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Poljakov, Oleg, 2015. *The Marvel of Indo-European Cultures and Languages. The Lithuanian Bridge to Indo-European*. Vilnius: Vilnius University Publishing House. 637 p.

THE MYSTERY OF INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES – A FEW REMARKS ON THE BOOK BY OLEG POLJAKOV

Marzena Marczevska
(Polska / Lenkija)

If you are looking for a book dedicated to those who are interested in the past of our language and the phenomenon of linguistic and cultural diversity, *The Marvel of Indo-European Cultures and Languages* by Oleg Poljakov makes for an essential reading. It is very difficult to address the book to both sorts of readers: linguists and non-linguists, especially if one wants to describe quite a complex relation between languages and cultures, but Oleg Poljakov manages to create a fascinating story about the emergence of the Indo-European language and people who developed a linguistic and cultural community. What is more, he presents comparative linguistics as an exciting journey that takes us to other countries, other peoples and other times. In this book, every reader can look at the history of words and the affinity of Indo-European languages by investigating grammar and lexical similarities and observing their origin. We will see that developments within languages are often possible to follow down to the smallest details. Oleg Poljakov presents a comprehensive overview based on many studies, referring to the recent developments in the exploration of Indo-European family of languages.

The relationships between Indo-European languages, as well as the reconstruction of their ancestor Proto-Indo-European language (PIE), have been studied and disputed for over two centuries. It obviously makes Indo-European (IE) the best-studied and described language family in the world. It is also necessary to notice that although linguists intend to infer relationships from morphological, phonological and lexical traits, most analyses rely on lexical data sets. Moreover, there is still some new evidence that is used in a discussion on the origin of PIE and the period when it was spoken and spread. According to most linguists, there are two main hypotheses related to this debate. The first one suggests that PIE was spoken in the Pontic-Caspian steppe. It is supported by archeological data and confirmed by the diffusion of cultural innovations linked with pastoralism. The second hypothesis implies that IE languages spread and dispersed into Europe with

the expansion of agricultural culture from Anatolia (Chang *et al.* 2015). As we see, both hypotheses expose the close relations between language and culture of a communicative community. Therefore, the concept of *The Marvel of Indo-European Cultures and Languages* as an overview of linguistic, cultural and historical determinants mixed with the presentation of research on the Indo-European family of languages seems to be adjusted to the objective pursued.

It should be mentioned that the recent period has also brought a few interesting books devoted to Indo-European languages and cultures (for example Meier-Brügger *et al.* 2003; Fortson 2004/2010; Mallory, Adams 2006; Clackson 2007; Beekes 2011). It means that Oleg Poljakov set himself quite a difficult task as it would be extremely hard to present some new hypothesis related to the reconstruction of a proto-language or to discover new linguistic or textual data that may help to formulate some revealing conclusions connected with particular traits of cognate languages. Of course, the description of the relationship between languages requires the comparison of structure and lexicon/vocabulary of the Indo-European languages. But there is much more information the reader can find in the book under review, especially if he/she is interested not only in concise and encyclopaedic knowledge related to IE languages and cultures and the main features of particular linguistic families or languages, but also in some theories emerging while IE languages have been studied. It is worth mentioning that Poljakov regards language as the main manifestation of every national culture, which explains the author's approach to his research. As the author wrote in the preface, the main aim of the book is to present IE languages "in the broad context of the history and the culture of the peoples who spoke or speak them, in their relationship to other languages and cultures". I think that this aim was fully accomplished. Thus, it is not surprising that the book contains a lot of information related to the past and present of IE language family, their valuable scripts and literatures.

As Poljakov addresses his book to the broad audience, he just describes many fascinating issues related to IE languages and cultures, not arguing with other linguists, just presenting an overview of earlier statements and comparing linguistic data to show the relation between Lithuanian and other Indo-European languages. According to Poljakov, Lithuanian is considered to be the most archaic among the Indo-European languages spoken nowadays (cf. Klimas 1957, 1969; Schmalstieg 1982). The evidence is found in the phonetic, morphological and lexical system as it is shown in many examples of linguistic data cited by Poljakov (cf. Smoczyński 2001, 2007).

