

Becoming a Class for Itself: Lev Iakubinskii and the Principles of the Proletarian Language Policy

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Abstract

The article focuses on an attempt to develop Marxist approach to linguistics in Lev Iakubinskii and Anatoly Ivanov's book *Essays on language* (1932). This collection of essays was widely known in the early thirties and had a direct impact on many contemporaries including Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Zhirmunskii but later was condemned as an example of "vulgar sociology" and consigned to oblivion. Iakubinskii and Ivanov states that the proletariat had a particular mission, which consisted in breaking the "illusion of unity" of a nation created by the bourgeois policy of language unification. They argue that the insolvable contradiction of the bourgeois language policy is its incapacity to become universal in the conditions of social differentiations linked to the unevenness of development. At the same time, the contradiction between the tendency for universality and the class oppression is dialectical and serves as the "internal driving force" of language development that should provide the basis for the language policy of proletariat.

Keywords: language policy, Lev Iakubinskii, vulgar sociology, Soviet Cultural Revolution, historical materialism, Marxist linguistics

1. Vulgar sociology or Marxist linguistics?

In 1932, at the height of the Cultural Revolution in Russia and during the brisk debate on the authentic Marxist approach to language, Lev Iakubinskii¹ reminds us that, according to Marx and Lenin, language has two main functions—"medium of intercourse" and "ideology"—and they "shouldn't be separated from each other":

Thus Marxist linguistics determines that language is a unity of these functions and shows how these two sides of language as unity are coming to contradiction with each other at different stages of the development of society and how this contradiction, determined by the socio-economical background, serves as an internal driving force of language development. (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 62).

The Marxist science of language is clearly opposed to “bourgeois” linguistics that separates various functions of language or exaggerates one of them “to absolute” and thus completely loses from sight the abovementioned unity of language. However, as Marxist linguistics was merging at the time with Nikolai Marr’s New Teaching on Language (NTL), Iakubinskii summarizes that language becomes a “form of existence of class-oriented psycho-ideologies” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 62). Twenty years later, after Stalin’s legendary intervention into the domain of language sciences, Iakubinskii’s book *Essays on Language (Ocherki po iazyku)*, written with I. Ivanov,² was branded as “vulgar sociologism” and thus consigned to oblivion. I believe this evaluation to be a major injustice because, as Craig Brandist and Mika Lähteenmäki point out, the articles in *Essays on Language* “in many ways sum up the achievements of early Soviet sociolinguistics” (Brandist and Lähteenmäki 2011, 80).

During his lifetime, Lev Iakubinskii (1892–1945)—one of Baudouin de Courtenay’s favorite students and a founding member of the OPOJAZ movement—had a rather stable career. Unlike Evgenij Polivanov (1891-1938)—another of Baudouin’s preeminent pupils and the initiator of OPOJAZ who famously criticized Marr’s linguistic incompetence—Iakubinskii publicly accepted NTL and not only avoided exile and arrest but also held some important positions in the governing body of Soviet linguistics in the late twenties and early thirties. However, in contrast with Polivanov’s posthumous fame, Iakubinskii’s work was rarely revisited and remained almost unknown to the West.³

The “vulgar sociologism” label was firmly branded on Iakubinskii as early as 1953 when the new head of Soviet linguistics, Viktor Vinogradov, in his preface to Iakubinskii’s posthumously published *History of Old Russian Language (Istorija drevnerusskogo jazyka)* attributed this fact to

Iakubinskii's adherence to Marr's recently denounced teaching (Iakubinskii 1953, 4). However, alongside this criticism, Vinogradov admitted that Iakubinskii's book contained many fresh "observations and generalizations" and that Iakubinskii had been gradually departing from Marrist dogmatism. The verdict of "vulgar sociologism" was literally reproduced in a 1986 edition of Iakubinskii's work in the preface written by Alexey Leontiev, where *Essays on Language* was considered as "lacking of any scientific interest" (Iakubinskii 1986, 6). Despite their criticism of the "purifying" of Marxist elements in the 1986 *Izbrannoie*, the editors of the recent bilingual (Russian-French) collection of Iakubinskii's work did not find a place for any of the articles included in Iakubinskii's 1932 book (Ivanova 2013). Finally, a notable historian of language sciences, Vladimir Alpatov, did not include Iakubinskii's work in his overview of "serious" Marxist approaches to language (Alpatov 2000), and he only briefly mentions it in his major work on Valentin Voloshinov's famous *magnum opus* (although the Iakubinskii influence on the Bakhtin circle is treated in detail: Alpatov 2005, 43–50).

