

IMPRESSIONS OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS IN THE SOVIET UNION

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Sociolinguistics in the USSR is a thriving field. This is apparent from the multitude of professional conferences held there on sociolinguistic topics, and the many Soviet publications in this area. An American member of the RCS/ISA had the opportunity to observe this activity for one month last year when he made a visit to Moscow, Baku, and Ashkhabad to consult with sociolinguists. The April, 1975, trip took place within the exchange program of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

A few impressions from this visit about the current state of Soviet sociolinguistics are presented below. Because some misunderstanding was inevitable in conversations conducted in second languages of one or more conversants, these impressions should be read as such, and certainly not as a Soviet-authorized account of sociolinguistic work in that country. Some observations on Soviet language planning will appear in the *Language Planning Newsletter*; therefore only the scholarly aspects of sociolinguistics are discussed in any detail below.

Sociolinguistics in the USSR Today

Soviet sociolinguistics has a rich history, and for various reasons topics in sociolinguistics have great practical importance for the USSR. An analytical survey of Soviet work in this field to date, with useful bibliographical information, can be found in Wolfgang Girke & Helmut Jachnow, *Sowjetische Soziolinguistik: Probleme und Genese* (Kronberg Ts., FRG: Scriptor Verlag, 1974), which, however, is based only on Russian sources.

Work on sociolinguistic questions continues at a great rate, especially at central institutions of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. One locus of such work is the Department of Sociolinguistics (Sektor sotsiolingvistiki) of the Institute of Linguistics (Institut Iazykoznaniiia) of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. This department sponsors both theoretical and empirical research. The Head of the Department (Zaveduiushchii Sektorom) is Dr. Iu. D. Desheriev.

Associated with this Department are two other organizations: (1) the Soviet Committee of

Sociolinguistics of the Soviet Sociological Association, and (2) the Scientific Council on the Complex Problem of the Regularities in the Development of National Languages in Relation to the Development of Socialist Nations (Nauchnyi sovet po kompleksnoi probleme "Zakonomernosti razvitiia natsional'nykh iazykov v sviazi s razvitiem sotsialisticheskikh natsii"). Desheriev is the President and A. N. Baskakov the Vice-President of the latter, which has 55 members in all. It in turn has a section of interlinguistics, headed by M. I. Isaev. Furthermore, in May, 1974, the Institute established a Task Force on Issues of an International Auxiliary Language (Problemaia gruppa po voprosam mezhdunarodnogo vspomogatel'nogo iazyka), in response to a request by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences for research on the applicability of such a language "under present conditions". The chairman of the Task Force is Isaev.

The most recent publication from the Institute of Linguistics is *Sotsiolingvisticheskie problemy razvivaiushchikhsia stran* (Sociolinguistic Problems of Developing Countries), ed. Desheriev, 1975. Current sociolinguistic (including interlinguistic) research at the Institute is expected to lead to several other publications in the next few years, including books on the following topics:

- Contemporary Sociolinguistics: Theory, Problems, and Methods (A. D. Shveitser)
- Social Linguistics: Towards a General Sociolinguistic Theory (Desheriev)
- Synchronic Sociolinguistics: Theory and Problems (1976; L. B. Nikol'skii; a theoretical work on the sociology of language and sociological linguistics)
- The Development of National-Russian Bilingualism based on data from Lithuania, Estonia, Azerbaijan, and Buriat ASSR; to deal with bilingualism among Russians and local nationalities)
- The Soviet Experience in Language Planning and the Development of Standard Languages (to be published in English and perhaps French)
- Language and Culture (Desheriev, ed.)
- Philosophical Bases of Contemporary American Sociolinguistics
- Problems of an International Planned Language (by 1978)

Problems of Interlinguistics: Typology and Evolution of International Planned Languages (in press)

Problems of Language Creation: The Structure and History of International Planned Languages

Conferences are also planned for the future, including:

The Development of Bilingualism among Pupils in Non-Russian Schools of the RSFSR (Nal'chik, June, 1976; sociological, linguistic, pedagogical, psychological, and methodological aspects)

Turkology (All-Union Turkological Conference, Sept.-Oct., 1976)

Problems of Terminology: Sociolinguistic Aspects (1977)

