

PROPER NOUN *SMOLENSK* WITHIN NATIONWIDE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE (BASED ON THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL CORPUS)

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Abstract. This work describes the historical and cultural information contained in the proper name *Smolensk*. Due to high linguistic and cultural value, any proper noun is one of the core language identifiers of culture and carrier of background knowledge of a linguistic personality. In this work, the source of the nationwide background knowledge was the Russian National Corpus (RNC) having 1,790 contexts with the proper noun *Smolensk* in various forms. The analysis of these contexts showed that they quite fully and exactly represent historical and cultural information related to the proper noun *Smolensk*. That information may be presented as a text which can be used in making of local linguistic and historical dictionaries, reference books and training materials, as well as in teaching practice in order to let native speakers and foreigners form background knowledge about Smolensk. Besides, the Smolensk-related background knowledge presented in the RNC was compared with regional onomastic background knowledge of contemporary residents of Smolensk that was revealed through the large-scale associative experiment (with 1,650 respondents); as a result, we have made an electronic Database including 1,212 reactions (13,471 uses) on the stimulus *Smolensk Region*. Among the Smolensk-related background knowledge in the RNC and in background knowledge of Smolensk residents, the most important information is that related to the military history of Smolensk land - the westernmost frontier of Russia - in the history of our home country. The approach proposed in this work can be used for analysis of other regional onomastic arrays, which may in the future form the basis for a sub-corpus of regional proper nouns with high linguistic and cultural value contributing to formation of background knowledge about Russia through the knowledge about its regions.

Keywords: proper noun; corpus linguistics; background knowledge; associative experiment; linguistic personality.

One of the high-priority areas in the present-day science of language is corpus linguistics. For Russian corpus linguistics, 2014 is a year of jubilee: on April 29, 2004, the Russian National Corpus (RNC) became publicly accessible in the Internet on <http://ruscorpora.ru>.

Significance of development of linguistic corpora was identified by V.A. Plungian as follows: "Any educated person knows the word "dictionary". Indeed, everyone knows what dictionary means, even a non-linguist, and now such person should know the word "corpus". Know what it is, what its purpose is, and why it is important. <...> Romantically tuned people

might even say there is a corpus revolution in linguistics. With corpora, this science has completely changed. Sure, we may put this pathos aside and reduce the degree a bit, but its significance is anyway very high" [1].

According to modern researchers, "corpus linguistics is now facing a kind of a boom. It began back in 60's with establishing of the Brown Corpus of the English Language. Up to now, it has been joined by a huge family of English corpora: The International Computer Archive of Modern / Medieval English, British National Corpus, National American Corpus, etc. with overall volume of 1...7.5 mln usages. In Germany, they have LIMAS-Korpus (1 mln units), in France in early 60's *Tresor de la Langue Française* (90 mln usages) was created as well. Scientists of Netherlands, Japan, Romania, India and some other countries are quite active too" [2: 2].

"Among Slavic countries, Czech Republic had been undoubted leader for a long time, no one even tried to compete, but in the recent five or seven years we see a boom of Slavic corpus linguistics, even the Association of Slavic Corpus Linguistics was founded. Besides, there is the Russian National Corpus. We were dishonorably dragging behind for a long time, but now we have the corpus which is, by the way, one of the world's best in standards, and it is available online and easy to use" [1]. Generally, it should be pointed out that "the scale of works done in the recent decades as of accumulation of tremendous amount of text corpora created for different purposes indicates that we are dealing with a new, **verbal form** of objective reality. In contrast to the reality itself controlled by the disposition of Providence, and to social life depended on politicians, this new form of life should be organized by scientists" [3: 234].

The term **corpus** defined as an aggregate of texts in electronic format "co-exists and often consolidates in scientific literature with such terms as "collection of texts", "full-text database", "electronic archives", "electronic library"" [4: 166]. In a narrow sense, the corpus of language is understood as "a collection of texts in certain language presented in electronic format and supported by a scholarly apparatus" which is commonly known as "labeling"" [5: 6]. However, as was reasonably said by I.I. Sazhenin, "if corpus is a collection of texts, the question what text is, regarding corpus, emerges by itself" [6: 295]. For instance, V.P. Zakharov avoids definition of corpus through the term of 'text' and offers, on our opinion, more precise definition: corpus is "a large, electronic, unified, structured, categorized, philologically competent array of language data intended for addressing particular linguistic tasks" [7: 23]. Anyhow, the main characteristic that allows naming the electronic informational field as a corpus is labeling. "The text labeling constitutes attribution of additional information (metadata) to texts and their components. Meta-definition of corpus texts includes both comprehensive data elements (bibliographic data, markers of genre and stylistic features of the text, information about the

author), and formal (file name, coding parameters, version of the labeling language, performers of the work stages)” [7: 5].

RNC-based researches, one of which is real work, among other tasks check effectiveness of a corpus as a tool and a source of material. We believe that contribution to resolving of this issue may be comparison of qualitative and quantitative data of the corpus with the data of experimental researches.