Poljakov underlines that the development of comparative linguistics came with the discovery of Sanskrit, the oldest language of the Indian subcontinent. Sanskrit is related to many European languages (this issue has been raised since the sixteenth century) and it may be very helpful not only in comparing the Indo-European languages with each other, but also in reconstruction of a proto-language, the hypothetical ancestor of Indo-European languages. It was also found that the original structure of Sanskrit forms was well-preserved and quite transparent what made this language the perfect base for linguistic reconstructions and comparative analyses.

The book consists of 12 chapters. Our linguistic and cultural journey starts with the prehistory of linguistics, the author traces the part which introduces readers to the world of linguistics and languages. In order to explain the essence of the emergence of linguistic thought, the author traces the beginnings of linguistic reflection in the Bible and the ancient cultures in general. This part is also devoted to the formation of literary languages and the creation and development of national languages in Europe. The second chapter deals with the appearance of comparative and historical linguistics and its significance. Poljakov recalls the opinion of the American ethnolinguist Edward Sapir that "Linguistics may be said to have begun its scientific career with the comparative study and reconstruction of the Indo-European languages". The author mentions those who gave the foundations of comparative and historical grammar: Franz Bopp, Jacob Grimm, Rasmus Rask and Alexander Vostokov. He also presents Wolfgang P. Schmid's hypothesis of Baltic Centrism (according to it, "Baltic languages were in the very epicentre of the splitting of the Proto-Indo-European language", which could have caused the preservation of their archaic character), Balto-Slavonic-Proto-Language hypothesis supported by many researchers (Vytautas Mažiulis, Simas Karaliūnas and Wojciech Smoczyński among others), Antoine Meillet's view that Baltic and Slavonic languages come from two different language groups, Vladimir Toporov and Vyacheslav V. Ivanov's hypothesis that the Slavonic languages derive from periphery Baltic dialects (West Baltic) and the achievements of the Neogrammarian school of linguistics, as well as researches of F. Fortunatov and F. de Saussure.

The third chapter is devoted to an outline of IE languages (Baltic, Slavonic, Germanic, Italic and Romance, Celtic, Armenian, Albanian, Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Nuristani Anatolian, Tocharian, Paleo-Balkan languages). The other chapters refer to the history of deciphering of ancient scripts (Anatolian and Hittite, Sanskrit, Greek, Etruscan, Italic, Gothic, Old Norse, Old Irish) and their relations to Lithuanian. As Lithuanian seems to be the central point of Poljakov's project, he concentrates on the position of the Lithuanian language in the Indo-European family. I find a comparison between both Baltic languages very useful and informative as there is still a discussion conducted which Baltic language, Latvian or Lithuanian, contains more archaic features. As we see, both of them preserved some features which we associate with the common past and IE origin. What makes Poljakov's work special is that he concentrates on Lithuanian as the most archaic among IE languages that are still spoken, alive and supported by its rich tradition in folklore and literature.

The book is constructed according to the idea formulated in the preface: it shows that the main aim of the book is to get a reader acquainted with "the world of ancient Indo-European languages", with their peculiarities and the world hidden behind them.

Poljakov's work is exceptional for many reasons. It is not the exact result of a regular research in comparative linguistics, so the reader who looks for the concise and systematic analysis of linguistic data may be a little disappointed. But instead we can find some interesting information devoted to the history, culture of PIE peoples and their proto-language which can be traced in many living languages. It is worth mentioning that the book is generously illustrated, which makes the linguistic journey quite pleasant

and fascinating. Besides, Poljakov demonstrates the rare ability of picking out details that allow him to transfer the professional knowledge to non-professional readers in the most accessible way.

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