

---

# A lexico-paradigmatic analysis of Russian demonyms

*Natalia Bobkova*

*Fabio Montermini*

CLLE, CNRS & Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès

---

## 1 Introduction

In recent years the study of ethnic terms (henceforth referred to as *demonyms*, also called *ethnonyms* or *gentilics* in various languages, and *katojkonimy* in Russian) has attracted the interest of linguists in several respects, including their lexical status and category, semantic features, variation, as well as their morphological and lexico-semantic properties. As far as derivational morphology is concerned, in particular, demonyms are interesting to study in at least three respects, all of which are related and will be tackled, at some extent, in the present talk:

- they form tight and extremely regular morpholexical networks, which allows to shed light on how these structures interact with derivational morphology (cf. Roché 2008, 2017; Schalchli & Boyé 2018, among others);
- they often make use of a large spectrum of morphological exponents (mainly, but not limited to, affixes), thus constituting an interesting testing ground for approaches to morphological rivalry (cf. Roché & Plénat 2016; Thuilier *et al.* 2021, a.o.);
- they involve peculiar interactions between derivational and inflectional morphology, thus calling into question the frontier between these two domains and to which extent it is (im)permeable (cf. Tuite 1995 on English; Schalchli & Boyé 2017 on French).

In this talk we present a first extensive analysis of a database of ethnic terms (nouns and adjectives) in Russian. The main issues we address concern the relationship between the place (city, region or country) name and its ethnic counterparts, and the network all these words form, in the line of what has been proposed by Schalchli & Boyé (2017) for French. Our analysis is thus carried on in a relational morphology approach, according to which the lexical networks words enter into directly interact with their construction and final form. We also adopt what we call a “constraint-based” model of morphology, according to which word-formation processes correspond to constructions the output form of a derived word as the result of the interaction between a lexeme’s form (a stem, which can possibly undergo various modifications in the derivation process, cf. Roché 2010) and the formal operation linked with a specific construction, which can be viewed itself as a constraint (Author 2 2017).

## 2 The demonymic system of Russian

As in other Slavic languages, and unlike, for instance, the Romance ones, demonymic nouns and adjectives are clearly distinguished lexemes in Russian, each of which follows a specific declensional pattern (for general treatments of demonyms in Russian and Slavic languages in general cf., among others, Akhmetova 2013, 2016; Berezovič 2018). In (1) we present some sets of lexemes including a toponym (country / region / city name), an ethnic adjective (roughly meaning ‘related to the place X’), a masculine and feminine ethnic noun (referring to the inhabitants of a country / region / city).

(1) <sup>1</sup> a.	Burjatij(a) ('Buryatia')	burjatsk(ij) <sub>A</sub>	burjat <sub>N,M</sub>	burjatk(a) <sub>N,F</sub>
b.	Volgograd	volgogradsk(ij) <sub>A</sub>	volgogradec <sub>N,M</sub>	volgogradk(a) <sub>N,F</sub>
c.	Kirov	kirovsk(ij) <sub>A</sub>	kirovčanin <sub>N,M</sub>	kirovčank(a) <sub>N,F</sub>
d.	Ostrov	ostrovsk(ij) <sub>A</sub>	ostrovič <sub>N,M</sub>	ostrovičk(a) <sub>N,F</sub>
e.	Zelenogorsk	zelenogorsk(ij) <sub>A</sub>	zelenogorec <sub>N,M</sub>	zelenogork(a) <sub>N,F</sub>

Examples (1a-d) illustrate the most frequent types of formal relations observed in Russian demonyms. More in detail, as these examples show, the ethnic adjective is derived by means of the suffix *-sk-* without exceptions.<sup>2</sup> As far as nouns are concerned, the situation is more complex. As other languages, Russian possesses a bunch of simple ethnic (masculine) nouns from which toponyms are created (1a). More often, however, masculine inhabitant nouns are constructed by one of the three suffixes *-c*, *-anin* or *-ič* and their variants (cf. below). Table 1 presents the proportion of masculine demonymic nouns in our database, distinguishing between Russian and foreign toponyms (cf. below for details on the database).

