ROBERT AUSTERLITZ

Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,
und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.

Robert Austerlitz died 9 September 1994. What follows is intended as a concise celebration of his memory; it focuses on his development and activity as a linguist.[1]

Robert Paul Austerlitz was born 13 December 1923 in Bucharest, of an Austrian father who had moved to Romania from Brünn, Moravia, and an American mother who had Bohemian roots. But he grew up at the intersection of Transylvania and Muntenia, in Braşov (= Kronstadt = Brassó), a city whose names—which he later etymologized (1975b)—reflected its linguistic complexity. The three main layers of its population consisted of Germans (Saxons had settled there in the thirteenth century, as well as Austrians from the seventeenth, and others in the twentieth), Hungarians, and Romanians, and Austerlitz learned German, Hungarian, and Romanian in that order. More significant for his development than the multilingual situation was Braşov's cultural intricacy: the Hungarian population alone, for example, was fragmented into Roman Catholic, Reformed (Calvinist), Lutheran (Evangelical), and Unitarian confessions. This environment proved an ideal laboratory for observation and taxonomizing, an environment in which his father was able to pass on to him an early appreciation—again, not so much linguistic but general-anthropologic and kinesic—for human diversity. Austerlitz attended German elementary and Romanian (Orthodox) secondary school (Liceul Andrei Şaguna, where his French and Latin teachers were particularly influential). During his four years at the liceu, Austerlitz's perspective was that of an outsider—he was just beginning to learn Romanian—and this perspective gave him a critical edge, allowing him to admix insight with sympathy.

When Austerlitz arrived in New York in 1938 just before his fifteenth birthday, he was thus already equipped with a fusion of what used to be called Western and Eastern European, Old World culture. Within a week of his arrival he was attending Stuyvesant High School, and over the next eight years he rapidly internalized New World, chiefly North American, high and popular culture (making deliveries for a Fifth Avenue chemist, service in the US Army, playing organ in Texas and jazz piano in New Orleans). His undergraduate work, begun at Washington Square College (NYU) and interrupted by the war, was resumed briefly at Loyola before he returned to New York in the summer of 1946. Here he explored philosophy at the New School for Social Research (it is revealing that the title of his B.A. essay was 'Synchronic and diachronic as linguistic categories') and simultaneously, at the insistance of Elliot van Kirk Dobbie of the English Department at Columbia University, Austerlitz began the study of linguistics. In May of 1950 he was awarded the B.A. from the New School and, one month later, in June, the M.A. from Columbia. The title of his (unpublished) M.A. thesis is *Phonemic analysis of Hungarian* (1950). Notice that this is the same year as Alarcos

[1] The focus on Austerlitz the linguist and scholar is not meant to belittle other accomplishments. He was, for instance, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and past president of the American Oriental Society; and, especially germane to this venue, he served as President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1990.

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Llorach 1950, and just one year after Roman Jakobson and János Lotz had published their 'Notes on the French phonemic pattern' (1949). The thesis was a little masterpiece. Viewed a half century on, it is a landmark.

At Columbia, Austerlitz studied Old English with Dobbie in 1947, then Turkic with Karl Menges and Indo-European, via Gothic, with André Martinet. The turning point came, however, with Austerlitz's study (primarily of Samoyed and Hungarian) under János Lotz. (Lotz had been lured to New York by Roman Jakobson; they had worked and associated amicably, together with Wolfgang Steinitz, at weekly seminars in Sweden during the war.) In very short order, Lotz communicated to Austerlitz his expertise in, and passion for, a broad spectrum of areas including descriptive grammar of the Uralic languages, Hungarian philology, and metrics. One element in the complex chemistry which allowed such a rapid and broad-banded transmission may well have been the fact that Lotz's background was in some ways similar, though in the reverse, to Austerlitz's: born in the US of Hungarian parents, Lotz had been transplanted to Hungary at the age of seven.

After 1950, Austerlitz quickened the pace even more. In the summer of 1951, he studied Korean under an ACLS grant at the University of California at Berkeley. From the autumn of 1951 until the spring of 1953 he was in Finland, assisted financially by Public Law 16 in the first year, and in the second year as a Ford Foundation Fellow.[2] His original motivation in going to Finland, besides the obvious one of continuing the Uralic studies he had begun under Lotz, was to find out more about Paleosiberian, particularly Ket (and Austerlitz dated his own interest in Nivkh to a lecture given by Jakobson at the Museum of Natural History in September 1949; see 1977:16). He spent the period 1951–53 attending lectures at the University of Helsinki, where his teachers included Pentti Aalto (comparative Altaic), Erkki Itkonen (Finno-Ugric morphology; Komi, Lapp, Mari), Eliel Lagercrantz (Saam), Toivo Vilho Lehtisalo (Samoyed), Paavo Ravila (Mordvin), Martti Räsänen (Turkic), and Lauri Posti (Baltic-Finnic Kulturwörter; Historical Baltic-Finnic phonology). Austerlitz had by now garnered the strongest possible preparation for a career in Uralic linguistics; but it was only the beginning.

