
[102] ***Roman Jakobson and the Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School***

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Through a study of both published academic texts and still little-known interviews conducted with several protagonists of the Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow semiotic school (Yu.M. Lotman, Vyach.Vs. Ivanov, T.M. Nikolaeva, B.A. Uspensky, amongst others), we intend to show how the participants of this school understood the considerable and particular importance of Roman Jakobson's works for the development of their basic theoretical concepts (such as the notions of language, semiotics, text, sign, word, etc.). In a sense, the most important protagonists of the Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow semiotic school could be considered "Jakobsonians" on the basis of at least two parameters: 1) their fixed opposition to the official Soviet ideology (to a considerable degree, it was the insistence on maintaining this position on the part of Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow researchers that allowed for the creation of a school as such); 2) the very broad circle of scientific subjects in which these scholars were interested. It is this latter attitude that has made it possible to speak, at present, about the particular semiotics of this school, in comparison with more "traditional" semiotic studies of signs and sign systems. On the other hand, Jakobson himself took much academic inspiration from the works of the Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow semioticians. He showed particular interest in their research in the fields of linguistic reconstruction (considered by some Soviet semioticians to be the strongest aspect of their research) and of the asymmetry of the brain as it relates to language activity. Numerous explicit and implicit references to the works of certain Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow semioticians made by Jakobson himself will be analyzed in the paper in light of the particular political and ideological situations that have arisen in Eastern and Central Europe over the last century. The previously unknown interviews support our emphasis on a new vision of the Moscow-Tartu / Tartu-Moscow semiotic school in particular, and of the role played by Jakobson in the evolution of the language sciences during the 20th century in general. At the same time, our research leads us once again to raise the question of the singular character of the interview as material for research in the history of linguistics, rethinking the problem of the particular treatment of such texts (publishing, commenting upon, translating, etc.) by historians of the language sciences.