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Author(s): Jeffrey Ellis and Robert W. Davies

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## THE CRISIS IN SOVIET LINGUISTICS

JOSEPH STALIN'S 10,000 word contribution to the *Pravda* discussion on Soviet linguistics marks a new and important stage in the post-war development of Soviet ideological controversy.

The intervention of Soviet political leaders in discussions of this sort has become a familiar feature of Soviet life. It seems to have taken place in various ways. In the biological discussions, it was a culmination of a protracted clash of opinion within scientific circles, with the Soviet Communist Party itself taking a definite stand in favour of a particular trend. There seems some evidence that in the musical uproar, centred round the opera of Muradeli, and in the famous 1946 discussions of Zoshchenko's short stories and Anna Akhmatova's poetry, it was partly popular reaction to these artists which led the Central Committee to take the matter up. The offensive against Alexandrov's work on Western philosophy seems, however, to have been undertaken entirely on the initiative of the Party, and in particular of the late A. Zhdanov. The discussions in the Soviet press since the war on architecture, on naturalism and realism in painting (initiated by the youth daily, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*) and on idealism in physics, have not so far resulted in the passing of any resolutions by the Party.

But not since 1934, when Stalin, Kirov and Zhdanov wrote some comments on a prospectus for a history textbook, has Stalin himself made a published contribution of this nature.

This whole development is therefore clearly worth detailed examination.

We propose here to give some account of the historical and theoretical background: Marr's unsuccessful attempt to provide a Marxist alternative to 'bourgeois' linguistics and the resulting crisis in Soviet linguistic practice. We shall then summarize the recent discussions, the aim of which has been to resolve the crisis by really applying Marxism to accumulated linguistic data. Finally, we shall attempt an evaluation of the whole controversy.

## I

## MARR AND TRADITIONAL LINGUISTICS: HIS EARLY PERIOD (UP TO 1924)

Before specific attempts were made, as a result of the Revolution, to apply Marxism to linguistics in Russia, the linguistic theory underlying the predominant trends was of course the same as that held by philologists throughout the world. This body of theory, which developed during the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> includes the assumption of the existence of 'ancestral' languages, like ancestral Indo-European, from each of which whole families of languages are derived.<sup>2</sup>

In developing the study of the Indo-European family, and especially of Russian within it, Fortunatov, Shakhmatov and other Russian scholars played an important role. At the same time, Russia took a prominent part in new fields of study (synchronic and general linguistics) alternative to historical (diachronic) comparative philology, with which was associated the ancestral language concept.<sup>3</sup> Baudouin de Courtenay laid the foundations of the study, associated in the West with the name of Fernand de Saussure, of a language as a whole at any one stage of its development (instead of the *history* of any *one* of its parts). Potebnya and Peshkovsky developed the theory of grammar, especially with reference to Russian, showing that important features of the syntactical structure of such languages could not be fitted into the classical conception.

But the study of linguistic problems in pre-revolutionary Russia was limited to a few main universities, primarily in Moscow and St. Petersburg; and study of the tremendous language fund of the Russian Empire, among its national minorities, did not exist, apart from such relatively favoured nationalities as the Georgians. Baudouin himself was persecuted for his political opinions as a liberal Polish nationalist.

It was thus in the context of an initial shaking of the hegemony of the ancestral language theory in world linguistics as a whole, and against a background of the peculiar distortions of linguistic study in Tsarist

<sup>1</sup> In the first stage of scientific linguistics (Pott, Bopp, Rask and Grimm, the German Romantic scholar of fairy-tale fame), *Sanskrit* was assumed to be the parent of Greek, Latin, etc. In the second stage (Schleicher), a *hypothetical* ancestral language replaced Sanskrit, but the characteristics of Sanskrit were still attributed to it. At the end of the century, the Neo-Grammarians (Brugmann, Streitberg and Delbrück) constructed this hypothetical language on the evidence of *all* the known Indo-European languages equally.

<sup>2</sup> Such families as Indo-European (the languages of Northern India, Persia and almost all of Europe, as well as some dead languages), Semitic, Hamitic, Sinitic, or Bantu.

<sup>3</sup> The ancestral language concept itself, while maintained by the twentieth-century followers of the Neo-Grammarians theory, was subjected to increasing degrees of criticism by certain scholars, beginning with Schmidt's 'wave-theory', and going on to the application of the 'Linguistic Geographers' conclusions from modern dialect phenomena. Cf. note 12.

Russia, resulting from the Government's 'Great-Russian' policy, that the linguistic studies of Nikolai Yakovlevich Marr (1864-1934) took place.

Marr was the son of a Scotsman who worked in Georgia, first in commerce, then in horticulture. As his mother was Georgian (Megrelian) and his father taught him French, he grew up in a multi-lingual environment (he first learnt Russian at school). At school, while his main interest was his father's subject botany, he excelled in classical languages, and helped his schoolmates with them, as well as translating from foreign languages for the school magazine (1880). Even as a youth he rebelled against authority and ran away from school. In the last years of high school he decided instead of medicine to study Oriental languages in St. Petersburg (1884)—this meant that the only career before him seemed to be that of a village schoolmaster teaching Georgian. However, he excelled in his studies, and was able to go on to post-graduate work. Objections were raised to his relating Georgian to the Semitic languages, but the quality of his work received acclaim. His visit to the Caucasus was cut short owing to the opposition of Caucasian academic circles to his studies of Georgian (1884) (See V. A. Mikhankova, *N. Y. Marr: Ocherk ego zhizni i nauchnoy deyatel'nosti* (Outline of his Life and Scientific Work); 3rd edition; Academy of Sciences, U.S.S.R., 1949, pp. 33-4.)

It is at this point that his creative linguistic work begins. Before the Revolution, and even during the period of Civil War and Reconstruction (till 1924) his work was carried out within the framework of the orthodox method, but he used this method on almost entirely untouched material. This 'orthodox' period may conveniently be divided into three main phases,<sup>4</sup> the last of which was transitional to his attempt to apply Marxism to his subject. In the first of these (1888-1910), he worked on the South Caucasian languages (Georgian, Megrelo-Chan and Svan) and connected the Caucasian 'family' (see note 2) with the Semitic family.<sup>5</sup> Between 1910 and 1920 he extended his study to languages of the North Caucasus (such as Abkhazian and the Daghestanian languages), many of which were unwritten, and to the 'Asiatic' languages of Hither Asia (Hittite (Proto-Hittite), Urartian, Elamite) newly discovered in cuneiform inscriptions; he incorporated the Caucasian family into a wider family with these dead languages. In the third period (1920-24) he began by expanding this 'Japhetic' family still further, by including in it

<sup>4</sup> This chronology follows his own, quoted by Meshchaninov, *Novoe uchenie o yazyke* (The New Doctrine of Language), Sotsekgiz, Leningrad, 1936, pp. 7-25.

<sup>5</sup> He later made this more precise. See Meshchaninov, *Problema klassifikatsii yazykov v svete novogo uchenia o yazyke* (Problem of the Classification of Languages in the light of the New Doctrine of Language), Ac. Sc. U.S.S.R., 1935; p. 48: 'It is a question not of the relating of Georgian with Semitic seeking an ancestor common to them, but of a tendency of Georgian, in its morphology.'

isolated languages of the Mediterranean such as Basque and the dead language Etruscan, and then saw connections between the Japhetic family and the *Indo-European* languages of the Mediterranean — he explained these by the ‘substratum’ theory, according to which the invading Indo-Europeans imposed their language on the Japhetic inhabitants<sup>6</sup> of the Mediterranean basin<sup>7</sup> (this theory was not peculiar to Marr — Pokorný, the Celtic specialist, and Forsten, also shared it for example).

Thus Marr’s work up to 1924 was carried out, as we have seen, essentially within the framework of orthodox linguistic theory.<sup>8</sup> Marr himself once wrote: ‘The Japhetic theory . . . was born in that complex and concealed bourgeois environment . . . as an antithesis to Indo-European linguistics.’<sup>9</sup> It cannot be denied by even his strongest opponents, whatever they may think of his later attempts at creating a new theory of language, that his early concrete study of little known languages was of considerable empirical value. (Cf. Stalin, quoted on p. 249.)

## II

### MARR’S DEVELOPED VIEWS AND THEIR RELATION TO SOVIET LINGUISTICS (1924-34)

The watershed of Marr’s work is marked by *The Indo-European Languages of the Mediterranean* (1924), in which he states that the Indo-European languages arose not from disintegration of an ancestral Indo-European language but as the result of the transformation of the Japhetic languages of the Mediterranean into Indo-European languages ensuing from the social changes connected with the discovery of metals and their wide use in society.<sup>10</sup> The immediate reason for this new theory appears to have been his own dissatisfaction, for which he did not give objective reasons, with the substratum theory;<sup>11</sup> at the same time the introduction of economic causation in the form of the discovery and wide use of metals was a first step towards his developed

<sup>6</sup> He first put forward the view that the Japhetic inhabitants of the Mediterranean were original in the preface to the German edition (1922) of *Japhetic Caucasus*. Its translator, Braun, later tried to effect conciliation between Marr and Indo-Europeanism (Mikhankova, pp. 317, 324), but Marr refused to take such steps as making a Japhetic comparative grammar (p. 329).

<sup>7</sup> Already in 1911, according to Mikhankova, p. 202, a report of Marr’s had included in the Japhetic Theory the task of considering the Japhetic ‘substratum’ of Indo-European, the Etruscan and Pelasgian languages, and certain apparently insoluble problems of the older history of the Mediterranean.

<sup>8</sup> His doubts about the orthodox theory go back to 1921-22, according to Mikhankova, p. 300. It may be noted that although he developed original theories he pursued successfully an orthodox academic career within Tsarist Russia, succeeding his teacher Rosen as Professor of Oriental Languages in 1908 and becoming an Academician in 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Meshchaninov, *Pravda*, 16.v.1950, p. 3, cols. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> And that certain ‘transitional’ Indo-European languages (Celtic, Germanic, Armenian, Albanian) are the result of incomplete Indo-Europeanization of Japhetic.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Meshchaninov, *Pravda*, 16.v.1950; Mikhankova, pp. 308, 341.

Marxist' theory. Meshchaninov (*Pravda*, 16.v.1950) reckons that Marr had come to a fully 'social' theory of language by 1929.

It is to be noted that the account of the origin of the Indo-European languages put forward by Marr and accepted by his uncritical followers<sup>12</sup> baldly connects a linguistic change (i.e. a change of language in certain speakers at a certain time) with an economic change without explaining *why* the latter should cause the former.<sup>13</sup> His only linguistic evidence consisted in the few features he had found in common between Japhetic and Indo-European, which if they really are of common origin would be well enough explained by a Japhetic substratum, that is by Japhetic speakers adopting Indo-European languages already spoken by other peoples. When one considers the overwhelming differences between Japhetic and Indo-European, not only in phonetic and grammatical structure but in vocabulary, one is bound to ask *why* the Indo-European languages should have developed entirely new names for previously existing things. 'For whom is it necessary that "water", "earth", "mountain", "forest", "fish", "man", "to walk" . . . etc. be called not "water" . . . etc. but otherwise?' (Stalin).<sup>14</sup>

But in fact in elaborating his New Doctrine of Language, far from considering these overwhelming differences between the Indo-European family and such other families as Japhetic, Marr more and more overlooked the evidence already accumulated by linguistic science that words for such things as 'water' in the Indo-European languages are more closely connected with each other, to put it in the most cautious terms, than with those in other languages. Instead he traced what he regarded as correspondences between languages, however remote they might be from each other, based on the Four Elements of primitive speech which he claimed to have discovered (see note 22 below). To do this he branded all previous findings with the stigma of being associated with the ancestral language theory and refused to consider any but his own 'data'.

This is all the more remarkable in that the Indo-European theory in

<sup>12</sup> The modifications of his theory by his followers as dealt with below tend to avoid this error at the cost of vagueness, for example Katsnelson in *Course of General Linguistics*: 'Different families of languages are not the product of parallel processes of development independent of each other, but are rather the result of processes ultimately connecting all the languages of the world, but differing according to the degree of intensity and permanence of the direction of development. Where mutual action of languages did not cease but went on in the same direction for centuries, elements of convergence gradually accumulated on a large scale. It is to be expected that the study of languages of a whole family by the method of linguistic geography will permit a new way of grasping the facts established by comparative historical linguistics.'

<sup>13</sup> i.e., how this particular economic change caused this particular linguistic change – later he came to the general view, which he regarded as Marxist, that causation in general must be economic.

<sup>14</sup> Chikobava's arguments against this theory of Marr's, that the effect post-dated the cause by thousands of years, and that not all Japhetic languages turned into Indo-European ones, because some still exist, are in our view not decisive.

an ancestral language sense was already exposing itself as inadequate from within its own body of data. Those Western philologists who worked on from the reconstruction of this ancestral language by the Neo-Grammarians were unable to agree among themselves on the phonetic system postulated;<sup>15</sup> and the *coup de grâce* was administered, though not all scholars have recognized this yet, by the discovery of Hittite. It is true that the comparative method in the sense of relating languages by systematic correspondences was vindicated by the absorption of the Hittite data into the Indo-European system. Nevertheless this relation could not be explained by an ancestral language because on the one hand this absorption was at the cost of transforming the reconstructed system into one even less like a real language, and on the other hand the time of original unity was put back even further into a period when the sociological formation required (ancestral 'nation') was impossible.<sup>16</sup>

The concrete alternative to the ancestral language, a question which Stalin explicitly left open, has not yet been formulated by any linguistic theory. It is only possible to say that while Marr posed a valid problem by opposing the ancestral language theory, his own solution was not a scientific one.

Thus, Marr had broken away from the main stream of the development of linguistics before he came to Marxism. He did not come to Marxism because linguistic problems demanded a Marxist solution.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, when he did claim adherence to Marxism, he began to infuse his own teachings (for example, on the class nature of primitive society) into what he called Marxism.<sup>18</sup> The change from the Japhetic theory to the New Doctrine of Language (1931) did not result from a real application of Marxism but was a change of name representing an internal change within Marr's own doctrine which claimed a Marxist basis because Marxism was the prevailing ideology of the state. This is not to deny Marr's own sincerity, or that he had always been of revolutionary views.<sup>19</sup> While before the Revolution he was not a Bolshevik, he had however always supported national liberation from Great-Russian domination. But this very consciousness of national suppression

<sup>15</sup> Cf. paper by T. Hill, 'The *Ursprache* Concept,' 1948 (not yet published).

<sup>16</sup> The latter point is made by Chemodanov (*Pravda*, 23.v.1950).

<sup>17</sup> As for example does a Western Communist philologist like Marcel Cohen in his *Linguistique et matérialisme dialectique* (Paris, 1948), which virtually does not mention Marr.

<sup>18</sup> See Chikobava's article in *Pravda*, 9.v.1950, p. 3, col. 5.

<sup>19</sup> According to Mikhankova (p. 261), he welcomed the October Revolution without reserve and (*ibid.*, p. 253) had broken with the Georgian nationalists finally already in February. And he was certainly not a nationalist in the narrow sense, as the following quotation adduced by Serdyuchenko shows: 'Even now there are cases of strife between noblemen Georgians and peasant Georgians. It is a question perhaps of only a little time before Tatar beks will shoot at Tatar workers and Armenian workers will seize the property of Armenian bourgeois.'

by 'great nations' over-reached itself and led him into theories denying nationality as absurd as the racialism he sought to combat.

It is difficult to summarize the theoretical position of the last years of Marr's life, because he was constantly putting forward ideas, often contradicting previous ones, without giving a comprehensive exposition of the New Doctrine. Until the present discussion there was a tendency to take his followers' word that their version of the whole doctrine (see below, Section III) was pure Marr, even though this seemed to have little relation to the various pronouncements in his published works. But it is possible to piece together some sort of general picture of the development of language as the 'later' Marr saw it. It is with this proviso that the following account is offered.<sup>20</sup>

The origin of language, he suggested, is in the most primitive human communities, tiny and isolated from each other. From the labour process which distinguished man from animal (here Marr is with Engels) arose communication, at first by gestures (linear speech). This was replaced by a system of articulate speech<sup>21</sup> only when (and here Marr contradicts the usual Marxist view) a separate class of 'magicians' arose who first used speech (the four elements<sup>22</sup>) for magical purposes of addressing the totem. It was they who in time imposed vocal speech on the whole collective; and there was conflict between communities with, and those without, vocal speech, until the former triumphed.

