

## S. Karcevskij on the asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign<sup>1</sup>

Malinka PILA

*Université de Padoue*

**Abstract:**

This paper aims to highlight the figure of S. Karcevskij, a Russian linguist usually mentioned by historians of linguistics for having introduced Saussure's theory to the Russians, but who was not appreciated enough for his own linguistic achievements. Karcevskij, who studied in Geneva from the beginning of 1900 as a pupil of Saussure, Bally and Sechehaye, not only adopted Saussure's method, applying it to the analysis of the Russian language, but also developed one of the basic concepts of the *Cours de linguistique générale*: the definition of sign. Karcevskij analyses the relationship between the *signifiant* and the *signifié* from a dynamic point of view. He observes that they are linked in a sort of unstable balance, which gives the *signifiant* the possibility to shift towards other *signifiés*, creating homonyms of the given sign, while the *signifié* has the possibility to acquire new *signifiants*, creating synonyms of the given sign. Karcevskij calls the precarious balance between «form» and «function» an «asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign». Karcevskij emphasizes that this asymmetrical dualism paves the way to linguistic changes. This concept was already present in Saussure's *Cours* but was not analysed to the same extent as in Karcevskij's work.

**Key words:** linguistics, S. Karcevskij, F. de Saussure, sign, *signifiant*, *signifié*, synonymy, homonymy, transposition, asymmetrical dualism

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an abridged and revised version of the article «S.I. Karcevskij: il dualismo asimmetrico del segno linguistico», in *Janus. Quaderni del Circolo Glossematico*, 2010, № 8/9, p. 69-83.

1.

Karcevskij, a Russian linguist who received his linguistic education in Geneva, is surely an interesting figure of the linguistic panorama of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, not only did he have an important role in spreading the ideas and methods of F. de Saussure both in Europe and in Russia, but he also gave a brilliant description of a grammatical language such as Russian simply by applying Saussurean principles to its analyses. Nevertheless, he remains little known<sup>2</sup>.

The reason is that, as he used to say, he was «in his work, a man of one love, and this love was the Russian language»<sup>3</sup>. Karcevskij wrote half of his works in French, half in Russian, and even when he wrote in French or / and dealt with questions of general linguistics, he could never quite keep himself from citing examples in Russian; therefore, he never quite made himself fully comprehensible to Western linguists, who generally did not know Russian.

In Russia, his fate was no better. In the mid-thirties, after the new linguistic movement of Marrism had become popular, Karcevskij's name was no longer cited in references of works published in the USSR. Moreover, keeping contact with the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, in which Karcevskij was an active participant, became more difficult for their Russian counterparts.

The situation changed only after Stalin's death. Karcevskij, however, died shortly afterwards, in 1955.

Nevertheless, Karcevskij's thoughts, representing in some ways a development of Saussure's theory, are of fundamental importance in the same interpretation of Saussurean ideas.

The author often stresses the need to study language from a synchronic point of view, but he also underlines the fact that synchrony does not agree with immobility. Language has to be considered as a mechanism, and the linguist's task is to understand its functioning, its dynamics. What allows Karcevskij to conceive language as a dynamic and fluctuating system is the nature of the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié*, the asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign.

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<sup>2</sup> Recently I. Fougeron published two collections of Karcevskij's works (Karcevski 2000; Karcevskij 2000). Moreover, she also edited the author's masterpiece *Système du verbe russe* both in French (Karcevski 2004) and in Russian translation (in Karcevskij 2004, p. 27-205).

<sup>3</sup> Jakobson 1956, p. 11.

2.

Before explaining how Karcevskij developed one of the basic concepts of the *Cours de linguistique générale*, the definition of sign, I believe it useful to cite some things about his life in order to understand his linguistic background.

Karcevskij was born in Tobol'sk (Siberia) in 1884. He became a teacher and worked there until he moved to Moscow, where he was arrested in 1906 for revolutionary activity. He escaped from prison and fled to Geneva in 1907. There, he studied at university as a pupil of F. de Saussure<sup>4</sup>, Ch. Bally and A. Sechehaye. In 1917, after the Revolution, he returned to Russia for two years. During this period he met some of the most important Russian linguists of his time (D. Ušakov, A. Peškovskij, R. Jakobson, N. Durnovo, etc.). Moreover, he took part in the meetings of the Dialectological Commission of Moscow, an opportunity to introduce Saussure and the *Cours de linguistique générale* to his Russian colleagues.

