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HISTORICAL MEMORY IN LANGUAGE.
ETHNOLINGUISTIC PANEL AT THE 16TH INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF SLAVISTS, BELGRADE 2018*

During the 16th International Congress of Slavists in Belgrade (20–27 August, 2018), a theme panel session took place, titled “Historical Memory in Language” and organised by Jerzy Bartmiński. The session included talks by: Bartmiński (Poland), Svetlana M. Tolstaya (Russia), Alla Kozhynova (Belarus), Aleksy Yudin (Belgium), Irina Sedakova (Russia), and Wojciech Chlebda (Poland).

Jerzy Bartmiński (UMCS, Lublin, Poland)

Tradition and linguistic memory: dormant, nurtured, and revived

The theme of the session combines the synchronic and diachronic approaches to language: language is looked at from the point of view of tradition that nevertheless remains valid as a cultural legacy, in Russian expressed as *zhivaya starina* ‘the living old’. The elements inherited from the past may vary in terms of status in the language system: they may belong to its active or passive layer, be present and nurtured in the speakers’ consciousness, or remain dormant. Etymological analyses reach the oldest, historical layer, whose role in the reconstruction of the linguistic worldview of ancient Slavs is invaluable. Questions about the past as it is reflected in language prompt further, more detailed, questions: (i) From which historical cultures do various semantic fields of the Slavic lexicon derive? (ii) What is the role in individual Slavic languages of the Proto-Indo-European legacy directly inherited by the Slavs? (iii) What elements were assimilated as a result of linguistic and cultural contacts with the ancient (Greek and Roman) tradition and Judeo-Christian tradition, in the Cyril-Methodius and West-European variants, beginning with the Middle Ages, and stretching throughout the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism and Positivism? (iv) In what form and to what extent are the elements

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of old anthropometric systems (artificial names based on the ancient model) present in the contemporary Slavic languages and literature? The catalogue of detailed questions is open.

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Svetlana M. Tolstaya (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)
Etymological memory of the word

The data found in the etymological dictionaries of Slavic languages (and above all in the dictionary of Proto-Slavic) provide an opportunity not only for a retrospective look and establishing a Slavic proto-form through semantic reconstruction, but also for reconstructing all lines of multidirectional semantic development of pre-Slavic words in different Slavic languages and dialects. Available observations on the pre-Slavic vocabulary indicate that the “memory” of the original meaning, despite numerous systemic and external factors contributing to semantic changes and obscuring the primary meaning, can persist over the centuries and become “actualized” at different historical stages in a variety of contexts and uses (including special and marginal uses). Examples (**pasti*, **věra*, etc.) are provided and discussed.

Alla Kozhynova (Belarusian State University, Minsk)
The internal structure of the word and its realization in ancient Slavic texts

The internal structure of the word plays a special role in the construction of text. It is the first link between the language unit and the outside world. The internal structure makes it possible to find a denotative rationale for most of the lexemes, including those that at the current stage of language development seem completely devoid of denotative meaning. But the contribution of the internal structures of lexemes in the formation of the language system is not limited to their role in preserving the concepts characteristic of the early stages of the development of human consciousness.

Alexander Potebnya wrote about the role of the internal structure of words in artistic writing, considering the latter as a synthesis of three elements: the external form, the internal form, and the content. In his opinion, authors of literary works are not driven by the search for new forms of perception, but by the desire to revive forgotten etymology.

Nevertheless, in most cases, the “life” of the etymology of a lexeme in text does not always depend on the active contribution from the author. The lexical internal form, being implicitly present in the lexeme, has the ability to manifest itself in natural combinations with other lexemes with similar meanings that originated at the dawn of human cognition.

In the unfolding of a text an important role is played not only by the primary semantic motivation of the word but also by its further existence in the language

system, its various lexical relationships that become imprinted in its semantics and later embodied in speech, with text as its product.

The goal of this talk is to demonstrate this principle with a variety of examples from ancient Slavic religious texts, both original and translated.