Sociology and Sociolinguistics (international symposium, probably 1977)

World-Wide Linguistic Processes (international symposium, tentative)

The second central institution at which important sociolinguistic research is being conducted on a continuing basis is the N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. This work is methodologically and substantively different from that mentioned above, and its practitioners use the term "ethnolinguistics" rather than "sociolinguistics" to describe it. But the work itself is of definite sociolinguistic interest. The major effort is that of the Department of Empirical Social Research (Sektor konkretnykh sotsial'nykh issledovaniĭ), headed by Iu. V. Arutiunian. This department conducts sample surveys of subpopulations of the USSR on topics of nationality and ethnicity. Results of their prior work in the Tatar ASSR have appeared in *Sotsial'noe i natsional'noe*, edited by Arutiunian (Moscow: Nauka, 1973). Since then, a survey has been carried out on the sociology of nationality, with a 105-item questionnaire that was administered by interviewers to approximately 30,000 respondents in Moldavia, Georgia, Estonia, RSFSR, and Uzbekistan. Among the questions asked are which language the respondent knows best, which languages he uses under what conditions, and which language he would like his children to take in school. The results of the language questions and other questions on cultural life will be analyzed together with those from social-structural and lifestyle questions on the same survey to add to our knowledge about national characteristics, national psychology, and the relationships among national groups. The interviewing was done by scientific staff members at cooperating institutions in the Republics being surveyed. The questionnaires are precoded, and the responses are

hand-transferred onto coding sheets before being punched on IBM-format cards for automatic processing. The research group has a statistician/programmer, who performs the analyses they ask for. They have unlimited access to computer time. I observed the code-transferring process during my visits to the Institute. The findings of this survey will be published in several volumes, most of which will present the results for individual nationalities and the last of which will be a general comparative study. Among the members of this research group, M. N. Guboglo is the one most actively interested in the linguistic aspects of ethnicity. He designed a survey of ethnolinguistic attitudes and behaviors that was conducted in Moldavia in 1969, with interesting questions that might usefully be tried in other sociolinguistic surveys outside the Soviet Union. Other departments of the Institute also conduct sociolinguistically relevant work. The North American department, for example, has a knowledgeable and active group of scholars studying ethnic and racial relations in the U.S. and Canada. L. N. Terent'eva, head of the Baltic Republics department, spends part of her research time working on the phenomenon of mixed marriages. Three of the aspects that concern her are the choice of nationality by children of such marriages, the choice of names for their children by the couples so married, and the effects of existing trends on the ethnic composition and distribution of the USSR. The entire Institute participates in discussions of the theory and terminology of ethnicity and nationality. Their debates about the roles played by language and other factors in national identity, going on during my visit, were informed by considerable familiarity with language situations and ethnic relations around the world. In the spring of 1976 a (second) conference will be held in Estonia on the relationship between language and culture. Publications of sociolinguistic interest can be expected to continue to emerge from the Institute.

Various individuals at other agencies of the Academy of Sciences also work on sociolinguistic topics. A. A. Leont'ev, head of the Department of Psycholinguistics at the Institute of Linguistics, described studies dealing with national differences in linguistic and communicative behavior. Data have been collected from Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Kirgiz, Tajik, Kabardian, Moldavian, Kalmyk, and Russian for a comparative analysis of the speed of speech, hesitations, speech labeling, gesticulation, the connotations of colors, etc. A study of language choice and the use of non-verbal communication in situations where a common language is absent is forthcoming. A study of the expression in communication of social prestige differences, based on Russian and other language data, and a study

of differences in perception and memory between Russians and Vietnamese are among the other projects mentioned by Leont'ev. Nikol'skiĭ is the head of the Department of Sociolinguistics at the Oriental Institute. He has been doing research on Korean and is planning to analyze its subsystems (dialectal, social, functional, etc.) in his future research. Other work is going on at the Institute of Russian, at the Department of English of Moscow State University, and elsewhere in Moscow. The Institute of Linguistics also has a Department of Applied Linguistics, but its research area includes computational and statistical linguistics and information theory, rather than problems of language teaching etc. The above examples by no means exhaust or even fairly represent the rich and varied research being conducted in Moscow on sociolinguistically related topics.

