

Linguistic Issues of the *Igor' Tale*

To doubt the authenticity of the *Igor' Tale* today, is no longer to produce a scholarly sensation. In fact, doubts concerning the work's genuineness arose almost at the very time of its publication on the threshold of the nineteenth century. Since that time several names of possible forgers have been suggested: Musin-Pushkin, Bantysh-Kamenskii, Ioil' Bykovskii, Karamzin, Elagin, Josef Dobrovský. The skepticism towards the *Tale* was nurtured not by the vague and even mysterious story of its discovery but rather by the text's unique position in the historical process of Old Rus' and, generally speaking, of Slavic literature of the time to which that text purportedly belonged. To put it bluntly, the *Tale* simply does not fit our perceptions and our knowledge of the cultural and literary horizons of the East Slavic twelfth century.

This is, however, only one side of the story. The other side are the linguistic aspects of the *Tale*. While historians of literature, of culture, and the "regular" historians were amazed and confused, and on occasion suspected the *Tale's* authenticity, linguists uniformly considered it to be authentic and old; such at least was the observation A.V. Isačenko made in 1941:

"Обособленное положение «Слова» в русской литературе, его лексикально-синтаксические особенности порождали и порождают до сих пор среди языковедов много спорных вопросов. Но странно: именно со стороны языковедов никогда не высказывалось ни малейших сомнений в подлинности, т.е. в древности этого памятника. Серьезные сомнения высказывались исключительно филологами, заинтересованными главным образом литературно-исторической стороной вопроса, начиная со скептиков пушкинских времен и кончая современными французскими «иконокластами» по выражению А. Мазона"; see A. V. Isačenko, "Dvoistvennoe chislo v 'Slove of P'liku Igoreve'," *Opera Selecta* (München, 1976 = *Forum Slavicum*, Bd. 45), pp. [34]-[48], esp. pp. [34]-[35]; article of 1941).

Unlike the scientist who quantifies, the historian of culture and literature deals with human emotions (those of his subjects and his own), with esthetical and ethical motivations, with ideas, movements, various *Zeitgeists*, and fashions. All this is difficult to measure. Of all the tools the historian of culture and literature has at his disposal, linguistic analysis is his closest approximation to scientific procedure. In case of texts subject to controversy, it is advisable to use this tool.

But what exactly should we measure? The *Tale's* strange and unusual vocabulary? Or its morphology and syntax that seems to be so old? What constitutes the measurable entity of any text in particularly and language in general? This question was raised and wittingly answered by Lev Vasil'evich Shcherba, an outstanding Russian

linguist. In 1910, he came to the class of his first-year students and wrote the following phrase on the blackboard:

Глокая кúздра штеко будланула бокра́ и курдячит бокрѣнка.

Shcherba asked his students to answer two questions: first, what is this phrase about? Second: what language it is written in? Students were able to answer both questions.

Indeed, though none of us would be able to find any of these words in any Russian dictionary, the phrase is quite transparent. It is about thing named *куздра*. We do not know what or who *куздра* is, but we know that it is she, the feminine, because of its ending *-a* which is further supported by the endings of its attributive (*глокая*) and the first predicate (*будланула*). We know that *куздра* is *глокая* and that she did something to the thing named *бокр*. Whatever she did, this was a forced and momentary action made in the past (*будланула*; cf. *толкнула, качнула, двинула* etc.). Moreover, we realize that *куздра* not just *будланула*, but *будланула штеко* (the ending of the word and its very position in the phrase allow us to believe that here we are dealing with the qualitative adverb). We further surmise that *будлануть* is a transitive verb, since it has a direct object in Accusative. We do not know who the *бокр* is, but we know that it is masculine and animate, because of its ending (*бокра*). We may further assume that *бокр* is some kind of an animal, for it has a little off-spring (*бокренка*; cf. *волк : волчонок, лис : лисенок*, etc.). Moreover, we know that at present moment *глокая куздра курдячит* this little off-spring. Now, we are able to answer Shcherba's second question: what language it is written in? The answer is simple: in a perfect modern Russian.

Shcherba's famous phrase proves a very important thing that we, the students of written texts, should keep in mind; namely that although the vocabulary is a very important part of any language study, it is not the lexemes that constitutes the language, but rather the relations between them, the linguistic system that can be detected through them. I find it's very interesting that all the skeptics of the *Tale's* authenticity always limit themselves by the study of the *Tale's* vocabulary; it is no less interesting that all the linguists who study the *Tale's* grammar find it to be an authentic text of the end of the 12th-the very beginning of the 13th century.