The notable exception to this trend is the opinion of the patriarch of Soviet German studies and theory of poetry Viktor Zhirmunskii, the author of the classic *National Language and Social Dialects* (*Natzional'nii jazyk i ego sotzial'nye dialekty*) (1936), in his early years close to the formalist movement. In a 1969 anniversary article entitled "Marxism and Social Linguistics," which was supposed to resume the itinerary of the Soviet school of sociolinguistics for the half century after the Revolution, he goes so far as to say that Iakubinskii's "not numerous, but very substantial works" had a "decisive influence" on the subject (Zhirmunskii 1969, 8). Apart from his published work, he emphasizes the intellectual "generosity" of Iakubinskii in the personal exchange with his colleagues and states that it was *Essays on Language* that gave "classical formulation of the formation of common-national language in the bourgeois society from the territorial dialects" that still provides the basis for "all our considerations on the topic" (Zhirmunskii 1969, 8). Besides this panegyric that praises Iakubinskii as the most important

precursor of the contemporary Soviet sociolinguistics, Zhirmunskii reproduces in his article many passages from *Essays on Language* without directly quoting him. He also draws attention to the fact that the research in the domain of sociolinguistics in the USSR in the second half of the twenties and thirties had been developing independently and “often in opposition” to Marr (Zhirmunskii 1969, 7). Brandist and Lähteenmäki recently stated that it bears a certain “thematic resemblance” to Bakhtin’s famous *Discourse in the Novel* (see Bakhtin 1981), written in the mid-thirties, and that he often places the ideas of what they call “Leningrad sociological school” in his own “ideal history of literary form” (Brandist and Lähteenmäki, 80).

Was the 1932 book a mere opportunistic attempt to promote “vulgar sociology” or the living source of Soviet social linguistics? In any case, its huge impact on Zhirmunskii’s work and very possibly on that of Bakhtin warrants a reevaluation of the work’s significance, which the present article endeavors to accomplish.

2. From formalist poetics to language policy

First and foremost, one cannot ignore that the interests of Baudouin de Courtenay were far ahead of mere “sociology of language”: he had a clear political engagement and even spent several months in prison in 1913 for his article on the possibility of political autonomy for the national regions of the Russian Empire (see Brandist 2016, 58–59). It is fitting that his pupils, Polivanov and Iakubinskii, played an active role in shaping the Soviet language policy, which was not far from the aspirations of previous generations of liberal intellectuals. These same intellectuals enthusiastically welcomed the February Revolution in 1917 and had hopes during the period of what I called once “New Scientific Policy” (see Blinov 2017) of Soviet government, which ended with the outcome of the Cultural Revolution in the late twenties.

Iakubinskii was, to put it in Mayakovsky’s words, mobilized from the “lordly gardening” of the formalist poetics: his first publications appeared in the famous OPOJAZ collections. Iakubinskii’s interest in the sociological analysis of

language could be clearly established already in his 1923 paper, “On Dialogical Speech” (*O dialogicheskoi rechi*), today widely considered as his major work. He shapes a substantial idea of “functional variety” of speech that was, to his mind, generally overlooked by contemporary linguistics. In a formalist manner, he discerns three major factors of classification of this variety according to the “sociological order”: *conditions of intercourse* (in the usual or unusual medium); *form* (direct, indirect, unilateral, or intermittent), and *objectives of intercourse* (practical and artistic, neutral and convincing). In the former case, he especially emphasized that “convincing” (*ubezhdaiuschii*) or “impressing” (*vnushaiuschii*) must be “intellectually and emotionally convincing” (Iakubinskii [1923] 1986, 18). This classification, as well as the focus on the examination of “everyday speech,” clearly distinguishes Iakubinskii from the more usual formalist scrutiny of literary texts. Moreover, in what he later refers to as “my formalist article,” (Iakubinskii 1932, 53) he proposes the analysis of “convincing” speech on the material of revolutionary rhetoric. In his 1924 article, “About the Lowering of Higher Style in Lenin” (*O snizhenii vysokogo stilii u Lenina*), published in *LEF* magazine (Iakubinskii 1924), he proposes what could be described as one of the first attempts at discourse analysis in linguistic literature. He observes the complete absence of “journalistic prose” (*publitsisticheskoi prozy*) analysis in contemporary language sciences and suggests that the different style elements (syntax, brackets, and choice of vocabulary) in the well-known Lenin article “About the National Pride of Great-Russians” (*O natsional’noi gordosti velikorossou*) are serving as a device of “lowering” pathetic of the Great War patriotic speeches; thus, Lenin’s narrative had a completely different impact on the reader.

