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MARXISM AND LINGUISTICS

by Joseph Stalin

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This booklet contains five letters by Joseph Stalin on the subject of language. All five were published in the summer of 1950 in reply to questions addressed specifically to Stalin by students in the field of linguistics. These letters were a part of a wide public discussion in the press and at conferences in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, which is still continuing.

The first reply, "Concerning Marxism in Linguistics," deals with the relationship of language to the activities of people and to social classes, and defines the characteristic features of language. It also criticizes the theories of the disciples of the late N. Y. Marr, a Soviet scholar whose ideas had long dominated the field of linguistics in the U.S.S.R.

The four other letters continue and develop Stalin's application of Marxism to the field of linguistics. In these, he takes up the relationship of language to consciousness, further evaluates Marr's work in linguistics, and discusses the question of national languages and the socialist state.

Appendices I and II contain excerpts from some of Stalin's earlier writings on language. Appendix I is a discussion of language and the national question which Stalin wrote in reply to a communication in 1929. It also quotes from a speech which he made at the University of the Peoples of the East in 1925. Appendix II is a brief selection from Stalin's remarks in reply to the debate on his report at the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1930.

As background material for American readers on the Soviet linguistics controversy, the editor has included as Appendix III a recent article on the subject by the noted philologist, Professor Margaret Schlauch, for many years on the faculty of New York University and now at the Universiy of Warsaw. Professor Schlauch has followed and taken part in the linguistics debate since the early 1930's. Her article summarizes Marr's theories, gives the history of the controversy, and points out its international significance.

I. CONCERNING MARXISM IN LINGUISTICS

A group of comrades of the younger generation have asked me to give my opinion in the press on questions relating to the science of language, particularly in reference to Marxism in linguistics. I am not a linguist and cannot of course satisfy these comrades fully. But as to Marxism in linguistics, as well as in other social sciences, this is a subject with which I have a direct connection. I have therefore consented to answer a number of questions put by these comrades.

QUESTION: *Is it true that language is a superstructure on the base?*

ANSWER: No, it is not true.

The base is the economic structure of society at a given stage of its development. The superstructure consists of the political, legal, religious, artistic, and philosophical views of society and the political, legal, and other institutions corresponding to them.

Every base has its own superstructure corresponding to it. The base of the feudal system has its superstructure—its political, legal, and other views and the corresponding institutions; the capitalist base has its own superstructure, and so has the socialist base. If the base changes or is eliminated, then following this its superstructure changes or is eliminated; if a new base arises, then following this a superstructure arises corresponding to it.

In this respect language radically differs from superstructure. Take, for example, Russian society and the Russian language. During the past thirty years the old, capitalist base was eliminated in Russia and a new, socialist base was built. Correspondingly, the superstructure on the capitalist base was eliminated and a new superstructure created corresponding to the socialist base. The old political, legal, and other institutions were consequently supplanted by new, socialist institutions. But in spite of this the Russian lan-

guage has remained essentially what is was before the October Revolution.

What has changed in the Russian language in this period? To a certain extent the vocabulary of the Russian language has changed, in the sense that it has been supplemented by a large number of new words and expressions, which have arisen in connection with the rise of a new socialist production, of a new state, a new socialist culture, a new public spirit and ethics, and lastly, in connection with the development of technology and science; a number of words and expressions have changed their meaning; a number of obsolete words have fallen out of the vocabulary. As to the basic vocabulary and grammatical structure of the Russian language, which constitute the foundation of the language, they, after the elimination of the capitalist base, far from having been eliminated and supplanted by a new basic vocabulary and a new grammatical system of the language, have been preserved in their entirety and have not undergone any serious changes—have been preserved precisely as the foundation of modern Russian.

Further, the superstructure is a product of the base; but this does not mean that it merely reflects the base, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its base, to the fate of the classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, no sooner does it arise than it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its base to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing everything it can to help the new system finish off and eliminate the old base and the old classes.

It cannot be otherwise. The base creates the superstructure precisely in order that it may serve it, that it may actively help it to take shape and consolidate itself, that it may actively strive for the elimination of the old, moribund base and its old superstructure. The superstructure has only to renounce its role of auxiliary, it has only to pass from a position of active defense of its base to one of indifference toward it, to adopt the same attitude to all classes, and it loses its virtue and ceases to be a superstructure.

In this respect language radically differs from superstructure. Language is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of

society and the history of bases throughout centuries. It was created not by any class, but by all society, by all the classes of society, by the efforts of hundreds of generations. It was created for the satisfaction of the needs not of only one class, but of all society, of all the classes of society. Precisely for this reason it was created as a single language for society, common to all members of that society, as the common language of its people. Hence the role of language as an auxiliary, as a means of intercourse between people, consists not in serving one class to the detriment of other classes, but in equally serving all society, all classes of society. This, in fact, explains why a language may equally serve both the old, moribund system and the new, nascent system; both the old base and the new base, both the exploiters and the exploited.

It is no secret to anyone that the Russian language served Russian capitalism and Russian bourgeois culture before the October Revolution just as well as it now serves the socialist system and the socialist culture of Russian society.

The same must be said of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian, Armenian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Tatar, Azerbaijan, Bashkir, Turkmen, and other languages of the Soviet nations; they served the old, bourgeois systems of these nations just as well as they serve the new, socialist system.

It could not be otherwise. Language exists, and it has been created precisely in order to serve society as a whole, as a means of intercourse between people, in order to be common to the members of society and the single language of society, serving members of society equally, irrespective of their class status. A language has only to depart from this position of being the common language of the people and to give preference and support to any one social group to the detriment of other social groups of that society, and it loses its virtue, ceases to be a means of intercourse between the people of that society, and becomes the jargon of some social group, degenerates, and is doomed to disappear.

In this respect, while it differs in principle from the superstructure, language does not differ from the implements of production, from machines, let us say, which may equally serve a capitalist system and a socialist system.

Further, the superstructure is the product of one epoch, an epoch in which the given economic base exists and operates. The superstructure is therefore short-lived; it is eliminated and disappears with the elimination and disappearance of the given base.

Language, on the contrary, is the product of a whole number of epochs, in the course of which it takes shape, is enriched, develops, and is polished. A language therefore exists immeasurably longer than any base or any superstructure. This in fact explains why the rise and disappearance not only of one base and its superstructure, but of several bases and their corresponding superstructures have not led in history to the elimination of a given language, to the elimination of its structure, and to the rise of a new language with a new vocabulary and a new grammatical system.

It is more than one hundred years since Pushkin died. In this period the feudal system and the capitalist system were eliminated in Russia, and the third, a socialist, system has arisen. Hence two bases, with their superstructures, have been eliminated, and a new, socialist base has arisen, with its new superstructure. Yet if we take the Russian language, for example, it has not in this great length of time undergone any fundamental change, and the modern Russian language differs very little in structure from the language of Pushkin.

What has changed in the Russian language in this period? In this period the Russian vocabulary has been much enlarged; a great number of obsolete words have dropped out of the vocabulary; the meaning of a large number of words has changed; the grammatical system of the language has improved. As to the general structure of Pushkin's language, with its grammatical system and its basic vocabulary, it has been preserved in all essentials as the basis of modern Russian.

And this is quite understandable. Indeed, what necessity is there, after every revolution, for the existing structure of the language, its grammatical construction and basic vocabulary to be destroyed and supplanted by new ones, as is usually the case with the superstructure? Who would benefit if "water," "earth," "mountain," "forest," "fish," "man," "to walk," "to do," "to produce," "to trade," etc., were called not water, earth, mountain, etc., but something

else? Who would benefit from the change of words in a language and the combination of words in sentences following not the existing, but some entirely different grammar? What would be the use to the revolution of such an upheaval in language? History, generally, never does anything of moment without some particular necessity. What, one asks, can be the necessity for such a language upheaval, when it is demonstrated that the existing language and its structure are fundamentally quite suitable for the needs of the new system? The old superstructure can and should be destroyed and replaced by a new one in the course of a few years, in order to give free scope for the development of the productive forces of society; but how can an existing language be destroyed and a new one built in its place in the course of a few years without causing anarchy in social life and without creating the threat of the collapse of society? Who but Don Quixotes could set themselves such a task?

Lastly, there is one other radical distinction between superstructure and language. The superstructure is not directly connected with production, with man's productive activity. It is connected with production only indirectly through the economy, through the base. The superstructure therefore does not reflect changes of development of the productive forces immediately and directly, but only after changes in the base, through the prism of changes wrought in the base by the changes in production. This means that the sphere of action of the superstructure is narrow and restricted.

Language, on the contrary, is connected with man's productive activity directly, and not only with man's productive activity, but with all his other activities in all spheres of work, from production to the base and from the base to the superstructure. That is why language reflects changes in production immediately and directly, without waiting for changes in the base. That is why the sphere of action of language, which embraces all spheres of man's activity, is far broader and more varied than the sphere of action of the superstructure. More, it is practically unlimited.

It is this which primarily explains why language, or rather its vocabulary, is in an almost constant state of change. The continuous

development of industry and agriculture, of trade and transport, of technology and science, demands that language should supplement its vocabulary with new words and expressions, needed for their operation. And language, directly reflecting these needs, does replenish its vocabulary with new words, and perfects its grammatical system.

Hence:

a) A Marxist cannot regard language as a superstructure on the base;

b) To confuse language and superstructure is a serious error.

QUESTION: *Is it true that language always was and is of a class character, that there is no such thing as a non-class language common and uniform to all the people of a society?*

ANSWER: No, it is not true.

It is not difficult to understand that in a society which has no classes there can be no such thing as a class language. There were no classes in the primitive communal clan system, and consequently there could be no class language—the language was then the common and single language of the whole collective body. The objection that the word class should be taken as covering every human collective, including the primitive communal collective, is not an objection but a play on words that is not worth refuting.

As to the subsequent development from clan languages to tribal languages, from tribal languages to the languages of nationalities, and from languages of nationalities to national languages—everywhere and at all stages of development, language, as a means of intercourse between the people of a society, was the common and single language of that society, serving its members equally, irrespective of their social standing.

I am not referring here to the empires of the slave and medieval periods, the empires of Cyrus or Alexander the Great, let us say, or of Caesar or of Charles the Great, which had no economic base of their own and were transitory and unstable military and administrative associations. These empires not only did not have, but they could not have a single language common to the whole empire

and understood by all the members of the empire. They were conglomerations of tribes and nationalities, each of which lived its own life and had its own language. Consequently, it is not these or similar empires I have in mind, but the tribes and nationalities forming part of an empire which had their own economic base and their own languages, formed in the distant past. History tells us that the languages of these tribes and nationalities were not class languages, but general languages of the people, common languages for tribes and nationalities, used and understood by all people.

