Roman Jakobson. *Remarks on the phonological evolution of Russian in comparison with the other Slavic languages*. Tr. by Ronald F. Feldstein. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2018. xxiv + 215 pp. ISBN 9780262038690.

Reviewed by Ronald I. Kim

During the 1920s and 1930s, in the capital of the newly independent Czechoslovak Republic, a Russian émigré and his associates produced a wealth of such innovative studies on the workings of human language that today, nearly a century later, their influence continues to be felt across a range of disciplines. Roman Jakobson, together with his compatriot Nikolai Trubetzkoy, was the central figure in the Prague Linguistic Circle, which built upon the insights of Ferdinand de Saussure to make lasting contributions to structuralist linguistics, poetics, and literary theory. Jakobson's impact on fields such as linguistic anthropology and semiotics remains palpable down to the present, and his theory of distinctive features and understanding of linguistic changes not as isolated events, but as changes to whole systems inspired many leading minds of the postwar generation, from Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, the founders of generative linguistics, to Uriel Weinreich and William Labov, who pioneered the study of language in its social context. Many of his observations were drawn from Russian and other Slavic languages, of which Jakobson had a legendary command, establishing his enduring status as a towering figure of Slavic studies.

Jakobson is mostly known among linguists today for his postwar publications written in English, which along with his prewar œuvre are collected in the nine-volume *Selected writings* (Jakobson 1962–2014). The first of these contains the work under review, the second monograph composed by Jakobson after his celebrated study of Russian and Czech poetics (Jakobson 1923). But whereas the latter was printed and remains available in the original Russian, *Remarks* suffered a less fortunate fate: after the Russian manuscript was destroyed in 1939 during the German occupation of Brno, it survived only in the French translation of Louis Brun, published in Prague in 1929 as the second volume of the *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*. The precipitous decline in knowledge of French among Slavicists (and linguists at large) has had the consequence that this major achievement of Jakobson's Prague years has tended to be somewhat overlooked, its analyses often known from citations in Jakobson's later publications.

The present edition owes its appearance to the efforts of Ronald F. Feldstein, a leading figure in Jakobsonian linguistics who has written extensively on many of the topics addressed in *Remarks*. Feldstein, who also collaborated on the translation of V. M. Illič-Svityč's classic *Nominal accentuation in Baltic and Slavic* (1979), has skillfully rendered Brun's French into idiomatic English academic prose, while striving to maintain (and, in select instances, restore) as much as possible of the sense of the lost Russian original. Given Jakobson's famously terse prose and the complexity of the concepts discussed, Feldstein has wisely decided to include annotations following each chapter, rather than after each section or all together at the end; this arrangement greatly facilitates the reader's task, without unduly interrupting the flow of the text.

The volume begins with a foreword by Feldstein placing *Remarks* in the context of Jakobson's scholarship (xiii–xvii) and orientational "Notes on Early Common Slavic to Late Common Slavic" (xix–xxi), followed by Jakobson's own preface (xxiii). The first two chapters, "Basic principles" (1–8; Feldstein's annotations 9–13) and "Remarks on current issues of comparative historical phonology" (15–21; 22–24), introduce the main concepts used throughout the rest of the study, including phonemes, phonological correlations and disjunctions, archiphonemes, the relation between synchrony and diachrony, and "laws" linking correlations in phonological change. Chapter 3 is devoted to "Remarks on the evolution of the phonological system of Proto-Slavic" (25–43; 44–57), focusing on the palatalization of consonants and treatment of diphthongs as crucial events in the trend toward rising sonority and syllabic synharmony.

