

BOOK REVIEW:

Russian Terminology Science (1992–2002)

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*S. D. Shelov & V. M. Leichik, Eds.
together with H. Picht & C. Galinski*

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The division of Europe (and, starting from there, the world) into East and West and hence “them” and “us” was artificial in a vast number of respects – except, of course, for those quite tangible clashes of ideological, political, and economic agendas that gave birth to it in the early 20th century and led to its gradual dissolution less than a century later. Though we are not quite out of the muddy waters of post-dividedness yet, and though a strong “nostalgia” is presently being experienced and expressed by those on both sides who built their world-view and perhaps even career on this very basis, European and global developments for the rest of the 21st century are bound to be determined by much else than the “good old” East-West opposition. Just like in all centuries before the 20th.

Scientific developments is one good example. The state-of-the-art of most present-day sciences has come about through continuous synergies across (what for a period became) the gap between East and West. For example, it is hard to describe the roots of today’s natural sciences without mentioning both Newton’s law of gravity and the periodic table developed by Mendeleev – or the basics of modern psychology without mentioning both Piaget’s work on child development and the conditioned reflexes of Pavlov’s dogs. Even in periods where East and West were divided the most, some contacts were maintained in many fields, and many devel-

opments continued “in parallel” due to similar points of departure and subsequent insights and experiences.

All this is also true of language theory in general and, as one might argue, of terminology research in particular. Ever since the study and management of professional terminologies became an independent field of activity through the pioneering work of Eugen Wüster in Austria and of D. S. Lotte and others in the USSR in the early 1930s – and the exchange of experience initiated between them already then – developments in this area have had a declared cross-national orientation with regard to both principles of analysis and terminology harmonization and standardization efforts. The dialogue today involves a number of environments across Europe including also e.g. (former East and West) Germany, Czechia, Italy, France, the Nordic countries, UK, and in other parts of the world. Still, the East-West division did of course inhibit this dialogue in various respects, complicating visits and personal contacts, publication options, etc. Moreover, in the 1990s the eastern part of Europe and, to an even higher degree, Russia and the former Soviet states experienced some years with political turmoil and economic crises and disintegration which took focus (and resources) away from ongoing research activities, terminology research included. So, ironically, the first years after the fall of the Iron Curtain indeed widened the gap.

That picture is about to change too, however. Part of the “East” is now part of the EU, opening new perspectives for *inter alia* scientific development and collaboration, and Russian is now experiencing fast and stable economic growth as well as systematic restoration efforts and investments targeting those key sectors of society that suffered in the 1990s, including science and education. After some years of depression, Russian terminology research is now witnessing a revival – as well as a change of generation – with new directions and focuses in research and practice, increased publication activity, curriculum developments, etc. So the ground is definitely prepared not only for re-opening the East-West dialogue, but identifying new areas of mutual interest and possible collaboration. One barrier that still remains, however, particularly as concerns Russia, is linguistic: Most terminology work published in Russian up till now is in Russian, the lingua franca of the former Soviet Block, which poses a challenge to many researchers outside of it. Clearly, a new *modus vivendi* is bound to crystallize itself quite soon on this point – just as “parallel discourses” have developed for the rich research traditions that used to exist in e.g. German or French only – and the key to that is Global English whether proponents of linguistic pluralism like the idea or not. In the meantime, translation efforts are clearly an important supplement.

In view of the perspectives just outlined, the publication of the collective volume *Russian Terminology Science (1992–2002)* is of great interest, in that it provides an unprecedented basis for non-Russian readers to (re-)discover both the roots and, especially, the present-day status and current orientations of Russian terminology research and management, and the people and environments behind these activities. The book has come about through a joint effort by the Committee for Scientific Terminology in Fundamental Research under the Russian Academy of Science, the

Russian Research Institute for Classification, Terminology and Information on Standardization and Quality (VNIKI) under the Federal Standardization Agency of Russia, and the International Network for Terminology (TermNet), Vienna. The Russian material was selected and edited by Vladimir Leichik and Sergey Shelov, and the final editing and translations into English and German were carried out in close collaboration with Heribert Picht and Christian Galinski who also provided vital practical support in carrying through the TermNet publication.

