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Soviet Literature of the Thirties :
a Reappaisal

Contents

ON OFFICIALESE :
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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It would appear there is something in the USSR and other socialist countries akin to a *language* (langue)*. Distinctive, it is also unparalleled : it is the language of power. And this language, if we are to believe numerous Soviet and foreign studies, can be recognized and identified as language.

This language, known as « officialese » or « Sovietese », would have several features : magic, mystery, inconcinnity or maximal opacity. We believe such features of problematic consistency reveal a basic postulate : there is a « Soviet language », it is an *object* of study, it must be described or destroyed, fought or purified, but of this there is no doubt : it exists and it is a language.

Such is the pregnant idea of language that we first wish to examine. What exactly is meant by « Sovietese » being a language ? What vision of language and its workings is summoned by this assertion ? Which concept of subject-speaker or linguistic community is at work ?

And yet what if the crop of studies on Sovietese, the apparent object, were but the construction by contrast of *another language*, another object, this one latent, never formulated as such, but whose analysis would prove far more fruitful ?

Translated by Dominique Michaud

*To differentiate between the two concepts of « langue » and « langage », we translated « langue » into « language » and « langage » to « Language ».

Such is the object, hollow, *negative* (in the photographic, not axiological sense), that we wish to unveil from the descriptions of the *positive* object, « Sovietese ».

I - THE LANGUAGE OF THOSE IN THE KNOW

A - *The Master-Machiavelli*

Most critics of « Sovietese » speak of a terrifying personage, of a linguistic monster, of a superhuman spectre whose intentions are then very much human : the absolute Master of language, master of words, he who arbitrarily *determines* their meaning :

> « Insofar as the Verb - as well as the entire system of communication for that matter - is in the hands of the Guide, of the highest authority, words and signs will have no other meaning than that which is officially assigned them. » (Heller-85, p. 289)

The Master, i.e. the political authority, also creates new words : he is an *inventor of language*. For A. & T. Fesenko[1] , who as early as 1955 used the phrase « Soviet language » :

> « They (the Bolsheviks) have usurped and monopolized the right to create phraseological clichés. » (Fesenko, p. 208)

The making itself of the language has a history :

> « The first characteristic of the Soviet language is its planned creation (the foundations were laid before even the Revolution). » (Heller-85, p. 276)

The lability of the meaning of words is deliberately used by the Master-Machiavelli with intent to *manipulate*. This is the general theme of various studies on political propaganda[2] made by Polish dissidents[3] .

But Sovietese, that language where words have lost their « inherent meaning » (Heller-79, p. 1), appears also to be a linguistic system that any man, even if being manipulated, could choose or not to follow with full knowledge of the facts :

> « The State determines the meaning of words, it sanctions their use and it creates a magical circle one must break into if one is to understand and be understood within the Soviet system. » (Heller-85, p. 275)

[1] Soviet linguists who emigrated to the United States after the Second World War.

[2] Called in Polish « nowo-mowa » after Orwell's « newspeak ».

[3] Cf. Karpinski-84, *Jezyk propagandy*-79.

The True and the False

In an imperceptible shift, we go from the instability of meaning in a language « created » and « monopolized » by the State (Heller-85, p. 293; Fesenko, p. 208) to a false meaning : falsehood. Words are then merely improper, ill-chosen :

> « Self-admiration and self-laudation are a screen that conceals the sad existence of Soviet republics attired with the flattest, most bombastic attributes : flowery Ukraine, sunlit Georgia... » (Fesenko, p. 30)

Such problematics of falsehood also imply a speaker's freedom to consciously tell the truth or tell a lie, imply in other words a *choice* as to the adequacy of the saying to the said. Through language, the Master-Machiavelli would have the freedom to either draw a map which would not represent the territory (*falsehood*) or draw several maps for the same territory (*dual Language*).

Words and Things

But because of its incomprehensible or false nature, the map sometimes *takes so much space* as to *take the place* of the territory : for its detractors, Sovietese is a system where *only words can be seen*, words behind which reality fades away and stops being perceptible :

> « Bolshevism is a true orgy of words which makes its way everywhere, into the very last village. » (Walter Schubart, *Evropa i dusha vostoka*, quoted in Fesenko, p. 45, with no reference as to the date of publication)

> « (In propaganda) words are a goal in itself. » (Karpinski, p. 42)

We thus go from referential instability to sheer referential opacity :

> « Made up of clichés, phraseology closes our eyes to the true nature of things and their relations, it substitutes their nomenclature for the real things; furthermore, this nomenclature is inaccurate. » (Vinokur in *Lef*, no. 1 (1924), p. 115; quoted in Heller-85, p. 281)