In this work we have analyzed material presented in the basic corpus of RNC. Generally, today the RNC includes 11 sub-corpus: basic, syntactical, newspaper, accentologic, multimedia, historical, and educational corpus of Russian language with parallel corpora, dialectal texts corpora, poetic texts, spoken language. The objective of this work is revealing and analysis of background knowledge related to the proper noun *Smolensk* in the basic corpus of RNC. Popularity of researches of the regional material in the present-day science has led to the fact that “a new scientific has recently appeared, so called ‘regionalistics’, which is a complex humanitarian discipline that studies processes of human activities and existence, as well as human-created culture in cooperation with environment within the compact geographical space, a ‘region’” [8: 171].

Relevance of research of onomastic material from RNC is reasoned by the fact that, according to founders of corpus linguistics, “the need for the National corpus becomes especially urgent when Russian society looks for a basement in resolving of identity problem, which is impossible beyond the context of language, a foundation of any culture” [2: 3]. Proper noun, having the highest degree of linguistic and cultural value, is one of the core language identifiers of national culture. As for G.F. Kovalev, “no need to mention the undoubted value of onomastic data and a special role of onomastic units in cultural and historical process and history of literature and language. It is commonly known that in the history of any language amount of onomastic units is much higher than amount of appellative units. Besides, history, literature and, especially, culture are written not by dates but by names” [9: 138].

Representation of certain analyzed lexical item (particularly, a proper noun) in the RNC context helps to reveal background knowledge connected to such proper noun. According to the concept of E.M. Vereshchagin and V.G. Kostomarov, content of background knowledge is a “sum of information originally attributed to members of particular language collective at particular stage of its development” [10: 41]. Traditionally, scientists outline three levels of linguistic and cultural value: *human-wide* (possessed by all people regardless of the continent, nationality, confession, etc.); *regional* (relevant for residents of a particular region, e.g. Central Europe); *country-wide* (used by all members of certain ethnic and language community). However, such classification, as for N.A. Maksimchuk, cannot be mechani-

cally transferred for description of background knowledge included in proper nouns to which it is common to outline the following levels: *human-wide* (proper nouns belonging to worldwide society); *nationwide* (proper nouns being a domain of a particular nation); regional / *country-wide* (proper nouns primarily typical in the territory of certain region) [11: 110]. This work deals with description of the title regional proper noun **Smolensk** within nationwide background knowledge presented in the RNC and within regional background knowledge of present-day residents of Smolensk Region.

We have chosen an associative experiment attended by 1,650 respondents as a basic analysis method of regional onomastic background knowledge of Smolensk residents; i.e. we have analyzed background knowledge of an aggregate regional language person. According to A.S. Zubtsov, “regional language person is a member of territorially separated language collective functioning within particular discursive space and having regionally marked knowledge, understandings, value focuses and tools of their indicative representation which are common for other members of such community” [12: 7].

The questionnaire filled in by the respondents prior to the experiment included the following characteristics: sex, age, place of birth, level of education, area of occupation, period of residence in the Smolensk Region and place of residence (city of Smolensk or any town of the Smolensk Region). The experiment itself consisted of the following: the tested persons were supposed within 1 minute to write down proper nouns which they associate with the stimulus **Smolensk Region**. The selection of the toponym **Smolensk Region** but not **Smolensk** was reasoned by the need to prevent from description of background knowledge through trivial names (shops, entertainment sites, etc.) being the components of mass culture that are used mostly by the residents of the regional capital city. As a result of the experiment, we have composed an electronic Database included 1,212 reactions (13,471 usages). The revealed proper nouns can be presented as 33 thematic groups [13: 58-79]. The most usable as per amount of non-repeated proper nouns was the group named “Population Centers” (272 proper nouns, 1,160 usages), which is quite typical for a regional experiment: most people associate the term of native region with the term of native city or native village. The second position is held by the thematic group named “Military Leaders, War Veterans” (113 proper nouns, 531 usages) including names of military servicemen born or living / lived in the Smolensk land, as well as those who took part in battles in the region. Content of this group (*M.I. Kutuzov* (121); *G.A. Potyomkin* (33); *G.K. Zhukov* (7) etc.) allows to speak about higher linguistic and cultural value of these proper nouns than the regional level, and their popularity indicates the contribution of the Smolensk land to Russian military history. We think it is quite reasonable, as the history of Smolensk Region is often called the history of wars, and such titles as the hero city, the guard city, the

shield city, and the key city brilliantly demonstrate the contribution of this land to Russian history. In the group “Names of Military History Events”, 55% of proper nouns (6 out of 11) relate to the Great Patriotic War which left a deep scar in the memory of Smolensk people due to chronological proximity of that event. The respondents named the following events of military history (in the order of decreasing of frequency index set in brackets): *The Great Patriotic War 1941-1945* (28); *The Patriotic War 1812* (21); *The Solov'yova Ford* (20); *Birth of Soviet Guards* (12); *Offensive Operation Yelnya Salient 1941* (9); *Battle of Borodino, Liberation of Smolensk Region on September 25, 1943* (8 each); *World War II, World War I* (2 each); *Battle of Smolensk July 10 - September 10, 1941, The Tartar Mongol Yoke* (1 each). In this work we will analyze how the Smolensk's contribution to Russian military history is presented within nationwide background knowledge of the RNC.