Larger communities formed by fusion.<sup>23</sup> With them mixed languages developed, in which words with more specialized meanings were formed

<sup>20</sup> Articles by Polák and Nandriş (in the *Slavonic Review*, 1948 and 1949), tend to present views held by Marr at different periods as belonging to one systematic theory. However much this may be his own fault for not having a systematic theory, it is fairest to Soviet linguistics to make clear that all does not belong to one period, and put it in its context of development as we have tried to do here.

<sup>21</sup> In *Selected Works*, vol. III, p. 119, Marr writes that vocal speech has lasted between 50,000 and 500,000 years, and standardized language (i.e. linear speech) between a million and a million and a half years.

<sup>22</sup> Marr began by tracing the components common to tribal names (and place names, etc.), then generalized these into original sound combinations underlying all words. Their number was originally put at 12, then changed to 3 and later 5 (see Popov in *Pravda* 30.v.1950) until it finally settled at 4 (Chikobava points out that Marr refused to say why *four* apart from the general magical significance of this number, although Meshchaninov put forward a phonological justification). According to Marr himself (Mikhankova, p. 349) their form (*sal, ber, yon, rosh*) is an abstraction from historical development; and Mikhankova (p. 441) admits that the theory has not been fully worked out. 'Illness and death stopped N.Y. from doing so, and after his death our philologists occupied themselves with it hardly at all!' Cf. Meshchaninov (in the *Bulletin* of the Language and Literature Department of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., referred to throughout this paper as *Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 4): 'Marr died leaving undeveloped the outline he had made.'

<sup>23</sup> This is the Marr theory of ethnogenesis, the importance of which can be seen from the following quotation: 'This need is met by the late Academician Marr's theories of ethnogenesis, which, as far as these fundamentals are concerned, are generally accepted and regarded as "the Soviet theory of ethnogenesis".' (Schlesinger in *Soviet Studies*, vol. II, No. 1, p. 9.)

The extremity to which this theory of Marr's originally went can be seen from the following description of it by Meshchaninov (*Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 4, p. 295):



by combining the original one-element 'words'. At the same time words in general developed meanings according to the principles of 'functional semantics', forming semantic series (e.g. the well-known woman-hand-water, the words for which, Marr alleged, all came from the same root in Georgian). This kind of process continued throughout history up to the formation of nations, and similarly the languages of the latter will one day give way to the one international language of world communism. Thus the direction of development is convergence, not divergence as in the ancestral language theory.

This universal convergent development, crossing and hybridizing the same original material of the four elements, constitutes the 'unity of the glottogonic process', that is the essentially similar development of all languages, based on the essentially similar economic development of all societies. It falls into definite stages (the 'stadial' theory), corresponding to periods of social structure.<sup>24</sup> Marr divided the stages as follows (it will be seen that they correspond to the traditional morphological divisions: amorphic, agglutinative, inflectional — contrast with Meshchaninov in Section III below):

(1) primitive communism, with synthetic structure of speech, with polysemantism of words, without distinction of fundamental and functional meaning;

(2) social structure based on division of different types of economy with social division of labour, i.e. division of society into professions, and stratification of a single society into productive-technical groups, which represent the original form of guilds.<sup>25</sup> To them corresponds language structure which distinguishes parts of speech, different clauses in the sentence, and different parts in the clause, etc., and has differentiated functional words (which consequently turn into morphological elements), differentiation of fundamental meanings in words and of functional sense;

(3) 'estate' or class society, with technical division of labour, and morphology of flexional order. (*Selected Works*, vol. III, p. 71.)

<sup>24</sup> Dealt with at length by Chikobava in Section 2 of his article in *Pravda* (9.v.1950).

<sup>25</sup> There is an interesting parallel between this modification of Marxism by introducing an additional social stage between primitive communism and class society, and the views of the 'legal Marxist' historian Rozhkov, who in attempting to apply economic materialism failed to see that from the Marxist point of view the essential difference between social formations lies in their 'main relations of production', and therefore distinguished far more stages than Marx's primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist (and Asiatic).

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'They [the four elements] were, in his opinion, the names by which the four Japhetic tribes called themselves, used as the original phonetic complexes participating in kinetic speech (the general means of communication, in those remote times, within the framework of the narrow interests of the primitive labour process). The crossing [fusion] of these four elements in the process of the crossing of the four Japhetic tribes conditioned the further course of development of speech... Later, in founding materialist linguistics, Marr did not renounce these elements, but introduced new content into them. He connected them not with ethnos, but with the norms of consciousness in their linguistic manifestation.'

This account of the history of all languages is a generalization of his theory of the Japhetic origin of the Indo-European languages into the view that all languages have passed through the stage of being 'Japhetic', meaning no longer a family, but the type of language corresponding to the earliest stage but one of social development. However, from Marr's own works the distinction is not always clear between a *stadiya* (stade) and a *sistema*, the latter being the concrete material of a 'family', which the original 'Japhetic' was. This problem was shelved by dropping the name 'Japhetic Theory' (1931).<sup>26</sup>

Thus Marr's view of the development of languages assumes changes from one stage to another by sudden 'dialectical' leaps. It does so on the basis of considering language a superstructure like law, philosophy and art, which consequently, like them, changes suddenly with each sudden change in the economic basis. Marr often said explicitly that language was a superstructure, though he also elsewhere, in order to sustain his arguments, called it a means of production. Stalin (see Section V below) attacks both extremes and propounds a solution to the contradiction.

At the same time as Marr was developing his theory, other theories continued to flourish in the Soviet Union. For example, an alternative derivation of the Armenian language was developed on the basis of traditional comparative philology by such scholars as Kapantsyan — for this he was attacked by Marr in 1931 and compared with the American Spitzer. Then one follower of traditional linguistics, Polivanov, attempted to set up a 'Marxist linguistics' in opposition to Marr. He posed all the comparativist arguments against Marr's whole theory, not only against his obvious errors, but did so in the name of Marxism as objective science — for example, he made a statistical calculation of the relative likelihood of the correspondences claimed by the two theories being real. But his *For Marxist Linguistics* (a collection of minor articles) failed to displace Marr in the eyes of the Marxists.<sup>27</sup>

Another attempt was made by the *Yazikfront* (Linguistic Front), which conceded that Marr's New Doctrine was 'the fundamental conquest of October in the field of linguistics', but insisted that it was now more of a bar to the development of linguistics than Indo-Europeanism was. Their argument that practice must be primary is opposed by Mikhankova (p. 446) as a disregard for theory, leading them into 'serious methodological and political mistakes (in the understanding of the national policy of the Soviet Government, of the class structure of Soviet society, etc.)'. However the argument from

<sup>26</sup> Marr himself said of the name 'Japhetic': 'In application to [my] theory as a whole, it has received such a general meaning that at the present time it has become superfluous.'

<sup>27</sup> Cf. for example Frček, in *Slovenské Spisovné Jazyky*, Prague, 1937.

practice reappeared in the recent discussions (see Sections IV and V below).

Meanwhile other scholars were quietly working on in the traditional way without open clashes with Marr.<sup>28</sup> Of course not only the Marrists were interested in the social content of language. We have just seen that Polivanov called his book *For Marxist Linguistics*. Selishchev, well known as a specialist in East and South Slavonic dialectology, wrote in 1926 a book on *The Language of the Revolutionary Period 1917-1924* in which, while the short theoretical introduction merely mixes tenets of the French sociological school (Durkheim, Meillet) with Marxist phrases, the rest of the book is a factual exposition of the changes in the Russian language brought about by the social upheavals of the Revolution. However, in general, the non-Marrist trend had followed the same lines as linguistics outside the Soviet Union.

### III

#### SOVIET LINGUISTICS AFTER MARR (1934-45)

Thus Marr's death in 1934 left at least three main strands in the thread of Soviet linguistic work; the confused heritage of Marr's own writings; the work of the traditional comparative philologists (for example Vinogradov and Bulakhovsky, both of whom are prominent in the current controversy); and, being studied by theorist and non-theorist alike, the new material of the primitive languages of remote parts of the U.S.S.R. (such as Chukchi, Yukagir and others). Of these, Marr's doctrine was now dominant. Thus after his death the Japhetic Institute, renamed the Institute of Language and Thought in 1931, was named after him, and in the ensuing period lip-service was paid to Marr even by those who made little concrete use of his doctrine, like Zhirmunsky in *National Language and Social Dialect*.

But the apparent triumph of Marr in Soviet linguistics, even among those whose actual work really continued the comparative philological tradition, was achieved posthumously by his own disciples, led by I. I. Meshchaninov,<sup>29</sup> only by considerable modifications in the 'New Doctrine of Language'.

Meshchaninov and his associates claimed the authority of Marr in all their works. In fact, however, they ignored parts of his doctrine and added to it as they found convenient. It is only in the current discussion that the extent of the confusion in Marr's attempts to apply

<sup>28</sup> Mikhankova (p. 447) acknowledges that the *Yazikfront* was useful in showing the liveliness of Indo-Europeanism; some of Marr's followers had so far forgotten this as to advocate conciliation with its representatives.

<sup>29</sup> A pupil of Marr already before the Revolution, whom Marr was able to get elected to the Academy (1932) only after a struggle (Mikhankova, p. 471).

Marxism has been revealed: as we shall see, Stalin's condemnation of Meshchaninov is directed not so much against his own theoretical work as against his cardinal role in the perpetuation of the Marr myth.

Meshchaninov's own writing shows a gradual departure from the original body of Marr's doctrine as conceived by Marr himself at the time of his death, but this departure was in no way a development towards the application of Marxism to linguistics as outlined by Stalin in his recent articles. It was rather an infusion of orthodox linguistic conceptions into the framework of Marrist terminology. As a result, his works increasingly lose the general and comprehensive (if confused) character of Marr's own 'New Doctrine', and become more and more specialized in content and formal in approach, coming down from the most general linguistics to an individual part of speech (the verb).<sup>30</sup> (This point has been made by Professor Matthews (whose 'Soviet Contribution to Linguistic Thought', Part I, *Archivum Linguisticum*, vol. 2, fasc. I, 1950, appeared too late to be used here)). In 1935, his *Problem of the Classification of Languages in the light of the New Doctrine of Language* was published (this was in fact a reprint of a speech he gave in February 1934, before Marr's death). The bulk of this work was incorporated in *The New Doctrine of Language*, published in 1936, and it is very interesting that from the larger work are omitted parts of the first book concerning the most extravagant components of Marr's doctrine, such as the 'four element' theory.<sup>31</sup> The object of *The New Doctrine of Language* itself was to expound the stadial classification by means of concrete language material, especially the newly studied primitive languages of the U.S.S.R.<sup>32</sup> The criterion of stadiality which Meshchaninov used here was the way in which the subject and object of an action are expressed in relation to the verb (the development from 'ergative' to 'nominative' construction), that is, it was a *syntactical* one, unlike Marr's. The title of his next work, *General Linguistics* (Uchpedgiz R.S.F.S.R., 1940), would appear to indicate a comprehensive scope, but in fact it no longer deals with stades as such, but, unlike the preceding work, simply considers the various types of syntactical combinations in abstraction from individual languages. He passes from this to *Constituents of the Sentence and Parts of Speech* (Moscow-Leningrad, Academy of Sciences, 1945) — here he deals in detail with the more formal side of the structural development of the

<sup>30</sup> Meshchaninov thus went against the perspective that he himself indicated in the preface to *The New Doctrine of Language* (OGIZ, Leningrad, 1936, p. 6) where he writes that while his course 'is not a comprehensive course in general linguistics', it is an 'exposition of material' as a basis for the 'composition of such a work in the future'.

<sup>31</sup> And this despite Meshchaninov's own later statement (in *Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 4, 1949, p. 295) that the 'doctrine of the four Japhetic linguistic elements was an indispensable feature of the Japhetic theory'. Cf. Note 23.

<sup>32</sup> As Meshchaninov himself notes in his article in *Pravda* (16.v.1950).

sentence outlined in preceding works. While excellent in its narrow sphere, this work can hardly be said to be any nearer to a Marxist approach to linguistics — it is perhaps significant that it is this work of Meshchaninov's which is most admired among those orthodox Western philologists who have paid serious attention to Soviet linguistics. His last published book *The Verb* (1949) deals purely with the development of the *form* of this part of speech from the forms of the predicate: *The New Doctrine of Language* on the other hand dealt with the verb as the central component of the sentence *in relation to thought*.

We have paid so much attention here to Meshchaninov's own works, because he determined the trend of the whole Marrist school.<sup>33</sup> His own tendency to depart in practice from the principles of the master he claimed to be following was reflected in his pupils. Professor S. D. Katsnelson, for example, in his *Course of General Linguistics* (Leningrad State University, 1941) makes use of Western developments in linguistics such as linguistic geography (see note 12). In short, the doctrines of Marr never really became deeply rooted in the linguistic work of the professional philologists who followed Marr, despite the increasing aura of reverence surrounding his name, and despite the increasing tendency to see his New Doctrine of Language as a part of the general Soviet ideology which became firmly established in the 1930s, and as an application of Marx's general doctrines of historical materialism to a particular subject.

But serious practical consequences resulted from this uncritical veneration of Marr's work. Marr himself, at the end of his life, had withdrawn from circulation a Course of Lectures he had given at Baku, which taught his erroneous 'four element' theory, but it was revealed in the *Pravda* discussion by Meshchaninov that this course was still being used by undergraduate students.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in teachers' journals, the four elements were being put to uses surpassing Marr himself in their absurdity.

It is obvious that the co-existence of the formal Marr tradition which was being inculcated in students and school-teachers, the Meshchaninov school, nominally developing within this framework, and the traditional comparative philology of the older generation, could not long continue. The practical tasks set by the development of Soviet society, and so far tackled without a consistent theory, demanded ultimately the emergence of an adequate theoretical basis, fitting into Soviet ideology as a whole.

<sup>33</sup> For a summary of post-war developments which shows that this statement has perhaps become less true in the past two years, see Section IV of this article.

<sup>34</sup> According to Stalin's subsequent statement, Meshchaninov himself was responsible for this (*Pravda*, 20.vi.1950).

However, before the full effects of these contradictions became apparent, the war intervened. While Soviet scholarship did not cease its activities, most of the student generation from the language departments were in the Armed Forces,<sup>35</sup> and the Institute of Language and Thought in Leningrad had to close down temporarily. The war in general shifted the focus of public attention away from ideological problems, and little was heard of Soviet linguistic controversy at this period.<sup>36</sup>

## IV

## SOVIET LINGUISTICS AFTER THE WAR (1945-50)

The story of the development of Soviet linguistics since the war is a complicated one. The three strands we have already distinguished for the pre-war period continued: Marrism, Indo-Europeanism, and practical work overlapping with these. But the general re-integration of Soviet ideology after the war led to a series of attempts to establish Marr's views as modified by his successors as the entirely dominating linguistic school in the Soviet Union, as the equivalent in linguistics of socialist realism in art, Grekov's work in historical studies, and the Lysenko school in biology. But in view of the haphazard and inconsistent outlook of the Marr school, this was an attempt to integrate by means of something in itself quite unintegrated and incapable of acting as a guiding force. The result of the successive attempts which we shall trace here to impose Marrism on Soviet linguistic studies was an increasing failure to cope with practical tasks connected with the social and economic changes among the nationalities in post-war years. This failure led to the crisis of early 1950, which is only now beginning to be resolved as a result of the discussions in *Pravda* and elsewhere.

Soviet linguistic studies and the direction of practical linguistic work were concentrated by 1945 in two main institutions: the Marr Institute of Language and Thought in Leningrad, under the direction of Meshchaninov, with a department in Moscow, and the Institute of the Russian Language of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. with its headquarters in Moscow, but with a department in Leningrad. At the same time there were important chairs and departments of linguistics in the leading universities, particularly of course in Moscow and Leningrad, and the national republics had linguistic departments attached to their own Academies of Science (that in Armenia was particularly active). The only regular central linguistics publication was the Bulletin

<sup>35</sup> Although officially reserved, students in these departments were permitted to volunteer, and many apparently in fact did so.