The second year of the Ford Fellowship had been earmarked for the study of Tungusic and, if possible, Nivkh, in Japan. Austerlitz spent the rest of 1953 studying Tungusic at Tokyo University under Shirô Hattori and attending other lectures in general, for example, on Korean, in the hope of learning Japanese. In the spring of 1954 he began fieldwork in Abashiri, Hokkaido, with a Nivkh informant originally from Siska, a locality in the Bay of Taraika, South Sakhalin Island. This was Chio Nakamura, a person of very high intelligence and enormous knowledge of her culture. She was trilingual in Nivkh, Orok, and Japanese; she was also a shaman. Austerlitz's earliest field notes confirm that he knew relatively little Japanese at the time; first contact was made by means of visual aids. (Austerlitz had a keen visual sense, and was a quick sketcher. All his field notes are profusely, and often wittily, illustrated.[3]) He deliberately chose, for the first form to be collected, the Nivkh word for 'comb' because it is easily elicited per demonstrationem and it has a simple phonological shape: /e/.

[2] Public Law 16, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which came into effect on March 24, 1943, provided an opportunity for disabled WWII veterans to train for jobs that they could hold. Veterans training under this act received the same rates of subsistence as those under the G.I. Bill.

[3] See the *Editor's Department* in this issue (pp. 4–6) for some examples of these drawings. I thank Karl Zimmer for supplying *Language* with them.

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This first bout of fieldwork continued for two months, and Austerlitz learned Japanese and Nivkh simultaneously from his informant (two years' worth of further fieldwork followed in 1956–58; this was supplemented in 1991 when Austerlitz was finally able to go to Sakhalin Island itself). In the autumn he returned to Columbia, where he completed the requirements for the Ph.D. (1955). His dissertation, *The metrical structure of Ob-Ugric folk poetry*, reflected in form and content the strands of thinking he had encountered in Lotz, with distinct Steinitzian undertones. It is instructive to note that when it came to be published, Austerlitz relegated the word 'structure' to the subtitle (1958b). He wrote some two decades later of one of his own articles, on the metrics of Friedrich Hölderlin (1979a:28): 'This presentation could be said to be structuralist, generative, functionalist, pragmaticist, semiotic(ist), Gestalt-oriented, etc. Inasmuch as these labels have lost their original meanings through uninformed and opportunistic misuse, they are disavowed.'

In later years, Austerlitz returned to the topic of metrics in a string of articles concerned with the design of folk poetry. Specific traditions included Khanty (1963a), Romanian (1975a, 1976b, 1980d), Kalevala (1985c,d), Karelian (1987b,c) and Japanese (1987d). He contributed to the understanding of the nature and scope of repetition, parallelism, and symmetry (1962a, 1980e), and to the discussion of genre (1962c, 1976a). He wrote seminally on the role of music in song-texts (1966a, 1967a) and provocatively on the communicative power of music on its own (1983a, 1985a). It is illustrative of the interconnectedness of the man's many-faceted interests that his writings on poetry and music culminate in his interpretation of myth, play, and humor (1988).

Austerlitz was convinced that in folk poetry, roughly half of the message is conveyed by the code. But not just in folk-poetry: at the opposite extreme (*les extrêmes se touchent*), in the most artificial poetry, as well, he felt this to be true. For the open-minded academic this point of view is perhaps best demonstrated in his analysis of Hölderlin's asclepiad strophe (1979a).