Working with the basic corpus of the RNC offers possibilities of two main types of search: search of exact forms and lexico-grammatical search which entails additional semantic, word-formation and grammatical characteristics. When revealing contexts connected with the proper noun *Smolensk*, we used lexico-grammatical search because it makes possible to obtain the full case paradigm of the mentioned lexeme, while the exact search selects only its ‘casus nominativus’. We obtained 2,013 contexts on request ***Smolensk***, however, we faced a technical problem of the material processing, because the instrumental case of the proper noun ***Smolensk*** completely coincides with the prepositional case of the adjective ***Smolensk***, for example: in the Smolensk battle, at the Smolensk cemetery, etc. These forms were differentiated only after thorough reading and mechanical sorting out of appropriate contexts: as a result, 221 forms of the prepositional case of the adjective ***Smolensk*** were sorted out. Besides, we detected a case where *Smolensk* was used in the name of the village (*in the Smolensk village*) and a context with the toponym-related adverb (*Smolensk-style potatoes*). Consequently, out of initial number of contexts (2,013) with a lexeme of ***Smolensk***, we excluded forms of the prepositional case of the adjective (221), name of the village and the adverb; therefore, for the further analysis we will use 1,790 contexts with the proper noun ***Smolensk***.

In order to determine specific aspects of the background knowledge connected to the proper noun ***Smolensk*** in the RNC, we will refer to thematic classification of the analyzed material. On the basis of the corpus data, we have obtained 220 thematic groups, and the most frequency-intensive (707 contexts with the lexeme ***Smolensk***) was a group with unidentified theme. So, informative are 219 thematic groups, including 71 groups with 250-2 contexts (totally 935 contexts) and 148 contexts are presented individually. On our opinion, number of thematically separated contexts is unjustifiably high, which considerably complicates analysis of the material. To us,

in this case the remark of S.A. Koval seems quite appropriate; he said that “there is a rule in the corpus linguistics that resembles the well-known ‘**golden rule**’ of mechanics (at work performance, any gain in applied force is accompanied with the loss in the covered distance). In corpus linguistics, any gain in efforts while labeling of the corpus is accompanied with loss in the efforts applied when using of such corpus” [14: 149-150]. We noticed that if one unites only single contexts in thematic groups as per entry word and summarizes them with the rest number of groups, the total amount of groups would decrease from 219 to 95, i.e. more than twice. And if all thematic groups would be united at least to one title, their number would reduce to 27, seven of which having over 50 contexts with the lexeme **Smolensk**: “Science and Technology”, “Policy and Social Life”, “History”, “Army and Military Conflicts”, “Arts and Culture”, “Private Life”, “Administration and Management”.

Having referred to direct analysis of contexts with proper noun **Smolensk**, we found out that most of them are anyway connected with the history, particularly, with the military history of the city. We noticed that by choosing the most significant contexts and placing them in certain chronological sequence, it is possible to obtain a quite connected text about the fate of Smolensk in Russian history.

As an epigraph to the text, it seems appropriate to use words of M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin:

*There are few towns in Russia that may compete with **Smolensk** in prominence (M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin. “Literature for Lunch” (1868)).*

Then comes a fragment representing contexts that characterize early stages of the city’s history:

*“The oldest cities that passed the thousandth anniversary are Belozersk, Murom, **Smolensk**, Rostov Veliky, Vladimir, Uglich, Staraya Ladoga” (Assembly of the Russia’s oldest cities (2002) // “Evening Moscow”. 2002.08.08).*

*“**Smolensk** existed even when there was no trace of the Russian state yet” (M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin. Literature for Lunch (1868)).*

*“In the X century Sreznevsky could count 21 big towns within the Kiev state: Beloozero, Vitichev, Vrushchev, Vyshgorod, Izborsk, Kiev, Korosten, Ladoga, Lyubech, Murom, Novgorod, Ovruch, Peremyshl, Peresechen, Polotsk, Pskov, Rodnya, **Smolensk**, Turov, Cherven, Chernigov” (N.G. Porfiridov. Ancient Novgorod. Essays From the History of Russian Culture XI-XV Centuries” (1947)).*

*“In XII century **Smolensk** was glaring with classic education by learning Greek and Latin languages” (M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin. Literature for Lunch (1868)).*

*“From old times **Smolensk** has been known for its book-reading. The evidence of such nature is, among other proofs, as was said before, the life*

history of Abraham Smolensky written in the first half of XIII century by Abraham's follower Yefrem" (N.K. Gudziy. *History of Russian Ancient Literature (XI-XV centuries)* (1938)).

"Now we can study and show earlier unknown pictures of **Smolensk**, one of the largest cultural centers of Ancient Russia" (E. Sheinina. *Old Frescos Reviving* // "Chemistry and Life". 1966).

