

Trubetzkoy, N.S. (Nikolai Sergeevich); (b. 1890, d. 1938; Russian), lecturer at Moscow University (1915-1916), Rostov-on-Don University (1918), Sofia University (1920-1922), finally professor of Slavic linguistics at Vienna University (1922-1938). One of the founding fathers of phonology and a key theorist of the Prague School. (See Also: *Jakobson, Roman; *Martinet, André).

Trubetzkoy's life was blighted by persecution. Born in Moscow of aristocratic, academic parents, Trubetzkoy (whose names have been transliterated variously) was a prince, and, after study and an immediate start to a university career in Moscow, he was forced to flee by the 1917 revolution; he subsequently also had to leave Rostov and Sofia. On settling in Vienna, he became a geographically distant member of the Prague Linguistic Circle.

It is at times difficult to tease his ideas apart from those of his friend *Jakobson, who ensured that his nearly-finished *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (1939) was posthumously published. Trubetzkoy had previously published substantial work in several fields, but this was his *magnum opus*. It summarised his previous phonological work and stands now as the classic statement of Prague School phonology, setting out an array of phonological ideas, several of which still characterise debate on phonological representations. Through it, the publications which preceded it, his work at conferences and general enthusiastic networking, Trubetzkoy was crucial in the development of phonology as a discipline distinct from phonetics, and the change in phonological focus from diachrony to synchrony. He argued that form (contrast, systemic patterning) must be studied separately from substance (acoustics, articulation), although he did not see the two as completely separate, unlike *Hjelmslev.

Phonology, he argued, should deal with the linguistic function of sounds (their ability to signal differences in word-meaning), as members of phonemic oppositions. The phoneme was his smallest phonological unit, as 'oppositions' existed only within a language's system, not quite the autonomous segmental building blocks, which they later became as the 'distinctive features' of *Jakobson, and through him, Generative Phonology (originated by *Chomsky and Halle).

He also investigated the neutralisation of contrast, which helped reveal segmental (un-)markedness, as the first to consider these subsequently extremely important ideas, and introduced the notion of 'functional load' (later developed by *Martinet). He considered each system in its own right, but was also crucially concerned with establishing universal explanatory laws of phonological organisation (such as the symmetrical patterning in vowel systems), and his work involves the discussion of hundreds of languages, including their prosody.

Having fled persecution before, the Nazi annexation of Austria proved too much. A brutal Gestapo raid on his home aggravated a heart condition and he died of a heart attack in hospital. His legacy lives on in the thriving field of phonology.

Primary work

(1939). *Grundzüge der Phonologie*. Travaux du cercle linguistique de Prague 7. Christiane Baltaxe, trans. *Principles of Phonology*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1969.

Chapman, S. & Routledge, P. (eds) (2005) *Key Thinkers in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pp 267-268.

Further reading

Anderson, Stephen (1985). *Phonology in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jakobson, Roman (1939). 'Nécrologie Nikolaj Sergejevič Trubetzkoy'. *Acta Linguistica* 1. Reprinted in Thomas Sebeok (ed.) (1966). *Portraits of Linguists*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 526-542.

Jakobson, Roman (ed.) (1958). 'Autobiographical notes on N.S. Trubetzkoy'. Appendix to second edition of Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge*; also in Baltaxe's (1969) translation.

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NB: The (*See Also*'s) at the start, and asterisked names in the text refer only to other linguists who feature in *Key Thinkers in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*. It's a good book – buy it!

Further further reading and notes

(Titles and things which I could not include in the published version due to constraints on space: 500 words in total...)

- Much has been written about Trubetzkoy and Prague School phonology. Some interesting pieces are:
Halle, Morris (1987). 'Remarks on the Scientific Revolution in Linguistics 1926-1929'. In Krystyna Pomorska *et al.* (eds) *Language, Poetry and Poetics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Fischer-Jørgensen, Eli (1975). *Trends in Phonological Theory*. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag.
Jakobson, Roman *et al.* (eds.) (1975). *N.S. Trubetzkoy's Letters and Notes*. The Hague: Mouton.
Simpson, J.M.Y. (1995) 'Prague School Phonology'. In E.F.K. Koerner and R.E. Asher (eds.) *Concise History of the Language Sciences*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Trubetzkoy was a true internationalist, and had contact with most of the other well known thinkers in phonology of the period, including Sapir, Hjelmslev, Jones and Firth. He corresponded widely and was a serious organiser, aiming to work with those who agreed with him that a truly 'phonological' approach was necessary. He worked to set up an 'International Phonology Association'.
- He published a number of articles on phonological issues while at Vienna (in Russian, French and German), many in the TCLP; most of the key points in them were incorporated into *Grundzüge der Phonologie*.