Jakobson then turns to a perennial problem of Slavic historical phonology in Chapter 4, "The Proto-East-Slavic change of initial *je-* to *o-* and similar developments in the other Slavic languages" (59–66; 67–69). After a brief overview of "Dialectal facts about Proto-East-Slavic" (Chapter 5: 71–73; 74–75), he explores the "Consequences of the loss of weak jers for the Slavic languages" (Chapter 6: 77–88; 89–97), including West Slavic and South Slavic as well as East Slavic. Chapter 7, along with Chapter 3 the longest in the book, explores "The establishment of the 'soft ~ hard consonant' correlation in Russian and other Slavic languages, and related facts" (99–117; 118–33), with detailed discussions of dialectal Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian developments. Chapter 8 briefly reviews "Features common to Russian and absent in other East Slavic dialects" (135–37; 138–40), and Chapter 9 analyzes the many complex "Russian dialect changes of unaccented vowels", collectively known as *akan'e* and *jakan'e* (141–52; 153–58). Chapter 10 summarizes Jakobson's conclusions on the systematic nature of linguistic change and spread of innovations, and his affirmation of structural linguistics as a reflection of a wider trend in the art and social sciences of the interwar period (159–65; 166–68).

There follow three extremely useful appendixes by Feldstein: a guide to Jakobson's system of transcription (169), the transliteration of Cyrillic adopted

in this edition (171–76), and an overview with vowel charts of major *jakan'e* types in East Slavic dialects (177–84). Bibliographical references to Jakobson's text (185–90) and Feldstein's annotations (191–93), Jakobson's footnotes (195–203), and a well-organized index (205–15) round out the book.

Having been (like Feldstein) introduced to Slavic linguistics by an adherent of the Jakobsonian school, the late Charles Townsend, this reviewer is well aware of the near reverence in which Jakobson continues to be held by many in the field. However, the 90 years since the publication of *Remarks* have witnessed an explosion of empirical data on language acquisition and change and the rise of new theoretical frameworks, from generative grammar to sociolinguistics to typology. As a result, many of Jakobson's views on phonological change and the relation between linguistic synchrony and diachrony have fallen out of favor. Moreover, for all its pioneering quality at the time, *Remarks* can scarcely be termed "one of the best and most detailed treatments of the events that transformed Late Common Slavic into the separate Slavic languages" (xix), given the innumerable advances in Slavic (not to mention Balto-Slavic and Indo-European) historical phonology since 1929, for example, the discovery of Old Novgorodian, the explosion of research on Balto-Slavic accentology, and major revisions to the reconstruction and chronology of Proto-Slavic, viz. Early Common Slavic and Late Common Slavic. The following paragraphs will attempt to do justice to the impact of *Remarks* while placing it in its historical context, by highlighting both those points in which Jakobson's analysis marked a breakthrough and/or presaged later ideas, and those which have since been superseded or are of purely historical interest.

All historians of linguistics agree that Jakobson and his Prague Circle colleagues played a crucial role in propagating Saussure's notion of language as a self-contained system (*un système où tout se tient*) and applying it to diachrony. Although the Neogrammarian generation of Slavicists and Indo-Europeanists was not quite as singlemindedly concerned with establishing sound laws as is sometimes caricatured, it is nevertheless true that much scholarship before World War I treated changes such as palatalization or umlaut in atomistic terms, as isolated events. Jakobson argued that all linguistic changes must be viewed in terms of their impact on the structure of the language as a whole, a view that has since come to seem entirely natural.

*Remarks* also introduced numerous groundbreaking concepts and anticipated others that would become established in the work of later generations. The remarks on phonemic oppositions in chapter 1 presage distinctive feature theory, although Jakobson's terminology was to change in the following decades as he posited new binary oppositions (see Feldstein's discussion on pp. 10–11). Jakobson's reference to the "speech community" (16) within which variation between older and newer phonological stages can be assigned to different generations or styles (17–18) comes across as strikingly modern, as the notion of the speech community did not become widespread until the

1960s; he also acknowledges variation on the individual level, that "one and the same person can use the existing variants of the language" (18).

