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"NORTH SLAVIC" DECONSTRUCTIVISM AS INVENTED TRADITION OF RUSSIAN HISTORICAL SLAVISTICS
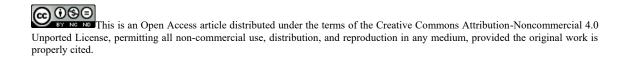
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Abstract

Introduction. The author analyzes the revisionist concepts of the history of the Eastern Slavic languages. It is assumed that historical Eastern Slavic philology became the victim of numerous ideological and political manipulations. **Methods**. The author uses the methods of intellectual history, the archeology of ideas and the history of ideas. It is assumed that the methods proposed in nationalisms studies, including the concept of invented traditions, are also applicable for the analysis of this problem. **Results**. Analyzing the problems of the intellectual history of Eastern Slavic languages studies, the author believes that some historians proposed a revisionist explanation of the history of the old-Novgorod dialect. Some authors believe that the concept of "Eastern Slavic languages" is an invented ideological tradition because supporters of the revisionist approach exclude the Novgorod dialect from the eastern Slavic area, localizing it among the "northern" Slavic languages – a separate group that they distinguish, although other authors deny its existence. Supporters of the revisionist approach determined the old-Novgorod dialect and Lechite languages, defined as Western Slavic languages, as North Slavic languages. **Discussion**. In general, the author believes that discussions and debates about the number of Slavic language groups and the affiliation of its dialects are mainly a political problem, actualizing the dependence of historical Slavic philology on the ideological situation. Analyzing the history of intellectual discussions, the author presumes that conservative stability is the main factor that determines the vectors and development paths of the academic community, eliminating the possibility of revising the dominant concepts.

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Keywords: East Slavic languages, West Slavic languages, revisionism, Old Novgorod language, history of ideas.

1. Introduction

The linguistic history of the Eastern Slavs, in particular, as their political history, in general (Kakolewski, 2019; Lajoye, 2019), fell a victim of political and ideological manipulations became a space where myths, stereotypes and clichés dominated (Culp, 2019; Farmer, 2019). The ruling political elites, intellectuals who were loyal to elites and some scientists produced and formed these ideologemes consistently. These concepts were based on loyalty and unwillingness to allow the emergence and progress of alternative viewpoints. Russian pre-revolutionary historians believed in the existence of a single Russian language, insisting that Ukrainian and Belarusian did not have independent status but there were its dialects (Fenghi, 2020; Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016; Laruelle, 2018; Plokhy, 2017; Stickland, 2020). Soviet linguists changed this scheme slightly; on the one hand, they recognized the independent status of the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages, proposing an ideological and academic compromise, assuming that the historical ancestors of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians formed drevnerusskaia narodnost' or Old-Russian nationality. On the other hand, Soviet scholars reached an academic compromise, imagining Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian languages as languages that belonged to the East Slavic subgroup of Slavic languages. This formally coherent concept fell into crisis in the early 1980s when some Soviet philologists allowed themselves to doubt the firmness of the conclusions and provisions of their predecessors. Therefore, some intellectuals proposed a revisionist viewpoint, based on a revision of the concept of the history of the Old Russian language and collective belief in the existence of the Old Russian nationality and East Slavic languages as its historical heirs also.

2. Problem Statement

Debates in the academic historiography about the history and quantity of Eastern Slavic languages in general and the status of Novgorod and Pskov dialects (or languages), unsolved and debatable problems of their belonging to Eastern Slavic or other Slavic languages, in particular, are the main problems, the author analyzes in this article.

3. Research Questions

The author analyses several research questions in this article, including 1) the main dominant positions of the academic community in historical and linguistic studies of Novgorod and Pskov dialects; 2) analysis of alternative viewpoints on the history and status of Novgorod and Pskov idioms in academic revisionist literature; 3) the prospects for the development of an alternative point of view (Novgorod and Pskov idioms were not dialects, but were independent non-Eastern Slavic languages) in the modern intellectual situation.

4. Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the author's goals are 1) analysis of revisionist approaches in history writing as alternative explanations of the history of the Old Novgorod dialect and its place in East Slavic languages; 2) analysis of revisionist concepts of typology of Slavic languages and the history of some dead Slavic

languages; 3) the study of the forms and causes of conservative stability in the Russian academic community which avoids debates about the status and affiliation of the Pskov and Novgorod dialects; 4) analysis of the developmental perspective of the revisionist viewpoint, which disputes the position of a compromise academic canon inherited from Soviet historiography and still dominate in academic literature.

