THE ROLE OF POLITICAL RHETORIC IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

Andreas Ventsel

The issues analysed in this paper are derived from the phenomenon of Soviet totalitarian language. As is welxl known, the Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology defined itself as a strictly objective, scientific world-view. Scientific discourse is characterised by attempts to minimise the ambiguity of the lexicon, which should ideally halt the drift of signifiers in relation to the signified. One would assume that the scientific nature of the reconstruction of society would have an impact on communication and natural language. The characteristics of totalitarian language reveal, however, that it is not in fact describable by a rigid connection between the signifiers and the signified, and that the semantic distinctiveness of words in the communicative function is compensated by the precise determination of their location in the axiological good-bad axis. In order to overcome this paradox, I will attempt, from a theoretical perspective, to draw out a fruitful intersection between Juri Lotman's concept of symbol and Ernesto Laclau's 'empty signifier', in light of which a symbol, as a special case of 'empty signifier', performs the function of a hegemonizing signifying practice. I will also highlight the role of symbols in political rhetoric and their impact on the development of Soviet language policies and the appearance of totalitarian language, and will point out, by way of a conclusion, that the more

Andreas Ventsel is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia (andreas.ventsel@ut.ee). This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT), Estonian Science Foundation grant ETF7988 "The Power of the Nomination in the Society and in the Culture" and grant ETF 7704 "Photography in Estonian Society and Cultural History."

totalitarian a society is, the greater the role played in the construction of its socio-political reality by linguistic elements ambivalent in their content.

Keywords: political rhetoric, totalitarian language, semiotics of culture, Laclau's concept of emtpy signifier, Stalinist era.

The construction of political reality is one of the many factors specifying human identity. For the self-reflection of the ideologies of totalitarian regimes, politics has the subordinating function *par excellence*, and for this reason political identity, arguably, has a considerable impact on socio-cultural identity. In what follows, an analysis is presented of the political discourse of the Stalinist era, based on the phenomenon of totalitarian language that was used for the indoctrination of the identity and world-view of Soviet citizens. The issues analysed in this paper are also derived from the phenomenon of totalitarian language. As is well known, the Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology defined itself as a strictly objective, scientific world-view. Scientific discourse is characterised by attempts to minimise the ambiguity of the lexicon, which should ideally halt the drift of signifiers in relation to the signified. One would thus assume that the scientific nature of the reconstruction of society would have an impact on communication and natural language. The characteristics of totalitarian language reveal, however, that it is not in fact describable by a rigid connection between the signifiers and the signified, and that the semantic distinctiveness of words in the communicative function is compensated by the precise determination of their location in the axiological good — bad axis. It is the author's position that reasons for this are to be found in the politico-rhetorical origin of totalitarian language, in light of which totalitarian language is to be perceived as a manifestation of power in a rhetorical form. From this perspective, it follows that the function and significance of political rhetoric in the general communicative space of the society has a considerable impact on the normative nature of natural language, especially on the lexico-semantic level. I will try to show this from a semiotical point of view; semiotics is not only a theory of signs, but theory of communication as well. The relationship between language and ideology has been studied by Bakhtin-Voloshinov (1929). A semiotic view to ideology is to be found in Reis's semiotic theory of ideology (1993). Several analyses come to mind that utilize semiotic vocabulary for dealing with issues usually associated with politics: such as political campaigns, projects or framing (Zichermanm, 2006; Clark & Jacobs, 2002) or political advertisements (Mcilwain, 2007). Undusk (2003) and Vaiskopf (2002) have written about the specificity of rhetoric in Stalinist-era political discourse; specifically semiotic analyses in studies of the Soviet cultural type can be found in Lepik (2007) and Ventsel (2006, 2007).

Nevertheless, to date totalitarian language has managed to escape semiotic analysis. This paper represents a modest attempt at filling this void.

The paper is divided into two major parts. In the first part, I will briefly specify the relationship between discourse and language, and will describe the Soviet totalitarian language. The second part examines the relationship between political rhetoric and totalitarian language, and the role of symbols in political rhetoric. Using a theoretical approach, I will attempt to draw out a fruitful intersection between Juri Lotman's concept of symbol and Ernesto Laclau's 'empty signifier', in light of which a symbol, as a special case of 'empty signifier', performs the function of a hegemonizing signifying practice. I will also highlight the role of symbols in political rhetoric and their impact on the development of Soviet language policies and the appearance of totalitarian language, and will also point out, by way of a conclusion, that the more totalitarian a society is, the greater the role played in the construction of its socio-political reality by linguistic elements ambivalent in their content.

