



The Philosophy and Practice of Foreign Language Education

The Contribution of L. V. Ščerba

Olga Campbell-Thomson

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Translated and edited with an introduction
and annotations by Olga Campbell-Thomson

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*For Don
ti amo e anche dopo*

Preface

This volume contains selected writings of the Russian linguist Lev Vladimirovič Ščerba (1880–1944). Taken together, these texts outline Ščerba's philosophy of foreign language education and his practical recommendations for teaching as underpinned by this philosophy. All the essays were written in the late 1930s and early 1940s, towards the end of Ščerba's life, and were specifically intended by the author as a systematisation of his outlook on foreign language education in the light of his theoretical conception of language formulated in the early 1930s.

The present translation is the first rendering into English of the selected texts. A key aim of providing English-language readers with access to the original historical sources collected in this volume is to broaden perspectives on the development of modern foreign language education as an academic field beyond Western Europe and the United States. The task, however, is not merely to add to the assemblage of available original sources in the field of language education.

The teaching of foreign languages and the training of foreign language teachers have long been characterised by a strong emphasis on teaching

‘methods’—often lacking theoretical or empirical basis—that have proliferated in a confusing and contradictory succession of ‘fads’. As a consequence, the field of modern language teaching is in dire need of deeper historical understanding and a major rethinking of its underlying theoretical foundations. The proposed volume of original sources responds to this need by demonstrating the productive relationship between linguistic theory and practice. Above all, these essays by one of leading but overlooked European linguists highlight the fact that modern language education is—or should be—an applied branch of general linguistics.

In addition to offering a comprehensive account of the discipline of language education as an applied branch of general linguistics, this collection provides insights into the emerging tradition of foreign language education at a crucial juncture within the wider European process of the professionalisation of modern language teaching and parallel developments in the national and historical context of Soviet Russia. Overall, the disciplinary, cultural, and historical knowledge condensed in Ščerba’s texts broadens our understanding of the interconnectedness of disciplinary developments in various historical and local contexts. As such, it makes an important contribution to the historiography of language education as an academic field, and one, I would argue, is essential to inform current and future developments in this discipline.

The ideas advanced in Ščerba’s texts are of direct relevance to educational policymakers, teacher trainers, methodologists, and foreign language practitioners. They should be of particular interest to readers in Anglophone countries where foreign languages remain on the periphery of all levels of education.

Astana, Kazakhstan

Olga Campbell-Thomson

Acknowledgements

Producing a book is an onerous even if a rewarding undertaking. This book is certainly no exception, representing the outcome of many years of thinking triggered by various experiences and interactions with many people.

I would like to begin by thanking my professor, Persi Borisovič Gurwič, for introducing me to the name and scholarship of Lev Vladimirovič Ščerba while I was an undergraduate. Professor Gurwič delivered a series of lectures on the history of language teaching with a combination of grace, wit, and seriousness that left an indelible impression. My joy in language learning and linguistic scholarship was further invigorated by my first academic mentor, Tamara Aniščuk, an expert in German philology. The compelling teaching and infectious quest for knowledge of these teachers laid the foundations for my enduring interest in language education and further academic studies.

My development as a scholar is largely due to the qualities of the exceptional academic advisors I had the privilege to work with and learn from during my postgraduate studies. Each of these professors, Phil Glenn, Helen Gunter, and Mel Ainscow, represented something special

about the craft of academic research and writing. They taught me the value of originality and rigour in research and also helped me understand that the worth and enjoyment of scholarly work can only stem from a genuine interest driving this work. I continue to draw inspiration from their engaging, honest, and provocative prose and ideas. And, yes, I have abided by their advice, being motivated to pursue my work on this book because the subject fascinates me and because I believe in the worth of delivering the scholarship of Ščerba to an English-language readership.

The interest shown in my work by colleagues was crucial in my decision to develop this work further into a monograph. My belief that Ščerba's contributions to the field of modern language education retain their relevance was greatly bolstered by Professor Kay Livingston and the editors of the *Curriculum Journal*, who expressed an interest in publishing my first translation of Ščerba's writing with a critical introduction putting his work in the current educational context. A detailed review of this publication by Dr. Kevin Williams helped me in my further reflections on Ščerba's scholarship and encouraged me to expand my translation project, ultimately leading to the production of this collection of Ščerba's essays.

Once this book entered its final stage, a dedicated proofreader, Matt Jones, read through bits of my writing and meticulously pointed out grammatical errors or bibliographical omissions. Beyond that time-consuming task, he offered me the encouragement and temerity to pursue.

Michael, Evelyn, and Ian deserve grand thanks for their love and their pride in my work which often sustained me throughout the writing process.

As for my husband Don who has been a source of inspiration and continuing support, words are neither necessary nor could ever suffice to express my gratitude.

