

Mikhail Bakhtin and early Soviet Sociolinguistics¹

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Mikhail Bakhtin's essays on the novel of the 1930s are perhaps his most original, influential and valuable contributions to the study of European language and literature. The terms and limits of that originality have, however, seldom been systematically analysed, with most commentators content to admire the bold interweaving of sociolinguistic and literary themes which we find in these essays. The sources of Bakhtin's ideas about the novel have been gradually coming into focus since the 1980s, but the sources of the sociolinguistic ideas embedded in these works have remained unexplored,² perhaps because it is generally assumed the ideas follow on from those delineated in Valentin Voloshinov's 1929 book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, which has often been ascribed to Bakhtin himself.³ There is, however, a qualitative difference between the linguistic ideas in Voloshinov's texts and those in Bakhtin's essays of the 1930s, not least the discussion of the historical development of language and discursive relations within society and the modelling of these features in the novel as a genre. While Voloshinov's work facilitated the transformation of Bakhtin's early phenomenology of intersubjectivity into the account of discursive relations we find in the latter's 1929 Dostoevskii book, both works present largely synchronic analyses quite distinct from that found in the 1934 essay. Voloshinov succeeded in transforming Bakhtin's early 'philosophy of the act' and aesthetic activity into discursive terms largely through his adoption of Karl Bühler's 'organon model' of the 'speech event' or 'speech act', but this left the static phenomenology of the earlier work intact.⁴ Similarly, Voloshinov and Medvedev managed to recast Bakhtin's early account of worldview into discursive terms by adopting and sociologising the notion of style found in works by Leo Spitzer and Oskar Walzel, but again the systematic transformations of the discursive environment remained beyond the purview of the Bakhtin Circle. Where, then, did Bakhtin, from 1929 exiled in a small Kazakh town where there was very limited access to books and little contact with his erstwhile colleagues, derive the historical and sociolinguistic ideas that pervade these works?

Characteristic of Bakhtin's work from this point is an increasing reliance on current Soviet scholarship. The sources already identified include the work of such important thinkers as the folklorists and literary scholars Viktor Zhirmunskii and Ol'ga Freidenberg, and the Hungarian theorist of the novel who had recently moved to Russia, Georg Lukács. What has not been fully appreciated, however, is that Soviet work on language and society was no less influential, and here we must highlight the role of two students of the Polish-Russian linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, Lev Iakubinskii and Boris Larin. Along with Zhirmunskii and Lev Shcherba, these scholars were based at the Gosudarstvennyi institut rechevoi kul'tury (GIRK, State Institute for Discursive Culture; formerly Institut sravnitel'nogo izucheniia literatur i iazykov Zapada i Vostoka [ILIAZV, Institute for the Comparative Study of Literatures and Languages of the West and East]) in Leningrad, where both Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev had been based in the late 1920s.⁵ At this time the ILIAZV scholars shifted their focus of attention away from the literary studies that had occupied them in the early years after the Revolution and towards the language question that dominated early Soviet cultural policy. The establishment of standard languages for the national minorities of the former Russian Empire to facilitate their achievement of a formally equal status with Russian was a priority, as was the spread of literacy among the masses of all national groups. The relationship between

1 My attendance at the XI International Bakhtin Conference in Curitiba was made possible by an Overseas Conference Grant from the British Academy. This financial support is gratefully acknowledged.

2 Perhaps the first person to begin the analysis of the sources of Bakhtin's ideas on the novel was Tzvetan Todorov in *The Dialogical Principle*, trans W. Godzich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 86-93. Other notable works include N.D. Tamarchenko, 'M.M. Bakhtin i A.N. Veselovskii (metodologiya istoricheskoi poetiki)', *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop* 4, 1998, 33-44, Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002). One conditional exception from the dearth of analyses on Bakhtin's linguistic thought at this time is V.M. Alpatov, 'Problemy lingvistiki v tekstakh M.M. Bakhtina 1930-kh godov', *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop* 1, 2002, 4-20. Unfortunately the sociolinguistic sources here remain unexplored.

3 V.N. Voloshinov, *Marksizm i filosofiya iazyka*. In Valentin N. Voloshinov, *Filosofiya i sotsiologiya gumanitarnykh nauk* (St. Petersburg: Asta Press, 1995) 216-380; *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973). For a survey of recent work on the authorship dispute see Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic For Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 126-40.

4 Craig Brandist, 'Voloshinov's Dilemma: On the Philosophical Sources of the Dialogic Theory of the Utterance' in Craig Brandist et al (eds.) *The Bakhtin Circle: In the Masters' Absence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

5 The students of Baudouin de Courtenay dominated linguistic studies in Leningrad and included Shcherba, Larin, Iakubinskii, and Evgenyi Polivanov, who Bakhtin regarded as a 'very significant figure' (M.M. Bakhtin, *Besedy s V.D. Duvakinykh* (Moscow: Soglasie, 2002)). Zhirmunskii had also attended Baudouin's lectures and regarded himself as his student.

national languages, between a national language and its regional dialects, and the social stratification of national languages thus forced themselves to the top of the research agenda for most Soviet linguists at this time.⁶ Two research projects at ILIaZV were directly related to these questions: Larin's examination of the pluralistic linguistic composition [*mnogoiazychie*] of the major cities and Zhirmunskii's research into the language of the German colonies within the USSR.

