ (from adjective gorodskoj), and gos- ‘state’ (from adjective
gosudarstvennyj), which usually appear in closed compounds and differ from the
preceding category in having easily recoverable full adjectival forms. As Panov (1971:
246) mentions, the clipping process is productive and gives rise to many ad hoc
formations. New clipped-AN constructions are often hyphenated like [N[N]]s, e.g., blat-
literatura ‘criminal literature’, tanc-niva ‘dance field’.
5) classifiers derived from letter names or abbreviations, which cannot serve as input to
derivation, like gamma-izlučenie ‘gamma-radiation’, SKČ-dvigatel’ ‘SKC-engine’

Reformatskij (1955: 291) also mentions relatively isolated examples of earlier unambiguous
[N[N]]’s, including ěxo-variant ‘echo variant’; Nata-val’s Hama-вазьe ‘Nata [a woman’s name]
waltz’, a Tchaikovsky piece; and Tulaugol ‘Tula coal’. In these cases, the modifier nouns are
neuter (ěxo) or feminine (Nata, Tula) and can be distinguished from clipped adjectives in that
they bear Russian nominal nominative case markers (-o and -a), which never appear
immediately after the root in any adjectival form and therefore cannot occur in clipped
adjectives, which are derived by cutting off the end of a complete adjective 19 However,
masculine nouns (which usually have no overt nominative case marker) and clipped adjectives
are often indistinguishable. For example, sportkompleks ‘sport complex’ could be analyzed as
containing the noun sport or the clipped adjective sport- derived from the full form sportivnyj;
similarly, turagentstvo ‘tour agency’ could be interpreted as containing the noun tur ‘tour’ or the
(older) clipped adjective tur- ‘tourist.ADJ’, a conventional shortening of the full adjectival form
turističeskij. In these cases, we can speak of an ambiguity between clipped-AN and [N[N]]
constructions.20 The tricky question is whether the clipped-AN construction and the [N[N]]
construction are the same construction. The argument for treating them a single construction
is supported by common examples in which the modifier can be perceived as either a clipped
adjective or a borrowed uninflected noun, e.g., sport, discussed above; the fact that the two

---

19 -o and -a do appear on possessive adjectives, as in Maš.in.a tabletka'Masha's.FEM.SG.NOM
tablet.FEM.SG.NOM' vs. Maš.in drug'Masha's.MASC.SG.NOM friend,MASC.SG.NOM' but these cannot be
preserved after clipping, even if clipping were applied to a possessive adjective.
20 There are also cases where the clipped adjective and the corresponding noun are clearly distinct.
For instance, the clipped adjective raj- as in rajsovet 'regional administration' in the Soviet Union, derived from rajonnyj 'regional',
is not confusable with the corresponding noun rajon 'region'. These are all cases in which the clipped adjective is
shorter than the corresponding noun, as clipped adjectives are almost all monosyllabic even if the corresponding
nouns are longer. The English modifier nouns commonly used in the [N[N]] construction, like art, are also
commonly monosyllabic, which is yet another way in which they might fit into the clipped-AN construction.
constructions seem to be used in similar domains (including establishment names, technical vocabulary and urban slang); and their mostly similar connotations.

Moreover, both clipped adjective expressions and [N[N]’s often signal that the referent of the head noun is of a type familiar to both the speaker and the listener. Thus, one who cannot claim familiarity with the field of mathematical psychology would feel like an impostor referring to it as the clipped form matpsixologija. Conversely, using the clipped term to someone unfamiliar with the field would seem pretentious and distance the speaker from the listener by making it obvious that they belong to different social groups. Neither of these effects is produced if the full-adjective equivalent matematičeskaja psixologija is used. Likewise, someone who rarely uses the Internet might feel uncomfortable using terms like web-priloženie21 ‘web application’, and using such terms (as opposed to their non-[N[N]] equivalents) could impose a distance from a listener or reader who is unfamiliar with the Internet.

Does this then mean that clipped adjectives and [N[N]]s are the same construction, a single generalized pairing of form and meaning? While the data are consistent with this hypothesis, they can also be explained by a general property of language. That is, reduced expressions may signal that the speaker expects the expression to be familiar to the listener (Lindbloom 1990), and both clipped-ANs and [N[N]]s are reduced expressions. By using a clipped adjective, the speaker or writer generally assumes that the listener or reader can recover the meaning despite the reduced parseability of the adjective. This explanation is strongly supported by the fact that the familiarity connotation is generated only when the clipped-AN or [N[N]] expression has not been conventionalized as the dominant, or the only, way of referring to a particular concept. Thus, there is no familiarity connotation for established terms like kolksoz (‘collective farm’, from kollektivnoe.ADJ ‘collective’ + xozjajstva.N ‘agriculture’) or turagentstvo, names of organizations like Tulaugol’, [N[N]]s like biznesmen that have no alternative Russian forms, or terms with ‘prefixoids’ like auto-, video-, audio- or super-. These all are sufficiently conventionalized for the speaker or writer reasonably to expect any Russian listener or reader to understand them, and therefore they do not commonly lead to the creation of an in-group/out-group boundary.

One can argue, however, that the clipped-AN construction and the [N[N]] construction are distinct in that the former often has Soviet-era connotations, while the latter has a cosmopolitan, Western association. Thus, the clipped-AN gorzal (‘city hall’, from adjective gorodskoj ‘city’ + noun zal ‘hall’) sounds like a Soviet holdover, whereas Krokus Siti Xoll sounds cosmopolitan (and deliberately so; see Janurik 2005); cf. (1) where a modern profession denoted by an [N[N]] borrowed from English is contrasted with an obsolete profession denoted by a Soviet-era [N[N]] with a Russian head noun:

(1) Naval’nyj – živoj čelovek (ili sil’no na nego smaxivaet) i čelovek sovremennyj. Advokat, biznesmen, a ne stalinskij “part-org-rabotnik”.

