

Chapter 9: Linguistics in Prague and Vienna between the wars

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1 The two main characters

1.1 Nikolai Trubetzkoy

1890-1938. Early studies in Russia, and a year in Leipzig.

1.2 Roman Jakobson

1896 - 1982.

Three chapters:

1896-1920: Jakobson the Russian.

1920-1938: Jakobson the emigré, Jakobson the Czech.

1940-1982: Jakobson the emigré, Jakobson the American. Teacher to Morris Halle, and supporter of Noam Chomsky. Enormous imprint on Slavic studies in the United States in the post-war world. Need for area studies, especially in Eastern Europe, during the Cold War period.

2 Education in pre-Revolutionary Moscow

Influence of Neogrammarians, and of Baudouin de Courtenay, but little yet of Saussure.

2.1 Husserl, Brentano, Gestalt psychology

3 Life in Russian exile, and Eurasianism

Moral decadence, deeply connected to Western (Enlightenment) influence on Russia. Anti-semitism.

Eurasianism today. Read this webpage—really:

<http://www.4pt.su/en/topics/eurasianism>.

4 Anti-mechanism, pro-organicism, anti-universalism, pro-peoples

4.1 Anti-mechanism

What is mechanism? What are small, random, fortuitous events? Mechanism has several aspects, as we try to read RJ and NT: (i) no room for function or goals (i.e., no room for teleology); (ii) a need to identify a small number of identifiable and distinct events as *causes* for every event.

Positively, they sought a model in which the way things are is the result of dynamic forces operative among a large number of elements. Systems are always in *dynamic equilibrium*, and never at rest.

What does it mean to say that language is functional?



6. N. S. Trubetzkoy in Prague, September 1930 (Photo Central European Press).

Figure 1: Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy



Roman Jakobson

Figure 2: Roman Jakobson

5 Vienna during the 1920s and 1930s

5.1 Karl Bühler, gestalt psychologist

Mutual influence of Bühler and Trubetzkoy.

5.2 Vienna Circle: scientists as philosophers

6 Prague Linguistics Circle: 1926 -

Taking advantage of the internationalization of linguistics as a profession. A time of manifestos. A time of political parties.

Structuralism, as understood by Jakobson—or by Jean Piaget in the 1950s. Influence of Jakobson on Claude Levi-Strauss at the New School for Social Research in New York during World War II.



Prague Phonological Conference, December 1930. From left to right, sitting: W. Doroszewski, V. Mathesius, K. Nitsch, A. Belić, H. Ułaszyn, Romanski, K. Bühler; standing: R. Jakobson, N. S. Trubetzkoy, D. Čiževskij, S. Karcevskij, A. W. de Groot, A. Sommerfelt, P. Bogatyrev, F. Oberpfalzer, B. Trnka, J. Mukařovský, G. Ružičić.

Figure 3: The Prague Linguistics Circle

7 Appendix on contemporary Eurasianism

From the webpage cited above, by Alexander Dugin, about whom we read elsewhere:

Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin (born 7 January 1962) is a Russian political scientist whose views have been described as fascist and who calls to hasten the “end of times” with all out war. He has close ties with the Kremlin and the Russian military, having served as an advisor to State Duma speaker and key member of the ruling United Russia party Sergei Naryshkin.[14] Dugin was the leading organizer of the National Bolshevik Party, National Bolshevik Front, and Eurasia Party. He is the author of more than 30 books, among them Foundations of Geopolitics and The Fourth Political Theory. He focuses on the restoration of the Russian Empire, through bringing back control over former Soviet republics such as Georgia and Ukraine, and unification with Russian-speaking territories, especially eastern

