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SOME NOTES ON THE MARR SCHOOL

LAWRENCE L. THOMAS

FROM ABOUT 1930 to 1950 linguistic work in the Soviet Union was dominated by the officially recognized theories and practices of the so-called Marr "school." For the most part, any but minor deviations from the theoretical foundations established by Nikolaj Ja. Marr (1865-1934) were severely suppressed. In 1950, however, Stalin officially repudiated Marr's theories and disbanded the group of linguists who had followed in his footsteps.

A great deal has come to be known about Marr and his school since the famous discussion in 1950. A number of informative articles have been published in this country and in England¹—some of them even before the discussion.² To the *Columbia University Slavic Studies* series we owe an extremely useful translation of the articles published during the controversy.³ Moreover, since Stalin's pronouncements on the subject, the scholarly shock troops of the Soviet Union have provided us with innumerable symposia, brochures and articles—of which the most important is the two-volume collection of articles, *Protiv vul'garizacii i izvrashchenija marksizma v jazykoznanii*⁴—reviewing Marrism in all its facets and in all its repercussions in other fields.

It would, therefore, be quite superfluous to take up the subject of "Marrism" again at this late date were it not for the fact that certain misconceptions concerning the development of Marr's theories and their acceptance in the Soviet Union have gained a wide currency. These misconceptions, in my opinion, have served to obscure both the sources for Marr's views and the real reasons underlying the

¹For example, J. Ellis and R. W. Davies, "The Crisis in Soviet Linguistics," *Soviet Studies*, II, No. 3, 209-64; J. Ellis, "A Further Note on the Soviet Linguistics Controversy," *Soviet Studies*, III, No. 2, 172-4; W. K. Matthews, "The Soviet Contribution to Linguistic Thought," *Archivum Linguisticum*, II, Fasc. 1, 1-23, and Fasc. 2, 97-121; M. Miller, "Marr, Stalin, and the Theory of Language," *Soviet Studies*, III, No. 2, 174-84; M. A. Poltorackaja, "Jafeticheskaja teorija Marra ili novoe uchenie o jazyke," *A Guide to Teachers of the Russian Language in America* (July, 1950), pp. 1-46; H. Rubenstein, "The Recent Conflict in Soviet Linguistics," *Language*, XXVII, 281-7.

²E.g., C. A. Manning, "Japhetidology," *Language*, VII, 143-6, and "Nikolay Marr and Armenian Studies," *Armenian Quarterly*, I, No. 2, 214-20; W. K. Matthews, "The Japhetic Theory," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XXVIII, No. 68, 172-92; G. Nandriş, "Old and New Paths in Slavonic Philology," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XXVIII, No. 70, 84-104; V. Polák, "Present-day Trends in Soviet Linguistics," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XXVI, No. 67, 438-51.

³J. V. Murra, R. M. Hankin, F. Holling, *The Soviet Linguistic Controversy* (New York, 1951).

⁴Edited by V. V. Vinogradov and B. A. Serebrennikov and published in Moscow, 1951-1952. It will be referred to hereafter as *Protiv*.

victory (and, ultimately, the defeat) of the Marr linguistic school. For example, in an article by J. Ellis⁵ we are told:

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.⁶ 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.

There is little to quarrel with in the first part of this statement; on the other hand, the second part of the paragraph contains a judgment that is, to say the least, naive. Even if we knew nothing further about the matter, it would seem, *a priori*, unlikely that Soviet "people at work in the field" knew something about Marr's theories in 1950 that they did not know, say, in 1930, or that it had taken them twenty-odd years to find that Marrism was inapplicable to the facts. Quite the contrary. There were those who objected to Marr's theories much earlier, as we shall see below, and there were linguists who (before their voices were silenced) pointed out that the facts did not fit his theories. Obviously, we must look for other reasons for Marr's rise and fall.

Another misconception which has tended to obscure problems connected with the Marr phenomenon has been the widely held view that Marr was, before the Revolution, an essentially orthodox specialist in Caucasian languages and that he developed his bizarre ideas only after the Revolution—with the intention, presumably, of thus creating a Marxist linguistics.⁷ This view has made impossible a clear picture of the internal development of Marr's theories and, further, has greatly distorted the role of Marxism in those theories. We are, in general, expected to believe that an ordinary linguist became a convert to Marxist theory and, in the space of just a few years (from about 1918 to about 1924) developed a linguistic doctrine

⁵"A further note . . . " p. 172. This same point of view (most clearly stated here) also runs through the article he wrote with R. W. Davis.

⁶The article by M. Miller (cited in Note 1, above) makes a deductive Marxist philosopher of Stalin. This assumption, too, is hard to follow in view of the empirical (and often, even, *ad hoc*) character of some of Stalin's formulations.

⁷This is the attitude we find, e.g., in Poltorackaja's article. On p. 3 she informs us that Marr greeted the Revolution enthusiastically and "soon after" joined the ranks of the Communist Party. As a matter of fact, he did not join the Communist Party until 1930. On p. 4 we are informed that Marr, before the Revolution, adhered to the principles of Indo-European theory and that "up to the years 1920-1921 he did not reveal his revolutionary qualities in his scholarly theses."

which he believed to be in accord with Marxism.⁸ Here again, even if we knew nothing more about the matter, it would seem unlikely that Marrism, in all its glory, could have sprung like Athena from even Marr's fertile brain. It surely must have had a more protracted development.

It is clear, therefore, that we must form some judgments concerning the evolution of Marr's thought before any valid attempt can be made to evaluate the reasons for his success in the 1930's and his disgrace in 1950. This will be my first task in the present paper. I shall then attempt to describe the progressive infusion of Marxism into his thought. Finally, I shall offer some hypotheses concerning the factors which won success for Marrism around 1930 and the factors which led to its fall in 1950.⁹

That Marr's linguistic work was not exactly orthodox is clear from his very first scholarly pronouncement—a short note in a Georgian newspaper, in 1888, concerning the genetic relationships of the Georgian language.¹⁰ The note asserted that Georgian was not an isolated language (as scholarship at that time maintained), but that it was genetically related to the Semitic languages. Since Marr gave no proofs for his view, there would be no point in mentioning this early communication were it not for the fact that there are two things which are important to us in it: Marr's willingness, even as a student, to set himself against prevailing scholarly opinion, and his desire to link, genetically, his isolated mother language to one of the great cultural linguistic families. He was never to abandon either of these tendencies.

Marr did not return to this subject for a period of twenty years. There were three reasons for this. First, he had to complete the work for his scholarly degrees; second, university affairs made it necessary for him to concentrate, for the time being, on Armenian and, third, and most important of all, his mentor, the famous orientalist, Baron

⁸This viewpoint is espoused, to one or another degree, by Ellis and Davis (who inform us, on p. 211 of their article, that Marr's work before the Revolution and up to 1924 “ . . . was carried out within the framework of the orthodox method . . . ”) and Rubenstein (p. 282), as well as most of the other authors cited in Note 1 above who, although well aware of Marr's earlier development, tend to place too great an emphasis on his later work.

⁹I owe a great deal of information to Professors Gleb Struve and Francis J. Whitfield (of the University of California) and to Professor N. Poppe (of the University of Washington). Professor Poppe, in particular, was most kind in sending me answers to questions concerning the situation in linguistics in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 1930's. Needless to say, the responsibility for hypotheses put forth in this article is mine.

¹⁰Reprinted in Russian translation (“Priroda i osobennosti gruzinskogo jazyka”) in *Izbrannye raboty* (hereafter abbreviated *IR*), I, 14-15.

Rosen, aghast at the turn Marr's thought had taken, enjoined him to silence until such a time as his position was more secure.¹¹

When in 1908 Marr again returned to the problem of a Georgian-Semitic relationship, he was prepared to demonstrate his claims.¹² His "demonstration" is a further revelation of his linguistic procedures. In order to prove a genetic relationship, Marr was quite willing to distort, and even falsify, linguistic facts. For his purposes it turned out, conveniently enough, that Georgian, like Semitic, had a "tri-literal" root; that, like Arabic, Georgian had only three cases in the noun; and that Georgian had retained many vestiges of a former suffix for feminine gender—again a feature that would make it resemble Arabic. The sound laws which Marr believed he could trace through Georgian and the Semitic languages also demonstrate the arbitrariness of his technique. Any particular sound change was free to take place or not take place; any sound in one of the compared languages could be equated, depending on the needs of the investigator, with any sound in some other language.¹³ Needless to say, this sort of methodology is a far cry from nineteenth-century linguistic practice.

