

Jakobson entre l'Est et l'Ouest, 1915-1939: Un épisode de l'histoire de la culture européenne. Édité par Françoise Gadet et Patrick Sériot, en collaboration avec les Cahiers Roman Jakobson (Michigan University, Ann Arbor, USA). (= *Cahiers de l'ILSL* [Institut de Linguistique et des Sciences du Langage de l'Université de Lausanne], 9.) Lausanne, 1997. Pp. 260.

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Who could have imagined twenty years ago, when his reputation was still riding the structuralist crest of the 1960s to mid-1970s, with what little fanfare the centenary of the birth of Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1896–1982) would come and go? No figure has had a greater impact on the study of language from the middle decades of this century onward. We have yet to appreciate the extent to which such Jakobsonian conceptions as marked and unmarked categories (dating from the start of the 1930s) and distinctive features (from later that decade) gave shape to a wholly new way of imagining language that, among other things, made later developments in cognitive science and artificial intelligence possible. Indeed it was Jakobson who first envisioned the role linguistics might play in these fields. His pioneering studies of aphasia marked the start of the modern traditions both of neurolinguistics and of cerebrally-oriented cognitivism, while simultaneously making a major contribution to literary and stylistic analysis by redefining metaphor and metonymy in connection with different forms of aphasic speech. This would have a still vaster impact, by showing that the humanities had significant insights to offer even the hardest of 'hard' sciences. What this has meant over the ensuing decades in terms of practical support for linguistic and literary studies, and of impetus for interdisciplinary work of the most fruitful kind, is incalculable.

Add to this his role as the prime intellectual force in the Prague Linguistic Circle; his revival of a tradition of linguistic analysis of child language acquisition which had almost completely devolved to psychologists in the first four decades of this century; his importance as a bridge between European and American linguistics (see Falk 1995), including the hand he took in rehabilitating the traditional idea of the 'mind' against a well-entrenched modernist Anglo-American scepticism; his development of the basis of what would come to be known as transformational-generative grammar in his work

on Russian conjugation; his single-handed efforts to integrate the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) into modern linguistics; his founding role in the modern tradition of semiotics, and of structuralist poetics; his pioneering work on machine translation and computer language — the list could go on and on — and it is truly startling that Jakobson's stock could be as low as it is these days.

There are several possible reasons. The rise of poststructuralism, starting in France in 1968 and culminating with its mainstreaming in American universities in the 1980s and after, knocked structuralist icons off their pedestals along with some of their prominent contemporaries like Jean-Paul Sartre, whose share prices have plummeted no less drastically than Jakobson's. Yet while Sartre's work has largely been jettisoned from philosophy to be at best reclassified as second-rate literature, Jakobson's contributions to linguistics have not been shunted aside but absorbed into received knowledge and methodology, without his name necessarily being attached to them. For younger linguists markedness is a commonsense notion, and if they associate it with anyone, it is probably Chomsky & Halle (1968).

Like it or not, this is a normal process in the formation of professional identity. People want to associate whatever they believe is good, useful and true with the particular group they consider themselves a part of, and generativists certainly do not embrace Jakobson as one of their own. On the level of national identity too, Americans think of him as a European, Europeans think of him as a Russian, and Russians, having (except for his fellow émigrés) only recently started to think about him at all, don't know quite what to think of a Jew who, though born in Russia, fled westward and made his brilliant career abroad.

Most fitting, then, to have set as the theme of this Symposium (held near Lausanne on 5–7 September 1996) the paradox of his identity: "Jakobson between the East and the West". Some of the 17 papers take on this theme directly, while others examine some facet of his work or career in either the Eastern or Western European context. Juxtaposing them highlights both the sweep and the ambiguity of his personal and intellectual affiliations in the years between the founding of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and his flight from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia.

