

Potebnja, langage, pensée. Édité par Patrick Sériot & Margarita Schonenberger. (= *Cahiers de l'ILSL*, 46 [2016].) Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 2016. 216 pp. ISBN 978-2-9700958-1-1. CHF 20.00 (PB).

Reviewed by Vladimir Alpatov (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)

The book under review unites the lectures delivered at a conference organized by the University of Lausanne in June 2013 in Switzerland. The participants of the conference were specialists from Russia, The Ukraine, Switzerland, France, Italy, The Czech Republic, and Estonia. The conference was dedicated to the life and work of A. A. Potebnja.

Professor of the Xarkov University Aleksandr Afanas'evič Potebnja (1835–1891) was one of the outstanding Russian scholars of the 19th century. He elaborated a variety of issues in philosophy, linguistics, literature and folklore and was the founder of the Xarkov linguistic school. The influence of Potebnja's ideas in Russia and the USSR was significant; some of the lectures published in this volume were dedicated to the history of this influence. However, Potebnja's ideas are almost unknown outside Russia and The Ukraine, and so one of the aims of the conference was to remedy this lacuna. The majority of the lectures were dedicated to Potebnja's philosophical views and his contribution to the theory of literature, while purely linguistic problems were somewhat in the shadow. The most investigated work in the lectures was his first book published in 1862 when Potebnja was 27 years old. This book has remained his major theoretical work; the most recent Russian edition appeared in 1999.

The only article specifically dedicated to linguistic issues is “Le verbe dans la dernière partie des *Notes de grammaire russe* d'A. Potebnja [The verb in the last part of *Iz zapisok po russoj grammatike* by Aleksandr Potebnja]” by Roger Comtet (Toulouse) (pp. 3–23). This part of Potebnja's main work on grammar was published posthumously in 1941. Comtet focuses on some principles of the investigation of linguistic data using as an example Potebnja's analysis of the verb and verbal categories. One of the peculiarities of Potebnja's theory was the panchronic, or achronic, approach: he used examples from manuscripts from the 11th century as well as from modern texts (6–7). Geographical borders did not exist for him either: he used examples both from Russian and other Slavic languages since he considered them variants of a common language (7–9). He preferred examples from dialects and folklore to examples from literature. Such ideas brought him together with Slavophile linguists; in particular, he continued their tradition to

consider aspect the main Russian verbal category, since it was specific to Slavic languages (13–16).

Potebnja's ideas in the national and political context are investigated in the article by Aleksandr Dmitriev (Moscow), "Philosophie romantique et positivisme dans l'héritage de Potebnja: le contexte russe et ukrainien [Romantic and positivist philosophy in the heritage of Potebnja: Russian and Ukrainian context]" (pp. 25–46). Dmitriev indicates the duality of Potebnja's position: he was Ukrainian, felt his connection with the Ukrainian folk culture but lived in a Russian cultural environment and wrote in Russian. Biographers of Potebnja have pointed out that he was an adherent of the idea of the common pan-Russian culture that necessarily included Ukrainian and Belorussian components. Dmitriev emphasizes that Potebnja could be at the same time a Russian and a Ukrainian patriot and did not feel any contradiction (p. 30). However, the differentiation was increasingly felt and there were both Slavophiles and Ukrainophiles among his pupils. During the years of the Revolution of 1917 Potebnja's ideas were discussed in debates about the future of The Ukraine. This article also touches upon questions of Potebnja's scientific positions. Traditionally he is considered the most significant Russian follower of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). However, Dmitriev shows that the Humboldtian ideas, brilliantly expressed in Potebnja's 1862 book, were replaced by positivist, Neo-Grammarians' conceptions in his later work (p. 32).

Donatella Ferrari Bravo (Pisa) in her article "La signification sémiotique du concept de 'forme': Potebnja et alii [The semiotic significance of the concept of 'form': Potebnja and others]" (pp. 47–59) examines some peculiarities of Potebnja's scientific thought. His work was characterized by great complexity of language, difficult terminology and constant striving for inclusion of many subject matters as well as the establishment of connections between different branches of science (p. 48). One of the most important concepts for Potebnja was that of 'form'. He made a distinction between 'internal form' and 'external form' under the influence of W. von Humboldt, a distinction of far-reaching semiotic significance. These ideas, together with the ideas of Aleksandr Nikolaevič Veselovskij (1838–1906), had a significant influence on the development of Russian literary studies.