At numerous points, Jakobson refers to what is now called diffusion of linguistic innovations in time and space. Much of his discussion is obscured for the present-day reader by the use of such terms as "borrowing" and "copying" (see, e.g., 104–06) or "hybridization" (161); but in all cases he is describing geographical and social diffusion of sound changes in progress. With his description of the relation between central and peripheral Ukrainian varieties (111) and of the Lach dialects as forming a "bridge" between the Czech and Polish consonant systems (117), Jakobson demonstrates his familiarity with many of the concepts of dialect geography that were famously explored by the Italian school of *geolinguistica* before and after World War II. The late spread of *akan'e* to Moscow, while the surrounding villages according to Dal' maintained *okan'e* as late as the mid-19th century (151), is a classic example of what is now known as the cascade model of linguistic diffusion first to larger, then to smaller population centers (see e.g., Labov 2003). The spread of *akan'e* itself is a typical instance of the well-known principle that mergers expand at the expense of distinctions (Herzog's Principle; Labov 1994: 311–31). And given that moving images had only come into being a generation earlier, Jakobson's likening of the advance of isoglosses across the East Slavic territory to a motion picture (125) must have been a particularly timely metaphor.

Jakobson's observation that phonological correlations can encompass genetically unrelated contiguous languages (88, 202 [note 12 to chapter 7]) reveals his interest in linguistic areas, an interest shared with Trubetzkoy, who had just introduced the term *Sprachbund* the year before (Trubetzkoy 1928; cf. Jakobson 1931). Finally, Jakobson prefigures later ideas about linguistic change in terms of change in underlying forms, as when he speaks of rapid speech variants becoming generalized (i.e., to all registers) and causing change "at a deeper level of intuition" (77), or when he describes how the palatalization of consonants word-finally and before certain vowels was "felt to be autonomous" (121), that is, the phonetic palatalization of these consonants was reanalyzed as underlying.

On the other hand, many of Jakobson's views on language change in general and on Slavic historical phonology in particular have not stood the test of time. As Feldstein explains in the Foreword, Jakobson held a teleological view of language evolution (cf. Jakobson 1928), according to which different "incompatible" features were in a "struggle" or "conflict" (xv) in a language, which would have to eliminate one or both unless it had previously "anticipated" the conflict by adopting appropriate changes (xvi). He approvingly cited Saussure's analogy between the workings of language and a game of chess, but criticized Saussure for not extending the analogy to diachrony (xiv, 15–16, 22), that is, for not "abandoning the mechanical nature" of sound laws (19). This teleological view of language change runs throughout *Remarks*, as

for example, when Jakobson states that "the loss of weak *jers* had upset the balance of the phonological system and the urgent necessity of reestablishing order required irrevocable changes" (78), or "the change from a phonemic pitch accent system to an intensity accent system required systemic adjustments" (155). Jakobson contrasts this with the "Neogrammarian rut" (15) in which Saussure persisted, the view that "language does not anticipate anything and … its parts move by accident", so that "the history of the sounds of a given language would be the result of turmoil and blind deterioration, caused by extrinsic factors" (16). For Jakobson, then, "the Neogrammarian concept of language history is tantamount to the absence of a theory" (164).

This is not the place to review the history of functionalist thinking on language, but readers of *Remarks* should be aware that historical linguists today do not in general believe that language change moves toward any particular goal. Already in the 19th century Darwin in his *Descent of man* (1871 I: 59–62) drew attention to the parallels between linguistic and biological evolution, but the general consensus of 20th-century linguistics holds that there is no evidence for natural selection or adaptive evolution in language change (Greenberg 1959: 69, Labov 2001: 6–15). Studies of language change (especially sound change) in progress since the 1960s have established that the only relevant advantage is to be found in the social context of language, whereby certain innovations acquire positive social evaluation and so spread through a speech community, then diffuse to other communities.[1] This is not to say that the structure of a language plays no role in the possible direction of development—it clearly does, which is a reason why one finds examples of "drift", i.e., parallel but independent developments in many language families of the world—only that the exact direction and resulting outcome depend above all on extralinguistic factors, which for the past can almost never be even approximately reconstructed.