The theme of *opacity* is constant in the metaphors of the obstacle to transparency or of the loss of a *direct link* between words and things. Thus, Soviet writer Korneï Chukovskiï, who denounced at length the language of bureaucracy which he called *kantseliarit*[4] , claims that *kantseliarit* is a « smoke screen, quite

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[4] Modelled on the names of illnesses such as *difterit* and *meningit*.

suitable for concealing truth » (Chukovskiï, p. 134), a language in which words have lost « any link with reality » (*ibid.*, p. 135), « an impenetrable, blind wall » (*ibid.*, p. 135). For his part, Karpinski reports that in 1950s' Poland, the language of political power was considered as « a message sent to the Chinese through a closed dormerwindow » (Karpinski, p. 1).

What is in fact a message in which only words are seen if not poetry ? Negative poetry though, ensconced in a conception where the poetical function of Language (as defined by Jakobson-60) is believed measurable, being inversely proportional to the amount of information conveyed by the message :

> « Sovietese is an ornate discourse in which steadfast rhetorical or poetical prescriptions have an absolute primacy on information. This only shows that raw information is beyond its scope. » (Martinez, p. 509)

> « Propaganda is a particular kind of poetry, especially when it has nothing to do with reality. » (Karpinski, p. 4)

Poetry here would be but a perverse diversion from the referential function of Language.

The Real and the Surreal

In arguments offered by the detractors of Sovietese, « reality » and the « real » are both the starting point and the ultimate term of the quest for true speech.

> « Marx's phrase : 'One's being determines one's conscience' clearly applies to the Soviet domain if we accept that the being - the reality in which we live - is created by language. This reality is illusory. Yet there is, parallel to it, a true reality : bread, love, birth, death. The Soviet language creates and extolls an illusory reality; the living language gives authentic reality the opportunity to exist. To a great extent, the forming of Soviet man is but the fray between two languages. » (Heller-85, p. 303)

The Master-Machiavelli would thus have succeeded not only in creating a language but also in creating a new kind of reality, a « pseudo-reality » (Karpinski, p. 70) :

> « In Communist countries principally, propaganda strives to create a special kind of reality, an autonomous reality, much like a map of the land of fairy tales, without any relation to reality as we otherwise know it. » (Karpinski, p. 64)

This other reality was named « surreality » by A. Besançon. For him, « officialese », which he opposes to « human language »,

is an hallucination, a mirage in which words have the *power to create* a surreality whose existence is only verbal. The Soviet political system would thus be a « logocracy » (Besançon, p. 210).

The surreality created by Sovietese is then similar to a « magical circle » (Heller-85, p. 306) within which « man (is) constantly hypnotized by these immutable magical formulas » (*ibid.*, p. 289) :

> « As great as Stalin's power is, as great then is the realm of slogans, magical decisions which determine the course taken by the Party. ...The word of the guide takes on a universal and absolute nature. Much like a shaman's incantation, it determines the fate of man and State and proclaims the shape, good or bad, of things to come. » (*ibid.*, p. 283)

The power of the Master-Machiavelli on this kind of totalitarian language that stifles free thought does not seem absolute

B - *The Master-Hermeneut (Getting the Better of the Master)*

Political power would thus be the Master of words it uses to manipulate the conscience of people. Yet it appears there are in the midst of these people especially conscious individuals who *know* how to turn false words round to reveal their hidden meaning which, in turn, they express in true words. These are the Master-Hermeneuts.

In 1980-81 for example, academic symposiums were held in Poland on the « language » of political power[5] . These work sessions had a prophylactic and educational goal : to learn and to teach how to defend oneself against propaganda. In the same spirit, M. Heller's reflection on language is in keeping with the political struggle as he writes :

> « The Soviet system is a dictatorship of language; in order to fight it, we must first destroy the language of dictatorship. » (Heller-79, p. 1)

Bilingualism and Dual Competence

The opposition between « officialese » and « living language » sometimes appears as a dual competence (in the strict sense of the word), a mastered and conscious diglossia within a radical distinction of the two languages. Indeed, for M. Heller the « Soviet language » is a genuine *language* and the Soviets would thus be

[5] Cf. *Manipulacja*-81, *Nowo-mowa*-81.

bilingual, *electing* to use according to context (at home/at an official meeting) one or the other of the two « languages » at their disposal.

However, looking for linguistic criteria of recognition of these languages is to no avail. This in fact is essentially a matter of differing interpretations on the meaning of words.