Therefore, today we will discuss works that were published during the last ten years and that were dedicated, directly or indirectly, to the *Tale's* grammar.

I shall start with two works by Professor Alan Timberlake of Berkeley. I have in mind his article "Augment imperfekta v Lavrent'evskoi letopisi," published in Russian in the *Voprosy iazykoznanania* 5 (1997), pp. 66-86 and in English in the *American Contribution to the Twelfth International Congress of Slavists* (Bloomington, 1998), pp. 501-514, and his article of 1999 "On the Imperfect Augment in «Slovo o polku Igoreve»,"

published in the book entitled *Roman Jakobson. Teksty, dokumenty, issledovaniia* (M., 1999), pp. 771-786.

Both articles are dedicated to the study of the augmented forms of the Imperfect (such as *бѣшетъ*, *бѣхуть* instead of the "standard" ones *бѣше*, *бѣху*). These forms constitute clear distinguishing marks indicating a manuscript's East Slavic origin. Research has shown that this feature is absent from manuscripts reflecting the norms of the Old Bulgarian literary tradition. The augmented forms of the Imperfect attracted the attention of scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, but the analysis of these forms did not go beyond mere pointing to the existence of these forms in various manuscripts. An explanation of the principle of distribution of these forms within a given textual segment was offered by Alan Timberlake.

In the first article of 1997, Professor Timberlake analyzed the distribution of the augmented Imperfect using the material of the *Laurentian Chronicle*. He demonstrated that, first, the distribution of this form is systematic and, second, that the context in which these forms occur changes over time. I checked the distributive principles postulated by Professor Timberlake against a number of texts written at the end of the 11th-the first half of the 14th centuries and found them to be valid.

Timberlake's finding has been argued in at least two articles, one by Sabine Stoll published in *Russian Linguistics* 24 (2000), pp. 265-285 ("On the Desinence {-t^(c)} of the Early East Slavic Imperfect"); another by Viktor Zhivov published in *Rusistika. Slavistika. Linguistika. Festschrift für Werner Lehfeldt zum 60. Geburtstag* in Munich in 2003, pp. 320-329 and, later, in Zhivov's collection of articles entitled *Vostochnoslavianskoe pravopisanie XI-XIII veka* (M., 2006), pp. 200-224 ("XOŷ-ть-н. Об идиосинкратических факторах при выборе морфологических вариантов"). Though containing interesting thoughts and materials, none of the articles can withstand a linguistic scrutiny and therefore could and (in my strong opinion) should be disregarded.

In 1999, Professor Timberlake analyzed the augmented forms of the *Tale* and showed that the distribution of these forms there was in full accord with the distributive norms postulated by him for a segment B of the *Laurentian Chronicle* covering the years 1111-1185 (see Timberlake 1999, 771-786) and, we might add, in accord with the distributive norms of the *Uspenskii Sbornik* and the *Hypatian Chronicle*. In short, the creator of the *Tale* had a perfect knowledge of not only the formation of the augmented Imperfect, but also of its distribution.

Now let us turn to the analysis of Dual forms in the *Tale*. It has been pointed out (I have in mind articles by Aleksandr Isačenko of 1941 and by Constantine Bida of 1956¹) that the creator of the *Tale* used forms of the Dual in an almost perfect accord

¹ Bida, Constantine: 1956, "Linguistic Aspects of the Controversy over the Authenticity of the Tale of Igor's Compain," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 1, pp. 76-87.

with the relevant rules of Old Church Slavonic, except for mistakes characteristic of texts written in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In 2001 this opinion was confirmed one more time in the important work by O. Zholobov and V. Krys'ko, *Istoricheskaia grammatika drevnerusskogo iazyka: Dvoistvennoe chislo*, M. (= *Istoricheskaia grammatika drevnerusskogo iazyka*, t. II). The importance of this work rests upon a huge variety of Old Russian texts analyzed and discussed there. It will be enough to mention that the list of primary sources includes 139 Old Russian texts, published or unpublished, dating from the 11th till 17th century, not to mention the extensive use of two main *kartoteka* of the Old Russian dictionaries, each containing about one million cards. More importantly, the authors analyzed texts of different genres: chronicles, patristic literature, hymnographic and hagiographic texts, birch-bark letters, acts, deeds, wills, etc. All this makes this book a certain break in our knowledge of what the Dual was and how it worked in the 11th-17th centuries. Being armed with this knowledge, the authors were able to compare the system of the Dual as it is attested in the dated Old Russian texts with that of attested in the *Tale*.