	<i>-c</i> (type 1a)	<i>-anin</i> (type 1b)	<i>-ič</i> (type 1c)
Russian	663 (69,94%)	277 (29,22%)	8 (0,84%)
Foreign	297 (95,50%)	14 (1,53%)	–

**Table 1: distribution of the main construction types of masculine denonymic nouns in the database**

Feminine inhabitant nouns, on their turn, are consistently constructed by means of the suffix *-k* (or a variant of it),<sup>3</sup> which attaches either to the 'bare' form of the toponym (cf. 1b, e), or to the masculine noun (cf. 1 a, c, d). Moreover, the situation is made more complex by the fact that many Russian city names include themselves suffixes, such as *-sk* (1e), which is the outcome of a further derivation from the corresponding adjective (cf. Cexanovič 2007).

### 3 Database construction

For our research we collected a database of Russian demonyms from various sources, namely the list of Russian cities provided in the Russian Wikipedia<sup>4</sup> and Babkin (ed.) (1964) for demonyms of Russian place names and the Russian Wikipedia, as well as other Internet sources for demonym of foreign place names. Since Internet sources, and in particular Wikipedia, are not always compiled according to strict lexicographic criteria, to be included each demonym had to appear at least once in the Russian National Corpus,<sup>5</sup> or, in alterna-

<sup>1</sup> Glosses are provided only for country or region names; when a gloss is lacking, the geographic name designates a Russian city. Brackets in the representation of words indicate the inflectional suffix of the citation form ((masculine) nominative singular).

<sup>2</sup> *-sk-* is one of the three main denominal adjectival suffixes in Russian, along with *-n-* and *-ev/-ov-* (cf. Zemskaja 2015; Kustova 2018; Autor 1 & Autor 2 in press).

<sup>3</sup> Both *-c* and *-k* possess an allomorph displaying an extra vowel when they appear in suffixless inflected forms (cf. *vinogradec<sub>M,NOM,SG</sub>*, *vinogradok<sub>F,GEN,PL</sub>*) (on vowel/∅ alternations in Russian cf. Sims 2017 among others).

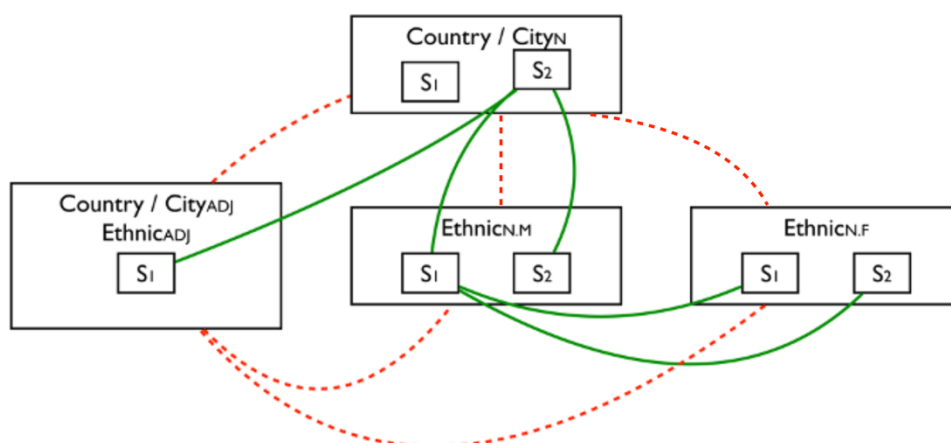
<sup>4</sup> [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список\\_городов\\_России](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_городов_России).

<sup>5</sup> <https://ruscorpora.ru/>.

tive, had to have at least one attestation in discourse in a Google search. This allowed us to gather a database of 3,523 demonyms from 1,133 Russian city names and 915 demonyms from 279 foreign place (mainly country) names.<sup>6</sup> The interest of distinguishing two different databases was, among others, the fact that it allows us observing the different treatment these demonyms receive, and to have hints on the actual productivity of each type. For instance, if we consider that demonyms from foreign toponyms have globally entered the lexicon more recently than those from Russian names, we can conclude that the suffix *-c* is overwhelmingly the most productive for the derivation of masculine names.

## 4 Analysis

On the basis of the collected database we propose a lexico-paradigmatic analysis of demonym formation in Russian. In our analysis, the lexico-semantic properties are partly disconnected from the formal ones. In particular, the former connect lexemes (or rather “lexemes”, as in Schalchli & Boyé’s 2018 analysis), whereas the latter connect stems stored in the lexical representation of lexemes. The overall schema of Russian demonym construction is presented in Figure 1, where red dotted lines represent lexico-semantic links, and green lines represent formal links.