Language and Discourse

If discourse is to be understood as a historically specific system of meanings that is embedded in a set of social practices, institutions and organizations (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000), it follows that the entirety of human reality is meaningful and constituted by norms, systems, rules and shared truths, reproduced and transformed through social activity. Discourse, as the totality of meanings, overcomes the distinction between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic. Systems of signification always pre-exist, and determine our patterns of thinking and behaviour, but they can exist only insofar as they are constantly reproduced and transformed through social practices. Thus, social realities are inseparable from the meanings attached to them and constructed by them; in other words, "discursive practices that confer meaning on social reality at the same time constitute social objects and identities" (Raik, 2003, p. 25). In addition, all discursive practices are, in principle, translatable into natural languages. It is language that is used for creating a cognitive and conceptual world; a hypothetical image of reality, delineated by the horizon of awareness of the individuals living in a particular society/culture. By influencing and changing a person's linguistic world, one can influence their activities, i.e. their acknowledged or unacknowledged orientation in the world (Ušakin, 1995, p. 144).

In the present context, it is language as used in political discourses, and the impact on language as a whole, that is the primary focus of attention. In political discourse, the dominant discourse is also the discourse of power. The relationship between political discourse and other discourses is dependent upon the mode of social relations. Political

discourse can directly subordinate other discourses, as it indeed happens in totalitarian societies. The world-view engineered by political communication rests upon identical conceptual structures that reduce thoughts and allow the dominant discourse to differentiate the historically-significant from the historically-insignificant and thereby acquire control over the field of interpretations. Individual or group-based political positions are not constituted solely by institutional affiliation or acquired roles, but also by cognitive-evaluative codes (classification schemata) that are necessary for rendering sense to political activity. By way of such schemata, agents classify themselves and allow themselves to be classified (Bourdieu, 1987). In this framework, politics can be conceptualized as a practice for the creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations that cannot themselves be located at the level of the social, "as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonism" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 153). Thus, it can always be understood as an expression of the power of discourses. One of the goals of the construction of political identity is, thus, the creation and reproduction of discourses through which power relations are furtively established in relation to the listener. One such medium, through which these dominant discourses (but also counter-discourses) are constructed, is natural language.

TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

In his infamous anti-utopia *1984*, George Orwell brilliantly describes the transformation that a language can undergo in strictly controlled and closed societies. The practice of 20th century totalitarian regimes indicates that this startling analogy of literary fiction (Orwell's 'newspeak') is possible in reality. During the last quarter of the previous century, linguists introduced the concept of totalitarian language into the vocabulary of the humanities. In specialized literature, totalitarian language is defined as a phenomenon that presumes a particular linguistic mentality, characteristic of totalitarian political systems. The latter are characterised by a complete or near-complete control by the state power over the rest of society (Brzezinski & Friedrich, 1956). In totalitarian political regimes, a particular organization (a party) subordinates the entirety of political power and sets the transformation of the entire society as the goal of its political practice (Anderson, 1993, p. 142). This is legitimized by a relatively clear-cut ideology.

The actual experiential world of the members of a society as a whole is, in a sense, unfathomable and diffusive. Ideology appears here as an interpretation of "reality", as the relation of code to texts; the set of individual experiences. Ideology, by functioning as a code in which concrete social information is accumulated and in which it is ultimately

transmitted, thus possesses certain properties of "language" that enable the reception of this or that fact, both real and potentially possible, according to the specific historic-cultural context. One of today's foremost ideology researchers, Andrew Heywood (1990), defines ideology as a system of beliefs, the veracity or falsity of which cannot be demonstrated in any scientific sense, but which nevertheless assists in structuring the world's comprehensibility (p. 2). Thus, ideology's field of significance is extremely broad. In political discourse, ideology appears primarily as the legitimizer of political power, as a factor in mobilising people, and creates a certain ideal organization in the customary muddle of political life by providing the so-called fundamental principles for the interpretation of the surrounding world.

It can be said that ideology as an element in social consciousness exists above all in natural language. Mediated by language, ideology takes root and begins to function in social consciousness. Conditionally, ideology can be treated as a relation of a secondary language to natural language, as a "secondary modelling system" in the terminology of the Tartu-Moscow school. Language allows power, in its diversity, to raise goals, to impart the ideology that legitimizes the practice of power, and to organize social order, all of which should ideally guarantee unanimity and the unification of pre-set patterns of behavior in the society (Kupina, 1999, p. 11). In totalitarian states, the politics of language have always served as an instrument in the hands of the dominant ideology by which the functioning and development of language is purposefully influenced, and which primarily operates on the language's lexico-semantic level and determines the axiological aspect of words (Kupina, 1995, p. 7). Ideally, these processes lead to a situation where individual linguistic consciousnesses are identified to the highest possible extent with the linguistic consciousness of the masses, and instead of the interpretations of an individual "self", there exists the position of the collective "self" (Cf Dobrenko (1993); Ventsel (2006).) This process is succinctly summarised by Arthur Koestler in his excellent *Darkness at Noon*, a book that dissects the logic of totalitarian power; the self, it is a grammatical fiction (Koestler, 1941). It means that in totalitarian society individual *I* is pure grammatical category. All depends on power.