In the second half of the twenties, Iakubinskii formally adhered to Marr’s NTL, although his interest in the analysis of political language on the material of journalism and everyday speech was evident already in his early formalist period. Two of his articles, written at the same time as those included in the *Essays on Language*, are of particular interest. The first, “F. De Saussure about the Impossibility of Language

Policy” (*F. De Sosiur o nevozmozhnosti iazykovoï politiki*), is no less than a manifest of the voluntaristic policy of language conducted during the Cultural Revolution in the early thirties. He criticizes Saussure’s thesis about the “inaccessibility” of language not only for individuals but also for the “mass of speakers or the group” (Iakubinskii 1931, 186). According to Iakubinskii, the approach of the Swiss linguist is typical for “bourgeois linguistics” that denies the very possibility of “organized intervention in the language process,” that is, the impossibility of the policy of language. For the authentic Marxist, linguistics that aims “not only to explain but to change the world,” it would mean the methodological impossibility of the science of language as such. By insisting on the “arbitrariness” of linguistic signs, Saussure ignores the fact that it exists in a “dynamical system” of developing language and acquires “the broadest rational and irrational connections—lingual and extra-lingual—that become a matter of discussion” (Iakubinskii 1931, 198). Saussure’s statement about the “passivity” of the masses and their satisfaction with the language inherited from the previous generations is equally wrong for Iakubinskii, as the masses are permanently contesting their language, and the possible failure of these attempts are rather due to their lack of understanding of the mechanisms of language changes. The most important issue, however, is Saussure’s blindness for the class differentiation of the speakers, prescribing the employment of the term “masses,” which is passive by definition and nonreflective of the language. This ignoring of class is not accidental as it denies the dialectical character of social and language interaction, and ascribes to the whole “mass of speakers” at any time the quality that has “the particular social class at the particular stage of its development” (Iakubinskii 1931, 208). This tendency, concludes Iakubinskii, reflects the aspiration of the bourgeoisie to fix its current domination and to give the “proofs” of the impossibility of revolution “at least in the language” (Iakubinskii 1931, 210).

However, Saussurean nondifferentiation of the social backgrounds of speakers and their historicity does not necessarily mean that Marxist linguistics should in turn

“absolutize” the “class nature” of language. Iakubinskii denounces this sort of abuse of Marxist methodology in another polemical article entitled “Against Danilovism” (*Protiv Danilovschiny*) (Iakubinskii 1932). Danilov, one of the leaders of the *Jazykofront* movement, pretended to explain the specificity of “proletarian speech style” from the point of view of what he believed to be Marxist linguistics. Following Swiss “bourgeois linguists,” he discerns between communicative and expressive functions of language and concludes that the sought-for specificity is contained in the “expressive-affective” style of a proletarian: it is simple and unpretentious, categorical in tone, and tends to invent the neologisms. Iakubinskii argues that these traits of style are by no means specifically “proletarian” because rural dialects are “simple,” the rhetoric of Italian fascists or Polish nationalists is no less “categorical,” and the bourgeois at the time of the French Revolution produced many “neologisms” omnipresent in the Soviet political vocabulary. Danilov reproduced, deliberately or by neglect, the Saussurean dichotomy of synchrony and diachrony and ignored the historical and dialectical character of the given social dialect. A social dialect has meaning only in the context of the national language history on which a Marxist linguist should project the class struggle history, which is understood according to the laws of dialectical materialism. If by “class” one understands an isolated social strata without a clear connection with the previous national language history, it would be just another face of Saussurean “metaphysical dualism”. In a sense, Iakubinskii was accusing Danilov of a sort of vulgar sociology that would be later associated with his own *Essays on Language*, as mentioned previously: “Danilovism” pretended to understand the class nature of proletarian speech style by mechanically combining its formal traits with some sort of idealistic image of a Russian worker, newly arrived at a big city and scarcely educated. To explain the true objectives of proletarian language policy, one should understand the dialectical process of forming the common-national language that will become one of the major themes of the articles collected in *Essays on Language*.

