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THE PRESENT STATE OF RUSSIAN STUDIES IN THE NETHERLANDS*

0. INTRODUCTION

This outline of the study of Russian in the Netherlands will focus on three areas: (1) the academic teaching of Russian as a second language, (2) the teaching of Russian linguistics, (3) research in Russian linguistics. Activities in the field of Russian literature fall outside the scope of this article. For a general outline of Slavic studies in the Netherlands, see van den Baar (1985) and Nikolaeva (1990).

1. FACTS AND FIGURES

The academic study of Russian takes place at the Slavic departments of the universities of Amsterdam, Groningen, and Leiden. All three departments also offer the possibility of studying other Slavic languages, either as a minor (as is the case in Groningen and Leiden) or as a major (Polish, Czech and Serbo-Croatian in Amsterdam).

In 1993 a total of 450 students were registered at the three Slavic departments, almost 100 of them freshmen. In contrast to the situation in the period 1989-1991, there has been a sharp decline in the number of first-year students since 1992. This is no doubt an international phenomenon due to the political and economic changes Russia has undergone since the previous decade. However, if one takes into account the total number of students over the past two decades, it turns out that the figures for 1993 are actually average (cf. the relevant statistics in van de Roer 1995, 71-73).

At present (January 1995), the total number of staff members with tenure is 29.8 full-time equivalents: 12.5 fte's in Amsterdam, 8.5 in Groningen, and 8.8 in Leiden. The academic ranking system is in many ways comparable to the one in the United States, including full professors ("hoogleraar"), associate professors ("universitair hoofddocent"), assistent professors ("universitair docent"), and lecturers ("docent"). The most striking difference consists in the fact that the number of fte's assigned to a given rank is fixed, so that climbing up in the hierarchy is possible only when a higher position becomes vacant. Budgetary cuts have caused the number of full professors of Slavic to be reduced from 8 to 4.5 fte's since 1984. Three chairs are held by specialists in Russian literature (Willem Weststeijn in

Amsterdam, Joost van Baak in Groningen, Joachim Klein in Leiden). The only full-time chair of linguistics is occupied by William Veder in Amsterdam. Contrary to traditional practice, Frederik Kortlandt's half-time chair of Balto-Slavic linguistics in Leiden does not serve the Department of Slavic, but that of Comparative Linguistics.

In January 1995, the distribution of the various positions at the three Slavic departments was as follows (numbers representing fte's):

January 1995	Amsterdam	Groningen	Leiden	total
full professor	2	1	1	**4**
associate professor	3	1	1	5
assistent professor	5.2	4	2.8	**12**
lecturer	2.3	2.5	4	**8.8**
total	**12.5**	**8.5**	**8.8**	**29.8**

Out of the total of almost thirty fte's, approximately one third is reserved for the teaching of Russian as a second language. Apart from administrative duties, other activities include teaching of and research in Russian literature and linguistics and other Slavic languages. Teaching of Russian linguistics is a concern of 2 to 3 fte's; research in the same field can be estimated on 3 to 4 fte's.

2. TEACHING OF RUSSIAN AND RUSSIAN LINGUISTICS

Students who wish to study Russian at the university enroll in a four-year program. In the first year they devote most of their time to learning the fundamentals of the language. After the first year, several fields of specialisation can be chosen, the traditional ones being literature and linguistics. Many second-year students spend three months in Russia to study at the university and to practise and enhance their knowledge of the spoken language.

Up to the end of the four-year program, language acquisition will play an important role in the curriculum. In Amsterdam and Groningen, computer-assisted language instruction systems for Russian are being developed or adapted to the specific needs of Dutch students. Computers are also being used to compile a new Russian-Dutch dictionary; Wim Honselaar in Amsterdam is currently working on an electronic conversion of van den Baar's Dutch-Russian dictionary (1989; cf. Honselaar and Elstrodt 1992). At the moment, a group of Belgian and Dutch Slavists is preparing a comprehensive *Handboek Russische Grammatika*, that is scheduled to be published in the near future by Postscriptum in Rotterdam. This

reference grammar will fill an important and long-standing gap in the teaching of Russian in the Netherlands.

As for the teaching of Russian linguistics, two specific projects should be mentioned. For several years already, teachers from Amsterdam, Groningen, and Leiden have been participating in a national graduate course in Russian linguistics, which means that they visit each other's department to lecture on special topics. In the field of Old Russian, an introductory textbook on birchbark documents has recently been written by Willem Vermeer (1995a).