After having proved, to his own satisfaction, that Georgian (now a member of a "Japhetic" family) and Semitic were related languages and that they were descendants of a "Noëtic" proto-language, Marr turned his attention to the languages related to Georgian (the Kartvelian or South Caucasian languages). They, too, were found to be related to Semitic.¹⁴ He next proceeded to study other Caucasian languages and, by 1911, was able to state that "all native Caucasian languages" belonged to the Japhetic family.¹⁵ It was relatively easy, in view of the obliging nature of the "sound laws" employed, to extend the Japhetic family beyond the limits of the Caucasus, first to Asia Minor, and then to the Mediterranean area. This extension was accomplished during the war years and immediately after so that by 1920 the Japhetic "family" included the Phrygians, Lycians, Carians, Etruscans, Pelasgians, Basques, and various other extinct or living peoples in the Mediterranean area—not to mention refer-

¹¹Cf. V. A. Mihankova, *Nikolaj Jakovlevich Marr* (1949), p. 31.

¹²See his "Predvaritel'noe soobshchenie o rodstve gruzinskogo jazyka s semiticheskimi," reprinted in *IR*, I, 23-38.

¹³For a linguistic analysis and judgment of Marr's procedures in this instance, see Gerhard Deeters, "Die Sprachwissenschaft in der Sowjetunion," in *Bolschewistische Wissenschaft und "Kulturpolitik"* (ed. by B. F. von Richthofen), pp. 236-51, and the review by Hans Vogt, *Journal asiatique*, CCXXII (1933), Bull. crit., 142-5. Cf. also A. Chikobava, "K voprosu ob istorizme v jazykoznanii v svete trudov I. V. Stalina," *Protiv*, II, 31-32.

¹⁴See his article, "O chanskom jazyke," reprinted in *IR*, I, 39-49.

¹⁵"Kavkaz i pamjatniki dukhovnoj kul'tury," *IAN*, Series VI (1912), p. 80.

ences to the aboriginal peoples of America, Asia, and Africa.¹⁶ All of these languages were supposed to constitute one family, and their bearers were assumed to be a “third” ethnic group (alongside Indo-European and Semitic peoples) inhabiting the Mediterranean littoral. The “family” was presumed to have been an all-pervading linguistic substratum which was broken up and overlaid by the invasion of Indo-Europeans.

In accomplishing the inclusion of all of these heterogeneous languages into one “family,” Marr relied on the testimonial value of a very small part of the lexicon. His favorite linguistic materials were ethnic terms, toponymic designations, and eponyms. The name of a people, a mountain, or a legendary hero of, say, the Iberian peninsula, was inevitably found to be cognate (after a suitable number of Marr’s sound correspondences had been applied) with a similar lexical item taken from one of the languages of the Caucasus.¹⁷ The methodological result of this procedure was that Marr came to be operating with a rather small number of aboriginal “roots” (consisting, usually, of the form *consonant, vowel, consonant*) which had undergone an ever-increasing number of sound transformations. Marr was later to canonize this procedural technique into his famous “four-element analysis” (quietly suppressing, at the same time, all references to its origin). The method, while it was extremely commodious, also had its dangers. Since these dangers were connected with certain other techniques of Marr’s science of Japhetidology (which Marr developed in dealing with Armenian), we must survey those techniques before we discuss the dilemma which now confronted Marr.

Marr’s work on Armenian paralleled his work on the “Japhetic” languages, and one of his first pronouncements concerning it (1899) showed (as had his earlier statement concerning the Georgian language) an orientation that was never to be abandoned. It appeared to Marr that the Armenian language had been assigned to the Indo-European family only because of the blind, imperialistic ethnocentrism of Western-European scholars. For him it was quite obvious that the Armenian language contained a “basic layer” which was genetically related to the neighboring Caucasian languages and that, furthermore, the Armenian nationality contained “two basic racial

¹⁶“Jafeticheskij Kavkaz i tretij ètnicheskij èlement v sozidanii sredizemnomorskoj kul’tury,” reprinted in *IR*, I, 79-124. Cf. particularly pp. 88-89, 117.

¹⁷An excellent example of the technique (applied to the term *Iberia*) may be found in “Kreshchenie armjan, gruzin, abkhazov i alanov svjatym Grigoriem,” *Zapiski Vostochnogo otdelenija Imperatorskogo russkogo arkheologicheskogo Obshchestva* (referred to, hereafter, as *ZVO*), XVI (1905), 63-211.

currents," one of them Armenian, and the other Japhetic.¹⁸ It is important for the reader to note that it was essential to Marr for the "Japhetic" admixture in the Armenian language to be "basic," that is aboriginal, and that linguistic mixture was supposed to accompany, and be accompanied by, an ethnic mixture. This theory of "layers," which Marr first elaborated in connection with the Armenian language, was generalized to the whole of Japhetic and came to be an indispensable part of Marr's methodology. As each new language was added to the Japhetic family, it was found to contain a "basic layer" genetically connecting it with the newcomer. By virtue of this reasoning, Georgian, which until 1914, was considered the "purest" of all representatives of Japhetic,¹⁹ came to be considered, by 1922, as a hopelessly "hybrid" language with layers connecting it to a bewildering variety of other languages.²⁰

One further thesis of Marr's developed out of his work on Armenian. Following the example of Armenian nationalists of the end of the nineteenth century,²¹ Marr distinguished two Armenian languages—Modern Colloquial Armenian and Old Armenian. For Marr, however, Modern Armenian was not a direct descendant of Old Armenian. He declared that the two languages had coexisted from antiquity, the one (Old Armenian) being a "princely" language, the "living language of the ancient Armenian feudal lords," and the other (the presumed progenitor of Modern Armenian) a "demotic" language.²² The division was made in order better to facilitate a comparison of Armenian with the Japhetic languages. But, for our present purposes, it is important to note that this dichotomy of Armenian into two languages is, at the same time, an assignment of different languages to different social strata in one language community. And, further, it is important to note that it took place in 1910—long before the Revolution.

¹⁸These judgments were contained in the speech in defense of his magisterial dissertation and were reprinted, under the title "K voprosu o zadachakh armenovedeniia," in *IR*, I, 16-22. For a modern view of the question of linguistic mixture in Armenian, see Hans Vogt, "Arménien et caucasique du sud," *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap*, IX (1938), 321-38, and "Substrat et convergence dans l'évolution linguistique. Remarques sur l'évolution et la structure de l'arménien, du géorgien, de l'ossète et du turc," *Festschrift til Konrad Nielsen, Studia Septentrionalia*, II (1945), 213-28.

¹⁹"Opredelenie jazyka vtoroj kategorii akhemanidskikh klinoobraznykh nadpisej po dannym jafeticheskogo jazykoznanija," *ŽVO*, XXII (1914), 39, 40.

²⁰"Le terme basque *udagara* 'loutre,'" *Jafeticheskij Sbornik*, I (1922), 22-23.

²¹Old Armenian had continued in ecclesiastical usage up to the Revolution. Armenian patriots demanded its replacement, as a literary norm, by the spoken language. Cf. I. K. Kusik'jan, "Oshibki N. Ja. Marra v osveshchenii istorii armjanskogo jazyka," *Protiv*, II, 432.

²²"O chanskom jazyke," reprinted in *IR*, I, 39-49. Cf. particularly p. 39, Note 3.

Marr's theory of "layers" and his assignment of these "layers" to different social strata went hand in hand with his sound laws and his penchant for using ethnic terms. A similarity in ethnic terms meant that an investigated language was Japhetic in origin. Its language, and its people, according to Marr, shared a "basic" layer with the other Japhetic languages and peoples. Moreover, since Marr was using these devices to establish a *genetic* affiliation, all question of linguistic *borrowing* was excluded by definition. The basic layers were considered primordial and were assumed to be the result of Japhetic migrations and cultural contacts which had taken place before the dawn of history.

