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Nikolai Marr and the idea of a unified language

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Abstract

Nikolai Marr's idea of the class-character of language assumes that language mechanically reflects the characteristics of the socio-economic basis. Marr argued that typological similarities between different languages are not based on 'blood relationship' but derive from the fact that all languages have developed through the same stages corresponding to the stages in the development of the socio-economic basis. For Marr, national oppression resulted from 'racial' or 'ethnic' definitions of such concepts as language and nation. His aim was to battle against oppression by replacing 'racial' definitions proposed by Indo-European linguistics with his non-ethnic and 'sociological' understanding of the concepts.
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1. Introduction

Starting from the mid-1920s many Soviet linguists – like scholars in different academic disciplines – started to feel the need to develop a new Marxist approach in their own field. Despite the fact that in the late 1920s there were different competing views regarding what 'Marxism in linguistics' would amount to, most linguists set off – in varying degrees – their Marxist approach against earlier, what they called, 'bourgeois' approaches to the study of language. A central figure in this enterprise was Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr (1865–1934) whose Japhetidology and then 'New Theory of Language' received the status of official 'Marxist linguistics' in the Soviet Union by the late 1920s and dominated Soviet linguistics

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till 1950 when Stalin – 'the coryphaeus of all sciences' – finally denounced it (see Stalin, 2001 [1950]). While most linguists engaged in the development of a Marxist approach to the study of language were relatively young and represented a new generation of linguists, Marr's credentials as a scholar and specialist on Caucasian languages were acknowledged long before the revolution. Moreover, he developed his influential views on the origin of language and on the development of language in primordial societies – which were inspired, e.g., by the works of Ludwig Noiré and Lucien Levy-Bruhl – before the 'New Theory of Language' became the official linguistic dogma in the Soviet Union.[1] That Marr was elected a full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences already in 1912 shows that he had a prominent role in pre-Revolutionary Russian scientific life.

Marr, who was never trained in the comparative-historical method, was a severe critic of and opposed his 'New Theory of Language' to 'Indo-European' or 'bourgeois' language studies, as he called them. He maintained that the genealogical classification of languages and the notion of language family amount to a racial account of language which must be discarded. As opposed to the idea of monogenesis, Marr's 'New Theory of Language' assumed that the languages of the world develop from primordial multitude of languages towards a single global language. By denying the role of language families and 'blood relationships' in the development of languages, Marr also rejected the view that racial, genetic and ethnic factors could function as criteria for the formation of a 'unified language'. In the need of such criteria, he went to argue in the late 1920s that language is a class phenomenon and, therefore, the linguistic unity a language may exhibit is based on its class-character. After being established in the writings of Marr and Marrists, the idea of the class-character of language became an official Marxist linguistic dogma in Soviet linguistics.

Having rejected the relevance of the 'blood relationship' as an explanation for typological similarities between languages Marr needed the concept of 'class' – in his idiosyncratic meaning of the term – in order to account for the linguistic and cultural unity within certain groupings of people. The present article discusses Marr's notion of the class-character of language and its theoretical ramifications regarding the definition of a language. It specifically focuses on what, according to Marr's theorising, counts as criteria for a 'unified language'.

2. Towards a 'Marxist linguistics'

The idea of the class-character of language which was one of the central tenets of the 'New Theory of Language' was based on the assumption that language is a superstructural phenomenon which, either directly or indirectly, reflects the characteristics of the economical basis. When language is seen as a class-phenomenon, a class change in a society inevitably results in language change, for all superstructural phenomena are causally related to the socio-economic basis of a particular society. In this view, the class-structure of a given society determines not only the social stratification of a language but also its actual linguistic structures and typological features.

