DISCUSSIONS

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BORIS A. USPENSKIJ, ИСТОРИЯ РУССКОГО ЛИТЕРАТУРНОГО ЯЗЫКА (XI-XVII BB.)


Uspenskij's book differs in several ways from other recent 'histories of the Russian literary language' written by Soviet scholars. Already the extensive bibliography of cited works (pp. 346–67) indicates that the achievements of international scholarship have been taken into account; this in contrast to e.g. N.A. Meščerskij's История русского литературного языка, L. 1981, in which foreign (=Western) contributions to the history of the Russian language are bluntly discarded: "In the 60s appear works by some foreign specialists on the Russian language, B.O. Unbegaun, G. Hüttl-Worth and others. The works of these authors are mainly of a negative nature, [...]" (pp. 10–11). In Uspenskij's book the reader is also spared the ritualistic references to the classics of Marxism–Leninism.

In his 'Introduction' (pp. 1–21), the author specifies the object of his study: the history of the literary language of Rus' as different from the history of the Russian language in general (≈ historical dialectology). The history of the literary language is defined as the history of a 'secondary' and 'artificial' norm as opposed to the 'non-literary' language, which represents the 'primary' and natural 'norm'. On the other hand Uspenskij takes care to point out that the literary language is not identical with the language of literature, which also comprises departures from the standard, neutral norm.

Uspenskij starts out with a general analysis of the language situation in medieval Russia, based on Ch.A. Ferguson's (1959, 325–40; 1964, 429–439) notion of 'diglossia'. Uspenskij claims that diglossia lasted until the 17th c. This controversial position will certainly arouse polemics. Thus, D.S. Worth (1978, 378) holds that diglossia was characteristic only of the early period: "[...] as far as grammar and morphophonemics are concerned, medieval Russia conforms to the diglossic criteria at most for one-fourth of the...
period from the 10th to the 17th centuries, and then (14–16cc.) only partly”. On the other hand, H.G. Lunt has argued convincingly that “in the 10th and 11th centuries there was still only one single Slavic language” (Lunt 1988, 12) “and therefore neither diglossia nor bilingualism” (Lunt 1985, 710).

In this review I shall, however, focus more on presentation than on polemics.

Uspenskij states that “from the introduction of Christianity and at least until the 18th c., the function of a literary language in Russia was fulfilled by Church Slavonic (CS). This language was taken over by the Russians from the South Slavs” (p. 14). In an adapted form, Russian Church Slavonic (RCS = церковнославянский язык русской редакции = slavon russe = Russischkirchenslavisch) fulfilled the function of literary language for the East Slavs who, according to Uspenskij, perceived it as the written, learned form of their own language, although, from an objective linguistic point of view it was a different language. This contention that East Slavic and RCS should be considered two different languages already in the 10th–11th centuries is not generally accepted, as already indicated above. Uspenskij holds that up to the 17th c. the two languages, RCS and the Russian vernacular, were in complementary distribution: RCS represented the written, literary tradition, whereas “Russian was primarily linked to the sphere of everyday communication” (p. 20).

In his view a change from diglossia to bilingualism took place in the 17th c., as a result of a “перестройка отношений между рус. и ц-сл. языком” (p. 317). The complementary distribution between the two languages was dissolving and they began to be used in partly the same functions; translations from one language to another appeared.

A new codified, literary Russian language, with elements of RCS, but to a large extent based on the spoken vernacular was established in the course of the 18th c., and by the beginning of the 19th c. the passage from bilingualism to monolingualism was completed: the ‘new’ Russian literary language had taken over all the functions of RCS, except that of a professional cult-language. The relatively recent establishment of this ‘new’ Russian literary language has been dealt with earlier by Uspenskij in his monograph Из истории русского литературного языка XVIII–начала XIX века, М., 1985, 215 pp.

The period of seven hundred years covered by the book under review may according to the author be divided in three main periods, connected with three subsequent cultural and linguistic influences of South Slavonic origin. This is reflected in the clear-cut composition of the book in three parts of two chapters each: 1. ‘Первое южнославянское влияние и фор-