This was the state of affairs before the Japhetic family grew to unmanageable dimensions (between 1920 and 1923). Since it now encompassed much of Eurasia and since Marr was now finding Japhetic elements in Western Indo-European languages, the problem of migration became an acute one. The situation was a direct consequence of Marr's methodology. He had assigned a multitude of languages (as well as "layers" in still other languages) to the Japhetic family. Since the material with which he worked consisted predominantly of ethnic terms, and since linguistic mixture, in Marr's sense of the word, presumed an ethnic mixture as well, this meant that the individual ethnic term (and, consequently, the *bearers* of that term) had to be ubiquitous. Moreover, the assignment of a hypothetical homeland to the Japhites became virtually impossible. In 1922 Marr offered a temporary solution by pushing the assumed period of migrations further back in time so that the "homeland" of the Japhetic peoples was to be sought in the "strata of fossil man."²³ Late prehistory presumably found the Japhites already dispersed all over the Mediterranean area in an "unbroken interlacement of co-totemic tribes,"²⁴ that is, with each and every tribe bearing the same ethnic designations. But this solution was of no avail for Indo-European languages, in which Marr was finding more and more Japhetic elements. Inasmuch as Marr was striving to prove *genetic* affiliations, it would not do to have the Indo-Europeans *borrowing* from a Japhetic substratum and, therefore, retaining a certain portion of their language in a relatively pure state. To save the situation Marr formulated a new solution, which he read at the Academy of Sciences in November, 1923. This was the famous statement concerning "The Indo-European Languages of the Mediterranean," in which Marr asserted that the Indo-Europeans did not constitute a separate immigrating

²³"Knizhnye legendy ob osnovanii Kuara v Armenii i Kieva na Rusi," *IR*, V, 65.

²⁴*Ibid.*

family of languages but that they were simply a stage transformation, *in situ*, of the already present Japhetic languages. This stage transformation was, according to Marr, called forth by a social revolution consequent upon the discovery and use of metals.²⁵ Beginning at this point, the Japhetic theory was gradually transformed into the now-famous "New Theory of Language" (although the actual designation came only later). Since Marr's work after the Revolution is generally well-known we need not go into it in any detail. It is however, of some interest and importance to note how much his post-revolutionary theories owe to his prerevolutionary work.

Thus we find that his famous theories of the development of languages through mixture ("hybridization"), his interest in origins, his doctrine of the class nature of language and his notorious four-element analysis all derived from his earlier linguistic practice. His theory of development by virtue of mixture is a direct development from, and a generalization of, his former discovery of Japhetic "layers" in every language to come into his ken. The interest in origins and prehistory grew out of the impossibility of constructing any reasonable theory of migrations. Instead, Marr kept pushing the hypothetical period of migrations and mixtures further and further into the remote past—until he was perforce brought to a consideration of the origin of human speech itself, and to the construction of his peculiar polygenetic theory.²⁶ The thesis of the class nature of language also had developed, as we have seen, out of his concentration on ethnic terms. Even his theory of stadialism, if we take its earliest formulation,²⁷ was based more on the nineteenth-century division of languages into synthetic, agglutinating, and flectional than it was on any Marxist tenets.²⁸ Furthermore, a good many of his even more estoteric theories (e.g., of the magical origin of language, of stages in the development of the thought process) owe as much to such scholars as Ludwig Noiré, Lévy-Bruhl and A. N. Veselovskij as they do to the Marxist "fathers."²⁹

As we can see from the above considerations, Marr's theories developed largely by virtue of their own internal dynamism. Consequently, most of his mature work is the result of an *adaptation* to

²⁵"Indo-Evropejskie jazyki sredizemnomorja." Reprinted in *IR*, I, 185-6.

²⁶It was *not* a monogenetic theory as Rubenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 282, would have it. Marr needed a polygenetic theory to support his theory of mixture and to justify the repetition of the selfsame ethnic terms (later "elements") over the entire Eurasian territory.

²⁷In "O proiskhozhdenii jazyka," *IR*, II, 179-209.

²⁸Cf. G. Nandriș, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

²⁹For an analysis of these influences and a detailed survey of Marr's linguistic development, see my book, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr*, in the *University of California Publications in Linguistics*.

Marxism and not a conscious theoretical construct on a Marxist basis. Moreover, it should be quite clear that we ought to banish, if possible, the prevailing notion that Marr was an orthodox linguistic practitioner before the Revolution. He emphatically was not.³⁰

On the other hand, curiously enough, commentators on Marr have almost unanimously lost sight of the great debt which Marr owed to the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century. His theories were based, up to the very end, on the biological, evolutionary concepts which were prevalent in nineteenth-century linguistic thought as well as in other fields. It was the biological theory of the progressive development of languages from simple to more complex forms that underlies much of his thinking. It encouraged his excursions into prehistory. Even his four-element theory finds its support in the then-current belief in a root period in the development of language. As A. V. Desnickaja has cleverly pointed out,³¹ Marr's language abounded in terms such as "crossing of languages," "hybridization," "cross-breeding," "multiplication of languages," etc.—terms borrowed from the vocabulary of Darwinism.

Nor is Marr to be taken as one who objected to the *principles* of Indo-European comparativism (and thus classed with such linguists as Schuchardt, who did).³² He objected to comparativism not on principle, but simply because it did not serve those transcendental aims which were dear to him. The methods of comparativism, strictly applied and rigorously adhered to, would not have yielded the results Marr sought—the genetic union, first of all, of the isolated Kartvelian languages with a culturally great linguistic family and, later, the positing of the Japhetic languages as a stage through which all other languages were supposed to have passed. There is every reason to assume that what Marr was after throughout his scholarly career was the establishment of a great cultural role for the Japhites (a role which the Indo-Europeans later "usurped") and, above all, for the Caucasian Japhites. He chose to achieve this goal by linguistic means.³³

³⁰M. A. Poltorackaja, for example, states (*op. cit.*, p. 6) that after 1930, Marr "rejected comparative analysis and replaced it with four-element paleontological analysis." As a matter of fact, Marr never submitted his work to the rigor of a genuine comparative analysis, so that he had nothing to "reject."

³¹"O roli antimarksistskoj teorii proiskhozhdenija jazyka v obshchej sisteme vzgljadov N. Ja. Marra," *Protiv*, I, 47.

³²As, for instance, he is treated by C. A. Manning, *opera cit.*

³³V. M. Zhirmunskij, "Lingvisticheskaja paleontologija N. Ja. Marra i istorija jazyka," *Protiv*, II, 178-9, characterizes Marr as a "romantic nationalist." This is an accurate evaluation. It explains Marr's constant references, dating from the beginning of his scholarly career, to Indo-Europeanists (and the Indo-Europeans) as "imperialists," "usurpers" and pretenders to a cultural tradition which really (according to him) be-

The reader may well wonder, in the face of what has been said above, how it could be that Marr was appointed Ordinary Professor in 1902, elected Adjunct to the Academy of Sciences in 1909 (and Academician in 1912) and made Dean of the Faculty of Eastern languages in 1911. The unfortunate fact is that Marr's concentration on linguistics after the Revolution, and the notoriety his theories have acquired, have quite effectively obscured his excellent, non-linguistic, prerevolutionary achievements. These achievements were gained in the fields of philology (I am using this term to mean the collection, collation, exegesis, editing and publication of literary monuments), and archeology. As a matter of fact, in point of quantity Marr devoted more time, before the Revolution, to these fields than he did to linguistics. It was for his achievements in philology (particularly in medieval Armenian literature) and archeology (he did an immense amount of work in the excavation of Ani—the ancient capital of Armenia), that he was elected to the Academy of Sciences. The memorandum recommending him for election to the Academy is extremely revealing; rather more than two pages recite his accomplishments in philology and archeology; three and one-half (extremely noncommittal) lines are devoted to his linguistic work.³⁴

The problem of assessing the influence of Marxism upon Marr has also been obscured by a number of factors. The most important single cause was the terms under which Marrism was discussed in 1950. What was debated in that controversy was, ostensibly, the problem of what a Marxist linguistics should consist of and whether Marrism satisfied the requirements of a Marxist linguistics. Consequently, Marr's total linguistic production was discussed, *as a unit*, from the point of view of Marxism. As a result, many scholars have adopted the same static point of view, and have neglected the *development* of Marr's theories and the history of the addition of Marxism to them. Another contributing factor has been the fact that Marr's theories *were* revolutionary—and there has been a tendency to equate “revolutionary” and “Marxist.” But Marr's rebellion against the compara-

longed to the Japhites. Marr did not change his views on becoming a “Marxist.” Even though he was later to speak of the union of all languages into a future, single, world-wide language, it is important to note that he always insisted that the linguistic heritage of no individual language be neglected in the formation of this future world language. “Obshchij kurs uchenija ob jazyke,” *IR*, II, 27. There is even reason to assume that he took Stalin's formula of cultures “national in form, socialist in content” at face value.