Side by side with this, of course, there were dialects, vernaculars, but they were dominated by, and subordinated to the single and common language of the tribe or nationality.

Later, with the appearance of capitalism, the elimination of feudal division, and the formation of national markets, nationalities developed into nations, and the languages of nationalities into national languages. History tells us that the national languages are not class, but common languages, common to the members of each nation and constituting the single language of the nation.

It was said above that, as a means of intercourse between the people of a society, language serves all classes of that society equally, and in this respect displays what may be called an indifference to classes. But people, the individual social groups, the classes, are far from indifferent to language. They strive to utilize the language in their own interests, to impose their own special vocabulary, special terms, and special expressions upon it. The upper strata of the propertied classes, who are divorced from and detest the people —the aristocratic nobility, the upper strata of the bourgeoisie—particularly distinguished themselves in this respect. "Class" dialects, jargons, drawing-room "languages" are created. These dialects and jargons are often incorrectly referred to in literature as the "aristocratic language" or "bourgeois language" in contradistinction to "proletarian language" or "peasant language." For this reason, strange as it may seem, some of our comrades have come to the conclusion that national language is a fiction, and that in reality, only class languages exist.

There is nothing, I think, more erroneous than this conclusion. Can these dialects and jargons be regarded as languages? Certainly

not. They cannot, firstly, because these dialects and jargons have no grammatical system or basic vocabularies of their own—they borrow them from the national language. They cannot, secondly, because these dialects and jargons are confined to a narrow sphere of members of the upper strata of a given class and are entirely unsuitable as a means of intercourse for society as a whole. What, then, do they have? They have a collection of specific words reflecting the specific tastes of the aristocracy or the upper strata of the bourgeoisie; a certain number of expressions and turns of speech distinguished by refinement and gallantry, and free of the "coarse" expressions and turns of speech of the national language; lastly, a certain number of foreign words. However, the bulk, that is, the overwhelming majority, of the words and the grammatical system are borrowed from the common national language. Dialects and jargons are therefore offshoots of the common national language, possessing no linguistic independence of any kind and doomed to stagnation. Anyone who believes that dialects and jargons can develop into independent languages, that they are capable of ousting and supplanting the national language, has lost all sense of historical perspective and has abandoned the Marxist position.

References are made to Marx, and the passage from his article, *St. Max*,* is quoted where it is said that the bourgeois have "their own language," that this language "is a product of the bourgeoisie," that it is permeated with the spirit of mercantilism and sale and purchase. Certain comrades cite this passage with the idea of proving that Marx believes in the "class character" of language and denied the existence of a single national language. If these comrades were impartial, they should have cited another passage from this same article, *St. Max,* where Marx, touching on the way common national languages arose, speaks of "the concentration of dialects into a single national language as the result of economic and political concentration."

Marx, consequently, did recognize the necessity of a *single*

* The second section of the joint philosophical work by Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology,* of which only the first and third sections have been published in English. St. Max is a satirical reference to Max Stirner (1806-56), philosophical anarchist and author of *The Ego and His Own.*

national language, as the highest form, to which dialects, as lower forms, are subordinate.

What, then, can this bourgeois language be which, according to Marx, is "a product of the bourgeoisie"? Did Marx consider it as much a language as the national language, with its own specific linguistic structure? Could he have considered it such a language? Of course not. Marx merely wanted to say that the bourgeois had polluted the common national language with their huckster vocabulary, that the bourgeois, in other words, have their huckster jargon.

It thus appears that these comrades have misrepresented Marx. And they misrepresented him because they quoted Marx, not like Marxists, but like dogmatists, without delving into the essence of the matter.

References are made to Engels, and the words from his *Condition of the Working Class in England* are cited where he says that "the English working class has with the course of time become a different people from the English bourgeoisie," that "the working men speak a different dialect, have different ideas and concepts, different morals and moral principles, different religion and politics from the bourgeoisie." Certain comrades conclude from this passage that Engels denied the necessity for a common, national language, that he believed, consequently, in the "class character" of language. True, Engels speaks here of a dialect, not of a language, fully realizing that, being an offshoot of the national language, a dialect cannot supplant the national language. But these comrades, apparently, do not regard with sympathy the existence of a difference between language and dialect. . . .

It is obvious that the quotation is inappropriate, because Engels here speaks, not of "class languages" but chiefly of class ideas, concepts, morals, moral principles, religion, and politics. It is perfectly true that the ideas, concepts, morals, moral principles, religion, and politics of the bourgeois and proletarian are directly antithetic. But where does national language or the "class character" of language come in here? Can the existence of class contradictions in society serve as an argument in favor of the "class character" of language, or against the necessity of a common national language? Marxism

says that a common language is one of the most important earmarks of a nation, although knowing very well that there are class contradictions within the nation. Do the comrades referred to recognize this Marxist thesis?

References are made to Lafargue,* and it is said that in his pamphlet, *Language and Revolution,* he recognized the "class character" of language, and that he denied the necessity of a common, national language. This is not true. Lafargue does indeed speak of a "noble" or "aristocratic language" and of the "jargons" of various strata of society. But these comrades forget that Lafargue is not interested in the differences between languages and jargons and that, referring to dialects now as "artificial speech," now as "jargon," he definitely says in this pamphlet that "the artificial speech of the aristocracy . . . arose out of the common language of the people, which was spoken by bourgeois and artisan, town and country."

Consequently, Lafargue recognizes the existence and necessity of a common national language, and fully realizes that the "aristocratic language" and other dialects and jargons are subordinate to and dependent on a common national language.

It follows that the reference to Lafargue misses the mark.

References are made to the fact that at one time in England the feudal lords talked "for centuries" in French, while the English people spoke English, and this is alleged to be an argument in favor of the "class character" of language and against the necessity of a common national language. This is not an argument, it is more like a joke. Firstly, not all the feudal lords spoke French at that time, but only a small upper stratum of English feudal lords attached to the court and in the counties. Secondly, it was not some "class language" they spoke, but the ordinary national language of the French. Thirdly, we know that in the course of time this French language had disappeared without trace, yielding to the common national language of the English. Do these comrades think that the English feudal lords "for centuries" held intercourse with the English people through interpreters, that they did not use the

* Paul Lafargue (1842-1911), a member of the Paris Commune, Marx's son-in-law, and one of the founders of French socialism; author of many articles, pamphlets, and books popularizing Marxist ideas in various scientific fields.

English language, that there was no common national language of the English at that time, and that the French language in England was then anything more serious than a drawing-room language current only within the narrow circle of the upper English aristocracy? How can one possibly deny the existence and the necessity of a common national language on the basis of laughable "arguments" like this?

There was a time when Russian aristocrats also toyed with the French language at the tsar's court and in the drawing rooms. They prided themselves on the fact that when they spoke Russian they stumbled into French, that they could only speak Russian with a French accent. Does this mean that there was no common national Russian language at that time in Russia, that the common national language was a fiction, and the "class language" a reality?

Our comrades are here making at least two mistakes.

The first mistake is that they confuse language with superstructure. They think that since superstructure has a class character, language must be a class, and not a common, national, language. But I have already said that language and superstructure are two different concepts, and that a Marxist must not confuse them.

The second mistake of these comrades is that they conceive the opposing interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the fierce class struggle between them, as meaning the disintegration of society, as a break of all ties between the hostile classes. They believe that, since society has split and there is no longer a single society but only classes, a common language of society, a national language, is unnecessary. If society is split and there is no longer a common national language, what remains? There remain classes and "class languages." Naturally, every "class language" will have its "class" grammar—a "proletarian" grammar or a "bourgeois" grammar. True, such grammars do not exist in nature. But this does not worry these comrades; they believe that such grammars will appear in due course.

There used to be "Marxists" in our country who asserted that the railways left to us after the October Revolution were bourgeois railways, that it would be unseemly for us, Marxists, to utilize them, that they should be torn up and new, "proletarian" railways

be built. For this they were nicknamed "troglodytes." . . .

It is obvious that such a primitive anarchist view of society, classes, and language has nothing in common with Marxism. But it undoubtedly exists and continues to prevail in the minds of certain of our muddled comrades.

It is of course wrong to say that because of the existence of a fierce class struggle society has split into classes which are no longer economically connected one with another in one society. On the contrary, as long as capitalism exists, the bourgeois and proletarians will be bound together by every economic thread as parts of one capitalist society. The bourgeois cannot live and grow rich unless they have hired laborers; the proletarians cannot exist unless they hire themselves to the capitalists. If the economic ties between them were to cease, it would mean the entire cessation of production, and the entire cessation of production would mean the doom of society, and the doom of the classes themselves. Naturally, no class wants to incur self-destruction. Consequently, however sharp the class struggle may be, it cannot lead to the disintegration of society. Only ignorance of Marxism and complete failure to understand the nature of language could have suggested to some of our comrades the fairy tale about the disintegration of society, "class" languages, and "class" grammars.

Reference is further made to Lenin, and it is said that Lenin recognized the existence of two cultures under capitalism, bourgeois and proletarian, and that the slogan of national culture under capitalism is a nationalist slogan. All this is true, and Lenin is absolutely right in this. But where does the "class character" of language come in? When these comrades refer to what Lenin said about two cultures under capitalism, it is evidently with the idea of suggesting to the reader that the existence of two cultures, bourgeois and proletarian, in society means that there must also be two languages, inasmuch as language is linked with culture and, consequently, that Lenin denies the necessity of a common national language, and consequently, that Lenin believes in "class" languages. The mistake of these comrades is that they identify and confuse language with culture. But culture and language are two different things. Culture may be either bourgeois or socialist, but

language, as a means of intercourse, is always a common national language and can serve both bourgeois and socialist culture. Is it not a fact that the Russian, Ukrainian, and Uzbek languages are now serving the socialist culture of these nations just as well as they served their bourgeois cultures before the October Revolution? Consequently, these comrades are profoundly mistaken when they assert that the existence of two different cultures leads to the formation of two different languages and to the negation of the necessity of a common language.

When Lenin spoke of two cultures, he proceeded precisely from the precept that the existence of two cultures cannot lead to the negation of a common language and the formation of two languages, that the language must be a common one. When the Bundists* accused Lenin of denying the necessity of a national language and regarding culture as "non-national," Lenin, as we know, vigorously protested and declared that he was fighting bourgeois culture and not a national language, the necessity for which he regarded as indisputable. It is strange that some of our comrades have followed in the footsteps of the Bundists.