Pre-revolutionary linguists had written much of relevance for these issues and Baudouin, who Bakhtin regarded as a 'very great scholar',⁷ had even been imprisoned for writing a pamphlet advocating a democratisation of language policy. Baudouin and Iakubinskii's other teacher Aleksei Shakhmatov respectively had written extensively on the formation of the Polish and Russian national languages from scattered Slavonic dialects in the pre-Revolutionary period, but their focus had been primarily psychological.⁸ Baudouin had argued that sociological factors must be considered, but he found both linguistics and sociology to be at too rudimentary a level of development to explore this beyond programmatic statements.⁹ The ILIaZV scholars were able to make these developments, however, and sought to thoroughly sociologise the dialectology of pre-revolutionary linguists such as Baudouin and Shakhmatov, through the application of ideas found in the historical works of Marx, Engels and especially Lenin. Most important in this regard was Lenin's detailed 1899 (second edition 1908) study *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and his 1914 *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* in which Russia's partial transition from a feudal to a capitalist society and the relationship between national language and national identity were discussed. What Zhirmunskii called the 'classical formulation of the formation of the common-national language of bourgeois society from the dialects of the feudal epoch' on the basis of the 'Marxist understanding of the social-historical process' was published by Iakubinskii as a series of articles in Gor'kii's prominent journal *Literaturnaia Ucheba* in 1930 and 1931 which were given the collective title 'Klassovyi sostav sovremennogo russkogo iazyka' (The Class Structure of Contemporary Russian Language), and a year later was published in book form as *Ocherki po iazyku*.¹⁰ It is this series of articles that constitutes the main source of Bakhtin's sociological and historical account of language in his essays of the 1930s.¹¹

It is not difficult to explain why Bakhtin was so well disposed towards Iakubinskii's articles at this time. Firstly, *Literaturnaia ucheba* was widely available at a time when few other publications were accessible to Bakhtin, and the apparent official sanction of the ideas presented there appeared to show a way for a recently arrested and vulnerable scholar to work and publish legitimately. Iakubinskii was by this point no longer regarded as a Formalist but as a fellow-traveller of Nikolai Marr, whose ideas had by now achieved canonical status in the USSR. While the Bakhtin Circle had shown Marr considerable respect from the early 1920s, and Bakhtin continued to do so even in the late 1950s, the extreme dogmatism that emerged in the 1930s could hardly have been to Bakhtin's taste.¹² Iakubinskii's continued allegiance to the ideas of Baudouin and his conditional acceptance of certain Marrist tenets, opened a space for a more constructive approach to the social stratification of language than Marr's own mechanical correlation between language and class. Moreover, Bakhtin was well aware that Iakubinskii's 1923 essay 'O dialogicheskoi rechi' had been an important influence on Voloshinov when he managed to translate intersubjectivity into discursive forms: dialogic relations. Bakhtin would also have found Voloshinov's final articles alongside those of Iakubinskii in the journal. Finally, Iakubinskii's prolonged association with Zhirmunskii, for whom he and Medvedev are known to have had considerable respect,¹³ would have further affirmed Iakubinskii's image in Bakhtin's eyes.

Bakhtin was to adopt Iakubinskii's account of the formation of the Russian national language and detach it from its historical coordinates. Unhitched from all specific institutional moorings and linked with Cassirer's account of the dialectical unfolding of symbolic forms,¹⁴ Iakubinskii's account of the formation of a Russian national language that is stratified according to class and ideology became an ideal narrative of the 'single glottogonic process' through which all languages develop. In accordance with both Marr's stadial theory of language development and Cassirer's stadial theory of the rise of critical culture, all languages and cultures pass through the same stages, though at different speeds. This process underlies

6 See, especially Michael Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998). While in many respects an exemplary study, Smith here oversimplifies the relationship between the ILIaZV scholars and the Marrists and ends up presenting the Bakhtin Circle as mere clients of Marrism.

7 Bakhtin, *Besedy s V.D. Duvakinyam*, 66.

8 The influence of Steindhal's and Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie* was especially significant on these thinkers. On this see Arleta Adamska-Salaciak, 'Jan Baudouin de Courtenay's Contribution to Linguistic Theory', *Historiographia Linguistica* XXV (1/2) 1998, 25-60, 33-4.

9 On Baudouin's incipient sociolinguistic thought see D.L. Olmsted, 'Baudouin, Structuralism and Society' and R.L. Lencek, 'Language-Society Nexus in Baudouin's Theory of Language Evolution: Language Change in Progress' in J.M. Rieger et al (eds.) *Jan Niecislaw Baudouin de Courtenay a lingwistyka swiatowa (Wroclaw: Zaklad Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 1989)* 26-34, 73-81.

10 Viktor M. Zhirmunskii, 'Marksizm i sotsial'naia lingvistika' in A.V. Desnitskaia, L.S. Kovtun and V. M. Zhirmunskii (eds.) *Voprosy sotsial'noi lingvistiki* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969) 5-25. Iakubinskii's articles, some of which were co-authored with his student A.M. Ivanov, were published in *Literaturnaia ucheba* (hereafter LU) 1 pp. 31-43; 2 pp.32-47; 3 pp.49-64; 4 pp.80-96; 6 pp.51-66 (1930) and 7 pp.22-33; 9 pp.66-76 and 1 (new series) 82-106 (1931). The book, credited to Ivanov and Iakubinskii, was published as *Ocherki po iazyku* (Moscow and Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1932). On the historical significance of this work see A.V. Desnitskaia, 'Kak sozdavalas teoriia natsional' nogo iazyka' in N.F. Belchikova (ed.) *Sovremennye problemy literaturovedeniia i iazykoznanii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974) 398-415.

11 The fact that the published articles bear no direct references to Iakubinskii is no obstacle here, since references to all the well-established sources of Bakhtin's work at this time, such as Lukács, Veselovskii and Cassirer, are similarly absent. Until the manuscripts have been made available to researchers we are unlikely to know whether such references were posthumously removed by ideologically motivated editors.

12 On Bakhtin's complex relationship to Marrism see Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle*, 109-15 and passim.

13 See especially P.N. Medvedev, 'Uchenyi Sal' erizm (O formal' nom (morfologicheskome) metode', *Zvezda*, 3, 1925, 264-76, translated as by Ann Shukman as 'The Formal (Morphological) Method or Scholarly Salieri-ism' in *Bakhtin School Papers, Russian Poetics in Translation* 10, 1983, 51-65.

