

Revolutionary Linguistics

The Ideology of the Soviet Esperanto Movement, 1917-1938

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Introduction

Utopian Linguistics

At the dawn of the 20th century a small but enthusiastic group of people had a unique utopian dream and devised a strategy to spread it across the globe. With their sights set on the international population, this group aimed to usher in a golden age where “education, ideals, convictions, aims, would be the same [for everyone], and all nations would be united in a common brotherhood” (Zamenhoff, 1). While their goals were lofty, their strategy was subtle. Instead of controlling governments, political parties, and other traditional institutions of power, this group decided they would spread their ideology through a seemingly more neutral medium – language. Recent work in linguistics and a flourishing of the psychological sciences had them convinced that the way people talk determines the way people think. It helped that the ideology they were trying to spread was built around a language – and by speaking that language this group was certain they would get people to think in their ideology, too.

At least this was the hope, a hope they all shared. Hope was central to this group’s ideology; they were named for hope. The name of their language and their ideology came from the root for hope: *espero*. These were the Esperantists, and their language was Esperanto.

In many places where they tried to spread their language and ideology governments stopped them. They saw the Esperantists’ global aims; they heard the rhetoric about a path towards linguistic utopia; and they didn’t trust the Esperantists. Non-democratic and authoritarian regimes generated the most opposition. The Tsarist government in Russia sent spies to local meetings and national congresses. The Nazi regime in Germany arrested

Zamenhoff, the founder of Esperantism, and murdered his two daughters in concentration camps. Fascists in Poland and Germany burned Esperanto books and closed Esperanto clubs. Across Europe many of the great powers monitored and regulated the flow of Esperanto; they worked to suppress Esperantists' vision of linguistic utopia (Forrester, 222).

In one authoritarian regime, though, Esperanto thrived. For about twenty years, at the very beginning of its existence, the Soviet Union harbored the Esperanto movement. Within the borders of the newly founded Soviet state the Esperantists were allowed to carry out their project of global proportions in safety. Unlike everywhere else in Europe, the Soviet government granted Esperantists state support: Esperanto was offered as an optional subject in school, and free classes were broadcast over the airwaves in Moscow.

Above all else, the Bolsheviks were ideologues. Lenin built the Soviet Union on the same strict principles with which he forged the Bolshevik party: "To belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it *in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology ... [and is] tantamount to renouncing socialism" (Lenin, "What is to be Done?"). How was it that Esperantism – an ideology with international goals and the avowed desire to change humanity's consciousness – was allowed to flourish inside the world's only Marxist state? The Esperantists were not necessarily opposed to the socialist project, but they had their own agenda. Each group had different visions of utopia and different ideas about how to get there. The Bolshevik party closely monitored the ideology of its members, and beginning with the formation of the Secret Police in 1917 they purged Soviet citizens whose ideology diverged from the Marxist agenda. Why did the Soviet government let this un-Bolshevik movement flourish in their country? Why were they willing to protect the Esperantists?

This thesis is about how the Esperantists got away with it. How they convinced the Soviet government to legitimize their project, and allow Esperantism to flourish as an independent ideology within the Soviet Union. The Esperantists offered the government some concrete advantages, such as the promise of international communication with the European proletariat. But beyond setting up thousands of international pen pals, the Esperantists didn't deliver serious political, military, or technical advantage to the Soviet leadership. Even at its height in the 1920s, the Soviet Esperantists only had about 16,000 members. An OGPU report from 1925 noted that, although it was composed of ardent believers, the Esperanto movement had not reached the proportions of a mass movement. Esperantism was not allowed to flourish inside the Soviet Union because of the concrete benefits it could offer the Soviet government. Instead, we turn to the Esperantists' ideology to answer the question: what made the Esperantists attractive, or at least acceptable, to the Soviet leadership?

Often, when scholars discuss the Soviet Esperanto movement, they describe it from the perspective of the revolutionary utopianism of the first Soviet decade. This approach highlights many important qualities of the Esperanto movement. In the 1920s the Soviet Union was ablaze with utopian projects, from fantastic novels about communist colonies on other planets to nudists who rode streetcars around the Moscow streets in the warmer months. Scholars draw a parallel to the Soviet Utopians of the 1920s from the European Utopian tradition, which had made its way into Russia well before the revolution. Even before Red October, Russian utopians dreamed of egalitarianism, a goal that manifested itself in different ways – from workers' councils to egalitarian architecture. In his monumental work *Revolutionary Dreams*, Richard Stites argued that the Esperanto

movement was part of this drive for egalitarianism. Esperanto is a wonderful example of egalitarian utopianism, because the Esperantists strove to cover the world in a mutually intelligible language of international discourse (Stites, 135).

A scholarly approach that casts Esperanto as just one more among many flavors of Revolutionary Utopianism has many attractive features. First, it seems to account for the fervor and vitality of the movement. Like many other Utopian groups of the 1920s, the Esperantists were busy proselytizing their program to anyone who would listen. They published hundreds of articles in dozens of magazines all over the Soviet Union, reinforcing their own understanding of the language and urging their fellow citizens to take up their visionary project. Second, the Esperantists were constantly arguing that they were decidedly *not* utopians, at least not in the pejorative sense. In 1933, Ernest Drezen, the secretary general of the Soviet Esperanto Union, wrote that one of the three criticisms of Esperanto that every speaker needed to disprove was the notion that “Esperantists are dreamers, idealists and detached from real life” (Drezen, “Teachings of Lenin”). If the Esperantists really felt this claim had no validity it is unlikely that they would have bothered to counter it, at least with the regularity that they did.

While the Revolutionary Utopianism approach helps us understand important elements of the story of the Soviet Esperanto movement, it does not explain everything. It views the Esperantists from the outside in and answers questions about how they interacted with other utopian groups and the Soviet state. But this approach does not pay careful attention to the Esperantists’ internal discourse. When one looks at the Esperantists’ articles and lectures one is struck by their fanatical – almost geeky – love of language. Every Esperantist spoke two languages, and most of them were fluent in more. While other people

went to the theater or the movies, the Esperantists studied the formal aspects of their language as a recreational activity, and wrote dictionaries, technical lexicons and philosophical articles extolling the virtues of Esperanto. To understand the Esperanto movement one must understand the Esperantists as they viewed themselves: as linguists and philosophers of language. By describing the Esperantists as both linguists and utopians, we can create a fuller, more nuanced characterization of the Soviet Esperanto movement.

Understanding the Esperantists as linguists does more than re-write history on their terms. It also answers the more fundamental question: Why did the Soviet government tolerate the Esperantists? The Esperantists benefited enormously from the fact that linguistic philosophy was almost wholly absent in the works of Marx and that the question of a “Marxist linguistics” had yet to be resolved. Some were genuinely excited about the Marxist critique and the Soviet project – specifically about how it could aid Esperantism. Others, realizing the shift in political power, tried to capitalize on an opportune moment. As one historian put it, “they expected that Socialism would be an advantage to Esperanto,” and they rebranded Esperantism in whatever way would help its dissemination (Forster, 197).

Regardless of their psychological motivation, the Esperantists converged on a common project: they made arguments that centered on three formal elements of Marxism, mimicking its forms in their own ideology. By deploying Marxist notions of science, history and materialism, they created a grand conceptualization of the place of Esperanto in human affairs. Their work produced an ideology that was Marxist in form, but Esperantist in content. By combining current trends in linguistics with Marxist philosophy they were able to create a brand of Esperantism that fit within the parameters of official Soviet ideology.

Each of the chapters of this work describes a different element of Marxist philosophy that the Esperantists incorporated into their own ideology. Chapter one introduces Esperantism and the Esperanto movement in the Russian territories. Both the Esperantists and the Marxists saw a tension at the very base of human interaction. The Marxists saw class struggle, whereas the Esperantists saw a struggle for mutual understanding. Working from these fundamental beliefs, both the Marxists and the Esperantists created a vision of utopia. This chapter explores the methods of Soviet Esperantists as they worked towards a utopian vision.

Marxists the world over – and especially the Soviet Marxists in power – held the firm belief that science drives progress. Marx loved technology and described technological advancement as one factor that propels humans forward in history. At the beginning of their movement, the Esperantists did not describe Esperanto in terms of science or technology. But beginning in the 1920s, the Soviet Esperantists began to talk of their language as a technological invention and a project of rationalization that was motivated by scientific principles. They used a movement in linguistics called structuralism to re-brand Esperanto as a scientific invention – one located half-way between a natural language and a technological construction. Chapter two shows how the Esperantists used structuralist arguments to imbue their movement with a flavor of science and technology that made it palatable to Soviet Marxism.

If Esperanto was driving man forward through history, what did history look like to the Esperantists? Rather than strictly copying the Marxist conception of history, the Esperantists approached their understanding of the historical process through the works of the Soviet linguist Nicholas Marr. Marr subscribed to Marxist beliefs, but he merged them

with a strange brand of historical linguistics. Chapter three shows how the Esperantists acted like historical linguists, combining Marr's theory of language development with a more traditional Marxist conception of history. The Esperantists – like the Marxists – believed that they were on the right side of history, that history was determined, and that the global advent of Esperanto was inevitable.

The Esperantists believed that, as their language spread across the globe, it would have a radically transformative effect on peoples' consciousness. Originally, the Esperantists understood that their language would change human thought. But as the Soviet Esperantists were exposed to the materialistic ideas of Marx, they began to think about the ways their language could also transform material interactions. The Soviet Esperantists were excited about the ideas of materialism and had a strong intuition that Esperanto was important, in part, because it could change material culture. Chapter four describes how, using a new trend in linguistics called linguistic functionalism, the Soviet Esperantists began to describe Esperanto as a tool. In doing so they created a materialistic philosophy about the interaction between language and human society.