The sociolinguistic work in Baku and Ashkhabad differs substantially from that being done in Moscow. The former is (a) more recent, (b) more applied, and (c) more national. Basic sociolinguistic research is only beginning, or only about to begin, in Baku and Ashkhabad. Language scientists there are aware of the desirability of such research and of the fact that they have theoretically fascinating local linguistic situations on which to do empirical work; but they have considered it necessary to accomplish higher-priority goals first. These include (1) alphabetizing the national languages, (2) standardizing them, (3) developing their technical terminologies, (4) writing and publishing textbooks on and in these languages for the schools, (5) training teachers of these languages for the schools, (6) training scientific manpower for further work on these languages, and (7) recording their dialects, which are fast disappearing in favor of the standard varieties. While scholars in the language sciences in Moscow are typically occupied with description and analysis, scholars with similar titles in Baku and Ashkhabad are often concerned more with influencing language and language behavior. They are racing against technology to expand their languages' terminologies. There are departments of speech cultivation (*kul'tura rechi, dil mādānijjāti*) which maintain a vigilant watch on the mass media's use of the language, to make sure that errors in vocabulary, grammar, and style are caught and corrected; these departments are treated by their colleagues in linguistics as indispensable. Many persons are working to overcome the dearth of dictionaries in these languages: the dictionaries that have been published are long since out of print and are considered inadequate anyway. Even those whose job relates to the Russian language are involved in this lexicographical work, whose main effect is to standardize

and develop the local national language. In the M. F. Akhundov Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute of Russian Language and Literature, the Lexicography Department is compiling a three-volume Azerbaijani-Russian dictionary, to be followed by a Russian-Azerbaijani one three times the size of the dictionary currently being compiled at the Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR. The staff informed me that the file cards with words, translations, and definitions number almost three million by this time. I was shown the incomplete typed manuscript: the letter "A" alone occupies more than 500 double-spaced pages. The enthusiasm among those working on this project was evident. According to one outside scholar, there are fifty co-workers in the project.

Thus scholarly activity in language planning seems to be subject to a geographic more than institutional division of labor. Scholars in Moscow work largely on general theoretical, methodological, and comparative studies, and also on the Russian language. Those in the non-Russian Republics work largely on their respective national languages. Studies relating to both categories (e.g. comparative Turkology) are carried out both in Moscow and in the various Republic centers. This is not likely to be just a temporary situation; the plan of activities recently adopted by the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR, reaching to 1990, provides for work almost exclusively on the Turkmen language and literature. The expectation that this division of labor will be long-lasting is illustrated by the fact that on 28 April the Lenin Library in Moscow removed from the main catalog hall the alphabetic catalog of holdings in the non-Russian languages of the Soviet Union. It was explained that this catalog was rarely consulted, and that those who read in the non-Russian Soviet languages mostly use the respective Republic libraries. (Persons wishing to use this catalog may of course still do so, in a different room to which a consultant will lead them. In that same room is also a very useful subject catalog of holdings in the non-Russian Soviet languages, by language).

Although foreign exchange resources available to sociolinguists are quite limited, domestic resources are plentiful. Manpower is made available, as indicated above, for enormous surveys. Cooperation is also offered by government agencies. The Institute of Ethnography, for example, hopes soon to get the government to administer a questionnaire to every nationally mixed couple applying to get married, and to every child of such a marriage when he or she at age 16 applies for a passport.

The Possibilities for Future Collaboration in Sociolinguistics

Soviet scholars working on sociolinguistic topics are interested in improving contacts and cooperation with colleagues abroad. But they also realistically understand that an increase in cross-national collaboration can be achieved only after careful planning. My conversations left me with the impression that collaborative research even on questions of great political and philosophical importance, such as language policy, will be possible between Soviet and other sociolinguists. Considerations in the planning of such work on the Soviet side will include: (a) whether the proposed sites for comparative research have enough in common, in spite of sociopolitical differences, to make comparison fruitful; (b) whether the foreign colleagues involved have the area knowledge required to make responsible use of Soviet data; (c) whether they have purely scientific and cooperative interests in the use of Soviet data; (d) whether favors granted to foreign scholars will be reciprocated; (e) whether favors received from foreign scholars will be such that it is possible for the Soviet side to reciprocate them; (f) whether the normal interests of project directors in the opportunity for first access to their own data will be safeguarded; (g) miscellaneous questions of protocol, diplomacy, and public policy. The climate for collaboration seems positive, in that the Soviet scholars with whom I talked were willing to discuss openly any topic at all and were interested in listening as well as talking. After an initial period of familiarization, my Soviet hosts were willing to discuss not only those questions on which a firm Soviet position exists, but also those on which debate is still going on within the country.