THE SOVIET TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

Soviet totalitarian language in its most radical form appears during Stalin's reign of power. It was during this period that the absolute cult of the leader and the total control by the state's (party's) power over the rest of society took their final shape in the Soviet Union. In order to characterise the totalitarian language of the era, I will first provide a list of

relevant, very broad characteristics of Soviet ideology that will help in understanding the pursuit of linguistic determination by the authorities:

The Soviet ideology presumes to be scientific, i.e. it claims to describe the world objectively. "The Marxist-Leninist theory is the science of the development of society, the science of the working-class movement, the science of the proletarian revolution, the science for the construction of a communist society" (Lühikursus, 1951 (1938), p. 321).

The above leads to the second important distinction: only Marxist ideology is inherently scientific. Since science describes the world objectively, the "scientific" conception of the world becomes the sole correct way of describing reality (Arendt, 1973, p. 460—483). The "true" way of comprehending the world that comes from the "correct" proletarian class consciousness, its conditions and the tasks it leads to, were argued over by most of the artistic organizations in the Soviet Russia during the 1920s (e.g. Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Rossysskaya assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisatelei - RAPP), the left-wing art front (Levij Front Iskusstva — Lef)). Influenced by these ideas, the canon of Stalinist social realism later took shape, and ultimately, essentially monopolised the possibilities of cultural cognition in general (Hlebkin, 1998, p. 59—64; Groys, 1992).

The axiological nature of Soviet ideology. Everything irreconcilable with communist values is excluded from the pyramid of values and turned into a negative.

The eschatological nature of Soviet ideology: history culminates with the arrival of communism. The projection of supreme value into the future, and with it the end of history as such (or more appropriately, the end of prehistory and the start of true history).

The most relevant item in this list is Soviet ideology's criterion of scientificity. In the ideology of totalitarian regimes, emphasis on the discovery of "the objective laws of history" or "the laws of life and nature" appeals to the common-sense understanding of the synonymy of science and truth (Chalmers, 1992, "Introduction"). Our everyday intuition tells us that the scientific world-view can be expressed in a language that is clear and distinct and has zero degrees of ambiguity. Ideally, this should halt the shift of significations in relation to signifiers and every word should correspond to a maximally, clear-cut content. According to the Marxist linguist Nikolai Marr, the Soviet theory of language was to be founded on principally novel, scientific thinking (Marr, 1936, p. 419). In Marr's theories of language a worldwide 'new language' associated with the appearance of a new language user, the masses. In Marrism, language is defined by way of material culture, that is, through denotation: by its very nature, language is the creation of the human collective, the reflection of not just thought, but of social order that reverberates in the language's syntax, grammar and semantics. Consequently, language does not exist in and of itself, but only through an organic connection with material culture and the society's history. In such a theory of language, signs and their denotations are rigidly bound to each other; denotation determines the concrete instances of sign use. In principle, this amounts to an isomorphism of reality,

thinking and language (Romanenko, 2003, p. 189). Every structural change in the material world (e.g. change in relations of production) that should have an expression in the human consciousness (e.g. unitary proletarian class consciousness), is reflected directly in language (e.g. proletarian mass language).

In her *Totalitarian Language: The Dictionary and Utterance Reactions (Тоталитарныи язык: словарь и рецевые реакции)* (1995), the noted Russian linguist Nina Kupina analyses the Stalinist period "Glossary of the Russian Language" (ed. D. Ušakova). A dictionary represents the norms of the linguistic system of a particular era, describing and prescribing the rules for using and interpreting signs and sign systems. Thus, a dictionary, with its normative functions, is thus a suitable object of study for analysing language policies of state powers and the development of totalitarian language.

The following attributes characterise the Soviet totalitarian language according to Kupina (1995, p. 13—15):

> Tendency towards the reduction and transformation of constant, ideological semantic concepts (*Leninism — it is Marxism in practice; social pacifism — a special case of opportunism, a social-democratic tactic that supports the imperialist policies of its state*).
>
> Tendency towards the creation of artificial and quasi-ideologemes (e.g. *aristocrat-bourgeois*). (Ideologem - ideologically loaded word or expression (Kupina 1995, p. 13)).
>
> Tendency towards a dualistic axiologization of vocabulary. The ideological expansion takes hold of all the levels of a word's semantic structure, thereby determining the word's connotative signification and simultaneously positioning the word in the polarised good-bad axis of values (e.g. *revolutionary — counter-revolutionary, soviet — anti-soviet*).
>
> Tendency towards the creation of antonymous and synonymous rows that systematically affirm ideological dogmas. Even ordinary, everyday words that at first sight should carry no ideological baggage turn into ideologemes (e.g. 'illiterate' — someone who has grievously erred against a particular field of knowledge, *this person is politically illiterate*).
>
> Tendency towards an ideological codification of non-traditional lexical combinations. Pronouns, adverbs etc. are explained ideologically (e.g. 'from below' — *because of the pressure exerted by the masses from below, the bourgeoisie may, from time to time, accede to the demands of the masses*).

