Reviews

Bibliographic references in the text are not always included in the list of references at the end or else there is a mistake in date, as in “Schegloff, 1974” (p. 110). When a numerical notation is made as a rough indication of intonation contour (as a convenience, supplementing the variable persistence oscilloscope display), the Trager-Smith system is used, with 1 as low and 4 as high, but it is attributed to Pike (46), who uses the opposite ordering.

But far more important is that this is a readable book, and a significant one. Linguists interested in discourse, as well as psychotherapists and students of other forms of conversation should find it contributing importantly to their study.

Notes

1 In testing these rules with students I found that I needed to modify The Rule of Requests slightly to say “specifying or implying an action X” to make them work in all cases we discovered.

2 See Fanshel and Moss 1971.

References


The subject of the book under review is the loss of overt present tense forms of the verb ‘to be’ in Russian, e.g. On bolen ‘He is ill’, On tam ‘He is there’, cf. On byl bolen ‘He was ill’, On budet tam ‘He will be there’. The word form est’ (Gr. ἄεστ) has been preserved with the meaning ‘there is’, e.g. U menja est’ kniga ‘I have a book’, cf.

Three types of explanation have been put forward in the earlier literature:

1. The absence of the present of ‘to be’ is an archaic phenomenon and dates from Common Slavic or even Indo-European times (Buslaev, Saxmatov, Vinokur, Bulaxovskij).
2. The loss of the present tense of ‘to be’ is recent and results from internal factors, in particular from the rise of the -preterit and the increasing use of subject pronouns (Pisani, Efimov, Sobolevskij, Borkovskij, Kuznecov, Lomtev).
3. The absence of the present of ‘to be’ must be attributed to Fenno-Ugric influence (Gauthiot, Vondrák, Lewy, Bubrix, Veenker).

The object of L’Hermitte’s study is to make a choice between these types of explanation on the basis of an extensive examination of the Old Russian material.

Before presenting the Old Russian facts the author discusses the notions ‘nominal sentence’ (phrase nominale), ‘subject’, ‘predicate’, ‘copula’, and the relation between subject and predicate, and gives a survey of the sentence types where an overt copula is absent in other Indo-European (in particular Balto-Slavic) and Fenno-Ugric languages. He concludes that both in Indo-European and in Slavic the nominal sentence is rare with 1st and 2nd person subjects and has a limited extension with 3rd person subjects outside the East Slavic linguistic area. Among the Uralic languages, the nominal sentence of Mordvin, Udmurt, Komi, Ob-Ugric, and Samoyed resembles the East Slavic construction, whereas Mari, Fennic, and Hungarian side with the common European linguistic type.

In the second part of his monograph the author examines the Old Russian material. After discussing the methodological problems, he classifies the material according to genre (chronicles, charters, journal of Afanasij Nikitin), region (Moscow, Novgorod, Smolensk, Kiev), person (1st and 2nd versus 3rd), semantic function (copula, auxiliary, localizing, existential, possessive, impersonal), period (up to 1117, 12th through 14th ct., 15th and 16th ct.). The total number of data is 3325 from the chronicles, 409 from the journal of Afanasij Nikitin, and 7775 from the public and private documents. It turns out that the decline of the present tense forms of ‘to be’ was early in central Russia (Moscow area) and late in the south-western dialects (Kiev area), while the north-west (Novgorod area) agrees with the south-west during the earliest period, but develops at a greater pace at the subsequent stages. The decline is fast with 3rd person copula and auxiliary forms, and slow with 1st and 2nd person forms and in localizing, existential, and possessive constructions. In the spoken language of the 16th ct., the present tense forms of ‘to be’ had probably been lost already.

Returning to the three types of hypothesis mentioned above, the author rejects the explanations in terms of inheritance or internal development in favour of the Fenno-Ugric substratum theory. This theory is also supported by two other types of evidence. First, it is a known fact that the original Fenno-Ugric population of the entire area north of the line Riga-Smolensk-Saratov has become russified at a
relatively recent stage. The tribes of the Merja and the Muroma, who lived to the north and to the east of Moscow, were assimilated in the 10th through 15th centuries, while the Fennic tribes around Leningrad and the Mordvins south of Gorky have been in the process of losing their identity up to the present day. Second, other characteristics which set Russian apart from the other Slavic languages can also be attributed to Fenno-Ugric influence, e.g. cokanie (Avanesov), akanie (Černyx, Lytkin), the rise of an inessive (second locative), certain types of syntactic construction, and the loss of grammatical gender in the plural. The similarity of the nominal sentence in Russian and Mordvin and the fact that the construction spread from central Russia to the west and then to the south forces us to conclude that it is of Fenno-Ugric origin. This conclusion is hardly open to doubt since the publication of L'Hermitte's monograph.

The book under review is very well written. Printer's errors are few, except on p. 49, where we find Lith. esū (esū), esi (esi), yrā (yrā), ẓmogūs (zemogūs), Marēs pussesere (Marēs pussesere), Latv. naw (nav), vinām (vinām), OPr. Aulauuns ast (Aulauuns, without ast), Imuns ast (does not occur in the texts; a correct example is Teikūns ast, which must be read Teikūns ast ‘Il a créé’), also p. 57: Pol. jestis (jestes), 5 × -s'- (-ś-). It is a pity that the author does not mention the use of to as a copula in modern Polish on this page. In the presentation of the Old Russian material one would have welcomed a discussion of the semantic development of est’ in the construction: Ū nego (est’) novyj kostjum. These remarks do not detract from the author’s convincing argumentation, which makes the book under review the third major contribution to the study of Fenno-Ugric influence on Russian in recent years, cf. W. Veenker, Die Frage des finnougrischen Substrats in der russischen Sprache (Bloomington, 1967), and A. Timberlake, The nominative object in Slavic, Baltic, and West Finnic (München, 1974). (The latter title is not mentioned in the book under review, obviously for chronological reasons.)


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The pattern of languages used in the early inscriptions of North India is very similar to that found in early Buddhist literature. The earliest inscriptions, those of Aśoka, are written in a variety of Prakrit (= Pkt) dialects; those of the early centuries of the Christian era are in a mixture of Pkt and Sanskrit (= Skt); from the fifth century A.D. onwards they are written in classical Skt. Despite this similarity, there has been no work produced in the study of the inscriptive mixed language to match Edgerton’s monumental Dictionary and Grammar of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (= BHS). This volume by Damsteegt (= D.) aims at rectifying this situation. Since most of the inscriptions written in Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit (= EHS),