By the mid 1930s the Soviet Esperantists had created a unique ideology, one that combined a belief in linguistic utopia with elements of Soviet Marxism: reverence for science and technology, a Marxist conception of history, and linguistic materialism. Even though it was an ideology distinct from Marxism, their formal similarity gave Esperantism a Marxist character that made it commensurate with the Soviet project. In 1937 when the Esperanto movement began to be targeted during the great purges, the Esperantists were not persecuted for their ideological beliefs. Rather, they were attacked because their clubs, magazines and congresses constituted elements of the Soviet civil society that was the real

target of the great purges. Chapter five describes the waning of the Esperantists in the late 1930s and their eventual purging during the years 1937-38.

At its height in the late 1920s, the Soviet Esperanto movement attracted only about 16,000 people, a tiny drop in the vast sea of Soviet society. Even within the international Esperanto movement, the Soviet Esperantists constituted a minority. Germany harbored more Esperanto enthusiasts, and the headquarters of the international Esperanto organizations were in France, Switzerland and England. In spite of its small size, the Soviet Esperanto movement is a crucial object for historical analysis. In dramatic fashion, we see in the history of the Soviet Esperantists the interplay of two ideologies – one with immense power and a developed state apparatus, the other with little force but boundless amounts of hope.

Recent scholarship has shed light on the complex ways that Soviet citizens interacted with the official state ideology, questioning our notions about the total nature of Bolshevik rule. Contra to the beliefs of the many earlier scholars, who characterized the relationship as unidirectional from the top down, scholars now show that many Soviet citizens actively wrestled with official ideology in a complex process of identity creation. In his work *Revolution on my Mind*, Jochen Hellbeck showed how ordinary Soviet citizens used the diary format to think deeply about how they could be good Soviet Marxists. These diarists were not passive recipients of official dogma; their private musings were written “in dialog with the twofold, transformative and participatory appeal of the Communist project” (Hellbeck, 14). The case of the Soviet Esperantists shows us that groups, too, had a complex and open relationship with the official state ideology. The Esperantists took the forms of Marxism willingly and initiated meaningful dialog about how to use those forms in

constructing an ideology of Esperantism. They were neither blind sheep, following the twists and turns of state ideology, nor were they dissidents. The Soviet project excited them and they found many parallels between Marxism and Esperantism. They wanted to engage with Marxism both because it offered them political legitimacy and because Marxist thought could be used to shape a better Esperanto movement.

By describing the hybrid philosophy of Soviet Esperantism, this thesis shows that Soviet citizens could meaningfully engage with state ideology on their own terms. Furthermore, it shows that this non-total model extends beyond individuals and applies to groups that constituted Soviet civil society until its dissolution in 1938. The individual members of the Esperanto movement debated and argued, working in concert to form a group character and a group ideology in aggregate. Not only as individuals, but also as a group, the Esperantists engaged in a dialectic struggle with official ideology – creating an identity that was unique, self-determined, and not prescribed by the Soviet government.

Chapter 1

Revolutionary Linguistics

In 1930 Nadezhda Krupskaya, the widow of Vladimir Lenin, wrote an article in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* about her specialty, the Soviet education system. She touched, briefly, on the educational merits of Esperanto, stating that “language is continuously connected with the experiences of people, with their living worldview [... But] this language, invented in the study, is poor and miserable” (Glazunov). Krupskaya’s argument stems from a deep misunderstanding of Esperanto and the Esperanto movement, a misunderstanding that plagued the Esperanto cause during the Soviet times and continues to haunt it today. Krupskaya’s thesis – that the study of Esperanto is divorced from a worldview or ideology – comes from her mistaken belief that Esperantism is solely about language and language acquisition. Esperanto’s inventor, Ludwig Zamenhoff, wrote broadly about the philosophical impetus for his creation. Esperanto’s advocates in the Russian Empire continued to theorize about the culture of the Esperanto movement. Esperanto was a language, but to speak Esperanto meant to practice Esperantism, which was an ideology.

Before we unpack the relationship between Esperantism and Marxism, we must first understand what it meant to be an Esperantist in Russia and the Soviet Union. This chapter traces the ideology of Esperantism, from its founding in 1887 up to the early Soviet times. It outlines the ideological underpinnings of the Esperanto movement and describes its organization in the Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union.

In 1887 Zamenhoff published *Unua Libro*, or *The First Book*, which laid out the tenets of Esperanto and Esperantism. In the short text, Zamenhoff expressed a critique that was, in many ways, similar to a Marxist critique. Marx saw division of labor and technical

progress as that which had raised man beyond the level of animals. But he also recognized that those very same practices introduced deep inequality and tension into human affairs.

Zamenhoff's words seem oddly similar:

And yet, though language is the prime motor of civilization, and to it alone we owe the having raised ourselves above the level of other animals, difference of speech is a cause of antipathy, nay even of hatred, between people, as being the first thing to strike us on meeting. Not being understood we keep aloof, and the first notion that occurs to our minds is, not to find out whether the others are of our own political opinions, or whence their ancestors came from thousands of years ago, but to dislike the strange sound of their language. (Zamenhoff)

To Zamenhoff, language barriers were no mere annoyance but a division that restricted human interaction in a deeply troubling way. Zamenhoff's upbringing may have influenced his view on language. He grew up in Bialystok, a city at the boarder of the Russian Empire where Jews, Russians, Poles, and Lithuanians often feuded over cultural misunderstandings.

Once the fundamental friction had been identified, Zamenhoff invited his readers to imagine a world without inter-linguistic tension, one in which man shared a common language. Like Marx's classless society, Zamenhoff's vision took on utopian proportions. In the world of the future, "education, ideals, convictions, aims, would be the same [for everyone], and all nations would be united in a common brotherhood." In fact, Zamenhoff

was willing to assert that “no sacrifice would be too great, if by it we could obtain a universal tongue” (Zamenhoff).

Only once he had established both the vision of the current, flawed, world and a vision of the future did Zamenhoff move on to discuss the mechanism by which humanity could progress towards utopia. That is, only once he established the philosophy of Esperantism, did Zamenhoff discuss the Esperanto language. Zamenhoff’s insight was to create an international auxiliary language, which one would learn in addition to one’s native tongue. As everyone in the world needed to be able to learn this language with ease, Zamenhoff decided that natural languages – with their irregular cases declensions and verb conjugations – wouldn’t work. Instead, he created a constructed language, modeled on the natural languages of Europe but simplified and regularized. *Unua Libro* specified the 16 basic rules of Esperanto and outlined a rudimentary vocabulary of 900 words, their roots taken from the Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages.

Unua Libro was translated into many languages, among them Russian and Polish. Carefully, Zamenhoff kept track of the number of people who had learned his language over its first couple of years, and in 1889 published a list of the first one thousand speakers of Esperanto; 919 of them lived in the Russian Empire.¹ In that time, second language learning was an activity of upper class, urban, and educated people. The major pockets of Esperanto reflected this, as they were all confined to the Empire’s major cities. The biggest collection was in St. Petersburg, where there were a total of 85 Esperantists. After that, significant groups lived in Warsaw, Odessa, Kiev and Moscow (Sidrov).

In the beginning St. Petersburg was the center of the Russian Esperanto movement. In 1889, just two years after Zamenhoff released *Unua Libro*, the Petersburg community

began publishing the world's first Esperanto magazine, *La Esperanto* (Spiridovich). In tandem with the magazine, in 1892 the St. Petersburg group formed the first Russian Esperanto society, called *Espero*, or hope. The society and magazine continued to exist together for only three years, before the Tsarist censorship banned the publication of "La Esperanto" in 1895, due to the generally leftist nature of the Esperantist organization (Smith). Throughout the pre-revolutionary years the government continued banning and shutting down national Esperanto organizations, but permitted local chapters. They condoned Esperanto as an intellectual pastime, but would not allow for national organization. They did not want the hobby to become a movement. Despite the constant censorship, Esperanto continued to spread, and in 1908 there were about 50 different Esperanto organizations scattered all over the Empire (Sidirov).²

But while the Esperantists were certainly on the left side of the political spectrum, they were not as radical as many of the other groups in pre-revolutionary Russia. Many of the early Esperantists came from the upper levels of Russian society and did not have much to gain from changing the status quo. Not outright revolutionaries, the Esperantists saw their language as a tool for pacifism, a sort of panacea that could unite humanity and root out violence and misunderstanding. The views of the early Esperantists were summed up in a chapter in the book *On the road to an International Language*. In it, two Soviet Esperantists looked back on the pre-revolutionary days of the Esperanto movement:

This layer of the intelligentsia saw in Esperanto a panacea for all life's ills. It would be sufficient to promote Esperanto, and it would spread among all nations and people would cease to be evil, realize that they are brothers, etc...