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[1] As pointed out in Lähteenmäki (2002), the ideas of Noiré and Levy-Bruhl were well-known in the Soviet Union. For instance, the Soviet Marxist theorist Nikolai Bukharin discusses both Noiré's views on the origin of language and Levy-Bruhl's views on the pre-logical thought in his *Historical Materialism* (Bukharin, 1976 [1921], p. 204, 206–207). Noiré's work also exerted influence on the Russian scientist, philosopher, economist and Marxist revolutionary Aleksandr Bogdanov who characterised the former as 'a Marxist of comparative philology having no idea of Marxism' (Bogdanov, 1995 [1918], p. 245).

That language is a class-phenomenon and a part of superstructure was by no means invented by Marr himself, but was a commonplace, for instance, in Nikolai Bukharin's (1976 [1921]) *Historical Materialism* and Georgii Plekhanov's (1926) *Fundamental Questions of Marxism* which were popular and influential textbooks on Soviet Marxism at that time. The view that the idea of the class-character of language was not considered as specifically Marrist even by his contemporaries is further supported by the fact that Georgii Danilov, a leader of Iazykfront and a critic of Marrists, attributed it to Paul Lafargue after whom the idea was 'later confirmed in the works by N.I. Bukharin' (Danilov, 1930, p. 79). In his pioneering study of the Lafargue showed that, on the one hand, social changes cause linguistic changes and, on the other hand, that a national language is not a unified whole but stratified along social classes. His views also inspired early Soviet sociolinguists among whom the topics like the language of workers, the language of peasants and so forth became widespread.

The idea that the class-structure of a society is reflected in the linguistic differentiation within the society was also taken for granted by most representatives of the so-called sociological approach in Soviet linguistics.[2] It was shared – albeit in a rather different, less mechanical form – even by many of Marr's ardent critics. According to the testimony of the outstanding linguist and literary scholar Viktor Zhirmunskii, the idea played an important role in contemporary social dialectology which developed 'completely independently of N.Ia. Marr's theory and not infrequently even in opposition to it' (Zhirmunskii, 1969, p. 7). Thus, from the late 1920s the idea of the class-character of language played an important role in the development of sociologically oriented language studies in the new Soviet state. However, in the aftermath of the linguistic discussion of 1950 Marr and Marrists were regarded solely responsible for introducing the thesis of the class-character of language which was characterised as 'anti-Marxist, anti-historical and unsubstantiated claim' (Sukhotin, 1951, p. 14).

At the same time, it must be emphasised that the early sociological approach to the study of language characteristic to Soviet language studies of the late 1920s and the early 1930s cannot be reduced into 'vulgar sociologism' only, although for many linguists, especially for Marrists, 'social nature' of language actually meant its 'class-nature'. It was not uncommon to combine this vulgar Marxist view with the ideas stemming from the German dialect geography as well as from the pre-revolutionary Russian sociological tradition which, in turn, was inspired by the French sociological linguistics (Desnitskaja, 1991, p. 480). Thus, despite the fact that the Soviet sociolinguistics was, to a certain extent, characterised by sociological determinism, its representatives also developed original and fruitful ideas concerning the interconnectedness of language and society – which were forgotten after Stalin's repudiation of Marrism in 1950 – and thus anticipated the later developments in sociolinguistics proper that took place in USA in the 1960s (for a recent discussion, see Brandist, 2003).

As regards Marr's alleged Marxism, there can be found some Marxist elements in Marr's theory as early as 1923, although he started to use Marxist vocabulary extensively and placed language in the superstructure in his 1927 Baku Course (Thomas, 1957, p. 92; Samuelian, 1981, p. 286). From thereon Marr started to add extensive quotations from

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[2] For a discussion of Valentin Voloshinov's reception of Marr's 'New Theory of Language', see Lähteenmäki and Vasil'ev (2005). Differences between Voloshinov's and Marr's conceptions of the class-character of language are analysed in Lähteenmäki (2005).