After the four-year program, only very few students get the opportunity to continue their academic career and to be employed by the university or government as a doctoral candidate. At this moment, two doctoral students are writing a dissertation in the field of Russian linguistics: Marja Koster (Amsterdam) is doing research on the use of cases and prepositions in Russian (non-liturgical and non-literary) texts of the 17th and 18th centuries; Zep Honselaar (Groningen) is conducting dialectological fieldwork in the Pskov area and is preparing a synchronic description of one of its dialects. Furthermore, Arno Verweij (Leiden) is writing a dissertation on the accentuation of postverbals in Slavic, in which the relevant linguistic data from Russian will be taken into account. In comparable fashion, Michael Bakker, a doctoral student in Amsterdam, is working on Russian Church Slavonic manuscripts for his dissertation on the Slavic Apostolos.

Russian is not only taught at the Slavic departments in Amsterdam, Groningen, and Leiden. The University of Utrecht and the polytechnic University of Eindhoven offer special short-term language courses in Russian. Students who wish to become professional interpreters or translators of Russian can enter a four-year college program in Maastricht. Furthermore, there are a few high schools and quite a number of evening schools and commercial language centers that offer courses in Russian (for further details see Janssen 1994).

3. RESEARCH

3.1. Modern Russian

In Search of Unity in Diversity. This is the subtitle of a dissertation by Nelleke Gerritsen on determining the invariant meaning of the reflexive affix -ся (1990). The title characterizes a sizeable amount of research on contemporary Russian conducted in the Netherlands over the last decades. In the words of Carl Ebeling: "The theoretical starting point is 'same form — same meaning', on the understanding that both form and meaning may appear in sentences in the shape of alternants, and that two meanings can rightly be called 'alternants' only if they

share one or more features" (1984, 97). The principle of "same form — same meaning" is, of course, based on the Saussurian concept of the linguistic sign and has become an explicit point of departure for the structuralism of the Prague School. In the Netherlands, it was Carl Ebeling who stimulated many Slavists to follow this approach when dealing with matters of Russian semantics (cf. already Ebeling 1956, 86 on the meaning of the Russian imperative; cf. also his 1978, with many examples from Russian). Most of the dissertations on Russian linguistics that have been published over the last decades have been written under the guidance of Ebeling and, more recently, his most prominent student, Frederik Kortlandt, who has himself published some fundamental studies on Russian phonetics and phonemics (1973a; 1973b; cf. also 1972a), verbal and nominal flexion (1972b; 1974), semantics (1980), and modern accentuation (1986).

In contemporary research, the determination of invariant meanings is not only limited to phonemic forms, but also applied to larger units like verbal constructions, word order, and intonation. In this broader sense, the work of the following scholars can be mentioned: Adriaan Barentsen, who studies the meaning and use of verbal forms in different contexts, focusing on their interaction with particles and conjunctions (e.g., 1979; 1980; 1984; 1986; 1992; 1994); Wim Honselaar, who works on the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of lexical elements (e.g., 1992 on modals; 1994 on prepositions); Adriana Pols, who has published a dissertation (1993) on the formation and meaning of prefixed imperfective verbs with the variant endings *-áть/-ять* and *-ывать/-ивать* (e.g., *подготовлять/ подготавливать*); Anna Stunová, whose work is focused on the aspectual differences between Russian and Czech (e.g., 1993; 1994); Cornelia Keijsper, who has written comprehensive studies on various topics such as information structure (1985), negation (1986), intonation (1992), and sentence accent and transitivity (1994). Keijsper's fundamental studies are also of great influence on the work of other Dutch linguists, in particular Nelleke Gerritsen (see above), Cecilia Odé, who has done research on intonation and other suprasegmental issues (e.g., 1989; 1992), and Kees Kompeer, who is preparing a dissertation on word order and adverbial modifiers (1992; 1994).