With respect to Saussure's chess analogy, Jakobson is correct that prior moves affect the synchronic system, but it hardly follows that language always tends by design toward a state of equilibrium in every, or even any, subsystem. The prevailing view today holds that human languages exhibit all sorts of synchronically unmotivated features that make sense only in terms of their history, much as male nipples or the human tailbone make sense only in the context of evolution (Lass 1997: 12–16). Languages thus abound in skewed distributions of phonological and morphological features ("accidental gaps"), which can persist over generations or even millennia. For instance, English allows the initial clusters *sl-*, *sn-*, *sm-*, but not **sr-*, which became *str-* already in Proto-Germanic; and only clusters of voiceless fricative + sonorant occur in general, including *fr-*, *fl-*, *thr-*, yet native speakers can pronounce

[1] For an exhaustive treatment of phonological change in its social context, see Labov 2001.

onomatopoeic or foreign words such as *vroom*, *Vladimir*, *Zlatan* without difficulty. Within Slavic, both modern standard Russian and Polish have phonemic consonant palatalization, but Polish systematically contrasts hard and soft paired consonants before all vowels, whereas Russian allows only soft consonants before *e*. A teleological approach to language change is furthermore hard pressed to account for the merger of Classical Greek /i/, /i:/, /e:/, /ei/, /ɛ:/, /y/, /y:/, /oi/, /yi/ as Modern Greek /i/, or the massive homophony that resulted by the operation of regular sound change from Old to Modern Mandarin Chinese, or the collapse in French of the singular-plural distinction for nearly all nouns following the loss of word-final *-s*. Such examples of "dysfunctional" or communication-destroying sound change could easily be multiplied.

It is in this context that the correlations of phonological features observed in Slavic languages should be understood. As the well-known saying goes, "correlation does not imply causation", which is why one can uncover all sorts of bizarre statistical correlations in the real world, for example, between the divorce rate in the U.S. state of Maine and annual U.S. per capita consumption of margarine.[2] That no modern Slavic language possesses both phonemic pitch and consonant palatalization (Jakobson's "conflict A"), or phonemic intensity accent and vowel quantity ("conflict B"), is an interesting observation, but does it thereby follow that no Slavic variety could ever possess such "conflicting" features for any length of time? This line of reasoning not only runs the risk of *argumentum e silentio*, it also *a priori* excludes other potential explanations for the observed distribution of facts, for example, the result of distinct, overlaying isoglosses. *Remarks* contains numerous statements such as "the Slavic languages that regularly preserved length under circumflex are the only ones that preserved tonal distinctions" (36); but the proverbial chicken-and-egg question of **why** these correlations occur and how they come about is never explicitly broached. Some correlations are supported by cross-linguistic or articulatory evidence, for example, reduction of unaccented vowels is generally associated with a strong intensity accent, but this does not mean that the latter necessarily "causes" the former, as Jakobson argues in chapter 9 (143–45 and passim).

This point is important, because Jakobson was consciously attempting, in Feldstein's words, "to deal with general and universal principles of historical linguistic evolution, rather than the specifics of the Common Slavic or East Slavic situation" (123). Jakobson's explication of "Laws of reciprocal relations of correlations" (19–20) illustrates his pioneering interest in linguistic typology and foreshadows the search for phonological universals at the turn of the 21st century, for example, "if a language has voiced fricatives, it also has voiced stops." Many of his generalizations, however, are based solely

[2] For these and other examples, see http://www.tylervigen.com/spurious-correlations (accessed 25 May 2020).

on Slavic languages and thus are far from universal in scope, as for example, when he asserts that pitch contrasts presuppose phonemic vowel length (20, 23; contradicted by Bantu languages), or that "if phonemic palatalization exists, then phonemic pitch must be absent (stated as a Slavic rule that is not necessarily universal)" (123; contradicted by Japanese, as Jakobson acknowledges in note 2 to chapter 6 [199], as well as Lithuanian and Latvian). In fact, considerations of language universals could be adduced in favor of some of Jakobson's observations, for example, the strong crosslinguistic tendency for consonants to be palatalized earlier by high front vocalics underlies the "two levels of palatalization" before high vs. mid front vowels (47), while the propensity for velars to be fronted next to high vowels accounts for the shift of *ky, gy, xy* > *k'i, g'i, x'i* (100–101, 120), and the reduction of the three-way contrast between nonpalatalized *r, l, n*, palatalized *r', l', n'*, and palatal *rj, lj, nj* (118–19) is connected with the fact that a phonemic opposition of [nʲ] vs. [ɲ] for example is crosslinguistically rare.