Navalny is a live person (or highly resembles one) and a modern person. A lawyer and a businessman, rather than a Stalin-era “part[y]-org[anizational]-worker”. (L. Radzixovskij, 2011: http://echo.msk.ru/blog/radzihovski/827382-echo; our translation)

21 or web-priloženie, since web is commonly spelled in the Roman orthography
However, this difference in connotations can be plausibly attributed to the interaction between the structure of the expression and the individual stems that enter the structure, rather than to the construction per se. Thus the same [N[N]] structure with different head nouns can have radically different interpretations: the name *Tulaugol* (lit. ‘Tula coal’) sounds like an old organization left over from the Soviet era, while *Tulabar* (lit. ‘Tula bar’) sounds like a trendy new place. Generally, it appears that at least one stem of an [N[N]] must be foreign-sounding in order for it not to be interpreted as a *kanceljarit*, that is, a stuffy bureaucratism (unless one is striving for irony). The stem can be a modifier like *art-* or a head noun like *bar*. The interaction between stems and constructions is what creates the connotation of the particular [N[N]] with either Soviet bureaucracy or urban cool: neither can do so on its own. Neither is it sufficient to claim that the connotation is stored with constructions that are partially lexically-specific, like *N-bar* or *art-N* in that new head nouns and modifiers can readily enter the construction and are immediately interpretable as Soviet vs. pretend-Western based on the language they come from. If this is true, then the existence of a formally-similar linguistic precursor does not necessarily bode well for an incoming construction. The existence of clipped-AN’s and occasional native [N[N]]s like *Tulaugol* allow native Russian speakers to parse an English [N[N]]. However, the connotations of the existing older [N[N]]s in Russian limit the construction’s productivity: one would not want the name of one’s trendy night spot to conjure up the image of a workplace for Soviet-era bureaucrats. Thus the existence of precursor [N[N]]s with different connotations may well lead to an avoidance of forming novel [N[N]]s in which both nouns are established native words that existed before 1989.

This issue raises the question whether construction–word co-occurrence patterns like those documented in section three are a reflection of the partial lexical specificity of the construction, or of the semantic compatibility between the individual words and the abstract [N[N]] construction. Some studies (e.g., Ambridge et al. 2012; Goldberg 1995) argue that constructions place restrictions on the types of words that can occur in their “open” slots: that is, a slot is open to any word that meets its specifications. In other words, according to this argument, the classes of words that can enter a particular slot in a construction are prototype categories. Prototype categories can be defined using a set of weighted semantic and phonological features; no feature is necessarily present in all members of the category, but each feature provides information about whether a particular lexical item is in the category or not: that is, they are either typical of members or non-members (Hampton 1979; Langacker 1987; Rosch & Mervis 1975; for a review of the literature on prototypes, see Murphy 2002, chapters 2-3, or Taylor 1995, chapters 3-4).

However, there is evidence that constructions can also attract individual words and not just broader classes (Bybee & Eddington 2006; Colleman 2009; Lakoff 1987; Plaster & Polinsky 2010; Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003) — in other words, evidence that categories of words that combine with a construction are exemplar-based. Exemplar-based categories gain new members by comparing them to existing members. If a new member is very similar to some members of a category, even if they are not central members, and not very similar to members of other categories, it will enter the category that contains the members it resembles. Bybee & Eddington (2006) explicitly argue for this position. Looking at adjectives that co-occur with various Spanish verbs of becoming, they note that for many of the verbs, the co-occurring adjectives do not form semantically coherent classes. For example, the adjectives most commonly occurring in *quedarse* ADJ ‘become ADJ’ are *quieto* ‘calm’, *callado* ‘quiet’, *inmóvil* ‘immobile’, *dormido* ‘asleep’, and *sorprendido* ‘surprised’. Falling asleep is not necessarily perceived by native speakers as being similar to being surprised, although one can find metonymic links between
Verbeemen et al. (2007) experimental results for a variety of natural concepts support something in between these two extremes. Indeed, the data of the present paper are compatible with a variety of granularity levels. It could be that the [N[N]] construction simply specifies that its modifier nouns should be English-sounding, recent borrowings; it could be that specific modifier nouns act as attractors for similar nouns entering the construction. However, as Langacker (1987) pointed out in cautioning linguists against what he calls the Rule/List Fallacy, it is likely to be both: redundancy appears to be a design feature of mental representations allowing for robustness against damage and noise as well as allowing for faster processing, as multiple routes race to achieve the same output (see, for example, Izui & Pentland 1990; Rogers & McClelland 2004).

6. Conclusion

[N[N]] constructions with Germanic stems in Russian are a rapidly expanding family of constructions with older more established relatives like the clipped-AN construction. We suggest that members of the family include [art-[N]], [N[klub]], and [N[bar]], among many others, as well as the more general [N[N]] construction. [N[N]] constructions are expanding because of having acquired cosmopolitan, modern, urban connotations due to high type frequency in English. The new prestige of the [N[N]] pattern causes the construction(s) to be recruited in naming certain types of businesses. Head nouns are not borrowed, as the language contains pre-existing translation equivalents with compatible connotations. The expanding family thus recruits pre-existing head nouns with compatible connotations that become integrated into, and associated with, the construction, resulting in partial lexical specificity. We suggest that this process of lexical diffusion, rather than wholesale construction borrowing, is behind the current increase in the numbers of nominal compounds in Russian, and other Slavic languages. Examining the process of lexical diffusion and the resulting evolution of the meaning of the construction and the nouns that occur in it, as nouns with distinct semantics are ‘captured’ (e.g., Elvira 2011), is an important direction for future research.
References:


