INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SLOVAK SLAVISTICS

JÁN DORUĽA

Abstract: The following contribution is an overview of the gradual and systematic establishment of the institutional foundations of Slovak Slavistics. It looks at how the research focus and programme were developed and its coordination centre set up, beginning in 1988. Following that, the Slovak Committee of Slavists was established and its statutes drawn up. Preparations then began for the 11th International Congress of Slavists in 1993. The Department of Slavistics at the Slovak Academy of Sciences was also established, becoming the Ján Stanislav Institute of Slavistics in 2005.

The article describes in detail the initial beginnings of the programmatic focus of research in Slovak Slavistics, highlighting the difficulties encountered and the various twists and turns that complicated the process of establishing the research programme and institutionalising Slovak Slavistics. It also stresses the results produced thus far and its future prospects.

Key words: Slovak Slavistics; programme of Slavistic research; Slovak Committee of Slavists; Congress of Slavists in Bratislava; Slavica Slovaca, Ján Stanislav Institute of Slavistics at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

This article is about the initial institutionalisation and further development of Slovak Slavistics at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS), predominantly associated with Slavistics work conducted at SAS and the Slovak Committee of Slavists. In an attempt to preserve the personal authenticity of this overview, I begin in 1988 when the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics at SAS saw the creation of a two-member Slavistics unit, which gradually took on more staff to become a coordination centre for Slavistic research in Slovakia. During this period, a Programme for Linguistic Slavistic Research in Slovakia was drawn up and submitted in October 1988 for public review to more than 70 participants including linguists, literary scholars, historians and ethnologists. The reviewers were selected in accordance with the concept behind the Programme for Linguistic Slavistic Research, which presupposed close interdisciplinary collaboration within the scope of the research and the topics outlined in the programme. Following the review, the programme reads:

The programme comprises research which Slovak linguistic Slavistics should undertake now and in the long term. (...) The main conceptual principle behind the programme is that the focus of research should be on Slovak language examined from a linguistic and comparative perspective and from a Slavist viewpoint against a wider cultural and historical background, including its entire historical development and contemporary state. It is therefore dependent
on wide interdisciplinary collaboration, which means that on some issues linguistics will be able to participate in finding and contributing to solutions. The forms of collaboration and management mentioned in the programme were agreed on in previous conversations and negotiations between the parties involved. (...) It is assumed that this programme will be carried out gradually, depending on the capabilities of the general linguistics department and other departments and staff. Some tasks depend on the implementation of the first research stage, primarily at planned conferences or at the Slavist Congress in Bratislava in 1993, where the preliminary findings of new collaborative research will be presented on a number of issues. (...) Under each research area, the programme lists the names of tasks (topics), the collaborating disciplines and managing organisations and, where necessary, how the first stage of research should be carried out. There are nine research areas and each contains within it a number of individual topics: 1. Ethnogenesis of Slovaks and the earliest history of the Slovak language (disciplines collaborating with linguistics: history, archaeology, ethnography), 2. Great Moravian Period and its reflection in Slovak language and oral lore as well as in other Slavic languages (archaeology, history, literary history), 3. Development of language of the Slovak ethnic group under feudalism in interlinguistic and interethnic relations (history, ethnography), 4. Slovak oral folklore in interSlavic relations from a historical and comparative viewpoint (folkloristics, ethnography, literary studies), 5. History of Slovak Slavistics (history, literary history, folklore, ethnography), 6. Relations between Slovak and other (Slavic) languages from a historical, comparative and typological angle (with regard to standard as well as non-standard forms and their development), 7. Slovak National Revival and Slavic equivalents (literary history, history, ethnography), 8. standard Slovak and Slavic connections (literary history, history), 9. Literary work of the Štúr group, language from a Slavic perspective (literary history) (Doruľa 1989, 201-202).

At the end of the published text of the Programme for Linguistic Slavistic Research in Slovakia, there is further information on its basic characteristics and overall concept. This reads:

By relations between Slovak and other languages including more distant ones (...) we also mean research into parallel phenomena within the entire range of linguistic development (...), the compilation of linguistic reference books and dictionaries, as well as tracking and assessing translations, reviewing academic work and information on academic and cultural and historical work in the relevant languages, and promotional activities. The programme is a list of tasks and the topics are given in note form. Research on single topics or parts of topics in the relevant areas can be carried out individually (e.g. should there be a number of topics within research area 6), and more generally within a team, and primarily through interdisciplinary collaboration. Each research unit or team will draw up a more detailed programme for research on the particular topic or part of topic. (...) The programme indicates that a substantial number of research findings are to be submitted as early as the conferences in 1991 and 1992. The conferences will be interdisciplinary. General papers and previous research findings are to be critically summarised at the same time as the latest research results are presented. The conferences are a means of preparing for the Slavist Congress in Bratislava in 1993. It has been suggested that the programme focus primarily on Slovak and be as extensive as possible. The emphasis is on Slovak, because it contains the responsibility Slovak linguistics and other scientific disciplines has as a debt to Slovak society. We are duty bound to pay off this debt. Pressing social needs oblige us to do so. (...) Nevertheless should this programme seem maximalist, it is because of the numerous obligations we are responsible for and even those we are not. During discussions and assessments of the programme, we agreed that all this needs to be examined. By joining forces and cooperating much can be achieved. However, even in