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The Centre of Siberian Studies in Cracow

Siberian linguistics cannot be studied as an independent, coherent subject at any university in the world. Siberiologists who actively pursue their research are usually more or less autodidacts in their field and they are mostly affiliated to one or another sort of academic institution for Orientalist or linguistic studies.

by Marek Stachowski

No wonder then that complaints about feeling isolated are heard from time to time. No wonder also that living and working as the only representative of Siberian linguistics at a particular university is less interesting and less inspiring than living and working among numerous colleagues.

One of the most important goals of the Centre of Siberian Studies, founded at the Jagellonian University in Cracow in October 1997, was to give the feeling of belonging together to those few young people who were interested in the linguistic history of Siberia.

The main activities of the members of the Centre (five persons at present: Marek Stachowski (the initiator), Elif Dilmaç, Kinga Maciuszak, M. Gürkan Önal, Marzanna Pomorska) are joint discussions of linguistic topics and the preparation of publications concerning Siberian languages (mostly from a historical and etymological perspective).

Another activity is organizing guest lectures. In the last year three specialists have given their lectures at the Centre. The first of them was Eugene Helimski (at present at Hamburg) who prepared a one-semester series of lectures on different languages and problems such as 'govorka' (Pidgin Russian in North Siberia), the northern sea way in the history of the Russian colonization of Siberia in the light of linguistic data, and so on. Besides, his lectures Helimski was also able to devote his time to writing his excellent monograph on Die matorische Sprache which appeared later in Hungary. Another guest of the Centre was Koichi Inoue from the University of Hokkaido (Sapporo), who gave a lecture on the history of scholarly and personal encounters of two famous explorers of Siberia: Bronislaw Pilsudski and Lev Stenberg. The last guest lecturer in the past year was Roy Andrew Miller (Honolulu), who talked about 'Japan, Siberia, and the Altaistics' which was a good, informative introduction to connections between Siberia and Far Eastern languages, as reflected in both earlier and modern research.

Unfortunately, two other guests of the Centre Mehmet Ölmez (Ankara) and Yong-Song Li (Seoul/Ankara) could only visit Cracow in September, i.e. in a period in which most students are away from the city, so that no lectures could be organized. Nevertheless, their visit offered a good opportunity to discuss numerous Siberian-Turkic etymologies.

Our co-operation with Dutch specialists in Siberian Studies had begun even before the Centre was established. One of them is Tjeerd de Graaf (Groningen) who is planning to visit Cracow in the spring of 1999. Our other colleague in the Netherlands is Uwe Blasing at the University of Leiden. It was on his initiative that last year I was invited to Leiden where I read a report on my fieldwork about the Arctic Circle (on the Taymyr Peninsula) as well as to

organizing our joint research into Northern Tungus and Russian loanwords in Dolgan, the northernmost Turkic language, this year. The contact with Uwe Bläsing is especially interesting because it is thanks to his efforts that courses in different Siberian languages are regularly offered each year at the Leiden University's Department of Comparative Linguistics. It goes without saying, of course, that they provide a reliable basis for educating future Siberiologists. In view of the very good, inspiring atmosphere in Leiden where I have also met other colleagues interested in Siberian topics (P. C. H. Schrijver, Leiden; Nganasan historical phonology) and S. A. Starostin (Moscow; Altaistics), the latter being incidentally a visitor to the same Department of Comparative Linguistics at the same time, I can only hope for the future continuation and extension of our joint projects.

Indeed, there seems to be some indication that Siberian linguistics has a future at our universities. Publishing possibilities are very good because the Centre has good access to at least three journals published by the Institute of Oriental Philology to which it is affiliated: *Folia Orientalia*, *Studia Turcologica Gracoviensia* and *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia*, the last also founded by the undersigned. As well as the journals, some interesting monographs on Siberia and its adjacent areas have appeared in Cracow in the past few years (apart from my own books on Dolgan and Yakut. This year, a monograph on the Fu-Yu Kirghiz in Manchuria was published by Gundula Salk, who based her study primarily upon her own fieldwork materials. It is also much to my delight to see more and more students from quite different philologies attending our Siberiological lectures in Cracow.