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Ethnonyms “Rusin” and “Rusinian” in Russian Discourse: A Corpus Study

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Этнонимы «русин», «русинский» в русской речи: корпусное исследование

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The article focuses on the analysis of the different ways in which the ethnonyms “Rusin” and “Rusinian” are used in Russian discourse. The analysis, taken from the Russian National Corpus for the time span of the last 300 years, is used to discover typical contexts, discourses and genres in which these ethnonyms are found. The evidence is of correlated social and historical phenomena that concern the Rusins as an ethnic group.

The results have shown that Rusin ethnicity is represented in two ways: either as united with Russian ethnicity and its other neighbours or as opposed to the surrounding ethnicities. As a rule, this is manifested through an enumeration of ethnonyms that are either names of Slavic or non-Slavic ethnicities which are in territorial contact with the Rusins.

The heterogeneous character of the Rusin ethnicity is often highlighted in the context of self-determination relative to other ethnicities. At the same time, the contexts in the Russian National Corpus demonstrate the inner heterogeneity of the ethnicity and its division according to various social dimensions. This is manifested in the combination of “Rusin” with differentiating adjectival attributes.

Predicative semantics related to “Rusin”, “Rusinian” often contain

negative connotations which are made prominent in the contexts that are concerned with oppressing the Rusins or with their participation in inter-ethnic conflicts. The ethnonym “Rusin” is often found in opposition to an object of a verb with the semantics of harm. Predicates with neutral and positive connotations are but a third of the total.

In the temporal dynamics of the usage of the ethnonyms in question, an explosion of interest can be noticed in the first twenty years of the 20th century. Most of the newspaper contexts come from the epoch after which there follow almost 60 years in which Soviet newspaper discourse did not raise the Rusin topic. This is reflected in the fact that there are no contexts of usage of “Rusin”, “Rusinian” in the period from 1920 to 1960.

The general discourse-temporal dynamics shows a clear tendency to shift from the more transient discourses (the press) to literary and historical reflections. The decrease in the occurrences of “Rusin”, “Rusinian” dating from 1940 in all spheres of communication correlates with the actions of the Soviet government after annexing Galicia to the Ukrainian SSR – all Rusin organizations were closed and Rusins were refused ethnic sovereignty. Rusin topics became taboo since the 1950’s which is evidenced in gaps across all discourses and genres represented in the Russian National Corpus. However, a sharp increase in the number of contexts from 2,000 onward shows a growing interest with regard to Rusin issues in the Russian Internet. We believe it to be due, at least in part, to the growing scientific and literary activity of the Rusin diaspora.

Keywords

Ethnonym, Rusin, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, collective identity, Russian National Corpus.

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