³⁴See *IAN*, Series VI (1909), 723. What we have said concerning Marr's philological work refers only to work done before the Revolution. After the Revolution Marrist philology followed in the footsteps of Japhetidology. For one judgment of this later work, see F. Novotný, “Homer ve světle jafetidologie,” *Listy Filologické*, LVIII (1931), 101-14.

tive method cannot be equated with Marxism, especially inasmuch as it is a well-known fact that Marr knew no Marxism before the Revolution. Furthermore, Marr's early, and apparently unequivocal, adherence to the regime is also not to be confused with an adoption of Marxist principles. The latter entered Marr's thinking gradually and, as I hope to show, his adherence to them was caused by the pressure of events.

In the early 1920's there were very few elements in Marr's theories that could be called Marxist. In the field of semantics one might call attention to Marr's excessive fondness for polarization of meaning (the development, out of one meaning, of its opposite) and for functional semantics (change of meaning by virtue of change in function of the designatum) in his construction of his prehistoric "semantic nests." But the idea of proceeding by dichotomy is not an exclusively Marxist one, and Marr's functional semantics could just as well have derived from crude sociologizing. The only definite sign of Marxist influence is his assertion in 1923 that Indo-European languages were a transformation of Japhetic languages contingent upon the use of metals in production (this is one of the first harbingers, incidentally, of his later theory of the superstructural nature of language).

This point of view is consonant with Marr's own statements concerning the Marxism in his theory. In 1924 he maintained that Japhetidology had developed on the basis of linguistic facts alone—not on the basis of Marxism—" . . . and if it has theses which affirm Marxist theory . . . then all the better for it and all the worse for its opponents . . . " ³⁵ And in 1925 he stated that the Japhetic theory "unexpectedly" turned out to be an affirmation of historical materialism. ³⁶ These can hardly be the assertions of a man who claimed to be a Marxist. Moreover, even these statements appear to have been designed for their audience. Professor Unbegaun has recently reported that when Marr was in Paris in 1927, he told him "Marxists regard my theories as Marxist: so much the better for Marxism." ³⁷

In 1926 there occurred, however, the first of those events which were to bring Marr to the study of Marxism. In Marrist circles it came to be known as the "internal fraction" (*raskol*) within the ranks of the Japhetidologists. ³⁸ A group of young Marrists were

³⁵"Osnovnye dostizhenija jafeticheskoi teorii," *IR*, I, 199.

³⁶"Chuvashi—jafetidy na Volge," *IR*, V, 328.

³⁷"Some Recent Studies in the History of the Russian Language," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, V, 117, Note.

³⁸Mikhankova, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-90. This internal disagreement was the more dangerous in that it followed upon the disintegration of a special "committee on numerals" which Marr had formed in an attempt at cooperation with the comparativists. They simply

willing to concede that Marr's was a materialistic linguistics but they were not willing to call it Marxist.³⁹ This attitude on the part of his own followers caused Marr to take stock of the situation. According to Mikhankova,⁴⁰ we begin encountering frequent references to the Marxist classics in Marr's work beginning with 1926. Her assertion matches with a statement Marr made to B. L. Bogaevskij in 1927, to the effect that he had "babbled" so much about Marxism that it had now become necessary to study and assimilate it.⁴¹

There were other reasons as well for Marr to take up the study of Marxism. Comparativists continued to oppose him, some of them even in print. Among such "bourgeois" linguists the Marrists included Bogorodickij, Brim, Bubrikh, Bulakhovskij, Durnovo, Freiman, Jushmanov, Karskij, Larin, Peterson, Peshkovskij, Vinogradov, Voloshinov, Ushakov, Shcherba, and others.⁴² Perhaps the most outspoken of Marr's critics was E. D. Polivanov. He voiced an uncompromising objection to Marr's theories in a series of articles published during the 1920's.⁴³ In these articles he also vainly tried to establish certain elementary facts: that the comparative method was not exclusively interested in Indo-European languages, that imperialism often promoted (rather than destroyed) an interest in unwritten languages, that, although a Marxist linguistics ought to be formulated, it would not do to reject the entire bourgeois heritage (especially the facts unearthed by bourgeois science)—particularly since the comparativists' formulae were essentially apolitical; that language was not exclusively a class phenomenon, and that a little knowledge of linguistic method (in addition to loyalty to the regime) was a necessary prerequisite for scholarship. In short, he unsuccessfully tried to gain acceptance for roughly the same principles that Stalin so successfully put forth in 1950. In 1929, during one of Marr's numerous journeys abroad, Polivanov delivered a speech against Japhetidology in the Communist Academy in Moscow. I have been unable to locate any published version of the speech, but it must have been a severe denunciation if one is to judge from the concluding

did not "talk the same language" as Marr, to quote Mikhankova, p. 387. In the group on numerals were such linguists as A. N. Samojlovich, N. S. Derzhavin, M. G. Dolobko, N. P. Poppe, L. P. Jakubinskij, and V. B. Tomashevskij. Cf. *Izvestija CIK*, No. 34 (2417) (April 12, 1925), 2.

³⁹I have based this statement on information received from Professor Poppe.

⁴⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 476.

⁴¹Reported in *Problemy istorii dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv*, No. 3/4 (1935), 165.

⁴²See V. Aptekar', "Na zabytom uchastke teoreticheskogo fronta," part 2, in *Literatura i iskusstvo*, II (1930), 132-3, and V. Aptekar' and S. Bykovskij, "Sovremennoe polozhenie na lingvisticheskom fronte i ocherednye zadachi marksistov-jazykovedov," *Izvestija GAIMK*, X, No. 8/9 (1931), 14.

⁴³Published in book form in 1931, under the title *Za marksistskoe jazykoznanie*.

remarks of the Marxist critic, V. M. Friche, who presided at the meeting and who was supporter of Marr's views. He stated that it was not a criticism but a "defamation" of the Japhetic theory and that it was directed "against a scholar who is one of the most valuable and active companions-in-arms of the Soviet Government and the Communist Party in the work of reorganizing science on a new basis."⁴⁴ The Marrists afterward referred to the event as the beginning of the end of "Polivanovism," that is, of the active opposition of traditional comparativists.

But Marr was to face an even more serious challenge. It came in the form of the establishment in 1930 of a group of young linguists that called itself "The Linguistic Front" (*Jazykfront*). The initial members of the group were I. Abaev, K. Alaverdov, S. Belevickij, M. Gus, G. Danilov, È. Drezen, E. Komshilova, F. Kure, T. Lomtev and Ja. Loja.⁴⁵ There is evidence for the inclusion of at least four later adherents: Dobrovol'skij, Del'skij, Nikiforov, and Vol'fson (an economist).⁴⁶ Danilov was the leader of the group,⁴⁷ and he, Loja, and Lomtev appear to have been its principal theoreticians.⁴⁸ Since the Linguistic Front was composed largely of young linguists, some of them members of the Communist Party (e. g., Danilov and Loja),⁴⁹ the taint of bourgeois comparativism was not so strongly attached to them (although the charge was made by the Marrists—and it was quickly pointed out that Danilov was a student of Polivanov).

In its initial manifesto, the group announced the path it was to follow: it was to wage war against the "idealism," "formalism" and "eclecticism" of the Indo-European school, on the one hand, and against "mechanistic" tendencies in Japhetidology, on the other. Victory over both the one and the other was to be the necessary prerequisite to the formulation of a truly Marxist linguistics.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁴Quoted in V. Aptekar' and S. Bykovskij, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁵They were all signatories to the Linguistic Front manifesto, pub. in *Literatura i iskusstvo*, No. 1 (1930), p. 3 of cover.

⁴⁶Cf. *Russkij jazyk v sovetskoj shkole*, No. 1 (1931), 173.

⁴⁷Cf. Aptekar' and Bykovskij, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, and F. Filin, "Bor'ba za marksistsko-leninskoe jazykoznanie i gruppa 'Jazykfront'," in *Protiv burzhuaznoj kontrabandy v jazykoznanii* (= *Obrazovatel'naja biblioteka GAIMK*, No. 7), p. 32.

⁴⁸Loja had attacked Japhetidology even earlier, under the pseudonym of "The Linguist" (*Jazykoved*). Cf. Aptekar' and Bykovskij, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁴⁹See N. Ja. Zolotov, "Protiv burzhuaznoj kontrabandy v jazykoznanii," in *Protiv burzhuaznoj kontrabandy v jazykoznanii*, p. 9.

⁵⁰This general statement was followed by a ten-point platform of immediate goals: 1) the working out of the main questions of linguistic science on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, with special attention to the problems of the Soviet era, 2) a systematic study of the languages of the USSR, in keeping with the general demands of socialist construction, 3) constant emphasis upon contemporary linguistic problems, 4) a thorough study of the language of the proletariat and of the *kolkhoz*, 5) active cooperation in the use of

adoption of a middle ground was to be both a source of strength and a fatal weakness.

