Student-driven research using the Russian National Corpus

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One of the greatest challenges facing students learning Russian is to bridge to gap between the simplified version of Russian presented in their textbooks and authentic Russian as it is written and spoken by and for native speakers. Even the best textbooks generally present only a fraction of the grammar and how it is used, causing great confusion for students when they try to read a newspaper or a novel and find uses of case and aspect that could not be predicted from their grammar books. The Russian National Corpus can be a wonderful resource for helping students to explore, document, and organize their knowledge of Russian grammar. I propose that the students take a leadership role in this process, with appropriate guidance of course. In this way the students become stakeholders in the learning process and can also learn from each other, rather than merely from their instructors. Here are some more concrete ideas for how to undertake this type of learning. First the students are given a guided tour of the Russian National Corpus. Then they are asked to create a digital log book where they will archive examples they themselves have found of uses of Russian case and aspect, following the presentation of these grammatical phenomena in *The Case Book for Russian* (Janda & Clancy 2002) and the *Aspect in Russian MediaBook* (http://www.unc.edu/depts/slavdept/lajanda/russian/ainr). All examples will be culled by the students from the Russian National Corpus. Students can present samples from their log book in class and discuss issues concerning homonymy of forms and how best to organize searches for various uses of case and aspect. Students prepare their own presentations of special uses of case and aspect, illustrated with the examples that they have found in the Corpus. This teaching method promotes a high level of proficiency in Russian and full mastery of grammar. Within the framework of the recently-funded "Exploring Emptiness" project (http://uit.no/humfak/8775), this model will also be extended to the interactive learning of Russian verbal morphology.