As is seen, this fragment shows that Smolensk is an ancient city, though the year of its first mentioning in chronicles is not stated in the RNC. Meanwhile, the first mentioning of Smolensk in the Ustyug (Archangelsk) Chronicle is dated in the year of 863. Even in that time the city was described as "the huge and highly populated site" [15: 423]. Besides, these contexts contain information about the significance of Smolensk as a quite large cultural center. Indeed, Smolensk was a significant trading and handicraft center and a military fortress as well. Archeological excavations at the Gnyozdovo Barrows located 12 km westward Smolensk and in the town itself indicate of highly developed crafts, and the vase made the first half of X century is the evidence of Russian writing before the establishment of Christianity [Ibid: 424].

The next fragment defines the significance of Smolensk in Russian history as a warrior city, a guardian city, and a shield city:

"**Smolensk** is called a gate to Central Russia, a bridge between west and east of our country" (Yury Tsenin. *Walk and Ye Shall Reach* // "Technology for Youth". 1977).

"Entire **Smolensk** is a fortress with embrasures towards the Dnieper River" (Nadezhda Zamyatina. *Non-Capital Sites. Where You Should Not Place a Capital City* // "October". 2003).

"Many times **Smolensk** was burned and besieged in old times..." (I.A. Bunin. *The Life of Arsenyev. Adolescence (1927-1933)*).

Really, the frontier location of the city (it is the western border of Russia, the 'key' to Moscow) has conditioned its role in global and Russian history which was precisely described by N.I. Rylenkov: "My native town, everyone / May say about you: / It is the chronicle of battles, / It is the story of Russian course of life..."

Then we will put the Smolensk-related contexts found in the RNC in chronological sequence of described events.

Speaking of Smolensk during the Tartar Mongol Yoke, we have found only one reference in the Corpus:

"Although we cannot see in the chronicles that Smolensk dukes anytime went to the Golden Horde and pay tribute, it is because narrators of our affairs lived in other regions and mention **Smolensk** and its events quite rarely" (N.M. Karamzin. *The History of Russian State: Volume 4 (1808-1820)*).

In fact, in 1127 the Kiev duke Mstislav the Great gave Smolensk for governing to his son, 17-year old Rostislav Mstislavich. When his father

died, Rostislav became a practically independent duke and governed Smolensk up to 1160, and then took the Kiev throne. By that way the independent Smolensk dukedom was established under government of the Rostislavich dynasty; prior to the Mongol-Tartar invasion, it was one of the most powerful Russian dukedoms. A hundred years before that invasion was the period of the Smolensk's prosperity: the city occupied 115 ha with about 8,000 houses and population somewhat 40,000 persons. At the turn of XII century, Smolensk outnumbered any other Russian town as of amount of stone churches. According to Smolensk historians, the following circumstance contributed to development of Smolensk: being hidden in the depth of Russian lands, it was not exposed to depredations of Mongol-Tartar armies and preserved its autonomy, though had to pay tributes [15: 424].

The next stage in development of Smolensk was the period within the Lithuanian state:

*"When Moscow was founded, **Smolensk** became, as our ancestors said, a precious necklace of Russia which, however, was valued by Lithuania, not less than by Moscow" (M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin. Literature for Lunch (1868)).*

*"When in 1514 the ancient Russian city of **Smolensk**, after over a hundred years of governance by Lithuania, was returned back by the great duke Vasily Ioannovich, he as a gratitude to God for such success of his armies decided to build a church in honor of the Smolensk Mother of God and a monastery on the place to which that icon was escorted by his grandfather" (N.E. Geinze. The Man Eater (1898)).*

*"In 1514, during the reign of Vasily Ioannovich, in memory of returning of **Smolensk** from the 110-year long grip of Poland, it was established to celebrate the icon of the Smolensk Icon of the Mother of God and the procession to the Novodevichy Convent" (E.A. Drashusova. Memoirs (1848)).*

*"Finally, in 1522 the truce was concluded and **Smolensk**, after more than 100 years under the sway of Lithuania, passed to Moscow" (D.I. Ilovaysky. The Epitomes of Russian History (1860)).*

*"In 1596, Boris travelled around regions of western Russia and on the Lithuanian border founded the stone fortress in **Smolensk** and attained keen praises of local people for his vainglorious mercy". "**Smolensk** will be the necklace of Russia!" reported the leader to the tsar upon arrival in Moscow" (P.P. Karatygin. Minions and Favorites of 16, 17 and 18 Centuries. Book Three (1871)).*

The contexts above show that the RNC does not indicate the period when Smolensk was governed by Lithuania, and only mentions the year of 1514 when the city returned back to the Russian state. Take note that Smolensk was within the Great Duchy of Lithuania in 1404-1514. Along with Polish and Lithuanian troops, Smolensk regiments took part in the battle of Grunwald in 1410 against the Teutonic Order. In the spring of 1440, Smolensk people kicked Lithuanian

protégés away, and the Lithuanian duke managed to get the city back only in the next year. Smolensk returned to Russia in 1514 after several campaigns of Russian armies lasted 14 years [15: 424].