5. Research Methods

The author used the methods of intellectual history and the history of ideas (Barger, 2018; Conklin, 2019; Isaac, 2016; Whatmore, 2016). Therefore, the analyzed concepts, on the one hand, are perceived as constructs, and theories are determined as invented historiographic traditions. On the other hand, the achievements of historical revisionism are also among factors that affect the methods that the author uses in the article significantly.

American historian MacPherson (2003), commenting on the role of revisionism in the development of the humanities, emphasizes that the fourteen-thousand members of this association, however, know that revision is the lifeblood of historical scholarship. History is a continuing dialogue, between the present and the past. Interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence, new questions asked of the evidence, new perspectives gained by the passage of time. There is no single, eternal, and immutable "truth" about past events and their meaning (p. 1).

Revisionist concepts play a special role in modern linguistics, actualizing the possibilities and potential of the radical form of epistemology in linguistic studies. Revisionism in philology is different from revisionism in history. Revisionist studies in linguistics are less politicized, focused on the revision of other academic concepts, they do not claim to replace the political or ideological preferences of society radically. Despite this formal "peaceful" nature of linguistic revisionism, the problems of the history of the Old Russian language (Simeon, 2018) and the typology of East Slavic languages stimulate the ideologization and politicization of science.

6. Findings

6.1. Academic "compromise" canon

A compromise concept inherited from the Soviet period dominates in modern Russian historiography and philology. Its main provisions are following: firstly, the territory of Kievan Rus (Raffensperger, 2016) was inhabited by a single ancient Russian nationality; secondly, the East Slavic tribes populated territories of Kievan Rus (Dimnik, 2016) and became its ancestors; thirdly, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian languages, defined as East Slavic ones (Sedov, 1995) became the descendants and historical heirs of the Old Russian language. This point of view, which continues to dominate and prevail in historiography, is not formally dominant in the modern intellectual situation, and therefore some scholars declare importance and necessity for its revision.

Heterogenization of history or academic attempts to revise the canon. What are the main provisions of the revisionist paradigm in the East Slavic linguistics? Which intellectuals made the greatest contribution to the rise and progress of alternative viewpoints in their attempts to deconstruct the official canon? Several authors, including philologists A.A. Zaliznjak A.V. Zhuravleva, V.L. Vasiliev, V.B. Krys'ko, G.A. Haburgaev, as well as historians (I.N. Danilevskij and V.L. Janin for example) preferred to express the revisionist point of view, which denies the existence of an East Slavic group of languages in their works. Summing up the ideas and assumptions of these scholars it is logical to formulate several ideas that form the hardcore of the revisionist paradigm in history writing of East Slavic languages. In recent years, revisionism (Post, 2017; Riggenbach, 2016) has become an influential factor in the development of history (Kolmas, 2018). Revisionism as a method and approach to writing history does not depend on political boundaries and this factor allows it to claim universality among other methodological paradigms. Revisionist points of view in the study of the history of East Slavic languages arose as a logical continuation of the attempt to propose an alternative approach to the study of the history of the Old Russian nationality in particular and, as a result, a history of the Eastern Slavs in general.

Russian historian Igor' Danilevskij (1998) presumes that in ethnic terms - today it is already quite clear - the population of Kievan Rus cannot be represented as a single ancient Russian nationality… its inhabitants were quite clearly divided into several ethnic groups with different appearance, language, material and spiritual culture (p. 248).

Historians in the contemporary Russian academic situation were the first intellectuals who were bold enough to express doubts about the inviolability and infallibility of the Old Russian nationality concept they inherited from the Soviet historiography (Cohen, 2017; Mardilovich, 2019; Thomas, 2019). Therefore, historians actualized the problems and possibilities of historical revisionism in studies of the East Slavic languages, assuming and realizing that, on the one hand, the population of the region was heterogeneous, and its historical and geographical ancestral homelands, on the other hand, could be different also (Jemialjančyk, 1998).

6.2. Revision of the historical concept of "East Slavic" languages

Supporters of the revisionist perception and deconstruction of the official historiographical canon believe that theories of East Slavic languages and Old Russian nationality arose and developed as an imagined and invented intellectual traditions in the historiography of the Soviet period. Proponents of the revisionist point of view on the history of East Slavic languages believe that it is important and necessary to abandon the geographical principle in its typology proposing other criteria for classification that would actualize not the geographical location of their speakers, but the structural grammatical features of the languages themselves. Supporters of the revision of the canonical version of the history of East Slavic languages insist that Slavic dialects of the Kievan Rus had significant features. Therefore, some intellectuals presumed that the language defined in historiography as "Old Russian" never existed, but in fact, several scripts used in the texts of the annals.