3. “Essays on Language” and the new style for popular science

One can easily guess why different generations of scholars classified *Essays on Language* as an embodiment of the so-called vulgar sociology that was widespread during the period of Soviet Cultural Revolution. It is certainly a product of its time: first, *Essays on Language* is a deliberate simplification of the main topics of social linguistics widely discussed in the twenties. Second, the necessity of the new revolutionary language for popular science is theorized in the eponymous closing essay “About the Popular-Scientific Language” (*O nauchno-populiarnom iazyke*). Iakubinskii argues that the language of popular science for the Soviet proletariat should be different from nineteenth-century flat positivism following Lenin’s dialectical style; that is, reveal the true contradictions of the considered problem and show its historical development.

Another particularity of *Essays on Language* that could embarrass contemporary readers is the presence of the extensive, often pages-long citations from the classics of Marxism-Leninism but equally from ethnographical and linguistic literature. However, the careful examination of the main arguments will show that the citations are well gleaned and logically arranged in sharp contrast with many other scientific works of the same and later periods that necessarily contained a quote from Lenin or Marx and Engels, often very far from its scientific domain. It could be suggested that the long quotes from non-Marxist or “reactionary” authors show the Iakubinskii and Ivaniov’s intention make out of their work some sort of anthology destined for the “writers” and “scientific workers” often deprived of access to prerevolutionary secondary literature. Many similar chrestomathies were published in the early thirties, such as the one on the national question (Velikovskii and Levin 1931), as quoted in *Essays on Language*.

Most of the articles were previously published in Gorki’s review *Literaturnaia ucება* and were meant for the education of proletarian writers. *Essays on Language* could be logically split into two parts: four of the essays contain some

practical advices for writers regarding literary techniques, and four are dedicated to more theoretical explanations of the proletarian language policy. The practical essays are certainly ideologically seasoned: one of them is a reminder of the language responsibility (*iazykovoï otvetsevennosti*) of a Soviet writer. From the more common perspective, they point at the numerous stylistic errors of proletarian writers and show that the old language norms could not be easily overcome. This combination of practical manual and theoretical reflections on the Marxism in linguistics is due to the particular discursive strategy: despite the absence of the adjective “Marxist” in the title, it has a similar ambition to Polivanov’s 1931 book, *For Marxist Linguistics (Za marksistkoje jazykoznanie)*, and, to a lesser extent, Voloshinov’s 1929 *opus magnum* (Voloshinov [1929] 1973). In addition, as I will show, *Essays on Language*, for good or bad, took the Marxist method much more seriously.

4. Formation of a common-national language and the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism

The accusation of vulgar sociologism in the early fifties supposed that the Marrist approach to language was quasi- and even anti-Marxist because it proclaimed that the language is assimilated to the ideology or superstructure, although it is a substantial part of the productive process; that is, it works simultaneously on the levels of infrastructure and superstructure (Stalin 1950). Like many victims falsely accused based on the infamous Article 58 during the Great Purge, Iakubinskii should be rehabilitated for the reason of “absence of the crime in the act.” He is not simply insisting on the indissolubility of communicational and ideological functions of language but states that in the *Essays on Language*, he will principally address the communicational function and later will dedicate another work to the ideological one (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 3, 63). This second book, however, was never written, although some of the related ideas were apparently included in Iakubinskii’s lectures on the history of the Ancient Russian language given in the thirties and published posthumously (Iakubinskii 1953). Notwithstanding a few ritual references to Marr, no trace of

Marrism can be found in *Essays on Language*. Iakubinskii indeed paid tribute to Marr's quasi-historical or paleontological "semantization" in his published articles (Iakubinskii 1927), but the scope of *Essays on Language* was completely different and, fortunately, was not a part of the interests of the author of NTL.

The main arguments are concentrated in the previously unpublished article "Capitalism and National Language" (*Kapitalizm I natsional'nyi iazyk*), which seems to be the theoretical core of the book. The article shows that Iakubinskii's attack on Saussure and Danilov (and indirectly on Polivanov who supervised the latter; see Iakubinskii 1932) was in fact consistent with the analysis that we find in *Essays on Language*. Iakubinskii reminds readers that, according to Marx and Engels, to understand the laws of historical development, one should examine the capitalist society as the "most complicated" and "most advanced" form of state that ever existed. For the sake of understanding the "class structure" of contemporary Russian language, proletarian writers and cultural workers should beforehand master the general tendencies of language development under capitalism and its particularities in the Russian Empire. The aim of the article is to perceive the difference of the language policy under capitalism from the previous feudal formation, which is especially important in the backward prerevolutionary Russia.