Marx, Engels and Lenin into his own writings, and the adoption of Marxist terminology was most intensive in 1930–1931 (Alapatov, 1991, p. 68). However, despite the overt use of Marxist vocabulary, there seems to be no doubt that there was nothing specifically Marxist in Marr's views concerning the origin and development of languages which, in fact, had been developed before the Revolution. As pointed out by Thomas (1957, p. 140), his adherence to Marxist terminology seems to have been opportunistic in the sense that he simply added Marxist principles to his already existing theory without making any significant modifications to it. This is further supported by the fact that Marr (1926, p. 249) insisted that the 'New Theory of Language' is based on empirical linguistic data and was developed independently of Marxism. For Marr, the fact that it is taken to be compatible with the basic tenets of Marxism can be regarded as an independent proof of the truth of Marxist positions, for the empirical facts on which the theory is based cannot be questioned. He incorporated Marxist ideas into his theory and by 1930 he already argued that the Japhetic Theory 'completely fuses with Marxism; it enters into it as an inalienable part and, in some spheres, as an indispensable aid in the concretization of some of its general theses' (Marr, 1933 [1930], p. 268).

Although Marr was quick to adopt Marxist terminology, his understanding of the concept of 'class' had little to do with its Marxist understanding. Nevertheless, he thought that his linguistic views concerning the different stages of glottogenesis would make an important contribution to the theory of sociology. In 1929 Marr argued that linguistic facts established by Japhetidology demonstrate that Engel's hypothesis concerning the origin of social classes needs 'serious corrections' (Marr, 2002 [1929], p. 86). However, Marr's views on the class-character of language were criticised by contemporary linguists who were developing a Marxist approach to the study of language of their own. For instance, in 1930 a group of young linguists called Iazykfront argued, among other things, that his views on the class-character of language in primordial societies were un-Marxist. Marr's conception was seen as too mechanical, for he equated socio-economic structures with linguistic structures. Moreover, he thought that linguistic as well as thought structures are *causally* related and derive from the socio-economic basis. His understanding of the relation of linguistic and socio-economic structures was unidirectional, there was no interaction between the basis and the superstructure. In his concluding remarks for the linguistic discussion of 1930 between Marrists and the representatives of Iazykfront, Danilov (1931, pp. 25–26) stated that Marr's conception is 'fuzzy and undialectic' and leads Marrists to 'mistakes of political nature'.

Marr was eventually forced to admit that his understanding of the notion of 'class' did not correspond to its established Marxist definition. In distinction from his earlier position according to which Marxism should be revised on the basis of new linguistic facts discovered by Japhetidology, Marr carefully emphasised that he did not intend to oppose his understanding of 'class' to its Marxist definition:

> I see that you have in mind the Marxist conception of class. But, of course, I do not have in mind a definition of class such as the one given now when I say 'class'. I did not intend to take that term, which has a definite content, and use it. Absolutely not. I am searching for a term and no one can point out one for me. When there is a collective organisation not based on blood relationship, I used the term 'class'. (Marr, 1932, p. 39.)

Thus, he uses 'class' to refer to all possible groupings of people the unity of which is not based on genetic or ethnic factors. His understanding of 'class' is much broader than the traditional Marxist understanding of the term according to which the formation of social classes is determined by socio-economic factors. According to Lenin's (1965 [1919], p. 421) definition,

> [c]lasses are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and their mode of acquiring it.

In this view, classes are supraindividual social structures which have their own causal powers which, in turn, determine individuals' lives. For Marr, however, 'class' does not refer to a grouping of people based on their place in the system of social production only, but it includes other kinds of groupings too. He also seems to have taken it for granted that that a class, unlike a nation, represents a unified grouping of people that can have a unified language. Thus, he subscribes to an essentialist understanding of class which presupposes that it is a well-defined and homogeneous grouping of people which exhibits some kind of natural order. It also seems to assume that the fact whether one belongs to a particular class or not is the decisive feature with respect to the formation of linguistic identity. Thus, Marr's understanding of 'class' clearly demonstrates that the appearance of explicit Marxist terminology in his texts does not make his theorising specifically Marxist. On the contrary, he used the concept of 'class' in a rather idiosyncratic, non-Marxist, sense in order to recapitulate his earlier position in pseudo-Marxist parlance. This is symptomatic to his general rhetorical strategy which was characterised by his use of well-defined technical terms in broad idiosyncratic meanings.