For example, A. & T. Fesenko explicitly adopt Orwellian problematics :

> « Never has the semantics of words and phrases been so different for popular masses and for those who hold power than in the Soviet era. Terms and expressions such as 'socialism', 'vigilance', 'enemy of the people', 'voluntary contribution', 'mass enthusiasm' are diametrical opposites in an official interpretation and in an authentically popular interpretation. » (Fesenko, p. 206)

On this account, the work of C. Jönsson (1985) is a notable exception. Jönsson develops a strange theory according to which « the contrast between the official political language and the private language » (p. 9) is foreseen in the Russian language itself. There would thus be *two* words for « truth » : *pravda* in the official language (this truth being relative, « variable » and « normative ») and *istina* in the private language (this truth being « objective », « absolute » and « scientific »), as there would also be two words for « lie » : the official *vran'ë* and the private *lozh'*.

Yet, whether words differ or whether these same words have different meanings, the Master-Hermeneut *knows* both « languages ». It is then quite normal he should know how to *translate* from one into the other, performing this task with the ease of a confirmed translator. We thus have numerous examples of translations.

For A. Besançon (1980, p. 201), « kolkhoz » must be translated in/ « human language » by « a servile plantation owned by a bureaucracy and supervised by a system of repression ». For M. Heller (1985, p. 274), « the phrase 'freedom of speech' means 'the necessity of condemning the innocent' ». In the same spirit, A. & T. Fesenko speak of a « dual semantics in the lexicon ». Thus

> « 'enemy of the people' is perceived by the masses as 'enemy of the regime', wanting but the good of the people; 'the work enthusiasm of the masses' conceals the frantic exploitation of man by State which in turn forces Soviet citizens to labour beyond themselves in the cold, hungry and in fear of repression; 'Soviet vigilance' is synonymous with a frightening terror which

> condemned countless innocent victims to die in the NKVD-MVD prisons. » (p. 206)

They conclude :

> « Revealing the authentic meaning of such phrases is a counter-poison developed by the people against being stupefied by false clichés. » (p. 206)

But here the Master-Hermeneut is unlike any other translator for he does not translate two equal languages; he sets right a false link between words and reality : *he translates from the false into the true*. The hermeneut, it must be noted, is either a conscious scholar working for the people or the « people » themselves.

Reading Between the Lines

There is yet another way of practicing hermeneutics and that is to read between the lines. In such case, we would have an ideal indirect schema of communication : a speaker S sends a coded message to an adressee A but a parasitic receiver R intercepts and deciphers this message that was not sent to him but which was *clear* before being coded. The notion here of mastery of language is carried out to its climax : meaning is equally mastered by Machiavelli who ciphers the message and by the hermeneut who deciphers it.

Thus, in A. Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*, Rusanov, the local Party authority, *interprets* the hidden signs accessible only to the initiated. There is at first the intent to communicate, which leads Jönsson (who studies this example) to consider Kremlinology as a « semiotic » activity : the analysis of a system of signs. For Jönsson, the USSR is characterized by an « esoteric communication » (p. 12) and it has a secret political life :

> « the leadership has a certain need to communicate with lower-level executives. They in turn need information on the balance of power at the top ... Thus, 'transmitters' and 'receivers' make equal use of an esoteric communication whose deeper meaning is only understood by a small circle of receivers. » (p. 13)

All these assertions, however, give but few formal criteria by which Sovietese can be defined as a language.

II - THE LANGUAGE OF THOSE NOT IN THE KNOW

Another approach, which appears to us complementary to the preceding, has Sovietese spoken only by ignoramuses, those who do not know how to speak other than how they already speak. Any

notion of conscious diglossia is then forsaken; sociopolitical groups are recognized by their language or the use they make of their language. We can thus single out a number of stylistic studies on the specific features of Sovietese. Paradoxically, by the great care they give to the texts, to the writing and to the facts of language, these studies, supported by several concrete examples, often reveal more than those studies on the opposition between « language of the true/language of the false ».

Yet this problematics of non-mastery is also highly contradictory.

A - *Ignoramus Popularis*

According to A. & T. Fesenko, the « correct usage » (kul'tura rechi) of Russian, of the « language of classics », was endangered at the onset of the 1917 Revolution by the systematic introduction of slang, regionalisms and trivial phrases, said operation being supported by Marxist theory which advocated « turning the Russian language upside down »[6] , that is putting on the foreground the sociolect of dominated classes.

