

Dana Kratochvílová

The use of the parallel corpus *InterCorp* in foreign language teaching

1. Dedication

The following text was written as a part of the project *Program rozvoje vědních oblastí na Univerzitě Karlově č.P10 Lingvistika*, subprogram *Románské jazyky ve světle jazykových korpusů*.

2. Introduction

There are many ways of teaching a foreign language. The goal of our paper is to present one method that has proven useful – a parallel language corpus which has been created at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. We would like to present this project and, later, show the possibilities of its use in class.

3. The parallel corpus InterCorp

The corpus *InterCorp* is a parallel synchronous corpus for most of the languages studied at the Faculty of Arts and was created by the department of Czech National Corpus (<http://ucnk.ff.cuni.cz/english/index.php>) in collaboration with other departments of the Faculty of Arts that specialize in foreign languages. It is a long-term project which is in constant development.

According to the *InterCorp* official web page, the corpus currently consists of over 867 million of words. The languages that are represented the most (more than 50 million words) are Spanish, German, English, French, Dutch and, of course, Czech (cp. ÚČNK 2013b). The corpus is accessible from <http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp> and, after a short online registration, it can be used free.

Although the *InterCorp* is intended primarily for academics, we would like to demonstrate how it can be used in foreign language teaching.

For most of the students the biggest difficulty is the domination of those aspects of foreign language that do not exist in their mother tongue. Our area of interest is Spanish; therefore we will use an example from this language.

4. *Subjunctive*

In the Czech language, our mother tongue and also the mother tongue of our students, there are three verbal moods: the indicative, the imperative and the conditional. However, Czech does not possess any direct equivalent for the Spanish subjunctive.

The understanding of the role of Spanish subjunctive is especially difficult in those situations where it can alternate with the indicative (e.g. epistemic modality, evaluatives) because these mood alternations create semantic differences that are very hard to be reflected in another language. Course books usually deal with this problem by creating a list of verbs that can be followed either by subjunctive or by indicative stating that the subjunctive shows more doubts or emotiveness. This explanation may be sufficient for beginners but not for more advanced students who usually seek more precise explanations. Grammar for advanced students deals with this topic more extensively; however, it cannot provide an exhaustive comparison with the student's mother tongue.

5. *Temer(se)*

Let's take the Spanish verb *temer(se)* (=to fear) as an example. This verb causes difficulties to the students for various reasons: firstly, it can be either pronominal (*Me temo que ya es tarde – I am afraid it is too late*) or non-pronominal (*Temo que llegue tarde – I fear he will come late*) and, secondly, it can be followed by either the subjunctive or by the indicative.

The Spanish normative grammar *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* by RAE explains the use of the subjunctive / indicative in terms of major (subjunctive) or lower (indicative) emotiveness. *Temer(se)* + indicative expresses suspicion or mistrust, *temer(se)* + subjunctive expresses fear. At the same time,

- the initial expectation of the conditional and future tense as the opposites of Spanish subjunctive was also confirmed;
- and finally, we can observe that language is not mathematical; even though we can formulate several conclusions concerning the usage of the constructions in question and we have seen the main ways of their reflection in Czech, we cannot say that they always apply, we can see that the semantic difference between *temer(se)* + subjunctive and *temer(se)* + indicative is not always reflected in Czech (they are both translated as *obávát se* + indicative) and we have found cases where the verb is translated in a different way to what we had expected (as *to think* or *to get frightened*) – we believe that this is also an important aspect that students of a foreign language should be aware of.

7. Conclusions

To sum up, we believe that a parallel corpus can prove useful not only in the academic sphere but in the class as well. Through its use the students can see some problematical aspects of the studied language reflected in their mother tongue; the corpus offers them several examples of translation and, unlike the standard dictionaries, these translations are not taken out of the context, for the whole sentence or even a paragraph they appear in can be shown. This provides the possibility of discussing and commenting upon them. In this way, the students are encouraged to formulate their own conclusions based on their own observations and they are taught to work with language corpora.

References

- Porto Dapena, J.Á. (1991): *Del indicativo al subjuntivo: valores y usos de los modos del verbo*, Madrid: Arco Libros.
- RAE (2009): *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, Madrid: Espasa Libros.
- ÚČNK (2013a): *Český národní korpus – InterCorp*, <http://www.korpus.cz/> (10.1.2013).
- ÚČNK (2013b): *InterCorp*, <http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp/?req=page:info> (31.10.2013).

Dana Kratochvílová, Institute of Romance Studies, Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, Nám. Jana Palacha 1, 116 38 Prague, Czech Republic, dana.krat@seznam.cz.