**Figure 1: global scheme of Russian demonym construction**

In particular, we consider that place names in Russian have a two-stem stem space, including a ‘hidden’, exclusively derivational, stem. This accounts for systematic allomorphies encountered both with adjectives and nouns. These include derivational variants of Slavic origin (like in *Dn(o) / dnovsk(ij) / dnovec*) and adaptations of ethnic affixes of foreign origin (like in *Korsika* ‘Corsica’ / *korsikansk(ij) / korsikanec*). Moreover, feminine nouns are also constructed formally (but not semantically) on the default stem of masculine nouns. Finally, we consider that, like in other languages (cf. Roché 2008; Schalchli & Boyé 2018 on French), the ethnic adjective, although it is formally linked only to the place name, is semantically linked to both the latter (meaning ‘related to the country / city X’) and to the ethnic names (meaning ‘related to the inhabitants of X’). In particular, we provide numerical evidence for

<sup>6</sup> The number of actually considered forms is higher than what expected for the number of toponyms considered because some places names display variation and more than one form are attested.

the different cases encountered, and for the fact that the schema proposed allows accounting for the great majority of them and for the variation observed.

## References

- Akhmetova, Marija V. 2013. Variantnost' nazvanij žitelej (po materialam èlektronnoj bazy SMI "Integrum"). *Vestnik RGGU* 8. 86-105.
- Akhmetova, Marija V. 2016. Strategii nominacii i "jazykovaja politika": nazvanija žitelej gorodov. *Labirint* 5. 76-85.
- Babkin, Aleksandr M. (ed.) (1964). *Slovar' nazvanij žitelej (RSFSR)*. Moskva: Sovetskaja Ènciklopedija.
- Berezovič Elena L. 2018. Slavjanske ottoponimičeskie nazvanija žitelej: asociativno-derivacionnaja i frazeologičeskaja semantika. In: Svetlana M. Tolstaja (ed.), *Slavjanskoe jazykoznanie. XVI Meždunarodnyj s'ezd slavistov. Belgrad 20-27 avgusta 2018 g.* 7-34. Moskva: Institut Slavjanovedenija Ran.
- Cexanovič, Marianna A. 2007. Suffiks -sk- v rusškoj toponimii i problema naloženija morfem v ottoponimičeskix prilagate'lnyx. *Vestnik PSTGU. III Filologija* 3.9. 14-22.
- Kustova, Galina I. 2018. Prilagatel'nye. In Vladimir A. Plungjan & Natal'ja M. Stojnova (eds.), *Materialy k korpusnoj grammatike russkogo jazyka, vyp. III: Časti reči i leksiko-grammatičeskie klassy*, 40-107. Sankt-Peterburg: Nestor-Istorija.
- Roché, Michel. 2008. Structuration du lexique et principe d'économie : le cas des ethniques. In Jacques Durand, Benoît Habert & Bernard Laks (eds.), *Actes du Congrès mondial de linguistique française, 1571-1585*. Paris: Institut de Linguistique Française.
- Roché, Michel. 2010. Base, thème, radical. *Recherches linguistiques de Vincennes* 39. 95-134.
- Roché, Michel & Marc Plénat. 2016. De l'harmonie dans la construction des mots français. In Franck Neveu, Gabriel Bergounioux, Marie-Hélène Côté, Jean-Marie Fournier, Linda Hriba, Sophie Prévost (eds.), *5<sup>e</sup> Congrès mondial de linguistique française*. Paris: Institut de Linguistique Française.
- Schalchli, Gauvin & Gilles Boyé. 2018. Paradigms and syncretism in derivation: The case of ethnics in French. *Lingue e linguaggio* XVII.2. 197-215.
- Sims, Andrea. 2017. Slavic morphology: Recent approaches to classic problems, illustrated with Russian. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 25.2. 143-182.
- Thuilier, Juliette, Delphine Tribout & Marine Wauquier. 2021. Affixal rivalry in demonym formation. Paper presented at the on-line workshop on affix rivalry, 19 March 2021.
- Tuite, Kevin. 1995. The declension of ethnonyms in English. *Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* [https://journals.linguisticsociety.org/proceedings/index.php/BLS/article/view/1420/0].
- Zemskaja, Elena A. 2015. *Jazyk kak dejatel'nost': Morfema, slovo, reč'*. Moskva: Flinta.