The subordinating role of the political dimension towards other fields that constitute the society (philosophical, religious, aesthetic, moral, legal, etc.). This was apparent in a particularly radical and explicit form in Stalinist totalitarian language. The most important basic ideologemes are formulated in political discourse, and on their basis, other semantic

spheres acquire their political-ideological significations (Kupina, 1995, p. 23). In this manner, a new system of ideological values is selected, which then becomes the basis for the construction of primary semantic-ideological oppositions and the development of axiological rules.

These attributes of Soviet totalitarian language are plainly not in agreement with neither the marrist approach to language, nor the central pretension of Soviet ideology: to be a world-view based strictly on science. In light of the above attributes, totalitarian language can be described as a language whose target is to give form to the linguistic consciousness of a primitive man. Primitive thinking is characterised by the feeling of self-superiority (in totalitarian language, an absolute value judgement, where '*us'* is always marked as the bearer of positive value) and the avoidance of complex thought operations that may threaten to crack the ready-made world-view (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993, p. 74—75). In principle, the entire strategy for constructing this political-ideological discourse can be reduced to two underlying statements: present US in a positive light and present THEM in a negative light. From these two statements, an operation of a reversal is derived: never speak anything negative about US and never speak anything positive about THEM (Dijk, 1998). The way in which these pairs of oppositions appear in texts, whether implicitly or explicitly, is dependent on the nature and purposes of the interest groups that produce the ideology.

It can be argued that through the mediation of totalitarian language, an asocial societal childishness was cultivated, with the purpose of completely inhibiting the social activity of the masses. This is most clearly expressed in the didactic and "educational" nature of the semantics of totalitarian language (On indoctrination during the Stalinist era, see e.g A.Tšerbinin, 1998; 1999). The ideal citizen of the Soviet society was an adult child, whose consciousness is easy to direct and manipulate by the authorities (Dobrenko, 1993, p. 45).

This axiologically-polarized linguistic primitivism is clearly at odds with the clarity of scientific discourse and excludes the latter in principle. The key to explaining this contradiction is provided by an analysis of the function of political rhetoric, since, as was already noted above, it is politics that is the field in totalitarian language that subjects other semantic spheres to itself.

Rhetoric in Political Discourse

If by politics we mean the application of mechanisms of power for the attainment of specific purposes, it is evident that such activities require a certain consensus on part of the subjects involved in political discourse concerning the content and mutual relations of

concepts that circulate therein, on the basis of which political discourse can exist as a field of communication in the first place. For the purposes of the present paper, political discourse can be defined as follows: political discourse is a body of discursive practices that identify the participants in a political situation as such and formulate the subject matter of concrete political communication. In order to mobilise the masses into a struggle for a class-free society, it is required, first of all, that the masses are able to conceive as significant the terms and concepts used in the discourse. In discussing political rhetoric, it should first be determined what distinguishes political rhetoric from other forms of rhetoric.

The classic conception of rhetoric says that it is an art of persuasion, defined by a set of specific rules. This paper is only concerned with verbal rhetoric. Extra-verbal rhetoric (e.g. gestures) is not addressed. The rules and structure of rhetorical discourse are not directly derived from natural language, but are rather a decisive reconceptualization of it (there are shifts in the system of linguistic relationships, the degree of facultative structures rises and they become the primary structure, etc.). "Rhetorical structure is transferred into verbal text from the outside and comprises a supplemental level of order for the text" (Lotman, 2002, p. 418). If we think of language as a discrete coding system, then rhetorical structure will appear in relation to it as a continuous coding system, integrating the text into a coherent meaning. The meaning of a complete text does not grow out of a linear or temporal sequence of segments, but is rather diffused in an n-dimensional semantic space of a given text (on a canvas, on stage, on screen, in an act of ritual, in social behaviour or in a dream) (Lotman, 2002, p. 406). According to Lotman (2002), the definition of text in cultural semiotics only superficially contradicts the linguistic definition of 'text', since even in linguistics texts are in fact coded twice: in natural language, and in a specific language's meta-language of grammatical description. Messages only satisfying the first requirement are not treated as texts (Lotman, 2002, p. 159))

For the sake of clarity with regard to the purpose of the present paper, rhetoric can be perceived from two aspects. First, rhetoric as a *practice of speech*, which covers rhetoric perceived as a verbal art of persuasion, and its teaching. Second, rhetoric as a *discipline*. This latter case covers the descriptive and normative instances of rhetoric (Lachmann, 1994, p. 5—21). The normative dimension allows us to treat rhetoric as essentially a secondary grammar and define the socio-cultural function of rhetoric. Rhetoric functions as a meta-system, consolidating the society and shaping its self-consciousness. Rhetoric as a descriptive-normative system of signs and sign relations allows us to conceive of it as an intra-cultural correlate of social and aesthetic values (ibid.).

