

## Comparative study of French and Bulgarian human general nouns

This research is part of an international project that aims at the linguistic description of human nouns in various languages (French, German, Romanian, Portuguese, Bulgarian, etc). We focus here on a subset of nouns (in French and in Bulgarian) denoting humans in a general way, which show small number of semantic features and can therefore be considered as superordinate. Our main goal is to compare the French lexemes *homme*, (*être*) *humain*, *personne*, *individu*, *gens* (man, human being, person, individual, people) with the available human general nouns in Bulgarian such as *човек*, *човешко същество*, *лице*, *индивид*, *хора*, *души*, on the basis of their uses that depend on their semantic and syntactic features, often different in the two languages. In our analyses, we adopt the referential semantics approach as presented in some recent works dealing mainly with French human general nouns<sup>1</sup> (Cappeau & Schnedecker 2012, 2014, Mihatsch 2015a et b, Schnedecker 2012), and for the comparison itself we explore data from monolingual and bilingual dictionaries which is put to the test using parallel corpora in various domains (medicine, law, film subtitles). We argue that certain nouns (as the French plurale tantum *gens* and its Bulgarian ‘equivalent’ *хора*) reveal more similarities than differences (for example, with regard to their contexts and the use of determiners), whereas others overlap only partially (*лице* corresponds almost exclusively to one of the meanings of *personne*). Moreover, the corpus data show that, according to the domain of use, a specific noun can be preferred to a general one in the translation (*пациент* ‘patient’ for *personne* in medical labels), and in other cases a French general noun, depending on the context, can be translated by a stylistically marked Bulgarian lexeme (*individu* bizarre: *странна особа* ‘an odd-looking individual/character’). We also take into account the correlation between the poor referential meaning of the human general nouns and their possible behavior as pronouns, at least for some of them: for example, *човек* ‘man’ as a subject in generic sentences is translated by the French indefinite pronoun *on*, and *gens* ‘people’ is, sometimes, “incorporated” in a nominalized adjective in Bulgarian, when it serves as a support for a classification of human beings: *gens de couleur* ‘people of color’ – *цветнокожи* ‘colored (people)’.

Our research shows that the human general nouns, often presented by dictionaries as interchangeable synonyms probably due to their ‘poor’ meaning, have nevertheless different interpretations and uses depending on various factors (context, pragmatics, syntactic position, choice of determiners, distinction between group and individual(s), etc). This is supported by a spectrum of available translation choices (in both directions: French-Bulgarian and Bulgarian-French), ranging from a ‘null element’ to a specific noun.

We hope that our work, besides the theoretical contribution to the human general nouns linguistic description, can be used for practical purposes as translation and foreign language teaching (French/Bulgarian).

### References

- Cappeau, P./Schnedecker, C., 2012, “(Les/des) gens vs (les/des) personnes. Evolution diachronique et comparaison diamésique. Des SN en voie de pronominalisation”, Colloque *DIAll*, Copenhague, novembre 2012.
- Cappeau, P./Schnedecker, C., 2014, “*Gens, personne(s), individu(s)*. Trois saisies de l’humain”, in : *Actes du 4<sup>e</sup> Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française*. Ed. F. Neveu & alii, 3027-3040.

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<sup>1</sup> As for Bulgarian, we found only one short study that discusses briefly two nouns: *човек* ‘man’, *хора* ‘people’ and their Portuguese equivalents (Venkova 1997, cf. references). This is one of the reasons we chose to work on this almost unexplored domain for Bulgarian.

- Mihatsch, W., 2015a, “La sémantique des noms généraux ‘être humain’ français et allemands”, in : *Les noms d’humains : une catégorie à part ?*. Ed Mihatsch W., Schnedecker C. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 55-83.
- Mihatsch, W., 2015b, “La position taxinomique et les réseaux méronymiques des noms généraux ‘être humain’ français et allemands” in : *Les noms d’humains : une catégorie à part ?*. Ed Mihatsch W., Schnedecker C. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 85-113.
- Schnedecker, C., 2012, “*Tout le monde, tous, (tous) les gens*. Relations sémantiques entre les expressions dénotant la totalité /+hum/ ?”, in : *Relations, connexions et dépendances. Hommages au professeur Claude Guimier*. Ed. N. Querler & alii, 123-150.
- Venkova, V., 1997, “The nouns *man* and *people* in Portuguese and in Bulgarian”, *Contrastive linguistics* 22-4, 5-12.

## Dictionaries

Le Petit Robert de la langue française (CD-ROM, 2009)

Le Grand Robert de la langue française (CD-ROM, 2009)

Le Trésor de la langue française (<http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>)

Френско-български речник (French-Bulgarian dictionary), Наука и изкуство, София 2002

Българо-френски речник (Bulgarian-French dictionary), Наука и изкуство, София 1983

Български тълковен речник (Bulgarian monolingual dictionary), Наука и изкуство, София 2012

## Corpora

<https://www.sketchengine.co.uk/>

<http://opus.lingfil.uu.se/index.php>

<http://dcl.bas.bg/bulnc/>