14 On Bakhtin's debt to Cassirer's neo-Hegelian dialectic see Craig Brandist, 'Bakhtin, Cassirer and Symbolic Forms', *Radical Philosophy*, 85, 1997, 20-27.

the rise of the novel, which ultimately becomes the organ through which the stratified language becomes conscious of itself as its own object. The neo-Hegelian nature of this ideal narrative is clear to see but, crucially, unlike Marr and like Cassirer, Bakhtin does not argue for the final merging of all languages and perspectives when culture becomes self-conscious. The 'autonomous and independent value' of 'various cultural forms' are maintained rather than subsumed into a single and all encompassing meta-form,¹⁵ and it is the novel that allows this to happen.

What follows is a short overview of the salient points made in Iakubinskii's articles and an analysis of how Bakhtin incorporated these features into his work of the 1930s.

Language as form and as ideology

The starting point for Iakubinskii is the contention that language has two fundamental functions from which all subsequent functions arise: '1) *language as a medium of intercourse* and 2) *language as ideology*'. While this distinction must not be erased, 'in no cases must these fundamental functions be separated from one another: in all its phenomena language fulfils both these functions at once'. Iakubinskii argues that the application of Marxism to language science reveals that 'a language is a unity of these functions', and allows the linguist to show how, at various stages of a society's development, these two aspects 'enter into contradiction'. This contradiction is determined by socio-economic circumstances and acts as the 'inner motor' of a language's development.¹⁶

Bakhtin adopts Iakubinskii's methodological premise language as the unity but not identity of form of communication and ideological content, opening his 1934-5 essay on the novel with an assertion that his fundamental aim is to overcome the separation between 'abstract "formalism" and abstract "ideologism" in the study of the artistic word. Form and content are united in the word, understood as a social phenomenon, social in all spheres of its life and in all its moments – from the sound image to the most abstract semantic strata'. This idea is said to define his whole emphasis on the 'stylistics of genre' in which stylistic phenomena are to be linked to the 'social modes in which the word lives' and the 'great historical destinies of genres'.¹⁷

Centrifugal and centripetal forces

Bakhtin is particularly well known for describing the unitary language as an 'expression of the historical process of linguistic unification and centralisation, an expression of the centripetal forces of language' but that alongside this process 'uninterrupted processes of decentralisation and disunification proceed'.¹⁸ The idea of contradictory forces at work within a national language and culture were fairly commonplace by the end of the 1920s in several disciplines. Both of Iakubinskii's most influential teachers, Baudouin de Courtenay and Shakhmatov, discussed the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces as crucial factors in the history of a language. Baudouin discussed this in his inaugural lecture at St. Petersburg University as early as 1870, and Shakhmatov revived the idea in 1915.¹⁹ In his *Ethics* of 1892 Wilhelm Wundt celebrated the triumph of the centralisation of language, literature, world-view and social life within a nation over the 'centrifugal' forces of different classes and associations.²⁰ In a 1929 article on the methodology of Soviet folklore, the veteran orientalist and folklorist Sergei Ol'denburg argued that 'interactions between different social milieux are phenomena no less important than those between races or peoples' and that 'to the tendencies toward differentiation are always opposed the tendencies toward unification'. Furthermore, Ol'denburg argued that awareness of this was leading to a breaking down of the 'artificial distinction between popular and non-popular' literature.²¹

Bakhtin linked these contradictory forces to a sociology of language so that:

At any given moment of its formation [*stanovlenie*], a language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but, and this is fundamental for us, into socio-ideological languages: languages of social groups, 'professional' languages, 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so on.²²

The crucial point here is that within a national language there are co-present linguistic dialects and social discourses, that he terms *raznoiazychie* and *raznorechie* respectively. The latter are not dialects in the exact (linguistic) sense but are related to social function (professional, class etc). The significance of this distinction has unfortunately been obscured by the translation of both *raznoiazychie* and *razno-*

15 Ernst Cassirer, quoted in Charles Hendel, 'Introduction' in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Vol. 1: Language*, trans R. Mannheim, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1955) 1-65, 34.

16 Ivanov and Iakubinskii, *Ocherki po iazyku*, 62. Original emphasis.

17 'Discourse in the Novel' (hereafter DN) in M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 259-422, 259; 'Slovo v romane' (hereafter SR) in *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975) 72-233, 72-3.

18 DN 271-2; SR 85.

19 I.A. Boduen de Kurtene (Baudouin de Courtenay), 'Nekotorye obshchie zamechniia o iazykovedenii i iazyke' in *Izbrannye trudy po obshchemu iazykoznaniiu* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR) 47-77, 58-60; A.A. Shakhmatov, *Ocherk drevneishago perioda istorii russkogo iazyka* (Petrograd: Imeratorskaia akademiia nauk, 1915) xlvii-xlviii.

20 W. Wundt, *Ethics in 3 Volumes* (trans. M.F. Washburn, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1907-8) I, 262-3; III, 269-72.

21 S.F. Ol'denburg, 'Le conte dit populaire, problèmes et methodes', *Revue des "etudes slaves"*, 9, 1929, 221-36, 234-5, quoted in Dana P. Howell, *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics* (New York and London: Garland, 1992) 173.

