

Weather nouns in French and Russian: from structural possibilities to semantic particularities

It is commonly admitted that weather nouns form a well-delimited semantic class characterized by a particular syntactic behavior (Ruwet 1990, Eriksen et al. 2010). Moreover, almost all weather nouns authorize properly atmospheric and metaphorical uses. The aim of our presentation is to verify the particularity of their syntactic and semantic behavior when they are accompanied by a complement in French and Russian. Our research is based on the empirical analysis of the use of ten weather nouns ('rain', 'drizzle', 'snow', 'hail', 'wind', 'fog', 'heat', 'thunder', 'lightning', 'storm') in two comparable corpora, i.e. the *Russian National Corpus* and *Frantext*. We will examine to what extent the specific behavior of weather nouns is language specific and can be linked to the structural possibilities available in a given language.

For the present study, we limited our investigation to one particular sub-construction in French, namely *un N_{weather} de N*, which authorizes both metaphorical and properly meteorological uses of weather nouns. Moreover, when appearing as N1, weather nouns allow almost the entire spectrum of interpretations available in this binominal construction (Bartning 1987, 1996, Flaux 1999, Strnadová 2010), next to some additional ones possible solely with this semantic class of nouns. Indeed, when the weather noun functions as the phrasal head, the complement can acquire a characterizing reading, as in (1), an intensive reading, as in (2), a mix of the two, as in (3), or even function as a sort of cognate object, as in (4), interpretation proper to weather nouns.

- (1) Un vent d'est, âpre et froid, soufflait. (G. Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, 1881)
'A wind from the East, harsh and cold, was blowing.'
- (2) Il faisait une chaleur de plomb [...]. (P. Fournel, *Besoin de vélo*, 2001)
'It was blazingly hot.'
- (3) Une pluie de déluge ! (E. Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*, 1843)
'A deluge rain !'
- (4) [...] ; tandis que, du centre du pouf, un jet colossal de fleurs montait, une gerbe de tiges parmi lesquelles retombaient des roses, des œillets [...] pareils à une pluie de gouttes éclatantes. (É. Zola, *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*, 1876)
[...] ; while, from the center of the footstool, a colossal jet of flowers went up, a spray of stems among which fell roses, carnations [...] like a rain of bright drops.'

When a weather noun functions as a complex determiner, it does not function as a mere quantifier but stays a qualifier, another exclusively weather-noun-particularity, emphasizing various facets of meaning inside a weather noun, such as manner of movement and intensity, as in (5), or its material characteristic, as in (6).

- (5) Maître Saval prit le balai [...] et se mit à frotter maladroitement le parquet en soulevant un ouragan de poussière. (G. de Maupassant, *Contes et nouvelles*, 1833)
Mr. Saval took the broom [...] and began to scrub the floor clumsily, raising a hurricane of dust.
- (6) A peine séchés, nos bras et nos jambes se couvraient d'un givre de sel fin. (Colette, *La Naissance du jour*, 1928)
'Barely dry, our arms and legs were covered with a frost of fine salt.'

In Russian, most weather nouns can be modified by three different morphological structures in which the weather noun always functions as a syntactic head: they can be followed by a noun in the genitive case, as in (7), by a prepositional phrase using the preposition *iz*+genitive, as in (8), and by an adjective, as in (9).

- (7) [...] puskaj na našej svad'be budet vertolët i puskaj on sbrosit na gostej celyj dožd' rozovyx kamelij. (RNC)
'[...] let there be a helicopter at our wedding and let it drop a rain of pink camellias on our guests.'
- (8) A požar vyzval dožd' iz pepla, na neskol'ko dnej pokryšij gorod gustym tumanom. (RNC)
'But the fire caused a rain of ashes, which enveloped the city with a dense fog for several days.'
- (9) Železnyj vixr' vyl vokrug blindaža, kosil vsë živoe [...]. (RNC)
'An iron whirlwind howled around the dugout, mowing down every living thing.'

Our data reveal language specific tendencies with respect to the frequency of weather nouns in different constructions, and their preference for properly meteorological and metaphorical uses.

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