Zamenhoff himself, a native of Tsarist Russia, especially in the last years of his working life, embraced this kind of idealistic vision of Esperanto, and expressed it in his theory of the “inner idea” of Esperantism. (Spiridovich)³

The expression of pacifism and neutrality matches those of Zamenhoff during this time as well. In 1905, seeing the popularity of his language, Zamenhoff met with European Esperanto leaders in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, where they drafted the *Declaration of Boulogne*. The document described Esperanto as a neutral language – one that had no official relationship with any political, religious, or ideological body. This philosophy continued to dominate the world Esperanto movement, and was the impetus for founding the UEA, or United Esperanto Association in 1908. By and large, the pre-revolutionary Russian movement was similar to the UEA in character, although some members had more radical tendencies. These Esperantists aligned themselves with the SAT (*Sennacio Associo Tutamundo*), an Esperanto organization founded by the French anarchist Eugene Lanti.⁴ Lanti believed that Esperantists had a joint responsibility to spread their language and destroy the European nation states. After the Russian Revolutions, the Soviet Esperantists would align themselves more closely with the SAT, but the conflict between anarchism and bolshevism would constantly test their relationship.

In 1917 the revolution threw the activities of all Russians into chaos, and the Esperantists were no exception. The Russian Esperantists’ magazine *The Wave of Esperanto* ceased its publication in St. Petersburg and communication between the disparate Esperanto groups became more and more difficult. In 1917 groups in Moscow tried to reorganize an all-Russian Esperanto Union, but the lack of centralized communication meant that their

proclamations and announcements weren't heard in the rest of the empire (Spiridovich). The formation of a lasting Union did not happen until 1921 at the third all-Russian congress in Petrograd where the Esperantists officially declared their support for the new government. There they formed the *Soyuz Espirantov Sovetskikh Stran (SESS)* or The Union of Esperantists of Soviet Countries.

In the first few years after 1917, the character of the Esperanto movement morphed along with the social composition of the new Soviet Union. Most of the new Esperanto leaders had some form of higher education. Ernest Drezen, the founding Secretary General of the SESS, had a PhD in linguistics and worked as a professor at Moscow State University. Others held technical and engineering degrees from Tsarist times. Gregory Demidyuk, who co-founded the Esperanto Journal *New Epoch*, had a degree in chemical engineering from Moscow Technical University, and Nikolai Intsertov, who would later become the executive secretary of the SESS, had studied organizational management and engineering. Others in the movement had a literary education. For example, Adam Iodko, had degrees in History of Philology from Moscow University, which he would put to use penning articles about Esperanto in many literary journals (Denisov).

Former officers of the Red Army began to take leadership positions in the early 1920s, and many of them used their new roles in Soviet society to further the Esperanto movement. Drezen had joined the revolutionary movement early and was in charge of guarding the Tsarist ministers who were imprisoned at Tauride Palace during the civil war. Later, he used his influence and connections in the Red Army to secure a job as Mikhail Kalinin's personal secretary. As Kalinin was the nominal head of state of the new USSR, Drezen had influence and connections at the top level of the CPSU. Adam Iodko also gained

influence during the Civil War, serving as the commander of a military unit on the southern fronts. Like Drezen, he used his newfound authority to secure top jobs in the new Soviet government, leading the Organization and Information department at the central archives of the RSFSR and later becoming the director of the BSSR Central Archives in Minsk. Still others in the movement fought on the wrong side of the war. For example, Intsertov joined the CSPU in 1921 but was expelled after being found guilty of supporting Denikin's White Army in his home province of Vorozhen. But Intsertov seemed to be an anomaly; most of the Esperantists had either fought with the Reds or had remained neutral during the civil war (Intsertov).

The class composition of the Esperanto movement changed too, as the Esperantists were eager to welcome proletariats into their ranks. Many of the leading Soviet Esperantists were from humble social origins. Drezen was the son of a Latvian shipbuilder, Demidyuk's father was a railroad worker and Iodko's a Minsk craftsman. Despite the rise of proletariat Esperantists, the movement remained a mix of workers and intellectuals. In the mid 1920s, when the OGPU commissioned a report on the composition and structure of the Esperanto movement, they found that the SESS was composed of only 30% workers. This was a huge gain from the pre-revolutionary Esperanto circles, but still about 60% of the union was made up of students, academics and white-collar workers. The movement was ethnically diverse, as well. While there are no statistics about the ethnic composition of the Soviet Esperanto movement, many Esperantists belonged to minority nationalities. Some of the movement's leaders, such as Drezen, Iodko and Tupitsyn, came from the Baltic States, and there were active Esperanto societies in the Caucasus and the far eastern provinces of the Soviet Union. Of the 13,800 members of the SESS in 1925, only about 15% were members of the

communist party, but among the leaders, party membership was more common – for example about 70% in the movement's Central Committee were members (Abolin).

During the destalinization process of the mid 1950s, the KGB exonerated most of the Esperantists who had been killed or imprisoned in the great purges. As part of this process, they collected an internal report that had been filed in 1925 on the composition and structure of the SESS. The document gives a good outline of both how the SESS (and by extension the whole Soviet Esperanto movement) operated, and what the Bolshevik government expected of them. The SESS was organized in a hierarchical structure with its center in Moscow. Esperanto clubs formed the cells of the organization and were responsible for local programming, membership records and dues collection. In the mid 1920s there were about 350 of these local organizations spread throughout the Soviet Union. Next in the hierarchy were the provincial committees followed by the regional and national offices. In 1937, at the time of the great purges, the central Moscow offices of the SESS employed four people: an executive secretary, an office secretary, a shipping agent and an accountant. Given the small staff for the central office, it is unlikely that the regional and national offices employed more than two or three people at a time (Stepanov, "Kak Eto Bylo").

The Esperantists organized their efforts on three fronts: through official channels in the Soviet Government, through SESS publications and through personal correspondence. The SESS directed their lobbying efforts towards two government institutions: the Communist International and the Commissariat of Education. Founded by Lenin, the Communist International was the Soviet agency officially in charge of spreading the Socialist revolution internationally. Together with the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, it determined Soviet foreign policy during the interwar period. In 1921 – at its third World

Congress – the Communist International addressed the question of official languages for the first time. In a closed meeting, the Executive Committee decided to include only German and French as official languages for publication, but added English and Russian the next day. They put the broader question of language on the agenda for the congress, but didn't bring it up until the last day of the congress, when the matter was discussed in between closing orations. The official stenographer's report drifts between direct and indirect speech, leaving it unclear who brought the matter before the plenum: "It was proposed to the presidium to create a commission from different parties to develop an international language. Will the congress agree to submit the task to the executive board? (Agreement)" (*Tretii Vsemirnyi Kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala*). However, official stenographers' notes from the subsequent Executive Committee meetings mention no discussion of any international language (*Deiatelnost Ispolnitelnogo...*). This didn't stop Esperantists from hoping that the Comintern might grant them official recognition, and they wrote letters and articles in favor of this goal. But despite their efforts, the Communist International never declared any language as the official international language of communism, nor did it develop its own international language, and it continued to publish in the original four languages.

The Esperantists also used education as another avenue to lobby for legitimacy from the new Soviet Government. Around 1920, they were able to convince the government to recognize Esperanto as a legitimate *optional* subject in schools and the Ukrainian government even formed an office for teaching Esperanto. By 1925, Esperanto courses were offered as elective classes in high schools in Tver, Odessa, Kharkov and Kiev. Although plans were made to introduce it as a compulsory subject in the Far Eastern Republic during

the Civil War, the local government dissolved before the plan could come to fruition (Spiridovich). In 1925 free Esperanto courses were offered over the radio in Moscow, and in 1926 the study of Esperanto was allowed as an optional activity in the Komsomol (Abolin). While the Esperantists were able to make inroads into the Soviet education system, they were never able to attain broad Esperanto instruction in the Soviet school system.

During the late 1920s, the Esperantists realized that a change of tactics would be needed if Esperanto were going to continue to flourish in the Soviet Union. Their educational efforts, while partially effective, would never result in mandatory instruction. And as the Comintern began to lose its power within the USSR, they realized that they would need to gain the allegiance of different government agencies. During the late 1920s and early 30s, the Esperantists focused their efforts on publishing and international correspondence. The central offices in Moscow published both a monthly Journal, *The Soviet Esperantist*, and a weekly bulletin to keep provincial members informed about the decisions of the executive committee. In addition, the Esperantists' personal correspondence with foreign workers was reproduced in magazines and newspapers across the Soviet Union (Abolin). The publications were meant to give reading practice to Esperanto speakers, and also to educate them about the goals of the movement and the benefits of Esperanto. Additionally, the Esperanto community kept up its pre-revolutionary tradition of constant translation, but now they translated not only Russian literary texts, but also communist books, such as the *Communist Manifesto* and other works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. After French, German, and English, Esperanto was the most published 'foreign' language inside the Soviet Union in the mid 1920s.

Personal correspondence was the main way that the Esperantists tried to spread their language beyond the border of the USSR. Each Esperantist developed a series of personal contacts through the SESS or other Esperanto organizations. Some of the correspondence was with people in far-flung places. Genadii Tupitsyn, an Esperantist who lived in Moscow and later immigrated to Latvia, established friends in London, Australia, and Seattle. Generally, the Esperantists were prolific correspondents. Between October 25th and February 26th of 1925 the Belarusian Central Committee of the SESS sent 1,250 letters internationally and received 875 (Abolin).

Although they maintained close correspondences with Esperantists the world over, the Soviet Esperantists were a unique force within the international Esperanto community. They had broken with the main branch of the Esperanto Movement, headed by the UEA, when they declared an official partnership with the Soviet government. And while they were nominally aligned with the SAT, the Soviet Esperantists were officially Leninists, not Anarchists. In many ways, the Soviet Esperantists were on their own. They shared a common history with the other Esperanto groups, one that stemmed from Zamenhoff's *Unua Libro*, but the Soviet Esperantists were required to work within a set of Soviet-dictated constraints that did not burden the others.