The Bolsheviks, solely concerned with practical tasks such as the political and technical education of youth, entirely neglected the purity of Russian (p. 35) until noticing around 1945 that the « new language » thus born did not suit their designs to manipulate the people (p. 16).

B - *The Ignoramus Bureaucrat*

The Bolsheviks also appear to be responsible for further contaminating Russian with their highbrow language : intellectuals, having lived abroad, brought back a taste for international words and political neologisms, which are so many incomprehensible barbarisms to the « people » (Fesenko, pp. 22, 25).

In the USSR, several writers, literary critics and linguists have spoken against a Russian language invaded by bureaucratic phrases ; such phrases according to K. Chukovskiï « clutter a sentence with empty words and divert one's attention » (Chukovskiï, p. 132).

It is important to stress that of all stylistic characterizations of the language of power or of the language of Soviet bureaucracy,

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[6] N. Ia. Marr, *Izbrannye raboty*, Leningrad, 1933, Vol. 2, p. 24; quoted in Fesenko, p. 60.

those remarks on vocabulary (neologisms and barbarisms) are the most frequent. Syntactic facts which would be exclusive to Sovietese are rarely put forward[7] . A. & T. Fesenko consider the syntactic changes in Russian during the Soviet period are « insignificant ». They apply a purely *stylistic* analysis to syntax : for them, the « bureaucratization » of the language translates itself into a « cumbersome and complicated syntax » (p. 187). They give as an example of clumsy stylistics the abundance of « desemanticized verb + nominalization » structures replacing full verbs (ex. : *vesti bor'bu* instead of *borot'sia* - « to lead the/a fight » instead of « to fight ») (p. 187). As for Chukovskiï, he deplores the abundance of nominalizations in nominal groups as well as the strings of cascading genitives, such as this example (excerpted from a Soviet commentary on Nekrasov) :

« Tvorcheskaïa obrabotka obraza dvorovogo idët po linii usileniia pokaza tragizma ego sud'by. » (Chukovskiï, p. 142)

(« The creative elaboration of the character of the servant follows the line of reinforcement of the demonstration of the tragic nature of his fate. »)

A last feature of superficial syntax frequently mentioned is the repetition of ready-made formulas :

« Like a house constructed of prefabricated panels, the language forms itself from Stalin slogans and quotations. » (Heller-85, p. 284)

Maria Fabris, who has studied several critical analyses of officialese, writes that these repetitions permit the assembling of « prefabricated » elements, which is « far easier than to produce new ones » and spares bureaucrats the trouble of showing initiative (Fabris, p. 145).

These preceding remarks on « syntax » present considerable interest, but the stake exceeds mere psychological notes on the intellectual laziness of mediocre people or on the imitation of pompous formulas by unimaginative bureaucrats. The means to analyze the repetition of « prefabricated » pieces must be searched elsewhere - we will come back to the subject.

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[7] On the other hand, as we may recall, Marr believed the relation between language and society first expressed itself through syntax and its historical transformations. Unlike Marr, Stalin (*Pravda*, 20 June 1950) stated it was « not to be desired that fundamental changes occur in language ».

C - *The Remedies*

On May 25, 1946, *Pravda* published the first in a long series of articles on the following theme : we must fight against incorrect (bezgramotnye) words of popular or foreign origin. Thus was heralded the recovery of language purity by the political authorities.

A few years later, K. Chukovskiï started a series of articles in *Literaturnaïa Gazeta* : it is the intellectual's duty to denounce the sclerosis of language and its impoverishment through clichés.

> « We must stop speaking out of inertia, and convince ourselves of the real meaning of words. » (Chukovskiï, p. 134)

This is a moral fight for him, takes which but on the same accents as the more political fight for the purification of language led by Gor'kiï in the 1930s (cf. *O literature*, Moscow, 1935) or by the linguist Filin and the Normativists in the 1960s and 1970s.

To speak in a true language and to speak in a pure language are one and the same thing, justified by the notion that words have a true meaning which a perverse use of language would have erased, and that it is imperative in a moral or political fight to recover that meaning.

III - THE WOUND OF NON-TRANSPARENCY

A - *A Hall of Mirrors*

It would be tempting at times to join in the fight of true against false, so greatly convinced are the authors, if however it did not turn out that this fight for words is similar to that of the Soviet political leaders. Strangely, the detractors and « authors » of Sovietese hold the same discourse on language and truth.