As an intellectual, Austerlitz was interested in intellectual history. He peppered his lectures and, even more so, his desultory conversation with anecdotes and asides about the history of ideas and the lives of their originators, promulgators, and critics. He loved linguistics as a scholarly discipline, but knew enough of its childhood and antecedents to feel that it was falling short of the mark. By the late 1970s, Austerlitz had become cynical enough to predict that if linguistics had a future in the United States, its brightest hope was not in linguistics departments per se, but rather with anthropological linguists and others like them (e.g. Sino-Tibetanists), that is, with those whose work is concerned with language(s), often over a large area and in a great diversity of cultural settings. (Austerlitz's own thinking and interests overlapped somewhat with those of Harold C. Conklin, but the influence of Floyd Lounsbury was also direct.) Among Austerlitz's publications are several that contribute to the history of linguistics and phonetics, for example, 1974b (on Sajnovics), 1974a (typology), and 1975e (bibliography for the history of phonetics). His propensity for thinking over vast spatial and temporal expanses is well illustrated by his articles on morphosyntactic, morphological, phonological, and phonetic typology across northern Eurasia (1970, 1980c, 1981, 1986c). His article on the distribution and development of [w] and [v] (1976d) spans two continents and three millennia. He also wrote on the cladistic difficulties presented by the Permian subgroup of Uralic (1985b) and on the Baltic-Finnic lexicon (1985f), on the lexical space occupied by the absolute superlative in Circumpannonia (1987a) and Europe as a whole (1991a), and on the Finnish-Yakut-Goethe axis that intersects a particular

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specimen of verbal art and its translations (1984c). In 'Contact, space, history' (1990d) he appeals to Uralicists both to look in deep and, paradoxically, to think out far: 'We need more information (much of it non-linguistic), more preciseness, and more daring.' This approach is exemplified in the four-page sweep from Finnish/Estonian/Saam to Chuvash/Rest-of-Turkic/'Altaic' of his 1993 article on demography and agglutination. The skew in the distribution of genetic density between the Old and New Worlds led Austerlitz to pilot speculation (1980a) that may have set a new wing of linguistics in motion (Nichols 1992).

As a teacher, he was equally at ease with undergraduates and with postgraduates. His classroom manner was lively yet calm, intense yet nuanced. His method, even with large audiences, was maieutic. He had no pet theory of his own or anyone else's and no use for disciples. He was a fearless thinker and encouraged students to do their own daring thinking. He imparted not only his knowledge but, more importantly, his love for his discipline and for the material itself; to study with him was to come to know that you could feel that way, too.

Austerlitz thought globally and in terms of millennia. Nevertheless, he was ever mindful of the small-scale, local, often messy detail of realia (notice again the connection with anthropology in the American tradition). It is no doubt this awareness, learned through a lifetime of paying attention to the great diversity of cultures surrounding him and coupled with the historical-linguistic training he had received at Columbia, that prompted him to criticize the matter and manner of many Long-Range Comparisons. He pleaded, in diverse fora over several years, for greater methodological rigor on the one hand and for imaginative sensitivity to societal, demographic, topographic, and climatic dynamics on the other (1972, 1978b, 1982b, 1983b, 1991b).

Austerlitz was stimulated not only by folkways but also by their conflict with the twentieth century. Among his publications that treat aspects of this conflict are 1975c and 1975d. He had a healthy measure of contempt for literacy (often remarking on the prodigious power of recall of his Nivkh informant, not coincidentally a complete analphabetic) and for that matter, for electronic technology in general. He typed most of his own work, and all of his thousands of personal letters, on a host of manual typewriters lovingly adapted and maintained for various purposes. Once when a knot of Slavist colleagues were complaining/boasting of the computer-related difficulties they were having in writing their books, Austerlitz wrily reminded them that Franz von Miklosich had penned his entire *Vergleichende Grammatik* without electricity.

Austerlitz's training in linguistics entailed a coupling of American and European linguistic theory, with data drawn from points increasingly further east: first Finnish, then the rest of Uralic, then Turkic, Korean, Tungusic, Japanese, Ainu, and finally, in March 1954, the beginning of forty years' study of Nivkh.

Austerlitz never published a grammar or lexicon of Nivkh (as early as 1979 he wrote to a publisher who had solicited a volume from him: 'As to myself as a prospective author, forget it. I am a perfectionist and most of my works will be posthumous'), but some twenty-five of his Nivkh-related articles have appeared; a few are still in press.

His first publication was 1956; it draws uniquely exuberant praise in Roman Jakobson's bibliography of Paleosiberian peoples and languages (Jakobson et al. 1957:73). In this article, glimpses of proto-Nivkh may already be seen in the form of speculations drawn from internal evidence. Austerlitz's subsequent articles on Nivkh elaborate and render increasingly explicit both the material and the method it inspired. Most of these studies either focus on semantic areas of the lexicon (religious terminology: 1959b; ethnobotany: 1962b; seal nomenclature: 1968a; terms for 'reindeer': 1976c; 'shaman's drum': 1984b; 'money': 1985g; 'shaman': 1986b; 'bride' and 'village': 1990a), or work

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out, in an unhurried, systematic manner, chapters for a work with the provisional title 'Etymologicum Magnum Linguae Giliacorum' that will remain unfinished (see 1980b for what was to be part of the introductory material, and 1982a, 1984a, and 1994, for representative parts of chapters).[4] A few others deal with grammatical categories and their interplay with phonology and lexicon ('Vocatif et impératif en ghiliak' 1958a, 'Semantic components of pronoun systems' 1959a), but the greater part of the remainder are concerned with art, for example, 'Gilyak verse and music' 1985e, 'Ten Nivkh (Gilyak) erotic poems' 1990b.