I add a few remarks on individual points where Jakobson's analyses are to be modified in the current state of research. With respect to Chapter 3, the reconstruction of Proto-Slavic today is quite different from that of Jakobson's time, so that references to "original long and short *o* in Common Slavic" (51) for example must be adjusted accordingly. Despite Jakobson's valiant efforts, most scholars believe that the split between South Slavic *-y* and North Slavic *-a* in the M nom. sg. of the present active participle does not have a purely phonological explanation (32; see Olander 2015: 88–92), and the similar contrast of South Slavic *-ę* vs. North Slavic *-ě* in the *jo*-stem acc. pl. and *jā*-stem gen. sg., nom. pl., and acc. pl. (the notorious *ě tertium*; 34–35, 52) is also likely to have a morphological origin (see most recently Kim 2019).

It should be kept in mind that many of the processes described in this chapter are properly speaking post-Proto-Slavic or Late Common Slavic, so that we are dealing with innovations that spread across an enormous, steadily diversifying dialect continuum stretching from the Elbe to the Peloponnese to northern Russia. Among these processes were the two famous tendencies toward rising sonority and syllabic synharmony, the latter including the creation of soft and hard consonants (xx–xxi). These were however only tendencies or, in constraint-based phonological approaches, surface conspiracies made up of multiple individual developments, and were never exceptionless rules at any recoverable synchronic stage. In particular, the crosslinguistically trivial palatalization of consonants before front vowels was at most an incipient phonetic process in Proto-Slavic, which is why Jakobson devotes his chapter 7 to "the establishment of the "soft ~ hard consonant" correlation" in certain languages such as Russian, but not others, such as Ukrainian; to my knowledge, there is no basis for assuming that the contrast was phonemicized, then lost in Western South Slavic (41–42, 85). One must therefore reject the fundamental assumption underlying the discussion in chapter 4, that **e*

and **o* were not phonemically contrastive in Proto-Slavic, that is, "*o* was the fundamental variant of the *e/o* archiphoneme" (59), with *e* automatically occurring after soft consonants; all reconstructions to my knowledge operate with distinct nonhigh vowels **e* and **a* (> **o*) for Proto-Slavic and the earliest stages of the individual Slavic languages.

In chapter 6, the loss of weak jers is connected to other phonological changes that differentiated the emerging Slavic languages, above all phonemic palatalization and the vowel system. Jakobson's choice of Czech, Western Bulgarian, and Northern Kashubian (i.e., the now extinct Slovincian) is interesting inasmuch as these represent transitional or peripheral areas from the perspective of Slavic dialect geography. Much of the discussion in section 6.6 is now outdated—note in particular that the oft-repeated claim that "[g]rammatical analogy is not sufficient in and of itself to cause a phonological correlation either to come into existence or to disappear" (86) does encounter exceptions (Hock 1991: 206–09)—but the importance of Slovincian as a relic of mobile stress in West Slavic cannot be underestimated.

In chapter 7, what Jakobson terms "the role of prothetic *v*" in the East Slavic languages simply refers to their conditioning: prothesis is regular before *u-* and *o-* in Belorusian and Ukrainian, including before *u͡o* > *i* in the latter (cf. Ukrainian *vin* 'he', *vivcʹá* 'sheep'), but confined to sporadic cases in Russian (e.g., *vósemʹ* 'eight', *vótčina* 'patrimony'). Felstein's annotations (128–31) are especially helpful here, as Jakobson does not in fact mention prothetic *v-* in his discussion of Ukrainian in section 7.6. The reader misses some reference to West Slavic, where prothesis also occurs: before *o-* in Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian; variably before *o-* in Colloquial Czech, where it is a well-studied sociolinguistic variable (see Chromý 2017); before reflexes of Late Common Slavic **ǫ-* in Polish (e.g., *węgiel* 'coal', *wąski* 'narrow'), and before *o-* as [wo-] in numerous Polish dialects, most famously those of Podhale (e.g., *łokno* 'window'). Pace Jakobson, we are dealing with a crosslinguistically common phonetic process independent of other developments affecting vowels or consonants, attested outside Slavic in languages from Armenian to Kazakh to Indian English.

