WRITERS' LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS AND CREATING MYTHS ABOUT LANGUAGES: CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AND JOSEPH BRODSKY IN SEARCH OF THE 'SLAVONIC GENIUS OF LANGUAGE'

Introduction

The long tradition of making evaluative judgements about the Slavonic languages on the part of both native speakers and outside observers has led to the creation of a corpus of colourful descriptions and produced a variety of linguistic myths. From the position of 'pure' linguistic science language myths are usually considered to be prejudices, and some of them are often qualified as being akin to racism and sexism.[1] However, in the wider context of the humanities the entire range of statements of this sort, regardless of whether they give preference to one language over another, forms a significant element of the cultural history of a particular nation and hence requires not only a classification of all their possible structures and metaphoric figures, but also a thorough exploration of the cultural links and ideological roots from which they grow. Thus we have two major overlapping groups of discourses—one that is located within the framework of descriptive linguistics, and one that originates elsewhere but which incorporates the linguistic argument. Discourses of the second group are common in philology, like linguistic purism, as well as in various kinds of language-related speculations based on national stereotypes found in literature, journalism, individual reflections, oral folklore, and jokes.

This not only brings about a new interdisciplinary subject of research, but also demands appropriate methods for dealing with such multifaceted topics as judgements on languages. On the one side we have schools of linguistics, on the other side there is literary and language critique and a whole domain of discourses which incorporates individual and collective wisdom about language(s), with all possible projections onto the mental and cultural peculiarities of a particular nation. Looked at more generally, the epistemology of linguistic science comes into contact with what can be called the 'imageology'[2] of naive linguistics, creating a large area of overlap where de-

Note. All translations of quotations from sources in languages other than English, as well as instances of emphasis by the use of italics, are mine except where I have indicated that italics are used in the original version.

[1] Laury Bauer and Peter Trudgill, 'Introduction', in *Language Myths*, ed. by Laury Bauer and Peter Trudgill (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. xv–xviii (p. xvii). The purpose of this book is to expose some of these stereotypes. See the chapters 'French is a Logical Language' (pp. 23–31), or 'Italian is Beautiful, German is Ugly' (pp. 85–93).

[2] Linguistic imageology is, in our opinion, a useful term for the field of research which would cover myths and conceptual metaphors of languages as they are understood in Richard Watts,

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scriptions of the former interact with judgements of the latter. Consequently, the main purpose of research in this field would consist in seeking answers to the following questions. From and to what features of 'national world-view'[3] are linguistic links drawn? Which features of a language and which linguistic categories are selected for these links and for language-related judgements in general? What are the ideological or political roots of these links? What techniques are used in establishing these links?

Judgements on language matters made by recognized writers comprise a particularly interesting subject because the 'judges' themselves are not only sensitive and influential users of their language, but, owing to the nature of their work, have the skills and authority to speculate on these matters in ways that often go far beyond the common stereotypes. Moreover, either they openly declare the ideological motivations that lie behind their statements, or these motivations can be decoded from their aesthetic or ideological creed. Their reflections can be particularly acute if they live and work in two (or more) language environments, as was the case with Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky, two Nobel Prize winners who both spent a significant period of their creative lives as émigrés. The linguistic competence of both poets can hardly be doubted. Miłosz extensively translated from Spanish, and from and into French and English; he knew Latin and in his sixties learnt Greek and Hebrew.[4] Like Miłosz, Brodsky had extensive experience in translating poetry into Russian, mostly from English, but also from Polish, Czech, and other Slavonic languages. English, along with his native Russian, also became the main object of his linguistic observations, which are lavishly scattered throughout his prose. The two men respected each other highly as poets, and despite the age difference remained good friends from the time of their

Language Myths and the History of English (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); see the introductory chapter 'Metaphors, Myths, Ideologies and Archives', pp. 3–23. The main purpose of the studies on linguistic imageology, however, would not be checking their credibility, but rather understanding their roots and building a typology of the models they are created by. The boundaries of Slavonic linguistic imageology as a research field at the intersection of linguistics and cultural studies were briefly outlined in my paper 'Slavianskaia lingvisticheskaia imagologiia segodnia: "obrazy iazyka" i sposoby ikh sopriazheniia s mental′nost′iu i kul′turoi' at the Thirteenth International Congress of Slavists in Ljubljana, 2003; full text in Russian available at <http://dspace.gla.ac.uk/bitstream/1905/42/1/KhairovEd.pdf> [accessed 31 August 2013].

[3] I am aware of the fact that this notion as well as the notion of 'ethnic mentality' is not sufficiently well defined and too tainted by numerous speculations. For more about these concerns see Shamil Khairov, 'Kniga Nadezhdy Zharintsevoi "The Russians and their Language" (1916) i sovremennye kul′turologicheskie interpretatsii russkogo iazyka', in *Ot lingvistiki k mifu: lingvisticheskaia kul′turologia v poiskakh 'etnicheskoi mental′nosti'*, compiled by Anna Pavlova (St Petersburg: Anthology, 2013), pp. 289–315.

[4] Miłosz gives a brief account of his experience as a translator in the introduction to a collection of his translations from a number of languages in his essay 'Gorliwość tłumacza', in Czesław Miłosz, *Ogród nauk* (Paris: Instytut literacki, 1979), pp. 171–74. The role of the different languages that Miłosz encountered in his lifetime is discussed in Elena Brazgovskaia, *Cheslav Milosh: iazyk kak personazh* (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2012), pp. 108–24.

first personal contact, which was established by Miłosz's consolatory letter to Brodsky upon the arrival of the latter in the United States. As they conformed to a similar scheme—'two Slavonic writers in exile'—their linguistic experience and opinions provide us with valuable material which allows us to examine to what extent their linguistic views overlap, when they follow and when they deviate from common stereotypes, what individual descriptions of languages they come up with, and how their philosophical creed and origin might influence their judgements.

At this point it is important to make a disclaimer: this article is not about two creative biographies,[5] but is written from a different perspective. It is about the nature of language-related statements made by writers, especially by those who work in exile and with their linguistic observations contribute to language myth-making. In this article we deal only with the poets' explicit language-related statements. Linguistic metaphors and language as a motif in their poetry are not discussed here.[6]

The list of linguistic features traditionally used in mapping the metaphysics of a particular Slavonic language or in specifying the 'Slavonic linguistic perception' of the world in general ranges from detecting traces of 'national character' in semantic structure or value of a single word (the 'key-words' approach)[7] to highlighting selected typological peculiarities of a particular language system. Within the domain of grammar the following 'specific' Slavonic features are most often identified:

- free word order as a reflection of the 'flexibility of mental processes';
- the role of inflection in thought;
- a highly developed system of word formation, with special reference to expressive models of suffixation such as diminutives and augmentatives;
- the influence of grammatical gender on the perception of the outside world;
- impersonal verbs and sentences in relation to personal will and choice;
- Peculiarities of the tense and aspect system of the Slavonic verb.[8]

As will be shown, the language-related statements of Czesław Miłosz and

[5] Regarding a comparative view of the biographies of the two poets, the most remarkable work is a book by Irena Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky: Fellowship of Poets* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). The author knew both poets personally and devotes a considerable part of her book to their language attitudes. See also Bożena Karwowska, *Miłosz i Brodski: recepcja krytyczna twórczości w krajach anglojęzycznych* (Warsaw: IBL, 2000).