As to a common language, the necessity of which Lenin allegedly denies, it would be well to pay attention to the following words of Lenin:

"Language is a most important means of human intercourse; a common language and its unhampered development is one of the most important conditions of really free and broad trade, commensurate with modern capitalism, of the free and broad grouping of the population in all the separate classes."

It follows that our respected comrades misrepresented the views of Lenin.

Reference, lastly, is made to Stalin. The passage from Stalin is quoted where he says that "the bourgeosie and its nationalist parties were and remain in this period the chief directing force of such

* Members of the General Jewish Labor League of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, formed in 1897 and known by the abbreviated name, Bund (union). The Bund joined the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party when it was formed in 1898. Active mainly among Jewish workers and artisans, it was closely allied with the Menshevik (reformist) trend in the Russian socialist movement.

nations." This is all true. The bourgeoisie and its nationalist party really do direct bourgeois culture, just as the proletariat and its internationalist party direct proletarian culture. But where does the "class character" of the language come in? Do not these comrades know that national language is a form of national culture, that national language may serve both bourgeois and socialist culture? Are not our comrades familiar with the well-known formula of the Marxists that the present Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and other cultures are socialist in content and national in form, *i.e.,* in language? Do they agree to this Marxist formula?

The mistake of our comrades is that they do not see the difference between culture and language, and do not understand that culture changes in content with every new period in the development of society, whereas language remains basically the same throughout a number of periods, equally serving both the new culture and the old.

Hence:

a) Language, as a means of intercourse, always was and remains the single language of a society, common to all its members;

b) The existence of dialects and jargons does not negate but confirms the existence of a common national language, of which they are offshoots and to which they are subordinate;

c) The formula about "the class character" of language is erroneous and non-Marxist.

QUESTION: *What are the characteristic features of language?*

ANSWER: Language is one of those social phenomena which operate throughout the existence of society. It arises and develops with the rise and development of a society. It dies when the society dies. Without society there is no language. Accordingly, language and its laws of development may be understood only if studied in inseparable connection with the history of society, with the history of the people to whom the language under study belongs, and who are its creators and repositories.

Language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which people communicate with one another, exchange thoughts, and

seek mutual understanding. Being directly connected with thought, language registers and records in words and in words combined into sentences the results of thought and man's successes in his quest for knowledge, and thus makes possible the exchange of ideas in human society.

Exchange of ideas is a constant and vital necessity, for without it, it is impossible to co-ordinate the actions of people in the struggle against the forces of nature, in the effort to produce essential material values; without it, it is impossible to ensure the success of society's productive activity, and, hence, the very existence of social production becomes impossible. Consequently, without a language understood by a society and common to all its members, that society must cease to produce, must disintegrate and cease to exist as a society. In this sense, language, while it is a medium of communication, is at the same time an instrument of struggle and development of society.

As we know, all the words in a language together constitute its vocabulary. The chief thing in a language's vocabulary is its basic word stock which includes all the root words as its nucleus. It is less extensive than the language's vocabulary, but it persists for a very long time, for centuries, and provides the language with a basis for building new words. The vocabulary reflects the state of the language: the richer and more varied the vocabulary, the richer and more developed the language.

However, by itself the vocabulary does not constitute the language—it is rather the building material of the language. Just as in construction work the building materials do not constitute the building, although the latter cannot be constructed without them, so too a language's vocabulary does not constitute the language itself, although no language is conceivable without it. But the vocabulary of a language assumes a tremendous significance when it falls under the charge of its grammar, which determines the rules governing the modification of words and the grouping of words into sentences, and thus lends language a harmonious and intelligible character. Grammar (morphology and syntax) is the collection of rules governing the modification of words and their combination into sentences. It is, therefore, thanks to grammar that language acquires

the ability to invest man's thoughts in a material linguistic integument.

The distinguishing feature of grammar is that it determines the rules of modification of words—not particular concrete words, but words in general, without any concreteness; it also determines the rules for the formation of sentences, not particular concrete sentences —with, let us say, a concrete subject, a concrete predicate, etc.— but all sentences in general, irrespective of the concrete form of any sentence in particular. Hence, abstracting itself, as regards both words and sentences, from the particular and concrete, grammar takes that which is general and basic in the modification of words and their combination into sentences, and builds it into grammatical rules, grammatical laws. Grammar is the outcome of a prolonged work of abstraction of human thought; it is a gauge of the tremendous achievement of thought.

In this respect grammar resembles geometry, which creates its laws by a process of abstraction from concrete objects, regarding objects as bodies without any concreteness, and defining the relations between them, not as the concrete relations of concrete objects, but as the relations of bodies in general, without any concreteness.

Unlike the superstructure, which is not connected with production directly but through the economy, language is directly connected with man's productive activity, as well as with all his other activity in all his spheres of work without exception. That is why a language's vocabulary, being the most sensitive to change, is in a state of almost constant change, and unlike the superstructure, language does not have to wait until the base is eliminated; it makes changes in its vocabulary before the base is eliminated and irrespective of the state of the base.

However, a language's vocabulary does not change in the way the superstructure does, that is, by abolishing the old and building something new, but by replenishing the existing vocabulary with new words which have arisen with changes in the social system, with the development of production, of culture, science, etc. At the same time, although a certain number of obsolescent words keep falling out of a language's vocabulary, a far larger number of new words are added. As to the basic stock of words, it continues

to persist in all its fundamentals and is used as the basis for the language's vocabulary.

This is quite understandable. There is no necessity to destroy the basic word stock when it can be effectively used through the course of several historical periods; not to speak of the fact that, it being impossible to create a new basic word stock in a short period, the destruction of the basic word stock accumulated in the course of centuries would result in the paralysis of the language, the complete disruption of intercourse between people.

The grammatical structure of language changes even more slowly than its basic word stock. Elaborated in the course of epochs, and having become part of the flesh and blood of the language, the grammatical system changes still more slowly than the basic word stock. Of course, it undergoes change with the lapse of time, becomes more perfected, improves and gives greater definition to its rules, and acquires new rules; but the fundamentals of the grammatical system persist for a very long time, since, as history shows, they are able to render effective service to society throughout a succession of epochs.

Hence the grammatical system of a language and its basic word stock constitute its foundation, the specific nature of the language.

History shows that languages possess great stability and a tremendous power of resistance to forcible assimilation. Some historians, instead of explaining this phenomenon, confine themselves to expressing their surprise at it. But there is absolutely no reason for surprise. Languages owe their stability to their grammatical system and their basic word stock. The Turkish assimilators strove for hundreds of years to mutilate, shatter, and destroy the language of the Balkan peoples. During this period the vocabulary of the Balkan languages underwent considerable change; many Turkish words and expressions were absorbed; there were "convergencies" and "divergencies." Nevertheless, the Balkan languages stood firm and survived. Why? Because their grammatical system and basic word stocks were preserved in the main.

It follows from this that a language, its structure, cannot be regarded as the product of only one epoch. The structure, gram-

matical system, and basic word stock of a language are the product of a number of epochs.

It is to be presumed that the rudiments of modern language arose in hoary antiquity, before the epoch of slavery. It was a rather simple language with a very meager stock of words but with a grammatical system, although, it is true, a primitive one, but a grammatical system nonetheless.

The subsequent development of production, the appearance of classes, the appearance of writing, the rise of states, which needed a more or less well-regulated correspondence for their administration, the development of trade, which needed a well-regulated correspondence even more, the invention of the printing press, the development of literature—all these were the causes of very great changes in the development of language. During this period tribes and nationalities broke up and scattered, intermingled and crossed; later there arose national languages and states, revolutions took place, and old social systems were replaced by new. All this caused even greater changes in language and its development.

However, it would be a profound mistake to think that language developed in the way superstructure developed—by destroying that which existed and building something new in its place. In actual fact, language did not develop by destroying existing languages and creating new ones, but by extending and perfecting the basic elements of the existing language. At the same time, the transition of language from one quality to another did not take the form of an explosion, of the destruction at one blow of the old and the creation of something new, but by the gradual and prolonged accumulation of the elements of the new quality, of the new language structure, and the gradual dying away of the elements of the old quality.

It is said that the theory that languages developed by stages is a Marxist theory, since it recognizes the necessity of sudden explosions as a condition for the transition of the languages from an old quality to a new one. This is, of course, untrue, for it is difficult to find anything Marxist in this theory. And if the theory of stages really does recognize sudden explosions in the history of the development of language, so much the worse for it. Marxism does not recognize sudden explosions in the development of lan-

guages, the sudden death of an existing language and the sudden creation of a new language. Lafargue was wrong when he spoke of a "sudden linguistic revolution between 1789 and 1794" in France (see Lafargue's pamphlet, *Language and Revolution*). There was no linguistic revolution, let alone a sudden one, in France at that time. True enough, the vocabulary of the French language was replenished during that period with new words and expressions, a certain number of obsolete words disappeared, and the meaning of certain words changed—but that was all. Changes of this nature, however, do not determine the destiny of a language. The chief thing in a language is its grammatical system and basic word stock. But far from disappearing in the period of the French bourgeois revolution, the grammatical system and basic word stock of the French language were preserved without substantial change, and not only were they preserved, but they continue to live to this day in the modern French language. I need hardly say that a period of five or six years is a ridiculously small period for the elimination of an existing language and the building of a new national language ("a sudden linguistic revolution!"). Centuries are needed for this.

Marxism holds that the transition of a language from an old quality to a new does not take place by way of an explosion, by the destruction of an existing language and the creation of a new one, but by the gradual accumulation of the elements of the new quality, and, hence, by the gradual dying away of the elements of the old quality.

It should be said in general for the benefit of comrades who have an infatuation for such explosions that the law of transition from an old quality to a new by means of an explosion is inapplicable not only to the history of the development of languages; it is not always applicable to some other social phenomena of a basal or superstructural character. It is compulsory for a society divided into hostile classes. But it is not at all compulsory for a society which has no hostile classes. In a period of eight to ten years we effected a transition in the agriculture of our country from the bourgeois individual-peasant system to the socialist, collective-farm system. This was a revolution which eliminated the old bourgeois economic

system in the countryside and created a new, socialist system. But this revolution did not take place by means of an explosion, that is, by the overthrow of the existing power and the creation of a new power, but by a gradual transition from the old bourgeois system of the countryside to a new system. And we succeeded in doing this because it was a revolution from above, because the revolution was accomplished on the initiative of the existing power with the support of the overwhelming mass of the peasantry.

