

Something Philological

Disclaimer: Preliminary version; to be revised.

0. Since my topic was given as “something philological” in the original list of contributions to this conference, I have chosen to interpret this broad title as freedom to begin with a few general observations about the field and its practitioners and how both have changed over the past fifty years.* After some thoughts about how we will work for the next decade or two, I will suggest a project that could benefit the entire field of Slavic linguistics and philology

1. The question of what should be done is inevitably paired with the question of how should and will it be done. Is the process of producing and publishing scholarship going to be different in any basic ways in the next century? Although a person writing a paper like this one in 1950 would have missed many of the most important changes to come during the second fifty years of the nineteenth century, I think we can at least be certain that there will be far-reaching innovations during the next decades. Some of these are already under way. Most of the changes in how we work and what we do during the past fifty years are the result of two basic factors: technological advances and the exponential increase in the amount of material which is available to individual scholars.

The technological advances are very obvious. The process of writing is very different when one works with a computer, and rewriting and revisions are both quicker and much less arduous. Producing the “weird symbols” that are so essential to our work has become almost no problem at all. As I write this in Word Perfect, I have about 1500 symbols instantly available, including pan-Cyrillic, pan-Latin, phonetics, Greek, and typographical characters. Typesetting directly from the computer (either by producing camera-ready copy or by feeding text into a typesetting machine) has revolutionized publishing. By now we take Xeroxing for granted, but those of us who have been in the field long enough remember when getting a copy of notes meant recopying by hand or typewriter, and getting a copy of a text or a book meant making expensive, often blurry, photographs which were prone to curling. Looking up a word in an out-of-print dictionary used to mean the excruciating process of finding it on a microfilm or microfiche. Now one can count on a good, inexpensive, and usually nicely bound xerocopy of the dictionary, or even a reprint edition. Consulting a dissertation used to mean a trip to the library of the university where it was written; now one gets a quick and reasonably priced copy from UMI. Text can be scanned into a computer hundreds of times faster than it can be typed in. Texts can be put up on the Web and made available to everybody. Library catalogs can be searched online, as can many bibliographies. The list could be extended greatly – I will refrain from doing so, since the point is clear.

The fact that so much more information is available to scholars now perhaps does not remind us of itself as frequently as the technological advances do, but it is just as important. The increase in information is of course partially a result of the technological changes, but it is also a result of

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the passage of time (which has brought about the inexorable accumulation of more data and opinions), the vastly larger number of scholars working in the field of Slavic linguistics, and policies (promulgated both by universities and by learned academies) which made the volume of publication more important than the quality.

As an illustration of the increase in the number of scholars in the field, one might consider the fact that when I was applying to graduate school in 1957, there were basically three places in the USA to do graduate work in Slavic linguistics: Harvard, Columbia, and Berkeley. Now there are well over a dozen reasonably strong Ph.D. programs in Slavic linguistics, and a large number of schools offering the M.A., B.A., or not even a Russian major, but with excellent Slavic linguists among their faculty. This expansion in the USA and Canada has been paralleled by major expansions in the Slavic countries themselves, in most of Europe, and in some other places, such as Japan, Australia, and Israel.

Not only are many more scholars working in the field, but they are being pressured to produce more publications, and many more venues of publication exist for them. Before WWII no journal published in the USA regularly printed Slavic linguistics. Now we have the *Slavic and East European Journal*, the *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, the *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, the *Russian Language Journal*, *Balkanistica*, and *Slovene Studies*, all currently coming out on a regular basis and usually containing Slavic linguistics in every issue. Americans also publish regularly in a host of journals in other countries, both Slavic and non-Slavic. Most of these journals did not exist before WW II.

The perfecting of the preparation and use of camera-ready copy and the offset process of printing have so lowered the cost of producing a book or journal that more and more publications appear each year, even in such a relatively small field as ours. The system of governmental subsidies for publications, which was a fundamental feature of scholarly life in Eastern Europe until recently, also played a major role in the increased number of publications in our field. The eagerness of North American, European, Japanese, and Australian libraries to buy East European publications at almost any price also stimulated the growth in numbers, if not in quality, of such publications.