Unlike their international colleagues, the Soviet Esperantists often worried about their relationship with Russian. Lenin and Stalin were both worried about the possibility of Russian chauvinism, and advocated that local education and business be conducted in local languages. But knowledge of Russian promised a greater access to education and work. By the end of the 1930s, Russian had become the de facto *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union. In general, the Soviet Esperantists shied away from mentioning Russian in their articles and

speeches. When the Esperantists did discuss Russian, they never placed it in competition with their constructed language. The historians Spidirovich and Demidyuk argue that, because the first Esperanto communities were in the Russian empire, Russian, Ukrainian and Hebrew speakers inadvertently changed the syntax of Esperanto to make it more like those languages. Drezen noted that Lenin was upset by the introduction of unnecessary foreign words into Russian, and promised that Esperanto would allow for international communication without such foreign intrusions. When talking about capitalist languages, the Soviet Esperantists would often mention English and French. Their avoidance of Russian indicates that they were worried about demonizing the language, and viewed it as another constraint to be skirted around.

Primarily, the Soviet government constrained the social composition, organization, and activities of the Esperanto movement. Like all civil society organizations, the SESS was officially registered with and monitored by the OGPU. In their structure and social composition the SESS conformed to Soviet norms, creating separate sections for each of the Socialist republics, for example. But the Esperantists were less constrained in the production of their own ideology. Fortunately for them, Marx had written almost no sustained analysis of language. The Soviet Esperantists were free from direct conflict with Marx, and could approach his texts from multiple angles and through the work of contemporary linguists.⁵ Where Lenin and Stalin talked about language, they spoke about it in the context of minority rights, insisting that minority nations be allowed to conduct their official business in their own cultural language. The Esperantists were happy to agree – this approach aligned with Esperanto’s status as an auxiliary language. Beyond the question of minority rights, a Soviet stance towards other aspects of language had not been developed. The Esperantists were

freer than most groups in the Soviet Union to exercise creativity and ingenuity when they constructed their own philosophy.

Chapter 2

Structural Linguistics

In “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” Engels recognizes that Marx was not the world’s first socialist. Men of the previous century had created the embryo of socialism and produced profound “criticism of the existing conditions of society.” Marx’s genius lay not in his ability to see the vague contours of “material and moral misery of the bourgeois world” but in his discovery of the law of surplus value, and in his strict materialism. These, above all else were Marx’s greatest contributions, for “with these discoveries, Socialism became a science” (Engels). The belief that Socialism ought to be scientific – that it should be based in economic laws and supported by actual data – was at the very core of the Marxist project. During Soviet times, the leadership expressed this view by supporting rationalization and planning. Any endeavor – whether it was carried out by the state or the individual – should be centralized, simplified, and subject to scientific analysis.

The early Esperanto movement did not share the Bolsheviks’ zeal for science or planning. *Unua Libro* mentions science only once, when Zamenhoff suggests that his language would help foster international scientific gatherings. Zamenhoff describes his language, above all, as a simplification of language, rather than a project of planning or rationalization. But during the 1920s, the Esperantists began to change the discourse surrounding their language. They began to describe it both as a technical invention – something akin to the telegraph – and as a project of rationalization. They claimed that, just as the Soviet economists were rationalizing and planning the Soviet economy, so too were the Esperantists rationalizing human language.

In part, the Esperantists' rhetoric surrounding science, technology and rationalization was inspired by the Soviet Taylorist movement. In management science, Soviet leaders imported the philosophy of the American industrialist Henry Taylor to rationalize the manufacturing process. Taylor sought to increase capitalist production in factories by scientifically studying the way that workers did their jobs, cutting out excess movement and wasted time (Smith, 74). While opposed to the implementation of Taylor's work in capitalist enterprises, many Soviet leaders were excited about the scientific management of time and movement. Taylor was famous for studying the flow of work and movement within a single factory, breaking apart the production process into a set of minute actions in order to discover how every action could be simplified. Lenin was fascinated by Taylor's writings, but believed that the American had erred in studying only a single factory at a time. He, and other Soviet administrators, thought that Taylor's ideas could be applied not just in factories but all across the Soviet Union to improve inter-city communication and enhance government functionality (Sochor, 248).

The Taylorist movement gained support from the Soviet leaders, particularly from Lenin, who even penned a number of articles on Taylor and the advantages of Socialist Taylorism. Many Esperantists were in communication with the Taylorist leaders, and some, such as Poltovsky, even wrote articles for the official Taylorist journal *NOT*. The Esperantists began to claim that they were doing for language what the Taylorists had done for labor. To prove their point, the Soviet Esperantists borrowed terminology and philosophy from the structural movement in linguistics, which had sprung up in France and Russia during the turn of the century. The structuralists created methods of formal analysis,

and the Esperantists borrowed these methods to recast their language in scientific and rational terms.

The person most commonly associated with the subfield of Structural Linguistics is Ferdinand de Saussure, though as we shall see, structural linguistics began to develop in Russia independent of Saussure's contributions. Saussure was born in Switzerland, but lived most of his life in turn-of-the-century Paris, where he lectured at the Université de Paris. Saussure himself wrote almost nothing down, and most of his contributions to linguistics come from notes taken by his students during a series of lectures known as the "Course in General Linguistics" which were delivered at the University in 1910. The *Course* was later disseminated throughout Europe, where it was recognized for proposing a radical and new direction for the field.

Saussure's *Course* is important for three reasons: he argues that linguistics should move away from historical considerations, that it should be based on the collection of data into corpuses, and that it should be focused on systems of rules. Starting from the Middle Ages, the field had been mostly concerned with what we call today Historical Linguistics – discerning language families and figuring out which languages are derived from which other languages. Saussure suggested that the field should move away from "diachronic" study – that is, the study of language change over time – to "synchronic" study. Synchronic study involves taking a sort of snapshot of a language, such as studying the grammar and rules of French as it is, not how it has changed since branching off from Latin some 2,000 years ago. In order to study a language synchronically, Saussure suggested taking actual speech data from a language's native speakers. This data Saussure called *speech*, or the actual linguistic utterances that constitute communication. Saussure contrasted *speech* (in French, *parole*)

with language (*langue*), or the idealized set of rules that govern the production of speech. Saussure contended that by breaking speech down into atomic units, like the phoneme, word, verb phrase and sentence, one could hope to uncover a language's "general grammar" or the set of rules that govern production. During the latter half of the 19th century, linguistics and philology were very much intertwined on the European continent. Saussure helped to differentiate the two and to recast linguistics as the rationalized study of language based on empirical data (Saussure).

Saussure's work was not introduced into Russia until 1917, and the first full translation of his *Course* was not published until 1931. In part, this was due to the fact that many of the ideas ascribed to Saussure had developed independently in Russia before the revolution. In the first decade of the 20th century, two Polish linguists, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay and his pupil Stefan Kruszewski, immigrated to Kazan, where they founded the Kazan School of Linguistics and became first to rigorously study phonemes, or the atomic phonological components of a language. The phoneme, they posited, exists in two planes at the same time: each phoneme exists first, psychologically, in the mind of the speaker and second, materially, as a wave of sound produced by the speaker's vocal apparatus. Baudouin extended the dichotomy further, asserting that the act of speaking is divided between the idealized component existing within the speaker's mind, or *language*, and the speaker's physical utterances, or *speech*. To many Russian and later Soviet linguists who read the *Course* after 1917, Saussure's work, particularly his distinction between *parole* and *langue*, appeared to be an elaboration on Baudouin's earlier work (Klosek, Kasevich).

In addition to analyzing many natural languages, Baudouin also studied Esperanto, along with two other constructed languages, Volapuk and Bolak. Later, Esperantists Iodko

and Andreev would take pride in Baudouin's association with their language, claiming that he had mastered it in a mere 168 hours. It seems that when Baudouin did talk about the constructed languages, such as Esperanto, he tried to figure out how they would mix with natural languages and why they were so much easier to learn than the natural languages. In an article published in 1900, entitled "On the Mixed Nature of All Languages," Baudouin stated that Esperanto's ease came from "the loss of reflexive declension and the replacement of agglutinative forms (cases) with prepositions; the replacement of reflexive conjugation with forms of pronominal origin and generally with different auxiliary particles; the loss of morphologically shifting stress, and so on" (Baudouin). By focusing on Esperanto's grammatical elements, Baudouin gives a structural account of why it is easy to learn.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Esperantists read Baudouin and used terms borrowed from Structural Linguistics to highlight the ease with which one could acquire Esperanto. Many Esperantists pointed to Esperanto's 16 original rules that were laid out by Zamenhoff in *Unua Libro*. They said that the simplicity of Esperanto derived from the simplicity of these sixteen rules and the regularity with which the rules were applied. While this claim was correct, other Esperantists recast the same argument into more technical terms. They explained that Esperanto's regularity was due to its status as an *agglutinating* language; one in which morphological components were glued together to form complex, yet regular word structures. Esperanto, they argued, was a sort of super-agglutinating language. It functioned the same way as other agglutinating languages, like Russian, but it was far more regular and far more predictable.

When linguists say that a language is agglutinating, they are placing it in a class based on its morphology. Morphology is the way that words change their form to play

different grammatical roles, for example the change between the Esperanto verb *fermi*, meaning ‘to shut’ and *fermis*, mean ‘[he/she] shut’ in the past tense. Complex words in Esperanto are built up by adding regular suffixes to a stem, for example the verb *malfermi*, meaning ‘to open,’ is composed of the prefix *mal-*, meaning ‘opposite’ and the root *fermi*, ‘to shut.’ Such a reliance on stems combined with prefixes makes Esperanto an *agglutinating* language, like Russian (Gledhil, 38). But Esperanto is unlike Russian, or many other modern agglutinating languages, because every suffix and prefix corresponds to one, and only one, meaning. In English, for example, the suffix *-s* (speaking phonetically) can make a word plural or mark it in the genitive case. In Esperanto, the suffix *-is* always makes a verb past tense. Such regularity is uncommon in natural languages.