According to their calculations, the *Tale* offers 47 correct forms of the Dual, not counting the words *dva* and *oba*. These forms are derived from nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs. The *Tale* contains all oblique cases of the nominal Dual except for the Prepositional; forms of the Present (in 1st: *есѣѣ* [7], *рострѣляевѣ* [43], *вѣ ... онутаевѣ* [43], *онутаевѣ* [44] and 2nd person: *о моя сыновчя ... рано еста начала* [26]), one form of the Imperative (*вступнута* [29]) and a number of forms of the 3rd person Aorist from various verbs (*разлучиста* [18], *слѣтѣста* [24], *погасоста* [25], *ся поволокоста* [25], *помѣркоста* [25], (*ся?*) *погрузиста* [25], *претрѣгоста* [41]). In short, the *Tale* uses the Dual in full accord with the other texts of the 12th-13th centuries. There are only 9 cases where the *Tale* uses the Plural instead of the Dual or uses Dual incorrectly. One example will be useful here: the *Tale* contains the following phrase *Ваю храбрая сердца въ жестоцемъ харалузѣ скована, а въ буети закалена* (26). The soft variant of neuter nouns in *-jǫ- (in our case *сердце*; but cf. also *два солнца помѣркоста* [25]) requires the ending *-u* in the Nom.-Acc. of the Dual according to the Old Church Slavonic grammar. In 1907, A.I. Sobolevskii observed that in the early East Slavic texts, however, "forms of the Neuter Dual in Nom.-Acc. were identified with the forms of the Masculine, that is, they obtained the ending *-a*."² To prove his observation, Sobolevskii referred to examples from manuscripts of the 13th-14th centuries (*ibid.*, 208). But Zholobov and Krys'ko were able to find an even earlier examples: from the birch-bark letters of the 2nd half of the 12th century.³ Thus, even

² "Формы дв. ч. средн. р. в имен.-вин. п. отождествились с формами муж. р., т.е. получили окончание *a*," see A. I. Sobolevskii, , *Lektsii po istorii russkogo iazyka*, M., 1907, p. 207.

³ See Zholobov, Krys'ko 2001, p. 73

when the *Tale* makes mistakes it does it in full accord with the mistakes of the 12th century.

Now let us turn to the spelling features of the *Tale*. It has been frequently observed that in spite of the fact that the *Tale* is known to us in the *printed* version and that the publishers preferred to use the Russian type (*grazhdanskii shrift*) and thus, by virtue of this choice, may have corrupted the original paleographical and spelling traits of their presumed manuscript model, the printed *Tale* still preserves some features characteristic of the East Slavic manuscripts that reflect the so-called Second South Slavic Influence. The Second South Slavic Influence upon East Slavic manuscripts began in the third quarter of the fourteenth century; it lasted down to the first half of the sixteenth century on Russian territory and even longer in Ukraine and Byelorussia. A.I. Sobolevskii was the first to have described this phenomenon and to have recognized its importance in the history of the East Slavic letters. Sobolevskii made his discovery public in 1893. It has been universally accepted by Slavists since then.

Our knowledge of the peculiar spellings that occur in East Slavic manuscripts as a direct result of the Second South Slavic Influence has significantly grown in last decade. This is due, first and foremost, to the work of the late Mariia Gal'chenko, published posthumously in Moscow in 2001.⁴ Gal'chenko analyzed only *dated* manuscripts written in the period between the middle of the fourteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries with respect to their letter forms, punctuation, and spelling. She analyzed about 200 manuscripts and created a kind of life-line of this phenomenon. As a result she established thirteen orthographical features characteristic of such kind of manuscripts.

In Gal'chenko's classification, first six characteristic features constitute *the minimal set of markers* for the Second South Slavic Influence, first nine characteristic features constitute *the expanded minimal set of markers*; finally, the entire set constitutes *the maximal set of markers*. The analysis of the *Tale's* orthographical features fit Gal'chenko's description of *the expanded minimal set of markers*.