3. Class language versus national language

Marr thought that the members of human societies used hand (or kinetic or linear) languages to communicate before the emergence of oral language. In his view, the origin of oral language can be found in communal magical activity in which cries were rhythmically repeated as a part of that activity. After being repeated countless times diffused cries started to separate out and acquired a semantic function. Marr (1926) emphasised that, unlike hand language, oral language was a class phenomenon from the very beginning, for it originally belonged to the ruling class of shamans only who tried to keep it as their exclusive property. Thus, Marr realised how one's linguistic competence is directly linked to the questions of power.

For Marr, evolution in language is determined by the socio-economic factors of a particular linguistic community. According to Marr,

> No natural words existed. Words were created beginning with the time when oral speech began to form in satisfaction to necessities which arouse with the development of economic life and social structure of collectives – by means of the technology acquired by that time and in dependence on the thought processes of those epochs. (Marr, 1936 [1928], p. 109.)

It is important that, for Marr, oral language was not evoked by communicative needs, but resulted from cooperative activity and conditions of labour. This reveals his debt to Noiré who argued in his book *Der Ursprung der Sprache*: 'the social activity directed *toward* a common goal, the most ancient *labor* of the elders of the clan, is the source from which language and reasoning originated' (quoted from Bukharin, 1976, p. 204). In arguing that the emergence of language is involuntary and cannot be explained by the communicative needs of the members of a society, Marr also comes close to Wilhelm von Humboldt. However, while Marr regarded language as a contingent property the emergence of which is determined and can be solely explained by conditions of labour and cooperative activity, von Humboldt argued that '*the bringing-forth of language* is an *inner need* of human beings' (von Humboldt, 1999, p. 27) and saw language as a universal and necessary property of all human beings. Consequently, the existence of universal features in unrelated languages can in Marr's case be explained by the fact that languages directly reflect the socio-economic development of societies the laws of which are universal, whereas, for von Humboldt, the existence of linguistic universals stems from the fact that all human beings share certain inner linguistic and conceptual forms.

Marr's association of class-structure with linguistic differentiation is based on the assumption that language is a superstructural phenomenon which is causally related to the socio-economic basis of a particular society. According to Marr, there are no natural languages, but different languages must be regarded as creations of human collectives which reflect the socio-economic structures of the collectives. In emphasising the reflective function of language he argues that language is superstructural social value and equates it with other superstructural phenomena such as paintings and the arts (Marr, 2002 [1928], p. 141). Marr postulates different stages in the development of language which derive from different developmental stages of socio-economic systems. For him, not only the social stratification of language but also particular linguistic features are determined by the class-structure and socio-economic formations of a society, at least at the early stage of glottogenesis. For instance, Marr maintained that typologically different language-types – agglutinative, flective and isolating languages – correspond to different social structures (Marr, 1936 [1928], p. 49).

For Marr, language mechanically reflects the social differentiation of a society and, consequently, a unified language can only exist in a class-less society. The existence of different social classes within a society, by definition, excludes the possibility of having a unified national language in a capitalist society. According to Marr,

> a national, all-national language does not exist, but there is a class language – and languages of one and the same class in different countries, given an identity of the social structure, reveal more typological relationship to each other than languages of different classes in one and the same country, one and the same nation (Marr, 1929, p. 33).