Irina A. Sedakova (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)

The memory of the national cultural tradition in modern ritual discourse

This paper presents and analyses the ways in which the memory of traditional culture is embodied in the records of modern rituals and verbal ritual practices in Russia and Bulgaria. Data from Internet sites and forums that deal with weddings, pregnancy, childbirth, baby name selection, burials, etc. are also incorporated. Preliminary observations allow one to draw conclusions as to the diverse ways in which traditional memory is continued and modified (through a desire for authenticity, modification of a given ritual, neglect of some of its details, emphasis on innovation). Traditions can also be actively launched, ritualistic patterns can be borrowed from other cultures, “classical forms” can be consciously dropped or left behind: cultural memory can thus be activated apophatically, as in negative theology, and reconstructed from that which is “not there”.

Aleksey V. Yudin (University of Ghent, Belgium)

Memory in the name: the toponymy of East Slavic spells

The name of a well-known person, place, or event is a “unit of memory”, with a function in language similar to that of the “place of memory” in culture. The name contains information about the real, mythologized, or mythological people, places, or events and, with a simple question “Who is X?”/“What is Y?” can evoke a standard narrative about the past along with the stereotypical worldview associated with that name. Proper names act as keys that open the door to narratives passed down from one generation to the next in the form of folk tales, parental explanations, school-style narratives, or encyclopaedic references. Thus, names enable traditional and modern culture to reproduce their content again and again.

East Slavic magic texts are replete with both real and mythological toponyms (hydronyms, oronyms, oconyms), primarily related to the events from sacred history (Jerusalem, Jordan, Zion, Sinai, Golgotha), but also to the habitat of the Slavs (the Danube, little-known local rivers) and the general folk worldview (*море Океан*, ‘Ocean Sea’, *остров Буян* ‘Buyan Island’, *речка Смородина* ‘Smorodina River’). Each of these is worthy of a separate study, and indeed, several of such studies have appeared in print (on Алатырь and Buyan in 1994; on Smorodina in 1996; the mythotoponymy of Russian spells in 1999; on the Jordan and the Danube in East Slavic magical folklore 2004; on Ukrainian and Byelorussian spells, with a focus on Zion, 2004). This paper provides an overview of the mythotoponymy of East Slavic incantations, describes the way mythotoponyms function in magic texts, and reports on the historical information conveyed in this folk genre.

Wojciech Chlebda (University of Opole, Poland)

How is history stored in memory, how is memory stored in language?

The theme of this session, “Historical memory in language”, contains three significant concepts: history, memory, and language: a discussion of them requires defining the relationships between them, as well as determining the relationship each of them has with objective reality. That reality is interpreted in idiosyncratic ways through historiography, memory, and language. The processes of interpretation can never be depicted in their fullness: in its essence it results not in mirror reflection but in an interpretation. The role of language is twofold: it participates in constructing the worldviews proposed by historiography and memory, and at the same time it creates a worldview itself.

Special attention should be paid to the Polish word for history (*historia*), which refers to a succession of past events or to a description of these events. These two meanings belong to different ontological orders and should be distinguished accordingly – also in the context of the “historical memory in language”. By “history₁” I mean successions of past events in real world, whereas “history₂” will be used to mean historiography, descriptions of past events that belong to the world of knowledge. However, there is yet another “description of past events”, namely the one that is stored in the memory of a given community. Importantly, language influences these two descriptions, historiographical and communal, so that we are faced with a network of complex mutual relations, in various configurations, between “history₁”, “history₂”, “memory” (especially communal memory), and “language”. The task at hand is to present the complexity of these relationships, so that in the near future it can be shown, with specific examples, how a certain fragment of “history₁” is portrayed, interpreted and, evaluated differently by “history₂” (historiography), memory, and language. This task cannot be accomplished without specifying the role of language and the mechanisms through which it participates in the formation of these interpretations, which in turn requires consideration of the dialectic relevance of linguistic traces of the past, detected mainly through etymological, word-formational, and lexical analysis. This must be correlated with the dynamism of how linguistic worldviews of the past are constructed (through metaphors, narrative modes, styles, genres, and conventionalised discourse patterns).

Translated by Anna Wyrwa