[6] For a treatment of the language theme in Miłosz's creative work, thought, and life from a broader perspective see Brazgovskaia, *Cheslav Milosh*.

[7] Probably the most frequently quoted source in this respect is Anna Wierzbicka, *Understanding Cultures through their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[8] See e.g. Boris Gasparov, 'Lingvistika natsional′nogo samosoznaniia', *Logos*, 14 (1999), pp. 48–67.

Joseph Brodsky reflect and refine some existing language myths, but also contain many apt descriptions and metaphors that complement these common stereotypes. Examination of these statements reveals two distinct themes: one that depicts the character of Slavonic languages, either seen individually or in contrast with other European languages, predominantly English; and the other that contrasts Polish and Russian, revealing the mechanisms of cross-evaluation when the structural differences between two languages are neutralized by their common origin and the similarity of their grammatical structure.

The 'Slavonic Genius' of Language: Polish and Russian vs. English

MIŁOSZ

The most articulate expression of Czesław Miłosz's language attitudes can be found in his collection of essays *Ogród nauk* (*Garden of Sciences*), and particularly in one essay from this collection entitled 'Język, narody' ('The Language, the Nations').[9] This essay was written as a critical response to a series of publications in the London-based newspaper *Wiadomości* in 1972–73 by the Polish émigré translator and essayist Jan Darowski. In this essay Miłosz uses the concept of the *genius of language*, invented by the leaders of the French Enlightenment and widely applied ever since in language-related contexts. Miłosz paraphrases Darowski's views as follows:

> All one needs is to have an ear in order to express one's opinion on the Slavs: the Slavonic languages—with their groups of hushing consonants, with their multi-syllable words—are clumsy and inconvenient. And they are absolutely useless in the domain of intellectual activity [. . .]. One can discern in these languages the Slavonic laziness, the individual's incapacity for independent thought, an inclination to fall into line with major movements—hence those slavophilisms, Messianisms, panslavisms etc. [. . .] Polish makes human contact with life unserious (chrząszcz brzmi w trzcinie) as if putting the fool's cap of its ć, ś, sz, and cz on words which sound solemn in other languages. 'Amour, love, or Liebe as *miłość*! Mors, death, Todt as *śmierć*! Bonheur, happiness as *ščęšče* [*sic*]!' [. . .] Every discussion [in it] quickly and irrepressibly turns into a sort of irritating quarrel, into oppressing the other's personality, into depriving the other of the right to speak. Our language does not let the speakers enjoy the easy communication with another sovereign person present in the language of the Anglo-Saxons, which is relaxed and economical, and which spares the nerves of its listeners.[10]

However, qualifying Darowski's articles as a typical Slavonic manifestation of self-deprecation, Miłosz warns readers against stigmatizing his opponent as a vulgar language determinist. In his essay he descends from the abstract to

[9] Czesław Miłosz, 'Język, narody', in Miłosz, *Ogród nauk*, pp. 121–37 (Miłosz's emphasis).

[10] Ibid., pp. 121–22. 'W Szczebrzeszynie chrząszcz brzmi w trzcinie' is the initial line of a humorous poem by Jan Brzechwa; its deliberate concentration of hissing consonants is often used as a tongue-twister.

the literary and historical grounds: he treats such linguistic speculations as an attempt at 'liberation', a search for the reasons why Poland had found herself on the margins of European civilization, and points to language as a response to the challenges of history. The Polish language is treated here by Miłosz in an ambiguous manner: on the one hand it is only a tool, the efficiency of which can be questioned in evaluative terms, while on the other it is an active subject endowed with a certain inner power and independence (an image of language widely accepted outside descriptive linguistics). Noting Darowski's accusation that Polish hampers the development of an adequate network of abstract concepts and thus puts obstacles in the way of social communication and technical progress, Miłosz does not directly refute this opinion.[11] Moreover, a few months later he makes a similar statement himself, albeit balancing it with the positive quality that Polish has of being *sensual*. Apparently adhering to the old notion that languages can be classified according to whether they are sensual (poetical) or logical, he claims that 'the Polish language is very bad at sustaining lofty flights of philosophy. Polish just *isn't concise enough*; it's *sensual*. *All abstractions sound heavy and artificial* in Polish.'[12]

In 'The Language, the Nations' Miłosz sets out his own view of the metaphysics of his native Polish as contrasted with that of English and, in some respects, French. Miłosz is convinced that English cannot serve as an ideal language for the Slavs. He champions the notion of the inner ability of a language to respond to the demands of civilization and refuses to admit that languages simply adjust and reflect the development of the latter. Miłosz points to the fields where English is left behind by its main donor, French, and lists the semantic fields that divide the metaphysics of these two languages from each other, namely, being (l'être), becoming (le devenir), and duration (la durée). He attributes to English such features as *compactness*, *solidity*, and *sobriety*, which he thinks are due to its Anglo-Saxon component. Although compactness is measurable and can refer either to the number of words needed to express an idea or to the average length of a word or sentence, the other two features are clearly relative. Some forms of compactness can become negative: the abundance of monosyllabic words, these 'verbs-for-everything' (*do*, *bring*, *make*, *speed*, *catch*, etc.), which, while being valuable in a technical civilization as useful tools for naming non-traditional phenomena, can, according to Miłosz, '*eat away at the very substance of the language*'.[13]

Another linguistic category used by Miłosz as a cultural argument is grammatical gender. He argues that English, being deprived of grammatical gender, is *isolated from nature*, *cold*, and *'bears the stamp of human loneliness*'.[14] It

[11] Ibid., p. 123.
[12] Ewa Czarnecka and Alexander Fiut, *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), p. 254.
[13] Miłosz, 'Język, narody', p. 124.
[14] Ibid.

would be difficult to find a more striking example of making a grammatical feature emanate extra-linguistic values. In the spirit of tradition, grammatical gender is used by Miłosz to highlight certain generic metaphysical qualities of the Slavonic languages, the most remarkable of which, according to him, is the strong individualizing of plants, animals, and inanimate objects. The link between grammatical and natural gender opens up the possibility of various sorts of personification and allegedly imposes a more vivid, animated, and 'ensouled' perception of the world. He notes that French also carries the mark of alienation from nature, but at least it keeps the feminine and the masculine genders, while English, which uses neuter to refer to everything except people, only stimulates such alienation.

Since grammatical gender is equally embedded in all Slavonic languages, it is easy to extend the Polish–English opposition and include all Slavonic languages, which, as will be shown later, makes the further detection of metaphysical differences between closely related languages such as Russian and Polish very difficult, especially if one wants to base them on palpable linguistic grounds. The natural and cultural connotations of grammatical gender have been a subject of observations in translation studies and studies in folklore for decades, and Miłosz's bold descriptions only draw the essence of their metaphysical potential.