<sup>36</sup> For a very full bibliography (in Russian) on the whole development of Soviet linguistics from the Revolution to 1945, see Katsnelson in *Bulletin*, vol. VI, No. 5, 1947, p. 384.

of the Language and Literature Department of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., published six times annually.<sup>37</sup>

In general it is true to say that Marrist influence was strongest in Leningrad,<sup>38</sup> and opposition to Marr strongest in Moscow, particularly in the Moscow University. The Editorial Board of the *Bulletin*, although under the direction of Meshchaninov, were evidently wavering in their views: as we shall see, strong criticisms were made of them during 1947 and 1948, leading to a change in the composition of the Board; at the same time, unsuccessful attempts were made (for example by N. S. Chemodanov in the discussions of October 1946) to secure the publication of a 'popular and scientific journal' which would openly support Marrist linguistics.

But at the end of the war and in the first few months after it there were no clear signs of any attempts by the Marrists to obtain monopoly for their point of view. For example, S. P. Obnorsky in an article in the *Bulletin* in 1944 (vol. III, No. 1) on the 'Treatment of the Russian language during 25 years' praised Marr's work, but in the sixth issue of the same year, writing on the contemporary Russian literary language, he did not even make reference to Marr. At the same time (in vol. III, No. 1) the *Bulletin* published an article (which was to arouse much controversy later) by Vinogradov, well-known opponent of Marr's doctrines, on 'Forms of the word'. Further, in early 1945 (vol. IV, No. 2) V. F. Shishmarev, writing on 'Work on languages, literature and culture'<sup>39</sup> in the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.' merely mentioned Marr (as a specialist in the Caucasus) and Meshchaninov (as a specialist in Palaeo-Asiatic) in a list with thirty or forty others, and wrote: 'Once we have decided to turn our attention to it (*filologiya*) there is an important task in front of us — to apply to it the Marxist point of view. Our task is to use the best of our inheritance from the specialists . . . and to re-work this best in the spirit of our basic methodological premisses' (here he clearly implies that in his view Marxism had *not* yet been applied). There is here no attempt to assert the ideological supremacy of Marr.

During the period from mid-1945 to mid-1946, a greater emphasis was placed on the importance of Marr's work. Writers paid tribute to Marr for his work in their own speciality.<sup>40</sup> Meshchaninov (in vol. IV,

<sup>37</sup> Edited by a Board consisting of I. Y. Krachkovsky, P. I. Lebedev-Polyansky and S. P. Obnorsky. The chief editor was Meshchaninov himself, the secretary S. G. Barkhuradov.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Havránek (see Section VI below): 'From Leningrad, i.e. from the very centre of the Marr school . . .' (*Tvorba*, 19 vii 1950).

<sup>39</sup> All of which is in Russian *filologiya*, which has a different sense from the English *philology*.

<sup>40</sup> For example, V. A. Gordlevsky, in vol. IV, Nos. 3-4, on 'The numeral 50 in the Turkish language.'

Nos. 3-4) wrote a laudatory article on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the death of Marr. But even Meshchaninov himself was at this time cautious in his approach to Marr:

There were separate elements of unjustified enthusiasms in the work of N. Y. Marr, there were even partial deviations from the correct application of methodological premisses. Marr himself also noticed this, and introduced the necessary corrections. But they are not the point . . . He put linguistics . . . on a correct path.

And later in the same article he refers to Marr's analysis of stadial transition by leaps as a 'system, it is true, insufficiently precise in its details'.

Meanwhile traditional linguistic views continued to be put forward, apparently without serious opposition. A session of the Department of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences was devoted to the memory of L. V. Shcherba, a pupil of Baudouin de Courtenay, and an article of his praising Baudouin was reproduced in *Bulletin* vol. IV, No. 5. An article in early 1946 (vol. V, No. 1) by E. Agayan<sup>41</sup> treated such 'Indo-Europeanists' as Acharyan with great respect, and put the anti-Marrist Kapantsyan and the Marrists Garibyan and Sevak on the same level, all being considered to be Marxist philologists. Next, the Indo-Europeanist G. O. Vinokur wrote some 'Notes on Russian word formation' (vol. V, No. 4). Finally, towards the end of 1946 (in vol. V, No. 5) the Polish philologist J. G. Kuryłowicz wrote his notorious attack on 'Ergativeness and stadiality in language', which figured prominently in all the later discussions. This concluded:

We merely affirm on the basis of the above that ergativeness and nominativeness not only do not reflect any distinction in thought, but are forms completely indefinite as stades. If stadiality in the development of language did exist, then it left no trace in the material at our disposal and set out above.

But the publication of his article was a last outcrop of the ideological laxness of the war years. Three events in the summer of 1946 led to the strengthening of Marrism among Soviet philologists. The discussions led by A. Zhdanov on the literary magazines *Leningrad* and *Zvezda* (centred around the stories of Zoshchenko and the poetry of Anna Akhmatova), and the resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on literature, the cinema, and the theatre, marked a greater attention to problems of ideology by the Party. The drafting of the post-war Five Year Plan (1946-50) led all academic institutions to discuss the whole problem of their work in a radical manner and on a fairly long-term basis. And on June 27th, 1946, Meshchaninov received

<sup>41</sup> On '25 years of linguistics in Armenia'. See below in this section for evidence of his changed attitude by late 1949.



a Stalin Prize First Class of 200,000 rubles for his work *Constituents of the Sentence and Parts of Speech* in which he 'applied Marr's teaching to the sphere of syntax and morphology'. This award was seen by the more enthusiastic Marrists (for example, Chemodanov) as an indication that the Communist Party and the Government regarded Meshchaninov's methodological position favourably.

It was in this atmosphere that the first large-scale discussion on Soviet linguistics was held at a joint meeting of the Institute of the Russian Language and the Institute of Language and Thought, called on October 18th, 1946, to discuss 'The tasks in scientific research work of the linguistic institutes in the current five year plan'. This meeting may be said to mark the nodal point in the *first drive for the establishment of the monopoly of Marrist doctrine* since the war.

Meshchaninov himself in opening the discussion confined himself to comparatively mild praise of Marr; in fact he referred to the difficulties of using Marr's works because of the frequent changes in his thought, and attacked Baushev of Leningrad for using the four-element theory 'which we renounced 15 years ago'. At the same time he referred to the general confusion of thought among philologists about fundamental problems, to which 'our attention has been extremely weak'. He referred to the failure to resolve the problems of stadiality, and to the number of conflicting theories recently put forward.<sup>42</sup> He attributed the failure to study such questions as the substratum theory, the comparative historical method, and the comparative grammar of the Finnish, Japhetic, Turkic and Iranian languages to the 'absence of criticism which could have helped forward the question': this absence had 'of course held up the solution of a number of basic methodological problems'.

Meshchaninov referred to the effect this was having on practical work, and even referred to the 'stagnant period' which Soviet linguistics was passing through. Other speakers followed him in this. They referred to the lack of knowledge among Soviet philologists of contemporary developments in Western linguistics. Guchman said 'we often even don't know what they are writing about us'; Yakovlev said 'I myself have only just begun to know the dominant teachings of the past 10 years' (structuralism, etc.). At the same time teachers in universities used textbooks based on the work of the end of the nineteenth century; and Soviet philologists did not even understand the different tendencies which prevailed among themselves, so that the establishment of a Chair of Comparative Philology in Moscow after a break of many years had

<sup>42</sup> His own on 'conceptual categories', Abayevy's on 'ideasantika', Bubrich's theory of an 'absolute' stade, and Katsnelson and Desnitskaya's rival interpretations of the ergative stade.

passed unnoticed. Phonetic study was now virtually ignored, it was said.

But while Meshchaninov's followers agreed with him on the bad state of Soviet linguistics, they did not follow him in his mild attitude (at this stage of the controversy) towards his opponents. P. I. Lebedev-Polyansky said that philological work was a part of the great struggle of socialism against capitalism and that 'all departures from Marr's teaching, both to the right and the left, or, more accurately, backwards from Marr, are impermissible'. N. S. Chemodanov attacked Chikobava for supporting Saussure by criticizing Marr, and Vinokur for his support of the ancestral language theory in his *Russian Language* (1945); he criticized the 1945 Scientific Assembly in Moscow University for the absence of any mention of Marr.

The immediate results of this discussion were however not striking. Meshchaninov recommended the inauguration of a series of self-critical reports and discussions, the development of closer links with the universities, and the education of young 'cadres' inside the linguistic institutes themselves. But there was no specific attempt to secure the full domination of Marr's teachings.

The effect of the discussion was rather to draw attention to the failure to resolve the problem of stadiality. The controversy which followed took place on the basis of the assumption that stadial changes did in fact take place, and by dialectical leaps.<sup>43</sup> A number of articles on this subject were published in the *Bulletin*,<sup>44</sup> and centred round a discussion in the Comparative Philology Section of the Institute of Language and Thought (which was under the direction of Zhirmunsky), a discussion initiated by Meshchaninov himself (it took place between December 1946, and February 1947). A. A. Kholodovich pointed out that Marr had studied stades from a *lexicological* point of view, and that Meshchaninov had devoted all his attention to considering *grammatical* stades, primarily from the point of view of the subject-object relation. He claimed that Meshchaninov in his latest work was devoting attention to those parts of grammatical structure which he had so far ignored, and that what was now needed was a synthesis of the *whole* of Meshchaninov's work with Marr's. This unresolved problem of the basic stadial categories into which language development is divided runs through the whole of the succeeding discussions.

During 1947 and early 1948 the surface of Soviet linguistic controversy showed little of the strong cross-currents beneath it. The discussion on

<sup>43</sup> During the October 1946 discussion Lebedev-Polyansky said 'it is possible to quarrel about the concrete ways in which stadiality is expressed, but impossible to deny its existence'.

<sup>44</sup> Meshchaninov and Katsnelson in vol. VI, No. 1, Guchman in No. 2, Meshchaninov again in No. 3.

stadiality had no conclusive outcome. A discussion held in November 1946<sup>45</sup> on Meshchaninov's work by the Moscow Department of the Institute of Language and Thought dealt with only secondary points.<sup>46</sup> A Scientific Conference of post-graduate research workers was held by the Institute in March 1947, but dealt only with very detailed problems. At the same time philological articles in the *Bulletin* became restricted to the purely technical.<sup>47</sup> But that practical tasks were unresolved was indicated by the annual discussion in the same year of the Leningrad Section of the Institute of the Russian Language on the study of dialects for the projected dialect atlas. This discussion indicated the large-scale nature of linguistic studies in the Soviet Union: already by this time material had been received from 2027 inhabited places. But what is most significant for our present analysis is that the work on the Atlas was far behind schedule, and that it was considered possible that the plan of completion by 1955 might not be fulfilled: work on volumes V, VIII and IX had not yet begun; material had to be received from 750-800 places per annum to ensure completion, and there were not enough trained philologists available to ensure this.

But there was so far little indication of the fierce controversy which was to take place later in the year. It is true that during 1947 a strong attack was made in both Moscow and Leningrad on Vinogradov's book *The Russian Language* because it ignored Marr, and that Katsnelson wrote a severe criticism of Vinogradov for his attempt to identify Potebnia's and Marr's teachings on stadiality,<sup>48</sup> but although this criticism was published to initiate discussion, it was not followed up. And the publication of an article by the President of the Belgrade Academy of Sciences, Belić, an Indo-Europeanist, on 'The nature of language and its study' (a report of a speech given on June 13th, 1947) and of a report by L. A. Bulakhovsky on the 'Slavonic names of birds'<sup>49</sup> which used purely non-Marrist comparative methods of analysis, was seen later by Marrists as an indication of the over-liberal attitude of the Editorial Board of the *Bulletin*. But the caution of even avowed Marrists at this stage was indicated in Katsnelson's article on '30 years of Soviet general linguistics' (in vol. VI, No. 5), where he referred to Marr and Meshchaninov as being the successors of Potebnia, Fortunatov and Baudouin, and as suffering from 'failings and

<sup>45</sup> Reported in the third number of 1947 of the *Bulletin*.

<sup>46</sup> There was much criticism of Meshchaninov's three-phase analysis of conceptual categories, grammatical conceptions, and grammatical categories.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Bogoliubov wrote on the 'Etymology of the Vakhani auxiliary verb *tei-tu*' (in vol. VI, No. 4, 1947).

<sup>48</sup> Vinogradov's article was published in the *Vestnik* of Moscow State University Nos. 3-4, 1946, published in the spring of 1947; Katsnelson's criticism was published in the *Bulletin*, vol. VII, No. 1, 1948.

<sup>49</sup> Delivered on the same date as Belić's, and printed in the second number, 1948, vol. VII, of the *Bulletin*.

mistakes', although 'closer than all other linguistic conceptions to a Marxist one'.

This apparent lull was not to last. The discussion led by A. Zhdanov on Alexandrov's textbook on Western philosophy (already in June 1947), and the discussion and resolutions of the special August 1948 session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences strengthened those who wished to secure the predominance of Marrism. Already in June, before the Lysenko discussions, two special meetings had been held.

The first was a joint meeting of the Gorky Institute of World Literature, the Institute of Language and Thought, the Oriental Institute and the Institute of the Russian Language, to discuss the work of the *Language and Literature Bulletin* of the Academy of Sciences. The *Bulletin* was criticized for its lack of critical articles on foreign linguistics, for its lack of material on contemporary languages and their relation with Russian, for its failure to publish enough material on Russian itself, on the work of Academies affiliated to the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, and on local work. But these criticisms, which reflected the practical weakness of Soviet linguistic studies, were supplemented by strictures on the Editorial Board for its publication of articles by Belić and Kuryłowicz, and for its failure to give a lead in favour of Marrism in Editorials — a reflection of this was seen to be the failure to publish any report of the criticisms of Vinogradov which had been made in Moscow and Leningrad. This attack was led by G. P. Serdyuchenko, who during the ensuing discussions was the most vehement of the Marrists.

The second discussion of June 1948, held by the Moscow section of the Institute of Language and Thought, on the 'Immediate tasks in Soviet linguistics' was led by Serdyuchenko and included criticisms of Shishmarev and Zhirmunsky for tracing certain of Marr's views to the pre-revolutionary philologist Veselovsky, and of *Russky yazik v shkole* (The Russian Language in School) for its favourable review of the non-Marrist *Introduction to Linguistics* (a work written by Reformatsky), and for its failure to criticize Vinogradov's book sufficiently. At the end of the discussion Serdyuchenko announced that the Institute intended to have a series of reports delivered supporting Marr and criticizing Western schools of linguistics (Saussurianism, Bloomfield, etc.).

This was the beginning of *the second main wave of the post-war 'Marrist offensive'*. This reached its height after the Lysenko discussions, in two meetings, one in Leningrad, called by the Academic Council of the Institute of Language and Thought and the Leningrad Department of the Institute of the Russian Language (on October 22nd, 1948), and the other in Moscow, called by the Academic Council of the Institute of the Russian Language and the Moscow Department of the Institute

of Language and Thought (on November 17th, 1948). These meetings both opened with a report by F. I. Filin 'Concerning the two tendencies in linguistics', and a main report by Meshchaninov.<sup>50</sup>

In his report Meshchaninov developed the parallel between the situation in biology, where bourgeois schools looked on the hereditary particle as a thing in itself, and in linguistics, where both the 'national spirit' school of Humboldt and the Saussurians saw language as a thing in itself, and not as a part of a law-governed process of development. He claimed that the Indo-European school was particularly useless in a country like the Soviet Union, where the different languages to be compared belonged to different language-families. The failure to develop comparative grammars of languages from different families, and the split of morphology from syntax in teaching Russian to the national minorities, were both failures of the attempts to apply bourgeois linguistic doctrines to the present situation in the Soviet Union. Linguistic studies must be developed on the basis of a close linking of language and society.

Now much of this argument is unimpeachable from a Marxist point of view. But Meshchaninov and Filin were later to be challenged by Stalin and others on the conclusion they drew from this, that Marr's doctrines *do* enable a close linking of language and society. Filin himself put forward certain Marrist propositions in this connection which were later to be challenged by Stalin (see Section V below):

(1) 'The New Doctrine of Language looks on speech as an ideological superstructure, the changes in which are determined in the final analysis by changes in the social and economic basis. The origin of language, its history and its contemporary position, are organically linked with the history of society, with the interchange and struggle of social formations, with the class struggle.'

