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## Review: *Fundamentals of the structure and history of Russian: a usage-based approach*

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**David K. Hart and Grant H. Lundberg. *Fundamentals of the structure and history of Russian: a usage-based approach*. Bloomington: Slavica, 2013.**

*Fundamentals* distinguishes itself from other English-language textbooks about the structure of Russian by being *usage-based*, which means that the authors eschew underlying abstract forms and ordered rules and instead anchor their synchronic description of Russian phonetics, phonology, and morphology in correspondences and choices among surface forms. (ix, 56ff.) The assertion that “a usage based description [...] renders a better picture of [phonetic and orthographic] reality than the generative-based description” (56; bracketed text added) is self-evidently true, and it is hard not to appreciate the difference the authors draw between generative *production* and what they archly call *degeneration* in the case of listener *perception* (57), that is, the unwinding of generative processes by a listener who begins with a surface form and must deduce an abstract underlying representation.

Because *Fundamentals* is a textbook, though, a more useful question in a pedagogical context might address not physical reality, but whether this particular descriptive approach is more *successful* than others in helping advanced language learners become more accurate and comfortable in their use of the target language. The anecdotal classroom experience of at least some language teachers seems to be mixed; there are students for whom the generation of related concrete surface forms from a common abstract base is illuminating, explanatory, and pedagogically useful, and others for whom the very fact of abstraction is distracting and confusing. Given that type of learner difference, this new textbook is welcome because it provides a pedagogical alternative to the more abstract models found elsewhere, and may therefore prove successful with students who find abstract treatments more alienating than illuminating.

*Fundamentals* is divided into three main sections: “Russian sounds” (1–63), “Morphology and morphophonemics” (65–149), and “Historical sound changes” (151–94), followed by a list of fifteen sources consulted by the authors (195–96). There is no index of either words or

ideas, but the table of contents and the use of section headings are sufficiently detailed to make it possible to navigate to major descriptive topics. The unequal allocation of pages to the three principal sections reflects the authors' primary emphasis on providing a synchronic description of modern Russian that uses only surface information available directly to speakers (parts 1 and 2). The authors segregate historical explanation (part 3) because, although it may illuminate why Russian behaves the way it does, diachronic information cannot be usage-based in situations where early linguistic forms are not directly accessible to modern speakers, and therefore cannot play an explicit role in a model that is allowed to look only at real surface forms (x). The title is potentially misleading because the treatment of structure is systematic, while the treatment of history is anecdotal; *Fundamentals* is not equivalently and comparably about the *structure and history of Russian* as much as it is a textbook about structure that makes effective and illuminating reference to history where it can help explain how structure came about.

The target audience for *Fundamentals* is advanced Anglophone students of Russian—advanced both because of the breadth of coverage and because the lengthy citations in academic Russian are presented without translation (e.g., 15). Technical linguistic terms (e.g., involving articulatory phonetics, 13) are given in both English and Russian, presumably so that students will learn this specialized vocabulary and be able to read more about the subject in authentic Russian linguistic sources. Each explanatory section is accompanied by exercises that enable students to explore and apply what they are learning in practice (e.g., phonetic transcription, 11). The language of the text is direct, informal, and clear, and the style, which incorporates rhetorical questions and a wealth of illustrative examples, makes the information (both factual, about Russian, and methodological, about how to think about Russian) accessible to a student audience that may lack experience reading academic prose. The authors' frequent emphasis that alternation under inflection exemplifies *relationships* (e.g., 30) and *generalizations about relationships* (e.g., 39, 59), rather than *processes*, is important to their methodology, although some instructors who are otherwise comfortable with the explanatory model might nonetheless prefer not to emphasize the methodology itself as strongly as the authors have chosen to do. The authors themselves occasionally find it difficult to adhere consistently to their orientation around surface forms,

e.g., “a complete word can be composed of a single morpheme: *слово* ‘table’” (69) alongside the description of “the ‘no ending’ or ‘zero ending,’ the lack of an overt ending” as “there is an ending [...] the ending is empty” (72–73).

What is likely to prove most original and broadly valuable in *Fundamentals* is the authors’ decision to provide a separate historical section in a textbook about the structure of Russian, and this part is likely to be of use as a supplement even in classrooms where the instructor might otherwise prefer a generative approach to synchronic description over the authors’ usage-based one. The phenomena discussed in this part correspond to questions that arise frequently in language classes (e.g., fleeting vowels [187–90], *e ~ ě* [162–66]) or those that have historical explanatory value (e.g., jotation, here called dejotation [180–82]), and the authors make effective use of comparison with other Slavic languages (166–70), something students of Russian frequently find exciting and engaging. The explanations and examples are clear, and although the section is too brief and selective to serve as a general introduction to the history of Russian, the historical discussion of specific topics is likely to be highly effective in the important role that the authors have defined for it: showing how language history can illuminate how modern Russian came to be the way it is.

It is difficult to avoid letting a small number of errors, inconsistencies, and imprecisions slip through in the first edition of a book that entails this degree of typographic complexity: The softness diacritic is described as an apostrophe written *above* a letter (7), but the example writes it after, rather than above, the consonant to which it applies, and it is described correctly as being written after the base consonant elsewhere (9). The phrase *usage-based* is sometimes hyphenated and sometimes not, even on the same page (e.g., “a usage-based program” ~ “a usage based description”, 56). The authors generally avoid Romanization of Cyrillic spelling, but where they do use it, their usage is not consistent either internally or with traditional practice in Russian linguistics and language pedagogy; thus *Julija* (34), *ikanje* (41), *yeri* (27ff.), *yat’* (158), *jer* (161). The decision not to mark stress on monosyllabic words (e.g., in the reading passage on p. 40) is common in textbooks, but since there are both stressed and unstressed monosyllabic words in Russian, as well as monosyllabic clitics that may be stressed when attached to some headwords but not to others,

this decision seems to perpetuate a questionable line of reasoning that rests on assumptions (stress needn't be marked in these situations because its presence and placement can be inferred) that are only largely, but not entirely, supported by the facts of the language. The curved superscript diacritic over the letter *ü* is oddly displaced to the right in a few places (e.g., 3 of 8 times in the list of sources, 195–96).

Whether instructors will adopt *Fundamentals* as the primary textbook for their Structure of Russian courses is likely to depend on how effective they find the usage-based explanatory model. Even those instructors who prefer a more abstract generative model for pedagogical reasons, though, should nonetheless consider incorporating the material from the historical portion of the book into their courses. And perhaps not just at the advanced level; if you've taught first-year Russian, you've probably had students ask "so where does that peculiar hard sign come from anyway?" You can find an accessible explanation on p. 161.

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**David Pesetsky. *Russian Case Morphology and the Syntactic Categories*. MIT Press, 2013.**

David Pesetsky's *Russian Case Morphology and the Syntactic Categories* (MIT Press, 2013) is one of the most thought-provoking works of theoretical linguistics to appear in many years. It provides a startlingly original analysis of a well-known thorny problem of Russian morpho-syntax, embedding the analysis of that puzzle within a radical rethinking of the role of case in syntactic theory, and taking us on a journey of consequences and extensions that challenge one's views of many aspects of minimalist theory, including key components of case theory, phrase structure, locality and others. If a monograph is to be judged by its creativity, its significance for the theoretical field at large and the range of details of its technical implementation, then *Russian Case Morphology and the Syntactic Categories* deserves mention among some of the most significant recent works of theoretical linguistics.