Another significant stage of the history of Smolensk is the period of its wars against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which is reflected with a number of contexts in the Corpus:

“...the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth declared war against Russia. After twenty months of siege, **Smolensk** surrendered. The Tushin's camp ceased to exist, as the impostor was no longer interesting for Polish gentry which began an open intervention” (T. Doroshenko. *Overcoming the 'Great Breakdown' of Russian State. Militia of 1611-1612* // “Science and Life”. 2006).

“The Poles laid siege to **Smolensk** which was stubbornly defending for 20 months” (L.A. Muravyova. *The Time of Troubles in Russia: Reasons, Milestones, Consequences* (2004) // “Banking and Finance”. 2004.11.22).

“In the Time of Troubles, voivode Shein fought the Poles near **Smolensk**, and when troubles came to Russia again, the Poles came to **Smolensk**” (B.A. Pilnyak. *The Third Capital* (1922)).

“The general situation sharply decayed by the autumn of 1611. **Smolensk** fell down. The Polish king did not conceal his intentions to become a Russian czar and join Russia to Poland” (L.A. Muravyova. *The Time of Troubles in Russia: Reasons, Milestones, Consequences* (2004) // “Banking and Finance”. 2004.11.22).

“When in 1632 the Moscow government, having taken advantage from the death of the Polish king Sigizmund III, decided to regain **Smolensk** from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, nobles made obeisance to the sovereign saying they could not wage war: some of them had not land, others had not peasants, and if they had, there were only 3-6 people” (Alexander Alekseyev. *The Berserk Zealots. The Moscow Russia in XVII century* // “Science and Life”. 2009).

“In 1632, during the Russo-Polish (Smolensk) War the Russians unsuccessfully tried to liberate **Smolensk**” (Heroic Chapters of Russian History (2004) // “Life of Nationalities”. 2004.06.16).

“The everlasting peace was established with the Polish king by the Polyanovsky treaty! We have repudiated **Smolensk**... And now let God bless us to protect our Fatherland: not only by swords and knives, but even by our teeth...” (N.I. Kostomarov. *Russian History in Biographies of its Principal Figures. Fifth Volume: XVII Century* (1862-1875)).

“In 1654, during the next Russo-Polish War, **Smolensk** was liberated, and in 1667 it finally returned to Russia” (Heroic Chapters of Russian History (2004) // “Life of Nationalities”. 2004.06.16).

“That is why, when **Smolensk** finally joined Russia, it became the Moscow's right hand in patriotism” (M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin. *Literature for Lunch* (1868)).

As is seen, the exact date of the beginning of the abovementioned events was not indicated again, namely 1609, when Smolensk was beleaguered by troops of the Polish king Sigizmund III and then was defending for 20 months. The special attention, due to its expressiveness, draws the context about the Polyanovsky peace treaty taken from the "Russian History in Biographies of its Principal Figures" by N.I. Kostomarov. The Polyanovsky peace treaty was concluded between Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in May 17 (27) - June 4 (14), 1634 in the village Semlyovo in the Smolensk region located between Vyazma and Dorogobuzh. That treaty finished the Russo-Polish War 1632-1634. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth reserved the lands of Chernigov with the cities of Chernigov and Novgorod-Seversky (actually passed to Poland) and Smolensk lands with the cities of Smolensk, Trubchevsk, Roslavl and etc. (actually passed to Lithuania) [16: 969]. Final joining of Smolensk to Russia was in 1667 under the Andrusovsky peace treaty.

Participation of Smolensk in the Patriotic War 1812, according to our observations, is maximally indicated in the RNC comparing to all other events of the city's military history. Let us put the main significant of them:

*"If the idea of the Patriotic War is 'overbuilt' with a political myth of the Russian state with informal capital in Moscow, that was **Smolensk** to be the 'key of Moscow' by a lucky and insightful remark of Kutuzov" (Alexander Arkhangelsky. Alexander II (2000)).*

*"The way of Napoleon to Moscow - from **Smolensk** to Vyazma and Mohaisk" (V.G. Lidin. The Wise Men (1927)).*

*"Enemy is rapidly approaching; farewell **Smolensk** and Russia..." (G.P. Danilevsky. The Burned Moscow (1885)).*

*"Having about 180,000 men and 356 cannons, Napoleon tried to attack the rear of Russian troops, capture **Smolensk** and cut Russian armies from Moscow" (Heroic Chapters of Russian History (2004) // "Life of Nationalities". 2004.06.16).*

*"In **Smolensk**, waiting for the enemy who was however too cautious on August 4, did not press till August 4, and today on August 4, there was a pretty good skirmish nearby the city when I saw a glorious feature of Smolensk locals that stuck in my memory: men and women were striving to fight outside the city walls; they picked wounded soldiers, stripped own clothes and bandaged wounds, irrigating them with tears, and brought inside the city from dangerous battle sites; the next night was calm; on the next day, August 5, the siege of **Smolensk** began" (D.V. Dushenkevich. My Memoirs from 1812 to (1815) (1838)).*

*"God bless you, the immortal hero! Our regiment stationed at **Smolensk** walls. The first army was nearby the city on the other bank of Dnieper" (N.I. Andreyev. Memoirs of an Officer of the 50th Jaeger Regiment (1844) // "Russian Archives". 1879).*

*"In the morning we took position on the hill on the Dnieper bank, almost at the same level with the fortress, having the outer settlement on the left. On August 5, there was a battle near **Smolensk**. Our position was situated in a manner that the entire fortress of **Smolensk** was over the river"* (A.K. Karpov. *Memoirs* (1831)).