It is said that the numerous instances of mixture of languages in the past furnish reason to believe that when languages mix, a new language is formed by means of an explosion, by the sudden transition from an old quality to a new. This is absolutely untrue.

The mixing of languages cannot be regarded as an instantaneous and decisive blow the results of which become manifest within a few years. The mixing of languages is a prolonged process which continues for hundreds of years. Therefore, there can be no question of explosion in such cases.

Further, it would be absolutely wrong to think that the result of the mixture of, say, two languages is a new, third language, which does not resemble either of the mixed languages and differs qualitatively from both of them. As a matter of fact one of the languages usually emerges victorious from the mixture, retains its grammatical system, its basic word stock, and continues to advance in accordance with its inherent laws of development, while the other language loses its quality and gradually dies out.

Consequently, mixing does not result in a new, third language; rather, one of the languages persists, retains its grammatical system and basic word stock and is able to advance in accordance with the inherent laws of its development.

True, the vocabulary of the victorious language is somewhat enriched at the expense of the vanquished language, but this strengthens, rather than weakens, it.

Such was the case, for instance, with the Russian language, with which the languages of a number of other peoples mixed in the course of historical development, and which always emerged the victor.

Of course, the vocabulary of the Russian language was enlarged

in the process from the vocabularies of the other languages but this not only did not weaken, but on the contrary enriched and strengthened the Russian language.

And the national individuality of the Russian language did not suffer in the slightest, because the Russian language preserved its grammatical system and basic word stock and continued to advance and perfect itself in accordance with the inherent laws of its development.

Undoubtedly, Soviet linguistics has nothing valuable to gain from the theory of mixture. If it is true that the chief task of linguistics is to study the inherent laws of language development, it has to be admitted that the theory of mixture does not even set itself this task, let alone accomplish it—it simply does not notice it or does not understand it.

QUESTION: *Did* Pravda *act correctly in inaugurating an open discussion on questions of linguistics?*

ANSWER: It did.

In what way these linguistic questions will be settled will become clear when the discussion ends. But it may already be said that the discussion has been very useful.

It has brought out, in the first place, that in linguistic bodies both in the capital and in the republics a regime has prevailed which is alien to science and men of science. The slightest criticism of the state of affairs in Soviet linguistics, even the most timid attempts to criticize the so-called "new doctrine" in linguistics, were persecuted and suppressed by the leading linguistic circles. Valuable workers and researchers in linguistics were dismissed from their posts or demoted for being critical of N. Y. Marr's* legacy or expressing the slightest disapproval of his teachings. Linguists were appointed to responsible posts, not on their merits, but because of their unqualified acceptance of N. Y. Marr's theories.

It is generally recognized that no science can develop and flourish without a battle of opinions, without freedom of criticism. But this

* For an explanation of N. Y. Marr's theories, see Appendix III.

generally recognized rule was ignored and flouted in the most outrageous fashion. A tight group of infallible leaders, having insured themselves against all possible criticism, began to act arbitrarily and highhandedly.

To give one example: The so-called "Baku Course" (lectures delivered by N. Y. Marr in Baku) which the author himself had rejected and had forbidden to be republished, was republished nevertheless by order of this leading caste (Comrade Meshchaninov calls them "disciples" of N. Y. Marr) and unreservedly included in the list of manuals recommended to students. This means that the students were deceived by having a rejected "course" presented to them as a first-class textbook. If I were not convinced of the integrity of Comrade Meschchaninov and the other linguistic leaders, I would say that such conduct is tantamount to sabotage.

How could this have happened? It happened because the Arakcheyev* regime prevailing in linguistics cultivates irresponsibility and encourages such highhanded actions.

The discussion has been useful above all because it brought this Arakcheyev regime into the light of day and smashed it to smithereens.

But this has not been the only use of the discussion. It not only smashed the old regime in linguistics, but it also brought out the incredible confusion of ideas on cardinal questions of linguistics which prevails among the leading circles in this branch of science. Before the discussion they hushed up and glossed over the unhealthy state of affairs in linguistics. But after the discussion began, silence became impossible and they were compelled to come out in the pages of the press. And what did we find? It turned out that in N. Y. Marr's teachings there are many shortcomings, errors, undefined problems, and unelaborated tenets. Why, one asks, have N. Y. Marr's "disciples" begun to talk about this only now, after the discussion began? Why did they not see to it before? Why did they not speak about it in due time openly and honestly, as befits scientists?

* An arbitrary and cruel regime. Count Alexei Arakcheyev (1769-1834) was a court favorite under the tsars Paul I and Alexander I.

Having admitted "some" of N. Y. Marr's errors, his "disciples," it appears, think that Soviet linguistics can only be advanced on the basis of a "rectified" version of N. Y. Marr's theory, which they consider a Marxist one. No, save us from N. Y. Marr's "Marxism"! N. Y. Marr did indeed want to be, and endeavored to be, a Marxist, but he could not become one. He was nothing but a simplifier and vulgarizer of Marxism, like the "Proletcultists" or the "Rappists."*

N. Y. Marr introduced into linguistics the incorrect, non-Marxist formula that language is a superstructure, and got himself into a muddle and put linguistics into a muddle. Soviet linguistics cannot be advanced on the basis of an incorrect formula.

N. Y. Marr introduced into linguistics another and also incorrect and non-Marxist formula regarding the "class character" of language, and got himself into a muddle and put linguistics into a muddle. Soviet linguistics cannot be advanced on the basis of an incorrect formula which is contrary to the course of the history of peoples and languages.

N. Y. Marr introduced into linguistics an immodest, boastful, arrogant tone alien to Marxism and tending toward a crass and frivolous negation of everything done in linguistics prior to N. Y. Marr.

N. Y. Marr shrilly abused the comparative-historical method as "idealistic." Yet it must be said that, despite all its serious shortcomings, the comparative-historical method was nevertheless better than N. Y. Marr's really idealistic four-element analysis, because the former gives a stimulus to work, to a study of languages, while the latter gives a stimulus only to lie on one's back and tell fortunes from teacups with the help of the celebrated four elements.

N. Y. Marr haughtily discountenanced every attempt to study groups (families) of languages as a manifestation of the "ancestral language" theory. Yet it cannot be denied that the linguistic affinity of the Slav nations, say, is beyond question, and that a study of the linguistic affinity of those nations might be of great value to

* Soviet cultural and writers' organizations of the early years following the Russian Revolution. They were severely criticized for their extremely sectarian policies and activities.

linguistics in the study of the laws of language development. The "ancestral language" theory, of course, has nothing to do with the matter.

Listening to N. Y. Marr, and especially to his "disciples," one might think that prior to N. Y. Marr there was no such thing as linguistics, that linguistics appeared with N. Y. Marr's "new teachings." Marx and Engels were much more modest: They held that their dialectical materialism was a product of the development of the sciences, including philosophy, in preceding periods.

Thus the discussion was also useful in bringing to light ideological shortcomings in Soviet linguistics.

I think that the sooner our linguistics is rid of N. Y. Marr's errors, the sooner will it be possible to extricate it from its present crisis.

Elimination of the Arakcheyev regime in linguistics, rejection of N. Y. Marr's errors, and the introduction of Marxism into linguistics are, in my opinion, the way in which Soviet linguistics may be put on a sound basis.

Pravda, June 20, 1950

II. REPLY TO KRASHENINNIKOVA

Comrade Krasheninnikova,

I am answering your questions.

QUESTION 1: *Your article convincingly shows that language is neither the base nor the superstructure. Would it be right to consider that language is a phenomenon peculiar to both the base and the superstructure, or would it be more correct to regard language as an intermediate phenomenon?*

ANSWER: Of course, peculiar to language, as a social phenomenon, is that which is common to all social phenomena, including the base and the superstructure, namely: It serves society in the same manner as society is served by all the other social phenomena, including the base and the superstructure. But this, essentially speaking, exhausts that which is common to and inherent in all social phenomena. Further on, serious distinctions begin between social penomena.

The point is that social phenomena have, in addition to this common feature, their own specific peculiarities which distinguish them from each other and which are above all important for science. The specific peculiarities of the base consist in that it serves society economically. The specific peculiarities of the superstructure consist in that it serves society by means of political, legal, esthetic, and other ideas and creates for society the corresponding political, legal, and other institutions. Of what then do the specific peculiarities of language consist, the peculiarities distinguishing it from other social phenomena? They consist in that language serves society as a means of intercourse between people, as a means for exchanging thoughts in society, as a means enabling people to understand each other and to organize joint work in all spheres of human activity, both in the sphere of production and in the sphere of economic

relations, in the sphere of politics and in the sphere of culture, in public and in everyday life. These peculiarities belong only to language, and precisely because they belong only to language, language constitutes the object of study of an independent science —linguistics. Without these peculiarities of language, linguistics would lose its right to independent existence.

Briefly, language cannot be ranked either among bases or among superstructures.

Neither can it be ranked among "intermediate" phenomena between the base and the superstructure, as such "intermediate" phenomena do not exist.

But perhaps language could be ranked among the productive forces of society, among, let us say, the implements of production? Indeed, there does exist a certain analogy between language and implements of production: Implements of production, as does language, manifest a kind of indifference toward classes and can equally serve different classes of society, both old and new. Does this circumstance provide ground for ranking language among implements of production? No, it does not.

At one time, N. Y. Marr, seeing that his formula—"language is a superstructure on the base"—was encountering objections, decided to "readjust" himself and announced that "language is an implement of production." Was N. Y. Marr right in ranking language among implements of production? No, he certainly was not.

The point is that the similarity between language and implements of production ends with that analogy of which I have just spoken. But, on the other hand, there is a radical difference between language and implements of production. This difference is that while implements of production produce material wealth, language produces nothing or "produces" words only. To be more exact, people possessing implements of production can produce material wealth, but those very same people, while having a language, but not having the implements of production, cannot produce material wealth. It is not difficult to understand that were language capable of the production of material wealth, windbags would be the richest men on earth.

QUESTION 2: *Marx and Engels define language as "the direct reality of thought," as "practical . . . actual consciousness." "Ideas," Marx says, "do not exist divorced from language." To what extent, in your opinion, should linguistics occupy itself with the semantic aspect of language, semantics and historical semasiology and stylistics, or should the subject of linguistics be form only?*

ANSWER: Semantics (semasiology) is one of the important sections of linguistics. The semantic aspect of words and expressions is of serious importance for the study of language. Therefore semantics (semasiology) must be assured a fitting place in linguistics.