The book consists of 28 papers by Russian terminology researchers, most of them rendered in English, but a few in German, together with a comprehensive bibliography. The papers cover a vast array of theoretical issues and empirical investigations subsumed under 6 sections: “Term and Terminology Theory”, “Cognitive Terminology Science”, “Terms in Natural Language Lexis and LSP”, “Terminography”, “Some Particular Aspects of Terminology Science”, and “Organization of Sci-Terminological Activities”. It is impossible within the limits of this review to comment on all specific topics and terminological data addressed by the individual authors or their often opposing views on current theoretical and methodological debates.

What strikes one as a reader in general, however, is that most of the discussion is interesting not because it presents a certain Russian or “Eastern” way or looking at things, but because it contributes new angles and arguments to the status quo and future challenges of terminology research at large. Thus, up until the late 1970s, terminology researchers in both the former Soviet Union and further to the West were very preoccupied with positioning themselves relative to general linguistics, which, in turn, can be explained by the strong influence of structural linguistics on the latter (an influence that was later “enrolled” into the alleged holism of Marxist philosophy in the Eastern countries, but was nevertheless still there). The structuralist preference to describe language as a self-contained system of elements and dependencies and, in particular, the word as an indivisible unit of expression and content was challenged by, and seemed to be incompatible with, terminologists’ interest in the dynamics behind the establishment of new term-concept relationships and their recognition and analysis of conceptual structures on their own terms, not only relative to their linguistic expressions (the terms). Though some terminologists, most notably Eugen Wüster, justly argued that similar phenomena may sometimes be viewed from different angles for different purposes, others found it necessary to cut the ties to general linguistics entirely, which resulted in a number of (over-) generalizations that are just as open to criticism as the dogma of classic structuralism. For example, it is still commonplace among terminologists to claim that only terms convey concepts whereas ordinary words “only” convey meanings – a rather idiosyncratic use of these terms that would make little or no sense to, say, a psychologist or a cognitive scientist. However, in the wake of what has been called the Cognitive Revolution (which reached the mainstream of linguistics and several other disciplines worldwide in the 1980s) it has now again become widely recognized that language is not autonomous, but part of the larger system of human cognition, and that the interplay between linguistic and cognitive mechanisms is not just a legitimate, but a very essential subject of investigation.

This renders the focus of earlier terminologists on the conceptual structures underlying professional vocabularies both uncontroversial and highly visionary – Lotte and Wüster were 50 years ahead of their time – and suggests new synergies, some of which are already being implemented, between terminology research and cognitive disciplines such as computer-aided knowledge management and engineering or mental modeling of space and motion. Another factor affecting current developments in terminology research is the gradual extension of empirical focus from “hard” fields like natural sciences and engineering to “softer” ones like politics, history, law, etc., and hence a growing demand for new cross-disciplinary links and synergies across the fields concerned.

All the trends and developments just sketched, and more, are abundantly reflected in the present book and approached from a variety of angles, some of which may be new to non-Russian readers, while others are merely relevant and interesting. The word-vs.-term (and/or meaning-vs.-concept) issue is addressed, inter alia, in the papers of Shelov, Alexeeva, Grinev, and Superanskaya, which may allow the reader to discover new historical facets of the debate as it developed in Russia and cross-nationally since the 1930s as well as new lines of argument such as the idea of distinguishing concepts from notions or seeing “termness” as a matter of measurable degrees rather than absolutes. The Cognitive Revolution is brought into the book most outspokenly by Novodranova, who insists on seeing terminology as but one manifestation of human cognition in terms of knowledge structuring and categorization, stressing the relevance of cognitive modeling in the analysis of professional knowledge as well as the resultant patterns of term-formation. Taking up the challenge, Manerko applies results gained on pre-linguistic spatial cognition to the analysis of complex NPs in the language of engineering, while Yeltsova applies spatial schemes to the analysis of medical terminology pertaining to anatomy. Speaking of special fields, the book spans a wide array of highly specialized and qualitatively different terminologies – from that of chemistry, over history and literary criticism, to the terminology of language theory itself. As for object languages, not only Russian, but also e.g. English, French, German, and Latin are considered in substantial depth. The book also covers e.g. sociolinguistic and text linguistic approaches to terminology work as well as recent first-hand experiences in the fields of terminography and terminology training. Yet, this review has to end somewhere.

Instead, the book itself is warmly recommended to anyone engaged in terminology research and practice who still has the courage, and time, to receive new substantial input. The book is best read not (only) as an update on the “Russian School of Terminology” (which is not “one School” at all) but as a source of new insights, reflections, and examples that may inspire and support the reader in his or her own future work.