*"...On August 5, the French occupied **Smolensk**. Bonapart was expecting the battle with Kutuzov, and Kutuzov retreated trying to decoy the enemy farther"* (D.D. Blagovo. *Stories of My Granny From Memoirs of Five Generations Written and Collected by Her Grandson D. Blagovo* (1877-1880)).

*"After the stubborn and bloody battle near **Smolensk**, happened on August 5, our troops began to retreat to Dorogobuzh"* (M.N. Zagoskin. *Roslavlev or Russians in 1812* (1830)).

*"On August 6, 1812, in the battle near **Smolensk**, the Selenginsky regiment was destroyed by hordes of Napoleon"* (N.N. Kargopol'tsev. Major A.B. Kamayev. *The Episode of Siberians' Life in 1812* (1882) // *"Old Times of Russia"*. 1883).

*"On August 6 the French occupied cities of **Smolensk**, Dorogobuzh, Vyazma..."* (G.G. Tomilov, V.G. Tomilov. *Book of Remembrance* (1776-1863)).

*"He wrote on August 8 to me: "The Battle at **Smolensk** was slaughterous and horrible"* (N.I. Grech. *Memoirs of My Life* (1849-1856)).

*"**Smolensk** was left on August 9. They said that the commander-in-chief himself had committed the city to flames and that it looked like dump of ruins* (Y.N. Tynianov. *Pushkin* (1935-1943)).

*"On August 11 I found out that **Smolensk** was captured on August 1, and immediately send Poroshkov to Moscow, and now they are detailing that our troops were attacked and **Smolensk** was burnt and lost"* (D.M. Volkonsky. *The Diary. 1812-1814* (1812-1813)).

*"In **Smolensk**, finally, despite Bonapart's wishes, the armies joined together"* (L.N. Tolstoy. *War and Peace. Volume Three* (1867-1869)).

*"Bagration reached his target: from now on the enemy could not interfere the meeting of the two armies near **Smolensk**"* (Y.N. Tynianov. *Pushkin* (1935-1943)).

*"When the armies of Barclay-de-Tolli and Bagration finally joined together near **Smolensk**, many people hoped than the enemy would be stopped there"* (G.I. Chulkov. *Emperors: Psychological Portraits* (1928)).

*"Moscow was quiet when our armies joined near **Smolensk** stood still; philistines flattered themselves that the campaign was over"* (F.V. Rostopchin. *Memoires of 1812* (translated by I.I. Oreus) (1823)).

*"But more time passed, and on August 12 the Moscow locals in terror found out that Russian armies left **Smolensk**"* (G.P. Danilevsky. *The Burned Moscow* (1885)).

*"They said that the tzar was leaving because the army was in danger, they said that **Smolensk** was left because Napoleon had million soldiers and*

that only miracle could save Russia" (L.N. Tolstoy. *War and Peace. Volume Three* (1867–1869)).

"When after destruction of **Smolensk** army of Napoleon moved to Moscow by straight and non-stop way, the people's consciousness gave a point that the most critical moment came, and that one cannot do without decisive and desperate combat, and that the army, although fighting heroically, had to retreat, should be headed by a man who is entrusted by the whole nation, the whole army, because only such man could take the most serious risk and the most heavy casualties, by no means shaking the belief in the critical need to have such tremendous losses either among people or among the troops he headed by him" (E.V. Tarle. *Borodino* (1952)).

"Having found out about capture of **Smolensk**, the czar came back to Saint Petersburg to appoint the skillful military leader, old duke Kutuzov, as a commander-in-chief of all active armies" (F.F. Vigel. *Remarks* (1850–1860)).

"Kutuzov ordered General Dokhturov to take the second army under his command: he heroically defended **Smolensk** from slashing attacks of Napoleon, and then the Dokhturov's corps joined main forces" (S.T. Grigoryev. *On the Borodino Field* (1947)).

"And how many soldiers fell only near **Smolensk**"? (M.N. Zagoskin. *Roslavlev or Russians in 1812* (1830)).

"...The battle at **Smolensk** with 6,000 killed and 12,000 wounded, with a terrible fire" (V.V. Vereschagin. *Napoleon I in Russia on Pictures of V.V. Vereschagin* (1899)).

"In that wonderful August night **Smolensk** looked to the French like outburst of Vesuvius looked to locals of Naples", Napoleon wrote" (unknown. *Smolensk Festivities. "The Long-Suffering Day"* (1912.08.21) // "The Russian Word". 1912).

"In **Smolensk** we were walking along destructed walls of the fortress; I spotted that place near brick-built sheds where we disadvantageously located and disorderly retreated" (N.A. Durova. *The Cavalrywoman* (1835)).

