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IS JAKOBSON RIGHT?

In Europe there exist two systems for the mimic expressions of assent and dissent: System A, which is used by the great majority of Europeans (Czechs, Russians, English, French, Germans, etc.) and System B, which is found predominantly in Bulgaria (and outside Europe, in Asia Minor, for instance, among Turks). Both systems include two kinetic forms, vertical nodding and horizontal turning of the head, which are, however, used to express content that is contradictory:

System A (Czechs, Russians, English, French, Germans)

ASSENT – nodding the head vertically

DISSENT – turning the head horizontally

System B (Bulgarians)

ASSENT – turning the head horizontally

DISSENT – nodding the head vertically

Roman Jakobson (1970, 1971, 1972, 1973) has attempted to delineate these two systems more precisely by pointing out the different directions in which the head moves initially. He stresses, above all, that the vertical nodding of the head in System A always begins *from up downward*, while in System B, it begins *from down upward*, and shows these contradictory, initial movements of the head to be decisive.

Only when the user of the A system registers an initial movement of the head from up downwards will he understand it to mean assent. And the user of the B system will understand dissent only if he sees that the initial movement of the head is directed from down upwards. The subsequent nodding movements are in fact only an emphatic extension of contradictory, initial movements.

By stressing the initial movement of the head in vertical nodding, Jakobson teaches us to see the differences which in ancient Greece and Rome were