THE FUNCTION OF POLITICAL RHETORIC

In accordance with its pragmatic nature, rhetoric is divisible into clearly defined types of speech whose specificity is established by the purposes of the speech. The primary types of rhetorical speech are political speech, court speech, and solemn or parade speech.

Political rhetoric is distinct from other speech practices primarily because it is used to register *official* political positions and intellectual frameworks that are then used not only for describing and conceiving, but also for *changing* the surrounding world. According to the American sociolinguist Joyce Hertzler (1965):

> ... the active language of people is a primary outgrowth of their life, and centres about things and occurrences that are essential to them. Hence it reflects every phase and aspect of their life, represents all known realities of life and tremendously influences every facet of life; in fact, it determines in considerable part what we are aware of, what we believe, how we pattern our thought and how we act. (p. 20)

But what, then, is the specificity of political rhetoric? According to the Russian researcher Rostislav Vodak, political language is located as if in a field of tension between two poles. On the one hand, it is determined functionally; on the other hand, it is subjected to the jargon of a specific group, together with its ideological world-view. "Political rhetoric must fulfil contradictory purposes: to be intelligible and comprehensible (in accordance with its propagandist tasks), and simultaneously targeted at a specific group (for historical and socio-psychological reasons)" (Vodak, 1998, p. 24). Thematic differentiation of political rhetoric determines its rhetorical specificity. Above all, political rhetoric is advisory and is thus directed towards the future. Its persuasiveness determines whether the addressee agrees with the addresser and either acts or does not act according to the latter's will. At the same time, it determines social behavior and shapes the self-image of individuals (their diligence, resistance, decisiveness, manliness, patience, etc.). Thus, it is parade rhetoric that is characteristic of political rhetoric, whose purpose is to develop certain qualities and to mobilise psychological resources in the society (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 27). Thus, one of the functions of political rhetoric is the creation of social identity. This brings us promptly to the issue of symbols in political rhetoric.

SYMBOLS IN POLITICAL RHETORIC

In political discourse (including rhetoric), symbols fulfil various different functions (Kolonitski, 2001, p. 11—12). First, symbols are means of identification, enabling the

creation of collective consciousness, solidarity, and the feeling of a unitary social community. Thus, symbols point to collective identity, operating as its sign. Second, symbols have a mobilizing and legitimizing function. In political practice, the utilization of symbols that are rooted in collective consciousness may help legitimize and assure the support of the masses for political subjects who use them for supporting their activities. Third, symbols bear a communicative function, used for transmitting important information that constitutes political discourse.

In the present context it is important to keep in mind that a symbol's capacity for producing meaning is always greater than is exemplified by its current realization: the associations that a symbol establishes with one or the other semiotic environment by its expression does not exhaust its meaning valences (Lotman, 2004a, p. 241). As a significant memory mechanism, symbols carry texts, plot schemas and other semiotic formations from one stratum of culture to another. Two aspects are relevant for us here: on the one hand, a symbol retains its invariant nature in the flow of time, yet on the other hand, "a symbol correlates actively with its cultural context, is transformed by its influence and transforms it itself" (Lotman, 2004a, p. 242). Its invariant nature is realized in different variants (ibid.).

Political Symbol as a Category in Hegemonic Processes of Signification

I will now attempt to flesh out the above consideration of symbols with the concept of 'empty signifier' by one of the leading contemporary political theorists, Ernesto Laclau, as one of the central categories for specifying hegemonic relationships. However, this does not amount to the claim that as concepts, symbol and 'empty signifier' are identical; instead, in certain articulations of the process of signification, symbols appear in hegemonic functions (for a more thorough theoretical synthesis of Lotman & Laclau, cf Selg & Ventsel 2008). According to Laclau, it is only at the level of discourse that any sense is rendered to hegemony. For Laclau, discourse is the primary terrain of objectivity as such. Nothing is constituted outside discourse. Yet all this has nothing to do with the debate between realists and idealists. Laclau does not deny that earthquakes and other physical phenomena exist. But whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the wrath of god or in terms of natural disaster depends on discursive structurations (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 108). So the problem of the constitution of social and political reality becomes, for Laclau, the problem of the *constitution of discourse*. Thus, hegemonic relation is a certain articulation of meanings (Laclau, 2006, p. 114). This articulation requires that a particular difference loses its particularity and becomes a universal representative of the signifying system as a whole. That way a *closure* for that system is provided. Since every system of signification is

essentially *differential*, its *closure* is the precondition of signification being possible *at all*. This particular signifier, an 'empty signifier' in Laclau's terminology, thereby acquires a dominant position in the signifying system, or discourse, and subordinates, to a greater or lesser extent, all the other elements of the discourse, allowing them to appear as *equivalent* and undermining their particular differences (Laclau, 1996a, p. 36—46). Paradoxically, this undermining results in a certain unity or transparency (systemicity). Yet, the important conclusion from this tension between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence is that there cannot be a final victory of either logic over the other; instead, it has to be created because without that object there would be *no signification*. However, it is relevant that, according to Laclau, the chain of equivalence that embodies the empty signifier cannot expand forever, since the expansion is limited once a set of core relationships have been established (Laclau, 1996b). The result is that at least some new associations (particular contents) would no longer be compatible with the residual particulars that are already in the chain. In other words, its invariant nature is realized in variants, making them similar to symbols as described above.