In 1924, the best-known representatives of Russian formalism studied *the language of Lenin* in No. 1 of the journal *Lef*. Opportunism or scientific interest ? They were unanimous in stressing that Lenin attacked the « verbose Language », the « bureaucratic verbiage » of the Tsarist administration (Eikhenbaum, p. 9) and the « formulas which make one shudder, seeing thus tarnished our dear Russian language » (Lenin-58, Vol. 5, pp. 235-236; quoted in Eikhenbaum, p. 9), but also the « distinctive verbiage of bourgeois intellectuals » (*ibid.*, p. 10) and the « torrents of words » of his social-revolutionary adversaries (Lenin-58, « The Harm of Phrase-Mongering », Vol. 29, pp. 565-566; quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 9-10). According to Eikhenbaum,

Lenin « cares not for bookish Language but rather for simple, spoken language » (*ibid.*, p. 9). He stands against « verbosity », the « great words » (p. 11); he « worries about the transformation, into trite terms of standard usage, of words which are dear to him and in his eyes wealthy with deeper meaning » (p. 10). To this Language invaded by empty words Lenin opposed, wrote Eikhenbaum, a « practical-type of Language » (p. 11) using « words from spoken language and everyday phrases » (p. 11). For Lenin, the Cadets, the SR and the Mensheviks were the « party of words » while the Bolsheviks were the « party of actions » (Lenin-58, Vol. 10, pp. 222-223; quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15). According to Tomashevskiï, Lenin opposed *life* to *verbiage* (Lenin-58, Vol. 24, p. 35; quoted in Tomashevskiï, p. 17).

Likewise, Chukovskiï recalled in 1963 that « Lenin accused his opponents of hiding behind their bureaucratic style the counter-revolutionary essence of their ideals » (Chukovskiï, p. 137).

What distinguishes Lenin's attitude towards language from what we have previously studied in the first two chapters ? One lone detail : the name of the adversary. From Lenin to Heller, the same notions of « language » and « life » are at work. This total reversibility of arguments does not appear in the least obvious to those who use them and even criticize their opponents *for what they themselves demand* in the name of the proper adequacy of their own language to reality :

> « Lenin demands the right to give words back their true meaning yet denies his adversaries that of using revolutionary terms without proper sanction. » (Heller-85, p. 278)

Why then are the features of the « language of power » so fiercely denounced by the representatives of that very same power ? Why does L.I. Brezhnev write :

> « All ideological education work must be carried out in a lively and interesting fashion, without phrasal clichés and without a standardized apparatus of ready-made formulas. A Soviet citizen is an educated and cultured man. Thus, when we speak to him in a bureaucratic language void of content, when we think we can get away with phrases made up of generalities rather than with phrases concretely related to life, to real facts, that is when he simply turns off his television set or radio or folds his paper. » (Brezhnev-81, p. 75) ?

Why do we find in Gor'kiï this demand for *clear* and *simple* language :

> « Lexical impropriety is always associated with ideological incompetence ... None of our critics has shown writers that the language in which they write is either difficult to understand or absolutely impossible to translate into foreign languages. Lest we forget, the proletariat of the Union of Soviets has conquered and claims its right to bolshevize the world ... It is essential we lead a merciless fight to purify literature of verbal rubbish, a fight for the purity and clarity of our language » (Gor'kiï-35, pp. 136-137; quoted in Fesenko, p. 202) ?

Why finally is one's argumentation denigrated by the other in the very name of the former's arguments :

> « 'Lenin's adversary' is 'the word endowed with a precise meaning, born with the passing of History' » (Heller-85, p. 277) ?

B - *The Perfect Language Already Exists*

This dialogue of the deaf is but apparent, the fight is the same. Oppositions must be outlined anew, not in terms of political camps but in terms of notions of language and discourse. The unthinkable epistémé presiding over the elaboration of the anti-official discourse as well as over that of the Soviet purist discourse reveals a common fantasm, a common utopia resulting from the same wound : *there are words between man and things.*

Transparent Language and Opaque Language

In the Occidental metaphysics of the sign, *significance* is thought in terms of *representation* : a name is given to a thing through substitution of the improper for the proper. Meaning is assimilated to truth which is the *correspondence* of words to reality. This explains why some words are *adequate* and others are not (cf. « translations ») :

> « (In the USSR) the problem of the relation between language and reality is quite unusual in terms of linguistic evolution in that it is one of dual semantics translated in official and unofficial semantics. This means that for a common spoken or written form there is either an intentionally false image or an authentic perception of Soviet reality. » (Fesenko, p. 207)

Guided by ethics, common sense or political conviction, the hermeneut pursues the false and the ambiguous to search for the true and the univocal he will later reveal in his ideal « clear

language » (which ideal language is highly reminiscent of the univocal meta-Language of the neopositivist enterprise).