Structural arguments abounded in the Esperantists’ writings of the 1920s. For example, Adam Iodko wrote extensively about the structure of Esperanto, focusing on its use of prefixes and suffixes. In his 1923 article, “The Working Class and the International Language” he pointed out that the Russian words for mother (*mat’*) and father (*otets*) stem from different roots. In Esperanto, however, the words for mother and father come from the same root: the Latin word “pater.” In Esperanto, the word for father is created by adding a male suffix “o” to the end, whereas the word for mother takes the female suffix “ino.” Thus, by learning only one root, the beginner can easily learn the words “patro” and “patrino.” Iodko estimates that Esperanto is equally productive as Russian, while using only about half its number of roots. Thus, he suggests that learning Esperanto would take about half the time of learning Russian! By talking about the “general grammar” of Esperanto word construction, and by giving examples taken from Esperanto sentences, Iodko works within the Structural Linguistic framework to show how Esperanto shares many of the same

features as Russian, but applies them simply and without exception.

In a different article, entitled “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization,” the Esperantist Andrei Andreev predicts the advent of a purely “mechanized language” that will afford humans greater cognitive capacities. The inevitability of such a language is obvious, he says: “This is confirmed by the transition of English, formed from the reflexive Germanic and Romance languages, in measurable degrees towards an agglutinative and root-isolating language, which made it the easiest of all the European languages in its grammatical structure] (Andreev, “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization”).⁶ The venue for the publication, the official magazine of the *NOT* (*Nauchnaya Organizatsia Trudy* or Scientific Organization of Labor) movement, might be the reason he refrains from mentioning Esperanto outright. But given Andreev’s status as an ardent Esperantist, it is clear that his “mechanized language” is a stand in for Esperanto. Furthermore, Andreev says that the mechanized language will spread for the same structural reasons English has, that is, because of its morphology. At the end of his article Andreev complains that the problem with bourgeois linguistics is that it “does not dare to make any sensible conclusion from all of its accumulated ‘highly scientific stuff and rubbish’ to improve this human speech” (Andreev, “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization”). That is, the point of this structural analysis is not knowledge generation, but the creation of new languages, organized rationally and scientifically. Because Andreev frames the claim in Marxist terminology, he reaches a political conclusion and challenges linguists in much the same way Marx challenged philosophers with his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Marx, “Thesis on Feuerbach”).

Structural Linguistics provided a way for the Esperantists to rationally and scientifically study their language. But the Esperantists went beyond the Structural Linguistic methodology. Esperanto, they claimed, was not just the object of rational study, but a rationalized project in itself. In “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization,” Andreev bemoaned the chaotic nature of speech, which compelled him and others like him to study its structure for many years. Andreev could only study speech in relation to a single national language. By differentiating speech from language and in highlighting the importance of linguistic structure, Andreev puts himself within the Structural Linguistic framework. The purpose of Andreev’s article was not just to describe the scientific rules behind the production of speech - it was a call to arms, a demand that speech become more rationalized itself.

In their writings and lectures the Esperantists went beyond the methodology of structural linguistics to revolutionize the concept of a “constructed” language. They often talked about Esperanto using scientific language, comparing it to a technical invention. Additionally, they insisted that their language fit halfway between a natural language and a formal language, like first order logic. Summing up these notions, in 1918 the Esperantist Poltovsky said that, “Being opposed to Esperanto now – it’s just the same as being opposed to aviation, the telegraph and electric motors” (Poltavsky). Both the Esperantists and the structuralists saw themselves as revolutionary rationalizers, reframing their spheres of expertise (the field of linguistics and human language itself) along rational and scientific lines.

Often, the Esperantists would compare their language to a technical invention. In his article “The International Language Esperanto,” Poltavsky states that: “(Esperanto) is just

the same type of technical innovation as international signaling for ships in the ocean. It is necessary for cultural and technical purposes, it resolves certain difficulties, and it provides a certain minimum of convenience” (Poltavsky). Poltovsky argues that the benefits of Esperanto are similar to the benefits of other technical innovations, like international signaling or the telegraph, in order to convince us that it is one such innovation. In the same article, Poltovsky mentions that Esperanto was created using the principles of modern scientific linguistics. Science went into inventing the telegraph; science went into inventing Esperanto too.

Other Esperantists tried to show how the *constructedness* of their language fit in with the economic theories of Marx. For example, Iodko argued that a constructed language like Esperanto was necessary for proper economic development. In an article entitled “Elements of Spontaneity and Consciousness in an International Language,” he posited that language, as the organizing form of economic cooperation, needed to be subordinate to economic conditions. But the linguistic make-up of Russia, with its many regional languages and dialects, was a remnant of a pre-industrial economy. A new language was needed to meet the new economic needs of the country. Just as the Russian economy was being artificially pushed forward through industrialization, so should a new, partially artificial, economic language unite the workers of Russia. Iodko contested that Esperanto’s artificiality was a positive aspect of the language. The language is natural enough to allow for free human discourse, but planned enough to assist in building a planned economy. Esperanto, he argues, is the obvious synthesis between the “spontaneous” natural languages and “conscious” formal languages (Iodko, “Elements of Spontaneity and Consciousness”).

Iodko wasn’t the only one to argue that Esperanto fit half-way between a constructed

language and a natural one. In his article “The International Language of Esperanto,” Poltovsky contends that Esperanto isn’t just a technical invention, but also a simplified natural language:

Esperanto is only a relatively artificial language. Its artificiality is expressed only in the fact that its grammar is simplified to the minimum possible, although it is based on the simplest grammar of any existing living language, English, and modified and augmented only a bit, in accordance with the principles of scientific linguistics. (Poltavsky)

Even though he does not invoke the vocabulary of formal linguistics, he is right in saying that the grammar of Esperanto is very similar to a natural language, English, but with a very regular morphology. Poltovsky invokes science to argue that, when Esperanto does differ from natural languages, it is actually better. Esperanto is like English, he argues, it has just been optimized using the scientific process.

Drezen, the secretary of the SESS, also argued that Esperanto fell half-way between a constructed language and a natural language, but for different reasons. In his article “Ways of Processing and Distribution” Drezen combines a structural argument with an historical one. It’s true, he says, that Esperanto possesses a highly regular grammar, a simple morphology, and an accessible and logical syntax – but Drezen points out that other constructed languages have these same structural features. Given such similarities, why do 95% of those who speak a constructed language speak Esperanto? What accounts for its success? Drezen pointed out that Esperanto’s grammar and vocabulary, while regular, were

never fully developed in *Unua Libro*. Because Zamenhoff left Esperanto syntax so underspecified, the rules and norms that did develop – even by the 1920s – had developed naturally. If Esperanto had been so strictly specified at its inception, Drezen argues, it would have ended up like Ido – a constructed language that was designed to be more logical than Esperanto and that attracted fewer speakers. Esperanto’s success, Drezen says, is due to its middle distance between the natural languages and strictly formal ones.

Drezen’s article aimed to prove that Esperanto was more than just a technically optimal language. He claimed that the direction of Esperanto – at least in the Soviet Union – was decided by its main speakers, the working masses of the USSR:

This (free development) is happening more and more with the introduction of Esperanto into the broad masses of the working people – It definitively establishes the overall direction of the international language, which gradually and slowly from the skeleton of the language, proposed by Zamenhof, is turning into a more vibrant, multi-faceted and rich language and gradually adapting itself to the needs of modern technology and culture.
(Drezen, “Ways of Processing and Distribution”)

Drezen argues that because Esperanto’s development as a constructed language had been directed through the participation of the Soviet workers, Esperanto had become a Socialist language. Indeed, similar claims form the underpinning of all the arguments made by the Esperantists. Iodko argued that Esperanto would best serve the economy of the Soviet Union because the country was united in a way that it hadn’t been under capitalist rule. He did not

believe that Esperanto would be able to unite economies that had been fractured by the capitalist mode of production. He contended that Esperanto could only reach its full potential in a country with a state-controlled, socialist economy.

Arguments like Drezen's were clearly developed to increase Esperanto's appeal to the Soviet government. Less than one third of the Soviet Esperantists were from the working class, and Drezen – the secretary general of the SESS – would have had a pretty good idea of the movement's social composition. The claim that Esperanto was a “Socialist language” because it had been developed by the working masses of the USSR was careful political positioning. He, and other Esperantists, saw the popularity of the Taylorist movement, and undoubtedly they were attempting to recreate its success.

But a genuine excitement also manifests itself in the Esperantists' structural arguments. Perhaps, for the first time, Esperanto's *constructedness* was no longer an object of ridicule. At the conclusion of *The Esperanto Movement*, historian Peter Forster comments on one frequent attack leveled against the Esperantists: “It is difficult for the sociologist to assess strictly psychoanalytical explanations of the disgust which can be associated with Esperanto. It can, nonetheless, be observed that the Esperantists have frequently had to combat the suggestion that an artificial language is ‘unnatural’” (Forster, 350).⁷ But in the early Soviet Union, they no longer had to combat the unnaturalness of Esperanto – they could embrace it. Marxism, combined with the technological utopianism of the early Soviet state, created an atmosphere in which the artificial and the constructed were viewed positively. While the Esperantists made structural arguments to further their political standing, they had reason to be legitimately excited by scientific Marxism and the rationalized Soviet project.

