Course Proposal

Ethnolinguistics in the Slavic Context
(The Slavic Linguistic Picture of the World)

Level  Credits
400      3

Target audience
Advanced undergrads in Russian, Polish, or Czech and graduate students in Slavic

Prerequisites
A minimum of two years of Russian, Polish, or Czech or the equivalent and permission of instructor

This course fulfills the area studies requirement for Russian and Polish majors in the Language & Civilization track.

Do languages shape the way we think? This course in ethno- or cultural linguistics will frame an answer to this question through examination of data from three Slavic languages – Russian, Polish, and Czech – in comparison primarily with English and, where appropriate, other languages. We will examine the semantics of both words and grammar, everyday language and literature.

No formal background in linguistics is necessary: readings and class discussions will provide an introduction to semantic analysis in several compatible ethnolinguistic frameworks (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Anna Wierzbicka’s Natural Semantic Metalanguage, and Jerzy Bartminski’s Cognitive Ethnosemantics) as well as present resources for research in this area (dictionaries, national corpora, and specialized studies in English, Russian, Polish, and Czech).

Concepts to be analyzed include, but are not limited to, the following: *home* (homeland), *right* and *left*, *fair* and *reasonable*, *conscience*, *spirituality*, *soul* and *mind* and *heart*, *truth* and *lie*, *friend*, *honesty*, *fate*, and a range of emotion terms (eg, *sadness*, *happiness*, *anger*, *pity*, *yearning*). In addition, data from cross-linguistic studies of gesture and discourse will be discussed.

Materials