

In memory of Professor Andrzej Zaborski

Professor Andrzej Zaborski died on 1st October, 2014. He was one of the most prominent Polish linguists, a world-renowned specialist in Semitic and Cushitic languages, as well as an expert in comparative studies of Afro-Asiatic languages.

Born in Kraków on the 7th of October, 1942, he had remained ‘a Cracauer’ for the rest of his life. All levels of his education were completed in Kraków and all his degrees were received there, starting from his secondary school diploma up to his academic degrees. In 2000, he was nominated as *Professor Ordinarius* of the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. However, he was also granted a number of academic awards from several foreign institutions, including his (second) habilitation in African Studies at the University of Vienna, and the titles of visiting professor at the Universities of Heidelberg, Mainz, Torino, and Udine. He lectured at many universities, including the University of Vienna, University of Cologne, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His research interests covered Afro-Asiatic linguistics, Semitic and Cushitic in particular, and the results of his studies were presented in many regular courses for students and during conferences worldwide. His teaching experience included regular lectures on Cushitic languages (Somali, Oromo, Beja), and also on Amharic, Tuareg and Masai.

With such a wide and diversified area of interests, his research specialization focused on Afro-Asiatic comparative linguistics, gradually developing from the Semitic field, including Cushitic evidence, and extending to other branches of the macrophylum, and even crossing its boundaries. This perspective in conducting comparative work gave him credence in terms of his ideas referring to reconstruction and classification.

Professor Zaborski’s academic career started in the Department of Oriental Philology of the Jagiellonian University, where he studied Arabic philology, Semitics and African linguistics. His MA thesis (1965) was entitled “The Medieval History of the Beja Tribes according to Arabic Sources”. The Semitic and African comparative studies focus which emerged with this master’s project

was further developed in the following stages of his academic career.

The groundwork for the next academic level, his Ph.D. thesis (1969) “Biconsonantal Verbal Roots in Semitic”, was written under the supervision of the brilliant Polish linguist Prof. Jerzy Kuryłowicz. A solid linguistic background was also secured by his other teachers: Aleksy Klawek, Tadeusz Lewicki, Tadeusz Milewski, and Zenon Klemensiewicz. His subsequent academic degree, i.e. his habilitation at the Jagiellonian University in 1976, was granted on the basis of the book *The Verb in Cushitic* (1975).¹

In the review that appeared in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* in 1977,² the book was evaluated as a ‘pioneer attempt’ to deal with comparative studies on the basis of the large material of Cushitic languages, including data that had not yet been published. Significant remarks refer to the methodology of comparative work which went beyond the techniques thus far used in Indo-European studies.

The second habilitation in African Studies, received at the University of Vienna in 1984, opened a new chapter in Andrzej Zaborski’s academic career. That year he conducted fieldwork on the Dahalo language in Lamu, Kenya, later (in 1989) on Beja in Sudan. His trips to Khartoum, Port Sudan and Kassala brought an interest in Nubian and other languages of Sudan.

He continued his work at the Jagiellonian University, where he was granted the position of ‘extraordinary professor’ in 1989 on the basis of the work *The Morphology of Nominal Plural in the Cushitic Languages* (Wien: Afro-Pub 1986). The publication became the main source for other works on Cushitic languages. The data are

¹ Andrzej Zaborski, *Studies Hamito-Semitic. The Verb in Cushitic*, (Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, CCCXCVII. Prace Językoznawcze, Zeszyt 48), Kraków 1975: Uniwersytet Jagielloński.

² F. R. Palmer, (Review of) Andrzej Zaborski: *Studies in Hamito-Semitic, I. The verb in Cushitic*. (Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, CCCXCVII. Prace Językoznawcze, Zeszyt 48) 184 pp. [Kraków]: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, [1975], *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40, 1, 1977, 198-202.

extensively used in comparative works on Cushitic and Afro-Asiatic until today.