BRODSKY

Depending on his needs, Brodsky could either associate a language with a given political system or, on the contrary, detach the former from the latter:

> This country [Russia], with its *magnificently inflected language capable of expressing the subtlest nuances of the human psyche*, with an incredible ethical sensitivity (a good result of its otherwise tragic history), had all the makings of a cultural, spiritual paradise, a real vessel of civilization. Instead, it became a drab hell, with a shabby materialist dogma and pathetic consumerist gropings.[15]

Here immanent features of Russian are opposed to something of a completely different nature—the Soviet environment—and in his autobiographical essay Brodsky endows the English language with values of the political system he sympathizes with. Regarding the question why he wrote this essay in English and not in his native Russian, the reason he states was to liberate his late parents from 'their captivity', 'to grant them a margin of freedom' represented by English. Despite the reassurance that 'one shouldn't equate the state with language', he associates Russian in this context with all the Soviet bureaucratic harassments his parents encountered during their unsuccessful applications to visit him in the United States. Brodsky wants to please his dead parents

[15] Joseph Brodsky, 'Less than One', in Joseph Brodsky, *'Less than One': Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 3–33 (p. 26).

by 'transferring' them to the language realm preferred by him (though not necessarily by them), suggesting that 'English offers a better semblance of afterlife.'[16] Here Brodsky follows an old formula expressed long before him: 'As England is the Land of Liberty, so is her language the Voice of Freedom.'[17]

A significant difference between the two poets on these matters is that while Miłosz highlights both strong and weak sides of English, taking a somewhat technical approach, Brodsky's gravitation towards English, as David Bethea points out, is both 'ethical' and 'aesthetic'. Bethea shows that Brodsky's 'idiosyncratic (and belatedly romantic) view of language and national character' is, in fact, a significant element of his exile creation strategy, in which, as Bethea notes, English plays the role of 'the necessary antidote to the false letter of the Soviet'.[18] It can be added that Brodsky does not stick only to this modern political opposition of the Soviet and the West, but also takes a broader view, commenting on the primeval metaphysical opposition between these two languages as representatives of two types of culture.

BRODSKY ON THE EASTERNNESS OF RUSSIAN

The 'Easternness' of Russian culture, if not of the Russian language as such, has been noted by writers and philosophers for a long time. In 1925 it attracted the attention of the young Nikolai Trubetskoi, then a leading Eurasianist, but later one of the most prominent linguists of the last century. Having emphasized the significance of the 'Mongolian certificate' for Russian culture, Trubetskoi failed, however, to provide convincing linguistic arguments in support of his Eurasianist theory.[19] Brodsky offers his own perception of Russian as a language of an Eastern nature. He indeed finds the Russian mind 'continental', and even 'claustrophobic', but where the Russian language is concerned, its Easternness, in Brodsky's view, is revealed in its predilection for rhetorical bombastic decorations, which places it among the languages of the East, in contrast to the 'concise', 'rational', 'truth-telling' English.[20] Brodsky must have known perfectly well that the statement concerning the 'truth-telling'

[16] Joseph Brodsky, 'In a Room and a Half', in Brodsky, *Less than One*, pp. 447–501 (pp. 460–61).

[17] George W. Lemon, *English Etymology; or, A Derivative Dictionary of the English Language* (London: G. Robinson, 1783); here quoted from Tony Crowley, *Language in History: Theories and Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 71.

[18] David M. Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 121.

[19] Nikolai Trubetskoi, 'O turanskom elemente v Russkoi kul'ture' (1925), repr. in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, 1 (1992), 92–106. On Trubetskoi's early writings in a wider Eurasianist framework see Patrick Sériot's critical study: Patrik Serio, *Struktura i tselostnost': ob intellektual'nykh istokakh strukturalizma v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evrope. 1920–30-e gg*. (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2001), pp. 67–86.

[20] Interview with David Bethea, in Iosif Brodskii, *Bol'shaia kniga interv'iu, sostavlenie i fotografii Valentiny Polukhinoi* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2000), pp. 505–52 (p. 541). In all further references to this volume the abbreviation *BKI* is used.

quality of English could easily be challenged: it would have sufficed to refer to Orwell, one of his beloved English authors, who wrote extensively about the corruption of language. Nevertheless, Brodsky claims that English has a core of anti-rhetoric. Furthermore, he associates English with an aspiration for global order ('стремление к мировому порядку'). He sees Russian as representing the *reflexive* and English the *rational* type of culture,[21] and sometimes relates this opposition to the opposition of *analytical* and *synthetic* which he likes to use in his language critique:

> [. . .] The English, for example, are exceedingly rational. At least, externally. That is, they often are likely to lose track of nuances, all those so-called 'loose ends.' [. . .] Just suppose that you cut through an apple and remove the skin. Now you know what is inside the apple but by the same token you lose sight of both its bulges, both its cheeks. Russian culture is interested precisely in the apple itself, taking delight in its color, the smoothness of its skin, and so forth. [. . .] Speaking crudely, these are different ways of relating to the world—*rational* and *synthetic*.[22]

Evaluating Polish and Russian

MIŁOSZ ON THE ENERGY, HEALTH, AND EUPHONICS OF POLISH

The whole gamut of language-related discourses—from single reflections to language myth-making—is full of evaluative ingredients, which traditionally take the form of metaphors of a biological, botanical, industrial, or medical character. And the further the discourse is from descriptive linguistics, the more active a role language is assigned in it. Miłosz tends to adopt a traditional approach when applying the concepts of health and vitality to the state of the Polish language. The *illness* of contemporary Polish, in Miłosz's opinion, lies in its *talkativeness* ('gadulstwo'), the quality that typologically can be matched with the 'rhetorical core' of Russian noted by Brodsky. Miłosz believes that Polish is *losing its energy* through the massive borrowing of new words. In answer to the hypothetical argument that a process of constant change is a normal phenomenon for a language, Miłosz expresses his doubts as to whether these changes are always for the better. It is worth noting that when Miłosz speculates on the subject of the energy, strength, and health of the Polish language, he in fact means Polish literature. The state of a language for him is a visible external symptom of the inner state of a literary organism. Thus he treats language as a mirror of literature, while Brodsky turns this relationship upside down (as will be shown below). Miłosz warns Polish poets and writers against unfounded wordplay, an infatuation with irony, a worship of foreign words, and empty talkativeness in general. Miłosz finds

[21] Interview with Annie Epelboen, *BKI*, pp. 130–53 (pp. 138, 142–43, 153).

[22] Marianna Volkova and Solomon Volkov, *Iosif Brodskii v N'iu Iorke: fotoportrety i besedy s poetom* (New York: Slovo, 1990); quoted from Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, p. 227.

Polish *not established* ('ustawiony') firmly enough, which makes it weak and non-resistant to influence from outside. He points to the early 1900s, the time of Polish modernism, as one of the weakest periods in the history of Polish literature and, thus, the Polish language. He qualifies Polish as *rich*, *warm*, but at the same time *capricious*, which is another source of its difficulties. Miłosz appeals to writers not to take a passive role in their interaction with the language. Even a talented writer can be a loser in this interaction, if he lets himself be driven by the natural forces ('żywioł') of his tongue.[23]

While Brodsky refers to the inarticulate buzz of language ('гул языка') which poets tune in to, Miłosz touches on concrete matters of the euphony of Polish. In a passage concerning the weak representation of the rural element in twentieth-century Polish Miłosz suspects that the blame lies with the immanent disadvantages of the rural dialects, such as their *rustling character* ('szelestliwość') and the weakness of their rhythmical structure. This is the reason why, in his opinion, no great Polish poets came from the countryside.[24] Sometimes Miłosz cannot restrain himself from making an ironical comment on the euphonics of a particular Polish word, as if hearing it with a stranger's ear. For example, he qualifies the word *rzeczywistość* as 'ochydne w dźwięku słowo' (a word that sounds disgusting).[25] Intentionally or otherwise, Miłosz does not dismiss the idea of judging languages on euphonic grounds. It should be mentioned here that comments on euphony in the Slavonic languages consist of a variety of long-standing myths, and scholarly arguments on this topic usually refer to their relative nature and lack of credibility.[26] But the construction of these myths—i.e. what features and what reasons make a language, its idiom, or a particular word euphonic—still awaits a proper classification.

