

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Roman Jakobson on Language by Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston

Review by: Morris Halle

Source: *Language*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Mar., 1992), pp. 182-186

Published by: Linguistic Society of America

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/416378>

Accessed: 09-07-2018 13:32 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Linguistic Society of America is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Language*

- and Peter Mühlhäusler (Pacific Linguistics C-70), 443–83. Canberra: Australian National University.
- . 1986. *Pidgin and creole languages*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- SINGLER, JOHN VICTOR. 1986. Short note. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 1.141–45.
- TODD, LORETO. 1974. *Pidgins and creoles*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Department of Linguistics
New York University
719 Broadway, Room 502
New York, New York 10003
- [Received 2 August 1991.]

Roman Jakobson on language. Edited by LINDA R. WAUGH and MONIQUE MONVILLE-BURSTON. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990. Pp. xix, 646. Cloth \$39.95.

Reviewed by MORRIS HALLE, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

On his gravestone in Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) is identified as a Russian Philologist. According to Webster's Third, a philologist is a linguist 'that concerns himself with human speech as the vehicle of literature and as a field of study that sheds light on cultural history'. Jakobson's important contributions to literature and cultural studies were anthologized in Pomorska & Rudy 1987. The book under review, a companion volume, presents the linguistic rather than the literary side of Jakobson's oeuvre. I list below the twenty-nine papers that make up the volume:

- (1) 'Current issues of general linguistics', an excerpt from an unpublished 1949 report for the Rockefeller Foundation.
- (2) 'Efforts towards a means-ends model of language in interwar continental linguistics', first published in 1963 in a special volume dedicated to the Ninth International Congress of Linguists, Cambridge, MA.
- (3) 'My favorite topics', a 1980 speech accepting an international prize.
- (4) 'The speech event and the functions of language', an excerpt from a 1959 lecture given at a conference on style in language.
- (5) 'Langue and parole: Code and message', an excerpt from an unpublished paper written about 1980, 'La théorie saussurienne en retrospect.'
- (6) 'Parts and wholes in language', a contribution to a 1963 book entitled *Parts and Wholes*.
- (7) 'Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances', first published in 1956.
- (8) 'The concept of mark', an excerpt from a transcribed conversation between Jakobson and Krystyna Pomorska published in English in 1983 under the title *Dialogues*.
- (9) 'Typological studies and their contribution to historical comparative linguistics', an invited address at the Eighth International Congress of Linguists, Oslo, 1958.
- (10) 'Implications of language universals for linguistics', from *Universals of Language*, ed. by Joseph Greenberg, 1963.
- (11) 'The time factor in language' and (12) 'The space factor in language', excerpts from *Dialogues* (like item 8 above).
- (13) 'Principles of historical phonology', an English translation of a 1949 revision of a paper first published in 1931.

- (14) 'On the theory of phonological affinities between languages', a translation of a 1949 revision of Jakobson's contribution to the Fourth International Congress of Linguists, Copenhagen, 1938.
- (15) 'The concept of the phoneme', a translation of an excerpt from a lecture given in 1942, soon after Jakobson's arrival in the United States.
- (16) 'The concept of the distinctive feature', an excerpt from Jakobson, Fant, & Halle's 1952 monograph *Preliminaries to Speech Analysis*.
- (17) 'Quest for the ultimate constituents', an excerpt from Jakobson & Waugh's 1979 book *The sound shape of language*. It represents Jakobson's final views on features and is a revision of the views expressed in item (16).
- (18) 'The sound laws of child language and their place in general phonology', originally published in 1949 as an appendix to Trubetzkoy's *Principes de phonologie*. According to a footnote in that book, the text represents Jakobson's contribution to the Fifth International Congress of Linguists that was to be held in Brussels in September 1939.¹
- (19) 'Why "papa" and "mama"?', a 1960 article.
- (20) 'Some questions of meaning', an excerpt from lectures delivered in 1973 at the Catholic University of Louvain.
- (21) 'Boas' view of grammatical meaning', first published in 1959 in a volume commemorating the centennial of Boas's birth.
- (22) 'Contribution to the general theory of case' reproduces the English translation of Jakobson's 1936 study of the meaning and structure of the Russian cases. It also includes an excerpt from the 1958 revision 'Morfologičeskie nabljudenija nad slavjanskim sklonenijem' (*SW II*, 154–83).
- (23) 'Shifters and verbal categories', an excerpt from a paper first published in 1957.
- (24) 'The phonemic and grammatical aspects of language in their interrelations', an address to the Sixth International Congress of Linguists, Paris, 1948.
- (25) 'Quest for the essence', originally published in 1966 in the UNESCO journal *Diogenes*.
- (26) 'The spell of speech sounds', an excerpt from Jakobson & Waugh 1979 (see item 17).
- (27) 'Linguistics in relation to other sciences', the final version of an address to the Tenth International Congress of Linguists, Bucharest, 1967.
- (28) 'Linguistics and communication theory', originally presented in 1960 to a symposium on the Structure of Language and Its Mathematical Aspects.
- (29) 'Brain and language', originally published in 1980.