However, in developing problems of semantics and in utilizing its data, its significance must in no way be overestimated, and still more its use must not be abused. I have in mind certain philologists, who, indulging excessively in semantics, disregard language as "the direct reality of thought" inseparably connected with thinking, who divorce thinking from language and maintain that language is outliving its age and that it is possible to get along without language.

Listen to what N. Y. Marr says: "Language exists only inasmuch as it expresses itself in sounds; the action of thinking occurs also without revealing itself. . . . Language (vocal language) has now already begun to yield its functions to the latest inventions which are unreservedly conquering space, while thinking is on the upgrade, departing from its unutilized accumulations in the past and its new acquisitions, and it is to oust and fully replace language. The future language is thinking which is developing in technique free of natural matter. No language, even vocal language, which is nonetheless connected with the standards of nature, will succeed in standing up against it."*

If we interpret this "labor-magic" gibberish into simple human language, the conclusion may be drawn that:

a) N. Y. Marr divorces thinking from language;

b) N. Y. Marr considers that intercourse between people can be achieved without language, with the help of thinking itself, of

* See N. Y. Marr, *Selected Works*, Russian ed.

thinking free of the "natural matter" of language, free of "the standards of nature";

c) In divorcing thinking from language and "having freed" it from "the natural matter" of language, N. Y. Marr lands in the swamp of idealism.

It is said that thoughts arise in the mind of man prior to their being expressed in speech, that they arise without language material, without the language shell, in, so to speak, a naked form. But this is absolutely wrong. Whatever the thoughts that may arise in the mind of man, they can arise and exist only on the basis of the language material, on the basis of language terminology and phrases. Bare thoughts, free of the language material, free of the "natural matter" of language—do not exist. "Language is the direct reality of thought (Marx). The reality of thought manifests itself in language. Only idealists can speak of thinking as not connected with the "natural matter" of language, of thinking without language.

In brief: An overestimation of semantics and abuse of the latter led N. Y. Marr to idealism.

Consequently, if semantics (semasiology) is safeguarded from exaggerations and abuses, similar to those N. Y. Marr and some of his "disciples" indulge in, it can greatly benefit linguistics.

QUESTION 3: *You quite justly say that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have ideas, concepts, customs, and moral principles that are diametrically opposed. The class character of these phenomena certainly affected the semantic aspect of language (and at times its form—the vocabulary—too, as is correctly pointed out in your article). In analyzing concrete language material and, first of all, the semantic aspect of language, can we speak of the class essence of the concepts they express, particularly in those cases when the matter concerns the language expression not only of the thought of man but also of his attitude toward reality, where his class affinity manifests itself especially clearly?*

ANSWER: In brief, you want to know whether classes influence language, whether they contribute their specific words and expressions to language, whether there are cases when people attach a different

meaning, in accordance with the class to which they belong, to one and the same words and expressions?

Yes, classes do influence language, contribute their own specific words and expressions to language, and at times understand one and the same words and expressions differently. That is unquestionably so.

From this, however, it does not follow that specific words and expressions, as well as the difference in semantics, can be of serious importance for the development of a single language common to the whole people, that they are capable of debilitating its significance or of changing its character.

Firstly, such specific words and expressions, as well as cases of difference in semantics, are so few in language that they hardly make up one percent of the entire language material. Consequently, all the remaining preponderant mass of words and expressions, as well as their semantics, are *common* to all classes of society.

Secondly, specific words and expressions having a class shade are used in speech not according to rules of some sort of "class" grammar, which does not exist in reality, but according to rules of the grammar of the existing common language of the whole people.

Hence, the presence of specific words and expressions and the facts of differences in the semantics of language do not refute, but, on the contrary, confirm the presence of, and need for, a single language common to all the people.

QUESTION 4: *In your article you quite correctly qualify Marr as a vulgarizer of Marxism. Does this mean that linguists, including us, the young generation, should discard* the whole *of the linguistic legacy of Marr, who nonetheless has a number of valuable linguistic research works (Comrades Chikobava, Sanzheyev and others wrote about them during the discussion)? Can we, in approaching Marr critically, take from him nonetheless what is useful and valuable?*

ANSWER: Of course, the works of N. Y. Marr do not consist only of errors. N. Y. Marr made the crassest mistakes when he introduced into linguistics elements of Marxism in a distorted form, when he tried to create an independent theory of language. But

N. Y. Marr has certain good works, written with talent, wherein, forgetting his theoretical claims, he conscientiously and, one must say, capably studies individual languages. In such works one may find no little that is valuable and instructive. It stands to reason that what is valuable and instructive should be taken from N. Y. Marr and used.

QUESTION 5: *Many linguists consider* formalism *as one of the main reasons for the stagnation in Soviet linguistics. We would very much like to know your opinion on what formalism in linguistics consists of and how it should be overcome.*

ANSWER: N. Y. Marr and his "disciples" accuse of "formalism" all linguists who do not accept N. Y. Marr's "new doctrine." This of course is frivolous and foolish.

N. Y. Marr held grammar to be an empty "formality," and the people considering the grammatical system as the foundation of language as formalists. This is altogether foolish.

I think that "formalism" was invented by the authors of the "new doctrine" to make it easier for them to struggle against their opponents in linguistics.

The reason for the stagnation in Soviet linguistics is not the "formalism" invented by N. Y. Marr and his "disciples" but the Arakcheyev regime and the theoretical gaps in linguistics. The Arakcheyev regime was set up by N. Y. Marr's "disciples." It was N. Y. Marr and his closest colleagues who put linguistics in a theoretical muddle. To get rid of the stagnation, both the one and the other must be eliminated. The elimination of these plagues will cure Soviet linguistics, lead it out onto a broad highway, and enable Soviet linguistics to occupy the first place in world linguistics.

J. Stalin

June 29, 1950

III. REPLY TO SANZHEYEV

To Comrade Sanzheyev

Esteemed Comrade Sanzheyev,

My answer to your letter has been long delayed, since your letter was forwarded to me only yesterday from the offices of the Central Committee.

You are unquestionably correct in your interpretation of my standpoint on the question of dialects.

"Class" dialects, which would be more correctly called jargons, serve a limited upper stratum of society and not the masses of the people. Moreover, they lack their own grammatical system and basic word stocks. In view of this, they can by no means develop into independent languages.

On the other hand, local ("territorial") dialects serve the masses of the people, and they have their own grammatical systems and basic word stocks. In view of this, some local dialects may, in the process of the formation of nations, become the basis of national languages and develop into independent national languages. Such was the case, for example, with the Kursk-Orel dialect (Kursk-Orel "speech") of the Russian language, which became the basis of the Russian national language. The same should be said of the Poltava-Kiev dialect of the Ukrainian language, which became the basis of the Ukrainian national language. As for the other dialects of such languages they lose their original character, become fused with these languages, and disappear within them.

There are also reverse processes, when the single language of a nationality which had not yet developed into a nation, owing to the absence of the necessary economic conditions of development, collapses as a result of the state disintegration of this nationality, while the local dialects, which were not yet digested in a single language, come to life and give birth to the formation of separate independent languages. This probably was the case with the single Mongolian language, for example.

July 11, 1950 J. Stalin

IV. REPLY TO D. BELKIN AND S. FURER

I have received your letters.

Your mistake is that you have confused two different things and substituted a different subject for the subject treated in my reply to Comrade Krasheninnikova.

1. In this reply I criticize N. Y. Marr, who, speaking of language (phonetic) and thought, separates language from thought and thus lapses into idealism. Consequently, my reply applies to normal people possessing a language. And I maintain that ideas can originate in these people only on the basis of language material, that bare ideas not connected with language material do not exist in people possessing a language.

Instead of accepting or rejecting this proposition, you put up anomalous, tongueless people, deaf mutes who lack a language, and whose thoughts cannot of course originate on the basis of language material. As you see, it is an entirely different theme which I have not dwelt upon and could not dwell upon, since linguistics treats of normal people possessing a language, and not of anomalous deaf mutes who lack a language.

You have substituted another topic which was not discussed for the topic under discussion.

2. From Comrade Belkin's letter it appears that he places on the same level the "language of words" (the phonetic language) and the "language of gestures" (the "hand" language in N. Y. Marr's terms). He apparently thinks that the language of gestures and the language of words are equivalent, that at one time human society lacked a language of words, and that at that time the "hand" language substituted for the language of words which appeared later.

But if this is really what Comrade Belkin thinks, he is making a serious mistake. The phonetic language, or the language of words, has always been the only language of human society capable of serving as a fully valid means of human intercourse. History does not know of a single human society, even the most backward, which did not have its own phonetic language. Ethnography does

not know of any backward nationality, even if it was as primitive as or even more primitive than the Australians or the Tierra del Fuegans of the last century, that did not possess its own phonetic language. The phonetic language is one of those forces in the history of mankind which helped people to detach themselves from the animal kingdom, to unite in societies, develop their thinking, organize social production, conduct a successful struggle against the forces of nature, and achieve the progress we have at the present time.

In this respect, the significance of the so-called language of gestures is negligible owing to its extreme poverty and limitations. This, precisely speaking, is not a language, and not even a surrogate language which may in one way or another substitute for the phonetic language, but an auxiliary medium with extremely limited means used by man sometimes for emphasizing this or that point in his speech. The language of gestures cannot be placed on a level with the phonetic language, just as the primitive wooden hoe cannot be placed on a level with the modern caterpillar tractor with a quintuple plow and tractor-drawn drill.

3. You are apparently interested primarily in deaf mutes and only then in problems of linguistics. Apparently, this very circumstance has prompted you to address a number of questions to me. Well, if you insist, I am not averse to granting your request. And so, how do matters stand with regard to the deaf mutes? Does their thought function, do ideas originate? Yes, their thought functions, ideas do originate. It is clear that since the deaf mutes lack a language, their ideas cannot originate on the basis of language material. But does this mean that the ideas of deaf mutes are bare, not connected with the "rules of nature" (N. Y. Marr's expression)? No, it does not mean that. The ideas of deaf mutes originate and can exist only on the basis of the images, perceptions, and conceptions formed in practice about objects of the exterior world and their relations among themselves, thanks to the senses of sight, touch, taste, and smell. Outside of these images, perceptions, and conceptions, thought is empty, devoid of any content whatever, *i.e.*, it does not exist.