It can be argued that Marr is right in the sense that national languages are not given but constructed for certain political and ideological purposes. That is, national languages do not exist naturally. National languages can also be characterised as class-languages, for they are usually constructed on the basis of particular dialects or vernaculars spoken by a particular social group. The idea that national languages are developed in class fashion was widely discussed in Soviet linguistics in the early 1930s. For instance, in his discussion of the concept of national language Lev Iakubinskii argued that in a capitalist society

bourgeoisie aims to construct a unified language common to all social classes on the basis of its own language form. However, this remains a myth, for the conflict created by the class-structure of a capitalist society sets limits to the unifying tendencies of bourgeoisie (Iakubinskii, 1930, p. 92).

Later on Marr argued that in addition to language thought too is a superstructural category connected to the socio-economic basis: 'there is no thought which is not a class thought' (Marr, 1934 [1931], p. 91). He also maintained that the evolution of thought and the evolution of language are intertwined and, accordingly, defined human speech as an inseparable unity of thought and language (Marr, 2002 [1931], p. 150). Since language and thought are seen as superstructural categories, it follows that they necessarily reflect the interests of a particular class which eventually blurs the difference between, language, thought and ideology.

By arguing that the evolution of language and thought is causally related to the evolution of a particular socio-economic system, Marr aimed to give a sociological explanation to linguistic phenomena. For him, there are neither immanent nor individual causes for evolution in language (Thomas, 1957, p. 96). Moreover, in Marr's sociological determinism neither an individual nor nation has a creative role in the development of language, for changes in language are caused by changes in the socio-economic basis. This would seem to mean that languages cannot be regarded as important transmitters of national cultural values, for class-languages only reflect class interests. In this, Marr radically differs from von Humboldt, who emphasised the active role of an individual in linguistic evolution and attributed language to nations. For von Humboldt (1999, p. 60), 'there resides in every language a characteristic *world-view*' common to the speakers of the same language, whereas Marr the idea of a world-view shared by the whole nation as scientific fiction. In his view, only representatives of the same social class can have a common world-view. The class principle also allowed Marr to account for why distant languages sometimes exhibit typological similarities without referring to a common ancestor as in Indo-European language studies criticised by him. Marr held that typological similarities between different languages are to be explained sociologically, for they stem from the similarities in the class-structures of societies.

4. Class-character versus blood relationship

In his critique of 'bourgeois' linguistics, Marr argued that Indo-European linguistics has mistakenly confused language with ethnicity which inevitably makes it a 'racial' account of language. He also held that Indo-Europeanism served racist political purposes, for it attached 'culture to race in a deliberate attempt to perpetuate western ascendance over' other tribes and peoples (Slezkine, 1996, p. 832). For instance, Marr held that it was symptomatic that 'the enlightened Europe did not spend to the study of the Irish language even a hundredth part of the material resources that were used to destroy it and exterminate Irish people, in particular' (Marr, 2002 [1926], p. 23). In distinction from Indo-European linguistics according to which languages of a single language family have developed from a common parent language, Marr's 'New Theory of Language' assumed that the languages of the world develop from primordial multitude of languages towards a single global language of the mankind. As to what this future language would be like, Marr wrote that 'the ideal language of the mankind in future is crossing (skreshchenie)

of all languages, unless oral language will not be replaced by another technical means which transfers human thought more accurately' (Marr, 2002 [1926], p. 211).

Marr maintained that languages of the world will inevitably merge into a global language, for the linguistic development directly reflects the development of societies from class-societies to a global class-less society of the mankind. However, in texts written during the first half of the 1920s there are passages suggesting that Marr was at least considering the possibility of a monogenetic theory of language origin. According to Thomas (1957, p. 81), Marr's discussion of the problem of a common homeland of the Japhites and the Semites seems to imply the notion of the family three and thus monogenesis, although in the same article he emphasises that languages develop from labour.