A lively discussion followed, which continued through 1930-1931 with reverberations lasting into 1932. It was not confined to linguistic publications, but overflowed into popular journals and public discussions. The members of the Linguistic Front argued that a materialistic linguistics could and must be created—that it should consist of the Marxist classics, certain elements of Japhetidology, and the factual material and positive results of the Indo-European comparativist heritage.⁵¹ In their opinion, it was too early to speak of Marr's Marxism: they considered his theory of the magical origin of language, as well as his theory of the class nature of language, as being definitely un-Marxist. They also argued that Japhetidology contained many "mechanistic" elements: four-element analysis, a schematized view of linguistic development that had no concrete correlates (Marr's "stages"), and the attempt to link language directly to the economic process (Marr quickly countered this reproach by inserting "stages in the thought-process" between language and the economy). They pointed out, quite justly, that Marr actually ignored attested historical events in the history of language. Further, they claimed that Japhetidology was interested in the remote past and remote future and neglected contemporary problems, and that it was characterized by a lack of self-criticism and idolatry of its leader.⁵²

During its brief existence, the Linguistic Front was able to reveal a number of failings in Japhetidological theory. It also forced to the

language in socialist construction, particularly in the development of national cultures, 6) strengthening of the role of Marxist theory in the solution of normative questions in linguistics, 7) a Marxist reworking of the methodology of language teaching. 8) setting up a five-year-plan goal for a series of Marxist works on the theory, history and practice of language, 9) close cooperation with Marxists in other fields, 10) the maintenance of an attitude of self-criticism. *Literature i iskusstvo*, No. 1 (1930) p. 3 of cover. Points three, four, and ten were aimed directly at Japhetidology; most of the other points were offered in competition with Japhetidology.

⁵¹It is interesting to note that this insistence, on the part of Indo-Europeanists and members of the Linguistic Front, that the factual constructs of comparativism be preserved, led to a change of Marr's point of view concerning linguistic "facts." Whereas he had always insisted that his theory was built on facts and facts alone, he now began to stress the point of view that facts, without a proper *theoretical* orientation, were useless. Cf. his "K voprosu ob istoricheskom processe v osveshchenii jafeticheskoi teorii," *IR*, III, 155, and Mikhankova, *op. cit.*, 494, Note 1.

⁵²See G. Danilov, "Lingvistika i sovremennost'," *Literatura i Marksizm*, No. 3 (1930), 70-91, T. Lomtev, "Ocherednye zadachi marksistskoj lingvistiki," *Russkij jazyk v sovetskoj shkole*, No. 5 (1931), 151-60, and the report of the discussion which took place in the Section for a Materialistic Linguistics in the Institute of Literature, Art and Language of the Communist Academy (Oct., Nov., Dec., 1930) published in *Russkij jazyk v sovetskoj shkole*, No. 1, (1931), 172-4.

surface certain differences of opinion among Japhetidologists. As late as 1928, Meshchaninov could write a popular article which described Japhetidology as a linguistic theory which had developed on the basis of factual investigation.⁵³ By 1929, this was not enough. Aptekar' insisted that Japhetidology was ". . . passing from 'elemental' materialism and dialectics to a conscious application of materialistic dialectics . . . and is transforming itself into Marxist linguistics . . ." ⁵⁴ By 1932, Filin was confessing that Japhetidology had not been able to "reconstruct" itself, in either theory or practice, quickly enough to satisfy the new conditions. There had been a delay in rejecting "Marrism"—the tendency of some workers to oppose the Japhetic theory to Marxism and to refuse to study the latter. Moreover, Japhetidology had neglected contemporary problems, particularly problems of pedagogy.⁵⁵ What is even more important is that the controversy forced Marr himself to acknowledge error on two counts—the excessively "mechanistic" techniques of Japhetidology (although here he tried to shift a large share of the blame to his students), and the Japhetidological definition of "class," which was found to be non-Marxist (in connection with the latter he blandly stated that he had not meant a Marxist "class" at all).⁵⁶

The Linguistic Front went down to defeat for a number of reasons. Their insistence that the facts discovered by the older comparative method be preserved of course left them open to the charge that they were defenders and tools of the Indo-Europeanists—a charge that was leveled at them from every side. Furthermore, since the group was composed largely of young linguists, they were accused of merely putting forth slogans without the essential "production"—a charge they, in part, admitted.⁵⁷ Some of the leaders of the group made errors in Marxist doctrine.⁵⁸ But perhaps the greatest effect upon the fortunes of the Linguistic Front was exerted by its middle-ground position. Its members were reminded that "Japhetidology

⁵³I. I. Meshchaninov, "O jafeticheskoi teorii," *Novyy Vostok*, No. 23/24 (1928), p. 313.

⁵⁴V. Aptekar', "Shag nazad," *Novyy Vostok*, No. 26/27 (1929), 265.

⁵⁵F. Filin, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁶N. Ja. Marr, *K bakijskoj diskussii o jafetidologii i marksizme* (Baku, 1932), pp. 37-39. A goodly number of other objections to Marr's theories, including the labeling of some of them as non-Marxist, may be found in the report of the discussion in the Communist Academy, cf. Note 52, above, and in I. I. Meshchaninov, *Jafetidologija i Marksizm* (Baku, 1930), pp. 38-67. This booklet contains a speech which Meshchaninov delivered before the Scientific Research Association of Marxists of the Azerbaidzhan State Scientific Research Institute in October, 1929, and a stenographic report of the discussion which followed.

⁵⁷Cf. T. Lomtev, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁵⁸Cf., e.g., B. Aptekar' and S. Bykovskij, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41, where they accuse Danilov of "great-power chauvinism."

never took up any intermediary positions,"⁵⁹ and that it had always been a dedicated enemy of everything which was bourgeois. Here, of course, they themselves had committed a tactical error in admitting many achievements for Japhetidology, and in admitting its priority.⁶⁰ They were immediately maneuvered into a position where *constructive* criticism and cooperation was demanded of them. It was made clear, for example, that the existence of a separate linguistic grouping was of no interest to the directors of the Communist Academy: what was necessary was the consolidation of forces in order to deal a death blow to comparativism, correct the errors in Marr's theories, and work out a Marxist-Leninist science of linguistics.⁶¹ And—one final reason for defeat—Marr had taken to the field before them.

This all-too-short survey of the linguistic controversies of the 1920's and early 1930's⁶² was given to show that Marr and his followers had ample reason for undertaking a more serious study of the Marxist classics. It was not until 1928 that Marr began publishing works containing a rather more extensive attempt to graft Marxism to his theory; and it was not until about this time that the Marrists began publishing symposia dedicated to theoretical problems, as well as collections of excerpts from the classics of Marxism concerning language.⁶³

Whether those Marxist principles which eventually found their way into Japhetidology were genuinely Marxist (as Marrists always insisted up to the controversy of 1950), or whether they were derived from Pokrovskij (as Soviet scholars are now insisting), or whether they were, in large measure, sheer sloganeering (as Soviet scholars have also insisted recently), is a question we may safely leave to the decision of specialists in Marxism. But it is interesting to note that both Stalin and Chikobava in effect reduce his Marxism to one great principle—that of language conceived as superstructure.⁶⁴ It is also interesting to note that certain Marxist linguists outside the Soviet Union never did acknowledge either Marr's theory or its Marxism.⁶⁵

⁵⁹N. Ja. Zolotov, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁶⁰Cf., e. g., T. Lomtev, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-3, and G. Danilov, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

⁶¹Cf. the "Khronika" section of *Russkij jazyk v sovetskoj shkole*, No. 5 (1931), 176.

⁶²The Linguistic Front, in particular, deserves a special study which would be impossible within the limits of this article. Such a study would contribute new evidence to what we know of the doctrinal polemics of the 1920's and 1930's. But what we have said here should be enough to show that Ellis and Davies (*op. cit.*, pp. 217-8) have greatly underestimated its role.

⁶³Cf., e.g., *Jazykovedenie i materializm*, ed. by N. Marr (M.-L., 1931), and *Marks, Èngels', Lenin i Stalin o problemakh jazyka i myshlenija*, Vyp. 75 of *Izvestija GAIMK*, (1933).

⁶⁴See Murra, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 72.