With his publications and conference papers, Professor Andrzej Zaborski actively participated in an ongoing discussion on the internal classification of Afro-Asiatic. He did not share the common opinion which distinguished Omotic as a separate branch within Afro-Asiatic. Instead, he proposed classifying the so-called 'Omotic' languages as West Cushitic heavily influenced by Nilo-Saharan. The view was supported by Professor Zaborski's studies of contact phenomena between Semitic, Cushitic, and Nilo-Saharan, as well as on distinguishing language subareas in Ethiopia.³ The genealogic tree of Afro-Asiatic became pictured in more compact bundles with his statements on the close relationship between Semitic, Berber and Cushitic, and their common larger distance in relation to Egyptian. Chadic languages began to be seen as the most distant relatives of all other branches.⁴

As a leading specialist in the morphology of Semitic and Cushitic, he presented critical evaluations of publications on Semitic and their genetic relations with other Afro-Asiatic languages. The reviews⁵ were in fact articles on many issues connected to historical linguistics and methodological questions of reconstruction. He recognized the great need to maintain close cooperation between specialists in all branches of Afro-Asiatic research in order to bring the reconstruction of Afro-Asiatic to the next stage of investigations.

He himself started to extend his interests into Chadic

³ Andrzej Zaborski, „Ethiopian Language Subareas“, in: Piłaszewicz, Stanisław, Eugeniusz Rzewuski (red.), *Unwritten Testimonies of the African Past. Proceedings of the International Symposium held in Ojrzeń near Warsaw on 07-08 November 1989*, *Orientalia Varsoviensia* 2, Warsaw 1991: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 123-134.

⁴ Andrzej Zaborski, „Językoznanstwo afroazjatyckie albo chamito-semickie pod koniec XX wieku”, *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* 1-2, 1996, 15-30.

⁵ E.g. Andrzej Zaborski, (Review of) Edzard, L. (ed.), *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities*, (Porta Linguarum Orientalium, Neue Serie, Band 24). Verlag Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2012, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, LXX, 2013, 3-4: 455-466.

languages and to compare the Chadic data with Afro-Asiatic evidence. One of the latest publications, a paper entitled “Questions of Chadic ‘prefix’ conjugations and Chado-Afroasiatic ablaut”⁶, is an instance of such comparative work. It is an analysis of the Chadic verbal morphology from an external (Afro-Asiatic) perspective, which is different from the earlier approach to this question. Zaborski claims that in Chadic verbs there are traces of the Proto-Afroasiatic prefix conjugations and the recognized evolution within Chadic enables a better understanding of the evolution from the ablaut (or apophonic inflection) of Old Cushitic to analytical and ‘apotonic’ West Cushitic.

Professor Zaborski also specialized in translation, including the theory and practice of translation.⁷ From 2002 to 2008, he edited a series of conference volumes entitled *Oriental Languages in Translation*. In his own contribution, he posed the question of whether a ‘philological’ translation exists, and the answer was that it does not. He argued that the language of every translation must be different from the language of the original, as languages are different, they cannot suddenly become identical, and it does not make any sense to compare language structures as such (Zaborski 2008: 37).⁸

Throughout his academic career, Profesor Zaborski performed numerous administrative functions. Since 2000, he held the Chair of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics. He was the Chief Editor of the *Folia Orientalia*, published by the Kraków Branch of the Polish

⁶ The paper was submitted as a contribution to the volume “Hausa and Chadic studies in honour of Professor Stanisław Piłaszewicz”, ed. by Nina Pawlak, Ewa Siwierska, Izabela Will, Warszawa 2014: Elipsa, p. 75-84.

⁷ Andrzej Zaborski, *Wspaniały świat Oceanu Indyjskiego Sulajmāna Kupca, Abū Zayda as-Sirāfięgo i Buzurga Ibn Šahrijāra: od literatury faktu do przygody i fantastyki (IX-X w.)*, Kraków 1998: Księgarnia Akademicka (przekład z języka arabskiego ze wstępem i komentarzem).

⁸ Zaborski, A. “Nobody Translates Untranslatables, or Untranslatability Does Not Exist”, [in] *Języki orientalne w przekładzie III, Oriental Languages in Translation* vol. 3, ed. by A. Zaborski, Marek Piela, Kraków 2008: Polish Academy of Sciences Press, 35-41.

Academy of Sciences. In 1997, he became the President of the Orientalist Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków.

Professor Zaborski was gifted tutor of many generations of students. The development of African Studies in Poland would not be possible without his interest, support, but also critical remarks, motivated by his concern for the level and quality of scientific research.

His death was a shock to his friends and colleagues. We will miss Him. May His soul rest in peace! Niech spoczywa w pokoju!

Nina Pawlak