In 1920 he moved to Strasbourg, where he worked under the supervision of A. Meillet on his future doctoral thesis *Système du verbe russe*, which was published in Geneva in 1927.

In 1922, he moved to Prague, becoming one of the promoters of the Prague Linguistic Circle, alongside V. Mathesius, R. Jakobson, N. Trubeczkoy, etc. and began to spread again the methods he had learnt at the Geneva School. Moreover, as J. Fontaine points out<sup>5</sup>, he became a point of reference, from a semiological point of view, thanks to his article «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique»<sup>6</sup>.

In 1928, in Moscow, he published *The outline of the Russian language* [*Povtoritel'nyj kurs russkogo jazyka*]<sup>7</sup>, which he defined as «an elementary introduction to the science of language based uniquely on the mother tongue»<sup>8</sup>.

Karcevskij spent the rest of his life in Switzerland, where he founded the *Société genevoise de linguistique*, with the aim of promoting the development of linguistics by analysing languages on the basis of the principles and methods of Saussure. In Switzerland, however, he complained about his scientific isolation. Nobody read his works and he could not publish them because of financial problems. He wanted to go back to

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<sup>4</sup> Some scholars claim that Karcevskij attended several of Saussure's courses (Fontaine 1997, p. 78; Komte 2006, p. 106, etc.). J. Toman, on the basis of the registers of the University of Geneva, maintains that Karcevskij only attended the Sanskrit course in 1911/1912, and states that in Geneva Karcevskij attended mostly the courses of Bally (Toman [ed.], 1994, p. 33). Other scholars agree with Toman (Baran, Dušičkina 1998, p. 151). Nevertheless, the most important element is that Karcevskij considered Saussure his Maestro, an impression, which many of Karcevskij's works clearly convey.

<sup>5</sup> Fontaine 2001, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Karcevski 1929.

<sup>7</sup> Karcevskij 1928.

<sup>8</sup> Jakobson 1956, p. 11.

Russia. The situation there, however, was even worse than in Switzerland. Karcevskij died in 1955, soon after receiving the permission to return and work in Russia.

Besides the two above-mentioned monographs, Karcevskij wrote approximately seventy essays and reviews. Among them, his most interesting work from a theoretical point of view, is «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique», published in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* in 1929. Here the author shows how the instability of the bond between *signifiant* and *signifié* represents the driving power of a language, which allows linguistic evolution.

We will now see what the asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign is, how it functions, and what consequences it has.

### 3.

At the beginning of his essay Karcevskij states:

«Le signe et la signification ne se recouvrent pas entièrement, leurs limites ne coïncident pas dans tous les points: un même signe a plusieurs fonctions, une même signification s'exprime par plusieurs signes. Tout signe est virtuellement "homonyme" et "synonyme", à la fois»<sup>9</sup>.

This can be considered the definition of the asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign. In these few lines, Karcevskij suggests that the structure of the linguistic sign has two essential characteristics: dualism and asymmetry.

The linguistic sign, in fact, is made up of two entities alternatively called by Karcevskij *signe* / *signification*, *signe* / *fonction*, *phonique* / *fonction* or, with a more Saussurean terminology, *signifiant* / *signifié*. These two entities, like two asymmetrical geometrical figures, are not perfectly superimposable; they are coupled in a sort of unstable balance and the *signe* shows a tendency for homonymy (more precisely it aims to acquire new *significations* in addition to its own, «proper» one), while the *signification* shows a tendency for synonymy (that is, it is inclined to be expressed by other *signes* in addition to its own).

In the article «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique» Karcevskij uses the term *signe* in an ambiguous way, sometimes referring to the sign as the unity of *signifiant* and *signifié*, sometimes referring to the *signifiant* alone.

To avoid any ambiguity, in this paper, I will use the Saussurean terminology: *sign* to refer to the complex entity, *signifiant* for the 'form', and *signifié* for the 'meaning'.

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<sup>9</sup> Karcevski 1929, p. 88.