Iakubinskii states that the economic and political aspects of feudal "atomism" determined the existence of a "sack of dialects" following Marx's comparison of the French people before the Revolution to a "sack of potatoes" (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 67). Already, the old regime's bureaucratic absolutism had a tendency toward the unification of language as soon as the central state apparatus became more and more involved in the governance of the particular regions; that is, it had the clear intention to transform itself into a nation-state. Moreover, in the late feudal period, commodity production had been developing, and the need to sign the treatises had been aroused for more and wider groups of the population. In this sense, Iakubinskii's analysis is rather standard for its time: he refers to the works of German

socialist Karl Kautsky, and a similar narrative could be found in the ninth volume of Ferdinand Brunot's major work, *History of the French Language* (Brunot 1927).

However, Iakubinskii emphasizes the multiplicity of factors leading to this transformation without reducing the necessity to use the unified "national" language for the needs of "production" or "administration." The process of what he describes as the "capitalization of language relations" (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 71) is multifold. First, a capitalist is not a mere owner but the direct organizer of the productive process; he is not a resident of an isolated feudal province but of the whole country. From the Marxist point of view, the bourgeoisie is using the unified national language as an instrument for becoming "a class for itself," that is, to identify itself with the whole nation. However, it is rather an ideal of the grand bourgeoisie and its satellite intelligentsia because the small bourgeoisie has to adapt itself for this general tendency and may preserve some local dialects.

The second major factor of language unification is the particular development of public speech under capitalism. The capitalist revolution brings the so-called freedom of public speech into the parliament and press, tending to promote it as "the general form of speech relation" (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 75) like that of the spoken language. However, this tendency, concludes Iakubinskii, has its limits in the bounds of the capitalistic society because the press, parliament, and bourgeois intelligentsia are all trying at the same time to "stop the mouth" of the subordinate classes, especially of their direct antagonist class, that is, the proletariat. For this reason, the bourgeoisie is facing an insolvable contradiction by denying the tendency to the "universality of national language that is inserted inside it" (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 78).

The third and critically important trait of "capitalization of language relations" is the fact that the bourgeoisie is using it as the instrument of domination of the "common-national" (*obschenatsional'nyi*) language. There certainly was a universal language in the feudal era, but Latin was by no means "its own language" for the different classes of a given society propagated by the Catholic Church, which

functioned as a global and transnational institution. By contrast, the bourgeoisie is primarily a class with pretensions to universality as it aspires to express the interests of the whole society. It overcomes the bilingualism typical for the feudal society by imposing on the whole country the “common-national” language that is “not alien [*tchuzhoi*], not external, not extraneous for the whole mass of dialects of a given language” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 82). Being the first quasi-universal class for itself, the bourgeoisie tends to create “an illusion of unity” of a given society that lasts right up to the moment when the proletariat breaks this illusion and in turn becomes a class for itself that marks the “beginning of the end of the bourgeois society” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 80).

As soon as capitalism necessarily enters its “imperial stage,” according to Lenin, it strives to become global. The national languages at this moment are becoming more and more internationalized but still are not replaced by one common global language. Once again, this tendency is not realized because the concurrence of the global languages includes only the languages of the most developed capitalist countries. Iakubinskii is thus coming to his general conclusion that “national language has a tendency to universality (in the various senses of the word)” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 84) but is not able to realize universality in the conditions of the class struggle and uneven (*neravnomernogo*) development of capitalism. This uneven character of development is the key to his analysis of the linguistic situation in late imperial Russia.

5. The unevenness of Russian language development and the proletarian language policy goals

The peasant’s language in a capitalist society is a vestige (*perezhitok*) of the feudal formation but still represents a “unity of opposites” and should be compared with a city as another unity of opposites dominating in the new circumstances. Capitalism is unable to solve the contradiction between village and city, and their linguistic relations are rather unilateral: the history of the peasant language under capitalism is a history of its “active language adaptation to the

capitalist relations under the oppression of capitalism” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 88). This adaptation has three main traits: it is *uneven* in different regions and subclasses; it is not *rectilinear* because the local dialects do not always give up without a fight; and it is *conscious* (at this point, we should remember Iakubinskii’s criticism of Saussure). In support of his argument, Iakubinskii, whose main linguistic specialization was the Russian language, gives many examples from prerevolutionary ethnographic and linguistic literature. The villages dominated by *kulaks* (rich peasants) are often much more conservative, whereas the most progressive are *sezonniki* (seasonal workers) who are accustomed to working in the city now and are consciously shaping their speech habitudes according to urban norms. At the same time, they regularly go back to their native villages and influence the speech of their neighbors. Already in this linguistic situation, this half-peasant, half-urban proto-proletariat is making a language for itself (*jazyk dlia sebia*) from the unconscious language (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 102).