"Russian participants of the great battle then hungrily asked the people from the Napoleon's circles and that is what they were told: "...in Vitebsk, in **Smolensk** he was seen exhausted and vacillatory, nobody could recognize the known Napoleon" (E.V. Tarle. *Borodino* (1952)).

"They paid high price to capture **Smolensk** and will enter Moscow without single shot!" (M.N. Zagoskin. *Roslavlev or Russians in 1812* (1830)).

"What would have been if Napoleon, having approached Tarutin, attacked Russians at least with one tenth of that energy that he had attacking **Smolensk**?" (L.N. Tolstoy. *War and Peace. Volume Four* (1867–1869)).

As is seen, events of the Patriotic War 1812 in Smolensk are presented in the Corpus very particularly: they are almost placed on a daily basis (though the contexts were taken from different sources). Moreover, the char-

acteristics of all happenings are shown in perception of Russian and French troops, and the appraisal of events near Smolensk in the general history of the Patriotic War 1812 is displayed as well. It should be noted that two contexts put in this fragment contain errors in the names of administrative centers of Smolensk region: Dorgobuzh (correct name is Dorogobuzh), Vyazma (correct name is Vyaz'ma).

The closest event of the Smolensk's military history to the present time is the fate of the city in the years of the Great Patriotic War, which is also widely reflected in the RNC:

*"Just like Napoleon, in the early June morning the Germans burst in Russia and moved towards their death along the well-tried high road via **Smolensk**"* (L.M. Leonov. *The Russian Forest* (1950-1953)).

*"It is not 1812, now we should hurry up even while harness! Otherwise we will snail up to **Smolensk**. Colonel said that were Germans who invented this expression"* (Konstantin Simonov. *Alive and Dead* (1955-1959)).

*"Though **Smolensk** has been always a kind of a shield for Moscow - both in the time of Napoleon invasion and quite recently, in the years of the Great Patriotic War..."* (I.A. Arkhipova. *The Music of Life* (1996)).

*"On July 16, 1941 the fascists captured **Smolensk** which was liberated on September 25, 1943"* (Heroic Chapters of Russian History (2004) // "Life of Nationalities". 2004.06.16).

*"In the second half of July, the Germans in their dash to Moscow had captured **Smolensk**, Yelnya, Roslavl"* (L.K. Chukovskaya. *The Agony. About Marina Tsvetayeva* (1981)).

*"Hitler arrived in **Smolensk** to personally manage the second, "general" offensive operation against Moscow arranged on the next morning"* (Mikhail Bubennov. *The White Birch* / parts 3-6 (1942-1952)).

*"In the time when Hitler settled in the reinforced-concrete bunker near **Smolensk**, field workshops were held in German troops of the Central front: pastor homilized and blessed soldiers for new deeds of valor"* (Mikhail Bubennov. *The White Birch* / parts 3-6 (1942-1952)).

*"Sure, Hitler wants to penetrate eastward, to **Smolensk**, and then to Moscow"* (G.S. Efron. *Diaries. Vol. 1. 1941* (1941)).

*"Because there, near **Smolensk**, the concentration of German army is highest"* (Reconnaissance Officer (2004) // "Soldier of Fortune". 2004.03.10).

*"Soon **Smolensk** and our village were captured by German troops, and the two-year long countdown of occupation started"* (V. Naumov. *A Photograph From Faraway Past* // "Science and Life". 2006).

*"Vyazma is in Smolensk region, and **Smolensk** is under Heinies now!"* (Konstantin Simonov. *Alive and Dead* (1955-1959)).

*"The third battle for **Smolensk** was in the Great Patriotic War in July 10 - September 10, 1941"* (Heroic Chapters of Russian History (2004) // "Life of Nationalities". 2004.06.16).

*"I remember how proud I was of our army which fought for **Smolensk** in accordance with earlier adopted plan" (Anastas Mikoyan. That is The Way it Was (1971-1974)).*

*"...Stalin's armies are defeated, six millions of people were taken prisoners, German army captured **Smolensk** and is approaching Moscow" (Konstantin Simonov. Alive and Dead (1955-1959)).*

*"However, Hitler failed to achieve his key targets: battles near Odesa, Kiev, **Smolensk** frustrated the German blitzkrieg" (Roy Medvedev. Joseph Stalin and Joseph Apanasenko (2003) // "Our Contemporary". 2003.08.15).*

*"March 27, 1943. The Germans are defending a new line in front of **Smolensk**. Concentration of artillery and aviation is huge at both parties". (V.V. Vishnevsky. Diaries of Wartimes (1943-1945)).*

*"In September 1943 the fascist troops were preparing for retreat, exploded houses in **Smolensk**, burned our village Odintsovo, and moved its inhabitants including our family to Germany" (V. Naumov. A Photograph From Faraway Past // "Science and Life". 2006).*

Finally, the last paragraph in our text about Smolensk based on the materials of the RNC may be related to the present condition of the city as an important political center and an "intermediary between Russia and Western Europe":