BRODSKY ON THE NET OF RUSSIAN SYNTAX AND THE 'TRAGIC CORE' OF RUSSIAN

In contrast with Miłosz, who warns writers not to be driven by the natural forces of their language, Brodsky believes that true poets and writers inevi-

[23] Miłosz, 'Język, narody', pp. 128–29. Miłosz repeats his statement about Polish *having no established voice* elsewhere: Czesław Miłosz, 'Mickiewicz', in Miłosz, *Ogród nauk*, pp. 138–42 (p. 139).

[24] Miłosz, 'Język, narody', p. 130.

[25] Czesław Miłosz, 'Rzeczywistość', in Miłosz, *Ogród nauk*, pp. 30–38 (p. 30).

[26] As in a comment made by Ivan Lekov: 'The statements on euphony cannot be scientifically credible. According to certain amateurish opinions euphony derives from an abundance of palatal sounds (as in Polish), while according to other opinions it originates in energetic and hard sounds (Bulgarian), or in clear vocalism (Serbian and Croatian). To the Southern Slavs the consonant clusters of Northern Slavonic languages do not sound euphonic, and to the Northern Slavs, for instance, the Bulgarian "dark" vowel *ъ* is peculiar and difficult to pronounce and so is usually replaced by other/similar vowels—*e, o, a*. Hence, the impression that euphony or its absence is relative and arbitrary' (Ivan Lekov, 'Sistema ot osnovni zakonomernosti v charakterologiiata na slavianskite ezitsi', in *Zakonomernosti na razvitieto na slav'anskite ezitsi*, ed. by Ivan Lekov (Sofia: BAN, 1977), pp. 7–36 (p. 31)).

tably do exactly that, as was the case with Dostoevskii or Platonov. And in his contemplations of the ways in which languages put crucial pressure on their writers, or, in a wider context, their speakers, he deviates from qualities traditionally assigned to the Slavonic languages as reflectors of their metaphysical peculiarities. His 'Catastrophes in the Air' is not just a literary essay; there is no problem about assigning it to the category of works about the philosophy of language. In this essay Brodsky attributes to language even more power than is the case in neo-Humboldtian discourses on linguistic relativism. Like Miłosz, Brodsky is far from being apologetic about his native tongue, but the ethical scale of his statements is set much higher. In the paragraphs relating to Platonov Brodsky discovers in Russian such features as destructive revolutionary *eschatology*, relentless *absurdity*, a *tragic core*, bringing about *social evil* and *dead-end psychology*. The following statement from this essay perfectly illustrates Brodsky's extreme evaluations:

> Platonov speaks of a nation which in a sense has become the *victim of its own language*; or, to put it more accurately, he tells a story about this very language, which turns out to be capable *of generating a fictitious world*, and then falls into *grammatical dependence* on it.[27]

This image of Russian reaches its peak in the claim that in Platonov's case, Russian '*language is a millenarian device*, history isn't'.[28] What makes it interesting to a scholar of language myths is that a similar kind of inverted logic can be found in numerous speculative texts originating in the marginal zones of linguistics and cultural studies that have emerged in Russia in the last two decades under the name 'linguistic culturology'. According to one of them, for instance, the reason why the formal rules of duelling took so long to be adopted in eighteenth-century Russia lies in the structural difference between the Russian and French languages. The 'flexible' Russian grammar allegedly tended to encourage a spontaneous fight, but with the gradual acquisition of foreign languages by the Russian nobles the 'regular' grammar of French and English persuaded them to accept the formal and meticulously structured rituals of duelling. So the more the Russian upper classes became fluent in French, the more they liberated themselves from the 'chaotic' metaphysical influence of their native tongue, which in this particular case was 'responsible' for the emotional and immediate method of resolving conflicts.[29]

Brodsky's statements are not so straightforward, though; he is trying to find the embedded ethical proclivities of his native tongue. In Tsvetaeva's writing Brodsky finds in Russian the best match to the spirit of Calvinism:

[27] Joseph Brodsky, 'Catastrophes in the Air', in Brodsky, *Less than One*, pp. 268–303 (p. 290).
[28] Ibid., p. 288. See also his notes on eschatology in Russian on pp. 283, 286–87.
[29] Alla Mel′nikova, *Iazyk i natsional′nyi kharakter: vzaimosviaz′ struktury iazyka i mental′nosti* (St Petersburg: Rech′, 2003), pp. 299, 303, 309.

> One of the possible definitions of her [Tsvetaeva's] creative production is *the Russian subordinate clause put at the service of Calvinism*. Another variation is: *Calvinism in the embrace of this subordinate clause*. In any case, no one has demonstrated the congeniality of the said *Weltanschauung* and this grammar in a more obvious way than Tsvetaeva has. Naturally, the severity of the interrelation between an individual and himself possesses certain aesthetics; but it seems there is no more absorbing, more capacious, and more natural form for self-analysis than the one that is built into the multistage syntax of the Russian complex sentence. Enveloped in this form, Calvinism 'takes' the individual much further than he would happen to get had he used Calvin's native German.[30]

Remarkably, Brodsky is wrong in identifying German as Calvin's native language (it was French), but in creating myths on languages it is the very fact of the metaphysical opposition as such that often makes up the main point. The word 'Calvinism' constantly appears in Brodsky's essays and interviews when these two subjects, Marina Tsvetaeva and Russian syntax, are linked. In Brodsky's context Calvinism is a severe moral self-treatment, but here Brodsky contradicts his own statements in which he makes Russian grammar partly responsible 'for the *moral ambivalence* and the diminished willpower' endemic to his generation.[31]

Although Brodsky joins the chorus of statements about the warm-heartedness and the spiritual nature of Russian, he finds the latter reflected neither in its gender-imposed personification nor in the extensive use of expressive suffixation, but, above all, in its syntactic flexibility and lack of constraints. The free word order can not only bring 'moral ambivalence', but also refines the perceptive abilities:

> [. . .] The noun [in Russian] could easily be found sitting at the very end of the sentence. [. . .] All this provides any given verbalization of the *stereoscopic quality of the perception* itself, and (sometimes) sharpens and develops the latter.[32]

Like Miłosz, Brodsky in his language critique also touches upon the length of Russian words, as if polysyllabic units are able to emanate euphonic magic. His main focus, however, remains on the syntax: he thinks that the lack of set limits in the Russian complex sentence can deceive a writer and lure him to unknown and unpredictable products, quite in compliance with the stereotype of the irrationality and flexibility of the 'Russian national character':

> As intricacies go, Russian, where nouns frequently find themselves sitting smugly at the very end of sentences, whose main power lies not in the statement but in its subordinate clause, is extremely accommodating. This is not your analytical language of 'either/or'—this is the language of 'although'. Like a banknote into change, every stated

[30] Joseph Brodsky, 'Footnote to a Poem', in Brodsky, *Less than One*, pp. 195–267 (pp. 232–33).
[31] Brodsky, 'Less than One', p. 9.
[32] Joseph Brodsky, 'The Child of Civilization', in Brodsky, *Less than One*, pp. 123–44 (p. 124).