However, the particular linguistic situation of the Russian proletariat is mainly peasant by origin. In addition to the widely discussed relation to the newly acquired bourgeois culture, proletarian language policy should first deal with the multiplicity of peasant dialects (*raznorechie*) “inherited” from past formations. To this point, Iakubinskii seems to support the old Jacobin idea of extirpation of patois as advised by the patriots of the First French Republic (see the classical work by De Certeau et al. 2002). This should eliminate the intra-class multiplicity of patois for two main reasons: first, it came from the outside in terms of production because the division of labor in the village is completely different; and, second, it contradicts the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat and reduces its unity.

At the first stage, the proletariat must “overcome” (*izzhit’*) the peasant dialects; at the second stage, the proletariat must deal with the new national language acquired from the old bourgeois culture. In this sense, Iakubinskii strictly opposes the most radical projects advanced in the early thirties: he denies the very idea of proletarian syntax,

grammar, or even pronunciation. It was simply confused with peasant vestiges that should be eliminated in the process of developing the proletarian language. This confusion came from the nondifferentiation of communicational and ideological functions of language: the proletariat is opposing the bourgeoisie “not in the language as a mean of intercourse but in the language as ideological function” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 121). In this act, the proletariat must “break the illusion of unity” of the nation promoted by the bourgeoisie in order to finish its historical task: create the classless society that only makes the unified national language possible. To accomplish this task, proletariat should destroy the unevenness of development as the main obstacle to creating the unified proletarian language. However, the old language norm would still be a subject of transformations: Iakubinskii suggests that the industrial (*proizvodstvennyi*) language would certainly play a dominant role in the future.

The authentic proletarian language policy should eliminate the unevenness of development not only between village and city but also between the Russian and non-Russian populations. Here, Iakubinskii’s analysis is less innovative: he simply states that the main interest of the proletariat is the elimination of “all open and hidden state forms of national enslavement” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 128). For this reason, the real “proletarian centralism” has nothing in common with the “Great-Russian chauvinism”. Moreover, he ascertains that it would certainly result in the flourishing of all national cultures within the newly created Soviet Union, although no particular form of interaction between Russian and non-Russian languages is proposed. In this point, Iakubinskii rather intentionally foreruns the upcoming turn to the expansion of Russian language usage on an all-Soviet scale.⁴

6. Conclusions

I wanted to show that Iakubinskii’s *Essays on Language* was by no means a specimen of so-called vulgar sociology or a mere opportunistic usage of Marxist terminology as was the case of Marr’s NTL (for NTL, see

Alpatov 1991). First, his interest in the variety of social functions of language was quite constant and could be affirmed even in his early “formalist” period. Second, he not only clearly distinguished ideological and communicative functions of language but also used this very distinction to shape his main argument. Third, while the contemporary projects to elaborate the “Marxist approach to linguistics” (such as that of Voloshinov or Polivanov) were using Marxist terminology for the *problem statement*, Iakubinskii proposed what seems to be a more authentic Marxist *solution*. He suggested that the insolvable contradiction of the bourgeois language policy is its incapacity to become universal in the conditions of social differentiations linked to the unevenness of development. But this contradiction between the pretention for universality and the class oppression is dialectical and serves as the “internal driving force of language development” (Iakubinskii and Ivanov 1932, 62) that opens the way for the final triumph of the proletariat. Finally, the potential of early Soviet political philosophy of language is far from exhausted and should not be reduced to trivial clichés, such as vulgar sociology, that already make up a part, and not a very glorious one, of our intellectual history.

NOTES

¹ In Russian: Лев Петрович Якубинский. Other possible spellings are Jakubinskij or Jakubinsky.

² Not much is known about his coauthor, Anatolii Matveevich Ivanov (b. 1904); even his date of death is unknown.

³ There is no mention of Iakubinskii in the recent account given by Lecercle (2006).

⁴ For more about this transitional period, see Smith (1998), Martin (2001), and Hirsch (2005).

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