Ever-higher prices, about which librarians are increasingly unhappy, makes producing periodicals an extremely lucrative business for most publishers. Not surprisingly, a number of new journals in linguistics (and almost every other imaginable field) is started each year, and of course material is needed to fill all those blank but potentially profitable pages. "Read more, write more, pester your library to buy more" is the triple mantra of the modern scholar. One might add that if there is not time to read more, some people at least adhere to the second and third admonitions.

Due to the sheer volume of materials which have appeared and continue to appear, it has become impossible for a single scholar to keep up thoroughly with more than one or two fields of Slavic linguistics. Several persons have pointed out in recent years, especially in reviews of ambitious books, that the time has probably passed when a single person can be an expert in a wide variety of topics or Slavic languages. The corollary, it seems to me, is that our field will become more and more like the hard sciences, where books and even major papers are more often than not written by teams of authors. Comrie and Corbett's magnificent survey of the Slavic languages illustrates this well. Individuals will continue to publish innovative works in specific areas, but the broad, synthesizing works will more often come from groups. For example, while an individual might, with appropriate consultations, still produce a basic survey of the Slavic languages, an in-depth study covering the phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology, etc. of all of these languages will come only from a team. Even such a detailed study covering only phonology or morphology or syntax is probably now beyond the capabilities of

one person. Whereas a single scholar might in the past have been considered an expert on almost all of Russian linguistics, now people have become specialists in phonology or syntax or lexicology or the history of the literary language or any of a number of other limited areas.

Russian, as the language which generates the greatest volume of scholarship and primary materials, is the extreme case, but keeping up well with research and data in any another single Slavic language, plus maintaining adequate theoretical expertise, has become nearly a full-time job as well. Over the years I have noticed a growing tendency among scholars to specialize in one language and then have a secondary, less deep knowledge of one or two more. A few exceptions do exist, but they are rare and seem to be getting even rarer. Among my own generation, Wayles Browne comes to mind – he always seems to know a lot about almost everything.

We cannot assume that the rate of appearance of new materials will lessen. On the contrary, the technological advances mentioned above and the ever-increasing pressure to publish guarantee an even greater flood of materials for the foreseeable future. The Web will make it yet easier to “publish” works that would never have been accepted by a properly refereed journal or book publishing house. Last week, for instance, I was intrigued by a note on the Linguist list about work on a non-Slavic language. What I found at the web site, however, was work lacking any theoretical rigor or probative value. In the day of the Web one can just make public a text, without even incurring the costs that vanity publishing in hard copy formerly entailed.

As noted above, we shall almost certainly have to work cooperatively much more than before, but many of the same factors which have made this close cooperation necessary have also given us the means to cooperate better. One thinks immediately of the computer, xerography, the fax machine, the Web, cheap long distance and international telephone rates, and many other facilitating developments. Writing a work together once meant a wait of several days to several weeks while mail went back and forth; now one can send materials electronically anywhere in the world in a matter of minutes. Modern software allows multiple authors to revise a text and have those revisions automatically marked for the consideration of co-authors.

2. As shown above, in many ways our work has become much easier than it was forty or fifty years ago, but because of technological advances, the great increase in the number of scholars working in the field, the accumulation of prior scholarship, and academic and publishing policies, the amount of material that we have to deal with is incomparably larger and will increase even more. Being a well-informed and productive scholar and linguist depends upon our tools and resources. Tools which depend upon general technological advances, such as computers, xerocopying, e-mail, and the web are available to almost all, but other tools which depend more upon the initiatives and industry of our fellow scholars are often not available.