idea instantly mushrooms in this language into its opposite, and there is nothing its syntax loves more than doubt and self-deprecation. Its *polysyllabic nature* (the average length of a Russian word is three to four syllables) reveals the elemental, primeval force of the phenomena covered by a word a lot better than any rationalization possibly could, and a writer sometimes, instead of developing his thoughts, stumbles and simply revels in the word's euphonic contents, thereby *sidetracking his issue in an unforeseen direction*. And in Dostoevsky's writing we witness an extraordinary friction, nearly sadistic in its intensity, between the metaphysics of the subject matter and that of the language. [. . .]. His treatment of the human psyche was by far too inquisitive for the Russian Orthodox he claimed to be, and it is *syntax* rather than the creed that is *responsible for the quality of that treatment*.[33]

Ignoring the presupposition held in linguistics that inflection, owing to the rules of grammatical agreement and government between the elements of a sentence, represents grammatical regularity and order, Brodsky renders Russian grammar as 'irregular'.[34] And the Russian complex sentence is linked by him with a Russian type of mind that can easily fall into an abyss of subordinating statements, albeit that the same syntactic substructure is also able to explore the human psyche in all its depths:

> Its subordinate clauses often carried him farther than his original intentions or insights would have allowed him to travel. [. . .] A born metaphysician, he [Dostoevskii] instinctively realized that *for the human psyche, there was no tool more far-reaching than a highly inflected mother tongue, with its convoluted syntax*.[35]

Brodsky does not explain how Russian syntax and Russian grammar in general can demonstrate such different, if not opposite, qualities—the Calvinist moral challenge, the sidetracking of a writer's thoughts in unforeseen directions, and the moral ambivalence in Tsvetaeva's and Dostoevskii's writings and his own reflections respectively.

It should be noted here that Miłosz mentions the deceptive flexibility of Polish syntax too, although in a narrower context, when he looks for the reasons why Polish was losing its density and strength in the 1900s:

> They [Polish writers] knew everything; they read everything, including Nietzsche, Baudelaire, and the French symbolists, but everything they wrote turned into a mush. In that attempt to accept the new intellectual content Polish lost out, because, *lured by the efficiency of syntax*, they fancied that everything was permitted.[36]

The comparison of Miłosz's and Brodsky's language critique makes it clear that the latter constantly moves from observations of a more technical or perceptional kind to conclusions on an ethical level, from literary matters

[33] Joseph Brodsky, 'The Power of the Elements', in Brodsky, *Less than One*, pp. 157–63 (pp. 160–61).
[34] Ibid., p. 160.
[35] Brodsky, 'Catastrophes in the Air', p. 278.
[36] Miłosz, 'Język, narody', p. 129.

to the peculiarities of the Russian psyche. Brodsky's range of conclusions is more grandiose. He wants to be paradoxical in his metaphysical revelations: the 'intricacies' of Russian grammar provide, according to him, an excellent *playground for evil to disguise itself*, while English, with its 'truth-telling proclivity', is unsuitable for this purpose.[37]

THINKING IN A LANGUAGE

Another significant point of comparison is to examine how the two writers project the interrelationship of language and thought onto their own mental processes and whether they attribute any values to the languages involved.

Since Miłosz does not write his original literary work in English, he claims that he conducts all his creative activity within the domain of his native Polish:

> In the first place my continuing to write in Polish indicates a continuing involvement in the whole Polish mess. In the second place, it's the product of my sense of guilt. In a way, to write in Polish is, of course, to converse with the dead. [. . .] For me there's no other way out except to write in Polish. I have said somewhere that there are writers who think more in ideas or images, whereas I think in language itself, so I simply had no other choice.[38]

After settling in the United States, Miłosz started to promote contemporary Polish poetry by translating it into English, and with time he also gradually switched to translating his own poems; thus he adopted the practice of re-creating his works in English, but he does not speculate much on the linguistic side of this process.

As for Brodsky, he positions himself as a Russian poet, but an anglophone writer. That is why his reaction to statements that a writer must be a monoglot is so blunt: he qualifies this notion as 'a provincial nonsense'.[39] He emphasizes that he thinks neither in Russian nor in English: 'People don't think in languages. When thoughts come I formulate them in Russian or in English. People do not think in languages.'[40] Brodsky applies different 'language–thought' schemes depending on the time, the situation, and the public scale of his words. Before his departure from the USSR he was expressing his worries about language, as Liudmila Shtern recollects:

> One day he was saying that he would get suffocated and become silent as a poet, and another day—that he was afraid of being left without the nutrient medium of the Russian language and being made silent: 'You know, here you listen to the language in a tram, in a bath house or at the beer stalls. But there [abroad] you'll have only the

[37] Brodsky, 'Less than One', p. 31; 'Catastrophes in the Air', p. 283. See also Brodsky's interview with David Bethea: *BKI*, p. 541.

[38] Czarnecka and Fiut, *Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*, p. 264.

[39] Interview with John Glad, *BKI*, pp. 109–21 (p. 117).

[40] Interview with Lisa Henderson, *BKI*, pp. 327–35 (p. 330).

language that you brought with you, because a poet cannot live without a language environment.'[41]

In his letter from America to the same correspondent, who was about to emigrate from the USSR and was worrying about her knowledge of English, he encourages her with the words that 'there are no foreign languages as such—there is only a different set of synonyms'.[42] But his later statements about the language of his intellectual existence were, without doubt, determined by his new status and location. He made all possible efforts towards a transition to English not only as the language of everyday existence but also as the language of his writings, something that can also be interpreted as his escape from being 'locked' in one culture.[43] He admits that if he were to return to Russia, he 'would be exceedingly bothered by the inability to use an additional language'.[44] Considering Brodsky's inclination towards English and Western culture as a form of his self-representation strategy, Karwowska points out that despite all this, Russian remained for him a kind of 'motherland in exile',[45] using another broad metaphor from the line *language as locus of existence*.

Miłosz, by contrast, is happy not to have moved away from his native tongue:

> I cannot stand writing in a foreign language; I am incapable of it. [. . .]. How glad I am now that I clung to my native language (for the simple reason that I was a Polish poet and could not have been otherwise); that I did not emulate those émigrés in France and the United States who shed one skin and language for another. I would not deny that my Polish served my pride by erecting a protective barrier between myself and a civilization in the throes of puerility [*qui sombre dans l'idiotie*].[46]

Inter-Slavonic Reflections: Brodsky and Polish; Miłosz and Russian

Examining inter-Slavonic linguistic perception of languages is a difficult task, because in this domain statements based on a structural contrast between languages or on language data in general are rarely applicable. Arguments of this type are more heavily loaded with stereotypes and prejudices of all

[41] Liudmila Shtern, *Brodskii: Osia, Iosif, Joseph* (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 2001), p. 124.

[42] Ibid., p.134.

[43] Grudzinska Gross devotes a separate chapter to comparison of both poets' positions concerning English and their principles regarding English translations of their own poetry (*Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky*, pp. 221–58). She points out Brodsky's constant desire to escape from 'one-languageness' (p. 223).

[44] Volkova and Volkov, *Iosif Brodskii v N'iu Iorke*; quoted from Bethea, *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile*, p. 228.

