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Obituary: In memoriam Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov (1928 - 2009)

Abraham, W.; Kulikov, L.I.

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OBITUARY

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov

1928, Odessa – 2009, St. Petersburg

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov, a great Russian linguist and typologist, died July 21, 2009 in St. Petersburg, at age 81, after a few months of heavy illness.

His name marks an epoch in the history of linguistic typology.

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov graduated from the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages in 1950. He started his academic career in 1959 when he embarked on graduate studies (*aspirantura*) at the Department of German Philology of the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute (*Pedagogičeskij Institut imeni Gercena*). His early works concentrated on German grammar and pedagogical aspects of teaching German.

The scope of his interests crucially extended in 1961, when, after defending his Candidate dissertation (*kandidatskaja dissertacija*), he joined the Research Group for the typological study of languages at the Leningrad Institute of Linguistics, founded and directed by Aleksandr Xolodovich.

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov became one of the most brilliant representatives of what is now known as the famous Leningrad/St. Petersburg Typological School, greatly contributing to the development of the methodology, achievements, and successes of the Research Group. During the years of the Iron Curtain, when many eminent linguists left the Soviet Union, Vladimir Nedjalkov remained and contributed to the development of the unique typological tradition in the country. His interests mainly focused on the typology of verbal categories, such as voice and valency changing (causatives, reciprocals, reflexives, passives), aspect and actionality (resultatives, inchoatives/inceptives), converbs, etc.¹ We owe Nedjalkov comprehensive descriptions and minute analyses of several categories both from a typological viewpoint and in individual languages — German, Chukchi, Nivkh, Evenki, and numerous others. His works of the last decade mostly concentrated on a typological study of reciprocal constructions — a long-term project. It has found its outcome in the fundamental five-volume work,² a true Encyclopedia of reciprocals — an impressive monument to his scientific life.

Nedjalkov's linguistic intuition, typological horizon and sharp eye made him a unique editor — every volume published under his editorship became a remarkable event within our field.

Nedjalkov was a man of rare integrity. He did not draw much of a difference between life and scientific work. His exuberant energy was the subject of legends and helped him to launch and realize the most fantastic collective projects. He literally 'infected' his colleagues with his energy, making possible endeavors which otherwise would never have been brought to their end. He liberally shared his ideas and insights with people who surrounded him. Many talented young researchers were attracted into his 'magnetic linguistic' field, being greatly helped by Nedjalkov to develop their professional skills and to find their place within the scientific and academic infrastructure.

Vladimir Nedjalkov's charming personality, his sense of humor, his sharp criticism, and his friendly invaluable help to colleagues will be sorely missed. But he survives in his fundamental works, in his students, and in his colleagues and their works.

Notes

1. A comprehensive bibliography of Nedjalkov's works published before 1999 can be found in: Werner Abraham & Leonid Kulikov (eds), *Tense-aspect, transitivity and causativity. Essays in honour of Vladimir Nedjalkov*. [Studies in Language Companion Series; 50]. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999, pp. xix-xxxiii.
2. Vladimir P. Nedjalkov, with the assistance of Emma Š. Geniušienė and Zlatka Guentchéva (eds.), *Reciprocal constructions*. 5 vols. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007. [Typological studies in language; 71].

Werner Abraham
Vienna

Leonid Kulikov
Leiden