22 DN 271-2; SR 85. The English translation renders the first 'iazkyk' in this quotation as 'language' rather than 'a language'. Since Bakhtin is speaking about the formation of a national language it seems to me important to stress he is speaking about language as a social fact.

rechie as 'heteroglossia'. For example, he argues that 'discursive diversity [*raznorechivost'*] ... does not go beyond the limits of linguistic unity (according to abstract linguistic features) of a literary language, does not turn into a genuine *raznoiazychie'* that would require 'knowledge of different dialects or languages'.²³ The centralising and decentralising forces thus simultaneously operate on a language in the process of formation but along different axes, as it were: linguistic [*iazykovoi*] homogenisation takes place at the same time as discursive [*rechevoi*] differentiation. The 'authentic medium of an utterance, in which it lives and is formulated' is therefore 'dialogised *raznorechie'*. The various discourses become 'dialogised' only because they interact *within* the shared medium of a single language, which was not possible when there was no common language (*raznoiazychie*) and social functions remained in isolation [*zamknutyi*]. Various utterances occur within a single language, thus being 'anonymous and social as language', but in differentiated discourses that are 'concrete, content-filled and accentuated'.²⁴ In the process of a language's formation, therefore, we do not have mechanically opposed tendencies but a dialectical contradiction in which the same historical changes that bring about the unification of the medium of communication (*iazyk*) also bring about social-functional or ideological differentiation (*raznorechie*), which the unified language must struggle to contain. Language, understood as 'ideologically saturated, language as worldview, and even as concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life',²⁵ thus develops in a spiral rather than in a straight line.

Confusion about the nature of Bakhtin's argument is aggravated by his very imprecise use of terminology here. This is undoubtedly the mark of a philosopher still unfamiliar with the finer points of linguistic theory. His employment of this terminology was much more assured by the early 1950s, by which time Bakhtin had clearly made a much more systematic study of contemporary linguistics.²⁶ Another problem in the essays from the 1930s is the lack of concrete historical reference, and Bakhtin's tendency to recast material from historical sources as part of a neo-Hegelian 'ideal history' of modes of thought in which the 'essence' of a form (particularly the novel) necessarily appears at the end of course of development. These problems lead Bakhtin's English language translators to fail to distinguish those instances when he is clearly writing about a language from those when he is concerned with language in general. There are, however many grey areas. In severing the account of the development of a language from its historical moorings Bakhtin is frequently led to present the social stratification of language and the co-presence of contradictory tendencies as an eternal principle.

Bakhtin's argument becomes considerably clearer when we recognise that Iakubinskii's articles are the most probable source of his formulations. Iakubinskii treats the historical vicissitudes of the national language and ideological differentiation as two sides of a single problem. Form of communication and ideological content are to be understood as united (but not fused) in language. It is this feature that fundamentally distinguishes Iakubinskii's argument from the class reductionism of Marr. The 'widening of the sphere of a language as a means of intercourse', argues Iakubinskii, 'is accompanied by another process (better – they are two sides of one and the same process)'. The verso of linguistic unification is the 'class differentiation of a language as ideology':

The same capitalism that maximally differentiates language as ideology strives to transform it into an all-national inter-class means of intercourse. In this way language, having taken shape in capitalist society, is characterised by the intensification of that internal contradiction that we mentioned above. This contradiction may be formulated as the contradiction between the commonality of language as a means of intercourse (form), and the class differentiation of language as ideology (content).²⁷

This dialectic of 'form' and 'content', so understood, is the methodological premise of Iakubinskii's detailed and sophisticated account of the formation of the Russian national language.

For Iakubinskii, language-as-ideology in a capitalist society bears features characteristic of all stages of its development. On the one hand, language-as-ideology is the realm of what the neo-Kantians called 'objective validity', that is, 'the inescapable form of our cognition', but developed 'according to the level of the formation [*obrazovanie*] and differentiation of the superstructural world'. Iakubinskii explicitly points to Marr at this point, arguing that at the beginning of its existence as an 'independent form of ideology' language was 'one of the forms of existence for the majority of other ideologies (religious, juridical, scientific, political and so on)'. On the other hand, language-as-ideology is also the embodiment the socio-specific worldviews of different social groups. The history of class society is therefore the history of class ideologies engaged in a struggle that reaches a peak under capitalism, when a common language-as-medium-of-intercourse becomes 'the form of existence of different class consciousnesses (psychologies)'.²⁸ This process is elaborated in a history of the formation of the Russian national language.

²³ DN 308; SR 121. The published translation is particularly confusing here: 'speech diversity does not exceed the boundaries of literary language conceived as a linguistic whole (that is, language defined by abstract linguistic markers), does not pass into an authentic heteroglossia'. However, and even more confusingly, the conflation of *raznorechie* and *raznoiazychie* is itself not consistent in the translation, since there are passages, e.g. DN 298; SR 111 where '*raznoiazychie i raznorechie*' has been translated as 'the heteroglossia and language diversity'. I am indebted to Mika Lähteenmäki for pointing this out.

²⁴ DN 272; SR 86.

²⁵ DN 271; SR 84. Bakhtin's use of 'language... as ideologically saturated' here to mean 'discourse' is very misleading. In the essay of discursive genres from the early 1950s his distinction between language and discourse is much clearer.

²⁶ Some of Bakhtin's notes from his study of linguistics in the early 1950s have been published as 'Iz arkhivnykh zapisei k rabote "Problemy rechevykh zhanrov"', *Sobranie Sochinenii* 5, 207-86. This has very recently been supplemented by some published notes from 1957 where Bakhtin systematically addressed the difference between discourse and language: M.M. Bakhtin, 'Iazyk i rech', *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop*, 1, 2001, 23-31.

²⁷ *Ocherki po iazyku*, 62-3.