[45] Karwowska, *Miłosz i Brodski*, p. 109.

[46] Czesław Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro*, trans. by Louis Iribarne as The *Land of Ulro* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), p. 78

sorts, from cultural rivalry to religious zeal or the remembrance of a turbulent history of coexistence.

BRODSKY AND POLISH

There is a strong discrepancy in the amount of attention that Miłosz and Brodsky devote to each other's languages, which can be simply explained by the asymmetrical interrelations of their respective countries of origin. Brodsky's perception of Polish does not occupy a significant place in his linguistic speculations. He belonged to the younger post-war generation, and, as for many in the Soviet Union, Polish became for him a sort of a cultural window onto Europe. As seen from behind the inner, Soviet, 'iron curtain', Polish was for liberal minds the language of a nation upon whom Communism was imposed, but who, despite this burden, managed to remain European and relatively modern. It is a well-known fact that even under Communist rule Poland was much more liberal than the USSR both in terms of censorship and regarding the selection of foreign authors for translation. At the beginning of his literary career Brodsky learnt Polish in order to be able to translate from it. He was given the task of translating a number of Polish poets, and participated in events devoted to the promotion of Polish literature.[47] Brodsky had no inherited 'imperial' bias regarding Poland and hence against the Polish language. On the contrary, he extends his sympathy for Poland as a country to the Polish language. His early perception of everything Polish was very positive and even Romantic. His personal encounters added to his enthusiasm for Polish. This corresponds to the generally positive, Romantic perception of Poland in post-Stalinist Russia, especially among pro-Western intellectuals.[48] As a poet sensitive to linguistic matters, Brodsky cannot avoid the temptation of making remarks about Polish. While he never openly reflects on the semantic models of Russian words, he occasionally examines the structure of a Polish word, being fascinated by the way in which it reveals the Poles' aspiration for independence:

> I remember how strong an impression the Polish words *podległość* ('dependence') and *niepodległość* ('independence') made on me at that time: not the etymological analysis as such but the simple feeling of these words.[49]

In these words Brodsky is recognizing a live model, an explicit sexual meta-

[47] Brodsky mentions one of these events in his letter to the editor of *Vechernii Leningrad* as a response to the libel against him. See Iakov Gordin, *Pereklichka vo mrake: Iosif Brodskii i ego sobesedniki* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Pushkinskogo Fonda, 2000), p. 168. Brodsky later confirmed his passion for Polish poetry in a number of interviews with Polish media.

[48] The Polish historian Andrzej Walicki, for example, mentions a number of instances of Polonophile attitudes encountered during his visits to the USSR. See Walicki, *Spotkania z Miłoszem* (London: Aneks, 1985), pp. 108–09.

[49] Interview with Jerzy Illg, *BKI*, pp. 315–28 (p. 326).

phor: *nie-pod-leg-ł-ość* (not-lying-under), a refusal to lie down under anybody, and he perceives this as a feature of the Polish mentality, thereby paying an indirect compliment to the related culture. After leaving Russia, Brodsky's positive sentiments refer almost exclusively to Polish poetry, which he ranks very highly. Brodsky encouraged his students to learn Polish, in order 'to be able to read the best poetry in the world',[50] which itself is an example of an evaluative formula: *a language is valuable because a valuable literature is written in it*.

MIŁOSZ AND RUSSIAN

Miłosz's knowledge of Russian is much deeper and his attitude towards Russia and Russian culture is much more complicated and rooted in the history of Polish–Russian affairs. Brodsky visited Poland only twice, both times coming from the West, whereas Miłosz grew up in the Polish community in Vilnius (Polish Wilno) within the borders of the Russian Empire, which Lithuania was then part of, but never visited Russia after Poland acquired its independence. The home language of his family and his language of education was Polish, but the official state language in pre-1917 Lithuania was Russian. He made a trip to Siberia with his family in his early childhood, and some time later, after the outbreak of the First World War, spent another four years deep in Russia in connection with his father's work as a communications engineer. This is how he describes his linguistic state of mind at that time: 'I was *under the sway of the Russian language* until the spring of 1918. *I was bilingual*.'[51]

Living in a country situated between two major European powers—Prussia (later Germany) and Russia (later the Soviet Union), the Poles had for centuries identified their position as being located between two evils. Quite naturally, Miłosz was always aware of Russia's sinister presence and her permanent shadow over Polish destiny. This, however, did not mean a sweeping rejection of everything Russian. His solid knowledge of Russian classical literature and socio-philosophical thought gave him a deeper insight into both Russian and Polish nationalisms. His *Native Realm*, in which he puts his personal biography in a wider European context, contains enough material for a separate article on how Poles perceive Russia, and the language component is an important part of Miłosz's view of Russia.

From our perspective, the main task in understanding his image of Rus-

[50] Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky*, p. 91. As the author notes, 'his Polish translations were more numerous than from any other language (English later won over)'. Gross also gives a detailed record of the Polish poets translated by Brodsky into Russian and English (pp. 182–83). Karwowska notes that Brodsky's assessment of the poetry of Slavs he translated in the USSR could depend on who the interview was given to: see Karwowska, *Miłosz i Brodski*, p. 96.

[51] Czarnecka and Fiut, *Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*, p. 17.

sian would be the separation of the national Polish element from the generic Slavonic heritage which Poles share with Russians and other Slavs. An additional complication here is the strongly asymmetric influence coming from the Russian side. Miłosz was fully aware of the problem of the undesirable penetration of Russianness into Polish national consciousness. The above-mentioned complexity is well illustrated by the following statement:

> One should not underestimate the defensive gesture of collective Polishness [*zbiorowości polskiej*] and of the national taboo. For a foreigner this kind of Polish 'nationalism' is incomprehensible, but we know how much of a Russian is sitting in each of us, and this is not the same thing as enmity of the Mexicans towards 'gringos', the Yankees, because we are threatened by Russification from inside, at least, *through the language*.[52]

Being aware of all cultural differences, including those shaped by Orthodox Christianity and Polish Catholicism, Miłosz does not perceive everything Russian in only one colour, and the Russian language appears in his statements as both sinister and attractive:

> Poles, it would seem, are able to get an intuition of 'Russianness' mainly through the language, which attracts them because *it liberates their Slavic half*; in the language is all there is to know about Russia. The very thing that attracts them is at the same time menacing.[53]

Miłosz characterizes the Russian language in various modes: it is a language strong and powerful in 'tone', it is a language of humour and laughter, but it is also a language of unwanted values, a language to be held at a distance and to be prevented from intruding into the Polish national psyche. Written in the last years of Stalin's rule, his book *The Captive Mind*, which made Miłosz's name as a prose writer, is set in the anti-Communist, pro-Western post-war political context. But the old 'inherited' perception of Russia and the stereotype of the Russian language held by the Poles are clearly evident in it. The threat of sovietization via the spread of the Russian language here overlaps with older fears of Russification.[54] And yet Miłosz never rejects the attractive, '*brutal-sweet*', and enigmatic component of the Russian language. Six years later, in 1959, he describes the presence of the Russian language in the everyday life of a Polish family in pre-war times as follows:

> To me, Germans, except for the cruel myth of the Knights of the Cross, meant nothing; I did not know their language. [. . .] Russia, however, was relatively, but only relatively, concrete, as a chaos and an infinity remembered from childhood and, above all *as a language*. At the dinner table in our shabby, miserable (as I know now) home,

[52] Letter to Andrzej Walicki of 19 November 1960, in Walicki, *Spotkania z Miłoszem*, p. 97.