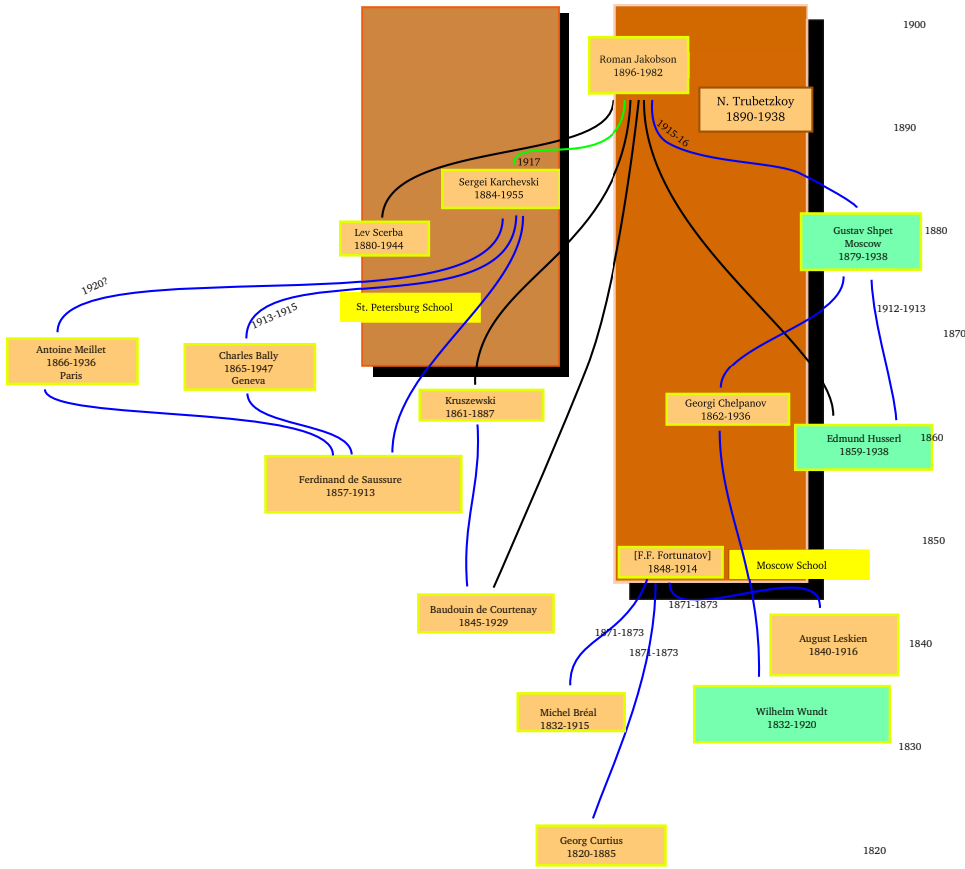


Figure 4: Influence in Russian linguistics schools before the Revolution

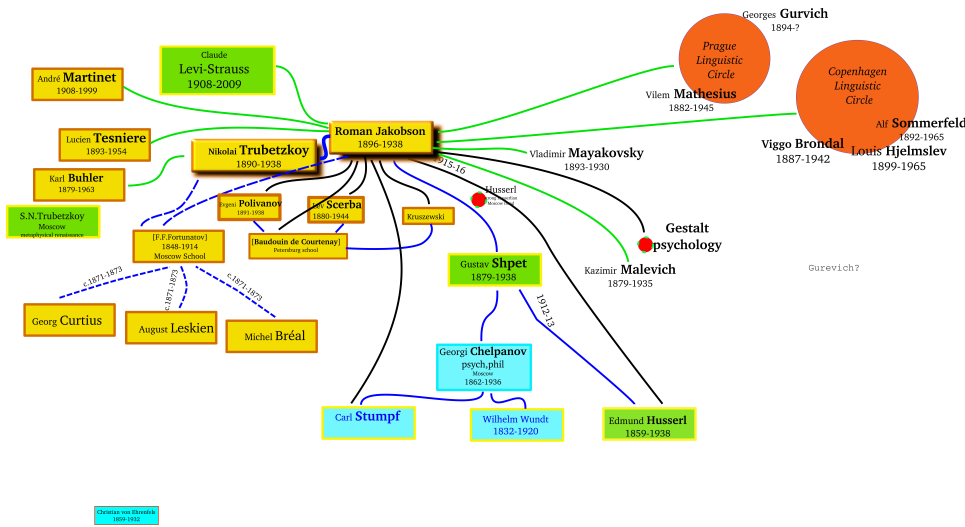


Figure 5: Jakobson and Trubetzkoy

Ukraine and Crimea. In the Kremlin, Dugin represents the “war party”, a division in the heart of the leadership concerning Ukraine, and is seen as the driving conceptual force behind Vladimir Putin’s initiative for the annexation of Crimea by Russia.[18] In 2014 he expressed the view that the war between Russia and Ukraine “is inevitable” and appealed for Putin to start military intervention in eastern Ukraine.

Believing that the so-called fifth column has been working for two decades to destroy Russia’s sovereignty from the inside, he proposed in 2014 to strip all dissidents, including musician Andrei Makarevich, from their Russian citizenship and deport them from the country.

He writes:

The role of the USA, the last remaining superpower in the world, is central to global geopolitics today. Beginning with the end of the 19th century, this peripheral, marginal continent, previously but a European province secondary and complimentary to the Old World, increasingly became an independent political and cultural power. After the Second World War, the USA even came to act as the paradigmatic, universal model for the countries of Europe themselves and even Asia. The significance of the steady growth of America and the totality of the American ideological, cultural, psychological, and even philosophical complex goes beyond the framework of purely economic or military influence. “Mythological America,” “America as a concept,” and “America as the American Ideal” are today manifesting themselves all the more visibly.

There must be compelling reasons why the “American idea” has taken root and implanted itself as something “neo-sacred” in global geopolitical consciousness connected to the collective unconsciousness of humanity and the mysterious continental geography that can be traced back millennia, the memory of which still lives in the archetypes of the psyche. Considering the “mythological” underpinnings of America as an “internal continent” is the main task of this chapter.

Skipping some very interesting material, he notes:

The most profound Russian thinkers of the 20th century were undoubtedly the Eurasianists, the ideologists of the special Third Way wing of the first Russian emigration who expressed genuinely important and reliable considerations on the fate of Russia. In their conceptions, the geographical location of Russia between East and West plays a central role. For them, Eurasia amounts to Russia and the Russian ethnos (in the supranational sense of the word) is considered to be the modern carrier of Turanism, a special imperial psycho-ideology accordingly passed down to the people of Rus by the Turkic-Mongolian tribes of the Horde. Thus, the Eurasianists, in contrast to the representatives of the monarchist camp, were not so much “Panslavists” as Turkophiles. And this is not a paradox since a significant part of the Russian nobility and, in particular, many Slavophile ideologists of the 19th century who constituted a significant percentage of the top Russian elite, were representatives of the Turkic heritage. For many Eurasianists, Russia-Turan was a supra-political concept whose value was defined by its geopolitical mission.

The intuition of the Eurasianists proved to be quite true, but the origins of this concept stretch back to pre-history, to the epochs prior not only to the conquests of Genghis Khan and his successors, but also prior to even the appearance of Slavs on Russian lands. Where did Russia-Turan come from?