⁶⁵E.g., A. Sauvageot, "Linguistique et marxisme," *A la lumière du marxisme*, I (1935),

These considerations have been offered not in order to deny the presence of Marxism in Japhetidology but in order to demonstrate the fact that it was grafted to Marr's own theories, that this grafting took place rather late, and that it came about as a result of Marr's adaptation to the requirements of the moment. As it became increasingly more evident that only a Marxist theory could survive in the Soviet Union, Marr became a Marxist. Hence the *ad hoc* and even opportunistic quality of that Marxism. It therefore cannot be said that Marr adopted the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic "after devoted study, about 1924" and that, from that moment, "the Japhetic theory assumes its final expression."⁶⁶ Moreover, Marr's "Marxism" cannot have been the most important reason for his success. There were far more cogent ones, to a consideration of which we must now turn.

In assessing the underlying causes of the victory of Japhetidology, one must draw attention, first of all, to the person of Marr. It must be remembered that he had a personal linguistic theory already before the Revolution and that that theory was well-nigh totally ostracized from any serious discussion. The author of the theory bore this ostracism unwillingly, although he did channel much of his energies into the fields of archeology and philology. With the coming of the war and the subsequent revolution, this ostracism could not long be continued with its former force, and Marr reacted by directing more and more of his energies to linguistics. There is apparently no doubt that he greeted the Revolution enthusiastically. There is certainly no question that he cooperated with the regime to the limit of his abilities.

It was now that his abnormally phenomenal capacity for work stood him in good stead. He was able to maintain a feverish pace in his scholarly activities and at the same time participate in numerous commissions, councils, and organizational committees, hold various directorships and editorships, and conduct a never-flagging propaganda campaign for his theory. Even an incomplete listing of his activities and posts constitutes an impressive catalogue. In 1919 he was instrumental in forming the State Academy for the History of Material Culture (transformed from the pre-Soviet Imperial Russian

163, 167, and M. Schlauch, "Recent Soviet Studies in Linguistics," *Science and Society*, I, No. 2 (1937), 162-5. The Swedish Marxist, Hannes Sköld, is also reported to have attacked Marr in his *Zur Verwandtschaftslehre: die kaukasische Mode* (Lund, 1929). This work appears to be unavailable in America.

⁶⁶Both quotations are from W. K. Matthews, "The Japhetic Theory," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XXVIII, No. 68, 183.

Archeological Commission), and remained its president until his death. In 1921 he formed the Japhetic Institute (later renamed the Institute of Language and Thought). He took part in the reorganization of a number of schools of higher education—for example, of the Faculty of Petrograd University. At the first All-Union Conference in 1923 he was elected Chairman of the Section of Scientists within the Union of Workers in Education. The same honor was conferred on him at the second and third All-Union Conferences. From 1925 on he was the Director of the Institute of Peoples of the Orient. In 1929 he was elected a member of the Communist Academy, and of the White-Russian Academy of Sciences.⁶⁷ In 1930 he was elected Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences and took an active part in its reorganization.⁶⁸ His political advancement proceeded at the same pace: in 1928 he received the Lenin Prize; in 1929 he was elected candidate to the Central Executive Committee, in 1930 he entered the Communist Party, in 1931 he became a member of the All-Union Central Executive Committee, in 1933, he received the Order of Lenin.⁶⁹

In the midst of all these duties (and we must emphasize again that this is only a partial list), he found time for several trips abroad and for numerous journeys to the most out-of-the-way spots in the Soviet Union (at all of which he unfailingly gave speeches publicizing Japhetidology). His students and co-workers were pressed into service and they also traveled about the country propagandizing the “new” linguistics. These efforts were intensified during the ideological conflicts of 1929-1930.⁷⁰

It is obvious that in this aspect of his work Marr and the regime were made for each other. The regime, in its drive for “planning” and the progressive regimentation of academic life could use an ally who came to it from that life; Marr, on the other hand, was happy to use state support for his own purposes—the propagation of Japhetidology.

Another important factor contributing to Marr’s success was the intellectual climate of the time. It was a period of transvaluations and of novelties which had not yet been transformed into instru-

⁶⁷Cf. *Problemy istorii dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv*, No. 3/4 (1935), *passim*. This issue of *PIDO* is extremely useful to the biographer of Marr; it was a special issue dedicated to his memory and contains many reminiscences, necrologies and decrees as well as a reproduction of scores of articles and notices which appeared in various journals, magazines and newspapers at the time of his death.

⁶⁸G. A. Knjazez, *Kratkij ocherk istorii Akademii nauk SSSR*, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁹See Note 67, above.

⁷⁰Cf. L. G. Bashindzhagjan, “Institut jazyka i myshlenija im. N. Ja. Marra,” *Vestnik AN*, No. 10/11 (1937), 262.

ments of oppression. Many people were genuinely in search of a Marxist basis for their disciplines; the actions of the regime, particularly after 1929, merely made that search more pressing and more imperative. Here again Marr's past was useful. Even though he had known nothing of Marxism, his past *was* revolutionary and his linguistic theories, despite their bizarre nature, were definitely not "bourgeois" comparativism. It was, perhaps, for this reason (as well as for his active cooperation) that such politically powerful figures as Lunacharskij⁷¹ (then Commissar of National Education), Pokrovskij⁷² (Vice-Commissar of National Education) and V. M. Friche, a Marxist literary critic (see text, above), gave him their early support and extolled his virtues, including his "elemental" Communism. It must be noted, however, that both Pokrovskij and Friche attempted to do roughly the same sort of thing in their disciplines as Marr did in his—and they may have exercised some influence over him.

But perhaps Marr's greatest reason for success was Stalin's support on a point of doctrine. Curiously enough, it was a point of doctrine which, until 1930, was not in the Communist codex—the theory of the eventual fusion of the world's languages into one universal language. Since Stalin's views on the matter underwent a certain development (although he, of course, denied any development), and since the problem has a considerable intrinsic interest, we shall deal with it in some detail.⁷³

On May 18, 1925, Stalin gave an address "On the Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the Orient" before a student gathering of the Communist University of the Workers of the Orient (KUTV) in Moscow.⁷⁴ Regarding the question of national languages, Stalin stated:

Certain persons (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language in the period of socialism and the dying away of all other languages. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now the situation has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages: for, by stirring up

⁷¹A. Lunacharskij, "Materializm i filologija," *Izvestija CIK*, No. 34 (2417) (April 12, 1925).

⁷²M. Pokrovskij, "N. Ja. Marr," *Izvestija CIK*, No. 118 (3352) (May 23, 1928).

⁷³I owe an expression of gratitude to Professor N. Poppe, who pointed out to me the initial stage of the evolution of Stalin's views in this matter.

⁷⁴"O politicheskikh zadachakh Universiteta narodov Vostoka," *Sochinenija*, VII (1947), 133-52. The quotation from this speech which follows is taken from J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (International Publishers, 1942), p. 196. This English translation does not contain the whole text of Stalin's speech, but it does have all the material essential to us.

the profound depths of humanity and by pushing them into the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that old tsarist Russia consisted of no less than fifty nationalities and ethnic groups? However, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on the scene, the October Revolution gave them new life and a new development.

Now, it seems quite clear from the above quotation that Kautsky was offered as only *one* of several people to speak of a universal language "in the period of socialism." It is noteworthy that Stalin did not qualify the concept "period of socialism." It could hardly be true that he was thinking of socialism within one country, in view of the adjective "universal" and the phrase concerning "the dying away of all other languages." Further, it is clear that Stalin had no interest in a "single, all-embracing language." Thus in 1925.

In 1930, however, in his address before the Sixteenth Party Congress, Stalin expressed a far different point of view. In his struggle against "Great-Russian chauvinism" he expressed the idea that, after the victory of socialism, national languages would be transferred into "a single, general language." Unfortunately, certain comrades had taken this to mean that national cultures and languages were to disappear with the limits of *one* state, before the victory of socialism on a world scale. In following this point of view they had fallen into the same error as Kautsky who had predicted a single, general, German language after the victory of a proletarian revolution in a united Austro-German state.⁷⁵ In his closing arguments (following his address) Stalin turned his attention to a number of questions which had been aroused by his speech. Some of the delegates apparently found his speech of 1930 to be at variance with the statement he had made concerning this question in 1925 and asked for elucidation. By way of elucidation, Stalin insisted that there was no contradiction but simply confusion in the minds of those comrades who thought they saw a contradiction. He claimed that in his speech of 1925 he had not objected to the concept of a single universal language after the victory of socialism *on a world scale* but, rather, was simply objecting to Kautsky's "national-chauvinistic concept of a single language after the victory of socialism in *one* country."⁷⁶

It seems to the present writer that any impartial observer would conclude that Stalin *did* change his mind between 1925 and 1930. To be sure, he did mention Kautsky in 1925, but only by way of

⁷⁵I. Stalin and L. Kaganovich, *Otchet central'nogo komiteta XVI s'ezdu VKP(b)* (1930), pp. 81-83.