The feeling that collaboration is needed is not based just on the desire for more information from outside the Soviet Union, but also on the sincere (and correct) belief that many of those who write on sociolinguistics, language planning, bilingual education, and related topics in the West seem to think they are breaking new ground, but fail to take account of the early (1920's) and continuing work in these areas in the USSR. Soviet specialists in language teaching are somewhat skeptical of the methods and fads characterizing this field in the West. E.g., a specialist in Baku was familiar with the Russian language textbooks used in the University of Ankara and considered them "primitive". Another suggested that those who are starting second-language immersion programs look at the Soviet experience. Another said that it isn't methods anyway, but enthusiasm, dedication,

knowledge, and cultural awareness that make a good language teacher.

Not all contacts with Soviet institutions will have to be directed through all-Union offices. The libraries of the Academies of Sciences of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan both maintain their own active book, microfilm, and photocopy exchange programs with dozens of institutions and individuals in other countries, and many Soviet and foreign scholars exchange publications on an individual basis.

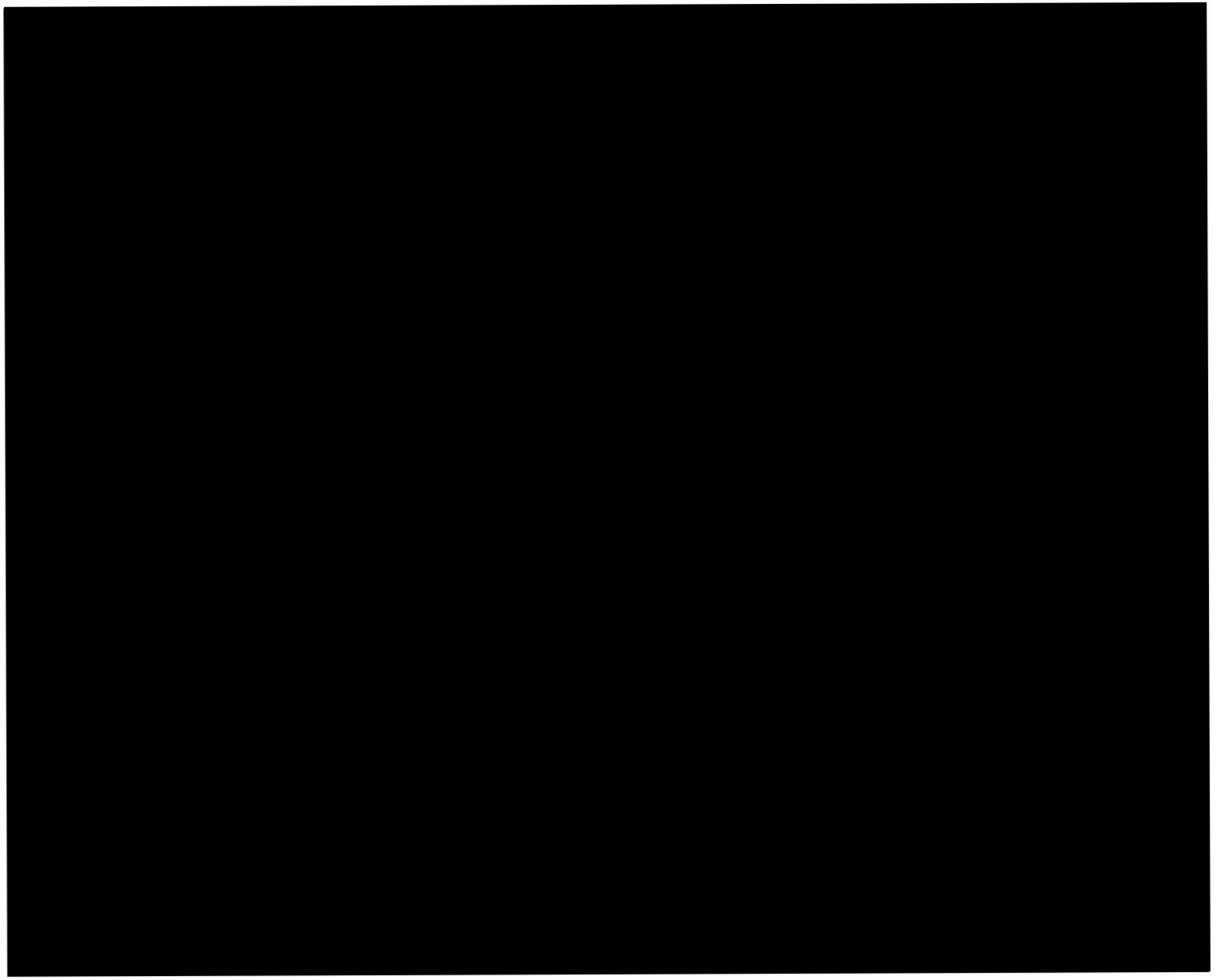
In addition to bi- or pluri-national programs, more than one Soviet scholar suggested the idea of international sponsorship of collaborative sociolinguistic research, basic and applied. Some thought UNESCO should launch a world-wide sociolinguistic research program, and support by Soviet scholars for any such initiative was promised. Both Desheriev and Nikol'skii suggested that the Research Committee on Sociolinguistics of the International Sociological Association undertake this initiative. Those working on interlinguistics were especially eager for cross-national collaboration and hoped to see the Center for Research and Documentation on the World Language Problem, in Rotterdam, coordinate work in this field.