Chapter 3

Historical Linguistics

Before the advent of structural linguistics at the beginning of the 20th century, the study of language was largely an historical project. Linguists were fascinated by questions of origin: Where did language come from? How did my tongue stem from other tongues? What caused my language to be different than the language of my neighbors? Often, linguists would create structural typologies to visualize the spread and differentiation of the world's languages. When Sir William Jones proposed a connection between English and Sanskrit in the mid 19th century, the field of Indo-European linguistics was born. By and large, the Indo-European linguists were interested in classifying languages into a tree structure, with Proto Indo-European at the root, German, Latin and Sanskrit as the trunk, and English, French and Hindi as the foliage. Despite the introduction of Structural Linguistics in pre-revolutionary Russia, many academics in Moscow and St. Petersburg continued to study the history of language and philology – the language of historical texts – diachronically, that is, through time. After the revolution, however, focus shifted away from the linguists practicing in the Indo-European school. One incredibly productive academic, Nikolai Marr, proposed a new framework for understanding the history of language and branded it as a uniquely Marxist form of historical linguistics, in part because he paid attention to the relationship between class and language. In the 1930s he received recognition from the young Soviet state and his theory of historical linguistics - dubbed “Japhedology” - was lauded as a productive Marxist reworking of a bourgeois science.

The Esperantists had a complex relationship with Marr and his theories. Some of Marr's theories ran counter to the Esperantists' goals, but Marr was a man of great influence

and sway in the scientific circles of the Soviet Union, and he seemed to support the Esperantists' project, even writing the introduction to one of Drezen's books. Often, when the Esperantists discussed their language they would set up their arguments by explaining the historical spread of language. These histories were intended to make the adoption of Esperanto seem like the next inevitable stage in human language. Because such stories were historical, the Esperantists often borrowed ideas and terms from Marr. The result was a series of distinct language histories, created by different Esperantists, each of which was a blend of Marr and Marx. Although the Soviet Esperantists never settled on an official one, these histories gave direction and motivation to their movement. By describing Esperanto as the result of law-driven, historical and forward-moving processes, the Esperantists aimed to convince themselves and others that the advent of Esperanto was inevitable; that they were on the right side of history.

Like many of the Esperantists, Marr came from the fringes of the former Russian Empire. He was born in the backwater town of Koutias, Georgia in 1863, and spent an unhappy youth feeling like an outsider due to his Scottish father, who spoke English at home. Marr, who maintained a strong Georgian identity, learned Georgian from his mother, and spoke both languages fluently. At a young age, Marr left Georgia for St. Petersburg to study linguistics, focusing on the languages of the Caucasus, mainly Georgian. As a young academic, Marr became famous for his refutation of the then-common monogenesis theory of language origin. In the late 19th century most linguists believed – as they still do today – that almost all of Europe's languages stem from a single mother language, called proto-Indo-European. In contrast, Marr posited a theory of polygenesis. He claimed that languages arose independently in many areas of the world at once and rather than becoming more

diversified, they are slowly decreasing in number.⁸ Language similarity wasn't because languages shared a common "mother language," but because of common syllable-sounds that formed the basic units of all human speech. Marr also proposed a different origin of semantics from his European colleagues. While they posited that words originally came from animal cries, Marr believed that hand signing gave rise to basic meanings, which were then elaborated into specific words using sound.

Despite his disagreements with the Indo-Europeanists, Marr was unwilling to give up the notion of language families altogether. Alongside the existence of Hametic languages (such as Coptic) and Semitic languages, Marr proposed a third group: Japhetic languages. Shem, Ham and Japheth were the biblical sons of Noah, and now each had a language group in his name. The Japhetic group originally consisted of the languages of the Caucasus and Basque. But as Marr's influence grew, so did his Japhetic family. Eventually, even the Indo-European languages were shown to be derived from the Japhetic group. In proposing polygenesis and incorporating all of the Indo-European languages into the Japhetic group, Marr posed a challenge to Indo-European linguistics. Much of Marr's data came from the languages of the Caucasus, Georgian and Armenian. Because few Indo-European linguists could speak these languages – let alone achieve the same mastery over them as Marr – the academics of Europe had a hard time refuting Marr's theories. Marr was invited to give lectures in many European universities, and cast himself as a challenger to the linguistic establishment. (Yaguello, 71).

In addition to an origin story for the world's languages, Marr invented a destination. As languages mix with each other, some will prevail while others fade. In turn these successful languages will mix with other successful languages until there is one single

mono-language left. In Marr's words: "The single world language of the future will be the language of a special new system, hitherto nonexistent, like the economy of the future, the classless society of the future, and the classless culture of the future" (Marr). Marr felt comfortable suggesting that language would change with the advent of socialism because, to him, language was a part of the superstructure of society. Language, like religion, art, and architecture, was subordinate to the economic conditions of man, and reflected the way that the instruments of production were distributed within a society. It was this component of Marr's theory that made him popular among the early Soviet leaders. Language, like class and culture, would transform into a single social phenomenon that would serve to unite the people (and the workers) of the world. Furthermore, class characteristics of language were primary to Marr, leading him, in the words of one historian, "to the somewhat strange conclusion that members of the proletariat speaking different national languages understand one another more easily than proletarians and members of the bourgeoisie speaking the same national language" (Yaguello, 78).

Although Marr did not begin to use Marxist ideas until after the October revolution, the ideological alignment of his later work paid dividends. At the time of his death in 1934 he was not only a chaired professor at Leningrad University, but also the head of the Leningrad Library and in charge of six research institutes, one of which was named in his honor. He had amassed a band of followers throughout the Soviet Union and an impressive list of publications – 507 in all, which were published posthumously in 15 thick volumes. (Yaguello, 78-79).

Before Marr's death, the Esperantists were eager to gain his favor and use Japhetic terms in describing their own project, hoping that it would bring them recognition from the

government. In an article commissioned by the Central Committee of the SESS, the Esperantist A. Andreev stated that Indo-European linguistics was a fantasy, and that “in our universities we need to teach not Indo-European linguistics, but Japhetic linguistics. The more or less sincere Indo-Europeanists understand this perfectly, have begun to confess that their ‘science’ has reached an impasse, and are vainly searching for a new path” (Andreev, *Japhetic Theory*). He concludes by offering Esperanto a place in the Marrian cosmology: “And thus international ‘artificial’ languages, which are scientifically designed, not only have the legal right to exist, but are essential to mankind for the very reason that they provide ways to speed up the process of creating a future world language” (Andreev, *Japhetic Theory*).

The Esperantists agreed with Marr not just because they wanted to win his favor, but also because his theories offered them a way to describe the history of language that benefited their movement. The Esperantists generally agreed that language was a part of the superstructure of society. Jumping off from this premise, they tried to subsume the entire history of human language into the Marxist framework, writing about the way that language fit into the process of class struggle. Often, the Esperantists would begin their articles by giving a short history of language development during the Feudal and Capitalist epochs. The point was to differentiate natural human languages – a product of class struggle – from Esperanto. They argued that, as a language without a history, it was unconnected to a specific class and therefore ideal for widespread adoption within the Soviet Union, and within the world proletariat.

Some Esperantists, such as Iodko, wrote about the role of Esperanto in history, but they never assembled their individual arguments into an overarching theory of historical

progress. In his article, “Esperanto Before the Court of Science,” Iodko used Marr’s premise that language is a part of the superstructure to explain why so many professors of linguistics had criticized Esperanto. With the advent of world capitalism, language itself had become just one component in the capitalist enterprise, Iodko argued. He likened language to a commodity, saying that the languages of the capitalist countries compete with each other, with the best language (i.e. the one that offers the best economic opportunities) winning. But Iodko admitted that language is a special kind of commodity - one that is exclusively used to convey ideology. Iodko states that, “for this reason, as with the changes in the general-political character, changes in language encounter resistance from the conservative part of society; they become established not in an evolutionary but an artificial way, by means of forcible reform or revolution.” (Iodko, “Esperanto Before the Court of Science”). Iodko doesn’t describe the exact connection between language and ideology - what formal elements of French, for instance, make it necessarily a capitalist language. But he does posit that changes in language are reflections of changes in the base of society. Given the proliferation of dozens of new Marxist and technological words into the Russian language after the revolution, it is possible that Iodko bases his claim on personal experience.

Elsewhere in his writings, Iodko introduces a different understanding of the role of language. In his 1926 article, “The Working Class and the International Language,” Iodko describes how language is connected to educational processes in bourgeois countries, claiming that control over language is one way capitalists have managed to control the flow of information. Iodko notes that the bourgeoisie have legitimized the multiplicity of world languages by pointing to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, claiming that a common language is contrary to God’s will. Really, Iodko claims, the bourgeois use national

languages to create language silos that prevent members of the proletariat from communicating with each other: “The bourgeoisie knows that with the introduction of the international language, its privileged knowledge of foreign languages will disappear, because each worker will easily be able to speak and be understood without the help of bourgeois experts and interpreters” (Iodko, “The Working Class and the International Language”). As before, Iodko makes it clear how differences in language fit into Marx’s theory of history. The distinction between different national languages is maintained as part of the way the ruling class keeps the working classes from acquiring revolutionary consciousness.