The article of Vladimir Feščenko (Moscow), "Forme et contenu comme guerre et paix (la philosophie russe du langage après Potebnja) [Form and content as war and peace (the Russian philosophy of the language after Potebnja)]" (pp. 61–77), is devoted to the history of the development of Potebnja's ideas in Russia after his death. The author does not examine Potebnja's linguistic work but rather his philosophical and philological work. One of the main issues was the relationship between form and content. Potebnja distinguished between internal form, external form and content, but in the first decades after 1862 the concept of internal form was reduced to the psychological concept of the artistic image. The first author

who went farther was Andrej Belyj (1880–1934), who in 1910 interpreted the ideas of Potebnja in the vein of symbolism (64–67). Belyj, like Potebnja himself, proceeded from the necessary connection between form and content, but then futurists declared a “war” between them in art and literature. These ideas were adopted and theoretically developed by the Russian formal school (Boris Mixajlovič Ėjxenbaum (1886–1959) and Viktor Borisovič Šklovskij (1893–1984), among others). The scholars of this school considered Potebnja one of their principal opponents and constantly attacked his ideas, especially in the early period (67–70).

These two stages of the fate of Potebnja’s scientific heritage are considered separately in the next two articles. Patrick Flack (Prague) deals with the estimates and interpretations of Potebnja’s ideas (“Andrej Belyj, lecteur de Potebnja: un jalon néo-kantien de l’approche poétique du langage en Russie [Andrej Belyj, a reader of Potebnja: Neo-Kantian landmark in the poetical approach to the language in Russia]” (pp. 79–92)). Belyj was a writer and philosopher, who criticized the psychological approach of Potebnja under the influence of neo-Kantianism. However, Belyj also pointed to some resemblance between Potebnja’s ideas and symbolism. Flack considers the conception of Belyj as an important landmark between Potebnja and the formal school (p. 79). Note that Flack constantly refers to Potebnja as “the Ukrainian scholar” although it is difficult to consider a separate Ukrainian science in the 19th century.

The fate of Potebnja’s ideas in the period of the formal school is described in the article by Tomaš Glanc (Zurich) “Ils s’opposaient à tout le monde’. Le statut de la pensée chez Potebnja vu par Jakobson [They opposed to everybody. the status of thought in Potebnja’s works from the point of view of Jakobson]” (pp. 93–103). Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) was one of the leaders of the formal school, who was in opposition to Potebnja’s ideas and repeatedly criticized Potebnja (who had died many years earlier). The general point of disagreement was their opinion about the main function of language: thought (Potebnja) vs. expression (Jakobson). In Jakobson’s later years, his divergences with Potebnja became less pronounced; in particular Jakobson, too, started to use the concept of internal form. On p. 99, Glanc gives an overview of the contexts where Jakobson mentioned Potebnja and Belyj in his writings.

Ljudmila Gogotišvili (Moscow) in her article “La forme interne immanente dialogique chez Bakhtine comme alternative à Humboldt et Potebnja [Immanent dialogic inner form of Baxtin as alternative to Humboldt and Potebnja]” (pp. 105–110) compares the ideas of W. von Humboldt and Potebnja (1862) with the conception of Mixail Mixailovič Baxtin (1895–1975) in “The Word in the Novel” (2012 [1934–1935]). Baxtin rarely mentioned these scholars, but Gogotišvili discovers some interesting similarities in their publications. For instance, it is possible to

suppose that Baxtin considered dialogism to be the internal form of the novels by F.M. Dostoevskij (p. 108).

Leonid Heller (Lausanne & Paris) in his article “Les mystères du 4^e élément, ou les composantes du signe selon Potebnja: Le problème du matériau dans l’art [Mysteries of the fourth element, or the components of the sign according to Potebnja: The Problem of the Materials in the Art]” (pp. 111–120) compares the model “word — sign — work of art” elaborated by Potebnja with similar models in the formal school.

Igor’ Pilščikov (Tallinn & Moscow) analyses in his article “La forme interne du mot dans l’interprétation des Formalistes russes (OPOJaZ, CLM, GAXN) [The inner form of the word in the interpretation of the Russian formalists]” (pp. 121–141) the understanding of the internal form of the word in the publications of several Russian literary scholars in the 1920s. The author examines the conceptions of the formalists proper (Jurij Nikolaevič Tynjanov (1894–1943), Ėjxenbaum) and Šklovskij as well as the more moderate scholars of the same paradigm such as Grigorij Osipovič Vinokur (1896–1947), Viktor Maksimovič Žirmuskij (1891–1971)) and their scientific opponents, in particular Gustav Špet (1879–1937) and Boris Isaakovič Jarxo (1889–1942). Potebnja narrowed Humboldt’s very wide concept of the internal form of the language down to the concept of the internal form of the word, i.e. the “immediate etymological meaning” of the word. It should be noted, however, that in the 1920s this term was understood in various ways.

Margarita Schoenenberger (Lausanne) in her article “*La Pensée et le langage* de Potebnja comme réaction probable aux recherches philologiques de N. Kostyr’ [Thought and Language by Potebnja as a possible reaction to the philological studies of N. T. Kostyr’ (1818–1853)]” (pp. 143–158) raises a question that has hitherto received little attention. The influence of German philosophy of language — W. von Humboldt, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), Heymann Steinthal (1823–1899) — on Potebnja is well-established, but his relations with his teachers at Xarkov University are much less clear. In Potebnja’s student years the main lecturer of the philological courses at Xarkov was Nikolaj Trofimovič Kostyr’ (1818–1853) who is by now virtually forgotten. His influence on Potebnja was called zero by Aleksandr Ivanovič Beleckij (1884–1961). Schoenenberger argues that, in spite of his young age, Kostyr’ was an old-fashioned scholar, who developed the archaic ideas of Aleksandr Semenovič Šiškov (1754–1841), disproved by other scholars, in combination with the philosophy of Georg W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and outdated views on the origin of language (pp. 148–153).