Therefore, some authors insist that the *drevnenovgorodskii dialekt* or Old Novgorod dialect significantly differed from other dialects, because it separated genetically from other Slavic languages in the pre-Slavic era that preceded the pre-East-Slavic period (Zaliznjak, 2004). Proponents of the revisionist viewpoint believe that dialects of the Old Novgorod language historically formed and developed independently from the East Slavic language areal (Haburgaev, 2005). Thus, the Novgorod dialect developed differently from the southern dialects, and this fact allows supporters of the revisionist approach to state and presume that the theory of East Slavic languages became a political and ideological construct only. The presence of the Old Novgorod dialect among the East Slavic languages can be determined as a political-historiographical misunderstanding and the result of the forced integration of historiography in political canon, but not the result of the development of the language itself. Therefore, supporters of the revisionist viewpoint insist that the peculiarities of the Old Novgorod dialect became, on the one hand, a consequence of its historical and chorological, archaicness (Šuster-Ševc, 1998) in comparison with the dialects that emerges later.

On the other hand, supporters of the exclusion of the Old Novgorod dialect from the East Slavic contexts insist that it had much in common with the Western Pre-Lechite, Pre-Sorbian (Mańczak, 1992) and the Balkan South Slavic dialects. Therefore, the proponents of this alternative approach used "northwestern Slavic languages" (Šahmatov, 1916) as an alternative definition in their attempts to denote the Old Novgorod, Old Pskov and Krivich languages. This idea destroyed artificial and political division of Slavic languages into Western, Eastern and Southern ones, but this idea dominated in Soviet historiography and continues to prevail in Russian. Supporters of radical revisionist epistemology believe that the Old Novgorod language belonged to the West Slavic languages (Krys'ko, 1998). Developing this assumption and revising the viewpoints and stereotypes that dominated on the Soviet historiography, supporters of revisionist concepts exclude Ilmen Slovenes (ancestors of the medieval population of Novgorod and Pskov) and Krivich tribes (ancestors of modern Belarusians) (Nikolaev, 2011) from the Eastern Slavs. Soviet and Russian scholar V.V. Toporov tried to localize and map the genesis of the Krivich tribes in the zone of the settlement of the Western Slavs (Toporov, 1990) also. A.A. Zaliznjak another outstanding figure in linguistics believed that the Old Novgorod language had much in common with the West Slavic (North Lechitic) and South Slavic (Slovenian) languages and dialects (Janin & Zaliznjak, 1986).

6.3. Historical Slavic studies, revisionism, and the "language" / "dialect" problem

Analyzing the revisionist approaches to history writing of East Slavic languages, the problem of the relationship between the categories "language" and "dialect" (Bassiouney, 2017; Reaser, 2017) arise inevitably. In historiography, the idea that the Old Russian language was just the language, while Novgorod and Pskov were its regional dialects is still the prevailing opinion. Modern Russian linguistics and historiography inherited this viewpoint from Soviet science, but the political and intellectual history of the 20th century provides historians with several examples of status changes when idioms, previously defined as dialects, became languages (Clampitt-Dunlap, 2018; McMahon, 2019; Suny, 2017). The change of status from "dialect" to "language" had political and ideological significance in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, and changes of borders and the emergence of new nations (Lowry,

2019; Tamir, 2019), that were ambitious enough in their attempts to establish a new independent, but nationalizing in fact (Brown, 2018; Stojanov, 2008; Wright, 2016), states inspired these transformations (Bergmann, 2020; Bieber, 2020; Hazony, 2018). A high degree of formal academic discussions and historiographic debates about the status of the Old Novgorod and Old Pskov dialects and the prospects for their recognition as separate extinct Slavic languages became inevitable. The hypothetical recognition of the Old Novgorod idiom as an independent language with a possible revision of its belonging to the East Slavic languages will not entail either territorial claims or the intensification of linguistic nationalism because its active users are absent. Despite these consequences of medieval Russian history, which did not lead to the emergence of strong regional identities, attempts to reconsider the status and affiliation of the Old Novgorod dialect in modern Russian linguistics and historiography are among marginal intellectual practices. Nevertheless, attempts to revise status and debates about the typology of Slavic languages are periodically renewed in academic literature.