The formation of the Russian national language

Iakubinskii's historical account begins with an examination of the language of the peasantry under feudalism, where society was divided into a 'series of linguistic regions corresponding to feudal estates [*pomest'e*]. These regional dialects were not monolithic, however, because 'the population of a feudal estate could include within its structure a series of primordial economic groups'. The resultant variations within feudal dialects were, and here Iakubinskii follows Marr closely, 'relics of the preceding stage of society'. In general, however, feudal linguistic relations were characterized by regional 'boundedness' and 'enclosure'. In feudal society 'peasants spoke differently in different regions, and within a region common characteristics naturally emerged, although they could also retain distinct characteristics inherited from preceding epochs'.²⁹

With the uneven development of capitalist relations within the framework of a feudal society, linguistic relations began to change. These new relations were first apparent within a growing town, where from its inception the population is to some extent a mixture of people from various feudal estates. A certain 'common conversational language' arose as a result, 'reflecting the characteristics of the varied dialects of settlers'. The language of each separate town was, however, formed in the grasp of intensifying inter-urban relations, on the basis of the conversational language of the largest centre(s) of the society. This forms the nucleus of the common-national [*obshchenatsional'nyi*] language, which develops as the bourgeoisie concentrated wealth in fewer and fewer hands, centralised production and thus the population, and brought about political centralisation. Paraphrasing Marx, Iakubinskii argues that 'linguistic sociality becomes ever less like that sack of dialects that it was under feudalism'. Giving earlier schematic accounts of centrifugal and centripetal forces within language some sociological concreteness, Iakubinskii argues that the formation of the national language is a 'tendency [*tendentsiia*] (striving [*stremlenie*]) to commonality', the progress of which depends on factors such as the arrival of new peasants with their own dialects, the stage of capitalist development, and the size of the capitalist centre. More importantly, however, the urban population is divided into classes and a stratum of 'professional intellectuals': 'the degree of commonality of the language of various social classes ... is different. Different classes generalise their language to various degrees depending on the extent to which they are compelled to do so by their objective class interests and on how much this generalisation is permitted by the objective political conditions in which the given social class develops'. The proletariat has an interest in generalising its language, but being politically subordinate, exploited and oppressed, it is unable to become a 'class for itself'. The contradictions of capitalism thus both drive and limit the development of a common national language.³⁰

Public discourse and its genres

Iakubinskii argues that the 'capitalisation' of linguistic relations is crucially tied to the development of 'public discourse' [*publichnaia rech'*], which is to be distinguished from conversational language in terms of possible numbers of participants and length of utterance. Reiterating a point from his 1923 article on dialogic discourse, Iakubinskii argues that 'conversation is the exchange of short rejoinders (dialogue)' while the utterances of 'public discourse' are 'extended, lengthy, monologic'.³¹ Public discourse is also more likely to be written. Platforms for public discourse only really arise as a result of the 'capitalisation' of linguistic relations, for 'public discourse begins to "flourish" in parliament and at court, in higher education institutes and at public lectures, at rallies and congresses; even the square becomes its platform'.³²

Parliamentary discourse, a diplomat's address to a conference, a statement in a dispute or at a rally, a political speech, the discourse of a lawyer or prosecutor, agitational speech on the street etc. etc. These are genres of public discourse characteristic of capitalism as opposed to feudalism, regardless of the fact that we find their embryos under feudalism. Capitalism speaks publicly incalculably more and in a different way than feudalism. Public speaking under feudalism is *narrowly specialised*, limited by the narrow domains of sociality; public speaking under capitalism pretends to universality; it wants to be as universal a form as conversational language... In accumulating the various genres of oral public discourse, capitalist sociality also accumulates corresponding written genres.

While capitalism develops a wide variety of genres of public discourse, it simultaneously restricts the access of much of the population to those genres. 'Inherent to capitalism' is, therefore, 'a tendency (striving) to transform public discourse into *as universal a form of discursive intercourse as conversa-*

28 *Ocherki po iazyku*, 62. The reference is to Marr's correlation of stages of language development with forms of social differentiation, on which see Lawrence Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957) 117-34. This also corresponds to Bukharin's definition of ideology as 'certain unified systems of forms, thoughts, rules of conduct etc.' such as 'science and art, law and morality, etc.', which was adopted by Voloshinov and Medvedev. See Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926) 208. Voloshinov and Medvedev both regard the philosophy of language and literary scholarship as branches of a 'science of ideologies'. See, for example, P.N. Medvedev, *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii* (Moscow: Labirint, 1993) 45; P.N. Medvedev/ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 37. On Voloshinov's debt to Bukharin see Tihanov, *Master and Slave*, 85-95.

29 L.P. Iakubinskii, 'Klassovyi sostav sovremennogo russkogo iazyka: iazyk krest'ianstva. Stat'ia chetvertaia', *Lu* 4, 1930, 80-92, 85.

30 'Klassovyi sostav' *Lu* 4, 86-8.

31 'O dialogicheskoi rechi' in *Iazyk i ego funktsionirovanie*, 17-58, § 4. Iakubinskii's colleague at ILIaZV Lev Shcherba had already made the same point as early as 1915: 'Every monologue is in essence a rudimentary form of the "common", normalised, widespread language; language "lives" and changes by and large in dialogue' L.V. Shcherba, 'Nekotorye vybory iz moikh dialektologicheskikh luzhitskikh nabliudenii' in *Izbrannye raboty po iazykoznaniiu i fonetike* (Leningrad: Izd. Leningradskogo universiteta, 1958) 35-9, 36. See also Shcherba, 'sovremennyi russkii literaturnyi iazyk', *Izbrannye raboty po russkomu iazyku* (Moscow: ucpedgiz, 1957) 113-130.

