

*Une familière étrangeté: la linguistique russe et soviétique*, ed. par P. Sériot, Paris, PUV, 1995 (= Histoire, épistémologie, langage 17/2), 255 pp.

This is a good book and (a rare feature in such publications) an interesting one. P. Sériot realized the difficulties that confronted him. Attempts to define linguistic traditions in geographic terms are not particularly convincing. Unlike schools, trends, and circles, traditions exist for centuries and experience a strong influence of their neighbors. Besides that, what looks like a national tradition sometimes turns out to be a string of chance events. Rasmus Rask happened to be a Dane, and no one could have predicted that for more than a hundred years after him Denmark would be blessed with outstanding linguists. However, this is what happened; hence the tradition of Danish linguistics. The flowering of German genius in the study of language that occurred in the 19th century is a miracle of the same order as the explosion of the Russian novel at the same time. Yet tradition is a smoother stream: compare the traditions of icon painting and story telling.

The history of Russian linguistics is especially hard to evaluate, for the 1917 revolution created an isolationist state, sent great scholars into exile, encouraged the growth of conformism, and eventually strangled all that could have made Russian contributions interesting to the world. A strange entity called Soviet linguistics was born, and as late as 1965 the question about its nature was still combustible enough to produce acrimonious debate. Also, Russian linguistics is not entirely Russian, as evidenced even by the essays collected by P. Sériot, for some of its most influential representatives were Ukrainians.

It is customary to bemoan language barriers and the Western world's ignorance of Russian linguistic thought, but today only the lazy repeat this complaint. Countless dissertations, anthologies, and surveys have been published (at least in English and German; I am less aware of French sources) that give an adequate idea of the most important works written in Russian. In their introduction, Sériot and Bacadorova do not mention this fact and give no bibliographical information, but Caussat begins his article on the Kazan school, quite appropriately, I believe, with the question, "What can one say about this school that has not yet been said?" Indeed, not much! *Une familière étrangeté*... is a success mainly because it does not aspire to be another congested history of Russian-Ukrainian linguistics from 1591 to 1991 (even though the themes are arranged chronologically), but rather offers a series of essays on general linguistics, phonology, and grammar as they have been practiced within the borders of the Russian/Soviet empire.

There are twelve articles in the book, each provided with a summary and key words in French and English. Several were written by French scholars, others commissioned and translated from the original Russian. A few deal with the rise of grammatical thought in Russia, the Kazan school, Slavophile

linguistics, and the changes in the orientation of Soviet linguistics in the twenties and thirties; these subjects, treated by L'. Āuroviĉ, P. Caussat, B. Gasparov, and P. S eriot, fall within the range of linguistics at its most general. Four articles are devoted to the achievements of individual scholars, namely Skovoroda (D. Rudenko and V. Prokopenko), Potebnja (J. Fontaine), Jakovlev (F.D. AŐnin and V.M. Alpatov), and Vinogradov (N. Vocadorova; theory of so-called standard languages (литературные языки)). R. Comtet discusses the emergence of and the differences between Őĉerba's and the Moscow phonological schools. A.V. Bondarko offers a short exposition of his ideas on the history of the notion of content in linguistics. S. Archaimbault and J.-M. Fournier speak of the treatment of tense in Russian grammars. Finally, there is an article on universal, or cosmic, language, an amusing child of the twenties (S. Kuznecov); the facts gathered by Kuznecov will also be new to most Slavic scholars.

Needless to say, this selection of essays does not even come close to exhausting the main topics pertaining to the history of Russian linguistics. We are not told what governed the editor's choice: his vision of the field or the availability of contributors. It is hard to judge whether someone who has never heard about Potebnja, Skovoroda, or Baudouin (to give random examples) will be able to follow the argument developed in the articles under consideration. But this is a perennial problem: abstracts, however informative and well-written, cannot replace firsthand knowledge of the subject. Other than that, S eriot's book can be warmly recommended to all those interested in the enigmatic Slavic (Russian) soul viewed from a linguistic perspective.

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