

Thomas Rosén. *Russian in the 1740s*. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2022. xiv + 198 pp. ISBN 9781644694145 (hardback); 9781644694979 (paperback); 9781644694169 (ePub); 9781644698303 (Open Access).

Reviewed by John Dunn

The Russian language in the 18th century can be compared to a sausage: we know pretty well what ingredients are used and we have an exact knowledge of what the final product is like, but what is less well understood is the bit in between. There is still much to discover about the processes by which the raw ingredients—in this case, the various forms of Russian and Church Slavonic that co-existed in Muscovite Russia at the beginning of the 18th century—are converted into this final product, the linguistic variety recognizable as something close to Modern Russian that emerges just over a century later. Dr. Rosén seeks to expand our knowledge and understanding of some of these processes by concentrating, as the title indicates, on a specific decade, the 1740s.

The choice of the 1740s is in part serendipitous, in that it was initially prompted by the accidental discovery of some Russian letters dating from that decade in the Swedish National Archives, but it is also a decade that is relatively unstudied, falling, as it does, between the linguistic upheavals of the Petrine period and Lomonosov's interventions of the 1750s. The lack of previous study might presuppose two potential outcomes: either the emergence of a quantity of previously unconsidered material offering useful insights, or else the sad discovery that there is not very much material available to study; in a curious and unexpected way, this book suggests that, with regard to this particular case, both outcomes might be possible.

The book is divided into nine chapters. After two introductory chapters, one giving general background information and the second discussing previous research, chapter 3 is devoted to an examination of the socio-linguistic situation in the Russia of the 1740s. Chapters 4–6 contain preliminary material relating to the texts which are to be analyzed, dealing with such matters as available sources, methodological issues, and what the author calls the “Situational Analysis of Registers”; this rather cryptic term refers to the participants and the relationships between them, the communicative purposes of the documents, the topics discussed, and other related matters. The linguistic analysis itself is the subject of chapter 7, and this is followed by a rather inconsequential chapter entitled “Functional Analysis” and a brief final chapter

giving general conclusions. What this outline may well suggest is a certain imbalance between introduction and presentation on one hand, and analysis on the other. The most important sections of the book are chapters 3 and 7, and it is on these that the greatest attention will be focused in the remainder of this review.

Chapter 3 is essentially divided into two parts: the first is concerned with education and literacy, while the second deals with what the author calls language management. On education, we are told rather more about structures than about content, which is perhaps inevitable given the nature of the information available. On literacy, the available information is even less helpful; though the author is able to produce interesting material relating to two Russian regiments, he is for the most part reduced to conjecture, based to a large extent on evidence relating to periods other than that which he is studying. The section on language management is likewise unenlightening. We are given a great deal of information about the structures and personnel of the Academy of Sciences and its *Rossijskoe sobranie* (Russian Conference); we are even given Tredjakovskij's contract of employment with the Academy in both French and Russian. For all that, however, we learn almost nothing about what these structures did in terms of language management, and it thus becomes hard to avoid the conclusion that in the 1740s there was little or no activity relating to language management, or if there was, it was carried out in places other than the Academy of Sciences.

It is true that, from time to time, the author suggests lines of enquiry that remain unexplored. In §3.2.2 (p. 42), he notes the probability that a significant part of the population might have been able to read Church Slavonic but not Russian, without, however, considering what this might mean in practice or what the implications might be. In §3.3.2 (p. 51), he mentions but does not analyze or discuss Tredjakovskij's 1748 treatise on orthography (which one might have thought an attempt at language management), and he concludes the chapter by quoting in full two template documents produced by the state administration: one relating to the Imperial title, the other being for a letter of credit. This is potentially a very useful resource, but Dr. Rosén appears more interested in the fact of their existence rather than the details of their linguistic content, which leaves matters rather hanging in the air. Nevertheless, for all these unexplored avenues, the reader may well feel that this chapter arrives perforce at the second of the two outcomes mentioned earlier.

The choice of texts subject to linguistic analysis is inevitably influenced by considerations of availability, including the discoveries made by the author himself. The texts encompass both manuscript and printed documents and include a hand-written receipt; a letter and an official report relating to a naval incident in 1742; a number of diplomatic documents, including royal correspondence, preserved in the Swedish and Danish National Archives; an extract from the *Artikul voinskij* (*Артикул воинский*, the military regulations

of Peter I, first issued in 1715); and an extract from Field Marshal de Lacy's reports from the front during the Russo-Swedish War of 1741–43. It is greatly to Dr. Rosén's credit that he quotes copiously from his selected texts, and where it is appropriate to do so, he places parallel texts in adjacent columns to facilitate comparisons (as with the three editions of the *Artikul voinskij*). Only once does this system break down: he quotes a lengthy extract from the de Lacy text, but then much of the discussion centers round passages from elsewhere in the document, which diminishes the relevance of the extract.

Here, there is a great deal to discover, but it has to be said that the quality of the linguistic analysis is somewhat uneven. The author seems to be mainly interested in orthography and morphology, and while he makes a number of useful observations on the former, on the latter he is too often content merely to note the presence of phenomena, without exploring their significance. Sometimes he does not even manage that; discussing the documents relating to the 1742 incident, he merely notes that "[i]n terms of morphology, the language of the documents contains little that cannot be expected from a text of the 1740s" (p. 125). Particularly disappointing is the lack of attention paid to syntax and vocabulary, both of which one might feel to be particularly important for texts of this nature and from this period. If the occasional syntactic construction is mentioned, vocabulary is almost totally ignored. For example, a letter from Empress Elisaveta Petrovna to the King of Sweden, quoted in full on pp. 130–32, contains a considerable number of striking syntactic and lexical elements, but while Dr. Rosén rightly draws attention to the use of formulae, these specific elements go unnoticed. Similarly, in the discussion of the three editions of the *Artikul voinskij*, the orthographical and morphological differences are conscientiously noted (other aspects of the language remain unaltered), but what escapes the author's attention is that these changes, and especially those introduced in the 1744 edition, provide useful information relating to the processes leading to the standardization of Russian orthography.

The reader may thus come away from this book with the feeling that an opportunity has been missed here and that the author has not fully succeeded in achieving what he set out to do. Perhaps the problem is that in attempting both to explore the sociolinguistic situation of Russia in the 1740s and to offer a detailed linguistic analysis of a number of individual texts, the work ends up falling between two stools, so that neither task is accomplished as well as it might have been. That said, however, the book should not be written off, since all those concerned with the Russian language of this period will find here much that will be of value, above all, perhaps, as a springboard for further research. Moreover, they will certainly have cause to be extremely grateful to Dr. Rosén for generously reproducing so much textual material and for presenting it in such a user-friendly manner.

The book is produced to a very high standard, and both the author and the publishers are to be warmly congratulated on the care they have taken

over the reproduction of texts that must have been extremely difficult to handle. The author's English, while not quite up to native-speaker standard, is certainly more than serviceable, but there is one mystery: how on earth was it possible that throughout the entire process of writing, editing, and publishing this book, nobody noticed that the word "genitive" is consistently misspelled, an error made all the more visible by the presence of a redundant capital letter?

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