During the more than sixty-five years that Jakobson was an active contributor to linguistics and related disciplines, his conception of the aims and purposes of his research underwent significant changes. Both the long introductory essay by editors Waugh & Monville-Burston and the selections in this book emphasize the views that Jakobson came to hold toward the end of his life, as against the positions that governed his work at earlier stages in his scientific career. Thus the volume reprints only four papers that Jakobson composed during the two decades he worked in Czechoslovakia (1920–1939), but includes ten papers composed after his retirement (1966–1982).²

In this later period Jakobson devoted considerable attention to the foundations of linguistics and to the implications of developments in linguistics for other sciences. In the words of the editors (451):

¹ In the notes to this article (p. 532) the editors misidentify the French naturalist Buffon (1707–1788) as a 'philosopher of the seventeenth century' and incorrectly state that the Soviet linguist Marr (1864–1934) was 'active from the 1920s through the 1940s'.

² This distribution contrasts markedly with that of the Pomorska & Rudy volume, where thirteen of the articles are from Jakobson's Prague period and seven from his post-retirement years.

'For Jakobson, language is a structured system of signs whose purpose is social communication. As such, it is linked both with all the similarly structured means by which humans communicate and with our biosocial nature. Starting from this structural-functional viewpoint, Jakobson elaborates an interdisciplinary model that has linguistics at the center and that expands outward to the other communication sciences and eventually to the natural sciences.'

This strain of Jakobson's thought has had some influence outside of linguistics: it has affected literary critics, anthropologists (e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss), and psychiatrists (e.g. Jacques Lacan). As far as I know, it has not been taken seriously by any biologist or physicist. In linguistics its influence has to this time been quite limited. It seems to me, therefore, that the editors have erred in attributing such great importance and assigning so much space to this aspect of Jakobson's work.

In contrast to these foundational writings, Jakobson's work on specific problems in linguistics has maintained much of its interest to this day. It is therefore to be regretted that more of it is not reprinted in the present volume. The value of the anthology for the working phonologist would have been significantly enhanced by the inclusion of articles such as the 1931 'Phonemic notes on Standard Slovak' (*Selected writings* [SW] I:221–30), the 1937 essay on ancient Greek prosody 'Z zagadnień prozodji starogreckiej' (SW I:262–71), the 1948 'Russian conjugation' (SW II:119–29), or the important 1963 paper on the historical evolution of Slavic accentuation 'Opyt fonologičeskogo podxoda k slavjanskoj akcentologii' (SW I:664–89).

I found the most to object to in the editors' treatment of Jakobson's most important contribution to linguistics—the 1927 discovery of the distinctive features as the ultimate building blocks of speech.³ In contrast to other approaches to phonology (most notably that of American structuralism, in which the concept of phoneme played a central role), for Jakobson—and also for Trubetzkoy (see Halle 1988)—the feature rather than the phoneme was the ultimate constituent. As Jakobson stated in 'Structuralisme et téléologie', an article written for the French publication *L'Arc 60* in 1975, '... from the very beginning of my phonological researches I assigned to the phoneme the rank of a secondary conception relative to the network of oppositions [features—mh] which determines the constitution of every phoneme of the given system' (SW VII:126).

It is therefore impossible to accept the editors' assertion that it was only in the late 1930s that 'it became clear to him that phonemes are decomposable into distinctive features' (11). In fact, most of the linguistic research conducted by Jakobson between 1927 and his emigration to the USA in 1941 was an attempt to document the basic role played by features—rather than phonemes—in linguistic phenomena of all kinds.⁴ These studies dealt with the

³ The discovery was communicated to the First International Congress of Linguists, the Hague, 1928, in a statement written by Jakobson but co-signed by S. Karcevski and N. S. Trubetzkoy. See Trubetzkoy's letter of November 22, 1927 (Jakobson 1975:109).

⁴ As I have argued in Halle 1988, much the same is true of Trubetzkoy's activities. The central importance of the feature in Trubetzkoy's conception of phonology is strikingly borne out by the fact that about three fifths (pp. 59–217) of Trubetzkoy's most important book (Trubetzkoy 1939) are specifically devoted to the discussion of the role of different features in the phonological systems of different languages.

evolution of phonological systems (*Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe comparée à celle des autres langues slaves*, 1929, *SW* I:7–116); linguistic alliances, i.e. genetically unrelated languages undergoing parallel phonological developments (*K xarakteristike evrazijskogo jazykovogo sojuza*, 1931, *SW* I:144–201); and the acquisition of language by children and loss of language in aphasia (*Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze*, 1941, *SW* I:328–401). What occurred in the late 1930s was the publication in 1939 of 'Observations sur le classement phonologique des consonnes' (*SW* I:272–79), where Jakobson replaced the heterogeneous IPA classification of speech sounds employing tongue positions for vowels and points of articulation for consonants by a single uniform set comprising exclusively binary features. The omission of this paper from the present volume is especially unfortunate as it is one of the best examples of Jakobson at work at the height of his powers.

