

Jens Nørgård-Sørensen In Memoriam*

Jens Nørgård-Sørensen (1954–2015) was an outstanding linguist, one of the most prominent academic leaders in Slavic studies, a dedicated teacher, an active organizer of educational and research networks, and a friend who we will dearly miss.

Nørgård-Sørensen the Scholar

Professor Jens Nørgård-Sørensen was born on 31 July 1954. He graduated from Aarhus University in 1976 and received his MA there in 1981, earning a University Gold Medal for his MA thesis “The category of definiteness in Russian” (Danish “Bestemtheds kategorien i russisk”). After several years as a research fellow and then an assistant professor, he advanced to reader (*lektor*) at the University of Copenhagen in 1991. He finished his doctoral dissertation and was awarded the doctorate (dr. phil.) at the University of Copenhagen in 1992. In the period 2004–09 he held an extraordinary professorship. In addition to his role as teacher and academic advisor, Nørgård-Sørensen served his university in a variety of leadership functions, including two terms as department chair. He represented the University of Copenhagen as a visiting fellow in Cambridge, UK (1994–95) and St. Petersburg (2010) and at numerous conferences in Slavic and general linguistics around the world. Jens had also planned to come to Moscow as a visiting fellow in the fall semester of 2015. He was an active member of the Slavic Linguistics Society and presented papers at several SLS annual meetings, including the founding SLS meeting in Bloomington (2006). His talk was on the program of the last SLS annual meeting in Heidelberg (September 2015), but unfortunately did not take place. Since 2005, Nørgård-Sørensen had been editor-in-chief of the journal *Scando-Slavica*. And since 1997 he had also been president of the Danish Slavic Association and the Danish delegate to the International Committee for Slavic Studies. In 2015, the university finally rewarded his merits with a permanent professorship.

* Thanks to Henning Andersen for portions of the content in this tribute.

Tragically, the appointment took place just a month before his untimely death. On 7 August 2015 Jens Nørgård-Sørensen died of a heart attack. Colleagues and close friends knew that Jens had suffered from a year-long serious illness, but his death was a shock to everybody.

Among Slavic and general linguists Nørgård-Sørensen was known for his contributions to Modern Russian grammar, especially Modern Russian morphology and morphosyntax, to the history of Russian, and to the theory of grammaticalization. Nørgård-Sørensen's doctoral dissertation *Coherence theory: The case of Russian*, which was published in 1992 in the series *Trends in linguistics: Studies and monographs*, vol. 63 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter), displays his interest in the interaction of grammar mechanisms with lexicon and a holistic vision of natural language, as well as his skills in the implementation of different theories and methods, including elements of logical analysis, functional sentence perspective, and discourse analysis. Nørgård-Sørensen was one of those rare linguists who are guided both by firm intuition and by deep knowledge of interface-conditioned phenomena. His first book included a chapter on word order, intonation, and theme–rheme structure in Russian. One of the leitmotifs in Nørgård-Sørensen's research in general and in his second monograph, *Russian nominal semantics and morphology* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2011), in particular, was the idea of conceptual kinship of nominal categories (definiteness, animacy, gender, case) and verbal categories (tense, aspect, mood). As an expert in historical Slavic grammar, Nørgård-Sørensen looked for support of his hypothesis on the underlying similarity of nominal animacy and verbal aspect in the parallel development of these categories in the Slavic languages. The same year, the collective monograph *Connecting grammaticalization*, coauthored by Nørgård-Sørensen with his Danish colleagues Lars Heltoft and Lene Schøsler, appeared in the series *Studies in structural and functional linguistics* (vol. 65; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011). The authors advance a theory of interrelated grammaticalization changes and argue that grammatical change always comprises semantic change. Nørgård-Sørensen's contribution to this collaborative work (chapter 4, "Patterns of connecting grammaticalization in Russian: Syntax, animacy, and aspect", pp. 113–70) offers an original account of case theory based on the functional approach, but its message can nevertheless be translated into the metalanguage of formal frameworks as well. Nørgård-Sørensen claims in this chapter that case usage in the Late Common Slavic and Old Russian systems was based on the inventory of verbal constructions and was not strict-

ly predicted by valency frames, while in the modern Russian system case usage is predicted by verbal valency. Thus, the history of Russian exhibits a typological shift which can be explained as the morphologization of verbal syntax.

A comparative reading of Nørgård-Sørensen's three books gives the impression that the focus of his interest gradually changed from the purely synchronic analysis of Modern Slavic data to contrastive linguistics and diachronic typology. Still, his research articles, book reviews, and conference papers suggest that he in fact pursued these lines of research in parallel. For instance, his paper on clausal topology in four languages—Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, and German—was published in Warsaw (*Studia gramatyczne* 8: 155–79) as early as in 1987. In his later years, Nørgård-Sørensen established an international network, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Education and Research, aiming to advance post-graduate education through conferences in Slavic, Nordic, and general linguistics and exchanges of teachers and MA and PhD students. Jens was always a very generous, active, and highly competent project leader and has contributed much to the success of thematic conferences in the series Typology of Morphosyntactic Parameters (TMP) organized by the Russian partner in this project, Moscow State University for the Humanities (now Moscow Pedagogical State University) in Moscow in 2013 and 2014. His last talk at the 2014 TMP conference was entitled “Old Russian past tenses: Development and usage”. Jens was also cofounder of the series of international conferences in general, Nordic, and Slavic linguistics for graduate and doctoral students (GeNSling), which since 2013 are organized as affiliated workshops of TMP conferences. Beginning in 2015, the organizing committee of the TMP conference intends to grant the Jens Nørgård-Sørensen's award for the best conference paper in Russian and Slavic linguistics.¹

The exceptional level of Nørgård-Sørensen's scholarship was recognized in a series of grants from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities. Besides his publishing, editing, and teaching activities, he contributed numerous articles on Slavic languages and on Slavic linguistics to the Danish encyclopedia (*Den Store Danske Encyklopædi*). With his death, the Slavic community has lost one of its leaders, a person who was both a prominent figure in Danish linguistics and an in-

¹ Information about the Jens Nørgård-Sørensen award is available at <http://ossetic-studies.org/tmp2015/ru/noergaard-soerensen-prize/>.

ternational scholar who dedicated his life and research to major problems of Slavic and general linguistics.

Jens Our Friend

Jens Nørgård-Sørensen lost Merete, his wife of nearly forty years, who tragically passed away in 2013. He is survived by their three children and five grandchildren, and by a brother. Jens was a charming personality who had a rare gift of being both delicate and direct at the same time. He loved his family, life, arts, music, and singing—and his passion for music and singing lives on in his children. After the death of his beloved wife, Jens prepared for publication Merete's two novels, making the way for her posthumous debut as an author in 2015.

Jens will be deeply missed by the students he taught and advised, by his colleagues, by the many friends he made in Denmark and abroad, and by all people who will turn to his legacy as a scholar.

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