This for example is what is found in Jönsson's article : the hermeneutical stand on reading between the lines is based on a definition of the sign as « something which stands in place of something which is absent » (Eco-75, p. 12; quoted by Jönsson, p. 2) or in other words, a vision of the sign as *parasite* : at the end of the hermeneutic process the sign must die, disappear so the meaning may be revealed in its original fullness. In order to justify that « semiotic » approach to « esoteric communication » in the USSR, Jönsson relies, in our opinion, on an erroneous interpretation of the Saussurian definition of language as a system of signs. While stating that « he (Saussure) has shown that the relation between signifier and signified is totally arbitrary » (p. 2), Jönsson passes in silence over the fundamental distinction between *signified* and *referent*, that which permits such a straight reading of the real behind the « signs ».

If language is but representation, it is understandable that any linguistic activity should instantly be depreciated when experienced as a system in which words describe words and not the things to which they refer. The discovery of the autonomous dimension of the signifier, whether in psychoanalysis or in modern literary writing, is not recognized by everyone and causes turmoil in the face of a proper order : that of *language*.

Be they dissidents from within or without, Kremlinologists or linguists employed by the Soviet State, all share a dream of a language that would not be a language but a faithful reflection, a transparent medium, a light shadow whose materiality would fade before the blinding light of a reality that is *seen* before being *said*. The ideal language would then be something that is not of the order of language but of the *substitute*, a map that would be but a pure and simple repetition of a territory, a second territory, identical to the first and substituted for it. The perfect language is one that is not seen : if officialese (the language of others) is only made up of words, true language *makes us forget its words* which are nothing more than the discreet and loyal representatives of things.

In this quest for an ancient philosophical and religious fantasm, that of the lost joy of direct communication (the Language of angels; cf. de Certeau-85) and of the im-mediate understanding of reality, surfaces an old suffering, that of division, and an old regret, that of unity. In fact, what is this dream of the Adamic language,

that which called things by « their » names, but an inconceived return to the problematics of the XVIth (when words were considered to be « signatures of things » : cf. C.G. Dubois-70), XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries when a perfect language would have enabled one to properly « calculate » (cf. Leibniz) the real to be said ?

But there is no need here to invent an artificial language or to reconstitute a pre-Babelian language : the detractors of officialese or Sovietese are unfailingly optimistic; the perfect language, that which tells the truth, already exists for them : it is called the « living language » (Fesenko, Heller), the « human language » (Besançon), the « private language » (Jönsson), the (true) « Russian language » (Heller), the « pure language » (Gor'kiï), the « simple language » (Lenin) or the « language related to life » (Brezhnev). This perfect and natural language is simply the negative of Sovietese, the artificial language.

The Being

In such a vision of a language whose first function is to represent what is, the relation between Language and reality seems to reveal an *implicit realist postulate* to those who by measuring the degree of adequacy of « officialese » to reality only reproduce the effect of immediate evidence of their own perception of reality. In the ideology of transparent representation *facts speak for themselves*, the real is intelligible prior to any linguistic *practice*, and truth, the natural datum and primary object, is apprehended *outside* any language.

Any and all reflection on the style and the sign in « officialese » prevents us from approaching the problem of the means toverifying the adequacy of the sign to the referent. This amounts to putting ontology into language and refusing to acknowledge that « there is no meta-Language », no space exterior to Language from which to measure this adequacy, no « natural » space where the real would give itself to knowledge without the mediation, the filter or the screen of Language.

Language is a Nomenclature

If the function of nomination is even more important than that of communication, it thus follows that language amounts to a body

(more or less wealthy, more or less beautiful) of words : it is a lexical stock (or a stock of assertions about the real, which is the same thing).

This explains why A. & T. Fesenko insist on *lists* of neologisms and barbarisms and A. Besançon on the translations of words; *nouns* are always called into question, almost never those forms peculiar to a given language. This explains the very rareness of syntactic notations. In this latter case, a phenomenon such as nominalization, for example, is described as a matter of vocabulary and style. Syntax then is only seen as the superficial arrangement of words between themselves.