Nivkh is an isolate. Austerlitz's passion for prehistory and his eye for the dynamics of synchrony inevitably led him to work out his own brand of Internal Reconstruction, a method which he applied to Japanese ('Japanische Säugetiernamen' 1989) and, partly in play, to Finnish and English as well: examples are 1978a and 1986a. He also explored the assistance which typology can render internal reconstruction (1990c).

Austerlitz's *Finnish reference grammar* (1964) provides the most detailed illustration of his belief that the linguistic data themselves, if treated systematically and with an eye to exhaustiveness, will yield not only answers but also the tools with which to probe deeper. This work was revolutionary for its time (see, for example, Raimo Anttila's remarks concerning Austerlitz's use of parallel underlying forms, 1975f:361) and is even now unsurpassed. It is nothing less than the morphonological component of a generative grammar of Finnish, but generative in the most liberal sense: rules are summoned to account for attested forms. What few rules turn out to be necessary, turn out not to require ordering or indeed any ad hoc justifications: skewed or defective distribution in the lexicon (with reference to both form and meaning, simultaneously) coincides with, and thereby identifies and suggests a metric for, aberrant or eccentric morphology and phonology, and each domain—distribution and operations—throws light upon the other. Like Meillet ('Toute description est historique, d'une mesure'), Austerlitz did not insist on a distinct cleavage between synchronic and diachronic linguistics; in his analysis of Finnish, this stance is reflected in the fact that for native, non-slang vocabulary nothing approaching the phoneme is needed or even useful: one proceeds directly from a code (consisting of elements of varying degrees of abstractness) to phones. This vast work remains practically inaccessible because of its format and distribution: it is a Bell & Howell Microfilm. Until it is re-edited and properly published, the interested reader may gain a glimpse of Austerlitz's achievements in such articles as 1960 (on suffixes *in statu nascendi*), 1982c (derivational morphology), 1965b (a reduction, from forty-four to one, of Finnish verb inflection types), 1979c (phonology and function in verb categories), and 1979d (phonology and morphology of Finnish given names). Articles that introduce and elaborate the code that Austerlitz devised for work with Finnish are 1967b, 1976f, and 1983e. Vital throughout this work is a detailed knowledge of distributional facts, in the tradition of Leonard Bloomfield, Eli Fischer-Jørgenson, Fred W. Householder, and Bengt Sigurd.

For Austerlitz, the modifier 'socio-' before 'linguistics' was as redundant as 'comparative' before 'literature'. He saw bi- and multilingualism as the norm (it must be recalled that he thought in terms of millennia), and his early and close association with Uriel Weinreich is borne out in such writings as his essays on Fenno-Scandia (1965a and 1975f), on special utterances in Japanese (1973), on bilingualism (1976e), and on register (1983c). There is a Labovian tinge to his 'A curious surrogate for r in the English of New York City' (1983d). Acute phonetic observations may be found passim in his

[4] A piece entitled 'Nivkh-Ainu-Orok symbiosis', most likely written in 1991 and apparently part of this larger work, was to appear sometime in Russian, but no information on its publication was available.

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writings, but they are perhaps at their most trenchant in his 'Twelve remarks on the teaching of phonetics' (1987g). He wrote highly original and accessible short introductions to the Uralic language family (1968b, 1987e); took a stab at the phonology of a Shanghai dialect (1987f); compiled a Finnish reader (1963b) with a glossary containing every form occurring in the texts, each form presented in a morphological analysis which he recommended that 'the user study . . . and, if necessary, dispute' (1963b:xi); and even wrote a few pages on syntax ('What S, O, and V remind me of' 1979b).

Throughout his career, Austerlitz was concerned more with the accurate collection and analysis of language data than with the theoretical correctness of the formulation of those analyses; put another way: less with the language of linguistics than with the linguistics of language(s). To quote James Matisoff (1978:230) in this connection: 'Nothing is a better cure for theoretical arrogance than the profound and prolonged study of a few languages typologically alien to one's own.'

Mais d'abord il faut être linguiste. Austerlitz was a linguist who had the kind of humility that is sometimes difficult to see because it shines so brightly. [DANIEL ABONDOLO, *University College London.*]*

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