Karcevskij exemplifies the concept of asymmetrical dualism by showing how a word is made up. The author states that the *signifié* of a word consists of «deux centres opposés de fonctions sémiologiques» adding that «l'un groupe autour de lui les valeurs formelles, l'autre les valeurs sémantiques»<sup>10</sup>. If we consider the word *voda* 'water', we can split its *signifié* into these elements<sup>11</sup>:

1. semantic value: water is a liquid defined by the formula H<sub>2</sub>O;
2. half-formal value: inanimate;
3. formal values of gender (feminine) and number (singular);
4. formal-functional value of case (nominative).

In Karcevskij's opinion, formal values (gender, number, case, aspect, tense, etc.) represent the elements of the *signifié* that all speakers understand in the same way; they are somehow safe from subjective interpretations and remain the same in every situation.

The semantic part of the word is a sort of residue, which cannot be split into such objective elements as the formal values. The exact semantic value of a word is never fixed without referring to a concrete situation, because it always depends on it:

«[...] chaque fois que nous appliquons un mot, en tant que valeur sémantique, à la réalité concrète, recouvrons-nous par lui un ensemble de représentations plus ou moins nouveau. Autrement dit, nous transposons continuellement la valeur sémantique de notre signe»<sup>12</sup>.

The transposition, which can be defined as a shift involving the semantic or the formal values constituting the *signifié* of a word, may be so small as to be irrelevant, and therefore, imperceptible; but it may also be considerable. In this case, a *tertium comparationis* is introduced to motivate the new meaning of the old *signifiant*.

It is important to note, regarding the components of the *signifié*, that in *Système du verbe russe* and in *Povtoritel'nyj kurs russkogo jazyka*, Karcevskij claims that formal values capture the semantic value of the words, giving them the form of a noun, a verb, or an adjective etc. Thus, the words are distributed into the various parts of speech, which in turn, allow them to establish grammatical relations in the sentence.

After having clarified the structure of a word, we will focus our attention on how a sign can be a homonym and a synonym at the same time and we will try to understand what role the above mentioned mechanism of transposition plays in this phenomenon.

In *Système du verbe russe* Karcevskij states that, «toute signification [...] n'est qu'un point de croisement d'une série idéologique avec une série

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> The example is taken from Karcevski 1927, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Karcevski 1929, p. 91.

psychologique. Elle est virtuellement un synonyme et un "homonyme", tout à la fois»<sup>13</sup>.

A *signifié* is necessarily «la spécification d'un genre»<sup>14</sup>; in other words, it is the species of a genus. The Russian word *učitel'* 'teacher', for instance, is a member of the series:

*učitel'* 'teacher',  
*prepodavatel'* 'lecturer',  
*nastavnik* 'preceptor',  
*rukovoditel'* 'supervisor',  
*vospitatel'* 'educator'.

All the members of the series represent a species of the genus *pedagog* 'pedagogue'; they are varieties of the same class of facts, and therefore, they are synonyms<sup>15</sup>. Karcevskij points out that every *signifié* is a member of an «ideological» (synonymic) series. Moreover, every series is open, and thanks to the transposition, can always accept new *signifiés*.

A *signifié*, however, can be conceived not only as a species of a genus, but also as «un groupement organisé de représentations»<sup>16</sup>. As such, it can be involved in whatever association of ideas primed by the concrete situation, thus evoking other groups of representations. Its proper (usual) *signifiant* will follow it in this shift. This phenomenon, called by Karcevskij «transposition», lies on fortuitous, subjective analogies between a fact and a group of representations.

Let us compare the meanings of the Russian word *byk* in two different sentences:

1. *Byk pasetsja v stade* 'The bull grazes in the herd';
2. *Most stoit na bykach* 'The bridge rests on pillars'<sup>17</sup>.