July 22, 1950 J. Stalin

V. REPLY TO A. KHOLOPOV

I have received your letter.

My answer has been slightly delayed owing to my preoccupation with work.

Your letter tacitly proceeds from two assumptions: from the assumption that it is possible to quote the works of one author or another *apart* from the historical period treated by the quotation, and, secondly, from the assumption that this or that conclusion or formula of Marxism, obtained as a result of studying one period of historical development, is correct for all periods of development and must therefore remain *unchanged*.

I must say that both these assumptions are deeply erroneous.

A few examples.

1. In the forties of the past century, when monopoly capitalism did not yet exist, when capitalism was developing more or less smoothly along an ascending line, spreading to new territories it had not occupied, and the law of uneven development could not yet be fully effective, Marx and Engels arrived at the conclusion that the socialist revolution could not triumph in any single country, that it could triumph only as a result of a general blow in all or in the majority of the civilized countries. This conclusion subsequently became the guiding principle for all Marxists.

But at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in the period of the first World War, when it became evident to everybody that pre-monopoly capitalism had clearly grown into monopoly capitalism, when ascending capitalism was transformed into moribund capitalism, when the war disclosed the incurable weaknesses of the world imperialist front, and the law of uneven development predetermined differing periods of duration for the maturing of the proletarian revolution in different countries, Lenin, proceeding from the Marxist theory, arrived at the conclusion that under the new conditions of development the socialist revolution could well triumph in one particular country, that the simultaneous victory of

the socialist revolution in all countries or in the majority of the civilized countries was impossible owing to the uneven maturing of the revolution in these countries, that the old formula of Marx and Engels no longer corresponded to the new historical conditions.

It appears that we have here two different conclusions on the question of the victory of socialism, which are not only mutually contradictory, but also mutually exclusive.

Some textualists and Talmudists, who quote formally, without delving into the substance of the matter and in isolation from historical conditions, may say that one of these conclusions should be rejected as absolutely wrong, and the second conclusion should be extended to all periods of development as absolutely correct. However, Marxists cannot but know that textualists and Talmudists err; they cannot but know that both these conclusions are correct, not absolutely, but each for its time: the conclusion of Marx and Engels for the period of pre-monopoly capitalism, and Lenin's conclusion for the period of monopoly capitalism.

2. In his *Anti-Dühring,* Engels wrote that the state must wither away after the victory of the socialist revolution. On this basis, the textualists and Talmudists in our party began to demand, after the victory of the socialist revolution in our country, that the Communist Party should take steps to bring about the speedy withering away of our state, to dissolve state institutions, to give up a permanent army.

But the Soviet Marxists, on the basis of the study of the world situation in our time, came to the conclusion that, under conditions of capitalist encirclement, when the victory of the socialist revolution has taken place in only one country, while capitalism rules in all the other countries, the country of the victorious revolution must not weaken, but in every way strengthen its state, the state institutions, the intelligence organs, and the army, if this country does not wish to be crushed by the capitalist encirclement. The Russian Marxists came to the conclusion that Engels' formula implies the victory of socialism in all countries or in the majority of countries, that it is inapplicable to the case when socialism triumphs in one particular country, while capitalism rules in all the other countries.

Obviously we have here two different, mutually exclusive formulas on the destinies of the socialist state.

The textualists and Talmudists may say that this circumstance creates an impossible situation, that one of the formulas should be rejected as absolutely wrong, and the other should be extended to all periods of development of the socialist state as absolutely correct. However, Marxists cannot but know that textualists and Talmudists err, for these two formulas are correct, not absolutely, but each for its own time: the formula of the Soviet Marxists, for the period of the victory of socialism in one or several countries, and Engels' formula, for the period when the consecutive victory of socialism in separate countries will lead to the victory of socialism in the majority of countries and when the necessary conditions will thus be created for the application of Engels' formula.

Many more such examples could be cited.

The same should be said of the two different formulas on the question of language taken from different works by Stalin and cited by Comrade Kholopov in his letter.

Comrade Kholopov refers to Stalin's work, *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics,* where the conclusion is drawn that, as a result of the crossing of two languages, let us say, one of the languages usually comes out the victor, whereas the other dies away, that consequently this cross does not yield some new, third language, but preserves one of the languages. He further refers to another conclusion taken from Stalin's report to the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,* where it is said that in the period of the victory of socialism on a world scale, when socialism has been consolidated and has become a matter of everyday life, the national languages must inevitably fuse into one common language, which, of course, will be neither Great Russian nor German, but something new. Comparing these two formulas and seeing that far from coinciding, they exclude each other, Comrade Kholopov is driven to despair. "From your article," he writes in his letter, "I understand that the crossing of languages can *never* result in some new language, whereas before the article I was firmly convinced that,

* See Appendix II.

according to your speech at the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, languages will fuse into one common language under *communism*."

Obviously, having discovered a contradiction between these two formulas, and believing deeply that this contradiction must be eliminated, Comrade Kholopov considers it necessary to get rid of one of the formulas as the incorrect one and to clutch at the other formula as the correct one for all times and countries, but he does not know exactly which formula to clutch at. It seems like a hopeless situation. Comrade Kholopov does not even guess that both formulas may be correct—each for its time.

This is always the case with textualists and Talmudists who, quoting formally without penetrating into the substance of the matter and irrespective of the historical conditions treated in the quotations, invariably land in a hopeless situation.

And yet, if the essence of the question is analyzed, there are no grounds for a hopeless situation. The point is that Stalin's pamphlet *Concerning Marxism in Linguistics* and Stalin's speech at the Sixteenth Party Congress have in mind two entirely different epochs, as a result of which the formulas too are different.

Stalin's formula in the part of his pamphlet relating to the crossing of languages refers to the epoch *before the victory of socialism* on a world scale, when the exploiting classes are the dominating force in the world, when national and colonial oppression remains in effect, when the national isolation and mutual distrust of the nations are reinforced by state differences, when there is as yet no national equality, when the crossing of languages takes place in the course of a struggle for the domination of one of the languages, when the conditions are as yet lacking for peaceful and friendly co-operation of nations and languages, when not co-operation and mutual enrichment of the languages but the assimilation of some and the victory of other languages are on the order of the day. It is understandable that under such conditions there can only be victorious and defeated languages. Precisely these conditions are presupposed in Stalin's formula when it says that the crossing of two languages, let us say, will result not in the formation of a new

language, but in the victory of one of these languages and the defeat of the other.

As regards Stalin's other formula, taken from the speech at the Sixteenth Party Congress, in the section relating to the fusion of languages into one common language, it has in mind an entirely different epoch, namely, the epoch *after the victory of socialism* on a world scale, when world imperialism will no longer exist, the exploiting classes will be overthrown, national and colonial oppression will be eliminated, the national isolation and mutual distrust of nations will be replaced by mutual confidence and the rapprochement of nations, national equality will be put into practice, the policy of oppression and assimilation of languages will be eliminated, co-operation among nations will be organized, and national languages will have the opportunity freely to enrich one another on the basis of co-operation. It is understandable that the suppression and defeat of some languages and the victory of other languages are out of the question under such conditions. In this case we will have not two languages, one of which is suffering defeat while the other emerges victorious from the struggle, but hundreds of national languages from which at first the most enriched single zonal languages will emerge as a result of lengthy economic, political, and cultural co-operation of nations, and subsequently the zonal languages will fuse into one common international language, which will of course be neither German, nor Russian, nor English, but a new language which has absorbed the best elements of the national and zonal languages.

Consequently, the two different formulas correspond to two different epochs in the development of society, and precisely because they correspond to them, the two formulas are correct, each for its own epoch.

To demand that these formulas should not be mutually contradictory, that they should not exclude each other, is just as absurd as it would be to demand that there should be no contradiction between the epoch of the domination of capitalism and the epoch of the domination of socialism, that socialism and capitalism should not exclude each other.

Textualists and Talmudists regard Marxism, the separate deduc-

tions and formulas of Marxism, as a collection of dogmas which "never" change, regardless of the changes in the condition of development of society. They think that if they memorize these deductions and formulas by heart and begin to cite them in every manner, they will be able to solve any problem, calculating that the memorized deductions and formulas will be useful to them for all times and countries, for all cases in life. But this can be the reasoning only of those people who see the letter of Marxism, but do not see its essence, who memorize the texts of deductions and formulas of Marxism, but do not understand their content.

Marxism is the science of the laws of development of nature and society, the science of the revolution of the oppressed and exploited masses, the science of the victory of socialism in all countries, the science of the building of communist society. Marxism as a science cannot stand still; it develops and perfects itself. In the course of its development Marxism cannot but be enriched by new experience, by new knowledge; consequently, its separate formulas and deductions cannot but change in the course of time, cannot but be replaced by new formulas and deductions corresponding to the new historical tasks. Marxism does not recognize any immutable deductions and formulas, applicable to all epochs and periods. Marxism is an enemy of all dogmatism.

J. Stalin

July 28, 1950

APPENDIX I

THE FUTURE OF NATIONS AND OF NATIONAL LANGUAGES*

You commit a grave error in putting an equal sign between the period of the victory of socialism in one country and the period of the victory of socialism on a world scale, in asserting that the disappearance of national differences and national languages, the amalgamation of nations, and the formation of one common language, are possible and necessary not only with the victory of socialism on a world scale, but also with the victory of socialism in one country. And you furthermore confuse entirely different things —"abolition of national oppression" with "elimination of national differences," "abolition of national state partitions" with "dying away of nations," with "amalgamation of nations."

It must be observed that for Marxists to confuse these diverse concepts is absolutely impermissible. National oppression in our country was abolished long ago, but in no wise does it follow from this that national differences have disappeared and that nations in our country have been eliminated. National state partitions, together with frontier guards and customs barriers, were abolished in our country long ago, but in no wise does it follow from this that the nations have already amalgamated and that the national languages have disappeared, that these languages have been supplanted by some one language common to all our nations.

You are displeased with the speech I delivered at the University of the Peoples of the East (1925), in which I repudiated the thesis that with the victory of socialism *in one country*—in our country, for example—national languages will die away, that the nations will amalgamate, and in place of the national languages one common language will appear.

* From Joseph Stalin, *The National Question and Leninism* (written March 1929), New York, 1951.

You consider that this statement of mine contradicts Lenin's well-known thesis that it is the aim of socialism not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and every form of segregation of nations, not only to bring the nations closer together, but also to amalgamate them.

