

**PREDICATE NOMINALS: A PARTIAL SURFACE SYNTAX OF RUSSIAN.** By Johanna Nichols. University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 97. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1981. xix, 397 pp. \$24.50, paper.

Johanna Nichols has set herself two goals: to write, first, a technical linguistic study of a single surface-syntactic relation and, second, a reference grammar of one of the most troublesome problems of Russian, the predicate nominal (PN). My intent here is not to provide an analysis of the merits of the linguistic arguments, for this has been done by Catherine Chvany in an excellent review article in *Language*, 60 (1984): 591-99. Instead I shall address the practical interests of the general Slavist.

This study examines more than what is generally understood as a predicate nominal; it considers all the constructions that are subsumed under the term *imennoe skazanie*. Chapter 1 establishes the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and communicative properties of PNs. (This contrasts with the heavily morphological emphasis of traditional studies.) The second chapter presents an inventory of all the verbs with which PNs are used. Chapter 3 is devoted to one of the principal stumbling-blocks to confidence in one's ability to speak Russian, the alternation of nominative and instrumental case in the PNs. (Even a quick perusal of this chapter will convince the reader that the problem is complex enough to warrant its omission as a criterion of judgment for practical expertise in Russian.) The fourth chapter deals with short form adjectives (and the short versus long adjective alternation), category of state words, and adverbials. The last three chapters constitute a brief overview of PNs and prepositions, conjunctions, and other related constructions.

In many ways Nichols' study epitomizes—and in some degree anticipates—some of the recent developments in general and Slavic linguistics, particularly in this country. In the two decades after Noam Chomsky's initial elaboration of generative-transformational (TG) grammar, the emphasis of much of the work carried out on Slavic languages in this framework was on the testing and development of a general linguistic theory. (The debt which this work owes the Prague School, and Roman Jakobson in particular, is generally acknowledged, particularly in phonology.) But while Chomsky and his followers have continued to develop the "extended standard theory" in extremely interesting and provocative ways, other linguists have continued to focus on discourse, on the whole text as opposed to the sentence. Essentially, this broader focus entails major consideration of context, pragmatic as well as linguistic. (Basic introductory summaries of this position can be found in *Discourse Analysis* by Gillian Brown and George Yule and *Pragmatics* by Stephen C. Levinson, both studies published in 1983 in the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics series.) This focus on pragmatics produces a tradition whose basic premises are opposed to the "logico-deductive" tradition in being open-ended, context-dependent, non-discrete, and inductive/abductive (Talmy Givón, "Logic vs. Pragmatics, with Human Language as the Referee: Toward an Empirically Viable Epistemology," *Journal of Pragmatics*, 6 [1982]: 81-133). Finally, a basic eclecticism has replaced the theoretical dogmatism that was so evident in the 1960s and early 1970s. While theory is still important, there is much more of a tendency among linguists to separate theory from data, to concentrate on the grammar of individual languages (of course, with the ultimate goal of discovering the universals of language).

Nichols' work reflects these current tendencies, even though it was published in 1981. Therefore, a student of the language, interested in using the latest research on Russian for practical purposes, will find in the study both positive and negative aspects of these latest trends. On the one hand, the elegant descriptive statement is gone; the number of factors Nichols has found to influence PNs is overwhelming—certainly for the casual reader. On the other hand, Nichols describes the situation in Russian as it actually is; there is no simplification or idealization. Her book provides a thorough treatment of the facts of predicate nominalization in Russian that concentrates on data rather than theory.

# Predicate Nominals A Partial Surface Syntax Of Russian Linguistics Volume 97

**Johanna Nichols**



**Predicate Nominals A Partial Surface Syntax Of Russian Linguistics Volume 97:**

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