Notes on Transliteration

Russian proper names and titles of Russian works appear in transliteration as follows:

а	a
б	b
в	v
г	g
д	d
е	e (after consonants) je (in all other cases)
ё	o (after 'ж', 'ч', 'ш', 'щ') jo (in all other cases)
ж	ž
з	z
и	i ji (after 'б')
й	j
к	k

л	l
м	m
н	n
о	o
п	p
р	r
с	s
т	t
у	u
ф	f
х	h
ц	c
ч	č
ш	š
щ	šč
ъ	”
ы	y
ь	,
э	è
ю	ju
я	ja

Exceptions are the names that are more familiar to English-speaking audiences in another form.

When quoting from published English-language sources, original spellings are retained.

For place names, the standard spelling as found in the geographical names database of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names is employed.

Illustrative examples of language usage drawn from various languages are presented in translated texts in their original graphic form.

Translator's Notes

In translating the essays in this collection, I have sought to preserve Ščerba's distinctive style with its combination of terminological rigour and colloquial-sounding usage, including his gendered linguistic markers and recurrent use of personal pronouns and clichéd expressions. I have also retained the numbering to which Ščerba frequently resorted in his texts in order to systematise his material. Regarding sentence structure, however, I have sought to balance the general preference for conciseness in English syntax with the tendency to greater structural complexity and length in Russian sentences while still remaining faithful to Ščerba's style of expression and occasional verbosity.

All references to sources and footnotes in Ščerba's original texts are preserved in my English translation. Wherever necessary, I have added my own clarifications of terminology, as well as historical and cultural references, either within square brackets in the body text or in footnotes indicated by superscript Roman numerals in-text.

Ščerba's argumentation is frequently supported by examples of language usage drawn mainly from Russian, French, and German. In cases where English translation is not required to convey these points,

such examples are presented in translated texts in their original graphic form. Where required to support the reader's understanding of the overall argument, I have provided English translations of Ščerba's Russian-language examples, as well as additional morpho-syntactic notations. These added features might have rendered the English texts cumbersome in places, however, such segments are offered mainly for illustrative purposes in order not to obfuscate Ščerba's ideas, which he typically presented in a straightforward and lucid manner.

Notes on my Rendering of Key Terminology

English does not encode the distinction found in Russian between *vospitanie* and *obrazovanie* as discrete concepts within the broad notion of education. Thus, whereas *vospitanie* denotes a person's worldview, behaviour, and relations to others, *obrazovanie* refers to a person's knowledge, skills, and capabilities for intellectual work, their ability to generalise, etc. In my translations I have chosen to render both *vospitanie* and *obrazovanie* (as well as their derivatives, such as *vospitatel'nyj* and *obrazovatel'nyi*) as *education (educational)* in English. Yet, where it was necessary to mark the distinction between the two Russian concepts, I opted for the English term *pedagogical* to convey the meaning of *vospitatel'nyj*.

One of the key terms used in Ščerba's writings selected for this collection is *metodika*, connoting methods of teaching foreign languages. Here I have opted to translate this in English as *educational methodology for foreign languages*.

The role of learners' own languages in the process of foreign language acquisition is discussed in a number of Ščerba's essays. As the phrase *rodnoj jazyk* does not have a precise equivalent in English, however, I have translated this as *learner's native language, mother-tongue, native tongue*, or simply *Russian*, depending on the context.

Historical References and Terminology

The city of Saint Petersburg (spelled St Petersburg throughout), which was the capital city of the Russian Empire from 1712 to 1918, changed its name several times during Ščerba's lifetime. St Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 at the beginning of World War One, then Leningrad in 1924 after the death of Lenin, and again St Petersburg in 1991 after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. These changes have been reflected in the university's name at different points in history and, depending on the specific timeframe, the university where Ščerba worked throughout most of his life is referred to as Petersburg University, Petrograd University or Leningrad University.

The term 'soviet' (Russian spelling *совет*), literally meaning 'council', was a traditional term used by the Tsar's (Emperor's) Soviet (Council) of Ministers. The new government established in Russia in 1917–1918 continued to use the term in its new nomenclature. The term 'commissar' came into wide use in 1917 for special officials of the new revolutionary authorities, especially of the Soviets. These terms have been embedded in the names of *Sovnarkom* and *Narkompros*, which are frequently referenced in this book.

Sovnarkom: On 26 October 1917, Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, formed his own government, the Soviet (Council) of People's Commissars, which was often referred to as *Sovnarkom*, from the first syllable of the three words in Russian, *Sovet Narodnyx Komissarov*. *Sovnarkom* was made up of twelve commissars (i.e. ministers or chairmen) in charge of twelve commissariats (i.e. ministries or commissions), with Lenin as the Chairman of the Council.