Thus, a symbol is a sign that possesses a singular content, arising from the co-existence of metaphor and metonymy. It points simultaneously to the particular and the general (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 168). "This is, however, nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifer by the signified" (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p. 11). This once again suggests Lotman's idea that a symbol's capacity for signification is always greater than its current realization.

Political Rhetoric in the Stalinist Era

The political rhetoric of the Soviet Union must be examined in an evident relationship with political propaganda. Broadly speaking, political rhetoric as an art of persuasion can be divided into four interrelated types: oratory, homiletics, didactics and symbolics. Each has its own strategy in speech and fulfils a specific task. The strategy of oratory is metonymic, being based on the juxtaposition and analysis of phenomena and ideas. By its very nature, oratory is dialogic. Unlike oratory, homiletics is monologic and its primary field of application is solemn, parade rhetoric. A homilist is similar to a prophet whose truth can not be contested. Here there is no need to justify the superiority of one's position, but only to explain it. Homiletics is closely interwoven with symbolics. The latter provides the former with the structuring elements of speech, on the basis of which the unity of discourse is established. It is the unmistakeable predominance of these two types of political rhetoric, homiletics and symbolic, that shifts political rhetoric towards propaganda. It should be noted here that in political rhetoric, the ambivalence inherent to symbols functions in yet another

way. Here, the impassioned and emotional load of the symbols becomes imperative. As long as a particular symbol is constantly associated with closely linked emotions, it will lay a foundation to an emotional generalization, required by the propagandist, and will hereafter aid the speakers in influencing the people in their desired direction (Barlett, 1940, p. 65). Mediated by symbols, the people's behavioral patterns and corresponding mental models are homogenized and fixed, in the long run reducing the deviation of their reactions from the norm.

Additionally, there was complete party-based censorship in Soviet culture over the public circulation of texts, which according to some researchers (Barlett, Lippmann), is one of the basic conditions for successful propaganda. This can be rephrased to say that the presence of censure will inevitably lead to the demise of oratory as a dialogic type of rhetoric.

Unlike in the post-revolutionary period, the political rhetoric of the Stalinist period is characterised by a considerable reduction in the relative importance of oratory and the fusion of symbolist and didactic types, and their propagandist peculiarity. The political turnabout that took place during the Stalinist period was expressed in the fading of national-bolshevist revolutionary fervour, and the pathos of a "peaceful build-up", which, in turn, led to the localization of the concept of world revolution; "to build socialism in a single country". However, at the same time this more-conservative direction in the Party political line was still explained with vocabulary derived from the revolution, leading to further emptying and ambivalence of the signifiers. Proceeding from political symbols treated as axioms, the goal of didactics was to provide order to the world-view, and the communication of this ordered picture to the audience in an intelligible manner. Stalinist didactics, however, took over the function of symbolics as well; the zone of axioms swelled until it turned into whole complete curricula, with their truth determined by reference to the authority: Stalin (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 197; Kupina, 1994, p. 44—52). Although Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin all figured as authorities, it was the will of the latter that determined which quotations could be used and how they should be interpreted.

This change is theoretically explainable on the basis of the works of Laclau and Lotman. The characteristics of Soviet totalitarian language as described by Kupina (1994): the reduction and transformation of ideological semantic concepts, the thriving of quasi-ideologemes in language, the construction of synonymous and antonymous rows, and the dualist axiologization of words, all indicate that a non-discrete translation strategy is prevalent in political rhetoric; discrete and clearly distinguishable signs are translated into a non-discrete whole, and "the main feature of such a world is universal resemblance of everything to everything; the main organizing structural relation that of homomorphism" (Lotman, 2004b, p. 570). In other words, the identity of the formerly-discrete elements is more or less transformed. This continuous translating strategy "makes one see