Nature and Culture

The language of the Master-Machiavelli seems to aim towards a goal, that of :

> « destroying any means of thinking logically. » (Heller-85, p. 282)

Here, G. Orwell is an inexhaustible source of inspiration : like *1984*'s newspeak, officialese would appear to control thought (Heller-83) and the absence of a word in a language would appear to *prevent* thought from using the corresponding concept. This is an ultraculturalist notion, a kind of grossly distorted Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, almost making the passage from one linguistic system to another. The contradiction is thus total between this ultraculturalist notion and the universalist and ontological notion of language as a reflection of the real that asserts the translatability of the false into the true, of the inadequate into the adequate, of the cultural into the natural.

The Innocent People

Indeed, there seems to be a *natural* space from which the adequacy of words to things can be measured. This space is « the people ». True language would thus be spoken by an innocent people, sort of a good savage, or Man before the Fall, using (transparent) language only in its referential function and communicating without ambiguity to name « bread, love, birth, death », those eternal themes whose designation by language is supposed to be above the contingent existence.

This « language of the people » would be the perfect language for it has been shaped by the ages and by experience and

it stands against the artificial vocabulary of officialese, *imposed* from above :

> « Unlike the people, who has along the centuries chiselled words and expressions encompassing all the variety of human life, the Bolsheviks have created hundreds and thousands of political phrases with no spirit. » (Fesenko, p. 208)

However, it must be noted that if the « people » is the criterion of truth, it is far from being that of beauty, for all popular, trivial or slang expressions are carefully excluded from the ideal, « pure » language. What appears then is a totally abstract and idealized image of the people. This image becomes negative as soon as « popular » features come into focus. In the purist discourse, the « language of the people », bearing poetry and spontaneity, is only acknowledged after having been reworked by the « great writers » (cf. Seriot-82, p. 70).

In fact, we observe in all these texts a constant hesitation between the socialist notion of « people » (as opposed to the bourgeoisie) and the romantic notion of « people » (as opposed to other peoples or cosmopolitan and uprooted elements).

Furthermore, the supposed attitude of the « people » towards language is surprisingly variable. Thus, within pages, A. & T. Fesenko state that the language of power is

> « a verbal drug which, true enough, is often unmasked by the people » (p. 30)

(this refers to the « reversion » or « diversion » of the words of power, whence the notion of a people-master), yet at the same time state that

> « The sometimes uneducated Soviet citizen, who does not always understand the authentic meaning of the traditional words of his mother tongue, nevertheless had to handle a great many incomprehensible words pertaining to a political terminology which was not created out of the needs of his personal « self » but out of State forms prepared beforehand by the Bolshevik clique. »(p. 27)

(whence the notion of an ignorant people).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION : THE SUBJECT AND THE DISCOURSE

Having revealed the existence of a mythical notion of language, we shall now give other bearings to the epistemological framework

within which we can theorize the relation between Language and power in Soviet-type societies.

That both adversaries use the same argumentation brings to the fore a classic phenomenon not in the least mysterious or magical : the subject-speaker is not aware of the word-reference production process he uses. As F. Flahaut (1978, p. 73) notes :

> « What the « naïve » subject identifies with reality is not language, but his discourse ('his' discourse meaning that which he makes his own). Each time this resolve as reality is carried out in the name of the Universal and of Truth, the discourse is incompatible with another which has admittedly or not, the same claims. »

By defining their object as an inadequacy of words to facts, the critics of officialese think they occupy a place that enables them to distinguish the real from the unreal, and measure the degree of inadequacy of words to reality. This place is the illusory space of an exteriority from which a subject could examine reality and the words used for saying it without having to theorize his own relation to it ; such relation is presented as immediate, absolutized and unquestionable. This ideology of transparency involves effects of recognition : a subject for whom « kolkhoz » is an opaque sign *recognizes* the truth when he sees « servile plantation » and thus recognizes himself as a potential subject of the discovrse he acknowledges as true (adequate). For him, this discourse is so « natural » that the words he uses become *invisible to him*. At work in an ideology of Machiavellianism or transparency is the same implicit conception of the *subject-speaker* as source, origin of his discourse, hereby placing himself outside of language to play on the meaning of words or verify their adequacy to reality. Yet the effects of recognition of truth *blind* him to exterior determinations of what he is saying. Believing himself the master of his discourse, he is in fact subjected to it. What every one believes to be the true language is simply his own discourse; the opaque language, or « officialese », is the discourse of others.

The works of M. Pêcheux have shown that linguistic productions are subject to two types of constraints, distinct yet interwoven : those pertaining to language and those pertaining to discourse. Statements are subject to rules of selection, combination and embedding, to specific *constraints* which are not solely within the scope of pure individual creativity. If the « language » of the Other is perceived as inadmissible, opaque, ugly or monstrous, it is because this perception, made in the name of common sense, true

meaning or universality of truth, is oblivious to its historical and ideological determinations.