(2) 'Language in its long history has developed and is developing by means of leaps, acquiring at various stages of social life a new quality, distinct in its basic features from its state in preceding periods.'

Both Filin and Meshchaninov combined their defence of Marrism as the *only* Marxist standpoint on linguistics with a sharp attack on Marr's opponents.<sup>51</sup> The meetings passed resolutions demanding practical

<sup>50</sup> That the meetings were intended by the organizers to parallel the biological discussions is emphasized by the title of Meshchaninov's report 'On the situation in linguistic science', an exact parallel with Lysenko's 'On the situation in biological science'. Similar conferences were held in other sciences.

<sup>51</sup> The points they made included the following. In the *Ucheniye zapiski* of Moscow University (No. 128, spring 1948), Vinogradov had praised Shakhmatov's methodological position; in the *Reports and Communications* of the Institute of the Russian Language (No. 4, 1947) he had praised Selishchev's 'Old Slavonic Language', then being prepared for the press; in *Reports and Communications* of the Philological Faculty of Moscow University for 1947 he said the achievements of de Saussure and his school must be used. Avanesov, Kuznetsov and Sidorov had used the work of the

steps towards the complete dominance of Marrism. The Leningrad resolution for example reads (in part):

The Academic Council considers essential:

- (1) the development of propaganda for the achievements of progressive Soviet linguistics [i.e. Marrism — R. W. D. and J. E.] on a wide scale;
- (2) the carrying-out of a critical re-examination of teaching syllabuses and plans for the preparation of post-graduate philological students; . . .
- (5) the preparation for publication of textbooks on general linguistics and on the main subjects of various linguistic specialities, corresponding to the requirements of materialist linguistics.

It is interesting to note how already at this stage the bad practical situation, and the failure to apply Marrism to the needs of the Soviet Union, were worrying the speakers in these discussions. V. M. Zhirmunsky, in charge of the Department of Comparative Linguistics of the Institute of Language and Thought, referred to the bad situation in which his staff, while studying problems of pre-history, and correctly criticizing the ancestral language theory, had not yet examined the modern and recent history of European languages from the point of view of stadiality. S. A. Katsnelson criticized the Marrists themselves for formalism in their application of Marr's doctrines. A. V. Desnitskaya pointed out that historical and archaeological studies on the one hand, and linguistic studies on the other, were moving along separate roads — the archaeologists said that the philologists were not linking linguistic questions with questions of the history of material culture, and the historians were using Western sources for linguistic evidence. This is very significant as showing that Marrism was not connected with general Marxist ideology and was not checking its conclusions with the results of other scientific disciplines in its field.

It was proving impossible to work out a consistent methodology on the basis of Marrism. In consequence, comparative grammars, published as part of the Five Year Plan, were using contradictory methods of approach, and virtually no Marrist textbooks had been published. Where practical work was good, as in some branches of the study of Russian, it was not using a Marrist basis. The advisers to the Ministry of Higher Education of the U.S.S.R. and the Ministry of Education of the R.S.F.S.R., the authors of textbooks and school syllabuses, most professors and research students, and the editors of *Russian Language in the School* were opponents of Marr. The Ministry of Higher Education,

western 'linguistic geographers' Jakobson and Trubetsky in their phonological work. Other philologists were openly supporting the ancestral language theory: Bulakhovsky in 'General Slavonic names of birds', Bubrich in 'Historical phonetics of Finnish', L. P. Yakubinsky in *Vestnik* of Leningrad University (No. 1, 1947) — and in the *Ucheniye Zapiski* of Rostov-on-Don University Kuznetsov had even attacked Nemirovsky for opposing the ancestral language theory.

having decided that the syllabus on the history of the Russian language prepared for the previous session under the editorship of Vinogradov was unsatisfactory, were still using it in the current session.

But these practical failings were all attributed by the Marrists to the influence of supporters of 'bourgeois' linguistic schools, and not to the inapplicability of their own methodology. During the whole of 1949 they carried out what may be seen as the *third stage of the Marrist attack*, but this time supported by a number of publicist organs: this attack had all the more force because the campaign against 'cosmopolitanism' was by now in full swing, and the Marrists saw their own campaign as a reinforcement of it.

In the first place, *Pravda* itself, the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, carried a review, on January 5th, 1949, of L. R. Zinder's *Questions of Phonetics*, saying that this work was 'an example of disrespect to both the reader and science', because it ignored the writings of Marx, Engels and Marr on linguistics, and ignored Soviet linguistics as a whole.<sup>52</sup>

In the second place, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, published by the Union of Soviet Writers, which had already come out in favour of Marr in 1947, published two articles on April 6th, 1949 (in No. 28), under the general heading 'For materialist linguistics'. These articles, by Meshchaninov ('The Creative Heritage from N. Y. Marr') and Serdyuchenko ('Against Idealism and Formalism in Linguistic Science'), repeated the attacks on 'certain of our scientists, even from the younger generation of philologists', who had an uncritical attitude to bourgeois philologists and a hyper-critical one to Marr.

Thirdly, *Kultura i zhizn* (Culture and Life) on May 11th, 1949, published an article by N. Bernikov and I. Braginsky, entitled 'For progressive Soviet linguistics' in which they violently attacked the opponents of Marrism. They referred to the split of linguistic theory from practice: 'the split of research work in linguistics from practical tasks is growing more and more'. The study of Russian and of the development of modern languages was falling behind, concentrating on petty details alone. This could be overcome only by criticism and self-criticism, by attracting public interest in linguistic studies, and by interesting practical linguistic workers in scientific work based on Marrism.

Great importance was attached to this article, since *Culture and Life* is the organ of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. The Academic Councils of the two Institutes held special discussions of the article in Leningrad (June 28-29th, 1949) and Moscow (May 27-28th, 1949) and passed

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted, however, that unlike Lysenko, the Marrists were never able to say that the Central Committee approved their point of view.

resolutions attacking 'reactionary idealists' such as Chikobava, Reformatsky and Kapantsyan, and even attacking some Marrists (Desnitskaya, Guchman and Zhirkov) for attempting to build a bridge between Marr and bourgeois linguistics. They suggested various practical measures: both Institutes to discuss problems jointly; two volumes of Marr's selected works to be issued in 1949-50; proper links to be developed with the Institute of the History of Material Culture, the Institute of Ethnography, and the Institutes of Literature, History and Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences; monthly open meetings to be held to discuss the most important problems; scientific research programmes to be examined and brought in line with the needs of the Five Year Plan and the public.

Finally, the whole question was discussed by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., the most important scientific body in the Soviet Union, and on June 21st, 1949, it passed a long resolution of 3000 words on 'The present position in Soviet linguistics and measures for improvement of linguistic work in the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.'<sup>53</sup> This reviews the whole controversy of the previous years, opening with a panegyric of the 'Bolshevik scientist' Marr. It attacks Vinogradov, Chikobava and others, and praises the work of Meshchaninov, while criticizing his theory of 'conceptual categories'. Dealing in detail with the bad practical situation in Soviet linguistics (see the quotation below), it at the same time attributes this to the influence of Marr's opponents and puts forward a series of thirteen practical proposals, including the setting up of a commission under the chairmanship of Vavilov (the President of the Academy of Sciences) to carry out these measures.

If Marr's doctrines had the significance that his supporters believed they had, this resolution would have set linguistics finally on a path where it could properly fulfil its practical tasks. But in the first place, Marr's supporters, notably Serdyuchenko, found themselves forced to fall back more and more on an uncritical approach to Marr, and on a mere negation of all 'bourgeois' linguistics. Y. S. Maslov, for example (see *Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 3) attacked all attempts to use the comparative historical method, even by such Marrists as Guchman. Serdyuchenko in the same number is reported as saying that it was necessary to 'take into account the element analysis', and in vol. VIII, No. 4, in praising the 'palaeontological method, unbreakably linked by Marr with the element analysis', declares that 'it is hardly possible to deny the fact of the existence of such primitive elements of the primitive root-word', and merely adds that 'no-one will now insist on establishing *precisely four* [Serdyuchenko's italics] primary elements of speech'. Even Meshchaninov, in the same number, only commits himself to

<sup>53</sup> This resolution is reproduced almost in full in the *Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 6, 1949.



saying that element analysis is not appropriate for modern languages.<sup>54</sup>

This increased dogmatism in relation to Marr was accompanied by criticism of Meshchaninov himself. According to Serdyuchenko (*Bulletin*, vol. VII, No. 3) Meshchaninov's studies have been deflected entirely to problems of syntax, ignoring questions of vocabulary, semantics, material culture, language and class, language and nation, and failing to establish any connection with philosophers, historians and ethnographers. Maslov adds (in the same number) that in his latest work Meshchaninov has turned from studying the problem of stadiality to mere 'description of formal language structures'. Meshchaninov (in *Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 5) admits this and at the same time declares that even his 'New Doctrine' (1936) based stades merely on separate examples and observations.

So we have a situation in which the followers of Marr, criticizing Marr's opponents and trying to squeeze them out of linguistic work, are themselves unable to develop a consistent Marrist theory, much less apply it in practice, and resort to supporting such concepts as element analysis which, it will be remembered, Meshchaninov declared in 1946 had been abandoned fifteen years before.

Thus the organization of teaching, research and field work became less and less co-ordinated. Many examples of this appeared in the May and June (1949) discussions. Peysikov spoke of the backwardness of semasiological and Iranian philological studies; Glonti referred to the low theoretical level in Georgia ('most Georgian linguists are grouped around the activities of [the anti-Marrist] Chikobava'); Mikhailov spoke of the weak links between the central organs and the localities, Chemodanov of the backwardness in the study of Romance languages. Yakovlev declared that Soviet philologists were ignoring Soviet works on linguistics, and paying most attention to the work of foreign writers; Bokarev pointed out that many written languages had no grammars or dictionaries, several languages had not yet been given a written form, and that a planned study of popular dialects had not been worked out. Meshchaninov himself (vol. VIII, No. 4) admitted that field-work among the national minorities was weak, and often confined to 'work in the study, using material collected by foreign scientists from foreign sources which have not been checked'. Even the problem of the origin of language, on which Marr and his followers had concentrated their attention, had not been examined enough in recent years, and had been

<sup>54</sup> The dogmatic extremes to which some Marrists were going by this time are illustrated by the report of a speech by Anna Movsesyan from Armenia in the January 1950 discussions. She pointed to the hesitancy on those of Marr's principles which his 'opponents declared to be incorrect and defective' and said that Marr's element analysis 'is the foundation of the New Doctrine of Language and stands in basic opposition to the bourgeois formal comparative method. Element analysis makes it possible to penetrate the true history of human language.'

considered apart from archaeology. As the resolution of the Academy of Sciences said:

Even [*sic*] the representatives of the New Doctrine of Language have not connected their work with the very important practical tasks of linguistic work in the national republics and regions of the U.S.S.R., often preferring narrow work in the study to carrying out the important tasks of the further development of national language work. Deprived of scientific leadership and co-ordination, the local linguistic centres have made a number of serious mistakes and failings in alphabet work, in working out national orthographies and terminology, and dictionaries and grammars of separate languages . . . The question of the extent of the understanding and use of the recently established national literary languages by the mass of the population has not been studied.

It was clear that such a situation could not long be allowed to continue, and that the break of theory from practice could not indefinitely be attributed merely to the insufficient grasp of the theory by Soviet philologists. During the remainder of 1949 the drive for Marrism continued. The *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on October 19th (No. 84, 1949) published an attack on the Armenian philologists Kapantsyan and Acharyan for their anti-Marrism, and pointed out that the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party had passed a resolution criticizing them. And even in 1950 it was publishing reports supporting Marr's 'Materialist doctrine of language' (No. 3), and describing the bad situation in Moscow University, which had not paid sufficient attention to the various 1949 resolutions (No. 14). At the same time the Editorial Board of the *Bulletin* was 'strengthened' by including the ultra-Marrists Serdyuchenko and Filin. A series of articles was published in most leading academic journals in early 1950 praising Marr's work.<sup>55</sup> The *Bulletin* itself (No. 5, 1949) carried an editorial on 'The present position and tasks of Soviet linguistics'.

In March 1950 an all-Union meeting of supporters of Marr was called under the auspices of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences, and the discussion at it seems to have followed the familiar lines. But the resolution was not discussed by the Presidium or transmitted for action or discussion to the Republics or localities. In fact already in the first few months of 1950 there were signs of a critical attitude to the Marr school in wider circles. No number of the *Bulletin* appeared in early 1950. But in 'Questions of Philosophy', No. 3, 1949 (published in April 1950) there was a long summary (by Spirikir) of the discussions at the Moscow and Leningrad meetings of January 24-27th, 1950, devoted to the 85th anniversary of Marr's birth and 15th anniversary of his death.

<sup>55</sup> e.g. in *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 2, 1950; *Vestnik Drevney Istorii* (Bulletin of Ancient History), No. 1, 1950.

Spirkir, while not attacking Marr himself, commented sharply on the contributions which his leading supporters made to these discussions:

Although he provided a comprehensive description of N. Y. Marr's personality as a scientist and a teacher, Academician I. I. Meshchaninov did not indicate future prospects for developing the science of language and in essence he by-passed the unsatisfactory situation on the linguistic front, failing to disclose the reasons for this unsatisfactory situation.

A similar comment was made on Serdyuchenko, and about Chemodanov it was said:

It was noted by those who participated in the discussion that Professor Chemodanov's report was not self-critical.

The editor of the journal in a note observed that the discussions did not reflect creative development; that the reports by the heads of the Institute of Language and Thought were insufficiently self-critical; that philologists of the Russian language did not participate; and that theoretical research, practical work and language teaching were all unsatisfactory.

Finally, on April 12th, 1950, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences passed a resolution 'on the scientific activity, position, and preparation of cadres of the Institute of Language and Thought'. This resolution seems not to have been published, but it apparently did not improve matters: it was evidently shortly after this that the decision was taken to launch the discussion in *Pravda* which re-examined the whole basis of Marr's theory.

## V

### THE 'PRAVDA' DISCUSSIONS AND STALIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS (MAY-JULY, 1950)

In opening the *Pravda* discussions on May 9th the editors stated in a note:

In connection with the unsatisfactory state of Soviet linguistics, the Board considers it necessary to arrange a free discussion in the pages of *Pravda* in order by criticism and self-criticism to overcome the stagnation in the development of Soviet linguistics and give a correct orientation to future scientific work in this field . . . Beginning with the present number two pages of *Pravda* weekly will be devoted to discussion articles on linguistics.

The discussion lasted for nine weeks, and included contributions from fourteen important philologists, whose viewpoints varied from the Marrism of Meshchaninov and Professor F. Filin (Academic Secretary of the Academy) to the extreme 'Indo-Europeanism' and opposition

to Marrism of Chikobava and B. Serebrennikov (Doctor of Philological Sciences in Moscow University).

The greatest contrast of views was presented at the beginning of the discussion. It was opened by Chikobava on May 9th with a strong attack on Marr ('On certain questions of Soviet linguistics'). This was followed in the next week (May 16th) by a somewhat vaguer reply by Meshchaninov, which nevertheless committed him to justifying Marrism along familiar lines. During the next two weeks there were several shorter contributions, most of which were by definite partisans such as the anti-Marrists Serebrennikov ('On the assumptions made by Marr in his research') and Kapantsyan ('Concerning certain of Marr's linguistic postulates'), or the Marrists Filin ('Against stagnation, for development') and Chemodanov ('Lines of development of Soviet linguistics'). But by this stage even some of these partisans were expressing themselves very mildly: Sanzheyev, for example, while bringing evidence for Marr, is humorously critical of his excesses, and Popov ('Neglected questions of Soviet linguistics') is not concerned with the main argument.