In Zhirmunskii's (1969, p. 176) view, Marr's 'tone of national romanticism' is also reflected in his use of biblical terminology the aim of which is to indicate genetic relatedness of the Japhites with the Semites and the Hamites named after two other sons of Noah, although Marr himself emphasised that the name 'Japhites' was purely conventional and did not presuppose the existence of a kinship relation. Moreover, Marr's urge to prove in his earlier writings that all European languages are actually Japhetic – Indo-European languages being a transformation of Japhetic languages only – strongly suggests that his theorising was driven by certain national romantic motives and can be regarded as pan-Japhetic, as Zhirmunskii (1952, p. 178) put it, for his aim clearly was to construct a noteworthy history of Japhetic languages and make them part of a Grand Narrative. In later writings, Marr introduced an explicitly non-ethnic variation of the same pan-Japhetic conception by arguing that all the languages of the world are related in the sense that their development is causally determined by universal laws that govern the development of societies and their social structures.

For Marr, typological similarities between the languages of one language family are not based on 'blood relationship' but derive from the fact that all languages have developed through the same stages each of which corresponds to the stages in the development of the economic basis of societies. Thus, for him, typological similarities are based on the degree of the identity of the social structure and derive from the fact that the languages have developed through the same stages reflecting the changes in the socio-economic basis. However, Marr did not deny the existence of language families as such but only rejected the traditional understanding of the notion according to which the languages of one language family have developed from a common ancestor. Marr (2002 [1929], p. 217) insists that the formation of language families is a later stage in the development of languages and derives from the unification of the economic and social structures. Thus, he holds that a language family – such as Indo-European languages – is not a distinct racial family of languages but simply represents a specific stage in the process of glottogenesis. According to Marr's 'stadial theory', the traces of the different developmental stages in this or that language can be discovered by his paleontological analysis which eventually reduces all the words of all languages to the notorious four elements *sal, ber, jon roš*. As Zhirmunskii (1952, p. 183) points out, Marr's original view on the origin of languages was based on the naïve thesis of the material unity of languages according to which all languages of the world have developed as a result of stadial transformations from the notorious four elements. The material unity was then re-interpreted by his followers as the unity of the process of historical development of human societies which explains the existence of certain universal features in unrelated languages.

Marr's idea of a single glottogonic process according to which all languages develop through the same stages reflecting the changes in the socio-economic basis of a given society clearly represents a form of universalism which can be seen as a reaction against the idea of national romanticism which Marr regarded a characteristic feature of Indo-European linguistics. Marr argued that 'while romanticism little by little evaporated from all fields of science, and even from the art and literature, this dead ideology remains almost untouched in linguists of the Indo-European school' (Marr, 2002 [1925], p. 105). For Marr, languages are not creations of nations or individuals, but derive from and reflect the socio-economic characteristics of societies. Since the laws that govern the socio-economic development of societies are universal, it also follows that languages must have universal typological features. In other words, the existence of linguistic universals in distant, unrelated languages can be explained by referring to common socio-economic characteristics of societies and universal laws that govern the development of socio-economic systems. Marr's universalism also allows him to explain the typological differences between languages by the fact that different languages are at a different stage of development, although they will proceed to develop along universal stages and eventually merge into a single global language. Paradoxically, his universalism which is based on the interconnectedness of the class-structure of a society and linguistic and thought structures necessarily leads to a crude form of linguistic relativism. For all languages are class-languages which reflect class-interests of particular social classes, it follows that they would be mutually incomprehensible at any given moment.

Marr thought that, in addition to the concept of language, also the concept of ethnos is not a racial but socio-economic concept by which he meant that the emergence of an ethnos is based on socio-economic conditions of a society instead of a blood or kinship relationship. When ethnos is seen as a socio-economic concept, it follows – according to Marr's dialectical reduction – that there will not be anymore such thing as ethnicity, when the class-societies of the world eventually merge into a global class-less society (Slezkine, 1996, p. 840). Denunciation of such concepts as nation and nation-state which presuppose the idea of ethnic unity was also a commonplace in the contemporary Soviet Marxism. For instance, in his writings on class-psychology Bukharin (1976, p. 211) criticised the notions of *Zeitgeist* and folk-soul as fictional, for they imply that a society or a nation would amount to a naturally existing homogeneous whole characterised by a uniform 'collective soul'.