Some of the most interesting papers include previously unpublished or obscure documents and information. "Roman Jakobson in Sweden 1940–41" by Bengt Jangfeldt (149–157) offers as an appendix the police report (in English translation) made when Jakobson and his wife Svatava crossed the border from Norway to Sweden in April 1940 and declared themselves political

refugees. It includes a very detailed account by Jakobson of their flight from Czechoslovakia and ensuing travels. Jangfeldt provides much other information of interest, such as the fact that Jakobson spent the two weeks of his crossing from Sweden to New York in May 1941 in unflagging, excited conversation with the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945). This experience no doubt had consequences for the subsequent history of structuralism, including the remarks on recent trends in linguistics in Cassirer's chapter on language in his 1944 *Essay on Man*, and especially his 1945 paper (delivered to the Linguistic Circle of New York just days before his death) in the second issue of "Word", the journal Jakobson co-founded.

"Trubetzkoy, Jakobson et la France, 1919–39" by Jean-Claude Chevalier (33–46) includes a number of extracts from unpublished or generally unavailable sources, including several letters and other documents from the archives of Lucien Tesnière (1893–1954) in the Bibliothèque Nationale, to show how much more hostility and suspicion Jakobson's work initially met with in France than did that of his close associate Prince Nikolaj Sergeevich Trubetzkoy (1890–1938). Chevalier attributes the difference to Jakobson's being

younger than Trubetzkoy, less legitimate, less European in personality, less princely, more troublesome ... [I]n a France of young linguists eager for something new, for theories, intellectual adventures, conquests, these Russians brought from the East an air of the exotic which set heads spinning. But it seems clear that Jakobson's mystical and sometimes violent character, along with his street juggler side, was disconcerting, even exasperating. (36–45, my translation: JEJ)

Another impressive paper, "Des éléments systématiques qui sautent les barrières des systèmes" by co-editor Sériot (213–236), reminds us of a generally forgotten intellectual and political movement of the 1920s and '30s called 'Eurasism', founded by a quartet of Russian émigrés one of whom was Trubetzkoy (on whom see further Sériot 1996). Its central tenet was that "the Russian Empire, succeeded by the USSR, corresponds to a *natural whole* which is neither Europe nor Asia but a continent unto itself [...] possessing a certain number of unifying elements" (213 n.1, my translation: JEJ; italics in the original). Sériot makes a strong case for reading much of Jakobson's linguistic work in the context of this movement, and from this he concludes that, fundamentally, neither Jakobson nor Trubetzkoy was really Saussurean at all.

Several other papers make a similar point about Jakobson's distance from Saussure. "S. Karcevski et R. Jakobson, grammairiens de la langue russe à l'époque du Cercle linguistique de Prague" by Jacqueline Fontaine (77–89) does it by drawing a comparison between the views of Jakobson and Sergej Karcevskij (1884–1955), who had himself been at Geneva during the years of

Saussure's lectures and was considered at least an auxiliary member of the Geneva School (see further Joseph 1996). She takes her evidence primarily from the two men's writings on the structure of Russian, where Karcevskij, none too surprisingly, comes across as the true Saussurean. "Fonctionnalisme et thérapeutique" by co-editor Gadet (91-108) looks at what Jakobson had to say about Saussure on language change and compares it with Jakobson's own views, as well as with Saussure's as read through Gadet's eyes. Her paper might have gained in focus from some consideration of Brigitte Nerlich's now quite substantial output on the development of functionalism (e.g., Nerlich 1995).

In the same vein, "Jakobson's Response to Saussure's *Cours*" by Ladislav Matejka (177-184) examines how, for Jakobson,

Saussure's linguistic contributions were an enduring source of inspiration, as well as a perennial target for sharp and often devastating attacks which tried to refute Saussure by revealing his weaknesses and contradictions... In fact, it is perhaps not far from the truth to claim that without Jakobson's life-long duel with Saussure's *Cours*, there would not be Jakobson's distinctive features theory as we know it. (177-180)

Far be it from your humble reviewer to dispute a point he himself made in this very journal in 1989, but I think we can now go further and consider just who was this Saussure that Jakobson was criticising. Jakobson's Saussure was a figure very different from, for example, Bally's Saussure, and as I have tried to show elsewhere (Joseph 1996), Jakobson constructed his Saussure in a phenomenological and, as a matter of fact, rather Eastern European mould. The fundamental question is not whether Jakobson was or wasn't a Saussurean, but what it meant to Jakobson to be a Saussurean in terms of both theoretical commitment and intellectual-professional identity.