manifestations of the One phenomenon in the various phenomena of the real world, and observe the One Object behind the diversity of objects of the same type" (Lotman, 2004b, p. 571). Political discourse's hegemonic logic of signification establishes a chain of equivalence between incommensurable words and concepts, which, ultimately, subordinates the vocabulary of other fields constitutive of society (philosophy, religion, aesthetics, ethics, jurisprudence, etc.). In Soviet totalitarian language, the political sphere subjected the semantics of the rest of language to itself. This process is roughly as follows: there are different signifiers floating in the discursive field, with their specific meaning lost (they are as if suffused with meanings — the extent of the attachment of signifiers is inversely proportional to the extent of their circulation in the given discursive formation); at some point, an empty signifier intervenes and, with a retroactive power, constitutes identity to the floating signifiers by attaching them together into a pragmatic chain of equivalence. This led to a situation where the Marxist-Leninist theoretical terminology, formerly part of scientific language, was emptied of its prior or particular content and, having become ambivalent political symbols, began to represent the entire social totality. *Industrialization* as a economic-technological term was emptied of its particular meaning and constitutes a chain of equivalence with signifiers from other discourses. *Industrialization is the weapon of class-struggle*; *only through industrialization is communism possible, etc*. This means that industrialization was turned into a universal representation for the entire social totality. The quotations, theoretical concepts and so forth, derived from Stalin and other classics of Marxism-Leninism, evolved into axiomatic-didactic symbols, began to justify the entire political situation, and legitimized the practice of power. The basic aim of the propagandists lay in maximizing the circulation of these slogan-like political symbols and in fastening them to the consciousness of the masses (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 169—171).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be noted that the reality constructed from political symbols during the Stalinist period was not one that could be used to describe the world in maximally unambiguous terms. The primary function of symbols circulating in political discourse was not to transmit specific and clear-cut content, but rather to generate an affect of emotions, crucial for identity creation. Under totalitarian conditions, the purpose of politico-rhetorical language is not the description of reality as unambiguously as possible, but rather the creation of an axiological (a so-called "black and white") system of symbols, then used for constructing social identity, mobilizing the masses in the direction desired by the authorities, and legitimizing the party's position of power in political discourse. In a society where politics subjects to itself other fields that together constitute the society, the impact of

political rhetoric, stemming from its peculiar nature, is inevitable for language as a whole (Cf. Lachmann's socio-cultural functions of rhetoric, especially the chapter "Rhetoric in political discourse"). Soviet totalitarian language is a telling example of this. Paradoxically, it seems that the more totalitarian the society, the more ambivalent the semantic references used by the authorities for self-description. The transparency and clarity of verbal contents might have undermined, on the linguistic-discursive level, the most important thesis of a totalitarian society: The Party is always right!

REFERENCES

Anderson, R. (1993). Totalitarizm: Kontcept ili idologiya [Totaltarism: Concept or Ideology]. —*Polis nr 1*, 142—154.

Arendt, H. (1973). *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Bakhtin, M. M., & Voloshinov, V. H. (1929). Marksizm I filosofiya yazyka [Marxism and Philosophy of Language].Leningrad: Priboij]

Barlett, F. (1940). *Political propaganda.* Cambridge: University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1987). *Choses dites*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Brzezinski, Z. K., & Friedrich Ñ. J. (1956). *Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy*. Cambridge: University Press.

Chalmers, A. F. (1992). *What is this thing called science? An assessment of the nature and status of science and its methods.* Queensland: Open University Press.

Clark, K., & Jacobs, B. (2002). Metaphors we teach by: An embodied cognitive analysis of No Child Left Behind. *Semiotica, 2002(138),* 179—203

Dobrenko, J. A (1993). Metafora vlasti [Metaphor of Power]. München: Verlag Otto Sagner.

Groys, B. (1992). The total art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, aesthetic dictatorship, and beyond. Princeton: University Press.

Heywood, A. (1990). *Political ideologies: An introduction*. New York: St. Martin´s Press.

Hertzler, J. (1965). *A sociology of language*. New York: Random House.

Howarth, D., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000). Introducing discourse theory and political analysis. In Howarth, D., Norval, A. J., & Stavrakakis, Y. (Eds.), *Discorse theory and political analysis:identities, hegemony and social change* (pp. 1-23). Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Khazagerov, G. G. (2002). Politicheskaya ritorika [Political Rhetoric]. Moscow: Nikkolo-Medina.

Koestler, A. (1941). *Darkness at noon* . London: Bantnam Books

Kolonitski, B. (2001). Simvoly I vlast' I bor'ba za vlast'. [Symbols and Power and Fight for Power]. Sankt-Petersburg: DB.

Kupina, N. A (1995). Totalitarnyi yazyk: Slovar' I rechevye realii. [Totalitarian Language: dictionary and speech reaction]. Ekaterinburg: The Ural University Press.

Kupina, N. (1999). Yazykovoe soprotivlenie v kontekste totalitarnoi kul'tury. [Linquistic Resistance in the Context of Totalitarian Culture]. Ekaterinburg: The Ural University Press.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. (1996a). Why do empty signifiers matter to politics*?* In Laclau, E (Ed.), *Emancipation(s),* pp. 36-46. London, New York: Verso.

Laclau, E. (1996b). The death and resurrection of the theory of ideology. *Journal of Political Ideologies. 1(3),* 201-220.

Laclau, E. (2006). Ideology and post-marxism. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 11(2)*, 103—114.