32 'Klassovyi sostav' *Lu* 4, 89-90. Original emphasis.

tional language', but due to capitalism's essential 'limits and contradictions', 'the universality of public discourse remains just as much a myth in a capitalist world as liberty, equality and fraternity and so many other good things'.³³

This is almost certainly the most immediate source of Bakhtin writing on 'discursive genres'. In these articles Iakubinskii uses the term 'discursive genre' extensively in precisely the way Bakhtin was to in the essays of the 1930s and then in the early 1950s. What Iakubinskii integrated into a substantive socio-historical account of the revolution brought about within discursive relations by the development of capitalism in Russia, however Bakhtin integrated into an 'ideal' literary history. Although Voloshinov had used the term sparingly in 1929,³⁴ Bakhtin treated the question historically his articles of the 1930s. His concern with this category reaches a peak in 1951-3, in the essay 'Problemy rechevykh zhanrov' (Problems of Discursive Genres), which was written in response to Stalin's attack on Marr in June 1950.³⁵ Here we learn that Bakhtin regards discursive genres as typical forms of utterance. While Bakhtin undoubtedly developed the idea by drawing on his knowledge of the theory of genre in artistic literature, it retained the sociological force that it was given by Iakubinskii in his work of the 1930s. Thus, in the 1951-3 essay he argues that discursive genres are 'drive belts [*privodnye remni*] from the history of society to the history of language', a metaphor used about language by Marr but here transferred to Iakubinskii's category.³⁶

Linguistic unification and discursive differentiation

In his 1940 article on the 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', Bakhtin describes the significance of the breaking-down of the Athenian city-state's linguistic isolation as a precondition for the rise of the significant parodic genres that are the precursors of the modern novel. Only with the coming of 'mnogoiazychie', a pluri-lingual environment (polyglossia), can 'consciousness be completely freed from the power [*vlast'*] of its own language and linguistic myth. Parodic-travesty forms flourish in conditions of *mnogoiazychie*, and only under such conditions can they be elevated to completely new ideological heights'.³⁷ This account is a clear example of how Bakhtin integrated the sociology of language developed in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s into an ideal history of literary form.

While the term itself is considerably older, 'mnogoiazychie' was used to refer to the co-presence of different national languages within a single city by Iakubinskii's colleague Boris Larin in a paper delivered at ILiAZV in 1926 and published in 1928.³⁸ Two years later appeared Iakubinskii's analysis of how the 'common-urban language' penetrated the ranks of the peasantry and led to a self-conscious approach to language. Iakubinskii also argued there that linguistic parody was a key form in the struggle of languages that resulted from the breakdown of 'feudal fixity'. Iakubinskii investigates '1) how the peasantry accommodates itself to the conversational language arising in capitalist society and 2) how the peasantry joins the process of the transformation of public discourse into the universal form of intercourse on the basis of its new genres (that are alien to feudalism)'.³⁹ This dual problem leads to three theses: a) The peasantry's assimilation of the common-urban language is an uneven process depending on the variety of social groups in a given village, the distribution and character of capitalist centres and the penetration of market forces into villages generally; b) the process of assimilation is not linear as a result of peasant resistance to the common-urban language and consequently c) assimilation is to a large degree a conscious process on the part of the peasantry. It is thesis c) that we are most concerned with here. According to Iakubinskii, the peasantry's move towards the common-urban language is a 'conscious act':

By counterposing the common-urban language to local way of speaking [*govor*], capitalism introduces linguistic facts into the peasantry's consciousness, forcing them to notice, recognise and evaluate these facts. It [capitalism] transforms unconscious language, *language-in-itself into language-for-itself*. Destroying feudal fixity, the traditionalism of peasant linguistic intercourse, through the class stratification of the village and the complex counterposition of the city to the village, capitalism forces the peasantry to choose between its own, old, local and the new urban, 'national' [language]. On this soil arises a struggle, and one of its weapons is mockery, linguistic parody of the speech of the backward or the innovators.⁴⁰

Bakhtin once more severed Iakubinskii's argument from its historical moorings, and incorporated it into an account of literary history with different origins and historical coordinates. Like Iakubinskii, Bakhtin links the rise of parodic genres to the breakdown of linguistic isolation, but he transposes the formulation, shifting it from the penetration of capitalist relations into the backward Russian countryside and to an account of the literature of late antiquity. The framework into which Bakhtin inserted the Leningrad

33 'Klassovyi sostav' Lu 4, 91-2. Original emphasis.

34 Voloshinov briefly uses the term 'discursive genre' in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, but it there remains relatively undeveloped and certainly not linked to historical considerations (*Marksizm*, 314-5; MPL, 96-7).

35 In their detailed commentary on the essay, the editors of the scholarly edition of Bakhtin's work fail to identify this source, claiming only that Bakhtin was probably influenced by Iakubinskii's 1923 essay on dialogue, from which he derived the term '*rechevoe obschenie*' [discursive intercourse]. M.M. Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii* t.5 (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996) 543.

36 M.M. Bakhtin, 'Problema rechevykh zhanrov', *Sobranie sochinenii* t.5, 159-206, 165; 'The Problem of Speech Genres', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986) 60-102, 65. Marr argued that 'language acts as a drive belt [*privodnoi remen*] in the region of the superstructural categories of society', quoted in Alpatov, *Istoria*, 35.

37 M.M. Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' (hereafter PND), *The Dialogic Imagination*, 41-83, 61; 'Iz predystorii romannogo slova', (hereafter PRS) *Voprosy literatury i estetiki*, 408-46, 426.

38 Larin, 'O lingvisticheskom izuchenii goroda' § 4.

39 'Klassovyi sostav sovremennogo russkogo iazyka: iazyk krest'ianstva. Stat'ia chetvertaia', Lu 6, 51-66, 51.

40 'Klassovyi sostav', Lu 6, 58-62. Original emphasis.

linguists' ideas had already been established by Aleksandr Veselovskii and Georg Misch. Veselovskii had described the rise of the novel as the product of the interaction of cultures, while Misch had described the 'discovery of individuality' in autobiography during Hellenic expansion as a 'sudden consequence of the extension of the field of view to previously unknown peoples, with different ways of living'.⁴¹ The achievement of linguistic self-consciousness was thus generalised and then linked to literary practice in conditions of *mnogoiazychie*. The result is that 'in the process of literary creation inter-illumination with an alien language illuminates precisely the "world-view" side of one's own (and the alien) language, its inner form, the axiological-accentuated system inherent in it'.⁴²

From raznoiazychie to raznorechie

For Iakubinskii it is the advent of capitalism that brings about the reordering of linguistic relations. Where the peasantry comprised a *collection* of geographically dispersed and socially isolated communities, the urban proletariat constitutes a *collective* of social groups that arise from the division of labour. The linguistic specificities of such social groups are now subsets of an overarching proletarian standard:

These intra-class groupings do not contradict the working class's objective interests as long as the specialised professional vocabulary is used within the narrow sphere of a given form of production and does not permeate the *whole* language of the worker, does not *completely* detach him, in linguistic relations, from the worker of another professional group.