From this point, the discussion tended to become more and more lost in a mass of detail: the main thread of the argument became somewhat confused, and the contributors seem to be trying to reconcile the two points of view, without examining their premisses fundamentally. They included Vinogradov, whose article ('Develop Soviet linguistics on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory') represented the most useful, but still largely unsuccessful, attempt at a reconciliation (June 6th), Bulakhovsky ('On the road to materialist linguistics'), Nikiforov ('The history of the Russian language and Marr's theory'), and Kudryavtsev ('On the question of the class structure of language') (these last three were published on June 13th). These were followed by Chernykh's article ('Critique of certain postulates of the New Doctrine'), published together with Stalin's main contribution on June 20th. Two further numbers were devoted to the discussion after this (on June 27th and July 4th). Here we propose to consider the discussion before Stalin's contribution *topic by topic*.

First, the most general question, *the relation of Marr's theory to Marxism, and to objective science in general*.

Chikobava holds that it is unscientific, because it is not based on facts. Chemodanov retorts that the ancestral language theory, supported by Chikobava, is refuted by the evidence of the other social sciences (but this could be looked on by anti-Marrists merely as an additional confirmation of their claim that the other social sciences, particularly early history, had become infected by Marrism).

Chernykh draws attention to the name of the theory: if Marrism is

Marxist, he says, why is it called the 'New' Doctrine, and not simply the Soviet theory of linguistics, for since Soviet society contains no ideological divisions Soviet science should be a united whole.

Vinogradov divides Soviet scholars into three kinds, as shown by the discussion up till Stalin: the straightforward followers of Marr who consider that he founded Marxist linguistics; those who disagree with this but think that he can provide the *basis* for doing so; and those who have no theory of their own but are a prey to bourgeois theories and empiricism. He accuses Marr's followers of not applying Marxism in judging pre-revolutionary Russian linguistics; while he recognizes Marr's merit in attacking bourgeois errors (although he did not attack linguistic idealism (Vossler) or formalism, according to Chikobava), he insists that they went too far, contravening Zhdanov's principle that to negate bourgeois science does not merely mean to say 'no'. Kapantsyan supports this view: he emphasizes the lack of continuity of Marr's followers with previous Russian linguistics, and accuses him of substituting for it a 'cosmopolitan' doctrine which led to the errors in Soviet linguistics.

Thinking on the same lines, Chikobava claims that while Marr was opposed to idealism he did not grasp Marxism, and this led to his errors in the application of it. Thus, he says, Marr substituted for the real history of language subjective 'linguistic palaeontology', and Vinogradov too condemns Marr's theory as anti-historical. Serebrennikov adds that Marr re-introduced the ancestral language in the form of the four elements.<sup>56</sup>

But most of the discussion was taken up not with these general questions but with the detail of the theory.

Here an examination of the theory begins logically with considering *the relation of language and thought*. According to Bulakhovsky and Chemodanov Marr's theory is based on the Marxist-Leninist view of consciousness. But Serebrennikov on the other hand claims that the doctrine of stades of thought, including pre-logical thought, is contrary to Lenin's statement (*Filosofskiy tetradi*, 1947, p. 308) that fantasy is always subordinate to objective thinking. Kapantsyan attacks Marr's assertion that the communication of the future will be thought without language: in this connection he adduces Engels's arguments against

<sup>56</sup> "In general, if we are to speak of an ancestral language, an original state of vocal speech, then this was the speech of narrow scope of a definite profession, magical speech . . ." (Marr, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 259.) If vocal speech, having been originally the acquisition of the magicians, developed from the originally isolated four elements, then the analogy between the ancestral language and the four elements is here complete.' (Serebrennikov.) In fact the words Marr so truly used against Meillet's conception of the ancestral language (Mikhankova, p. 430, note 2) could be used against Marr himself: 'What kind of history is this, if it is impossible to determine exactly either time or place?'

Dühring. Vinogradov argues that Marr goes against Stalin's teaching on the subject, that he vulgarizes the relation between language and thought, and that his school has produced no concrete analysis of the sentence as examined in relation to thought by Engels and Lenin: against this Meshchaninov claims that Marr had realized that the word has meaning only in the sentence, and therefore derived parts of speech from constituents of the sentence.

From this discussion naturally moves on to the *relationship of language with society* — Marr regarded *language as a superstructure*, equally with thought (but see above, p. 217). Kapantsyan regards this as one of Marr's services to linguistics, and no one before Stalin expressed complete disagreement with it. Chikobava writes that language cannot be compared directly with other superstructures like art without considering its specific features, although the posing of this problem by Marr was an undoubted service. Nikiforov thinks language is a superstructure, but not of a class nature (this contradicts Stalin's demarcation of superstructure, see below). Meshchaninov criticizes Marr as mechanical for identifying superstructure (language) with basis. No one sees the contradiction between the view of language as a superstructure *and* as a means of communication — for example, Bulakhovsky claims that Marr accepted Stalin's view on the latter point. What is seen is Marr's error in giving primacy to linguistic factors — for example, according to Kapantsyan he ascribed the development of dialectics by the ancient Greeks and Hegel and Marx to the stage of linguistic structure shared by Greek and German!<sup>57</sup>

There is more criticism of the complementary theory of *the class nature of language*. Chikobava sees this theory as contrary to its role of communication. To this Chemodanov replies with quotations from the classics of Marxism to show that language is class-language, except of course in primitive communism, where, he argues, Marr, as he himself pointed out, meant something different by 'class'. Kudryavtsev admits that Marr is wrong here, while arguing that evidence from modern French and other languages disproves Chikobava. Meshchaninov considers that the falsity of Chikobava's analogy between language and a rifle is self-evident (but cf. Stalin's with machines, below).

Turning to the *historical development of languages*, the first point discussed here is *the unity of the glottogonic process*. According to Chikobava and Serebrennikov, this necessarily implies original similar material — the four elements. Meshchaninov, inconsistently according

<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to compare Marr here with Hogben and Bodmer, who in general equally seek 'social' explanations, and yet can write (*Loom of Language*, p. 165): 'It is unlikely that Hegel would have taken in three generations of Germans and one generation of Russians if he had been trained to write in the terse English of T. H. Huxley or William James.'

to Chernykh, affirms such unity without the four elements. *On convergence and divergence* within this process, Chikobava insists that both take place, while Meschaninov explains obvious cases of divergence like the Romance languages, as being really a result of convergence between Latin and such languages as Celtic. He also understands unity of the glottogonic process to include parallel syntactical developments in languages far apart; but Chemodanov regards it as simply reflecting the parallel development of thought. Bulakhovsky rejects the 'evidence' for such unity from semantic series of the specifically Marr type. Nikiforov and Chernykh take the case of Slavonic as evidence against Marr: Chernykh says there is no historical example of convergence at all;<sup>58</sup> the danger of racialism in this kind of classification of languages, he says, exists only if one language-type, for example the inflected, is looked on as higher, as Marr himself (and Meshchaninov in 1931) did.

Now Popov divides the linguistic theory of Marr into two parts. The first is *the origin of language*: here, he says, it is impossible to achieve much, and Chikobava for example criticized the 'class-origin' which Marr attributed to language along with the rest of Marr's class theory of language. The second is *the origin of 'systems' of languages* in a concrete historical epoch, where Popov claims Marr has achieved much of value. This question includes various themes which constitute the detailed subject-matter of linguistics.

The most general of these is the question of the *stadiality of languages*. Chikobava holds that the stades are objectively undefined, that this doctrine is just as racist as comparativism, and that stades must be traced within one language, and cannot replace historical or genealogical treatment. Serebrennikov rejects language stadiality on the grounds that Lenin rejected stadiality in thought (see above). Kapantsyan says it is based on Marr's mechanical understanding of materialism. Vinogradov, showing that there is no linguistic palaeontology in a specifically Marr sense (replacing history, cf. Chikobava above), distinguishes stades as conceived by Marr and by Meshchaninov, and quotes Meshchaninov's retreat in 1937 to the position that they may be distinguished in content without change in form. Bulakhovsky also refers to Meshchaninov's works; Sanzheyev attempts to salvage stadiality by applying it in his own way to the Mongol languages.

Also of fundamental importance is the question of the *four elements*. Chikobava and Serebrennikov direct their main fire at them, showing that Marr had no proof for them and that there is every proof against. Nikiforov says that they yield no results, Kapantsyan that they are not phonetically possible and that even if they were they could not have

<sup>58</sup> He invokes Engels's authority to point out that it is nonsense to say that Russian 'veli' (they led) does not derive (by divergence) from common Slavonic 'ved-li'.

survived into the historical period. Vinogradov quotes Marr himself that they are inapplicable to the modern period. Chemodanov defends them as representing the undifferentiated state of primitive speech as described by Engels, and says they are no worse than comparativism and in any case are unessential to the theory (whereas Bulakhovsky computes that if everything based on them were removed only ten per cent of Marr's writings would be left). Meshchaninov pointed out that in the latest stage Marr treated them ideologically rather than formally.<sup>59</sup> In connection with this question the relation between Marr and his followers is discussed. Chikobava insists that they still adhere to the four-element theory, while Popov says that some have over-simplified and vulgarized it. Serebrennikov says that criticism of it is denounced as criticism of Marxism itself. According to Meshchaninov there are four views of the elements: that they are useless, that they are useless for modern languages (his own view), that they are able to throw light on early language development, and that they are useful only for tribal names. Chernykh accuses Meshchaninov of obscuring the issues with vague generalities.

On the *relation of Marrism to the detail of traditional linguistic theory*, Chikobava and Serebrennikov defend the comparative method, the application of which Marr denied (Popov) to the hilt, saying it is the only one of value to Soviet linguistic work; and Chernykh denies that opposition to the ancestral language theory is the beginning of Marxist method (this was the view of Meshchaninov, who said that if peoples are mixed then languages are, in other words, that ancestral language and mixture are opposed). Bulakhovsky says this theory need not be racist if it is merely a reconstruction, a sum of original forms. Filin distinguishes the historical comparative method which Engels supported (Chemodanov also cites this, saying that Engels's support of comparativism was relative) and the formal comparative method: he quotes Vendryes as admitting the latter to be exhausted, and himself points out that it is theological in origin. Vinogradov, distinguishing universal comparative (Marr) from formal comparative says most clearly that comparative data are proved facts, not only lexical but grammatical; moreover, they are accepted in practice by the adherents of convergence. Nevertheless, an alternative must be found to the formalist ancestral language conclusion, without waiting for the other social sciences to do this for linguistics. Chikobava considers that the deficiencies of the comparative method, for example, its ignoring of the phenomena of

<sup>59</sup> Cf. his remarks in mid-1949: 'Marr saw the whole danger of the formal utilization of the element analysis, and in 1933 declared "that the analysis according to the elements is extraordinarily complex and difficult, precisely because it is not formal, but ideological, bound up with the technique of thought . . ."' (*Bulletin*, vol. VIII, No. 4, p. 295.) Cf. notes 23 and 31.



mixed languages, are not a reason for rejecting it and accepting the four-element theory, but should be explained and remedied.

On the question of the *causation* of particular linguistic processes such as *sound-changes*, the ascribing (by Marr) of social causes to phonetic processes is opposed, but there is agreement (Chikobava, Filin, Chemodanov), that lexical processes have directly social causes; further, Chemodanov includes syntactical changes in the semantic ones so caused. Meshchaninov states generally that internal changes have grown 'on the same soil as external convergence'; but Nikiforov insists that all causation is within in the given language, that is, not from hybridization (cf. above), and similarly Vinogradov considers that Marr attributed too little to internal development of a language.

As regards *semantics*, considered to be Marr's great contribution, Vinogradov denies that he founded a materialist method of semantic analysis. Bulakhovsky agrees that Marr did not apply the semantic principles of Leninism, and opposes the weight given by Marrists to 'palaeontology' at the expense of living languages. According to Vinogradov and Kudryavtsev, Marr did not extend his semantic study to modern languages at all, his work being irrelevant to national languages and languages under socialism.

In fact, most dissatisfaction is expressed about the *relation of the theory to the practical needs of Soviet society* (work on which constituted the third of Vinogradov's groups above). There is general agreement that this should be the criterion of the development of Soviet linguistics. Chikobava denies that the works of Marr or his followers (for example, Chemodanov's *Introduction to Linguistics*) are of any use for this. Kapantsyan and Serebrennikov say that theory must come from practice, and Chernykh that the stagnation in theory is affecting practical work. Bulakhovsky adduces the need for the study of bilingualism in Soviet republics, and for the production of Dictionaries such as the Academy Russian one mentioned above. In particular, the concrete study of Russian has nothing to gain from Marr's methods (Vinogradov, Nikiforov and Kudryavtsev confirm Chikobava).<sup>60</sup> Kapantsyan points out that the orthographical reform of Russian was justified practically, not a realization of Marr's theories. On the future international language, Chikobava sees a contradiction between Marr's advocacy of administrative methods and Stalin's no-coercion policy; but Bulakhovsky replies that administrative measures such as schools are involved in all contemporary linguistic development.

Finally, the contributors touch on the question of *the regime in linguistics* which prevailed at the time the controversy began. Popov

<sup>60</sup> For the Marrist view that these methods are of prime importance for Russian, see Mikhankova, pp. 298-9.

complains that Marr's published works lack critical editing (vol. V is an extreme example of unintelligibility); Sanzheyev criticizes the previous discussions as formalities which had no results, mere negative criticism of the past work of colleagues without positive proposals. The change in this marked by the *Pravda* discussion is indicated by Meshchaninov's admission (in the first part of his article) that a number of Marr's views were erroneous.

This then was the background to Stalin's contributions to the linguistics discussion. (A reasonable translation of Stalin, *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics*, has been published by *Soviet News*, London, 1950).

As we understand Stalin, his object was to show that in trying to overcome the weaknesses of the 'bourgeois' ancestral language theory, Marr made a false start. The attempts of Soviet philologists, especially Meshchaninov, to get over this false start by ignoring those cruder errors (such as the four-element theory) which in reality lay at the basis of Marr's theory, inevitably led to failure, as did their later attempts (during 1949) to develop Marrism into a dogma by an increased uncritical approach to his work. These attempts were aimed at turning something which was fundamentally un-Marxist and incapable of consistent practical application, into a consistent Marxist methodology, applied to a society in which Marxism is the predominant ideology. The consequent weakness of practical linguistic work was made abundantly clear in the discussions from 1945 onwards, summarized above.

Stalin's object then, it seems, was not so much to lay down a detailed Marxist theory of linguistics as to clear away what he considered to be Marr's fundamental errors, while at the same time putting forward some fairly simple propositions on the basis of which a Marxist theory of linguistics could be developed. This concentration on putting Soviet linguistics on the right road (the 'broad highway') explains why, while pronouncing on general principles where linguistics meets sociology, he is not concerned with criticizing other theories (such as the ancestral language theory) which had preceded Marr's. As we shall see, however, he does make statements about certain questions within linguistics itself. He makes it clear that linguistics is a science in its own right, not merely part of sociology, though connected with it, and that internal linguistic considerations are not to be condemned as formalism. He rejects the mixture theory according to which developments in individual languages are caused by other languages; he rejects the view of the origin of language that presupposes original gesture language; he re-admits the comparative method irrespective of the ancestral language theory itself, which, he says, 'has nothing to do with the matter'. But he says nothing about concrete types of grammatical system and the

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question whether the inflexional or the analytical represents progress in language (we have seen that this question had exercised both Marr and the later controversialists).

Now to the details of Stalin's contributions.

His first article (published in *Pravda* of June 20th), 'Regarding Marxism in Linguistics', consists of his answers to four questions put by 'comrades from the youth'. He makes it clear that he 'cannot satisfy the comrades in full' as regards philological details, but is concerned with *Marxism* in linguistics, 'as in other social sciences'.

To the *first question*, 'Is it true that language is a superstructure on a basis?' he replies 'No, it is not true'. In elaborating this answer, he begins by defining the Marxist terms 'basis' ('the economic system of society at a given stage of its development'<sup>61</sup>) and 'superstructure' ('the political, legal, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society, and the political, legal, and other institutions corresponding to them'). The relation between them he defines as being that each basis (e.g. feudal, capitalist, or socialist) has a different superstructure. (See also Section VI below).

This does not apply to language. For example, Russia has both a new (socialist) basis and a new superstructure (socialist political, legal, and other institutions), but while there is a considerable number of new words and expressions, reflecting the new production, state, culture, community, morals, technology, and science, and some other words have dropped out of the vocabulary, nevertheless the basic fund of words and the grammatical structure of Russian remain unchanged.