Lachmann, R. (1994). *Die Zerstörung der schönen Rede. Rhetorische Tradition undkonzepte des Poetischen*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Lepik, P. (2008). *Universals in the Context of Juri Lotman`s Semiotics.* Tartu: University Press.

Lippmann, W. (1955). *The public philosopy*. New York: Mentor.

Lotman, J. M. = 2002 [1981]. Semiotika kul'tury I ponyatie teksta. [Semiotics of Culture and Concept of Text]. Istoriya I tipologiya russkoi kul'tury. [History and Typology of Russian Culture] (pp. 158-162). [Sankt-Petersburg: «Isskustvo»-SPB],

Lotman, J. M 2004à [1981]. Simvol v sisteme kul'tury. Semiosfera (pp. 240-249). [The semiosphere]. [Sankt-Petersburg: «Isskustvo»-SPB.

Lotman, J. M 2004b [1978]. Fenomen kul'tury. [The phenomenon of culture]. Semiosfera (pp. 568-580). [The semiosphere].Sankt-Petersburg: «Isskustvo»-SPB.

Lotman, J. M 2005 [1981]. Ritorika. [Rhetoric]. *Ob iskusstve (pp. 404-423). [On Art]*. [Sankt-Petersburg: «Isskustvo»-SPB], 404-423.

Lühikursus 1951 (1938) = *Üleliidulise kommunistliku (bolševike) partei ajalugu: Lühikursus [The History of the union-Wide Communist (bolshevist) Party: A Crash-Course]*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus [Estonia State Publishing House]

Marr, N. J (1936). Izbrannye raboty. *[Selected Works]*. Leningrad: State University Press.

Mcilwain, C. D. (2007). Race, pigskin, and politics: A semiotic analysis of racial images in political advertising. *Semiotica*, *167*, 169—191.

Orwell, G. (1961). *1984.* New York: New American Library.

Pfeffer, J. (1992). *Managing with power: politics and influence in organization*. Boston: Whitepress.

Raik, K. (2003). *Democratic politics or the implementation of the inevitabilities: Estonia's democracy and integration into the European Union.* Tartu: University Press.

Reis, C. (1993). *Towards a semiotics of ideology*. Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter,

Romanenko, Andrei. Sovetskaya slovesnaya kul'tura: Obraz ritora. *[Soviet verbal culture: Rhetor's image]*.Moscow: URSS]

Selg, P., & Ventsel, A. (2008). Towards a semiotic theory of hegemony: naming as a hegemonic operation in Lotman and Laclau. *Sign System Studies 36.1*, 167-183.

Stalin, J. V. Marksizm I problemy yazykoznaniya. [Marxism and problems of linquistic]. Moscow: Political Publishing House].

Štšerbinin, A. I. Totalitarnaya indoktrinatciya: U istokov sistemy. Politicheskie prazdnimki I igry. [Totalitarian indoctrination: on roots of system. Political Celebrations and Games] — *Polis,* 5: 23—45.

Štšerbinin, A. (1999). S kartinki v tvoem bukvare. [From a picture in your Alphabet book]. — *Polis,* 1: 3—27.

Zichermann, S. (2006). Bush's straight talk erases Kerry's scholarly chalk. The U.S. presidential debate of 2004: Who won the image war? *Semiotica*. *162,* 323—339.

Undusk, J. (2003). Retooriline suund Eesti nõukogude ajaloo kirjutuses [Rhetorical constraints in Soviet historiography]. In: Krikmann, Arvo; Olesk, Sirje (eds.), Võim ja kultuur [Culture and power]. Tartu: Ilmamaa, 41—69.

Ušakin, S. A. (1995). *Rech' kak politicheskoe deistvie.* [Speesh as a Political Action]. — *Polis* 5: 142—153

Vaiskopf, Mihhail. (2002). *Pisatel' Stalin* [The writer Stalin]. Moscow: Novoje Literaturnoje Obosrenije.

Van Dijk, T. (1998). *Ideology. A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage.

Ventsel, A. (2006). "See vereside on nüüd uuesti kinnitatud, värskendatud ja laiendatud": "Rahva*"* konstrueerimine Teise maailmasõja järgses nõukogude poliitilises retoorikas ["This Blood-bond is now renew, refresh and expanded". Constructing "People" in Soviet Political Rhetoric after WW II]. *Akadeemia 7.* 1427-1450.

Ventsel, A. (2007). The construction of the "we" — category: Political rhetoric in Soviet Estonia from June 1940 to July 1941. *Sign System Studies 35.1-2*, 249-267.

Vodak, R. M (1998). *Spetcial'nyi yazyk i zhargon: O tipe teksta "partiinaya programma"*. [Specialized Language and Jargono: On the Type of Text «Party Program»]. Volgograd: Pedagogical State University of Volgograd Press.

Vygotsky, L. S & Luria, A. R (1993). *Etyudy po istorii povedeniya*. [Essays in the of History of Behavior]. Moscow: Moscow State University Press.