6.4. From the "East Slavic" to the "North Slavic" languages

In the late 1980s, A.A. Zaliznjak modified the arguments of supporters of the revisionist approach, suggesting that the Krivich (Polish, North Lechite and Sorbian languages) was a dialect from a separate North-Western group of Slavic languages. The Slovenian Ilmen dialect (together with Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian), as A. Zaliznjak, presumed belonged to another group of Slavic languages, defined by him as South-Eastern. Proponents of this viewpoint underline the parallels of Novgorod's toponymy with the West Slavic languages, perceiving the Novgorod dialect, defined by them as an independent language, as one of the Western Slavic languages, denying its Eastern Slavic status. These ideas inspire and stimulate the deconstruction of the theory of the Old Russian nationality and the Old Russian language. The very definition of "Eastern Slavic languages" in this intellectual situation becomes an archaic, politically motivated and ideologically biased theory that is doomed to lose its academic role and significance. Therefore, supporters of the revisionist viewpoint propose to modify the traditional concept of the three groups of Slavic languages, offering to supplement it with a fourth one, North Slavic, group. Supporters of this revisionist theory insist that the fourth group of Slavic languages included idioms determined as Western or Eastern Slavic languages. For example, Lechite (Western Slavic) and extinct Old Novgorod and Old Pskov dialects (Eastern Slavic) are imagined as potential members of the North Slavic group. The hypothetical exclusion of the Old Novgorod and Old Pskov dialects from the East Slavic ones allows us to abandon their perception as dialects, inspiring the revision of their status and their recognition as separate languages (Zaliznjak, 1988).

6.5. The prospects of revisionism as a form of radical epistemology in modern Russian linguistics

An analysis of some concepts in the history of East Slavic philology allows us to state the significant fragmentation of the Russian academic community and the heterogeneity of viewpoints proposed by its representatives. Analysing this situation of methodological and conceptual heterogeneity in history writing of the Slavic languages, it is necessary to take into account factors that actualize the main trends in the development of the academic community. The author believes that the metaphor

proposed by British historian Eley (1991) applies to our attempts to describe the modern scientific Russian community of linguists. Eley (1991) believes that any science is comparable to a moving train: if supporters of the traditional positivistic methodology ride in most wagons, then adherents of radical epistemology travel in other wagons of this imagined academic train – conservative scientists form the majority and they would be happy to get rid of radical revisionists as authors who encroach on historically arising and politically sanctioned norms of academic orthodoxy.

The fact that the train continues to ride remains positive because the movement of the science train provides for a hypothetical possibility of change. Commenting on the British historian's assumption in the Russian linguistic perspective, the author is forced to admit that proponents of conservative approaches form the majority. The formal institutions of the academic community (periodicals, scientific institutions, structural units of research institutes and universities) are under control of scholars who represent the older generation, tend to adhere to traditional paradigms and avoid radical epistemology. Therefore, it is impossible to exclude the use of informal practices of control of the scientific community, including ideological restrictions, the opacity of the peer review institution and politically motivated censorship (Antonova, 2017) in formal academic periodicals, which inspires the marginalization of those authors who prefer to use the methods of radical epistemology, including its special or private cases such as modernism and constructivism. The author believes that a compromise in modern Russian linguistics is virtually unattainable.

The author presumes that the scientific community will continue to function as fragmented and heterogeneous from a theoretical and methodological viewpoint. This factor will strengthen the differentiation of research institutes and universities, specialized periodicals, which can be divided informally into traditional and radical epistemological. The first ones (faculties and departments in regional classical universities, some units of research institutes, as well as periodicals of state institutions) will reproduce the canon of ideologically and politically motivated knowledge inherited from previous generations of researchers. They will inspire the conservation of the community, the rise of methodological discrepancies and, as a result, they will create conditions for stagnation. The second ones, as proponents of radical epistemology, will be marginal in the shadow of the conservative majority, but their diverse activities, including publications that will not coincide with the dominant discourse problematically and thematically, will become an actual alternative to the official canon, inspiring the heterogenization of studies in the history of Eastern Slavic languages.

7. Conclusion

Summing up the main ideas of the article, several factors should be taken into account. Firstly, an alternative or revisionist viewpoints on the history of East Slavic languages in modern Russian historiography and philology are marginal because they are virtually invisible in the dominant inertial model of the development of the humanities that reproduce grand narratives inherited from the Soviet historiography. Secondly, the prospects for the development of the revisionist approach are uncertain, because its active and vivid popularizers and defenders became too weak after the death of A.A. Zaliznjak. Thirdly, an alternative concept promoted by revisionist scholars will be marginalized by a conservative majority that is not interested in revision of the existing approaches in history writing of

Slavic languages. Fourthly, the hypothetical transformation of the revisionist approach into academic "mainstream" is disadvantageous for both historians and philologists, because conceptual changes will stimulate a radical revision, including revision of the concept of ancient Russian nationality in historiography and necessity of new Slavic languages typology in philology. In general, revisionist approaches to the history of East Slavic languages should be recognized as an important and positive factor for the development of the scientific community because the radical revision of the earlier theories and concepts can expand the forms and horizons of possible interpretations, inspiring and stimulating an interdisciplinary synthesis of historiographical and philological achievements.

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