Further, the superstructure is engendered by the basis but it does not merely reflect it: it is a most active force in consolidating the basis and liquidating the old classes: this indeed is the function for which it is created by the basis.<sup>62</sup> But language 'is engendered not by any particular basis, by the old or new basis within a *given* society, but by the entire course of the history of the society and the history of the bases during centuries. It is created, not by any one class, but by the whole society,

<sup>61</sup> Engels in a letter to Starkenburg (25.1.1894) further defines this term: 'What we understand by the economic conditions which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society are the methods by which human beings in a given society produce their means of subsistence and exchange the products among themselves (in so far as division of labour exists).' And see note 81.

<sup>62</sup> General Marxist theory constantly emphasizes this point. Just as the individual human consciousness, while reflecting objectively real being, is not a mere passive recipient, but itself reacts back upon and alters those conditions, and just as that combination of human consciousnesses which constitutes society in its 'spontaneous process of development' becomes 'the conscious action of men . . .', so 'stands out . . . the tremendous role of new social ideas, of new political institutions, of a new political power'. (*History of the CPSU(b)*, Eng. edn., p. 130). See also Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 475-7, 517-8, Lenin, *Selected Works*, Eng. edn. vol. XI, p. 377, lines 1-12.

by all the classes of the society, by the efforts of hundreds of generations. It is created to satisfy the needs not of any one class, but of the whole of society, of all the classes of society'.

Not only Russian, but all the other languages of the Soviet Union, serve the new basis, the socialist system, equally as well as they did the old Russian bourgeois culture and capitalist system. If language ceases to serve the whole of society, and supports a particular social group, it becomes a jargon (class-dialect) 'degrading itself and dooming itself to disappearance'.<sup>63</sup> In this respect language (as opposed to jargon) resembles such means of production as machines, 'which can serve equally well both the capitalist and the socialist order'.

A final difference between superstructure and language is that the superstructure is not connected directly with production, but is connected through the medium of the economic basis, and reflects changes in the level of development of the productive forces only after changes in the basis. Language, on the other hand, is connected directly with productive activity and with all human activity 'from production to the basis, from the basis to the superstructure', and reflects productive changes immediately.

*The second question* was 'Is it true that language has always been and still is class language, that there is no non-class, people's language, common to, and single for, society?' Again he answers in the negative. '... Everywhere, at all stages of development, language, as a means of communication of people in society, has been common to, and single for, the society, equally serving the members of the society irrespective of their social position.' (By 'society' here is understood not 'conglomerations', 'temporary and unstable military and administrative associations' like the Empires of Cyrus or Alexander the Great, but the tribes and peoples within them, 'who lived their own lives and had their own languages'). Local dialects were subordinate to the single and common language.

With the appearance of capitalism, 'with the elimination of feudal divisions and the formation of a national market, peoples developed into nations, and the languages of the peoples developed into national languages'.

Classes use language in their own interest and impose upon it their own expressions, but the jargons resulting are not class 'languages', for they do not possess their own grammatical system and fundamental vocabulary and they 'are completely unsuitable as a means of communication between people for society as a whole'.

Stalin then seeks to refute the argument that the classics of Marxism

<sup>63</sup> i.e. a class jargon (as distinct from a technical jargon of a professional group) disappears (at the latest) with the class using it.

speak of class languages. When Marx said<sup>64</sup> that the language of the bourgeoisie is the product of the economic life of the bourgeoisie he was merely referring to a mercantile jargon. When Engels said<sup>65</sup> 'the workers speak a different dialect, possess different ideas and conceptions, different customs and moral principles, a different religion and politics from the bourgeoisie', he was not speaking about languages, and denying the existence of a common national language, which Marxism says is one of the most important characteristics of a nation. When Lafargue<sup>66</sup> spoke of the 'class nature of language' he was speaking of court or aristocratic jargon or 'artificial speech . . . separated from the common national language, which both the bourgeoisie and the artisans of town and country spoke'.

The fact that 'English feudal lords for centuries spoke in French' only refers to 'an insignificant upper section of English feudal lords', speaking 'the common language of the French', and this 'toying with the French language subsequently disappeared completely, giving place to the common national language'. Similarly with Russian aristocrats in the Tsarist court in the eighteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

To think otherwise is to confuse language with the superstructure and to see the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat as 'the disintegration of society, as the rupture of all ties between hostile classes', and to make the same mistake as those 'Troglodytes' who wanted to tear up the 'bourgeois' railways left in the country after the October Revolution.

When Lenin said that there are two cultures under capitalism, bourgeois and proletarian, and the slogan of national culture under capitalism is a nationalist slogan, he was speaking of culture, not language.

When Stalin (continues Stalin) said that the bourgeoisie and its nationalist party directs bourgeois culture, he was not denying that the national language may also serve socialist culture, 'socialist in content and national in form, i.e. in language'.

In short, language has not an essentially class character.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> In *Saint Max*.

<sup>65</sup> In *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*.

<sup>66</sup> In *Language and Revolution*.

<sup>67</sup> The former case (Anglo-Norman) was of course earlier than the formation of the French national language.

<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to note that during the 1949 discussions Serdyuchenko (in an article published in the *Bulletin of the Language and Literature Department of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.*, vol. VIII, No. 4) complained that not enough work had been done by Soviet philologists on the question of language and class. In fact, he stated, only three works had been published: Selishchev's *Language of the Revolutionary Period* (1928) which he claimed was anti-Marxist; K. N. Derzhavin's work on the struggle of classes and parties as reflected in the language of the French Revolution (1929); and a work on French political terminology.

*The third question* put to Stalin was: 'What are the characteristic features of language?' It is here that Stalin outlined those basic propositions, mentioned above, on which it is intended that a Marxist linguistics should be built up.

Language, he writes, is inseparable from society and must be studied in 'inseparable connection with the history of society, with the history of the people to whom the language under study belongs, and who are its creators and repositories'.

It is a medium of communication, 'directly connected with thought', it 'registers and shapes into words, and in words combines into sentences, the results of thought and man's successes in his quest for knowledge, and thus makes possible the exchange of ideas in human society'. Hence it is 'at the same time an instrument of the struggle and development of society'.

The 'foundations, the specific nature' of a language consist in its basic word stock, the vocabulary, which persists over centuries, and in its grammar, the rules governing modification of words and their combination into sentences, an abstraction like geometry. Vocabulary does not change in the way the superstructure does, 'by abolishing the old and building something new, but by replenishing the existing vocabulary with new words which have arisen with changes in the social system, with the development of production, of culture, of science, etc.' 'The grammatical system of a language changes even more slowly than its basic word stock.'

'Languages', he continues, 'owe their stability to the stability of their grammatical system and their basic word stock.' For example, in the Balkan languages, influenced in their vocabulary by Turkish, there were 'convergences' and 'divergences' (in relation to Turkish and for that matter to each other). 'Nevertheless, the Balkan languages stood firm and survived. Why? Because their grammatical systems and basic word stocks were preserved in the main.'

'It follows from this that a language, its structure, cannot be regarded as the product of only one epoch. The structure, grammatical system, and basic word stock of a language are the product of a number of epochs.'

Although the development of production, the appearance of classes of society and of writing, the rise of the state and still more of trade, needing 'a well-regulated correspondence', the printing press, and the development of literature, were all causes of very big changes in the development of language, and although tribes and nationalities 'broke up and scattered, intermingled and intercrossed . . .' causing 'even greater changes in language and its development', nevertheless language did not develop in the same way as the superstructure, by destroying

and creating individual languages, but 'by extending and perfecting the basic elements of the existing language'. Nor did the transition of language from one qualitative state to another take the form of a dialectical leap<sup>69</sup> (the stadial theory, held by all Marrists), but of a gradual accumulation of the new and the dying away of the old. Lafargue was wrong to imagine a sudden linguistic revolution between 1789 and 1794.

'In general it should be said, for the benefit of comrades who are enamoured of [dialectical] leaps, that the law of transition from an old quality to a new by means of a leap is inapplicable to the history of the development not only of language; it is not always applicable either to other social phenomena pertaining to the basis or the superstructure. It is obligatory for a society divided into hostile classes. But it is not at all obligatory for a society which does not have hostile classes.' He adduces as an example the transition in the Soviet Union from the individual peasant system to the collective farm system, which 'did not take place by means of a leap, that is by the overthrow of the existing power and the creation of a new power, but by a gradual transition . . . to the new system'. This was because it was a 'revolution from above . . . with the support of the overwhelming mass of the peasantry'.

The mixing of languages also 'is a prolonged process which continues for hundreds of years'. There can therefore be no question of dialectical leaps (the stadial theory) in such cases. And the result of mixture is not usually a third language which does not resemble either of the mixed languages and which differs qualitatively from them both, but one of them emerging 'victorious from the mixture'. In this way Russian absorbed vocabulary from various other languages and was thus enriched. 'Undoubtedly, Soviet linguistics has nothing valuable to gain from the mixture theory. If it is true that the chief task of linguistics is to study the internal laws of language development, it has to be admitted that the mixture theory does not even set itself this task, let alone accomplish it — it simply does not notice it, or does not understand it.'

*The fourth and final question* put to Stalin was 'Did *Pravda* act rightly in inaugurating an open discussion on linguistics?' He replied in the affirmative. 'In what way these linguistic problems will be settled, will become clear when the discussion ends. But it may be said already that the discussion was very useful.'

Firstly, it has been shown that there has been a regime in linguistic institutions under which the slightest criticism of the 'New Doctrine' has been suppressed. However, 'no science can develop and flourish without a battle of opinions, without freedom of criticism'.

<sup>69</sup> *Vzryv*, literally explosion. On this and *skachok*, lit. leap, see discussion reported in *Vestnik Akad. Nauk S.S.S.R.*, 9/1950, p. 61.

Secondly, the discussion has revealed 'the incredible confusion of ideas on cardinal questions of linguistics which prevails among the leading circles in this branch of science'. They have had to admit that Marr's teachings contain a 'whole number of shortcomings, errors, undefined problems and unelaborated tenets'.

They still think, however, that 'Soviet linguistics can be advanced on the basis of a "rectified" version of Marr's theory, which they consider a Marxist one. No! Save us from the Marxism of Marr! Marr did indeed want to be and endeavoured to be a Marxist, but he could not become one. He was nothing but a simplifier, and vulgarizer, of Marxism, similar to the Proletcultists or Rappists.'<sup>70</sup>

Marr introduced the incorrect formulae that language is a superstructure and has a class character, and thus stultified Soviet linguistics. He introduced an immodest, arrogant tone, 'alien to Marxism and tending towards a crass and frivolous negation of everything done by linguistics before Marr'. He abused the comparative historical method as 'idealistic', when his own four-element analysis was truly idealistic. And the former at least 'gives a stimulus to work, to the study of languages, while the latter gives a stimulus only to lying on a stove and telling fortunes in coffee-grounds'.

Marr opposed all study of language families as being tainted with the ancestral language theory. But the linguistic relationship of, for example, the Slavonic languages, is a fact and 'might be of the greatest value to linguistics in the study of the laws of development of language. The "ancestral language" theory of course has nothing to do with the matter'. With Marr's dismissal of all previous linguistics, Stalin contrasts Marx and Engels's recognition that 'their dialectical materialism was the product of the development of the sciences, including philosophy, in preceding periods'.<sup>71</sup>

Stalin concludes: 'Elimination of the Arakcheyev<sup>72</sup> regime in linguistics, rejection of Marr's errors, and the introduction of Marxism into linguistics are, in my opinion, the way in which Soviet linguistics may be put on a sound basis.'

Following this article, questions were addressed to Stalin by various workers in the field, including contributors to the discussion. In his

<sup>70</sup> Proletcult-groups of 'Leftist' intellectuals, predominant in literary circles in the early days of the Revolution.

RAPP – The Revolutionary Association of Proletarian Writers, dissolved in 1932.

<sup>71</sup> It will be remembered that Lenin (in 'The Three Sources and the Three Component Parts of Marxism', *Selected Works*, Eng. edn., vol. XI) referred to Marxism as being based on the best elements of German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism. And Stalin in 1924 had said that for their 'style in work' the Bolsheviks must cultivate a combination of American efficiency with Russian revolutionary sweep.

<sup>72</sup> Arakcheyev – reactionary adviser to Alexander I, predominant during the period of repression after the Napoleonic Wars.



reply of June 29th to Krasheninnikova (first published in *Bolshevik*, No. 12, 1950) he answers five questions:

(1) Would it be right to consider that language is a phenomenon peculiar to both the basis and to the superstructure, or would it be more correct to regard language as an intermediate phenomenon?

He replies that language, like basis and superstructure, serves society; but while the basis serves society economically, and the superstructure serves society 'by means of political, legal, aesthetic and other ideas and creates for society the corresponding political, legal, and other institutions', language serves society as a means of communication, of enabling the organization of 'joint work in all spheres of human activity'. It is because of these peculiarities that linguistics is an independent science.

'Briefly: language cannot be ranked either among bases or among superstructures. Nor can it be ranked among "intermediate" phenomena between the basis and superstructure, as such "intermediate" phenomena do not exist.'

It cannot be ranked among productive forces, although like them it manifests 'a kind of indifference towards classes', because it produces nothing. 'It is not difficult to understand that were language capable of producing material wealth, windbags would be the richest men on earth.' Thus Marr was equally wrong when, after his view that language was a superstructure had met with objections, he then tried to rank it among productive forces.

(2) To what extent, in your opinion, should linguistics occupy itself with the semantic aspect of language, with semantics, and historical semasiology, and stylistics; or should form alone be the subject of linguistics?

Stalin agrees that semantics must be studied, but its significance must not be overestimated, as it was by Marr when he prophesied that 'the language of the future will be thought, developing in technique free from natural matter'. Stalin condemns this as 'labour-magic gibberish'. Moreover, in Stalin's view, 'bare thoughts, free of the language material, free of the "natural matter" of language -- do not exist'.

(3) In analysing concrete language material, and, first of all, the semantic aspect of language, can we speak of the class essence of the concepts expressed by it. . . .?

There are words and expressions understood differently by different classes: but they 'hardly make up one per cent of the entire language materials', and 'are used in speech not according to rules of some sort of a "class" grammar, which does not exist in reality, but according to

rules of the grammar of the existing language, common to all the people'.

(4) Can we, in approaching Marr critically, take from him nevertheless what is useful and valuable?

While Marr made the most crass mistakes 'when he tried to create an independent theory of language', he nevertheless 'has certain good and brilliantly written works, wherein, forgetting his theoretical claims, he conscientiously, and, one must say, capably, studies individual languages. In such works one may find no little that is valuable and instructive'.

(5) Of what does formalism in linguistics consist and how can it be overcome?

'N. Y. Marr and his "disciples" accuse all those philologists who do not accept Marr's "New Doctrine" of formalism. This of course is frivolous and unwise.

'Marr held grammar to be an empty "formality", and people who consider the grammatical system to be the foundation of language to be formalists. This is altogether foolish.'

The reason for the stagnation in Soviet linguistics is not the 'formalism' invented by Marr and his 'disciples', but the Arakcheyev regime and the theoretical gaps in linguistics... The elimination of these plagues will cure Soviet linguistics, lead it out on to the broad highway, and enable Soviet linguistics to occupy the first place in world linguistics.

Finally, in *Bolshevik*, No. 14, 1950, Stalin replied to three more sets of questions, in letters dated July 11th, July 22nd and July 28th.

Firstly, he answered Sanzheyev on the question of dialects. 'Class' dialects (jargons) cannot develop into independent languages, but local ('territorial') dialects, which have their own grammatical system and basic word stock, may form the basis of national languages, for example the Kursk-Orel dialect as the basis of Russian, the Kiev-Poltava dialect as the basis of Ukrainian. Other dialects fuse into these languages. The reverse may happen when a nationality disintegrates and local dialects, not yet fused, are revived to form separate independent languages, e.g. possibly Mongolian.

Secondly, D. Belkin and S. Furer suggested that the evidence of deaf-mutes showed that thought could exist without language. Stalin explains that he was speaking of normal people. No society, however backward, is without vocal language, which is what 'helped men to emerge from the animal world, to unite in a society, to develop their thinking, to organize social production, to wage a successful struggle with the forces of nature and to attain the progress which we have at

present'. Marr's view of the primacy of 'hand' (gesture-) language is wrong. As to deaf mutes, their 'thoughts arise and can exist only on the basis of images, perceptions and conceptions which they form in the course of life about objects of the outside world and in their relations among themselves thanks to the senses of sight, touch, taste, smell'.