⁷⁶I. Stalin and L. Kaganovich, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.

example, inasmuch as Stalin's further statements categorically deny the possibility of *any* universal language.⁷⁷

This, then, represents a curious case of doctrinal convergence between Japhetology and "Marxist" dogma. It may even be possible that it was more than a convergence and that Marr was instrumental in forming Stalin's views—inasmuch as Marr was speaking of a *future* single language in a "future, extra-class, extra-national, single, pan-human society" as early as 1924.⁷⁸ That the significance of Stalin's change of attitude was not lost on the Marrists and that they took it as a victory for their cause may be seen from the following Marxist statement (which refers to the above formulation before the Sixteenth Party Congress): "It became more than clear that *the methodology of the New Theory of Language is the methodology of dialectical materialism since it led to a deduction of such importance to us. It also became clear that the struggle with Indo-Europeanism, which N. Ja. Marr conducted—was not an accidental one, but one of profound principle, and that it was indissolubly linked with the proletarian revolution.*" (Italics are those of the original author).⁷⁹

To summarize: the Marr school maintained itself and won a victory over its foes because Marr was a consummate organizer, a skilful polemical tactician, and because he had a revolutionary doctrine (although not a Marxist one). It won out over the opposition because Marr enthusiastically greeted the new regime and worked

⁷⁷There is one further curious fact to be noted in connection with Stalin's attitude toward the hypothetical single language. In Stalin's *Sochinenija*, XI, 333-55, we have an article entitled "Nacional'nyj vopros i leninizm." A section of this article, "Budushchnost' nacij i nacional'nykh jazykov," pp. 341-9, is devoted to the problem discussed here. In it he expressed the same views as he did at the Sixteenth Party Congress. According to the date given at the end of the article, it was written March 18, 1929 (although not published until 1949) and, therefore, pre-dated the Sixteenth Party Congress by one year. But what is curious is the fact that the 1930 speech gave a rather garbled version of Stalin's views—so garbled that certain delegates had to be informed that Stalin was *not* contradicting his views of 1925. The article in question, however (which was presumably written *one year earlier*), gives a carefully constructed argument—one which wards against any misconstruing. Stalin quotes his statement of 1925 (which we have given in the text, above) and carefully points out that he was really only warring against Kautsky's conception (pp. 344-345). It seems unbelievable that Stalin would have put together a carefully reasoned statement in 1929 only to give a rather confusing one in 1930. In view of this circumstance, in view of the fact that this article, ostensibly written "in reply to comrades Meshkov, Koval'chuk, and others" (and, therefore, in reply to some sort of public demand) in 1929 was not published until 1949, and in view of the fact that the article contains, in embryo, Stalin's doctrine of "zonal languages" (pp. 348-9), which did not appear again, so far as I know, until 1950, I can only conclude that it is a spurious, late inclusion into Stalinist scripture. (Are Stalin's references to himself, in the third person, as "Stalin" further evidence in this direction?)

⁷⁸"Osnovnye dostizhenija jafeticheskoi teorii," *IR*, I, 216.

⁷⁹I. Kusik'jan, "Jafeticheskaja teorija i indoevropeizm," *Vsesojuznyj central'nyj komitet novogo alfavita*, *N. Ja. Marru*, p. 170.

diligently for it. And last, but by no means least, Marr won because Stalin became intrigued with his theory of a universal language “after the victory of socialism.” In any case, Marr’s “Marxism” and the specific content of his theories had very little to do with the matter.

When we turn our attention to an investigation of the causes which led to the fall from grace of the Marr school in 1950, we find that much less remains to be done. Ellis and Davies (in their article cited above) have provided us with a very thorough account of the controversy of 1950 and of the events leading up to it. Incidentally, they (and W. K. Matthews, also cited above) have been virtually the only investigators to point out that the controversy started long before 1950, and that in its initial phases it was dominated by the Marrists, who were seeking to re-establish their hegemony after a period of wartime laxity. What remains for me to do, therefore, is the comparatively easy task of slightly shifting the emphasis—occasioned by the fact that certain features of the controversy have become clearer with the passage of time. In addition, I must face the challenge of offering an explanation for the banishment of the Marr school, inasmuch as I have at the beginning of this paper rejected Ellis’ explanation in terms of which the Marr school was supposed to have been found wanting because it had not succeeded in carrying out practical tasks and because its theories were not in accord with the empirical facts.

Immediately after the war, all seemed to be well with the Marrists. An indication of this is Meshchaninov’s receipt of a Stalin prize of the first degree in 1946 (for his book *Sentence Elements and Parts of Speech*, published in 1945). Discussions which were held concerning Meshchaninov’s book and the problem of stadialism (as well as concerning the tasks confronting linguistics in the first postwar five-year plan) found the Marrists in general agreement on Meshchaninov’s version of the stadial theory—even though there was some disagreement concerning details. Moreover, apart from a few rather mildly-worded criticisms of the traditional linguists Vinokur, Chikobava and Obnorskij, there was no concerted attack upon comparativists.⁸⁰

⁸⁰For a report of these discussions, see *Izvestija AN*, Otdelenie literatury i jazyka (hereafter referred to as *Olija*), V, No. 6 (1946), 505-14, and *Olija*, VI, No. 3 (1947), 258-64.

Ellis and Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-5, consider these episodes as being the first postwar Marrist attempt at establishing a monopoly. This thesis could only be accepted with great reservations. As a matter of fact, the authors themselves are forced to admit (p. 225) that “. . . there was no specific attempt to secure the full domination of Marr’s teachings.” That the real Marrist offensive came somewhat later may be seen from two articles by Filin: in 1947, he still spoke favorably of such linguists as Peshkovskij, Bogorodickij, Bulakhovskij, Vinokur, and Peterson (“Nauka o russkom jazyke za tridcat’ let,”

During 1946 and 1947, however, a number of events occurred which were to make the Marrists far more conscious of ideological heresies. One of these was, of course, Zhdanov's famous inauguration of the "anti-cosmopolitan" trend. But there were also two others—and these, although of considerable importance in the field of linguistics, seem to have been missed by the commentators. One of them was the publication in 1947 of Vinogradov's book, *Russkij jazyk*, which, while still in manuscript, was given the Lomonosov Prize of the first degree by the Moscow State University and which was accepted as a textbook by the Ministry of Higher Education. The other was the granting of a First Stalin Prize in 1947 to Obnorskij for his nationalistic *Očerki po istorii russkogo literaturnogo jazyka starshego perioda* (1946).⁸¹ Traditional linguists had not received honors such as these since the inauguration of the Marr "school." Moreover, there could hardly be a book more in contradiction with Marxist theory than that of Obnorskij.

Taking their cue from Zhdanov, the Marrists began a more violent attack upon the comparativists in the second half of 1947 and the first half of 1948. This period must be singled out because, for the moment, the Marrists confined themselves to a denunciation of "cosmopolitan" trends and the tendency of some linguists to give too much credit to Western linguists. Shor and Chemodanov's introductory text, and Reformackij, Chikobava, and especially Vinogradov, were singled out for criticism.⁸² In keeping, however, with the new trend of emphasizing the native tradition in science, the Marrists did not attack any favorable references to nineteenth-century Russian linguists.

One facet of the attack deserves special mention. It was found that the *Bulletin* of the Section of Literature and Language had been extremely derelict in its duties; it had not reacted in any way to Party directives; it did not publish "lead" articles and, on the other hand, published too many articles on specialized subjects; and it had allowed such idealistic linguists as Kuryłowicz and Belić to appear on its

Olija, VI, No. 5, 411); in 1948, the only linguist worthy of note was Marr ("O dvukh napravlenijakh v jazykovedenii," *Olija*, VII, No. 6, 486-96).

⁸¹It is interesting that, although Obnorskij's book was mentioned in the earlier stages of debate (cf. *Olija* V, No. 6 (1946), 511, 514), and Filin gave it fulsome praise (cf. *Olija*, VI, No. 5 (1947), p. 413, including a favorable book review (*Vestnik LGU*, No. 10 (1947), 109-16), his name was never cited during the later, more violent controversies. In fact, time out was taken to honor him on his sixtieth birthday (*Olija*, VII, No. 6 (1948), 582-4). Receipt of the Stalin prize evidently put him beyond reach of the Marrists, even though the ideas he represented were very much under attack.