[53] Czesław Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, trans. by Catherine S. Leach as *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (London and Manchester: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981), p. 138.

[54] Czesław Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł*, trans. by Jane Zielonko as *The Captive Mind* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), p. 19.

Russian had been *the language to make jokes in*, whose *brutal-sweet nuances* were untranslatable.[55]

Native Realm has a subtitle 'Search for Self-Definition', and in it Russia plays the role of a mirror to reflect the significant and the sensitive points of the author's Polishness. The Russian national character is shown here from the Polish point of view partly by comparing two cultures, in which the language component is fully fused. As for the perception of Russian within this fusion, Miłosz recalls a remarkable exercise he used to perform in his younger years, which gave him 'a good deal to think about':

> One had to take a deep breath and pronounce [in Russian] first in a deep *bass* voice: 'Wyryta zastupom yama glubokaya' ['A deep pit dug out with a spade'], then to chatter quickly in a *tenor*: 'Wykopana szpadłem jama głęboka' [*the same in Polish*]. The arrangements of accents and vowels in the first phrase connotes *gloom, darkness, and power*; in the second, *lightness, clarity, and weakness*. In other words, it was both an exercise in self-ridicule and a warning.[56]

This impression that Russian has a darker, denser, more tragic, and even fearful 'voice' is intuitive and impossible to prove, but it is also traditional, almost a commonplace. It was not an individual impression unique to Miłosz, and it cannot be based purely on a euphonic notion, detached from the relative size and the history of relations between the two countries. Similar descriptions of Russian had been formulated a hundred years before Miłosz. Here he follows his famous predecessor Adam Mickiewicz, who in one of his Paris lectures contemplates the 'tone' of Russian, coloured with fear, a heritage from Genghis Khan, and the tone of Polish:

> The Polish language that flourished in the gentle warmth of Christianity had a different sound. In the tone of Poles there was something similar to the tone of the French monarchy of the Middle Ages, to the *tone of the time of chivalry*. But [. . .] Europe went in a different direction. The Christian tone of Poles started to weaken too; Poles retained it, but they already *did not have the strength to raise it to the force of the Russian tone*. Now the Russian soldiers still laugh at the Polish officers as if they beg their soldiers to open fire, as if they bow before the line.[57]

The alleged ability of Russian to 'add force to a phrase' is also mentioned

[55] Miłosz, *Native Realm*, pp. 137–38.

[56] Ibid., p. 138. 'Вырыта заступом яма глубокая' is the first line of a poem by Russian folk-style poet Ivan Nikitin (1824–1861).

[57] Adam Mickiewicz, 'Literatura Słowiańska, Wykłady w Collège de France, Kurs Drugi, Rok 1841–1842, Wykład XXXIII', *Dzieła*, 10 (Kraków: Czytelnik, 1949), 395–405 (p. 398). In this lecture Mickiewicz also mentions the French tone, which Poland understood and was inspired by. The French tone of Napoleon is perceived in a rather abstract and symbolic manner, while the Russian tone in his contemplations is endowed with physical vocal features, as follows: 'There have been many attempts to imitate imperious gestures of the tsars; the Russian generals and officers tried to simulate the hoarse voice of the Romanovs, which indeed contained something fearful' (ibid., p. 399).

by Miłosz in *The Land of Ulro*, where he lists Russian along with Latin and French among the languages that made an impact on his 'internal rhythm'.[58] Miłosz calls for resistance to the influence of Russia and the Russian language, but at the same time admits having 'almost exaggerated sympathy for Russians taken individually'. He complains about the lack of a proper tool to describe how and why these contradictory attitudes can 'hang together'.[59] To Miłosz the difference between the two national psyches lies in the broader Polish view of the world against that of the Russian, but also in the presence of the eschatological element in the latter:

> The Poles are closely related to the Russians and menaced enough from within by the weakness of their own individualist ethic to be fearful. But their history, which made them what they are, was on the whole deprived of eschatology.[60]

The Polish metaphysical standing is more material, more balanced, less extreme:

> To me, the 'depth' of Russian literature was always suspect. What good is depth if bought at too high a price? Out of two evils, would we not prefer 'shallowness' provided we had decently built homes, well-fed and industrious people?[61]

Brodsky, as was noted above, refers to eschatology too, but in direct connection with the Russian language as such: he champions the idea that eschatology is one of its inherent features.

In discourses of this kind, images of national characters inevitably overshadow images of languages, with distinct linguistic elements virtually disappearing from view. Where inter-Slavonic perception of languages is concerned, the grammatical structure of the languages involved provides observers with almost no grounds for comparison, in contrast with the Slavonic–Western oppositions. Almost all evaluations and attitudes here have an 'ideological' character, and, being projected from outside, they refer to a particular language in general as a representative (or mirror) of its speakers.

The use and appreciation of Russian was taboo among both pro-Western liberals and nationalists in Communist Poland, and being aware that such an attitude towards Russian as an unwanted lingua franca had not disappeared with the fall of Communism, Brodsky, on the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate from Katowice University in 1993, gave his speech in English rather than Russian.[62] And this 'asymmetrical' position of Russian is vividly illustrated by Walicki from the opposite perspective by the following anecdote:

[58] Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro*, p. 47.
[59] Miłosz, *Native Realm*, p. 146.
[60] Ibid., p. 144.
[61] Ibid., p. 145.
[62] According to Grudzinska Gross, 'fearing, that he might offend Polish national sensibility' (*Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky*, p. 189).

Spring 1976, the house of Mr and Mrs Miłosz in Berkeley. [. . .] At a certain moment, just before the meal was served, Miłosz got into a merry mood and started singing in Russian (in the house of his parents, as we know from his essay on Russia, Russian was the language of humour). Mrs Miłosz immediately summoned him to order, reminding us that 'in her house this language was not used'.[63]

Despite his excellent knowledge of Russian and his academic duties, which included lecturing on Russian literature, and Dostoevskii in particular, Miłosz almost never translated from Russian, for which he gives a reason that is not surprising in the light of this topic: that Russian with its '*great power of attraction*' might pose a 'threat' to his way of thinking and writing in Polish.[64]

Conclusion

Questioning the verity of evaluative language-related statements by referring them to the language system taken 'in itself and for itself' is not the main purpose of this exercise; these statements and their core content can be understood only against a wider cultural and historical background. In fact, the very idea that languages or their elements can be valued according to criteria divorced from cultural and political history is open to serious question.[65] Particular episodes from the cultural history of nations bring to life different oppositions. As far as Slavs are concerned, the promotion of the unique nature of their language(s) as a reflection of their 'national soul', in an effort to equate them with the more established European languages, always appeared on the agenda in times of their cultural and political revival and self-identification.[66] Vladimir Macura, for example, points out that in the context of the Czech National Revival a Slavonic language can be qualified both as illogical and as 'the most logical', because the political meaning of the attribution refers to a 'quality' that has to make the language in question different from other languages (in that particular case, German).[67]

The fact that in recent decades there has been a flourishing of speculative

[63] Walicki, *Spotkania z Miłoszem*, p. 98.

[64] Miłosz, 'Gorliwość tłumacza', p. 171.