The linguistic relations between professional linguistic groups in capitalist society are therefore sharply distinguished from those between the professional groups of feudalism, where 'secluded' groups developed their own mutually incomprehensible languages. The professional stratification of language within the proletariat is thus quite different from the 'raznoiazychie' that the proletariat inherits from the peasantry. This latter contradicts the objective interests of the working class and must be 'liquidated' in the formation of an independent proletarian language.⁴³

In its transformation from a 'class in itself' to a 'class for itself', the proletariat must develop its own language in contradistinction to the language of the bourgeoisie. The manifestation of this distinction is not, and here Iakubinskii shows considerable distance from Marr, in the proletariat's pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary, but in the proletariat's '*discursive method*'. This is 'the *mode of usage* of the material of the common-national language', the '*treatment [obrashchenie]*' of this material, 'the *mode of selection* from it of facts necessary for concrete purposes', the '*attitude* toward these facts and their evaluation'. This 'proletarian discursive method' is formed spontaneously during the proletariat's struggle with the bourgeoisie 'in the order of everyday conversational intercourse and is organised by the most advanced linguistic workers, the ideologues of the proletariat (writers and orators) in the various genres of oral and written public discourse'. This method is at first mainly formed in the 'political, philosophical and scientific genres of public discourse', but after the proletariat's seizure of political power the process acquires a 'mass character' and spreads to 'all discursive genres'.⁴⁴

The social stratification of language is now understood as stratification at the level of discourse and it is argued that workers become conscious of this stratification in and through the democratisation of discursive genres by a political leadership. Here we have the germ of Bakhtin's idea that the democratisation of culture is synonymous with its 'novelisation'. The political leader is replaced by the novelist. Rather than 'political, philosophical and scientific genres of public discourse,' proving the locus for democratisation, it is in and through the novel that adopts this role. Just as Bakhtin detaches Iakubinskii's concrete historical narrative from its institutional coordinates and absorbed into an ideal narrative, so he severs literature from its institutional moorings and subsumes politics into ethics and aesthetics.

Iakubinskii's series of articles end with a characterisation of the current state of 'linguistic politics'. He argues that all unnecessarily technical vocabulary associated with 'bourgeois specialists' must be shunned in favour of a truly 'popular-scientific language' [*nauchno-populiarnyi iazyk*].⁴⁵ Under the dictatorship of the proletariat the common-national language must be 'common in its tendency towards all the genres of discourse'. It will be 'more democratic the more it is accessible to the masses, and the less it is differentiated according to genre' overcoming the enormous differentiations of the 'assimilation of actuality in discursive genres' introduced by capitalism.⁴⁶ The development of a common-national language, and thus the overcoming of 'raznoiazychie', can reach fruition. This is because capitalism's contradiction between town and countryside can be overcome and the subordination of previously oppressed classes can cease. Since the proletariat is a universal class, it aims to destroy the class structure once and for all, and so the national language can now become 'common to all classes of society'.⁴⁷

41 A.N. Veselovskii, 'Grecheskii roman' in *Izbrannye stat'i* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939) 23-69; A.N. Veselovskii, *Istoricheskaia poetika* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1940). It may be significant that Veselovskii was an important and acknowledged source for Marr's work and that Zhirmunskii was the editor and wrote the introduction to these editions. Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (2 vols.; trans E.W. Dickes; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950) vol. 1, 69. See also Tihanov, *Master and Slave* 149-50; N. Tamarchenko, 'M.M. Bakhtin i A.N. Veselovskii'; Craig Brandist, 'Bakhtin's Grand Narrative: The Significance of the Renaissance', *Dialogism* 3 (1999) 11-30, 19-24.

42 PND 62; PRS 427.

43 'Klassovyi sostav sovremennogo russkogo iazyka: iazyk proletariata. Stat'ia piataia', *LU* 7, 1931, 22-33, 24-5.

44 'Klassovyi sostav' *LU* 7, 32-3.

45 Iakubinskii, 'O nauchno-populiarnom iazyke', *LU* 1, 1931, 49-64.

46 L.P. Iakubinskii, 'Russkii iazyk v epokhu diktatury proletariata' *LU* 9, 1931, 66-76 74.

47 'Russkii iazyk' *LU* 9, 71.

Where Iakubinskii saw the final democratisation of linguistic relations to lie in the future, Bakhtin appears to endorse the present time as fully 'novelised'. Where for Iakubinskii the 1917 revolution provided the final precondition for true linguistic democracy, Bakhtin located this back in the Renaissance:

We live, write and talk in a world of free and democratised language: the old complex and multi-levelled hierarchies of words, forms, images, styles that permeated the whole system of the official language and linguistic consciousness was swept away by the linguistic revolutions of the Renaissance.⁴⁸

It is difficult to know how to take this passage, which was written at the height of the Stalin terror and the encodement of 'socialist realism'. One thing is certain, however. Such a judgement could be possible only if the institutions within which language culture is articulated were removed from view. Such are the consequences of Bakhtin's neo-Kantian heritage, which compelled him to view culture as an ethical concern with all questions of determination from without consigned to the realm of the natural sciences. An awareness of Iakubinskii's articles which constituted a major source for these works can assist in restoring these factors.

