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A Further Note on the Soviet Linguistics Controversy

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aspects of the system which have been emphasized in these pages, but these negative aspects constitute an important part of the truth, and Dr. Schlesinger (while making a number of interesting speculations about a remote and prosperous future) did not appear to give sufficient weight to them.

A. NOVE

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE SOVIET LINGUISTICS CONTROVERSY

In view of the references in Dr. Miller's 'Marr, Stalin and the Theory of Language' to Marr's 'technical linguistic oddities' and 'phonological eccentricities' as something incidental to the Soviet condemnation of his doctrine as a whole, it seems necessary to say a little more about these 'oddities'.

Not only is the question one of theoretical (linguistic) importance (as ventilated by Professor A. S. C. Ross in 'Philological Probability Problems', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Series B, volume XII, no. 1, 1950, p. 58), but it bears directly on Dr. Miller's subject of why Marr has been found incompatible with Marxism, or, in Professor Matthews' terms (in his broadcast talk last year and in 'The Soviet Contribution to Linguistic Thought' (part 2), *Archivum Linguisticum*, vol. II, Fasc. 2, 1950, p. 119), whether there can be a 'synthesis' or only a 'symbiosis' between 'Indo-Europeanism' and Marxism (Professor Matthews gave no reasons for his believing the latter).

Marr's doctrine was condemned by the consensus of Soviet opinion after a public discussion by experts in linguistics and a statement by Stalin, in effect on behalf of the Communist Party. Neither of these events can be ignored in explaining the condemnation. To ignore Stalin's statement would be to ignore the specific Soviet relation between knowledge in general and the political leadership, dealt with by Dr. Miller. But equally, to ignore the preceding discussion would be to ignore the fact that Marr has been condemned essentially because his theories were found by the people at work in the field not to be compatible with the observed facts.

Moreover, to take the reasons given by Stalin himself, we find that he says that the comparative-historical method, for all its shortcomings,¹ gives results, whereas the New Doctrine leads nowhere, which is because the former is scientific, corresponding to the facts, the latter unscientific, contradicting the facts.

Unlike the other reasons he gives — Marr's false conception of language as a superstructure, of its class-nature, and of its stadial development — the substance of this reason has long been familiar to Western philologists, but that does not lessen the present need to explain it. Nor need it prevent using

¹ On which see now B. A. Serebrennikov's 'On the Question of the Defects of the Comparative-Historical Method in Linguistics', *Izvestia Akad. Nauk: Otdel. Lit. i Yaz.*, 1950, pp. 177ff.

the examples given in the Soviet discussion, it being understood that they form part of the common heritage of linguistic data on which any scientific linguistics must be based.

According to Marr, there is at all stages in the development of language a relation between the sound of words and their meaning which rests on the innate meaning of sounds themselves (this is how he understood his much-invoked proposition that even the smallest units of language, phonemes, are social units), but which differs in each stage of society, depending directly as it does on the ideology (the superstructure) of each type of society. Such a view of course includes, in reference to the *origin* of language, that held by Sir Richard Paget (cf. Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 and 58), but Marr ascribed this property of the glottogenic process to the *whole* history of language, embodying it in the Four Elements.

Now there are of course theoretical (logical) objections to Marr's argument: as has been pointed out also by Vinogradov,² Marr confused thought in the sense of ideology with thought in general which is involved in all human activities, from the productive process to the superstructure, (from which language *is* inseparable), thus effecting in any case an undistributed middle in his reasoning. This means that the reasons that he claims prove his theory are nullified. But there are also positive practical reasons which prove that it cannot be true. Among these are the etymologies which result from the theory.