Thirdly, A. Kholopov had contrasted Stalin's statement at the 16th Congress of the C.P.S.U. (1930) that under Communism the languages of the world will merge into one, with his recent denial of the mixture-theory. Stalin replies that statements concerning one period of history must not be confused with those concerning another. For example, Marx and Engels' proposition that socialism would come simultaneously in various countries, made under conditions of pre-monopoly capitalism, must not be confused with Lenin's that it would come first in one country, under conditions of imperialism. In the pre-socialist period 'the crossing of languages proceeds as a struggle for the domination of one of the languages', but 'when world imperialism no longer exists . . . national languages are able freely to enrich each other by way of co-operation'. At first zonal languages will appear, and 'then zonal languages will merge into one common international language, which, of course, will not be German, Russian or English, but a new language, which has absorbed the finest elements of the national and zonal languages'.

After the original article of Stalin's 'Regarding Marxism in Linguistics' of June 20th, two more supplements of *Pravda* were devoted to the discussion, in the June 27th and July 4th numbers.

The June 27th number included two articles: 'A Militant Programme for the Construction of Marxist Linguistics' by T. Lomtev, Professor of Moscow State University, and 'For a Leninist-Stalinist path of development of Soviet Linguistics' by Professor G. Akhvlediani, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., both of which quote Stalin's article.

Lomtev begins with questions of theory of the science of language. If language were a superstructure, all languages would follow the same development (glottogonic unity); but the facts show that they do not. Instead of recognizing this, Marr resorted to further idealist and formalist propositions to justify his view:

(1) languages have converged from smaller languages since the beginning, linguistic relationship is due to crossing, languages are not separate massifs but all derive from the same material of the four elements — this contradicts Engels, who says that both convergence and divergence take place;

(2) languages develop by leaps through stades, and are differentiated by the period at which they drop out of this process, e.g. Chinese

belongs to the primitive stade, Indo-European to the last, consequently they are not equal — in fact, languages develop according to the concrete conditions on a concrete territory; Meshchaninov admits that stadiality has not yet been defined, but he will not reject it;

(3) national languages are bourgeois, not inherited from the popular language, for this exists only in dialects (according to Vinogradov), but created as a literary language — this contradicts Lenin's teaching on the linguistic effect of a unified market.

He proceeds to questions of method. All science has the same method of cognition — dialectical materialism — but different methods of research. The comparative-historical method has advantages as well as faults. It traces the history of languages through the comparison of elements from the same source, namely the *principal* source of the given language. It ought also to consider the other sources, that is, languages not related. It does not consider the constituent parts of what is now one word (e.g. Russian *ber-loga*). It considers words with related meaning (e.g. Russian *mat'*, mother, *mater*) but not words with divergent meanings (like Russian *kon'*, horse, Latin *canis*, dog); but the theory of science shows that there are changes in what is related, on the basis of social-productive function, so that if the horse had originally the same social-productive function as the dog, the words could be cognate, given phonetic correspondence.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, Lomtev draws certain conclusions. We should not reject the comparative method but re-evaluate it. Marr did not do this, he rejected it as associated with the ancestral language concept, when in fact each particular correspondence could be due to borrowing (as in modern cases like 'party' — Russian *partiya*, German *Partei*, etc., all from French *partie*). Instead he traced all words back to the four elements regardless of their history: for example, he separated Ukrainian *kin'* from Russian *kon'* and connected it with Breton *ki* (cf. note 73); such a treatment of Ukrainian constitutes an encouragement to the political elements wishing to turn the Ukraine westwards away from Russia. But we should take over the idea of breaking words into previous elements, provided that these were real words in a previous stage, thus avoiding both bourgeois linguistic method and formal, mechanical, vulgar Marrism. Stalin is to be thanked for laying the foundations of Marxist linguistics.

Akhvlediani first discusses the cause of stagnation in Soviet linguistics. The subject is of vital interest, he says, not only to specialists but to the whole Soviet intelligentsia, to all kinds of craftsmen with words.

<sup>73</sup> At this point Lomtev is obscure. If Slavonic had a word cognate with (not borrowed from) Greek *Kuōn* (as in *cynic*), English *hound*, Welsh *ci* (as in *corgi*), and Breton *ki*, we should expect it to begin with a sibilant, like the Lithuanian or Sanskrit; but Lomtev speaks of the 'irregularity of correspondence of Latin *c* and Slavonic *s*'.

Stalin's contribution has aroused international interest, among both friends and enemies. Chikobava is right that most of Marr's disciples merely repeat his principles as slogans, and have attempted to exclude scholars like Vinogradov and Bulakhovsky from linguistic work, and have ignored past achievements like those of Fortunatov, Shakhmatov, and Baudouin. Only in Georgia has there been a collective of linguistic workers which is not Marrist. Chikobava however is not sufficiently critical of Marr himself, who did not develop a single idea by research after 1920, who wrote many articles the content of which has nothing to do with their titles, and in which the separate statements are not connected with each other, and who also developed the erroneous proposition that language is a superstructure of a class nature.

The difficulties in the development of Soviet linguistics are due to growth, not decay. They have not been clearly put by either the opponents or the supporters of Marr. They should be overcome by using dialectical materialism, the pre-revolutionary heritage (Vostokov, Potebnya, Fortunatov, Baudouin, etc.), and the Lenin-Stalin theory of nationality. The biggest error is the Chinese wall erected against Indo-European studies. Because Marr was against any link with these studies, his pupils were ignorant of what he rejected (although he himself knew it well), as well as of later developments. At the same time, while there were few other Marxists in linguistics, some honest Indo-Europeanists (Marr called even his arch-enemy Meillet honest), for example Vinogradov, Bulakhovsky, and Chikobava, were doing good work. On the other hand some Marrists were worthless (e.g. N. Yakovlev gave an exact date — 1947 — to a post-war change in the pronunciation of *k*), Serebrennikov's attack on the four elements is commendable, but he chose an unhappy term in comparing the 'convenience' of this theory and the comparative-historical method. In fact, the latter can show social history (e.g. the various terms related with Russian *zhena*, woman, English *queen*, *quean*, etc.). Therefore this method is not reactionary. But Marr would allow no compromise with it. Since he also concentrated on the past and was opposed to normative grammar, his work has nothing to do with contemporary culture. Three difficulties result: the failure to use previous science, in technical method as well as ideamethodology; the consideration of the science as not existing before Marr; and the dissipation of linguistic cadres.

On the question of genealogical classification and the ancestral language, Akhvediani writes that, as Chikobava pointed out and Chemo-danov emphasized, since all known languages exist as stabilized in history, they must have had an 'ancestral language state' (Meshchani-nov). For the Romance languages come from Latin, in however complex a way. The terms 'ancestral language', 'Indo-European', 'family',

are odious only because Marr made them so. But Chemodanov and Chikobava forget that the question is not of differentiation or integration of languages (for both occur) but of how systems, families, and ancestral languages were formed. Differentiation and reuniting derive from social-political factors: Herodotus records that Europe in his time had hundreds of languages. Some began by being united, like Latin, Slavonic and Iranian. Some, like these, disintegrated, others did not, like Armenian and Albanian; some differentiated more strongly, like Latin, Iranian and Germanic, others more weakly, but all these differences result from historical conditions. Otherwise we cannot explain the correspondences between the Indo-European languages and between them and Hittite. Hence Stalin advocates the comparative study of the languages of the Slav nations. Meshchaninov is right that at the beginning of the glottogonic process there were many small languages, but if we say that languages were differentiated only originally, and if we do not consider their sources, we deny their social formation and the historical nature of linguistic laws. According to Chikobava the stadial theory is racist; in fact, no language is superior to another, all are developing, whether through a capitalist or socialist stage (e.g. the giving of alphabets to Soviet languages), improving not in grammar but in content.

He concludes by outlining future tasks. We have a sound basis in the Lenin-Stalin social doctrine of language, the practical literary and linguistic work of Soviet workers, and Stalin's principle of national form and socialist content. The terminological, normative-grammatical and dictionary work of the U.S.S.R. demand colossal linguistic forces. One must learn a language in all its dialects. We must use the heritage of the past; study bourgeois nations and socialist nations; find the new laws of socialist linguistic development; as Stalin says, remove Marr's errors and end the Arakcheyev regime. The themes which arise include: the laws of a given language in socialist and past capitalist society; the forms of improvement of it in socialist society; the fate of dialects, their mutual influence and fusion in the same way as the languages of the future: state and national languages, bourgeois and socialist; pre-zonal languages becoming zonal. There are further problems of the psychology of socialist speakers; of language and thought; of the transition to communism. The best section of Soviet philologists, including some 'Japhetic' ones, is already working well, if with insufficient knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. To build communism, all must be united, in order to solve problems, including those posed by Marr, of languages both living and dead. Soviet linguistics will outstrip bourgeois linguistics, even in technical method, and re-create a Soviet comparative-historical linguistics.

The second supplement to *Pravda* published after Stalin's contribution included a statement by the Editors (the July 4th number). This reads (in part):

The discussion opened on the pages of *Pravda* evoked a lively response from the Soviet scientific public. The Editors have received more than 200 articles from scientists, primarily philologists — workers in scientific research and teaching institutes of Moscow, Leningrad, Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Latvia, Esthonia, and various towns, provinces and regions of the Soviet Union. The editors have also received a large number of letters from readers of *Pravda*, testifying that the questions put in the discussion have evoked a great deal of interest not only among specialists in linguistics, but also in the broadest circles of Soviet intellectuals.

In the course of a free discussion basic problems of the development of Soviet linguistics have been subjected to a critical discussion. Almost all the participants in the discussion have come to the conclusion that our linguistics is in a state of stagnation and needs a correct scientific orientation.

After referring to the importance of Stalin's article both for linguistics and for Marxism as a whole (including for 'historians, philosophers and economists') and emphasizing the importance of Stalin's statement that a 'struggle of opinions' and a 'renunciation of Marr's mistakes' is needed if Soviet linguistics is to 'occupy the first place in world linguistics', the Editorial statement concludes: 'With the publication of the articles in this number the Editors are closing the discussion.'

The contributors to this number included several philologists who contributed previously (Vinogradov, Bulakhovsky, Meshchaninov and Chemodanov) and a number of others (including Academician S. Obnorsky, Professor N. Yakovlev, Professor E. Galkin-Fedoruk and Professor G. Tsereteli).

Several contributors emphasized the practical harm done by the 'New Doctrine'. Dr. Dauranbaev, of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, pointed out that the doctrine of the class nature of language had led to the dropping of 'root-words' in Kazakh and other previously unwritten languages, just because they had been used before. Tolstov, from the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., admitted that as well as philologists, some 'historians, archaeologists, ethnographers and anthropologists' had made mistakes by following Marr.

Some of the Marrists (notably Meshchaninov himself, Chemodanov, and Garibyan)<sup>74</sup> wrote agreeing that they had been mistaken in blindly

<sup>74</sup> As recently as October 1949, Garibyan had himself been criticized in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, No. 86, 1949, by Agayan for trying to reconcile the doctrines of Kapantsyan and Acharyan with Marr's.

following Marr, and declaring their willingness to work on new lines. Meshchaninov for example wrote that his school had exaggerated the rôle of Marr not only in linguistics but also in allied sciences, and this had led them to underestimate the heritage from pre-Marr Russian linguistics. They had blindly reacted against any attempts to apply the comparative-historical method, 'naively thinking that such attempts inevitably involve a return to the ideas of the formal idealist science of the past century'. They had turned linguistics away from practical needs and lost it 'in the depths of the ages'. 'The positive side of our work, aimed at a close study of the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the languages of the many nations of our country' had been swamped by these errors.

Other contributors dealt with the way forward now for Soviet linguistics. Bulakhovsky (in an article entitled 'New Stage') stressed the distinction between vocabulary, reflecting social developments, and grammar, embodying human thought over a long period, and noted that the comparative method could be applied only to languages with a 'close morphological resemblance'. Shishmarev (in 'For a science worthy of our era') emphasized the contradiction between Marr's theory and concrete history, and that 'only history will help us to discover the internal laws of development of language, which is the fundamental task of linguistics'. Vinogradov (in 'A programme for Marxist linguistics') emphasized the general proposition that 'the sphere of language is almost unlimited'. He mentioned the points on which to base the concrete development of linguistics, notably '(1) internal laws of development of language and (2) character of qualitative changes in language'. Further, he wrote, the doctrine of the basic word stock laid the 'Marxist foundations for historical lexicology and the history of word-formation', for example in the study of the rôle of Church Slavonic in Russian.

So far little else has been published to indicate the forms which the re-orientation of scholars and institutions in general will take. Professor Havránek in *Tvorba* (July 19th, 1950) quotes a letter from a Czech student in Leningrad which gives some idea of the general atmosphere: 'The philologists have resolved to revise their knowledge and standpoint and devote themselves energetically to the new work. The young people are eager to apply the views of Stalin.'

The work of previously existing institutes is being revised. For example, the Institute of Slavonic Studies has announced that an expedition of linguistic scientists is investigating Bulgarian settlements on the territory of the U.S.S.R. On their return the compilation of a linguistic atlas of Bulgarian dialects will be completed; preparations are under way for compiling a scientific grammar of the Bulgarian



language, which will lead to the subsequent compilation of scientific grammars of other Slav languages; on this basis a comparative study of the Slav languages will be begun.

A linguistics conference of Soviet institutions of higher education was opened in Moscow on August 21st, by the Minister of Higher Education of the U.S.S.R., and included representatives from the thirty-two Soviet universities and 359 pedagogic institutes where linguistics is taught.

But the most important change has been the decision of the Academy of Sciences (July 1st, 1950) to move the Institute of Language and Thought from Leningrad to Moscow and fuse it with the Institute of the Russian Language into a united Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. The new Institute is headed by Vinogradov, formerly director of the Institute of the Russian Language; Meshchani-nov has become the head of the Sector for the Languages of the Peoples of the North and Finno-Ugrian, and remains a member of the Presidium of the Academy; Serebrennikov is in charge of the group working on general linguistics. The new Institute 'will study problems of the history of the Russian literary language and of the languages of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., the Caucasian, Azerbaijanian, Armenian and other languages'. It has already announced its research programme for the rest of 1950. This includes the compiling of two works, one developing Stalin's propositions on linguistics, one devoted to the 'criticism of the basic propositions of Marr's theory'. The practical plan envisages the preparation of text-books on problems of general linguistics for students, of scientific grammars and dictionaries of the Russian language, and the study of local dialects and in the first place the Kursk-Orel group of dialects. The publication of the 12-volume dictionary of modern Russian will be continued; the preparation of a 7-volume dictionary of Old Slavonic is under way. The importance of the making of scientific grammars and dictionaries for those peoples of the U.S.S.R. who have only recently become literate is emphasized. Several expeditions are being undertaken: one to make a more precise grammar of the Nenets language, one to study Tunguz-Manchurian languages in the Amur basin; the Khanty (Ostiak) and Mansy dialects are to be investigated; grammars of Chukhot, Nana and Eskimo and an Eskimo-Russian dictionary are to be prepared.

Thus the discussions have clearly already led to a speed-up in practical work: whether the basic problems will be now resolved and the stagnation in Soviet linguistics overcome cannot yet be precisely determined.

Meanwhile a number of questions of interpretation remains to be resolved.

## VI

## AN ATTEMPT AT EVALUATION OF THE CONTROVERSY

In evaluating the crisis in Soviet linguistics and the beginning of the resolution of it as a result of Stalin's contributions there are two questions of primary significance for the reader.