The novel

It is crucial to recognise that in the 1930s Bakhtin was not a linguist, but a theorist of the novel. For him, the novel embodies an image of society, but this is a verbal image of the verbal structure of society. The novel is 'a microcosm of *raznorechie*'.⁴⁹ Iakubinskii provided Bakhtin with a coherent model of the socio-linguistic relations that are both a precondition of the novel as a meta-genre and an object of its artistic imaging. Bakhtin essentially abstracted from Iakubinskii's account of the recent history of the Russian language, treating it as a general account of European linguistic history from antiquity to the Renaissance. Such a strategy fits in with the Marrist contention that all languages undergo a 'single glottogenic process', passing through the same stages of development, but not necessarily at the same tempo.⁵⁰ It also reminds one of the Bakhtin Circle's early adherence to the idea of the impending 'Third Renaissance' which would begin in Russia and sweep through Europe.⁵¹ This abstract use of historical categories, along with Bakhtin's own philosophical idealism, leads to a definite ambivalence over whether the novel is a historically specific phenomenon or an eternal principle.

Bakhtin's originality in these essays lies not in his description of discursive diversity of a national language but in his characterisation of how the novelist exploits that diversity. Thus, 'the novel begins to make use of all languages, manners, genres, it compels all the lived-out and decrepit, all socially and ideologically alien and distant worlds to speak about themselves in their own language and their own style'. The novelist plays a crucial role in the democratisation of linguistic relations by providing an image of the struggle between discourses that occurs within the 'various genres of oral and written discourse'. The nature of this engagement in the novel is, however, not simply polemical but, rather, artistic and creative. The author's and hero's words fuse together and are transformed into an artistic image within which an unresolved 'mutual interaction between worlds, points of view, accents' is captured.⁵² If the *mnogoiazychie* of the period of Hellenic expansion was a precondition for the flowering of parodic genres, with language use becoming a conscious act, the *raznorechie* of the Renaissance, the point of transition between feudalism and capitalism, provides the conditions for a flowering of parodic genres at a higher level. At this point it is no longer only languages as such that become self-conscious, but also socio-specific discourses. The parodic genre par excellence is the novel. It is not only language as such, but '*raznorechie* in itself' that 'becomes in the novel and thanks to the novel, *raznorechie* for itself'. Novels of the most advanced kind 'rise from the depths of *raznorechie* to the highest spheres of the literary language and overwhelm it'.⁵³

Conclusion

An examination of Bakhtin's debt to Iakubinskii's articles of 1930-31 shows the extent to which in the 1930s Bakhtin was attempting to integrate his work into the Soviet scholarship of the day. The attempt continued for a considerable time, with Bakhtin's work following the twists and turns of contemporary scholarship closely. This was certainly not limited to sociolinguistic ideas, but extends throughout his work and requires further research. As we have seen in the case of Iakubinskii, however, Bakhtin's idealism sapped some of the radical potential of the ideas he incorporated, even though it ultimately insulated him from some of the cruder corruptions of scholarship in the Stalin period. This suggests that many more of these forgotten sources probably deserve to be re-examined in their own rights rather than being dismissed as Stalinist hack-work.

Bakhtin's most original and, I think, valuable ideas are to be found in his work on the novel from the

48 PND 71; PRS 435.

49 DN 411; SR 222.

50 Bakhtin may have been following Zhirmunskii in the later 1930s, for the latter had attempted to establish a methodology for 'comparative literary studies' on the basis of Marr's notion of the 'single glottogenic process' in an important and influential article 'Sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie i problema literaturnykh vliianii' *Izvestiia akademii nauk SSSR, otdelenie obshchestvennykh nauk* 3, 1936, 383-403, 383-4. On the significance of this article see A.V. Desnitskaia, 'Na putiakh k sozdaniiu istoriko-tipologicheskoi teorii eposa: stranitsy nauchnoi biografii V.M. Zhirmunskogo' in D.S. Likhachev (ed.) *Iazyk, literatura, epos (k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia akademika V.M. Zhirmunskogo* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2001) 377-401, 380-85.

51 N.I. Nikolaev, 'Sud'ba idei tret'ego vozrozhdeniia', *MOYSEION: Professoru Aleksandru Iosifovichu Zaitsevu ko dniu semidesiatiletii*, (St. Petersburg, 1997) 343-50.

52 DN 409; SR 220-1.

53 DN 400; SR 211.

1930s, but that originality is not to be found in any of the specific bricks from which he builds his theoretical edifice. It is, rather, in the structure of the edifice itself. We have seen here that the sociology of language that is central to his account of the novel was largely derived from Iakubinskii, but Bakhtin then integrated this into an account of the novel that drew on many other sources, including the Russian Formalists, Veselovskii, Cassirer, Zhirmunskii, Lukács, Hegel and the German Romantics. The way that Bakhtin's theory develops in this period is closely tied in with the debates within Soviet scholarship at the time, and this became ever closer with rising nationalism in the later 1930s. Thus, while Bakhtin's work continued to be shaped by the German idealist tradition that formed the foundation of his philosophical outlook, the way in which he adapted this tradition in specific works was shaped by the distinctly Soviet context in which he operated. Furthermore, the under-researched Soviet scholars with whom Bakhtin was engaging, such as Marr, Freidenberg, Iakubinskii, Zhirmunskii and Larin, were themselves reworking German ideas in the Soviet context. If we are to understand the nature of Bakhtin's articles of the 1930s, and to appreciate fully the extent to which he made an original contribution, we therefore need to be aware of both the German and specifically Soviet dimensions of his intellectual environment. But if we are more concerned to understand the phenomena discussed in these works, and to appreciate the contribution of Soviet scholarship, along with its historical contours, we should be less content to single Bakhtin out for special attention. His work should be treated as but a valuable contribution to a dialogic process, the significance of which dwarfs that of his own writings.