



HAL
open science

English Tough constructions and their analogues in French and Russian: a parallel corpus investigation

Alina Tsikulina, Fayssal Tayalati, Efstathia Soroli

► **To cite this version:**

Alina Tsikulina, Fayssal Tayalati, Efstathia Soroli. English Tough constructions and their analogues in French and Russian: a parallel corpus investigation. In Trawiński, B., Kupietz, M., Proost, K. & Zinken, J. (Eds.) 10th International Contrastive Linguistics Conference (ICLC-10) book of abstracts, Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS), pp.324-326, 2023, 978-3-937241-96-8. 10.14618/f8rt-m155/113 . hal-04376252

HAL Id: hal-04376252

<https://hal.univ-lille.fr/hal-04376252v1>

Submitted on 10 Jan 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Alina Tsikulina/Fayssal Tayalati/Efstathia Soroli

ENGLISH TOUGH CONSTRUCTIONS AND THEIR ANALOGUES IN FRENCH AND RUSSIAN: A PARALLEL CORPUS INVESTIGATION

Keywords Corpus Linguistics; tough constructions; parallel corpora; semantics; syntax; English; French; Russian

The languages of the world present great variability in form-to-meaning mappings. Such diversity comes out clearly when one examines how constructions are used. For instance, evaluative constructions involving Tough predicates (e.g., This road is difficult to cross) present atypical mappings and vary greatly across languages: in some languages (e.g., English/French), speakers typically use so-called tough constructions (TC) – constructions involving sentences in which the syntactic subject NP of the matrix is logically the missing object of an embedded non-finite verb (Chung 2001; Guérin 2006, but see Van de Velde 2020 on the functional alternatives French offers); in others such as Russian (RU) – a language without such syntactic property – speakers opt for a variety of functional analogues (e.g., impersonal constructions, use of passives, deverbals) (Comrie/Matthews 1990; Paykin/Van Peteghem 2020).

Despite a growing interest in TC asymmetries and this great crosslinguistic variability, little is still known about the involvement of the semantic aspects of such evaluative constructions (e.g., the scope of the adjective, the animacy of the involved NP, or the degree of transitivity of the non-finite verb) and their role in across- and within-language variation (Becker/Estigarribia/Gylfadottir 2012; Boutault 2020; Kim 2014; Tayalati/Mostrov/Van de Velde 2020).

The aim of this paper is to explore and contrast the syntactic and semantic features of TC and their analogues in French and Russian based on a parallel corpus, identify the most typical patterns across these systems, and investigate how specific semantic properties (NP animacy, adjective scope, transitivity) relate to specific evaluative configurations.

The corpus study, based on the Opus corpus subtitles database (Tiedemann/Thottingal 2020), allowed to extract target English TC as source patterns using attribute expressions that contained two of the most frequently occurring adjectives within TC (difficult and easy) which were further mapped and compared with the corresponding aligned translations in French and Russian. In total, 375 target segments were identified (125 with difficult and 250 with easy).

The results show that even though English and French have been thought to belong to the same language type, French seems to allow a multitude of functional equivalents (e.g., reflexive uses, deverbals, compact suffixed adjectival predicates) that co-exist with typical TC, as previously suggested by Van de Velde (2020). With respect to Russian, this language offers mainly constructions involving a predicative (Comrie/Matthews 1990; Shcherba 2004), passive uses (Paykin/Van Peteghem 2020) and alternatively some compact adjectivals, deverbals and some other functional analogues (e.g., distributive adjectival uses, impersonals). Additionally, the data suggest that, although French and Russian offer similar functional

patterns, their contexts of use differ to some extent. More specifically, the analysis showed that the animacy of the NP as well as the adjective-type do not influence much the choice among different functional analogues, as opposed to the degree of transitivity of the English embedded infinitive, which had a differential impact in the translations: although highly-transitive verbs allowed for great functional variability in both Russian and French, less prototypical contexts for evaluatives (low-transitive ones) led to an almost unique functional strategy in Russian translations (use of predicatives).

This parallel corpus study allowed an in-depth investigation of a grammatical phenomenon that is only little discussed for Russian, and mainly explored from a syntactic point of view in English and in French. The findings support a multidimensional account of evaluative constructions that takes into account their inherent semantic properties, and further suggest a classification on a cline of tough-predication according to their degree of compactness.

References

- Becker, Misha/Estigarribia, Bruno/Gylfadottir, Duna (2012): Tough-adjectives are easy to learn. In: Supplemental Proceedings of BUCLD 36, pp. 1–12.
- Boutault, Joasha (2020): Vers une définition des constructions « tough » en anglais: les adjectifs et leur complément infinitif. In: *Anglophonia – French Journal of English Linguistics* 30. <https://journals.openedition.org/anglophonia/3773> (last access: 27 September 2022).
- Chung, Yoong-Suk (2001): Tough construction in English: A construction grammar approach. Ph.D. dissertation. Berkeley: University of California.
- Comrie, Bernard/Matthews Stephen (1990): Prolegomena to a typology of tough movement. In: Croft, William (ed.): *Studies in typology and diachrony: Papers presented to Joseph H. Greenberg on his 75th birthday*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 43–58.
- Tayalati, Fayssal/Mostrov, Vassil/Van de Velde, Danièle (2020): Les constructions Tough: Syntaxe, sémantique et interfaces. In: *Langages* 218 (2), pp. 7–16.
- Guérin, Valérie (2006): On tough constructions in French. In: *Manoa Working Papers in Linguistics* 37 (1), pp. 1–21.
- Kim, Kitaek (2014): Unveiling linguistic competence by facilitating performance. Ph.D. dissertation. Honolulu: University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Paykin, Kaiya/Van Peteghem, Marleen (2020): Des adjectifs tough dans des langues sans construction Tough? Le cas du russe. In: *Langages* 218 (2), pp. 75–88.
- Shcherba, Lev (2004): *Yazykovaya sistema i rechevaya deyatel'nost'* [Language system and speech activity (in Russian)]. Moscow: Editorial URSS.
- Tiedemann, Jorg/Thottingal, Santhosh (2020): OPUS-MT–Building open translation services for the World. In: Martins, André/Moniz, Helena/Fumega, Sara/Martins, Bruno/Batista, Fernando/Coheur, Luisa/Parra, Carla/Trancoso, Isabel/Turchi, Marco/Bisazza, Arianna/Moorkens, Joss/Guerberof, Ana/Nurminen, Mary/Marg, Lena/Forcada, Mikel L. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 22nd Annual Conference of the European Association for Machine Translation*. Lisbon: European Association for Machine Translation, pp. 479–480.
- Van de Velde, Danièle (2020): Les adjectifs tough du français comme prédicats dispositionnels. In: *Langages* 218 (2), pp. 107–124.

Contact information

Alina Tsikulina

Université de Lille

alina.tsikulina@univ-lille.fr

Fayssal Tayalati

Université de Lille

fayssal.tayalati@univ-lille.fr

Efstathia Soroli

Université de Lille

efstathia.soroli@univ-lille.fr

Bibliographical information

This text is part of the publication: Trawiński, Beata/Kupietz, Marc/Proost, Kristel/Zinken, Jörg (eds.) (2023): 10. International Contrastive Linguistics Conference (ICLC). Book of Abstracts (pre-conference version). Mannheim: IDS-Verlag.