Reviews

Biryła, M.V. and Suprun, A.Ja., eds. *Pytaŋni bilinhvizmu i ŭzajemadziejania moŭ. 'Navuka i technika', Minsk, 1982. 253 pp.*

Of all the union republics the BSSR has the highest proportion of non-Russians (62.1% according to the 1970 census) who claim Russian either as their native language or as a second language; indeed, it is asserted that for many Byelorussians Russian is a second 'native' language. From a Soviet point of view there are obvious advantages in this situation, since it helps to reinforce Russian's understandably dominant position among the languages of the USSR, a position which the foreword to the volume under review attributes to a 'deep respect for the Russian people and a genuine desire for access to the achievements of world culture, including Russian culture'. Be that as it may, bilingualism which involves two languages as closely related as Byelorussian and Russian inevitably brings difficulties along with its advantages. The very similarity of the two languages, while it self-evidently facilitates the acquisition of Russian by a Byelorussian and vice versa, leads to a high level of interference, in either direction, in phonetics and morphology no less than in lexis and semantics. Such interference — the word is used here in its linguistic rather than its political sense — inhibits the attainment of what is referred to in the foreword to this volume as 'symmetrical bilingualism' i.e. the ability to use one or other language as necessary without difficulty and without mistakes. It is to this problem that the collection of articles is primarily addressed.

The nine articles are: E.R. Sabalenka, 'Nacyjanalny skład nasielnictva Bielarusi' (pp.6-17); A.I. Źuraŭski, 'Dvuchmoŭje i šmatmoŭje ŭ historii Bielarusi' (pp. 18-49); A. Ja. Michnievič, 'Funkcyi movy i maŭleńnia i prablemy biełaruska-ruskaha dvuchmoŭja' (pp.50-75); A. Ja. Suprun, H.P. Klimienka, 'Niekatoryja psichalinhvistyčnyja asablivaści biełaruska-ruskaha dvuchmoŭja' (pp.76-105); P.P. Šuba, 'Mižmoŭnaja biełaruska-ruskaja amanimija i paranimija' (pp.106-31); A.I. Pađužny,

'Bijałahičnyja i sacyjalnyja ašpiekty hukavoha řadu movy' (pp.132-142); Ł.C. Vyhonnaja, 'Prablema indyvidualnaha ŭ sacyjalnietyčny' (pp.143-75); P.V. Sadoŭski, 'Z'javy fanietyčnaj interferencyi va ŭmovach biełaruska-ruskaha bilinhvizmu' (pp.176-228); A.F. Manajenkava, 'Ab niekatorych špiecyfičnych z'javach ruska-biełaruskich moŭnych kantaktaŭ u halinie leksiki i siemantyki' (pp.229-62).

Sabalenka's article is a straightforward, factual account of the ethnic composition of the population of the BSSR which is presumably intended to serve as a background for the articles which follow. According to the 1979 census Byelorussians comprised 79.1% of the population, followed by Russians (11.9%), Poles (4.2%), Ukrainians (2.4%). The most mixed population is found in the Hrodna region, where nearly a quarter of the population is Polish; the least mixed in the Minsk region. Russians are found predominantly in the towns, Poles in the countryside. In comparing the ethnic mix over the course of the 20th century the author notes — without comment — the substantial decline in the Jewish population from 13.7% in 1897 to 1.4% in 1979. Źuraŭski's article, likewise, is not concerned with a 'problem' of contemporary bilingualism. It is in the nature of a scholarly, but familiar and uncontentious survey of the history of bilingualism and multilingualism in Byelorussia, in which a considerable amount of attention is devoted to the place of the Byelorussian and Polish languages within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Źuraŭski's conclusion is that for Byelorussia the *šmatmoŭje* of previous centuries has given way in modern times to a characteristic Byelorussian-Russian *dvuchmoŭje*.

