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Review: *How Russian Came to Be the Way It Is. A Student Guide to the History of the Russian Language; Studies in Accentology and Slavic Linguistics in Honor of Ronald F. Feldstein*

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Tore Nessel, *How Russian Came to Be the Way It Is. A Student Guide to the History of the Russian Language*. Bloomington: Slavica, 2015. 361 pages.

Tore Nessel is professor of Russian Linguistics at Arctic University of Norway. As many other professors, he has frequently found himself in situations where the simple conjugation of a verb like *nucamb* 'write' (1) triggered many questions from his Russian class. It is in practice impossible "to travel through time/centuries" every time a new exceptional form is introduced or mentioned in the setting of a language class. *How Russian Came to Be the Way It Is* is designed to make Russian more accessible to students by shedding light on Russian linguistic changes over its history.

Beyond being merely an addition to existing textbooks for studying the history of the Russian language, Nessel's book was written as a guide intended to reach many different student audiences, whether undergraduate or graduate; linguists outside the field interested in the history of the Russian language; or learners from other fields than linguistics who are curious about the topic. It provides a review of "all the major changes in the Russian grammar and sound system in order to explain how the Russian language came to be the way it is" (1). Above all this book was conceived as "a linguistic tool" (1-2) to help students read original medieval texts in order to open "a unique window into the culture and history of Russia" (2), and to enable the study of medieval Rus' from original sources as opposed to being reliant upon the small number of available translations from this sizable body of literature. Readers should approach this book, Nessel says, as a journey back in time of two thousand years, designed to provoke their interest in the topic and to help them resolve puzzles introduced by historical changes in the Russian language.

Several features distinguish this book from other textbooks on the history of the Russian language. First, a companion webpage with supplementary information, given in the form of Power-Point

presentations, is accompanied by the author's own audio narrative. This webpage will be attractive to readers because it helps to illuminate the most important events in Russian linguistic history, while simultaneously expanding the student's knowledge and interest on such historical topics as migrations, The Birch Bark Letters and the Old Novgorod dialect, the lost Aorist and Imperfect tenses, and other such phenomena. The author's method of combining the textbook with audio-presentations is a modern and engaging approach to teaching, likely to be effective in today's classroom. The possibility of contacting the author with questions, and an open discussion blog created by him, makes this material even more accessible. The author ends each chapter by directing students to additional resources in a section *For Further Reading*. Finally, since the agenda of this book is to review and present linguistic changes in the history of the Russian language in the most approachable and understandable way, the work is free of complex linguistic terminology and burdensome loads of technical linguistic analysis. The author's language is straightforward, informal, and very clear. The presence of excerpts from texts is minimal, just enough to avoid confusion while remaining faithful to the original conception that the book is to be a linguistic tool for students learning to read original medieval Russian texts.

How Russian Came to Be the Way It Is contains fifteen chapters followed by four appendixes with morphological tables, illustrating major differences between Old Church Slavic (his chosen term) and Old Russian, a chronology of the major sound changes, and examples of textual analysis, followed by an impressive bibliography and indexes divided into an index of names and a subject index. The content of this book is easy to access and navigate because of its very detailed table of contents followed by lists of 89 tables and 20 figures, preface, notes on transliteration, transcription, orthography, examples, and abbreviations, as well as a detailed introduction on how to use the book.

The chapters can be grouped into four main sections, each concentrating on a different major topic: information on history, literature, and linguistics (5-75); historical changes in grammar (77-193); historical changes in the sound system (195-290); the penultimate chapter on the essential features of the Old Novgorod dialect (291-301);

and an epilogue that reflects on the relationship between these parts (303-305). It is possibly unorthodox for chapters on historical changes in grammar (77-193) to precede chapters on historical changes in the sound system (195-290), but the author's choice in this regard clearly reflects his classroom experience. Since the target audience for this book is mainly a student population, the author's pedagogical strategy underlying the presentation of his material will no doubt be heartily appreciated. Making use of his valuable teaching experience, Nessel addresses historical processes on the basis of examples with which students are likely to be familiar, forms that stand out as non-typical in modern Russian or, as he calls them, "today's exceptions" (1). The author's review of these linguistic changes travels backwards through history and takes the reader to the point where the "today's exceptions" were "yesterday's rules" (1).

Explanations are clear and comprehensible. While the main part of this book is devoted to the presentation of facts about the history of Russian from Proto-Slavic to Contemporary Standard Russian, the author also offers various ways in which these changes may be interpreted. In his own words, "even when we have well-attested facts at hand, there is considerable room for interpretation" (303). The clarity of his examples effectively illuminates linguistic changes that operated over this long history, and even though the number of examples is modest, they are cited in modernized orthography, making them more easily accessible to a broader audience. What students will find particularly valuable is the analysis of a passage from the *Primary Chronicle* (Appendix 4), which provides an idea of how to use the book as a linguistic tool when approaching a medieval text with the aim of analyzing and interpreting it. Rather than being an exhaustive analysis, the textual exegesis remains brief yet clear, and it effectively employs morphological, syntactic, phonological, and sociolinguistic techniques. The only item that could be added to this book, in my opinion, would be an appendix listing different passages from the historical Russian literary canon so that the readers might more easily apply the tools they have acquired to various texts.

Nessel's *How Russian Came to Be the Way It Is* presents a successful overview of the history of the Russian language in a highly effective and approachable manner. The author obviously brings to bear

on his task a tremendous amount of experience from teaching this subject, and he has an indubitable gift for simplifying things so that the subject is accessible to various kinds of readers. In light of all the questions students confront early on in connection with exceptional forms, this book could reasonably be recommended as supplemental reading material even for a first-year Russian class. For classes on historical Russian linguistics I believe it should be required reading and that it will be enthusiastically received.

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Miriam Shrager, Edna Andrews, George Fowler, and Steven Franks, eds., *Studies in Accentology and Slavic Linguistics in Honor of Ronald F. Feldstein*. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2015. 306 pages.

As the title states, this volume was compiled in honor of the work and influence of Ronald F. Feldstein on the fields of accentology and Slavic linguistics. Though Professor Feldstein did some work in most of the areas covered in the volume, the book is unified by the ideas of the Prague Linguistic Circle and Jakobsonian structuralism, of which Feldstein was an important representative for many Slavic linguists working today.

The volume starts with two essays by colleagues dedicating the collection and praising the significant influence of Dr. Feldstein, one by an early mentor and then later colleague of Professor Feldstein, Charles E. Townsend (Townsend also includes a collection of English, Russian and Czech limericks.), the other by a colleague at Indiana University, George Fowler. Also included is a full bibliography of Ronald Feldstein's publications.

Based on the focus of the articles in the collection, the book might be more accurately called "Studies in Aspect, Accentology, and Other Areas of Slavic Linguistics." There are four articles on aspect in Russian