Again, let me look back. When I started graduate school in 1957, the lack of certain resources for linguists and philologists became immediately apparent. To begin with, there was no adequate bibliography either for study or for research. One could not even be sure what else was missing, since the bibliographies that should have allowed us to find out what was available had not yet been compiled. If one dug around enough, it became clear that no Slavic language possessed all of the minimum of other reference tools (beyond a good bibliography). These tools would include, at a minimum, moderately comprehensive dictionaries of both the contemporary language and the older stages of the language; a reliable etymological dictionary; a thorough reference grammar (including syntax); a reasonably complete history of the language, including the literary language; an accurate and thorough description of the dialects; and an adequate sampler of texts from various periods, regions, and genres, published with enough philological precision to be of use to linguists. We really needed much more than the items listed, but these

were the absolute minimum. If one tried to be not just a Russianist, but also a Slavist, then s/he needed some other tools, such a dependable survey of the Slavic languages and a Slavic etymological dictionary.

If I ask myself what reference works have we been given over the last forty-two years, the answer has to be “very many, but far from all that we need.” If I ask myself what is most lacking, the answer that forces itself to the front is still “an adequate bibliography.” To be sure, several good bibliographical tools have appeared, such as those by Stankiewicz and Worth, Matejka, Moiseenko & Gadani, and the Soviet series *Slavjanskoe jazykoznanie*. The MLA and UNESCO bibliographies include a lot, but far from all, of the Slavic material appearing. All the works listed and many others help, but there is no general bibliography in the field that meets the three criteria of being comprehensive, up-to-date, and reliable.

Probably the best of the works named in the preceding paragraph is, in my opinion, Stankiewicz and Worth, but it still has three shortcomings. First, it is only a *selected* bibliography, not a comprehensive one. Second, it is not annotated. Finally, it only goes up to 1962. None of these points is listed as a reproach to the authors. Given the time and resources that Stankiewicz and Worth had at their disposal, comprehensiveness and annotations were not realistic options. Any printed bibliography becomes outdated by the passage of time. The MLA bibliography, which is now continuously updated online, eliminates this problem, but the online version only goes back a couple of decades and thus lacks much indispensable material (in addition to that which the original bibliography omitted by accident).

Probably very few of you would dispute the need for better bibliographical control in our field. The issue at hand now is how to remedy the situation not just on an interim basis, but permanently. The first questions that require an answer are, what sorts of bibliographies do we need, and how shall we see that they are produced? My suggestions follow.

An updated version of Stankiewicz and Worth would be extremely valuable, but it would still have to leave out much material that would be invaluable to some users. By its very nature, a selective bibliography can never satisfy all needs. The most useful tool would be not a selective, but a comprehensive bibliography, which could then easily be shortened to provide selected bibliographies for specific needs. This shortening could be accomplished on-line in the same way that one now does an electronic search: by searching for certain key words and selectors, although it would be even easier if certain information were included in the original entry in the data base. For printed versions of a bibliography, a scholar could do more precise separation.

Annotations of a factual nature can greatly enhance a bibliography. I still remember how, years ago, I eagerly awaited the arrival of a new book called *Istorija bolgarskogo sklonenija*. When I opened it, however, I found not the general study seemingly promised by the title, but a study of nominal declension in four manuscripts of the 14th century. How many times have you been baffled by such titles as “Eshche ob istorii odnogo slavjanskogo literaturnogo jazyka” or “Aspects of the Structure of Lower Slobbovian?” All these ambiguities could be eliminated by brief and objective annotations.

Evaluation of works can be greatly facilitated by a listing of reviews, which allow the user to see the opinions of other scholars about the work. The fact that Stankiewicz and Worth listed so many reviews is one of the many things that make it so valuable.

The utility of a bibliography can also be increased by observing what might be termed the “spill-over” principle. Since the work of many of us spills over into adjoining fields which usually do not have comprehensive and up-to-date bibliographies, a truly useful Slavic bibliography should include materials on such fields as Baltic linguistics, Balkan linguistics, and medieval studies. The principle for including items in these adjoining fields should be, initially at least, that if they occur in a journal whose contents are included in the Slavic bibliography, then

works in “spill-over” fields should also be included. The percentage of additional items is not likely to be especially large, and the benefits of knowing that a given publication has been fully searched will be significant.

Another principle should be that of complete excerpting. When an issue of a journal is put into the data base, every article and review in it of interest to Slavic linguists and philologists should be included. This does not mean including articles about literature or art or music, but it does mean doing a complete entry of all relevant items in order to avoid gaps and omissions. When the scholar doing the inputting is not able to annotate certain articles properly or does not read the language in question or is uncertain about some things, the article can be marked for the later attention of a specialist.