The one paper which starts from the assumption that Jakobson's position relative to Saussure is too complex to reduce to [+] or [-] is "Remarks on the Sources of R. Jakobson's Linguistic Inspiration" by E. F. K. Koerner (159-176), which, if somewhat programmatic, at least offers a comprehensive organisational scheme for the immense task of sorting through the far-flung forces shaping the polymathic Jakobson's thinking about language. Koerner considers how well Jakobson's own evaluation of some of his influences (especially Fortunatov, Baudouin de Courtenay, Kruszewski and Saussure) accord with a more objective measure of their impact on him. The editors, in their introduction to the volume, contrast a Koerner who "insists on the fundamental role Saussure played for Jakobson" with a Matejka who, "on the contrary, foregrounds the divergences of interpretation of fundamental concepts in the two linguists' work" (p.3, my translation: JEJ), but I think that

here again, as in their own papers, the presumption that all is black or white has blinded them to gray.

Both "L'influence de Husserl en Russie au début du XXème siècle et son impact sur les émigrés russes de Prague" by Maryse Dennes (47-68) and "The Critical Horizon of Jakobson's Work and its Multidisciplinarity" by Savina Raynaud (195-206) revisit territory covered in 1975 by Elmar Holenstein, with Dennes providing significant updating in the form of post-1975 references. Holenstein's own paper, "La Russie — un pays qui transcende l'Europe" (131-147), appears to graft a few notes about Jakobson onto a piece written for an unrelated volume (Holenstein 1998). Giving scant attention to the specifics of Jakobson's case, it amounts to little more than a second-rate version of the culture chapter in the Lonely Planet Guide to Russia. "Jakobson and Bohemia / Bohemia and the East" by Jindřich Toman (237-247) offers considerably deeper insight by focusing on Jakobson's writings on Czech culture, but still reads like an occasional paper; perhaps its author, who has given us one of the more important recent books on Jakobson (Toman 1995), was wrong-footed by the challenging Symposium theme.

The remaining contributions are "Roman Jakobson: deux programmes de fondation de la slavistique, 1929/1953" by Natalja Avtonomova (5-20), "Du libre et du lié dans les références doctrinales et nominales de Jakobson et de Troubetzkoy" by Pierre Caussat (21-32), "The Ontology of the Phoneme in Early Prague Linguistic Circle" [*sic*] by L'ubomír Ďurovič (69-76), "Futurism and Phonology: Futurist roots of Jakobson's approach to language" by Boris Gasparov (109-129), "R. O. Jakobson et N. S. Troubetzkoy: deux personnalités, deux sciences?" by Vladimir A. Plungjan (185-194), and "Roman Jakobson's Conception of 'Sprachbund'" by Helmut W. Schaller (207-212). Some of these papers are less interesting than their titles, but others are quite good and none entirely without interest, in some cases perhaps less because of their author's efforts than the fascination of their subject.

In life, Jakobson provoked extreme reactions of devotion or repulsion in those who knew him. In the first decade and a half following his death, such reminiscences as have appeared have likewise been prone to excesses of reverence or antipathy, neither of which is conducive to any kind of objective assessment of the man or his work. Gadet and Sériot have produced one of the first volumes on Jakobson to aim for real balance rather than hagiography (or demonography). Paraphrasing Brutus, they have come to disinter a Roman, not to praise him, and in so doing have led us toward a new understanding of this fallen Caesar whose once-divine shades may yet reclaim their place in the pantheon.

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