*"Now **Smolensk** looked absolutely different - a spruce peaceful town decorated with national flags and natty crowd, with many women dressed in the height of fashion, wearing tight skirts, luxury broadbrims and Japanese umbrellas (unknown. Smolensk Festivities. "The Long-Suffering Day" (1912.08.21) // "The Russian Word". 1912).*

*"**Smolensk**... This ancient city gratifies the tourists by glittering parks and gardens, postcard-looking views of architectural monuments and terrifies by full absence of traffic roads in combination with high relief" (Yulia Makeyeva. Smolensk // "Russian Reporter". No. 28 (156), July 22-29, 2010).*

*"One of the future Russian capitals looks like, for instance, **Smolensk**, border city for ever, a convenient mediator, an intermediate between Russia and Western Europe" (Dmitry Zamyatin. Metageography of Russian Capital Cities // "October". 2003).*

*"Recently I visited **Smolensk** which is threatened to become new capital of united Russo-Belarusian state (Yury Yentsov. The Fifth Column (1997) // "Capital". 1997.06.10).*

*"**Smolensk** is a place for an expansionist capital with the view on Belarus, and even on Ukraine if you have good eyesight (Nadezhda Zamyatina. Non-Capital Sites. Where You Should Not Place a Capital City // "October". 2003).*

These contexts display that the RNC contains quite full and exact evidence of the history of Smolensk. When analyzing the material, we have

found only one context having a mistake of fact: “On May 6, 1966 Smolensk was awarded the title of the Hero City. Sevastopol” (*Heroic Chapters of Russian History* (2004) // “*Life of Nationalities*”. 2004.06.16) (actually, Smolensk was awarded the honorary title of the Hero City on May 6, 1985) and two abovementioned contexts with incorrect spelling of proper nouns.

The alone possibility of formation of such text is clear indicator of the fact that the RNC is pretty representative and credible source (except for particular cases) of nationwide level for generation of background knowledge about the history of Smolensk. It should be particularly pointed out the possibility of practical application of this text in teaching. V.A. Plungyan said the following about practical use of the RNC materials: “Teaching language with the help of the Corpus is a huge area of contemporary linguistics. <...> Everyone knows that the two things to master a language are a dictionary and a grammar. <...> And now, for a human to know language not two but three things are essential: a dictionary, a grammar, and a corpus of texts of such language, because both dictionary and grammar are generally useless without this live space where language is actually functioning” [1]. A teacher may offer to the trainees a ready text for understanding and analysis (just like the one presented above) or (in highly skilled groups) offer them an independent search of contexts in the RNC connected to Smolensk and model their own text taking into account the chronology of events. In particular, one should mark the possibility to use such texts in the teaching methodology of Russian as foreign language in order to help foreigners in forming of background knowledge about Russia through studying of historical and cultural aspects of its regions. V.A. Plungyan characterizes practical benefit of the RNC for a foreigner as follows: “His language consciousness is not Russian. And he needs badly a tool opening him a maximum wide (and maximum comfortable) access to the world of Russian language. In this case the present-day science cannot offer anything better than the Corpus. It is where both a teacher and a student may answer many questions they are interested in, by the way, such answers that even a native speaker may not find at once. That is why corpora are extremely popular amid foreigners” [5: 16]. It is no coincidence that electronic corpora of Russian language first appeared not in Russia but in Europe: the Uppsala Russian Corpus developed in Sweden and currently is stored on the server of Tübingen University in Germany; interesting projects on Russian corpus linguistics are being developed in Finland [Ibid: 16-17].

Thus, as a result of the analysis of material related to the proper noun *Smolensk* in the RNC, we have made the following conclusions:

1. The possibility of description of the Smolensk history on materials of the corpus proves the fact that “we deal with a new verbal form of an objective reality” that reflects nationwide background knowledge.

2. Information connected to the history of Smolensk is presented in the RNC quite detailed and exactly, which allows making texts that can be

used in linguistic and historical dictionaries, reference books and training literature, as well as in teaching process in order to help native- and foreign-speakers form background knowledge about Smolensk.

3. The RNC contains all key stages of military history of Smolensk (inclusion of Smolensk into the Lithuanian state, relations with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Patriotic War 1812 and the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945). Most of contexts are related to the Patriotic War 1812 (in contrast to the background knowledge of contemporary residents of Smolensk, where most of proper nouns refer to the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945).

4. Analysis of the data presented in the Corpus contributes to adjustment of its materials through detection of factual errors. Examples in this work are the following: the year of awarding the title of the Hero City to Smolensk, names of administrative centers of Smolensk region, namely, Dorogobuzh and Vyaz'ma.

5. Analysis of the RNC materials contributes to its categorization (for example, the abovementioned thematic classification of the material) for its further improvement.

6. Developers of the RNC point out that the "polycentrism" shall form the basis of the RNC project, i.e. new sub-corpus shall be created [17: 130], and a regional onomastic sub-corpus may become one of new types of them. Such sub-corpus will contribute to formation of nationwide background knowledge through regional proper nouns of high linguistic and cultural value that should be determined in a preliminary regional onomastic study.

Source

Russian National Corpus. URL: <http://ruscorpora.ru/search-main.html> (accessed: 15.03.2014).

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