⁸²Cf. *Olija*, VII, No. 5 (1948), 466-8, *Vestnik AN*, No. 2 (1948), 113-8, and *Vestnik AN*, No. 10 (1948), pp. 120-1.

pages.⁸³ Inasmuch as the chief editor of the *Bulletin* was Meshchaninov, this attack can only mean that the Marrists themselves did not represent a unified group.⁸⁴

In the last months of 1948 and during 1949, the offensive took a more virulent turn. Emboldened by Lysenko's victory in August, 1948, the Marrists now attacked *all* deviations from the teachings of N. Ja. Marr, including those based on the scientific traditions of nineteenth-century Russia.⁸⁵ In trying to follow in Lysenko's footsteps, the Marrists were only conforming to logical reasoning. Lysenko emphasized environmental influence just as Marr had, and Lysenko's biological genes were abruptly modified by their environment just as Marr's linguistic "genes" (the four elements) had been. Marr had gone so far as to say that language and thought were so conditioned by the economic base that a change in the base would produce such a dramatic change in thought processes that " . . . new generations seem to be newcomers from another world in comparison with former generations . . . " ⁸⁶ Lysenko's theories agree very well with such a view.

The controversy (if one can bestow such a term on a debate in which only one side, the Marrist, was vocal) raged throughout 1949. It was carried on in learned journals, in the form of popular brochures, in discussions, and even overflowed into publicistic organs.⁸⁷ The Marrists deplored the fact that recent years had seen a revival (both openly and furtively) of the theory of proto-languages and an at-

⁸³Cf. *Olija*, VII, No. 5 (1948), 463-6, and *Vestnik AN*, No. 10 (1948), 123.

⁸⁴The leading role in most of the discussions was taken by Serdjuchenko, both in point of space devoted to his views and in point of the virulence of the attack. He was later joined, in his spearheading function, by Filin and Chemodanov. In view of the fact that criticism of the editorial board of the *Bulletin* was, above all, a criticism of Meshchaninov, and in view of the fact that in the subsequent discussions he always adopted a milder tone than his colleagues, one is forced to the conclusion that he was in the unhappy position of playing strawman to both sides.

⁸⁵That the Marrists were trying to capitalize on Lysenko's success may be seen from Meshchaninov's article "O polozhenii v lingvisticheskoj nauke" *Olija*, VII, No. 6 (1948), 473-85, Filin's article "O dvukh napravlenijakh v jazykovedenii, *Olija* VII, No. 6 (1948), 486-96, and the Resolution of the Council of the Institute of Language and Thought and the Leningrad section of the Institute of the Russian Language, taken on the 22nd of October, 1948, in the same journal, pp. 497-9.

⁸⁶"Jazyk i myshlenie," *IR*, III, 96.

⁸⁷Cf., e.g., Note 85, above, and *Olija*, VIII, No. 1 (1949), 85-92; No. 2, 168-73; No. 4, 289-320, 393-5; No. 5, 479-91, 493-5; No. 6, 497-521; *Izvestija AN*, No. 11 (1948), 71-74; No. 1 (1949), 11-22; No. 11, 18-41; No. 1 (1950), 134-5; No. 3, 44-57; *Russkij jazyk v shkole*, No. 1 (1949), 70-73; No. 2, 1-11; No. 3, 38-44; No. 5, 71; No. 6, 1-29; No. 2 (1950), 73-75; *Voprosy Filosofii*, No. 1 (1949), 265-85; No. 3, 326-37; *Pravda*, Sept. 14, 1949; Nov. 11, 1949; *Literaturnaja gazeta*, April 6, 1949; *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, May 11, 1949; and such brochures as I. I. Meshchaninov, *Novoe uchenie o jazyke*, Kiev (Radjans'ka shkola, 1949), and G. P. Serdjuchenko, *Roľ N. Ja. Marra v razvitii materialisticheskogo uchenija o jazyke*, Moscow (Izd. "Pravda," 1949).

tempt to reintroduce the comparative method. The latter tendency, they found, often seemed to be linked to an extolling of the virtues of such nineteenth-century linguists as Baudouin de Courtenay, Fortunatov, and Shakhmatov. Such inimical tendencies and influences must be banished from Soviet linguistics, and the development of the Marr heritage must be continued. That the Marrists hoped to campaign on the same basis as they had in 1930 is evidenced by occasional references they made to the "Linguistic Front" group.⁸⁸ They laid great emphasis on the fact that conditions were very bad on the linguistic "front"; students were studying outdated, comparativistic works and their studies all too often were in the hands of traditional linguists.⁸⁹ They accused each other of not having been "critical" enough to catch such contaminating influences in the bud.

The Marrists carried the field with virtually no opposition. Their victory was made complete by the publication of the Resolution of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of July 21, 1949.⁹⁰ The resolution demanded a complete adherence to the linguistic theories of N. Ja. Marr and projected a series of practical measures to attain this adherence. It remains to be explained why, when the officially sponsored discussion opened on the pages of *Pravda* in May, 1950, the Marrists went down to defeat.

To start with a secondary cause, they were defeated because they did not present a unified front. The oblique criticism of Meshchaninov, as editor of the *Bulletin*, degenerated to a point where the Marrists were freely criticizing one another either for relaxing their watchfulness in matters of theory or for attempting an eclectic compromise in their own work. This tactical error may be clearly seen in the discussion which took place on January 24-27, 1950, in commemoration of the eighty-fifth anniversary of Marr's birth and the fifteenth anniversary of his death. Since few traditional linguists were present

⁸⁸Cf. e.g., Filin, "O dvukh napravlenijakh . . .," *Olija*, VII, No. 6 (1949), 490.

⁸⁹Ellis and Davies, *op. cit.*, *passim*, were misled by this constant emphasis on the bad state of linguistics into assuming that this was the main reason for the fall of Marrism. But it is important to note that this charge was always brought by the *Marrists*, and it was brought against all the linguists who followed traditional practice. What the Marrists blamed each other for was the insufficient amount of "criticism and self-criticism" which had allowed comparativism to flourish. But that is another matter. In any case, to say that the Marrists had failed to "produce" is to oversimplify a bit; their theoretical orientation prevented them from doing much comparative and historical work, but they did produce a great deal of valuable work in descriptive linguistics (and were thus following a trend that has appeared in other countries as well). Cf., in this connection, N. N. Poppe, "Post-War Soviet Linguistics," *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the USSR*, II, No. 6, 49-56.

⁹⁰See *Olija*, No. 6 (1949), 497-501.

(and specialists in Russian were totally absent) the meeting at times gives one the impression of a family quarrel.⁹¹

But the greatest error committed by the Marrists consisted in their attempt to link the linguistic controversy to the controversy in biology and their demand that there be a return to the heritage of Marrism in its formulation of the early 1930's. As I have explained above, there was a certain logic in their view. The internationalistic doctrine of Marrism (and it was, essentially, an internationalistic theory) could flourish in 1930; Marr could deny the existence of proto-languages (in the comparativists' sense of the word), and of "racially pure" linguistic stocks; he could assert that language was totally dependent on the economic base and look hopefully forward to the day when the economic base would be a socialistic one and all the languages of the world would fuse into one great language. But the Soviet Union after World War II was a far different place from the Soviet Union of 1930. It was now a nationalistic state that was emphasizing the inherited and the traditional. In a certain sense, therefore, one could say that the death-knell of Marrism was struck already in 1946, when Obnorskij received his Stalin prize. In this atmosphere Lysenko's theories themselves were an anomaly.⁹² A by-product of the Marrists' attempt to put the discussion on a 1930 basis was their rejection of the traditions of Russian linguistic science. This, too, was impossible at a time when the continuity of Russian science was being stressed, and Russian "firsts" were being registered in every field of knowledge.

The Marrists were defeated, in short, not because their theories were suddenly found to be at variance with the facts, but because the Party-line had veered in a different direction and they were unable to follow it. Or, as a once-great theoretician in these matters was wont to put it, a formulation valid for one period of history is not necessarily valid for another.

⁹¹*Voprosy Filosofii*, No. 3 (1949), 326-337. A translation of this report may be found in Murra, et al., *The Soviet Linguistic Controversy*, pp. 1-9.

⁹²To be explained, perhaps, by an anachronism in Stalin's own reasoning, according to which what was no longer valid for nations and peoples was still valid for the birds and bees?