In Marr's case the agenda behind the 'sociologisation' of such concepts as 'language' and 'nation' was his battle against different forms of national oppression which, for him, directly resulted from 'racial' or 'ethnic' definitions of the concepts. Marr maintained that the 'New Theory of Language' amounts to a universal account of language unlike Indo-European linguistics which restricts itself to the study of a specific group of languages and is characterised by its Europe-centrism. For him, Indo-European linguistics represented a racial account of language loaded with a hidden political agenda the aim of which was to provide justification for colonialism and cultural imperialism. Marr thought that national oppression in its various forms derives from the fact that the concepts like 'language', 'nation', 'ethnos' or 'tribe' have been misconceived as racial or ethnic concepts. He discarded the notion the traditional understanding of the notion of language family and replaced the idea that linguistic unity is based on a 'blood relationship' with his non-ethnic concept of class-language. Marr denied the relevance of ethnic, genetic and racial factors in the formation of the linguistic and cultural identity of an individual as well

as a language and ethnos and maintained that they derive from socio-economic formations of a society. Despite the fact that Marr's fantastic theoretical views were pseudoscientific and cannot be evaluated according to scientific standards, it can hardly be questioned that he sincerely believed in the potential emancipative power of the 'New Theory of Language' and its non-ethnic conception of language and nation.

5. Conclusion

Although the pseudo-scientific nature of Marr's fantastic ideas is beyond any doubt (see, e.g., Thomas, 1957; Alapatov, 1991), his linguistic views do not amount to a mere historical curiosity. On the contrary, the study of Marrism can have a therapeutic function in the Wittgensteinian sense of the word, for it exposes how our theorising about language and scientific practice in general are conditioned by various extra-scientific factors which do not surface under 'normal' circumstances. That Marrism dominated Soviet linguistics as the official linguistic dogma for almost 25 years, can, at least in part, be explained by the fact that Marr's utopian idea of a single universal language was on a par with Stalin's views regarding the 'question of nationalities' and thus could be seen as a theoretical justification and support for Stalin's russification policy the aim of which was to create a new unified Soviet culture and to make Russian the *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union. In Stalin's view, it was crucial for the development of the future 'common socialist' culture that there existed a rich variety of different national cultures provided that they were national by form, but socialist by content. At the XVI Congress of the All-Union Communist Party held in 1930, Stalin actually criticised the supporters of Great Russian chauvinism in the questions of nationalities and stated that 'we, supporters of the future merging of national cultures into one common (both in form and content) culture with one common language, are at the same time supporters of the bloom of national cultures at the current moment in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat' (quoted from Iakubinskii, 1931, pp. 66–67). Stalin, like Marr, saw the emergence of a unified socialist culture and a single global language inevitable after all societies eventually merge into a worldwide classless communist society. Thus, the institutional primacy of Marrism, which continued 16 years after Marr's death, was clearly made possible by the political and ideological conditions of the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Despite the unquestionable connection between Marrism and the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union, it, nevertheless, seems that there are not sufficient grounds to characterise Marr's theorising as an outcome of the ideological and political conditions of the Soviet Union. For this would imply that in addition to the status of the 'New Theory of Language' as the official Marxist account of language, also the essence of Marr's theorising would also have been determined by the ideological and political factors. This, however, does not seem to be the case, because there was nothing specifically Marxist in Marr's linguistic views as such. Marr criticised Indo-European linguistics and wanted to replace the 'racial' definition of the concepts of language and nation with his non-ethnic understanding of the concepts. His aim was to fight against national oppression which, in his view, derived from the mistaken identification of language with race and ethnos by the representatives of Indo-European language studies. Thus, irrespective of our opinion about the scientific value of Marr's linguistic views, Marrism as a historical phenomenon reveals how the concept of language used in scientific discourse is inseparable from the concept of human society and the individual's role in it.

Acknowledgement

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