(1) *What direction will Soviet linguistics now take and what will its relation be to linguistics in the rest of the world?*

In the Soviet view, the fundamental difference between linguistics in the Soviet Union (and other countries with a similar economic system) and in the rest of the world is that in the Soviet Union with its planned economy, production is for use not profit, and the science of language, based on the Marxist ideology, must act in the interests of the working people irrespective of nationality, and has the function of assisting the linguistic and cultural development of all the nationalities (for example Stalin points out that the comparative study of the languages of the Slav nations could be of great use); in the capitalist world, however, linguistics has the function of assisting the domination of one nation by another, while in its theoretical development it is divorced from reality.<sup>75</sup>

Linguistics in the West (and non-Marrist linguistics in the Soviet Union) as it has developed since the time when Marr broke away, is essentially divided into two disciplines, the historical (comparative), continuing the work of the Neo-Grammarians (as outlined at the beginning of this article), and general and synchronic, concerned with language as a system.

As regards the former, it has continued to amass facts, which Marrism ignored but which will now be used systematically by Soviet linguistics; but the theoretical explanation hitherto given of them (the ancestral language theory and its development, cf. notes 1 and 3) has reached a crisis, which Marr diagnosed but did not scientifically resolve.<sup>76</sup> Stalin leaves this an open question, concentrating interest rather on the later history of languages. But even if only for the purpose of a full understanding of the latter it is to be expected that Soviet linguistics

<sup>75</sup> Marr emphasized the former point: 'Indo-European studies are flesh and blood of bourgeois society, built on the exploitation by European peoples of the peoples of the East by a murderous colonial policy' (quoted by Mikhankova, p. 313).

<sup>76</sup> Marr not only rejected 'Indo-Europeanism' as racist (cf. note 75), but Indo-European languages as a 'racial family' and not a stade (Mikhankova, pp. 312-3). But 'sound-laws', the phonetic correspondences between related languages (or related words), are the basis of the real material, the apparent contradictions in which traditional linguistics has failed to explain, and it is no explanation to suppress the sound-laws as Marr did in propounding the four-element theory.

will now really apply, without Marr's factual aberrations, the long-enunciated principle of working with the social sciences (history, archaeology, etc., which will now rid themselves of Marrist influence) to solve this problem.

One aspect of the crisis of historical linguistics was the separating off from it of 'synchronic' linguistics. In Saussure's hands the study of a language as a system was sharply opposed to the study of the history of its parts. In the Soviet view this is a reflection of the philosophical dualism and general disintegration of bourgeois thought in its reactionary stage: as a result of the increasing assertion of atomistic individualism (that is, the free interplay of individuals no longer constituting an harmonious system),<sup>77</sup> system is excluded from history, and history from system.

In fact, the biggest contributions to twentieth-century Western linguistics have come from the attempt to reconcile history and system. Trubetsky and Jakobson made a conscious attempt to resolve this 'crying antimony' by postulating that systems changed not by accident as Saussure had said, but through design (teleology), the nature of the system continuously improving itself. But this attempt fails because it ignores the basis of the 'antimony', which is the structuralist view of language as a system *independent of the society speaking it*.<sup>78</sup> This dependence has been brought out by scholars like Dr. M. M. Lewis (for example in his analysis of the linguistic effects of the Industrial Revolution in *Language and Society*).<sup>79</sup> It remains to resolve the problem of system and history on this basis. The Meshchaninov followers of Marr (for example, Katsnelson in 'Thirty years of Soviet linguistics', in *Bulletin*, vol VI, No. 5, 1947), claimed that they had done so, but a scientific solution was of course impossible within the Marr framework. With the removal of this framework Soviet linguistics is now in a position to grapple with the problem.

An interesting case of the relation between Soviet and 'bourgeois' linguistics is to be found in the East European states allied with the Soviet Union, where Marrism had only just begun to make headway. For example, in Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party cultural organ *Tvorba* has already begun its own discussion on Czech linguistics in the light of the Soviet controversy. It was opened by Professor B. Havránek, Dean of the Philosophical (Arts) Faculty of Prague University, on 'Stalin's Article and Czech Linguistics' (No. 29, July 19th,

<sup>77</sup> For this Marxist view of the ideological development of 'bourgeois' science in general, see for example C. Caudwell, *The Crisis in Physics*.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Saussure (*Cours de linguistique générale*, p. 317): 'Linguistics has as its sole true object the study of language regarded in itself and for itself.'

<sup>79</sup> It has long been acknowledged in the abstract by such scholars as Alf Sommerfelt and the whole 'Sociological' school (who in practice interpenetrate with structuralism).

1950), followed by V. Skalička, Professor of Linguistics, on 'Stalin's Article and our Linguistic Tradition' (No. 30, July 26th, 1950).

Havránek says that there are two kinds of opposition to Marr; and that the kind which was formerly prevalent in Czechoslovakia was essentially opposition to Marxism and the Soviet Union. Pre-Stalin Marxist criticism of Marr assumed that his material was not adequate to his premisses, without realizing that his premisses themselves (on language and superstructure, class, and changes by leaps) were wrong. But it must not be thought that the new correct premisses are a ready-made formula from which 'to weave linguistic webs'. Working élan can flow only from a theory experienced, not from one merely taken over; hence the work of the former Prague Linguistic School, which had a working élan, must be put to use. Among the studies of contemporary national languages in Czechoslovakia, Russian studies are well ahead, but there is a lack of 'cadres' in Czech philology.

Skalička says that opposition to Marr must not mean return to old positions, but that tradition must be evaluated. It consists of four schools: the classical school, studying grammar, which helped in national renaissance and paved the way for comparative; the comparative school, which has discovered many facts but has too positivist a methodology, not seeing phenomena in their inter-relation; structuralism, for example the Prague school, which has the same faults of the abstract application of dialectics<sup>80</sup> as Marrism; and the 'New Doctrine', which is only theoretical, not connected with practice. Positive points to be taken over from Marr, Skalička thinks, include not only his descriptive works on individual languages but also the struggle against 'too mechanical an idea of the ancestral language' (not his struggle against the historical comparative method), 'which [struggle] is moreover in the tradition of certain Russian linguistic schools'.

It will be seen that the observations of both Havránek and Skalička illustrate very well our view of the place of this controversy in the development of world linguistics.

(2) *What is the importance of this controversy in Soviet ideology as a whole?*

We have already noted the importance of Stalin's statements on the possibility of certain qualitative changes taking place without leaps, without *sudden* change; and that such changes may take place, in Stalin's view, even in the whole basis of society, after state power is in the hands of the working people. Of considerable importance to general Marxism too are his comments on the absence of a common economic basis for

<sup>80</sup> An example of explicit Marxist dialectic being put to this structuralist purpose is the *Linguistique et matérialisme dialectique* of Professor Cohen, mentioned above.

the whole Empire of Charlemagne or of Cyrus, and his exposition of the relation of superstructure to basis.<sup>81</sup>

But probably the most important contribution made by Stalin to general ideological questions is his definition of the place of language in society — language is a social phenomenon, but one which does not belong properly either to basis or superstructure, a social phenomenon which does not depend mainly on class.

This definition represents an extension by Stalin explicitly to problems of language of views on the relationship of society and culture, inherent in the philosophy of Marx, Engels and particularly Lenin, but often forgotten by their followers both in the Soviet Union and in the West.

Stalin's remarks open the way to a reconsideration by Marxists of the whole problem of relative and absolute elements in art and culture. It will be remembered that Lenin, in discussing the question of truth, had referred to the presence of elements of absolute truth within the relative truth, had shown that the view of Marxism as a purely relativist philosophy, which holds that all truth is dependent on the needs and interests of a particular society, was a mistaken one (*Selected Works*, vol. XI, pp. 194-200, esp. p. 198). This conception of truth was extended by him to problems of culture in his articles on Tolstoy, where he argues that in spite of his class limitations, Tolstoy's work is of aesthetic and historical value because he reflects in part not merely his own class views but 'the conditions of Russian life' as a whole (*ibid.*, pp. 681-91).

The presence of relative elements (broadly corresponding to superstructure and class outlook in society) and absolute elements (corresponding to technique, means of production in society) in all arts and sciences is now generally recognized by Marxists:<sup>82</sup> Stalin places

<sup>81</sup> In an important article in *Bolshevik*, No. 18 (Sept. 6th) 1950, G. Glezerman sets out certain Marxist terms, using Stalin's articles. He describes the *mode of production* as divided into two parts — the *forces of production* and the *relations of production*, or *basis*, to which corresponds a superstructure of political, legal, religious, artistic and philosophical views and institutions, of which the most important are political institutions. The superstructure is changed by sudden leaps; it reflects changes in production *not* directly but *via* the basis (e.g. Russia was the birthplace of Leninism *not* because it was the centre of the most developed productive forces, but because it was the centre of *revolutionary struggle*). The *mutual relationship* of basis and superstructure constitutes the historical peculiarities of a particular society. In a socialist society the superstructure plays a particularly active role as new productive relationships are formed *consciously* by the efforts of the masses, the party and the state.

<sup>82</sup> This point was touched on by G. F. Alexandrov and others in a discussion in the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences (see *Vestnik Akad. Nauk* 9/1950). It is interesting to note the part played by two British Marxists in the further development of Lenin's teachings on this question. Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality* analyses the *hierarchy* of arts and sciences and thus takes a step towards understanding their different functions in society. F. D. Klingender in *Marxism and Modern Art* analyses the relative and absolute elements in art in a way which fits in very well with Stalin's analysis of the place of language in society.

language among those phenomena (like technology) in which relative elements are least present, rather than among those (like religion, philosophy, economic theory) where in class society the relative plays a significant rôle. This links with his reiteration that the best, the absolutely valid, must be taken over from class society and moulded and developed by Marxism, in linguistic science just as Marx and Engels did in philosophy and economics, while the relative, the temporary, the transient in linguistic theory, dependent on class and social limitations, must be discarded.

It is possible to draw certain tentative conclusions about the place of this controversy in the post-war development of Soviet ideology. Like all other Soviet developments, it must be seen in relation to the social complex in which it has taken place. In the Soviet view, the 'building of socialism' in the U.S.S.R. has been completed, and the period through which it is now passing is one of transition from socialism (where the social product is distributed 'according to work done') to communism (where, with a much greater output, it will be distributed 'according to needs').

Economically, this period is characterized by the drive for further technical advance in industry, and to bring the countryside up to the level of the town (by the merging of small collective farms, the irrigation and afforestation projects, etc.)

Ideologically, its features were characterized by Zhdanov in the philosophical discussion of June 1947 as follows:

In our Soviet society, where antagonistic classes have been abolished, the struggle between the old and the new and consequently the development from the lower to the higher takes place not in the form of the struggle of antagonistic classes and of upheavals, as is the case under capitalism, but in the form of criticism and self-criticism, the fundamental motive force of our development, a powerful instrument in the hands of the party. This is undoubtedly a new form of movement, a new type of development, a new dialectical law.

This accounts for the emphasis placed by Stalin and others on the importance of criticism and self-criticism in Soviet science. Before Stalin contributed to the discussion an Editorial in *Bolshevik* (No. 11, June 1950) had criticized the lack of discussion, especially among 'certain professors' who 'did not find the courage to maintain their point of view in questions concerning their speciality, simply because in some newspaper' (such as *Literaturnaya Gazeta*) 'a review or article on these subjects has appeared, and what is more not always a sufficiently qualified one . . . A scientist must not keep silent about or praise what he is not in agreement with. Lack of principle does not befit a Soviet scientific worker.'

Following this, Stalin re-emphasized that Marxism is, in Engels's words, 'Not a dogma but a guide to action':

Marxism as a science cannot stand in one place, it develops and is being perfected. In its development Marxism cannot but be enriched by new experience, by new knowledge — consequently its separate formulae and conclusions cannot but change with the course of time, cannot but be replaced by new formulae and conclusions corresponding to new historical tasks. Marxism does not recognize immutable conclusions and formulae, binding for all epochs and periods. Marxism is the enemy of all dogmatism.

Elsewhere he wrote that 'No science can develop and flourish without a battle of opinions, without freedom of criticism'.

In summarizing the results of the Linguistic Conference, S. Kaftanov, the Minister of Higher Education of the U.S.S.R., emphasized this point (in *Uchitelskaya Gazeta* (Teachers' Newspaper), No. 71, 6.ix. 1950). He criticized a certain professor who had sent material to the Ministry just before the discussion headed 'For the advanced linguistics of Marr and Meshchaninov', but immediately after it, and without admitting his own errors, had criticized the situation in his own Institute as one in which the Marrists were holding sway, conveniently ignoring the material he had previously sent himself. Kaftanov adds that 'we do not need a surface reconstruction, which often amounts to the changing of headings and the corresponding re-writing of introductory and concluding lectures, but serious deep work . . .' He criticizes the vulgarizers of Marxism who fail to free science from its bourgeois errors and use its material creatively, who merely deny the old; and he gives as an example of the ridiculous extremes which can be reached through over-simplifying Marxism the work of Komarov on 'the party character of machines' and 'Professor Lebedev's statement that the dialectical method often enables us to reach conclusions and general laws completely without needing new experiments, the application of mathematical analysis, or any extraordinary mental efforts'. Kaftanov comments: 'It is doubtful if he would agree to go up in an aeroplane constructed on the basis not of precise mathematical calculations but of general conclusions.'

It would be a mistake to see this discussion as a radical departure which invalidates the conclusions of the earlier controversies.<sup>83</sup> These

<sup>83</sup> Attempts to generalize about these discussions often lead to strange conclusions. A good example is provided by an article in the *Sunday Times* which deals with the linguistics discussion as 'the climax of the ideological purge carried out among Soviet intellectuals over the past two years' and adds: 'The essence of Stalin's article was its strictly utilitarian approach. He scornfully dismissed the subtleties of linguistics, and stated that language must get on with the practical task of establishing an international terminology and vocabulary for the peoples who would eventually join the Communist family': we need hardly point out that this 'summary' bears no relation to anything that was said in the discussion.

broad discussions are all part of the same process, seen by Soviet scientists, as the most important way of ensuring that the 'struggle between the old and the new' by means of criticism and self-criticism does in fact act as the 'motive force' of Soviet development as far as science is concerned. This viewpoint is summed up by Academician Vavilov in an article in *Pravda* of August 7th, 'For the creative advance of Soviet science'. In this article he contrasts Soviet and Western science:

Soviet science profoundly differs in character, content and structure from science in the capitalist world. It differs first of all in its very nature, in its world outlook, which is dialectical-materialist through and through; it differs in the choice of subjects for research, trends and methods; . . . it differs also in that all investigations of nature and developments of technique are subordinated to the one lofty goal of building the new communist society.

Further, he points out that 'science in the capitalist world is in the main individualist in character', whereas in the Soviet Union 'it is our aim that scientific tasks be controlled and regulated collectively, solved collectively, and critically discussed collectively' (he adds that this 'in no way goes against the full utilization of all the precious qualities of personal initiative, talent and experience of each and every scientist'). Against this background he analyses the development of Soviet science, beginning with collective research work, leading to the planning of research, and finally to the 'broad collective discussion of basic trends in the various fields'. Thus to Vavilov the 1936 discussion on physics, the 1947 philosophy discussion, and the 1948 biology discussion, have their climax in the Pavlov discussion and the linguistics discussion this year, in which Stalin 'presented the questions so broadly and so clearly on basic principles that a scientist in any branch of knowledge may draw from the philological discussion conclusions of paramount importance directly for his own work'.

Following on from this, the Chief Academic Secretary of the Academy, A. V. Topchiev (in *Vestnik Akad. Nauk* 7/1950) emphasizes that the preparation of the Academy's plan of work 1951-55 must be undertaken on the principle of the 'creative collective method of discussion'.

He concludes that Stalin's writings on linguistics must lead Soviet scientists to develop such broad discussions of 'scientific questions on

The *Daily Herald* goes even further. In his reply to Kholopov Stalin drew an analogy between the different nature of language mixing before and after the establishment of Socialism, and the familiar question of the changed attitude of Marxists to the withering away of the state in conditions of 'capitalist encirclement' of the U.S.S.R. (which he first raised in March 1939). The *Daily Herald* treats this as a new doctrine, and sees the object of Stalin's (linguistics!) article as 'that the people may be prepared for an even tighter dictatorship, an even mightier militarism' (2.viii.1950).



which there are disagreements on methods of principle' in the immediate future, particularly in the fields of chemistry, theoretical physics (especially in relation to quantum and relativity physics), mechanics, cosmogony, geography, soil science, geology, philosophy, history and oriental studies.

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JEFFREY ELLIS  
ROBERT W. DAVIES