Gal'chenko was able to show that the expanded minimal set was characteristic of 112 scribal systems in manuscripts under consideration and that the number of systems characterized by the expanded minimal set increased significantly towards the end of the fifteenth century.

To sum up, analyzing the graphic and orthographic system of the *Tale* and comparing it with analogous systems of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries point to a strong resemblance between the two. It looks as if the manuscript model of the *Tale's*

⁴ M.G. Gal'chenko, *Knizhnaia kul'tura. Knigopisanie. Nadpisi na ikonakh Drevnei Rusi. Izbrannye raboty*, M.–SPb., 2001.

printed text could have belonged into the time frame between the second half of the fourteenth and the end of the fifteenth century.

The results of the present analysis coincide with the statements of the publishers of the *Igor' Tale* and of other people who allegedly saw the manuscript. All of them considered, or were told to have considered, that manuscript to have been written between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (Musin-Pushkin, Malinovskii, Ermolaev, the printer Selivanovskii, and finally Karamzin).

In 2004, A.A. Zalizniak published a book «*Slovo o polku Igoreve*»: *vzgliad lingvista* (M., 2004) in which he summarizes most of what has been just said. The book consists of four separate articles dedicated to one general subject — the linguistic issues of the *Tale*. The main article «Лингвистические аргументы за и против подлинности Слова» analyzes in details various arguments pro and contra, expressed in the past, and evaluates their validity. The article «К чтению нескольких мест из Слова...» discusses some "темные места" of the *Tale* and suggests a new explanation, reading and/or understanding of them. While doing this, Zalizniak refers to the data of broad variety of Old Russian texts and East Slavic dialects. Two last articles «О нескольких лингвистических работах противников подлинности Слова...» and «Новейший кандидат на авторство Слова — Йосеф Добровский» analyze articles published by German scholars in 1970ies-90ies (Trost, Aitzetmüller and Hendler) and book by Professor Edward Keenan of Harvard published in Cambridge, Mass., in 2003 and point to linguistic mistakes made by these authors.

For the purposes of our round table, I shall briefly discuss here only one observation made by Zalizniak in his main article «Лингвистические аргументы за и против подлинности Слова». He showed (cf. § 9-13 of the article) that the *Tale* uses enclitics in full accord with the Old Russian usage, namely they follow the Wackernagel's Law (let me remind you that Jakob Wackernagel established this law before 1936). The most indicative here is the use of the enclitic *ся* in the *Tale*, since this enclitic's position before or after a relative verb in Old Russian language was determined by a very complex set of rules. The *Tale's* use of *ся* reflects an early stage in the development of this enclitic's history. This early stage is attested in early birch-bark letters, in the passages with direct speech in the Kievan Chronicle as it is preserved by the Hypatian codex and in few other texts, all created in the pre-Mongol Rus'.

To sum up. Generations of linguists who have studied the *Tale's* morphology and syntax have found no fault with its "ancient" character. The *Tale* follows the morphological norms established by scholars on the basis of other Old Russian and Church Slavonic texts of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. Moreover, the *Tale's* grammatical deviations from these norms are paralleled by analogous grammatical "mistakes" occurring in other texts of that time. The *Tale* regularly adheres to the ancient norm in its

use of Duals, the Dative possessive, the augmented imperfects, the enclitics that were to undergo a significant decline in frequency and changes in outward appearance in subsequent centuries. When we compare the just mentioned morphological and syntactic features of the *Tale* with those of its closest counterpart, the *Zadonshchina*, we regularly find that the *Tale* morphologically is more "correct," that is, that it displays earlier forms. The *Zadonshchina's* mistakes in the use of the Dual, the absence of the Dative Possessive and of augmented imperfects in parallel passages of its various versions, forms that had become obsolete by the time of that text's compilation, appear non-problematic to traditionalists who assume the *Zadonshchina's* secondariness.

The situation becomes more complicated if we take the opposing side and assume that the *Tale* is secondary to the *Zadonshchina*. In this case we have to admit that although the purported forger showed a great deal of compliance with the *Zadonshchina's* vocabulary, phraseology, poetic devices and imagery, he showed no conformity whatsoever with its grammar. In fact, he ruthlessly corrected the *Zadonshchina's* grammar throughout to put it in accord with the Old Russian norms of the twelfth-thirteenth century (norms of which he was fully aware).