In the first sentence *byk* means 'bull', whereas in the second one, *byk* is used in a figurative (metaphoric) sense to refer to pillars. The ideas of

<sup>13</sup> Karcevski 1927, p. 31. This statement seems to be imprecise. Synonymy and homonymy cannot involve the sole *signifié*; they necessarily concern the sign as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> Karcevski 1927, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> The relationship between *pedagog* and each member of the given series (*učitel'*, *prepodavatel'*, *nastavnik*, *rukovoditel'*, *vospitatel'*) seems to be the same kind of relationship as between a hyperonym and his co-hyponyms. By comparing the semantic matrices of the given terms, in fact, we notice that the hyperonym is characterized by a certain number of semantic markers, which are also present in the semantic matrix of its co-hyponyms. The latter, however, contain some additional markers, varying from one co-hyponym to another. Thus *flower* is the hyperonym of *rose*, *daisy*, *tulip*, etc., which are its co-hyponyms. We observe the same kind of relationship between *pedagog* and *učitel'*, *prepodavatel'*, *nastavnik* etc. In regards to the synonymic series, in *Système du verbe russe*, Karcevskij adds that the language may lack the hyperonym of a series; or, in other words, some series do not have the word naming the class of facts to which the given varieties belong. This does not spoil our interpretation of the concept, because the missing hyperonym is present in the language as a «virtual», as a possibility.

<sup>16</sup> Karcevski 1927, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> The two examples are taken from *Povtoritel'nyj kurs russkogo jazyka* (cf. in Karcevskij 2000, p. 116), but the case of *byk* is also analysed in *Système du verbe russe* (Karcevski 1927, p. 30-34).

strength and solidity of the pillars allow them to be associated with bulls. *Byk* in (2) has undergone a shift and has become a homonym of *byk* in (1). But *byk* (2) is also a synonym of *ustoj*, which actually means ‘pillar’. So, through transposition, we obtained both a homonym and a synonym at the same time.

We can illustrate the above with this diagram:

*homonymic series* (↓)

*byk* (1):  
(usual meaning ‘bull’)  
[+ animate]

↓

<i>byk</i> (2): (metaphoric meaning ‘pillar’) [– animate]	→	<i>ustoj</i> : (usual meaning ‘pillar’)	<i>synonymic series</i> (↔)
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The transposition of one of the values can affect the others, or, to be more precise, it can leave traces in the others.

When using *byk* in the sense of pillar, the word loses the formal value of animacy, and, since in Russian the declension of animate nouns differs from that of inanimate ones, one must say, *Ja smotrju na byk-i mosta* ‘I’m looking at the pillars of the bridge’, and not, *Ja smotrju na byk-ov mosta*, because *-ov* is the accusative plural ending of animate nouns.

The essential thing in every transposition is the discordance between the proper meaning and the metaphoric one. This gap remains until the *tertium comparationis*, the psychological link between the two meanings, is perceived by the speaker. The more one uses a word in its metaphoric sense, the less one perceives its proper meaning; and, in the end, the two words separate and become independent of one another, while still sharing the same *signifiant* (homophones)<sup>18</sup>.

In Russian the word *ključ*, for instance, means ‘key’, ‘clef’, ‘interlinear translation’, ‘source’. If it is possible to find a link between ‘key’ and ‘interlinear translation’, because both of these meanings suggest the idea of opening something, it is much harder, even impossible, to find a connection between the previous meanings and that of ‘source’. These are homophones<sup>19</sup>.

We have just seen a case of semantic transposition, but transposition can also affect the formal (grammatical) values of a word. If *Zamolči!* ‘Be

<sup>18</sup> Karcevskij 1927, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> The example is analysed both in «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique» (Karcevskij 1929, p. 90), and in *Povtoritel’nyj kurs russkogo jazyka* (cf. in Karcevskij 2000, p. 140).

quiet!' is a proper imperative, in the case of a sentence like, *Smolči on*<sup>20</sup>, *vse by obošlos* 'If he had said nothing, all would have gone well', we have a shifted, or metaphoric imperative, because the imperative form is used with a hypothetical function. They are homonyms.

The imperative form has some synonyms too; that is to say, it can be expressed by other means besides its proper one: *Zamolčat*! (verb, infinitive), *Molčanie*! (noun, neuter, nominative case)<sup>21</sup>.

Karcevskij points out that grammatical and semantic transpositions behave in the same way. The only difference is that the grammatical transposition is more regular than the semantic one.