Despite these criticisms, *Remarks* should not be seen as a mere historical monument, of value only to those interested in the historical development of Slavic linguistic studies. An early highlight for this reviewer is the collection of data in chapter 4 relating to the variation of *je-* ~ *o*, a perennial problem of Slavic and indeed Balto-Slavic historical linguistics, including often overlooked facts such as Old Russian *Vifleomŭ* 'Bethlehem', *Geona* 'Gehenna' (showing that the alternation was not limited to word-initial position) and the Lower Sorbian contrast of *je-* vs. *he-*. Chapters 7 and 9 have also aged quite

well. In the former, the overview of East Slavic vowel changes remains useful, particularly the presentation of Ukrainian dialectal developments (northern, southern, Transcarpathian); while for his part, Feldstein provides an extremely lucid commentary on Jakobson's conception of the chronology of weak jer loss in Slavic and its effects in East Slavic in the annotations to chapters 6 and 7, complete with figures depicting the diffusion of jer-fall (94–95) and tables summarizing conflicts A and B and their resolution in East Slavic (126–27). Chapter 9 offers a survey of *akan'e* and *jakan'e*, which Jakobson rightly presents as a reduction of phonemic contrasts in pretonic syllables, conditioned in sometimes complex ways by the vowel of the tonic syllable and/or soft ~ hard quality of the adjacent consonants (dissimilative *akan'e*). Those who are familiar only with the standard Russian rules for unstressed vowels will be impressed by the sheer diversity of patterns attested in traditional East Slavic dialects, many of which have since disappeared under the impact of war, urbanization, and other modern developments.

As already noted, Feldstein's translation is outstandingly precise and idiomatic, and his annotations nicely complement Jakobson's often dense treatment of complex facts. I have detected only a handful of lapses: p. 5, l. 4 from below should say "since literary Russian does not have long hard hushers as single phonological units"; p. 31, l. 2 should be "of the stronger component, to the detriment of the weaker one"; p. 41, section 3.18: Dependency > Dependence; p. 59, l. 4 from below: in front of which > before which; p. 88, l. 13: in the latter > in the former; p. 103, l. 7 from bottom: This tendency was derived from; p. 135, l. 12 from below: change of *o* to *e* > change of *e* to *o*; p. 149, l. 12 from below: in accented syllables > in unaccented syllables; p. 159, l. 6 from below: *contradiction* > *contradictio*; p. 198, l. 9: delete the first *o* in $oo\widehat{r}_1dlo$. In Figure C.3 on p. 179, *e* conditions pretonic [i] and *'o*, *o* pretonic [a]; in Figure C.4, *e*, *'o* condition pretonic [i] and *o* pretonic [a]. On p. 184, table C.11 from the preceding page has been mistakenly copied as table C.12. Finally, palatalized labials are found not only "in some dialects" of Polish (94), but also in the standard language under some analyses (e.g., Gussmann 2007: 32–46).

In closing, Prof. Feldstein is to be commended for having produced an elegantly annotated edition of one of Jakobson's seminal early works, which will introduce his theoretical concepts and insights to a new generation of Slavicists. That many of Jakobson's views are no longer widely held does not in any way diminish his stature in Slavic studies, and younger scholars who have not had any exposure to Jakobsonian (or indeed structural) linguistics will benefit greatly from *Remarks*. The problems of Slavic historical linguistics and dialectology discussed there are notoriously refractory, and it is of more than historical interest to recall how they were treated by Jakobson and his

colleagues in the legendary Prague School. If we want to move forward, we need to know where we came from.

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Department of Older Germanic Languages
Faculty of English
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
ul. Grunwaldzka 6
60-780 Poznań, Poland
ronald.kim@yahoo.com