The two views that Iodko presents are not contradictory, but they do not offer a comprehensive, systematic history of language. Other Esperantists, however, tried to explain the entire course of human linguistic development in a coherent story. Jan Loya, a professor at Moscow University, produced one such coherent history, and similar theories are given by Andreev (1926) and Spidirovich (1926). Loya was born in Latvia and studied linguistics in St. Petersburg, where his thesis constituted an attack on the Kazan school of formalism founded by Baudouin de Courtenay. Later, he became head of the foreign languages department at Moscow State University, before moving back to Latvia and running the department of Slavic Philology at the University of Riga. He survived the western front of World War I, the Russian Civil War, the Great Purges, and World War II, dying in Riga in 1969 at the age of 73 (“Loja”).

Loya’s system for understanding the history of language follows the general contours of Marx’s theory of economic development. Language, Loya assumes, changes as the modes of production change, so tribal language differs from feudal language, which

differs from capitalist language. Loya, Andreev, and Spidirovich all begin by noting that folk language, or tribal language, is highly differentiated between communities. During the Feudal period tribal languages merge to some extent, but groups remained separate through a proliferation of dialects: “In the feudal period there were countless independent communities, which produced everything they needed and were separate from the others... and each spoke in its own dialect” (Loya). To borrow the idea of the Russian linguist and novelist Bogdanov, who also theorized about international communication, the world existed as one extended language chain. The members of each community could speak to the members of its neighboring community, but not to those who lived three or four away.

During the period of capitalism, however, language relations changed. The growing markets demanded a broader sphere of influence, and so language barriers began to break down with broader trade routes and improved transportation. But the shifting world posed a problem: which of the many regional dialects were going to be chosen as the language of national communication? Loya, Andreev, and Spidirovich argue that in all cases the language of the most important city became the language of the land – so Parisian French in France, London English in England, etc. Furthermore, the wealthy bourgeois living in the capital cities were able to turn their dialect into first a written language and then a literary language. Novels began to be written in Parisian French, but not in the dialects of Alsace or Bordeaux. National languages, these authors argue, are just one way that an advanced and industrialized polis was able to bring first the countryside, and later colonial territories, under its subjugation. Furthermore, they argue that it is the duty of the socialist state to develop the local dialects, to give them a voice and a system of writing so that the formerly oppressed peoples can express themselves in their primary language.

Loya's analysis doesn't just provide a history of language; it was also written to gain favor from the Soviet government by legitimizing Lenin's and Stalin's language policy. Language policy in the Soviet Union – part of the broader policy regarding minority nations, which was Stalin's specialty – was motivated by a hatred of imperialism and wariness towards “Russian Chauvinism.” The top Soviet leadership was anxious to distance themselves from the Tsarist regime, which they portrayed as having instituted a hegemonic policy of Russian language and Russian culture throughout the Empire. Lenin in particular, was worried about the young Soviet Union acting imperialistically towards its minority populations, and so he implemented policies that granted the right of self-determination for minority groups, including the right to conduct education and official business in the local language.⁹ Loya was particularly sensitive to the issue of minority language rights, having worked as a lecturer at the University of National Minorities in St. Petersburg for three years. By describing how the Russian language, among others, was part of an imperial process, Loya legitimizes Lenin's decision that favored the supremacy of local languages (“Loja”).

Loya's history concludes by legitimizing Esperanto and showing how it is in alignment with the Leninist language policy. Loya argues that Esperanto will replace national languages by becoming the international language of trade and business. But unlike the national languages, such as French or English, Esperanto's status as an auxiliary language meant that it would permit the flourishing of local dialects. Loya wants languages to revert to their feudal or clan-like state, but on top of the regional dialects he wants to add a layer of Esperanto that will both preserve local culture and serve as a mechanism for economic communication.

While Loya and the others take the major contours of their theory from Marx, it is unfair to categorize this work as simply Marxism applied to language. Indo-European linguists were largely concerned with tracing the provenance of languages. Loya shifts his treatise away from the classic Indo-European questions, asking not where languages came from, but why some have the status that others do not.

Drezen, too, created a singular story that explained previous language dissemination and Esperanto's rise. Drezen's system for understanding the history of language does not pass through stages like Loya's; but his system is Marxist in that it is progressive. To Drezen, language is getting simpler and easier to use, and as man passes into the epoch of communism Drezen thinks it will become easier still. Drezen starts from Marr's premise that language is part of the superstructure, but adds an interesting stipulation: "Language is a kind of superstructure over the existing economic and industrial relations and serves the purpose of mutual understanding in the circle of persons who master them and use them" (Drezen, "Ways of Processing and Dissemination"). That is, whenever there is a group of people in a closely interconnected economic relationship they tend to speak the same language. Like Loya, Drezen believes that national languages in Europe developed as the economy became more interconnected and more complex. But unlike Loya, Drezen does not see national language as means of repression, but a sort of mutually agreed upon way for members of an interconnected national economy to communicate.

Furthermore, Drezen argues that some forms of language are more stable than others. He does not explain precisely what he means by *stable*, but generally seems to say that the simpler the language, the more stable it is. As language changes with the economy, Drezen argues, it selects for stable forms in an almost Darwinian fashion:

Every attempt to forcibly save the less persistent forms and forcibly reject forms that are more suitable for the current conditions for less suitable ones has always failed. In this respect, convincing examples of such attempts are: 1) Old Church Slavonic, which the Orthodox Church tried to preserve, and 2) the Petrine clerical style of speech, which the Tsarist Bureaucracy tried to preserve.” (Drezen, “Ways of Processing and Dissemination”)

Drezen also gives examples of the Russian words *samkhod* (self-driving), which was forgotten in favor of the simpler *afto* (car) and *mokrostup* (boots), which was replaced with the international word *kalosha* (galoshes). Drezen’s history of language includes more room for formal analysis than Loya’s. In Loya’s interpretation of the history of language, it does not seem to matter how the language functions. The languages that gain international use do so for purely economic and social reasons. But Drezen seems to argue that languages tend towards simplicity, and that the formal elements of a language play a role in its history. Like Loya, Drezen concludes his history of language by discussing Esperanto, which, for him, represents the ultimate simplification of language. Those who fight against Esperanto, they both suggest, are fighting against the predetermined simplification of language.

The Esperantists were not historical linguists in the Indo-European tradition. They were not interested in discovering the origin and paths of dissemination of the world’s languages. When they did write histories of language, the Soviet Esperantists modeled their work on Marr, proceeding from the assumption that language constitutes part of the superstructure of society, and they traced the social and economical factors that shaped

language spread. Furthermore, they wrote histories of language with the intent of validating the spread of their own language, claiming that Esperanto was the next inevitable form of human communication. But because the Esperantists looked closely at the relationship between language, economics and society, one can view their histories as a sort of proto-historical sociolinguistics, a discipline that would not become a part of western academia until the late 1960s. The Esperantists took their inspiration, in part, from Marx, who is widely considered one of the founders of modern sociology. The Esperantists did not back up their claims with extensive data, and their analyses were created with the propagandistic intent of furthering the spread of their own language. But by focusing on the social factors of language spread and development, the Esperantists made a move that their rivals, the Indo-European linguists, would not make for a couple of decades. While they may appear somewhat naive, and they were constricted by orthodox Marxism, the Esperantists' histories of language display creativity and ingenuity.

Chapter 4

Functional Linguists

Perhaps due to the revolutionary fervor of the time, Soviet linguists constantly called for a complete overhaul of their field. For example, in a 1930 article called “Towards a Marxist Linguistics,” Loya claimed that the field lacked a “single method” and a “unified system of concepts.” Above all else, he criticized Courtenay, whom he accused of being an idealist, and the structuralists, whom he called formalists. Courtenay was guilty of “considering not society, but the individual,” and focusing solely on the individual’s psychology. The structuralists were guilty of considering only isolated words and sentences, not the communicative process. Rather than bogging themselves down in idealism and formalism, Loya argued that Soviet linguists needed to remold their field based on the precepts of dialectical materialism. Marr echoed Loya’s criticisms as well. He contested that linguists should be able to describe the economic and material conditions of man, somewhat like economists.

The friction between Loya, Marr, Courtenay and others stemmed from their disagreement about how one ought to study language. Courtenay and the structuralists were linguistic formalists, whereas Loya and Marr were functionalists. Loya and Marr wanted to study what language *is* by studying what it *does*, by studying its function. This approach places greater emphasis on the communicative aspects of language and its role in human social interaction. Instead of calling themselves functionalists, Marr, Loya and others used the term linguistic materialists. Although they did not criticize Courtenay like Loya, the Soviet Esperantists of the 1920s and 30s also adopted a functionalist perspective of language. They paid little attention to psycholinguistic questions, instead focusing on the relationship

between language and socioeconomic processes. Often, they talked about language, specifically Esperanto, as a tool that shaped man's productive activities. By echoing the functionalist perspective, the Esperantists brought their own ideology in line with the dominant attitude of the Soviet linguistic establishment.

Often, functionalism in linguistics is defined dialectically - that is, in opposition to formalism. While almost every linguist working since Saussure's revolution at the beginning of the 20th century counts herself as a structural linguist, many identify as either a member of the functionalist camp, or the formalist camp. Formalism - most commonly associated with the work of American linguist Noam Chomsky - aims to analyze linguistic form, the underlying grammatical or phonological structure of speech. It is enough, the formalist says, to study the patterns that linguistic data contains; we don't necessarily need to worry about the purpose of those patterns. The functionalist, on the other hand, launches her analysis of language by thinking first about the function of language. If some utterance has a communicative purpose, the underlying structures of the utterance must be connected to the purpose, she assumes. To the functionalist, we need to study both the underlying structures and the function of the speech if we want to produce a cogent analysis of the speech itself.