The author underlines the fact that the «game» of synonymy and homonymy rests on the «differential nature» of the linguistic sign. A linguistic system cannot be based on simple oppositions. Every linguistic sign is a member of a series of facts and therefore shares something with the other members of the series. However, at the same time, it is somehow different from all the other members of the same series. That is why in Russian, the same morpheme *-a* expresses the value of the genitive case in the paradigm of masculine singular declension of nouns, while at the same time expressing the value of the nominative case if the considered series is that of the feminine singular noun paradigm.

Every language moves between two poles: the general and the individual, the abstract and the concrete. Every sign must be so general as to be recognized and used by every member of the linguistic community, but it must also be able to capture every single element of the surrounding reality. Thus, if the signs were fixed, if each of them only had one meaning, the language would be an unusable catalog of labels; if the signs were so flexible that it would be impossible to assign them a meaning without reference to a concrete situation, language would also be useless. The sign needs only be partially modified, in order to be recognized by every speaker and to adhere to every specific situation. This is the reason why:

«[...] le signifiant (phonique) et le signifié (fonction) glissent continuellement sur la "pente de la réalité". Chacun "déborde" les cadres assignés pour lui par son partenaire: le signifiant cherche à avoir d'autres fonctions que sa fonction propre, le signifié cherche à s'exprimer par d'autres moyens que son signe. Ils sont asymétriques; accouplés, ils se trouvent dans un état d'équilibre instable. C'est grâce à ce dualisme asymétrique de la structure de ses signes qu'un système linguistique peut évoluer: la position "adéquate" du signe se déplaçant continuellement par suite d'adaptation aux exigences de la situation concrète»<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *Smolči* = imperative mood, second person singular; *on* = subject personal pronoun, third person singular, nominative, masculine.

<sup>21</sup> Karcevskij 1929, p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



## 4.

In 1957, N. Pospelov published an article on the linguistic heritage of Karcevskij. In this essay Pospelov states that the principle of asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign, conceived as an intersection between synonymy and homonymy, is the fundamental idea of Karcevskij's theory. Nevertheless, Pospelov adds that, with the principle of the asymmetrical dualism of the sign, Karcevskij causes the Geneva School's static linguistic theory to explode, by finding the deep internal conflict between *significant* and *signifié*<sup>23</sup>.

It is not clear where the discordance between Karcevskij and the members of the Geneva School actually was.

The Geneva linguistic theory can be defined as static because Saussure, after having pointed out the differences between static (synchronic) and evolutive (diachronic) linguistics, states that they do not have the same level of importance. He believes that, «l'aspect synchronique prime l'autre, puisque pour la masse parlante il est la vraie et la seule réalité»<sup>24</sup>. In his works, Karcevskij often insists on the importance of the synchronic approach to language, thus going down the path paved by Saussure.

Maybe Pospelov intended to underline the fact that Karcevskij pays more attention to the dynamism of the language than the Geneva linguists did, by finding in the conflict between *signifiant* and *signifié* the premise to linguistic changes. If this interpretation is correct, it can be deduced that, in Pospelov's opinion, Saussure and his pupils conceived the language as a static, rather than dynamic system. In this sense, T. de Mauro, in an interview with F. Erban<sup>25</sup>, observes that Bally and Sechehaye edited the *Cours*, arranging the students' notes with the aim of creating a general linguistics handbook for students. Thus, Bally and Sechehaye made some interpolations and did not reproduce the argument order chosen by Saussure. As a result, it seemed that Saussure had a static conception of language and that he had focused on the analysis of its phonological and morphological aspects, neglecting its semantic one.

It was the work of R. Godel and the critical editions of the *Cours de linguistique générale* by R. Engler and T. de Mauro<sup>26</sup> that did justice to the Saussurean theory by showing that, in Saussure's opinion, language undergoes continuous breakdown and reconstruction, and is therefore always in a changeable situation. Moreover, meaning seems to be an equally important element in this phenomenon.

Therefore, it would seem that Saussure's conception of language is anything but «static», leading us to refuse Pospelov's aforementioned statement.

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<sup>23</sup> Pospelov 1957, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Saussure 1916, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> De Mauro 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Godel 1957; Saussure 1916 [1968] and 1916 [2000] respectively.

5.

At this point, it would be relevant to identify the sources from which Karcevskij could have drawn some inspiration in elaborating the concept of asymmetrical dualism of the sign.