[65] Even the common perception that the vast distances and harsh climate of Russia are reflected in the dramatic core of Russian, so deeply rooted in stereotypes of Russianness and the Russian language, is hardly proved by the linguistic facts and can be challenged by a socio-historical approach. See, for instance, how Leonid Batkin challenges Dmitri Likhachev's opinion about 'embedded' Russian concepts *udal'*, *prostor*, and *volia* taken in isolation from social and historical reality: Leonid Batkin, 'Po povodu "Zametok o russkom" D. S. Likhacheva', in id., *Pristrastiia: izbrannye esse i stat'i o kul'ture* (Moscow: Oktiabr', 1994), pp. 245–64 (pp. 253–56).

[66] Many speculations of this type can be found in periods of national revival. See e.g. Vladimir Macura, *Znamení zrodu: české obrození jako kulturní typ* (Prague, 1983). The chapter entitled 'Lingvocentrismus' (pp. 47–68) concentrates on the evaluation of different language strata in order to back up national cultural values. For most Southern and Western Slavs this is the middle of the nineteenth century.

[67] Macura, *Znamení zrodu*, pp. 38–39.

language-related judgements, particularly those published in Russia in a genre of so-called 'linguistic culturology', may be interpreted, on the one hand, as an effort to re-establish an 'original' national identity, thus helping to eliminate the demons of the Communist past, and, on the other hand, as a search for a vaccine against omnipotent globalization.[68] These texts are preceded by a long tradition of imaging languages along with depicting national psyches. Thus, not only does the typology of language-related statements require a proper gradation, but also the relationships between the discourses to which they belong need to be identified and classified whenever this phenomenon is described.

Comparing the linguistic observations of Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky, it is evident that the same languages may be endowed with different, sometimes contradictory, qualities depending on the observer's origin and location and, of course, the type of oppositions in which they are engaged. The Slavonic–English oppositions heavily exploit the structural differences between languages, linking them to differences in cultures and 'mentalities'. As for inter-Slavonic contexts, the structural references lose their illustrative value because they are not distinct enough to support ideological interpretations. The difference between the attitudes of Brodsky and Miłosz towards each other's language can be understood as a projection of the asymmetrical nature of Russian–Polish relations. The differences between how they contrast their native languages with English can only be understood if we bear in mind their individual exile strategies and their personal attitude to locus and history—more specifically, Miłosz's affinity to his roots and his acceptance of history on the one hand, and Brodsky's cosmopolitanism and his rejection of history on the other. That is why Miłosz's statements on languages are more earthbound and more prescriptive, and Brodsky's, on the contrary, more abstract and ethical. Brodsky's 'trademark' is putting the metaphysics of a language, whether Russian or English, ahead of history and literature.[69] It does not take long to notice that Miłosz's linguistic observations are pointed in two directions. In the first case he is in fact targeting Polish literature: in his language critique one can detect a certain pity, even reproach for the

[68] In the Slavonic world the quest to find connections between the meaning of specific national words and 'semantic' patterns of the perception of the world or moral values seems to be triggered by the works of Anna Wierzbicka. As far as Russian is concerned, the books of Vladimir Kolesov (see e.g. *'Zhizn' proiskhodit ot slova…'* (St Petersburg: Zlatoust, 1999)) have become another popular example of this sort of literature. The ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt and their reinterpretations have been brought back onto the agenda, often simplified and used for wide-ranging connections between language and all sorts of national habits or values. See the critical overview of neo-Humboldtianism in modern Russian Studies in A. V. Pavlova, 'Svedeniia o kul′ture i "etnicheskom mentalitete" po dannym iazyka', in *Ot lingvistiki k mifu*, pp. 160–240.

[69] For more on Brodsky's language myth-creation see Shamil Khairov, '"Esli Bog dlia menia i sushchestvuet, to eto imenno iazyk . . .": iazykovaia refleksiia i lingvisticheskoe mifotvorchestvo Iosifa Brodskogo', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 67 (2004), 198–223.

underachievement of Polish literature at certain periods. His evaluation of Polish here has a more technical character. The second direction concerns the linguistic core of Polish identity, the conflict between the essence of 'Polishness', and the influence of 'Russianness' through the Russian language, which can to a certain extent be connected with the border zone of his birthplace. The references to linguistic elements in the first case are quite clear, but in the second, where languages are perceived as repositories of the national psyche, they inevitably become unarticulated, vague, and obscure.

The asymmetry in the attitudes of both poets to each other's language lies in the fact that Russian is not only a significant part of Miłosz's personal biography but is also ever-present in any consideration of the Slavonic beginnings of Poland's European destiny. Brodsky's attitude towards Polish can be described in linguistic terms as 'synchronic' and personal, whereas Miłosz's sentiments about Russian are clearly 'diachronic' and 'collective', since he often speaks on behalf of his compatriots. There is no evidence of Brodsky being involved in deeper metaphysical reasoning about Polish or any Slavonic language other than Russian.[70] The only metaphysical opposition he is interested in is that of Russian and English, which he characterizes in terms of an opposition between 'reflexive' and 'rational' cultures. Miłosz's concerns about his native Polish are those of a man responsible for a valuable inherited tool, while Brodsky expresses his absolute belief in the survival abilities of Russian and in its suprahistorical power.[71] Miłosz is a man of tradition: he is quite comfortable with the traditional list of metaphors applied to the image of a language: illness, strength, durability, its ability to respond to the challenges of the times. He does not look for answers outside history, while Brodsky, by contrast, is not interested in seeing things in a 'linear' sequence. Brodsky deliberately emphasizes his own theoretical constructions in his personal profile of a poet who is both a 'tool' of a spiritually endowed Russian but at the same time a thinker who belongs to the world of reason, i.e. to the cultural context of the West.

Both authors prove that the tradition of language myth-making and the search for the metaphysics of a language were still alive and thriving at the end of the twentieth century. The main problem of examining the subject re-

[70] In Brodsky's early language attitudes one can detect a popular thesis that not only does every stratum of a language reflect the national psychology but any change can damage the balance between the two. It is known that when he was still in Leningrad the young Brodsky was once about to send a letter to the editor of a daily newspaper in defence of Russian orthography against a proposed reform. In this letter he argued that despite a close genealogical relationship each Slavonic language conveys a different psychology, and thus any modification by analogy with a neighbouring language can be harmful to Russian: see Gordin, *Pereklichka vo mrake*, p. 141.

[71] See e.g. his statements in the interviews with Arina Ginsburg, Jadwiga Szymak-Reifer, and David Montenegro: *BKI*, pp. 371, 629, 272. See also Solomon Volkov, *Dialogi s Iosifom Brodskim* (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 1998), p. 180.

mains in the nature of the domains involved: although the language references remain relatively (although only relatively) discrete and can at least be related to the customary descriptions used in linguistics, the second domain refers to diffused notions of national psyche, national spirit, and the perception of the world. Miłosz once warned one of his correspondents: 'We have to move away, and we can't do anything about this, from notions of "the spirit of the nation" as too much compromised, but at some point, when we have more refined tools, we'll return to them.'[72] It would be hard to disagree with this statement, but it seems as if there is still a long way to go before this refinement is obtained.

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[72] Miłosz's letter to Andrzej Walicki of 19 November 1960, in Andrzej Walicki, *Spotkania z Miłoszem*, p. 167.