Narkompros is an abbreviation of *Narodny Komissariat Prosvěščenija* (People's Commissariat for Enlightenment). In 1918, *Sovnarkom* ordered the transfer of elementary, secondary, and higher educational institutions to the Commissariat's jurisdiction. Anatolij Lunačarskij (1875–1933) was the first People's Commissar of Enlightenment and remained in his office from 1917 to 1929.

Calendar Change. A new calendar was introduced on 24 January (6 February), 1918.¹

The Western European Calendar, which has also been referred to as the Gregorian calendar and was introduced in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, was not adopted in Russia until 1918. The Julian calendar, which was behind the Gregorian calendar by approximately 12–13 days, had been used in Russia until the Decree of 24 January (6 February), 1918. The decree stipulated that the Julian date was to be written in parentheses after the Gregorian date until 1 July 1918. This explains why two different dates might be encountered in Russian historical records. Thus, for example, the announcement by the party of Bolsheviks proclaiming itself the sole ruling body in the country has been dated as 25 October 1917 (“old style” or Julian Calendar) and 7 November 1917 (“new style” or Gregorian Calendar).

¹ Decree “Introduction of a New Calendar”. January 24 (February 6) 1918. Source: *Documents of Soviet History. Volume I. The Triumph of Bolshevism 1917–1919*, ed. Rex A. Wade. (Academic International Press, 1991).

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Chapter 2. Building the Scientific Foundations of an Educational Methodology for Foreign Languages

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Chapter 3. The Relationship between Educational Methodology for Foreign Languages and the Needs of Society

Щерба Л. В. «Зависимость Методики Преподавания Иностранных Языков от Состояния Общества и его Задач». В сборнике Щерба Л. В. *Преподавание Иностранных Языков в Средней Школе. Общие Вопросы Методики*, под ред. И. В. Рахманова, Москва, Изд. Академии Педаг. Наук РСФСР, 1947 г.

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Chapter 7. The Interrelationship Between Grammar and Lexis from a Methodological Perspective

Щерба Л. В. «Грамматика и ее Взаимоотношение с Лексикой с Методической Точки Зрения». В сборнике Щерба Л. В. *Языковая Система и Речевая Деятельность*. Редакторы Л. Р. Зиндер и М. И. Матусевич. Ленинград, Изд. Наука, 1974 г.

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Chapter 8. Phonetics of the French Language: An outline of French Pronunciation in Comparison with Russian

Щерба Л. В. *Фонетика Французского Языка: Очерк Французского Произношения в Сравнении с Русским*. Пособие для студентов факультетов иностранных языков. Глава 1. Ленинград, Москва, 1937.

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Chapter 9. The Relationship Between the Mother Tongue and a Foreign Language

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Note: In identifying bibliographic references and quotations related to Ščerba, I have drawn both on my own research and on the notes by Margarita I. Matusević and Lev R. Zinder, who edited and published several collections of Scherba's writings posthumously, including the following edition:

Zinder, Lev V. and Margarita I. Matusević. “Spisok Trudov Akademika L. V. Ščerby” [Works by Academician L. V. Ščerba], in *Jazykovaja Sistema i Rečevaja Dejatel'nost'* [Language system and speech activity], 413-418. Leningrad: Nauka, 1974

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About the Author

Dr Olga Campbell-Thomson trained as a language teacher before obtaining her Master's degrees in Linguistics and Speech Communication in Russia and in the United States. She completed her doctoral studies at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. Over the past thirty years, her career has encompassed research and teaching in the multilingual and multicultural environments of the United States, Cyprus, Qatar, and the United Kingdom. She has an enduring interest in language education and her current research is focused on the history of teaching and learning modern foreign languages.

Abbreviations

<i>AN</i>	<i>Akademija Nauk</i> [Academy of Sciences]
<i>APN</i>	<i>Akademija Pedagogičeskix Nauk RSFSR</i> [Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the Russian Federation]
<i>IJaŠ</i>	<i>Inostrannyj Jazyk v Škole</i> [Foreign Language at School]
<i>MP</i>	<i>Ministerstvo Prosveščeniya</i> (Ministry of Public Education)
<i>MRSSŠ</i>	<i>Materialy po Reforme Srednej Školy</i> [Materials on the Reform of Secondary School]
<i>OLIPNJa</i>	<i>Sankt-Peterburgskoe Obščestvo Lic Interesujuščixsja Prepodavanijem Novyx Jazykov</i> [St Petersburg Society of Individuals Interested in Modern Language Education]
<i>OLJa</i>	<i>Otdelenie Literatury i Jazyka (AN)</i> [Section of Literature and Language]
<i>ORJaS</i>	<i>Otdelenie Russkogo Jazyka i Slovesnosti (AN)</i> [Section of Russian Language and Philology]
<i>PMVUZ</i>	<i>Pedagogičeskij Muzej Voенno-Učebnyx Zavedenij</i> [The Pedagogical Museum of Military Educational Establishments]
<i>ŽMNP</i>	<i>Žurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveščeniya</i> (Collection of Decrees of the Ministry of National Enlightenment)