Patrick Sériot (Lausanne) in his article “Matérialisme ou mentalisme? Une querelle post-marriste à propos de Potebnja (années 1930–1940) [Materialism or mentalism? Post-marrist discussions on Potebnja (1930–40)]” (pp. 159–183)

discusses a particular period in the history of Soviet linguistics. Nowadays, Soviet humanities of the 1930s and 1940s are usually characterized by scholars outside Russia as dogmatic and wholly subordinated to the official demands of the time. However, Sériot shows that this opinion is incorrect with regard to Soviet linguistics. In the 1930s and 1940s, the “new doctrine on language” of Nikolaj Jakovlevič Marr (1864–1934) remained predominant, but Marr’s followers, including his official successor Ivan Ivanovič Meščaninov (1883–1967), deviated from the ‘standard’ doctrine. In particular, Soviet linguists were looking for another authoritative figure in the history of linguistics, and the political situation demanded the search for this figure among Russian linguists. The most appropriate candidate was Potebnja, because some of his ideas were consistent with conceptions of Meščaninov and his pupils. According to Sériot, the central problem of Soviet linguistics in the 1920s was ‘language and society’, but in the 1930s the focus shifted to ‘language and thought’ (p. 161). Marr only rarely mentioned Potebnja, but Meščaninov and his pupils analyzed his ideas in several publications. Sériot discusses appraisals of Potebnja by Meščaninov and especially his pupil Solomon Davidovič Kacnel’son (1907–1985), who emphasized the importance of Potebnja’s ideas on the inseparability of language and thought and the importance of linguistic data for the understanding of the history of thought. According to Kacnel’son, one of the main merits of Potebnja is the shift of attention from linguistic form to linguistic content (pp. 166–180). Sériot compares the ideas of Kacnel’son with contemporary mentalist conceptions including those advanced by Damourette & Pichon (1930–1949 [1911–1940]) in France (p. 171). I can add that Potebnja was the classic of linguistics for various Leningrad linguists of that time, not only Kacnel’son, who developed Potebnja’s ideas till the end of his life, but also for Aleksandr Alekseevič Xolodovič (1906–1977), unquestionably a brilliant structuralist and theoretical linguist, who translated Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857–1913) and Nikolaj Sergeevič Trubeckoy’s (1890–1938) works into Russian: in 1946 Xolodovič called Potebnja his “true teacher” (Alpatov 1988: 176).

The article “Les emprunts de Potebnja à Lazarus: Essai d’élucidation [Borrowing from Lazarus to Potebnja: an attempt at elucidation]” (pp. 185–201) by Serhii Wakoulenko (Xarkov) deals with the influence of Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) on Potebnja. Lazarus was a German-Swiss psychologist and an outstanding scholar of the second half of the 19th century. He was closely connected to Heymann Steinthal, the prominent continuer of the Humboldtian tradition at the time of Potebnja; Lazarus and Steinthal published the journal “*Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*”. The influence of Steinthal on Potebnja is well-known and was pointed out by Potebnja himself, but a similar influence of Lazarus has never been the subject of study. Potebnja mentioned Lazarus only occasionally, but Wakoulenko believes that a certain influence of Lazarus on Potebnja

cannot be ruled out. For instance, the transition from the Humboldtian concept of the internal form of language to the more limited concept of the internal form of the word was more clearly formulated in the works of Lazarus than in those by Steinthal, and Potebnja could therefore have adopted ideas from the former (191–195). He could also have borrowed the notion of condensation of thought from Lazarus, according to the author.

Finally, Sergej Zenkin (Moscow) in his article “La critique de Potebnja dans les travaux de Boris Engel’gardt [The criticism of Potebnja in the works of Boris Engel’gardt]” (pp. 203–214) analyses two works of Boris Engel’gardt (1887–1942) written in the 1920s but published only recently. Zenkin highly values these writings. Engel’gardt did not agree with the ideas of Potebnja and called them ‘gnosiological psychologism’; in his opinion, Potebnja did not distinguish between thought and cognition.

All the authors of the book aim to interpret interesting aspects but, ultimately, only vaguely formulated ideas put forward and developed by Potebnja himself. However they all agree on his significant role in the history of the development of linguistic theory in Russia and The Ukraine.

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Reviewer’s address

Vladimir Alpatov
 Russian Academy of Sciences
 Institute of Linguistics
 1, Boļšoy Kislovskij pereulok
 125009, Moscow
 Russian Federation
 v-alpatov@ivran.ru