The articles by both Michnievič and Suprun and Klimienka are mainly concerned with questions of theory, the former being — to this reviewer at least — somewhat impenetrable. Michnievič attempts to draw rather theoretical distinctions

between *mová* and *maŭleńnie*, distinctions which may well be very interesting from a purely theoretical point of view but which do not appear to tell us anything very useful about a given language or — since this is the point of the collection of articles under review — bilingualism. Indeed, it is only towards the end of Michnievič's article that much reference is made to bilingualism, and then what is said makes depressingly familiar reading. Though it is acknowledged that Byelorussian is still used in all spheres of life, Michnievič goes on to add that account must be taken of the role of Russian as 'the language of a great fraternal nation, the language of relations between both nationalities and nations, i.e. a language with specific functions *peculiar to it alone*' (my italics — *PJM*). This sad reflection on the status of Byelorussian in present-day Byelorussia is unfortunately backed up by a table which purports to show that among 28 linguistic situations involving public utterance only in three — funeral orations, formal speeches at table, and oral recounting of everyday events — is Byelorussian used as often as Russian. The bulk of the article by Suprun and Klimienka is taken up with a discussion on what exactly constitutes linguistic interference (attention is paid to the theories of Weinreich, Leont'ev, Osgood and Erwin et al.) and the authors conclude that there is a need for greater terminological exactitude in defining interference from a psychological point of view. With no doubt unintended irony, given the highly theoretical nature of their article, they then add that at the same time the most important thing, particularly in the context of Byelorussia, is to define more precisely the 'actually existing phenomena connected with bilingualism'.

Perhaps the most interesting — and certainly the most factually informative — article in the collection is Šuba's analysis of interlingual homonymy and paronymy, which includes a useful comparative-synchronic classification of the c.500 pairs of Byelorussian and Russian words which can be seen as interlingual homonyms. Šuba uses this term to define 1) words of common East Slavonic/Slavonic/Indo-European origin whose meanings in the two languages have diverged to such an extent that the connection between them is not always readily made (e.g. бич); 2) the coincidence of what is a loan-word in one language with a native word in the other (e.g. вейка); 3) homonyms which have arisen

through a phonetic or grammatical change in one of the two languages (e.g. уезд). His terminology, however, sometimes lacks precision. Thus, he does not always distinguish sufficiently clearly between homonyms and paronyms, including under the latter heading some pairs which, by conventional definition, belong under the former and vice versa. Furthermore, Šuba's definition of what constitutes an interlingual homonym is sufficiently broad to include *faux amis* in which the bilingual speaker of Byelorussian and Russian has, in effect, to make a mental phonetic or grammatical adjustment in order to perceive two similar forms as being homonymous, i.e. his definition includes pairs such as BR рэч — R речь, BR калёсы — R колеса which are neither homophones nor homomorphs. Such criticisms notwithstanding, Šuba's article (unlike some others in this collection) does at least serve a useful function in drawing attention to practical examples of potential confusion for bilingual speakers of Byelorussian and Russian.

Of the remaining articles in the collection those by Pađužny (on biological and social aspects of a language's sound system) and Vyhonnaja (on the question of the individual in sociophonetics) seem to have only marginal relevance to bilingualism — the latter, in particular, is concerned almost entirely with individual variations in stress and pronunciation within one language; while the article by Manajenkava is confined to a rather narrow area — the influence of Byelorussian on the language of native Russian settlers in the Vietka region. The article by Sadoŭski describes, in some detail, the results of a number of experiments conducted with a variety of groups of Byelorussian-Russian bilinguals (differing as to place of abode, age, sex, education etc.) in an attempt to assess the interference of Byelorussian phonetics in their spoken Russian. The problems encountered are the expected ones (e.g. the pronunciation of Russian ч', p', r as Byelorussian ч, p, g, a tendency to pronounce unstressed vowels in keeping with native norms) and Sadoŭski reaches no startling, or even unexpected, conclusions.

All in all, a somehow disappointing book, typical of many of the *zbornik* type, in that it seems unable to make up its mind as to whether to concern itself with abstract, theoretical questions or the more concrete, practical phenomena of bilingualism in the context of Soviet Byelorussia.

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