Moreover, our forger added new orthographical features to the *Tale*: features characteristic of the Second South Slavic Influence. By doing this he, for purposes unclear, made his forgery look like a twelve-century text copied between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. In short, our forger showed a great deal of linguistic awareness in areas that have become apparent to students of Slavic linguistics only in the last hundred years or less, and that only in stages.

In 2003 I published an article under the title "The Linguistic Practice of the Creator of the *Igor' Tale* and the Linguistic Views of Josef Dobrovský". The name of Dobrovský as a possible creator of the *Tale* was offered by Professor Edward Keenan. At first glance, good arguments can be offered in support of Dobrovský candidacy for having been the producer of the *Tale*. Not only did he have access to the *Hypatian Chronicle* and the *Pskov Apostol* of 1307, but he also was a linguist, the best of his time; thus he possessed or, at least, might have possessed, the knowledge needed for compiling the *Tale*. Hence, the aim of the article was to find an answer to this very question: did Dobrovský, the scholar who during his lifetime was called the "Patriarch of Slavistics," the author of the first historical grammar of Slavic languages, in short, the greatest scholar of his time, did he possess enough knowledge to forge the *Igor' Tale*?

The answer was an unambiguous "no."

Dobrovský indeed was a great scholar and his grammatical treatise *Institutiones* were a great step forward on the way towards a better understanding of the history of Slavic languages and Old Church Slavonic in particular. He was a man of his time, however. Dobrovský's status as the "Patriarch of Slavistics" was not enough to put him

outside of the natural development of linguistics as a science and did not prevent him from mistakes and gaps in knowledge unavoidable in his time.

His time-bound vision of the Church Slavonic language was too limited for him to understand and account for all the characteristics of the *Igor' Tale*, let alone to compose it. By analyzing his main linguistic achievement, his *Institutiones* and comparing Dobrovský's linguistic views with the linguistic practice of the creator of the *Tale*, I tried to show that in the field of Church Slavonic phonetics Dobrovský did not realize the importance of the reduced vowels (hence his problems with the groups *tьrt and *trьt); that he had a faulty understanding of Old Slavonic and Old Russian verbal systems (namely, the past tenses) and of Church Slavonic and Old Russian Dual forms.

But Dobrovský was not alone in his views. On the contrary, most of his ideas were part of the mainstream of Church Slavonic linguistics long after Dobrovský's time. Thus, for instance, Dobrovský's erroneous view of the verbal Dual was shared by all European Slavists until 1870 and by Russian Slavists until 1914.

Non-linguists absolutely does not realize the power of language as a linguistic mechanism; namely, the amount and complexity of rules they have to obey in order to produce a correct text. The simplicity with which a native speaker produces an oral or written text deprives him of ability to comprehend the true extents of the information he subconsciously uses at that moment. But those of us who are not the native-speakers realize this much better. The native-speaker of the 12th-century Old Russian language lived in the 12th century Old Rus'. A Russian who lived in the 14th, 15th, 16th and so on centuries was not a native-speaker of the 12th-century Old Russian anymore. He was a foreigner and had to learn this language as a foreigner. And his foreign accent would have always betrayed his native place and native language, as my accent betrays my Russian origin.

Handout
Olga B. Strakhov
Linguistic Issues of the *Tale...*
(round table)

1. "Обособленное положение «Слова» в русской литературе, его лексикально-синтаксические особенности порождали и порождают до сих пор среди языковедов много спорных вопросов. Но странно: именно со стороны языковедов никогда не высказывалось ни малейших сомнений в подлинности, т.е. в древности этого памятника. Серьезные сомнения высказывались исключительно филологами, заинтересованными главным образом литературно-исторической стороной вопроса, начиная со скептиков пушкинских времен и кончая современными французскими «иконокластами» по выражению А. Мазона"; see A.V. Isačenko, "Dvoistvennoe čislo v 'Slove of P"lku Igoreve'," *Opera Selecta* (München, 1976 = *Forum Slavicum*, Bd. 45), pp. [34]-[48], esp. pp. [34]-[35]; article of 1941).

2. Phrase by L.V. Shcherba:

Глѡкая кѹздра штѣко будланѹла бокрѧ и курдѧчит бокрѣнка.

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Viktor Zhivov:

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