1

Introduction

1. The professionalisation of modern foreign language education evolved alongside socio-economic and political developments unfolding across vast imperial territories and newly emerging nation-states in Europe in the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. Ever-wider access to secondary education, prompted by economic growth and the democratisation of societal structures, coincided with an increased focus on the study of living languages among European philologists. Texts written in classical languages ceased to be regarded as the principal depository of knowledge as scholarly and literary production in major European languages now far superseded the works of ancient authors in volume and relevance. With these developments came a growing mindfulness of modern languages as a subject worthy of attention in the context of formal education. The expansion of international business, trade, and travel further contributed to increasing awareness of the need for modern foreign languages on a mass scale.

The institutionalisation of modern language teaching entailed conceptualising and formulating the purposes and processes of such teaching.

As numerous ideas about language teaching and learning emerged, flourished, or declined over time, each impacted the complex and meandering development of the field to varying degrees.

The contributions of Russian (and European) linguist Lev Vladimirovič Ščerba (1880–1944) have certainly had a lasting impact on the field of modern foreign language education. A theoretical linguist with a prolific research agenda encompassing phonetics, phonology, lexicography, philology, and dialectological studies, Ščerba had a lifelong commitment to practical aspects of language education. As the first Russian linguist to attempt to establish the practical field of foreign language teaching on a scientific basis, Ščerba formulated a set of principles underlying foreign language instruction at various levels of the educational structure. Many of these principles were implemented and further developed in Russia and throughout the rest of the Soviet Union. Moreover, Ščerba's scholarship in the area of language education also served as a point of departure for subsequent research in the growing field of applied linguistics in the Soviet state. The innovativeness and influence of Ščerba's prodigious impact on the field of foreign language studies in his own country contributed to the firm placement of foreign languages in the basic school curriculum of the Soviet Union, the establishment of a countrywide network of specialised foreign language-medium secondary schools, and the introduction of professional training in numerous languages in higher educational institutions, with extensive courses in phonetics patterned after Ščerba's design. The many reprints of Ščerba's texts on various aspects of language education in Russian-language editions testify to the enduring relevance of Ščerba's work and continued interest in his philosophy of language education.

Widely regarded as one of the most distinguished linguists of the twentieth century, Ščerba established an international reputation with his pioneering work in the field of phonetics, especially his contribution to the development of the theory of the phoneme and his foundational work in lexicography, including the compilation of bilingual dictionaries. However, Ščerba's work on educational methodology for foreign languages has been overlooked in international debates. This is in part because he wrote primarily for a Russian-speaking audience, though also

due to external attitudes of affected perplexity towards Russian scholarship (as Ščerba himself alluded to with the phrase *rossica non leguntur*).ⁱ Although he was of course proficient in a number of European languages, Ščerba wrote most of his texts in Russian. When discussing matters of foreign language teaching, however, he emphasised that the issues he raised were common tasks of language pedagogy. Far from being parochial concerns, the ideas Ščerba advanced in his work are equally relevant and applicable in any national educational setting.

In the specific national and temporal context of Soviet Russia, Ščerba's work continued an educational tradition with a strong focus on the formative role of schooling not only in equipping students with knowledge and skills but also in forming their character and worldview. Ščerba's philosophy of language education, his practical recommendations on the sequencing of the content of foreign languages in school curricula, and his insistence on the foundational role of philological education *per se*, all contributed significantly to preserving humanistic traditions in education in Russia in spite of dramatic political and socio-economic transformations following the two revolutions of 1917. Indeed, the continuity and tradition of the educational research approach enshrined in Ščerba's philosophy of language education provide grounds for readers to reappraise prevailing accounts that focus on ruptures with the past in this period of Soviet Russia and thereby overlook some important continuities.

Ščerba's work was shaped by various strands of domestic and international developments in the area of language education, revealing the interconnectedness of seemingly divergent positions across geographical and temporal contexts. His thought is remarkable in combining multiple distinct influences on the development of the field of language studies in Europe and Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. These influences include the "linguistic lead" of phoneticians who stimulated public and official interest in reforming modern language studies across a number of European countries, as well as a commitment to the educational rationale that was central to progressive pedagogical thought in Russia. To these Ščerba added his own interest in philology as a tradition that had hitherto been eschewed by many linguists, language practitioners, and educationalists as irrelevant to the study of living languages.