Most of the articles and books already mentioned have been published by Rodopi (Amsterdam—Atlanta) in the series *Studies in Slavic and General Linguistics (SSGL)*. The first volume (a *Festschrift* for Carl Ebeling) appeared in 1980; since then twenty-two volumes have been produced. The series (edited by Adriaan Barentsen, Ben Groen, and Rob Sprenger) contains either monographs (mostly doctoral dissertations) or collections of papers on particular themes or for special occasions. The volumes most relevant for Russian studies are, to begin with, the theses (already mentioned) by Keijsper (1985, vol. 4), Odé (1989, vol. 13), Gerritsen (1990, vol. 15), and Pols (1993, vol. 19); furthermore, a two-volume study (1993, vols. 20-21) in which Andries van Helden presents a comprehensive

analysis of the East European linguistic Kulagina or Set-theoretical School (cf. the laudatory review by Meyer 1994); finally, two collections of articles devoted to Russian linguistics (1986, vol. 8; 1992, vol. 17), as well as the linguistic contributions to the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh International Congress of Slavists (1983, vol. 3; 1988, vol. 11; 1994 [1993], vol. 22). Many of the relevant articles in *SSGL* on Russian linguistics have already been referred to; other contributors in this field include Andries Breunis (e.g., 1992 and 1994 on impersonal constructions), Jadranka Gvozdanović (1992 and 1994a on verbal prefixes; cf. also 1994b on the Russian tense system), Peter Hendriks (1986 on ellipsis and conjunction reduction), Annie Meintema (1986 and 1988 on the genitive and accusative for the direct object case in negative constructions), Henk Proeme (1983 on terminativeness and aspect), and Ben Groen (1986 and 1992 on phonological issues). Groen is currently completing an exhaustive description of Russian nominal parts of speech.

Finally, André van Holk in his text-linguistic studies based on the concepts of Case Grammar focuses on semiotic aspects of the cultural background of Russian literary texts (e.g., 1990; 1992; 1994a; 1994b; 1995).

3.2. Old Russian

A relatively new field of research in Old Russian linguistics is berestology, the study of the numerous birchbark documents from Novgorod and other medieval Russian towns. In the Netherlands, two scholars have recently published articles on berestology and related issues: Jos Schaeken, who concentrates on the chronology of linguistic and paleographic features reflected in birchbark letters (1995a; 1995b) and in other documents from the North Russian area (1992), and, especially, Willem Vermeer, who is not only working on birchbark letters and their language (1991a; 1992; 1995b; forthc.), but who has also published on broader topics in the prehistoric and historical dialectology of Common and East Slavic (1986; 1991b; 1994).

As for the study of the Church Slavonic tradition in medieval Russia, William Veder does research on the transmission and transformation of texts in the *Slavia Orthodoxa* as a whole and in the Kievan Rus' in particular (*Paterik Skitskij, Lestvica, Pandects of Antiochos, O Pismenex, Azbučnaja Molitva*, edificatory compilations; cf., e.g., 1992; Veder and Turilov 1994). Veder is also coeditor of *Polata knigopisnaja*, a journal published in Amsterdam and devoted to the study of early Slavic books, texts and literatures.

Other studies of the history of the Russian language include those by Jadranka Gvozdanović on the use of grammatical categories in medieval texts (1993) and on the syntactic and pragmatic parameters underlying punctuation and scribal

conventions in older documents (forthc.). Linguistic data from Old Russian are also used in Roel Schuyt's descriptive and historical study of the morphology of verbal aspect in the Slavic languages (1990). Furthermore, several of Frederik Kortlandt's publications on historical linguistics contain important observations on the early development of the Russian language (e.g., his accentological studies of 1975 and passim).

4. THE FUTURE OF THE STUDY OF RUSSIAN IN THE NETHERLANDS

The conditions for the academic study of Russian in the Netherlands are largely provided by the Slavic departments in Amsterdam, Groningen, and Leiden. It is sad to report that the figures in the table presented in section 1 will already be outdated by the time this article has appeared in print. Further reductions are in an advanced planning stage: by the beginning of 1998, Amsterdam will in all likelihood be forced to cut down from 12.5 to at best 11 fte's (the exact details have yet to be determined), Groningen from 8.5 to 7 fte's, and Leiden from 8.8 to 6 fte's. The minimum of twenty-four fte's that is to be foreseen stands in sharp contrast to the situation that existed only twelve years ago, when a total of over fifty fte's were occupied at five Slavic departments, including Utrecht and Nijmegen. The reduction is hard to accept in the light of the many scholarly activities that have been reviewed only briefly in this article. Also, it leaves negligible academic prospects for doctoral students in Russian linguistics, not to mention experienced researchers like Nelleke Gerritsen, Andries van Helden, Cecilia Odé, Adriana Pols, Roel Schuyt, and Anna Stunová, who are at present unemployed or employed outside Slavic studies. It is obvious that this development endangers the continuity of Russian studies in the Netherlands.

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