You consider, further, that it also contradicts another of Lenin's theses, namely, that with the victory of socialism on a *world scale,* national differences and national languages will begin to die away, that after this victory national languages will begin to be supplanted by one common language.

That is quite wrong, comrades. You are deeply in error.

I have already said that it is impermissible for Marxists to confuse and lump together such diverse phenomena as "the victory of socialism in one country" and "the victory of socialism on a world scale." It should not be forgotten that these diverse phenomena reflect two entirely different epochs, distinct from one another not only in time (which is very important), but in their very nature.

National distrust, national segregation, national enmity, and national conflict are, of course, stimulated and fostered not by some "innate" sentiment of national animosity, but by the striving of imperialism to subjugate other nations and by the fear inspired in these nations by the menace of national enslavement. Undoubtedly, so long as world imperialism exists, this striving and this fear will exist—and, consequently, national distrust, national segregation, national enmity, and national conflict will exist in the great majority of countries. Can it be asserted that the victory of socialism and the abolition of imperialism in one country mean the abolition of imperialism and national oppression in the majority of countries? Obviously not. But it follows from this that the victory of socialism in one country, notwithstanding the fact that it seriously weakens world imperialism, does not and cannot create the conditions necessary for the amalgamation of the nations and the national languages of the world into one integral whole.

The period of the victory of socialism on a world scale differs from the period of the victory of socialism in one country primarily in the fact that it will abolish imperialism *in all countries,* will eliminate both the striving to subjugate other nations and the fear

inspired by the menace of national enslavement, will radically undermine national distrust and national enmity, will unite the nations into one world socialist economic system, and will thus create the real conditions necessary for the gradual amalgamation of all nations into one.

Such is the fundamental difference between these two periods.

But it follows from this that to confuse these two different periods and to lump them together is to make an unpardonable mistake. Take the speech I delivered at the University of the Peoples of the East. There I said:

"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 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."*

From this passage it is evident that I was contradicting people of the type of Kautsky, who (that is, Kautsky) always was and has remained a dilettante on the national question, who does not understand the mechanics of the development of nations and has no inkling of the colossal power of stability possessed by nations, who believes that the amalgamation of nations is possible long before the victory of socialism, already under the bourgeois-democratic order, and who, servilely praising the assimilating "work" of the Germans in Czechoslovakia, asserts offhand that the Czechs are almost Germanized, that, as a nation, the Czechs have no future.

From this passage it is evident, further, that what I had in mind in my speech was not the period of the victory of socialism on a

* Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, p. 196, New York, 1942.

world scale, but exclusively the period of the victory of socialism in *one country.* And I affirmed (and continue to affirm) that the period of the victory of socialism in one country does not create the necessary conditions for the amalgamation of nations and national languages, that, on the contrary, this period creates favorable conditions for the renaissance and flowering of the nations that were formerly oppressed by tsarist imperialism and have now been liberated from national oppression by the Soviet revolution.

From this passage it is evident, lastly, that you have overlooked the colossal difference between the two different historical periods, that, because of this, you have failed to understand the meaning of Stalin's speech and, as a result, have got lost in the wilderness of your own errors.

Let us pass to Lenin's theses on the dying away and amalgamation of nations after the victory of socialism on a world scale.

Here is one of Lenin's theses, taken from his article, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," published in 1916, which, for some reason, is not quoted in full in your letters:

"The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and all national isolation; not only to bring the nations closer together, but also to merge them. . . . Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, *i.e.,* of their freedom to secede."*

And here is another thesis of Lenin's, which likewise you do not quote in full:

"As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries—and these differences will continue to exist for a very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale—the unity of international tactics of the Communist working class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences

* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* Vol. XIX, pp. 50-51, New York, 1942.

(that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of Communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as will *correctly modify* these principles in *certain particulars,* correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences."*

It should be noted that this passage is from Lenin's pamphlet *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder,* published in 1920, that is, *after* the victory of the socialist revolution in one country, *after* the victory of socialism in our country.

From these passages it is evident that Lenin does not assign the process of dying away of national differences and amalgamation of nations to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, but exclusively to the period that will come *after* the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, that is, to the period of the victory of socialism in all countries, when the foundations of a world socialist economy will already be laid.

From these passages it is evident, further, that Lenin qualifies the attempt to assign the process of dying away of national differences to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, as a "foolish dream."

From these passages it is evident, moreover, that Stalin was absolutely right when, in the speech he delivered at the University of the Peoples of the East, he denied that it was possible for national differences and national languages to die away in the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, and that you were absolutely wrong in upholding something that is the direct opposite of Stalin's thesis.

From these passages it is evident, lastly, that, in confusing the two different periods of the victory of socialism, you misunderstood Lenin, distorted Lenin's line on the national question and, as a consequence, you involuntarily headed for a rupture with Leninism.

It is a mistake to think that after the defeat of world imperialism national differences will be abolished and national languages will die away directly, at one stroke, by decree from above, so to speak. Nothing is more erroneous than this view. To attempt to bring

* V. I. Lenin, *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder,* p. 73, New York, 1940.

about the amalgamation of nations by decree from above, by compulsion, would be playing into the hands of the imperialists; it would spell disaster to the cause of the liberation of nations, and be fatal to the cause of organizing co-operation and fraternity among nations. Such a policy would be tantamount to a policy of assimilation.

You know, of course, that the policy of assimilation is unreservedly excluded from the arsenal of Marxism-Leninism, as an anti-popular and counter-revolutionary policy, a fatal policy.

Furthermore, we know that nations and national languages possess an extraordinary stability and tremendous power of resistance to the policy of assimilation. The Turkish assimilators—the most brutal of all assimilators—mangled and mutilated the Balkan nations for hundreds of years, yet not only did they fail to destroy them, but they were forced to capitulate in the end. The tsarist-Russian Russifiers and the Prussian-German Germanizers, who yielded little in brutality to the Turkish assimilators, tore and mangled the Polish nation for over a hundred years, just as the Persian and Turkish assimilators for hundreds of years tore and mangled and massacred the Armenian and Georgian nations; yet, far from destroying these nations, they too were forced to capitulate in the end.

All these circumstances must be taken into account to forecast correctly the probable course of events as regards the development of nations directly after the defeat of world imperialism.

It is a mistake to think that the first stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat will mark the beginning of the dying away of nations and national languages, the beginning of the formation of one common language. On the contrary, the first stage, during which national oppression will be definitely abolished, will witness the growth and flowering of the formerly oppressed nations and national languages, the establishment of equality among nations, the elimination of mutual national distrust, and the knitting together and strengthening of international ties among naions.

Only in the second stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat, as a single socialist world economy is built up

in place of the capitalist world economy—only in that stage will something in the nature of a common language begin to take shape; for only in that stage will the nations feel the need to have, in addition to their own national languages, a common international language—for convenience of intercourse and for convenience of economic, cultural, and political co-operation. Consequently, in this stage, national languages and a common international language will exist side by side. It is probable that, at first, there will be formed not one world economic center common to all nations and with one common language, but several zonal economic centers for separate groups of nations, with a separate common language for each group of nations, and that only later will these centers combine into one common world socialist economic center, with one language common to all nations.

In the next stage of the period of world dictatorship of the proletariat—when the world socialist economic system has been sufficiently consolidated and socialism has become part and parcel of the life of the peoples, and when practice has convinced the nations of the superiority of a common language over national languages—national differences and languages will begin to die away and make room for a world language, common to all nations.

Such, in my opinion, is the approximate picture of the future of nations and of the way the nations will develop toward their future amalgamation.

APPENDIX II

NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND SOCIALISM*

. . . The second group of questions deals with the national problem. One of these questions which I consider most interesting compares the treatment of the problem of national languages in my report at the Sixteenth Congress with the treatment given in my lecture at the University of the Peoples of the East in 1925,† and finds a certain unclarity which should be explained. The note says: "You objected then to the (Kautsky's) theory about the dying away of national tongues and the formation of a single common language in the period of socialism (*in one country*), while now, in your report at the Sixteenth Congress, you declare that communists favor the merging of national cultures and national tongues into one common culture with one common language (*in the period of the victory of socialism all over the world*). Is there not unclarity here?"

I think there is neither unclarity nor any contradiction here. When I spoke in 1925, I was opposing the national-jingoist theory of Kautsky, in virtue of which a victory of the proletarian revolution in the middle of the last century in the united Austro-German state would have led to the amalgamation of nations into one common *German* nation, with one common *German* language, and to the *Germanizing* of the Czechs. I opposed this theory as anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist and quoted facts from the life of our country after the victory of socialism in the U.S.S.R. which refute this theory. I still object to this theory, as you can see from my report at this Sixteenth Congress. I object to it because the theory of the fusion of all the nations of, say, the U.S.S.R. into one com-

* Joseph Stalin, Reply to Discussion on "Political Report of the Central Committee to the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," June 27-July 2, 1930, in *Leninism*, Vol. II, pp. 347-48, N. Y., n.d.

† See Appendix I, pp. 48, 50.

mon *Great Russian* nation with one common *Great Russian* tongue is a national-jingoist, anti-Leninist theory, which is in contradiction to the basic principle of Leninism that national distinctions cannot disappear in the near future, and that they are bound to remain for a long time, even after the victory of the proletarian revolution *all over the world.* As for the development of national cultures and national tongues taken in more distant perspective, I have always maintained, and continue to maintain, the Leninist view that in the period of the victory of socialism *all over the world,* when socialism has been consolidated and become a matter of everyday life, the national languages must inevitably fuse into one common language, which, of course, will be neither Great Russian nor German, but something new. I said this quite definitely in my report at the Sixteenth Congress. . . .

APPENDIX III

THE SOVIET LINGUISTICS CONTROVERSY*

In the summer of 1950, it will be recalled, the American press carried reports of a contribution by Joseph Stalin on the subject of linguistic science and Marxism. Journalistic comments on it revealed a good deal of ignorant confusion, since most of the writers obviously knew nothing whatsoever about the scholarly problems involved.

There was also deliberate distortion. In one section of his article Stalin had stressed the heritage of the Russian language as a national treasure shared by all ranks in the population at all times, and he had stressed also the linguistic unity which permits an entire nation to enjoy that treasure in common. Hence reporters generally tried to prove that Stalin's intention was to affirm "Russian" linguistic nationalism in a chauvinistic sense. His skeptical position in regard to artificial international languages was taken to mean a retreat from international socialist attitudes to an aggressive nationalist position. Finally, it was likewise implied that Stalin's statement came as a fiat unexpectedly imposed on linguists from without; that they had no voice in the matter at all, and no choice but to accept an unwelcome decree issued from above by a non-specialist: in fact, by an unqualified interloper.