It is true that an example like the derivation of Indo-European *mater*, 'mother', from *ber* (Element B, through bar, mar, ma) and *sal* (Element A, through sar, tar, ter) quoted by B. V. Hornung, *Izvestia Akad. Nauk: Otdel. Lit. i Yaz.*, 1950, p. 350 (since the Pravda discussion), 'astonishing' (to quote Dr. Miller on Marr's arbitrary phonology in general) as it is, does not at present contradict any observed facts, because we have no direct evidence of the history of this word before it took this form (though there are hypotheses based on comparative evidence, cf., on family terms in general, e.g. G. Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, 1941, p. 412, T. Burrow, "'Shwa" in Sanskrit', Transactions of the Philological Society, 1949, pp. 50-1). But following from his assertion that the elements are productive also at later stages, Marr gave similar etymologies to more modern words, etymologies which involve a history of the word other than it is already known to have, either from previous records or from its place in the structure of the language. (This is why Marr is condemned for his 'anti-historicism'.)

Examples of these are (Serebrennikov, *Pravda*, 23.v. 50): Marr compares Russian *bor* (pine forest) with Latin *ar-bor* (tree). But *arbor* comes from *arbos* which is cognate with Sanskrit *ardhami* (grow), with *b* corresponding to *dh* as in *verbum*, Lithuanian *vardas*, English word; so that *-bor* was originally *-dhos*. Or he compares Greek *balanos* (acorn) with Latin *panis* (bread) as both from 'palan'. But *balanos* corresponds to Latin *glans* (acorn), Russian *zhelud* (from *gelondi*), while *panis* was originally *pastnis*, as we see from the diminutive *pastillum*. Or he compares Chuvash *jyvyys* with *arbor*,

² *Bolshevik*, No. 15, August 1950, p. 17, 'Marr confused social outlook, i.e. superstructure, and general human thought in its development'.

but the -v- comes from -g- (Tatar *agach*), the -b- from -dh-. Or Georgian *i-tan-s* with Latin *tangere* (touch) but the Latin -n- is an infix (cf. *tetigi*, *tactum*). Or German *Himmel* (heaven) with Russian *zemlya* (earth), from *hi-mel*, *ze-mel*, but the Russian -l- is not original — compare Polish *ziemia* beside *mleko* (milk) with Church Slavonic *zemlja*, *mlěko*.

There is not space here to give full proof of these generally-recognized etymologies, nor, which comes to the same thing, to give the myriad other similar examples³ ('I can only recommend' as Ross, p. 58, says on the distinct, and debatable, question of ancestral languages '... handbooks of comparative philology, e.g. A. Meillet, *Introduction à l'étude comparative des langues indo-européennes*' or, we may add, many of the articles in *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Literary and Linguistic Section*, for 1950), but it will be seen that once Marr's chain of reasoning is brought out into the light of day, as it has been by the Soviet controversy, a vital link in it is exposed as false, and it becomes impossible to continue regarding his as a serious contribution to scientific general and comparative linguistics (though, as Stalin acknowledged, others of his works are of value).

J. ELLIS

SOME NOTES ON AN INTERPRETATION OF STALIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LINGUISTICS CONTROVERSY

The purpose of these notes is to examine a number of points in Dr. M. Miller's provocative article on 'Marr, Stalin and the Theory of Language'.¹

1. Dr. Miller gives the following characterization of what she describes as the 'Soviet notion of "Marxism"':

Stalinist thought, and Soviet thought in general . . . uses the name of Marxism to bring together, at any particular moment of our contemporary time, all methodical usages in all sciences and disciplines which have proved their capacity for the increase of knowledge, both as against their competitors, and, of course, as judged by those responsible in Soviet society. Two general consequences follow from this: that all such methodical usages, whatever their origins, are related (with or without critical modification) to the principles which have their roots in Marx's own work, and so are brought in to the general constellation of ideas which goes by the name of Marxism; and that all methodical usages *in any field* which have proved less valuable are designated as non-Marxist.²

In the case of certain of the sciences, Dr. Miller continues, the basic principles are more or less the same both inside and outside the Soviet Union, and here

³ As just one more example, and with reference to note 73 in 'The Crisis in Soviet Linguistics' (*Soviet Studies*, II, 3), I am indebted to Mr. R. Browning for pointing out that there is in fact a Russian word *suka*, 'bitch'.

¹ *Soviet Studies*, vol. II, no. 4, pp. 364ff.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 366-7.