Soviet scholars are, of course, eager to participate in international conferences and congresses where appropriate. They often reminded me, however, that in order to process necessary formalities they need to be invited about a year in advance of the actual event.

Soviet Ideas for the 9th World Congress of Sociology, 1978

As organizer of the sociolinguistics program for this congress, I requested ideas from several Soviet sociolinguists about the program. In general, they were troubled by the continuing uncertainty about what sociolinguistics is, i.e., what it includes and what it excludes. Desheriev expressed the view (also supported by Nikol'skii) that the sociology of language and sociological linguistics should be studied together, not separately. He also thought it important to recognize that the field has major futuristic and applied components. He wants to see sociolinguistics emerge as a field with its own subdivisions, categories, and units of analysis, not ones borrowed from other fields. The ethnographers, on the other hand, seem particularly interested in the behavioral rather than the linguistic aspects of sociolinguistics. Whatever their natural differences in orientation, both linguists and ethnographers asked for a panel in which sociolinguists would look critically at their own field

as a field: its boundaries, its conceptual frameworks, and its progress toward a general theory. Arutiunian also said Soviet ethnographers could best participate in the sociolinguistics program if it included a session broad enough to allow for their only partly linguistic approach to ethnicity. Interlinguists expressed a desire for at least one panel on world-wide linguistic developments and international language planning. Nikol'skii wanted language planning in general to be emphasized. Guboglo suggested an interesting scheme for organizing the presentation and distribution of papers: each paper giver would furnish 30 copies and be entitled to order 20 papers from the program. The 5-10 papers in a group would be distributed in advance to the group's members and one discussant. They would be discussed but not read or even summarized at panels.





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMPRESSIONS OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS IN THE SOVIET UNION Jonathan Pool	1
BE FINE THE POEMS OF ANNA BROWN Told to Anthony Gorman and Written down as verse by Edward Rose.....	6
EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATIONS, AND EVASIONS: HOW NEWSPAPER EDITORS ACCOUNT FOR THEIR COVERAGE OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT Monica B. Morris.....	20
TEACHING OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS.....	26

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The SOCIOLINGUISTICS NEWSLETTER is published through the Scholars Press by the Research Committee on Sociolinguistics of the International Sociological Association. Henceforth there will be three or four issues a year. Stress is laid on professional activities of our membership and our readership, particularly on new developments in research and teaching in sociolinguistics: we hope to draw attention to that most critical topic, the study of language involvements in society. We invite contributions on both theoretical and practical aspects of that topic. You may wish to send contributions either to the Editor, the Managing Editor, or to any of the Associate Editors listed below.

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