

Studies of particular languages

ENGLISH *See also abstracts 81–228/9, –246*

81–251 Burgin, Ken. How English is cornering the language market. *Times Higher Education Supplement* (London), **385** (7 March 1980), 10.

It cannot be argued that knowledge of foreign languages improves our exporting or promotes science and technology – Britain has done better at exporting to Europe than to English-speaking parts of the world. The curriculum is already too crowded to introduce any new subjects. The level of motivation to learn a language in Britain is low and is declining, partly because of the spread of English as a lingua franca and partly because of the devaluation of the idea of the ‘educated man’. English is entirely dominant in two continents, North America and Australasia. In a third, Europe, it is the first language of 60 million people and the second language of most educated people outside Britain. In the fourth, South America, it has penetrated deeply through commerce and aid. In Africa English is the single most important language, and in Asia English is the commercial language; it is also the lingua franca among educated Indians. The cultural diffusion of English is reinforced by developments in communications technology. Foreign-language policy in Europe favours the advance of English over other second languages. English and French may well become the official languages of the Common Market.

In spite of its vast vocabulary, English is a simple language, which is part of its appeal. Despite substantial developments to facilitate the learning of languages, the results are not commensurate with the resources. High motivation is the main factor in promoting language learning, and a willingness to immerse oneself in another culture. A strong sense of nationality is not conducive to language learning.

FRENCH *See also abstract 81–243*

81–252 Majumdar, M. J. and Morris, A. M. The French pluperfect tense as a punctual past. *Archivum Linguisticum* (London), **11**, 1 (1980), 1–12.

The pluperfect tense has been found with punctual past function in different registers of contemporary spoken and informal written French. Spoken French has lacked the capacity to make by means of tense use a distinction between punctual past events and other past events having present consequences or effects for the speaker, since the disappearance from speech of the *passé simple*, some 200 years ago. In the present

century speakers first experimented with the *passé surcomposé* for use as a punctual past in contrast to the *passé composé*, but this was not generally adopted. The pluperfect appears to be having some success in establishing itself as a punctual past, enabling the spoken language to contrast the *passé composé* with the pluperfect as the written language contrasts the *passé composé* with the *passé simple*.

RUSSIAN

81-253 Birkenmaier, Willy. Die Kategorie 'zählbar-nichtzählbar' beim russischen Substantiv. [The 'countable/uncountable' category in the Russian noun.] *IRAL* (Heidelberg), **18**, 1 (1980), 31-40.

The subdivision into countable and uncountable nouns is differently organised by human languages. In the Germanic and Romance languages it is indicated by restrictions imposed in the use of articles and plural forms. In Russian there is no possibility of differentiating word classes by articles. This article studies the formation of singulatives by means of suffixation as a Russian device to distinguish mass words and thing-words.

81-254 Feldstein, Ronald F. On stress and the vowel-zero alternation in Russian. *Russian Language Journal* (Michigan), **33**, 115 (1979), 29-44.

The inflectional forms of nouns and adjectives in Russian, especially those with zero-inflection, are classified in terms of their stress pattern, the most important distinction being that of final stress either representing stress on the zero ending, or 'predesinential' stress. Forms with mobile vowels are then compared with this basic pattern; with non-zero inflections they have identical stress patterns with other forms, but with zero-inflections they appear to manifest double the number of patterns.

This distinction is claimed to follow quite simply if some forms are analysed as having underlying mobile vowels, while other forms have their mobile vowels inserted by rule. Apparent exceptions are related to Church Slavonic influence.

81-255 Padučeva, J. V. Topic and focus in Russian bi-nominative sentences. *SMIL: Journal of Linguistic Calculus* (Stockholm, Sweden), **3/4** (1979), 29-48.

A detailed description of Russian bi-nominative sentences (i.e. sentences where two noun phrases are connected with a form of the verb *byt'*) is presented. The basic form is seen as consisting of a subject noun phrase and a predicate noun phrase which also constitutes the focus of the sentence. Two rules operate on these basic forms: 'Asyntactic focus' shifts the subject to the end of the sentence and make it the focus, while

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the predicate occurs at the beginning of the sentence – this transformation brings with it an existential presupposition that there is something of which the predicate is true. 'Prothesis', which is used in expressive sentences, moves the focus to the front.

This descriptive framework is then applied to bi-nominative sentences in detail. Subject-predicate ambiguous structures are brought up in its support. Finally, the use of particles (such as *vot, i, èto*) is shown to be correlated with these focus properties.

81-256 Priestly, T. M. S. Spelling-pronunciations in modern Russian. *Journal of Russian Studies* (Lancaster), **38** (1979), 3-14.

Evidence is examined for and against the theory that standard orthography has been the cause of, or at least a major factor in, changes in the pronunciation of Russian. Attention is drawn to changes which might have, but have not, occurred. Some 17 observed changes are then tested against a range of competing explanations. These include the influence of grammatical factors, geographical/dialect factors, Baudouin de Courtenay's law, foreign derivations, bookish and technical origin. The majority of the instances examined indicate a tendency for pronunciation to move closer to spelling, but it is suggested that the influence of spelling has been important in such changes rather than ultimately decisive.

81-257 Shapiro, Michael. Russian conjugation: theory and hermeneutic. *Lanugage* (Baltimore, Md), **56**, 1 (1980), 67-93.

This study re-examines the data of contemporary Russian conjugation in the framework of a semiotic concept of linguistic structure based on markedness as the informing principle. Emphasis is placed on demonstrating the coherence of expression and content that allows grammatical facts to subsist as such. This is achieved by analysing in detail how the relational values of the pertinent grammatical categories are represented diagrammatically in their phonological and morphophonemic expression. Setting explication of grammar as its goal, rather than description or predictability, the analysis articulates a radically different and explicitly hermeneutic perspective for linguistic inquiry.

81-258 Waring, A. G. The modality of the future tense in Russian. *Slavonic and East European Review* (Cambridge), **58**, 2 (1980), 161-81.

A discussion of the modal meanings of the future perfective form in Russian. The existing literature is surveyed and criticised for its dependence on philosophical preconceptions. A series of examples gives a general meaning for the future perfective of unreality but (as opposed to the subjunctive) of feasibility.

The problem of when modal overtones arise is considered in some detail, the conclusion being that they exist whenever the verb is used

without relation to any specific time. Specifically, they occur in negative sentences, conditionals, sentences conjoined to modally specified sentences and assessments of capability. [A number of intermediate cases are considered.]

CHINESE

81–259 Chin-Chuan Cheng. Language reform in China in the seventies. *Word* (Miford, Ct), **30**, 1/2 (1979), 45–57.

Chinese language reform was defined in 1958 as (1) character simplification, (2) popularisation of Putonghua (the standard language), and (3) popularisation of pinyin, the Chinese phonetic writing using the Latin alphabet. The agency which plans and carries out reform is the Chinese Committee on Language Reform, part of the State Council of the Central Government. Simplification of characters consists usually in reducing the number of writing strokes by about six. Draft schemes are published in daily newspapers and thousands of people write in to comment. Simplification can result in ambiguity – experimental characters printed between December 1977 and May 1978 were then discontinued.

Popularisation of Putonghua is limited to the Han Chinese areas of the country. It is still not standard in all schools. Popularisation of pinyin has been carried out by means of series of broadcasts in 1974, 1975 and 1978. Pinyin exists side by side with the Wade–Giles system, usually used outside China for transliteration purposes. Because the Chinese script is so complex, school children probably spend one-tenth of their time on science and one-third on the language, aiming to learn 2,500 characters in the first two grades. The desire for stability in the script may override the desire for change.