Some scholars<sup>27</sup> claim that there is a tight link between Karcevskij and Saussure, and that the concept of asymmetrical dualism represents the development of some of Saussure's ideas, a hypothesis that this author supports.

In the *Cours de linguistique générale*, in fact, there are some passages where Saussure investigates the structure of the sign, relating it to linguistic changes, and suggests the same conclusions drawn later by Karcevskij. The latter simply explained to a deeper extent how this can be possible and how the mechanism of linguistic changes works.

The two passages I was referring to are in chapter II, part I (on mutability and immutability of the sign) and chapter VIII, part III (on unity, identity and diachronic reality).

The first passage (chapter II, part I) states, «quels que soient les facteurs d'altérations, qu'ils agissent isolément ou combinés, ils aboutissent toujours à un déplacement du rapport entre le signifié et le signifiant»<sup>28</sup>. Saussure gives an example. The word *necāre* in classical Latin means 'to kill'; in vernacular Latin (IV-V centuries) *necare* means 'to drown'; in modern French we have *noyer* with the meaning of 'to drown'. The vernacular Latin *necare*, and the French *noyer* are nothing but the result of a shift in the relationship between «idea and sign», between *signifié* and *signifiant*. Saussure points out that this is a consequence of the arbitrariness of the sign, and that the language is «radically powerless» against the factors influencing the relationship of the *signifiant* with the *signifié*.

The other passage (chapter VIII, part III) states:

«[...] l'altération du signe est un déplacement de rapport entre le signifiant et le signifié. Cette définition s'applique non seulement à l'altération des termes du système, mais à l'évolution du système lui-même; le phénomène diachronique dans son ensemble n'est pas autre chose»<sup>29</sup>.

It seems that Karcevskij agrees with Saussure when he states that the asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign represents the premise for the evolution of the linguistic system.

The Genevan stamp on Karcevskij's theory of the sign is evident. The article «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique», however, was published in Prague, where the author's ideas were adopted by R. Jakobson and V. Skalička.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. for instance Fontaine 2001, p. 87; Kuznecov 2003, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Saussure 1916, p. 111.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Jakobson fully agrees with Karcevskij's theory, and adds that the numerous «antinomies» implied by the game of *signifiant* and *signifié* represent the motor of grammatical changes<sup>30</sup>.

In one of his works, Skalička highlights the importance of «homonymy» and «homosemy» in determining the relationship between «meaning» and «form» in the sign. Homonymy manifests itself when one and the same form has several meanings (e.g. germ. *Bauer* means 'farmer' and 'cage'). Homosemy emerges when one and the same «element» has several expressions, as is the case for the first person singular in the conjugation of the Czech verbs *nes-u* 'I bring', *kupuj-i* 'I buy', *dělá-m* 'I do', where it is expressed by three different morphemes. If this phenomenon takes place at the semantic level, Skalička calls it synonymy. Skalička explicitly quotes Karcevskij when stating that the formal and the semantic part of the sign are not always symmetric<sup>31</sup>.

It should be noted that in Prague, even before Karcevskij's arrival, these concepts were already being discussed, providing a perfect environment in which his ideas could flourish.

In Mathesius' essay written in 1911, for instance, the author deals with the potentiality of linguistic phenomena, defining it as a static oscillation, as the instability of language at a given moment<sup>32</sup>. Karcevskij was surely aware of Mathesius' work – he included it in the bibliography of his monograph *Système du verbe russe*.

Karcevskij could have also drawn inspiration from Russian Formalists. Using linguistic means to analyse literary texts, they in fact identified the shift in the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* as a basic tool in the analysis of poetic language. It is probable that Karcevskij became well acquainted with these theories during his stay in Moscow between 1917-1919, when he took part in the meetings for the Dialectological Commission, which was also attended by many Formalists.

## 6.

From all of the above, it emerges that «Du dualisme asymétrique du signe linguistique» can be considered the result of an original and deep reflection that drew its inspiration from theories originating from various sources such as Geneva, Prague and, most likely, also Moscow. We must not forget, of course, that all of this was made possible thanks to «European» and «Russian» linguistics of that era following the same structural synchronic direction.

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<sup>30</sup> Jakobson 1932.

<sup>31</sup> Skalička 1935.

<sup>32</sup> Mathesius 1911.

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