That is why « servile plantation » is neither truer nor falser than « kolkhoz ». The expression *takes its meaning* by functioning within a « discursive formation » that determines « what can and must be said » (Pêcheux-75, p. 144). The scope of the expressible is narrow : we cannot say everything just as we can never say just anything.

Indeed, speech never appears on a « neutral » background. Solitary, without memory, the Adamic language is the most tenacious myth in linguistics. In fact, whether written or spoken, a text never has an absolute initial. It always « speaks » before and elsewhere. The « speech » of the subject is heterogeneous, an answer, echo, reference or rejection of the discourse of others.

Soviet political discourse does not escape this situation. It is not a closed space, the pure crystal of an absolute folly or of a perfect lie, the schizophrenic product of a Master of words. Like any discourse, it has no proper exterior, no strict boundaries. The Other still reappears on the implicit level, even if evacuated from the explicit level. The presence of the Other's discourse in Soviet political discourse can be detected in material *traces* that are realized in language and more precisely in syntax. These traces are visible, for instance, in the syntactic phenomenon of embedding. They can be substantival clauses, gerunds, nominalizations, any form where a predicative clause is moved away from the main clause in which it was inserted. (This phenomenon does not occur in the simple and canonical declarative sentence of the Aristotelian concept of language as representation of the world.) This gap allows us to *reify* anterior and exterior predicative relations, and make them into objects which we can observe without having to process the relation between subject and predicate. The responsability, the source of this predicative relation are erased. The abundance of nominalizations, duly noted by Chukovskiï and many others, shows us that a voice without name resounds within Soviet political discourse. In this discourse without subject, a flimsy caricature perhaps of the « process without subject » (cf. Althusser), the voice without name echoes other voices, in an anonymous answer to an invisible Other, unspeakable yet always present.

Let us for example take the following statement :

> « Razrabotka programmy svidetel'stvuet ne tol'ko ob istoricheskikh pobedakh v oblasti khoziaïstvennogo i kul''

turnogo stroitel'stva, no i pokazyvaet bol'shuiu i raznostoronniuiu rabotu partii. » (Khrushchëv-61, p. 126)

(« The elaboration of the (Party's) program testifies not only to historical victories in the field of economic and cultural edification, but also shows the great and diversified work of the Party. »)

In this statement with neither subject nor cause, the enunciator is but a witness : he « sees » objects, processes of which he is not the Agent; his saying fades behind his seeing. Yet the nominalizations that follow the two verbs can only be conceived as the refutation of an anterior adversative statement of which only a half-erased *trace* remains.

There is thus nothing to say on the subject of untruth, inadequacy, frenzy or word-play except that meta-Language does not exist. Rather we should take notice of the real of language, the forms proper to syntax, the forms of subjectivity that are inscribed or hidden in it. For this discursive functioning bases itself upon the limits of the possible and the impossible in a given language : we have shown elsewhere (cf. Seriot-85) that this eclipse of the subject of enunciation and the gap in levels of assertions could not take the same linguistic forms in Czech, for example, or Chinese for that matter, in which there are no nominalizations. The heavy and confused *style* of Sovietese is but the result of this eclipse of the subject of enunciation in embedded forms. A literal translation into French or English would be ungrammatical to a point. On the other hand, should we insist on respecting the grammaticalness of the target language in translating, by replacing for example a nominalization by a coordinate or subordinate clause, we transfer the distribution of implicit and explicit elements and run the risk of reintroducing the element of responsability, thus making a *political mistake*.

We shall say in conclusion that officialese is not magical, because it is not a *language*. It is a discourse which is characterized by an extreme tension between its avowed homogeneity and monolithism and its fundamental heterogeneity. This heterogeneity, which can be pinpointed in underlying phenomena of syntax, indicates the constant presence of anterior adverse discourses.

There is no need to drive back into the discourse of the Other, into « officialese » the fantasm of the dishonest mastery of language in the name of the honest mastery of such language. Any ideology aims to conceal its relation to the real by pretending it is universal,

natural and ahistorical. Furthest from the anathemas on lies and manipulation, we believe it more useful to study the *functioning* of a discourse in a given society by recognizing the contingent and ideologically determined character of word-reference.

But if Soviet political discourse shows such a strong inclination towards the eclipse of the subject of enunciation, towards the subjection of the subject-speaker to the universal subject, we can rightly ask ourselves the reasons for such a subjection in a political practice which claims to fall within Marxism-Leninism.

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