All this is quite the opposite of the truth. The distortions amount to downright lying. Stalin is actually a student and specialist in those fields of sociology which border immediately on linguistics (nationalities, minorities, and so on). He wrote about some broad philosophical principles underlying these disciplines and many others.

Moreover, he did not suddenly descend upon the body of Soviet

* Article by Prof. Margaret Schlauch in *New World Review*, New York, August 1951.

linguists with an unsolicited decree concerning their special subject. A lively debate on the matter had been going on for some weeks, chiefly in the columns of *Pravda*. Stalin entered it upon invitation, in response to questions posed to him directly by several young students. What he said was sensible, temperate, and on the whole far better linguistic doctrine than much that had preceded it. It gave a basis for correcting what had become a very unfortunate situation among specialists, due to a cult of admiration for one scholar, supinely followed even by dissenters from his theories.

Now that the air is cleared, there is no reason why the good research done in the past—despite some fallacious methodology—should not be followed by much better research and practical work in the future. That is all there is to the story.

At the time of the October Revolution in Russia, there was a scholar named N. Y. Marr working in the field of Caucasian languages (called by him the Japhetic group of languages). He had a wide range of information and a great enthusiasm for his subject. The great impetus given by the young Soviet regime to field work and research in languages no doubt delighted him. He threw himself along with many others into the investigation of the many linguistic families in the U.S.S.R., and into the preparation of grammars and texts for a number of them that had never before been written down. He also studied a certain amount of Marxist philosophy to familiarize himself with the guiding principles which had helped to shape the new government's excellent work in his field.

With all his enthusiasm, however, Marr apparently quite failed to understand certain fundamental concepts of Marxism. Using glibly such terms as class conflict, ideology, superstructure, and economic basis, he misapprehended them, proceeded to elaborate a school of thought which he claimed to be "Marxist linguistics," and succeeded in making it into something like an official doctrine. Some of the ideas he developed actually had nothing to do with Marxism.

Marr attacked the methods and results of earlier schools indiscriminately and with increasing acrimony. Thus the vast labors of Indo-European specialists, including his Russian as well as his western European predecessors, were condemned in a lump as

"bourgeois idealist" and "reactionary" products. Marr condemned the comparative methods by which these specialists had established the kinship of various families of related languages, and accused them of mystical idealism when they postulated lost "parent languages" to explain likenesses among groups of those existing today.

Here are some of the specific doctrines propounded by Marr to replace those he attacked.

In the first place, he claimed that in the very earliest stages of humanity, when the first human animals were learning to live together socially on the basis of shared labor, people communicated only by gestures and like inarticulate means. Spoken language, he argued, was later developed by a primitive ruling-class group of priest-magicians; and they kept this device as a class privilege removed as long as possible from the inarticulate masses. Thus language was supposedly developed as a weapon in a class struggle and belonged to the "superstructure" of society (as Marxists technically use that term).

Marr affirmed that he had worked out and knew of a certainty just what were the first four syllables of human speech to be articulated. They were *sal, ber, yon* and *rosh*: no more, no less than these. (Marr never gave his proofs for this claim.) From these four "elements," so-called, all speech supposedly evolved, diversifying gradually into various similar groups, and then—at certain times in certain places—under favorable conditions taking abrupt leaps forward into new linguistic systems.

The sudden advances postulated by Marr were supposed to have produced new "stadial developments" in language. The shift from sentences of simple, short words strung together without inflection, into sentences with grammatical agreement and morphology, represented such a stadial advance, initiating a new "family" of languages. The "revolutionary" shifts in question, according to Marr, were produced by technological advances, notably the discovery and the use of metals such as copper and iron among primitive peoples. Those making the discovery moved forward to a new linguistic stage, leaving other sections of the human race behind with the older language patterns. Hence the various stages still found today.

The innumerable ramifications of human speech began, of course, countless ages ago. Yet Marr claimed that he could juggle vowels and consonants in words existing today, no matter how different they may now appear, so as to show their derivation down the ages from the syllables *sal, ber, yon* and *rosh*. (He never explained his procedure.)

He also claimed that he could penetrate far back into the primitive thought of man, to the "totemic" and "cosmological" stages, by means of a process called "semantic paleontology." (Again, he never explained his procedure.) His method seems to have been the grouping together of terms and ideas often associated in folklore and mythology. These he called "semantic clusters," and with them he operated in connection with his four primordial syllables. One of his "semantic clusters" was the group "water-woman-serpent," which he found illustrated in the plots of such various stories as the medieval Tristan legend, modern fairy tales about dragon-killers, and the classical myth of Perseus and its analogues. In the course of their searches for such clusters, Marr and his disciples proposed some etymologies which were, to say the least, startling. They went by the name of "Japhetic" studies.

The cult surrounding Marr was so great, even after his death, that those who disagreed were pushed aside, in the sense that—as is now revealed—they found it difficult to publish articles and to train students from any other point of view.

However, it is not true that no scholar raised his voice to disagree with Marr and his school. Lively debates challenged them at various stages. Among other items, I recall reading a pamphlet in 1932 by P. S. Kuznetsov, called *The Japhetic Theory*, in which some of Stalin's criticisms were anticipated in matters restricted to language. Others who disagreed, and said so, were V. V. Vinogradov and V. N. Sidorov. In *Science and Society* (1936-37), No. 2, pp. 152-67, I summarized Marr's theories and Kuznetsov's challenge, with which I agreed. It was Marr's chief disciple, I. Meshchaninov, who led the opposition to them.

The domination by Marr's followers was first effectively challenged when *Pravda*, on May 9, 1950, published a long article by A. S. Chikobava attacking the entire school and defending the older "comparative" method. The author accorded warm praise to

the undoubted achievements of Marr, but subjected his doctrines to critical analysis. If language was part of the superstructure, a purely class product, asked Chikobava, how could it originate in pre-class society, at man's initial stage of development? (This was a major point made by Kuznetsov in the 1930's.) Moreover, Chikobava accused Marr's school of attempting an oversimplified correlation of economic factors with linguistic phenomena. He rejected Marr's insistence that an artificial international language is necessary as a pre-condition to realizing a classless society. He strongly disagreed with the "stadial theory" of language development, which in effect establishes a hierarchy of linguistic structures and condemns certain languages to remain on a "lower" stage permanently. Finally, he concluded with a rejection of the four primordial elements and all that had been deduced from them.

In a long reply (May 16), Meshchaninov did little more than recapitulate the basic doctrines of Marr, while he conceded a few inadequacies in their formulation and corrected Chikobava's statements in details.

By the middle of June, fourteen fairly long communications had appeared on the subject in *Pravda*. Some writers (like Chemodanov, May 23, and Kudriavtsev, June 13) carried on the defense of Marr; others (like Bulakhovsky, May 13) limited themselves to a defense of old-fashioned comparative methods, or deplored the sweeping claims and innovations (V. V. Vinogradov, June 6). More than once the question was raised: Why have we allowed this body of doctrine to be imposed, and to produce a condition of stagnation in our work?

A group of young students then asked Stalin to answer several pointed questions bearing on the controversy. This he did on June 20. The immediate service of his reply was that it corrected obvious errors concerning the relations of language to social classes. Not only was it impossible for a class of magician-priests to produce language as a class weapon before there were any classes, but in later times also the existence of classes (even with their special jargons differing in the way of vocabulary and usage) does not change the basic nature of language as a means of communication serving entire national communities *as a whole*.

Language, Stalin pointed out, differs essentially from the class-conditioned elements making up a cultural superstructure. It "is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of society and the history of bases throughout centuries. It was created not by any class, but by all society, by all the classes of society, by the efforts of hundreds of generations. . . . This, in fact, explains why a language may equally serve both the old, moribund system and the new, nascent system; both the old basis and the new basis, both the exploiters and the exploited."

The wider implications of Stalin's essay pass far beyond the narrow realm of linguistics. They remind us how important it is to discriminate carefully in dealing with elements within and without the superstructure, in relation to all problems of human culture. The Marr school demonstrated how far awry speculation and practice can be bent when such elements are not properly distinguished. Certainly Stalin's distinctions had nothing to do with any so-called "Russian nationalism," nor did they imply a retreat from the international affinities of socialism which (as history is teaching us today) does not wait for an artificial world language in order to enlist the support of increasing numbers of peoples, speaking many tongues, throughout the world.

Among the salutary criticisms made by Stalin was his condemnation of the oppressive dogmatism fostered by Marr's school. Such defects and kindred problems became the topic of discussion in the scholarly journal, *News of the Academy of Sciences* (Division of Language and Literature), in 1950-51. Some writers documented the scope of the inhibiting influence and how it had prevented that "conflict of opinion and freedom of criticism" which in Stalin's words are needed for the growth of science. Some articles undertook to show how certain special topics should be reoriented in the light of the recent clarification; others discussed problems of linguistics with little or no reference to the recent controversy.

As this survey must have made apparent, it seems to me that Stalin's invited participation had a most beneficial effect on the situation of linguistics in the U.S.S.R. I believe that this was possible

because he showed how to replace pseudo-Marxist principles with genuine ones.

Having been reminded of the historical role of language and its actual place in the constellation of social forces, linguists can proceed with their jobs with a clearer understanding of them. Just as the problem was first opened up by linguists, they are the ones to do the corrective work and to proceed to more fruitful activities than the juggling of hypothetical primeval monosyllables.

To investigate how languages serve not merely groups and classes but the entire societies of which they are the products, means to penetrate into some fascinating regions in which grammar and vocabulary are brought into relationship with broad questions of social psychology.

Realizing that language serves all levels of a society equally (allowing, of course, for nuances of style and vocabulary) helps us, for instance, to understand the universal enjoyment of great masterpieces of literary art, even when these had an origin within the patronage of a relatively restricted social group. The people as a whole, moving forward to a socialist society, take with them as their rightful heritage the great language monuments of a Dante and a Chaucer, a Pushkin and a Shakespeare. The medium *per se* offers no class barriers to a people educated in the best tradition of its national culture; the nobility and the humanity of sentiment embodied in words speak with increasing clarity to audiences released from oppression, fear, and exploitation.

It is the universality of the linguistic medium, of which Stalin spoke, combined with the transcendent quality of grandly creative word-masters, which makes possible the living continuation of great literary traditions.

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