As noted, the insistence on the primacy of the feature over the phoneme is what distinguished Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's approach from that of other structuralists, both American (cf. e.g. Harris's 1942 review of Trubetzkoy 1939) and European (e.g. Martinet 1957).⁵ And it is the primacy of the feature over the phoneme that was made the cornerstone of the generative phonology that emerged in the 1960s in response to Chomsky 1957. As noted by the editors, Jakobson found much of the work in generative phonology uncongenial: '... he was disturbed by their [Chomsky & Halle's—mh] tendency to absolutization and their disregard for the functional, pragmatic, social, and communicative basis of language' (28). Because of our close personal relationship, Jakobson hardly ever expressed his disagreements with us in print. For the very same reasons, neither Chomsky nor I criticized Jakobson's views in print. Since I did not discuss my views on these matters while Jakobson was alive, it would not be proper to criticize his views now, and I can do no more here than acknowledge the existence of these divergences.⁶

An anthology of the work of a scholar must be judged above all by the extent to which it accurately reflects this work and its importance. As I indicated above, I do not believe that Waugh & Monville-Burston were altogether successful in this respect. Their anthology does do justice to Jakobson as the author of *The sound shape of language*. It is not nearly as successful in presenting the work and thought of Jakobson in earlier periods, work and thought that—in my judgment at least—were considerably more significant than that produced by Jakobson in his last decade.

⁵ While in agreement on the issue of features as the basic building blocks of speech, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy disagreed sharply on whether all features are binary, as well as on what features to include in the universal feature set. I have discussed this disagreement in Halle 1983.

⁶ In discussing Jakobson's reactions to the work of other linguists, the editors write: 'Many of his judgments of contemporaries are indirect, however, and thus his texts are addressed to unnamed interlocutors. One of the aims of 'Russian Conjugation' (RJ 1948), for example, was to critique the description of Russian conjugation by a representative of American structuralism ...' (27–28). This statement is incorrect. The original text of 'Russian conjugation' (Word 4.164–67) included a detailed criticism of Cornyn 1948. When 'Russian conjugation' was reprinted in *SW* II and elsewhere, the text of these four pages was omitted. It would appear, therefore, that—with the understandable exception of Chomsky and myself—Jakobson did not practice indirect criticism by innuendo.

REFERENCES

- CHOMSKY, NOAM. 1957. Syntactic structures. The Hague: Mouton.
- CORNYN, WILLIAM S. 1948. On the classification of Russian verbs. *Lg.* 26.64–75.
- HALLE, MORRIS. 1983. On the origins of the distinctive features. Roman Jakobson: What he taught us, ed. by Morris Halle, 77–86. *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 27, Supplement.
- . 1988. N. S. Troubetzkoy et les origines de la phonologie moderne. *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 42.5–22.
- HARRIS, ZELIG S. 1942. Review of *Grundzüge der Phonologie*, by N. S. Trubetzkoy. *Lg.* 17.345–49.
- JAKOBSON, ROMAN. 1962-. The selected writings. The Hague: Mouton-DeGruyter. [Abbreviated SW.]
- . 1975. N. S. Trubetzkoy's letters and notes. The Hague: Mouton.
- MARTINET, ANDRÉ. 1957. Substance phonique et traits distinctifs. *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 53.72–85.
- POMORSKA, KRYSZYNA, and STEPHEN RUDY (eds.) 1987. *Roman Jakobson/Language in literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- TRUBETZKOY, NIKOLAJ S. 1939. *Grundzüge der Phonologie*. Prague: Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague, 9.
- Department of Linguistics & Philosophy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139
- [Received 16 June 1991;
revision received 23 August 1991.]

Finnisch-ugrische Sprachforschung: von der Renaissance bis zum Neupositivismus. By GÜNTER JOHANNES STIPA. (Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia, 206 / Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne, 206.) Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, 1990. Pp. 438.

Reviewed by LYLE CAMPBELL, *Louisiana State University*

Stipa's history of Finno-Ugric linguistics is truly excellent: it is comprehensive, learned, and exciting. S has discovered and integrated many heretofore neglected sources and facts. The result is a remarkable contribution not only to the history of Finno-Ugric (henceforth FU) linguistics, but also to the history of Indo-European (IE) linguistics, to the historiography of linguistics, and to intellectual history in general. The scholarship is dazzling. It is the product of a decade of research in the universities, libraries, and archives of many countries; more than 1800 sources appear in the bibliography (with entries in thirteen different languages). Nevertheless, it is not only the book's extensiveness but its consequential content that is so stunning.

In the chapter on the Renaissance and the Reformation, S surveys the first word-lists, dictionaries, and grammars of the various FU languages, and in the process we learn that a number of common misconceptions recited in the history of linguistics fall by the wayside. For example, long before Sir William Jones' famous 'philologist passage' in 1786 (see Mukherjee 1968), often cited as the beginning of IE studies and of historical linguistics, and before Sajnovics (1770) or Gyarmathi (1799; cf. Hanzeli 1983), we learn that Sebastian Münster (1544) discovered—using historical linguistic techniques—that Finnish, Es-