2.1. Within the past few years it has become feasible for the first time to produce and make available a bibliography that is both comprehensive and continuously up-to-date. The personal computer and the Web are of course the two factors that allow this great advance. Although printed bibliographies can still be produced for those people who do not have access to or who do not wish to use the Web, it remains a fact that on one hand a printed bibliography is inevitably out of date by the time it is printed, and that on the other, any attempt at a moderately comprehensive bibliography of Slavic linguistics and philology will be too large for most publishers to produce and too expensive for most people to buy. Selected bibliographies will still be of use for some purposes, especially when a person who is an expert in one field wishes to investigate fields in which they are not an expert. Libraries will probably continue to buy printed bibliographies on major subjects, such as Russian.

If one wished to produce an updated version of Stankiewicz and Worth or Matejka or any of the other bibliographies mentioned above, one would have to start by reentering the material of the original into a word processor or database. Now, however, by judicious selection of the form of entry, we can produce a body of work which will be transmitted for an indefinite length of time without reentry of the data. Selection of the form of entry is the key. Many of us have worked with microcomputers long enough to see older materials become obsolete and unusable. In fact, one of the reasons I began to think again about bibliography for this paper is that when I prepared to teach my survey course on the South Slavic languages this year, I had to reenter much of my course bibliography, even though my word processor for this type of work has been Word Perfect for twelve years. During the time since I started the bibliography and course notes, the symbol set for Word Perfect has undergone changes. The fonts which I used from 1988 until 1997 no longer work well in WP 7, 8, and 9, so retyping became necessary.

Relatively recent developments, above all the adoption of Unicode, XML, and SGML, give us reason to believe that materials can now be entered once and for all if the process is sufficiently well thought out in advance. Deciding what to include and how to encode it will be a major task, requiring consultations with librarians, data processing specialists, and many others. I do not propose to attempt to spell out the details here. It would take too long, and I simply don't know all of the questions, let alone the answers. The first task in the project will be to resolve these questions.

2.2. It is clear that there will have to be a central database to which materials are submitted electronically by many contributors. Such an ambitious project will not succeed unless there are many scholars cooperating. Grants can probably be secured for part of the work, but most will have to be done on a continuing volunteer basis, with a central coordinator for the volunteers. This, as I understand it, is the basic principle of the *MLA Bibliography*. By breaking up the work

into small enough discrete parts, scholars can volunteer as little as ten hours per year and still be of real help.

There is already an excellent model for what I am proposing. It is the computer operating system Linux, where programmers from all the world contribute, but a central authority (in this case, Linus Torvalds) has final authority over what goes into the authorized version of the program. I believe that the bibliography I am proposing has a natural home: Indiana University and Slavica Publishers. The *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies* began at Indiana nearly fifty years ago, thanks to the foresight and dedication of a great scholar and benefactor of Slavic studies, J. Thomas Shaw. Now Indiana can take the initiative again. This does not mean that a faculty member at Indiana has to take primary responsibility. I am well aware that the Slavic linguists at Indiana have a lot of responsibilities already (including Slavica; I thank them again for providing Slavica with a good home, intelligent leadership, and bright prospects for the twenty-first century). Slavica and Indiana can provide a continuing home, hold the copyright to the database (thereby preventing inappropriate and unauthorized additions or deletions, just as Linus Torvalds does), and provide a server for the Web version. Other scholars from other universities can be coordinators for the individual sections of the bibliography, and a scholar from outside can also be the initial overall coordinator. The coordinators will change from time to time, but the work can go on under the aegis of Slavica and Indiana.

Many details will have to be worked out to make this proposal a reality, but I believe that it should and must be started immediately. I am willing to devote time to it, and I call upon my colleagues, both those in Bloomington for the conference and those reading this around the world, to join the work. Many hands make light work.

[This paper ends here now, but the final version for publication will contain much more. Stay tuned! — gf and CEG]

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