The first group of theorists to call themselves functionalists was the Prague School of linguists. This group of Czech and Russian thinkers was active from the 1920s until the advent of World War II in the early 1940s. The most well known contribution of Prague linguists to functional theories of communication is their theory of Functional Sentence Perspective. Sentences, they argued, consist of two parts: the topic, which expresses information already established in the communicative context, and the comment, which conveys new information. The function of the sentence is to convey information, and the

distinction between the topic and the comment is the main way this function is achieved (Vande Kopple). The Prague school - and linguistic functionalism itself – was not limited to Czechoslovakia. Many members of the Prague School came from the former Russian Empire, and the Prague School's program of research was presented at the 1929 Congress of Slavists, which was attended by researchers from across Eastern Europe. While functionalism began in Prague, its tenets were disseminated widely throughout Europe. Scholars in Russia were aware of the functionalist agenda, and debates about functionalism permeated not only Czech, but also Soviet linguistic circles. It is safe to assume, then, that most of the Esperantists, and certainly the leaders of the movement, many of whom held advanced degrees in literature and linguistics, would have been well versed in the tenets of functionalism.¹⁰

Although they would have been knowledgeable about the functionalist agenda, the Esperantists rarely use the word function when they talk about Esperanto or about language. Instead, they often liken their language to a tool or an instrument - sometimes talking about it in the same breath as a plow or a gun. And this was also true of the Prague school linguists. In examining the origins of Prague school functionalism, one scholar points out that “one finds only few attempts at defining or explaining the ‘function’ in the Prague writings [but] other terms from the finalist (functional) way of interpretation such as ‘means,’ ‘instrument,’ ‘tool’ ... etc. give evidence of the teleonomic (functional) approach” (Dirven, 4). The Soviet Esperantists and the Prague school linguists had different goals, but these citations show that the use of the word “tool” and “instrument” was associated with functionalism in the linguistic discourse of the time. The Esperantists knew this, and drew the analogy between their language and a tool when they wanted to talk about the purpose, or function, of their

language.

The Esperantists characterized their language as a tool to make functional arguments about their language. Different Esperantists elaborated on the thesis that “language is like a tool” to construct different functional understandings of Esperanto, and language generally. In drawing such analogies, and in thinking functionally, four Esperantists I will examine engaged in deeply philosophical dialogues about the purpose of language and the interaction between human agents and their language faculty.

The first of the four is Vladimir Varenkine, an ethnic Russian Esperantist who worked as the director of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages. In 1926, Varenkine delivered a lecture called “Methods of Agitation and Propaganda in Esperanto” intended to equip the novice Esperantist with the tools to argue for the efficacy and supremacy of Esperanto. In response to the objection that Esperanto is a) “lifeless and unnatural” and b) not consistent with the principles of Marxism, Varenkine instructed his students to respond as follows: “1) We certainly agree that language has labor at its root, it is an instrument of labor and, developing this idea, we state that therefore, like any tool, it can be consciously improved” (Varenkine). This portion was intended to show that Esperantists were motivated by Marxist principles and by the desire to improve the efficacy of labor. Next, Varenkine instructed his students to address the first worry, that Esperanto is “unnatural”:

The concept of naturalness is relative, i.e. in the national languages “naturalness” was observed only at the lower levels of human development, when people in general acted weakly on nature and did not know how to

improve their means of production and that, with the growth of human consciousness human intervention in their own language also grows. (Varenkine).

The purpose of these two responses is to allay fears about Esperanto's constructedness, but in formulating them Varenkine reveals a sort of functional understanding of language. Like any other means of production, the purpose of language is to help produce economic wealth. However, unlike with a hammer or a plow, Varenkine doesn't seem to believe that language was invented solely for the purpose of increasing economic output. Rather, the function of language had to be discovered as humans increased their conscious awareness of what language could achieve. Once language's functional role as a tool of production was understood, humans started shaping that tool - improving the grammar, reforming spelling, etc. Esperanto, to Varenkine, demonstrated the triumph of consciousness over spontaneity. Only those who truly understand the functional role of language would be willing to forgo natural languages all together in favor of a method of communication that was designed specifically for economic efficacy, as Varenkine believes is the case with Esperanto.

Varenkine seems happy to work with the simple analogy that language is like a tool. However, other Esperantists were warier of drawing the analogy without exploring it further. Andreev, in his 1926 article "Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization," makes a similar claim to Varenkine, both asserting that language plays an economic function and that language acts like a tool: "Language is a pure product of our collective labor relations, established in the course of these relationships and ever-changing under their influence. This

is the same kind of instrument of our work as a machine or an axe” (Andreev, “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization”).

But Andreev is not content with leaving the analogy at just that. To explain himself further, Andreev quotes Baudouin de Courtenay. Loya’s earlier characterization of Courtenay as an idealist seems unfair, for Courtenay also shared the belief that a parallel could be drawn between languages and tools:

Phrases about the organic development of language, its similarity to a living organism, which cannot be created artificially, are not acceptable for the scientific analysis of language. Language is not a finite organism, an unshakable idol, but merely an instrument created by the people. Man has not only the right but the duty to improve his implements. (Andreev, “Our Speech as an Object of Rationalization”)

On the surface, Courtenay’s argument is about what should be included as data in the scientific study of language. Courtenay argues that simply studying the words and sentences of a language would only reveal half the picture. Because language is used by humans - because it is a human tool - a full understanding of language can only be uncovered when one studies the relationship between language and people. For example, simply studying the structure of a plow - its shape, its materials - is useless, unless you also study how its structure is designed to be used by human beings. By making such an argument, Courtenay - and by extension Andreev - adopt a functionalist perspective. That is, they both argue that linguistic data should be studied as they relate to their function in the economic sphere of

human activity.

In both cases, Andreev and Varenkine argue that language serves a functional role in economic activity. But when they talk about economic activity, they seem to speak of individual economic activity; that is, they seem to assert that the individual's language serves as a means to realize the individual's economic potential, just as how an axe, wielded by a single person, helps to realize their own economic output. But neither Andreev nor Varenkine posits a strategy for understanding just *how* economic factors change language. Nor do they theorize about just *how* language realizes economic potential. It seems very possible that a person who has lost the ability to speak can still produce goods.

Perhaps because they were motivated by these worries, some Esperantists reformed the connection between language and tools to focus on language as a social tool - a tool of organization rather than as a means of production. Drezen, for example, prefaced his likening between Esperanto and a tool by first focusing on a potential gap in the analogy. In his article "Ways of Processing and Dissemination of the International Language" the then-secretary of the SESS stated that: "It is hardly possible to speak of language as a tool as if it were a tool of the purely mechanical sort. For if this were the case, then a language already acquired would not be subjected to changes in the direction of greater difficulties and more complex and incorrect structures" (Drezen, "Ways of Processing and Dissemination"). Drezen notes that tools tend to be the simplest they can possibly be while still performing their function. But language has all sorts of complex structures that don't seem necessary to perform simple economic functions. The development of language, the way that language is passed down from one person to the next, seems different from the way that mechanical tools are passed down, Drezen argues. While he doesn't want to abandon the comparison

between Esperanto and a tool, Drezen wants to draw the conversation away from mechanical tools, like hammers, axes and plows.

Rather, Drezen believes that language and Esperanto are social tools, tools of communication. First, he reformulates language from an instrument of production, to an instrument of mutual understanding: “Forms of language - instruments of mutual understanding have always appeared as the result of their compliance with certain industrial relations and a certain cultural plane, as the result of a kind of silent, sometimes unconscious agreement between the members of the collective users of a given language” (Drezen, “Ways of Processing and Dissemination”). Rather than a personal and economic function, Drezen assigns language a social function. The power of language in economic activity doesn’t stem from its ability to determine how the individual worker produces material goods, but how groups of workers join together to create economic relationships. The language you speak determines your economic role, not because it sets limits on what you can produce, but because it sets limits on whom you can trade with and whom you can cooperate with.

Unlike Varenkine, who believes that labor relations determine language, Drezen believes in a dialectical relationship between language and social economy: “Material conditions of production, on the basis of which human relationships developed and the collective culture of mankind was built, are primarily determined by a greater or lesser expansion of the individual users of a given language” (Drezen, “Ways of Processing and Dissemination”). The geographical distribution of languages determines the geography of the economy. And in turn, language is a “result of [its] compliance with ... industrial relations.” Drezen imagines a complex relationship where the form of a specific language

(its grammar and its vocabulary) is determined by economic relations but where the distribution of that language determines economic relations.

Note also that Drezen speaks both about the economic base (“conditions of production”) and the superstructure of ideas (“culture of mankind”). To Drezen, language serves a social cooperative function, and humans engage in social relations both during labor and during intellectual endeavors. So while language plays an economic function, Drezen gives it room to play cultural and intellectual functions as well. While Drezen compares language and tools, he does so as a rhetorical move, not because he really thinks language is literally a tool that can be wielded by humans.

Iodko, like Drezen, compares language to a tool for rhetorical purposes, in part to justify Esperanto as a “modified” language: “Language above all plays the role of an ordinary tool of communication. And as ordinary tools are modified and improved, depending on the needs of society, so should language be changed and improved” (Iodko, “Esperanto Before the Court of Science”). But Iodko brings up another unique aspect of language - its ability to influence the ideological sphere of human interaction: “But as language not only plays the role of an ordinary tool of communication, but is also the expression of the ideology of a given society, so language changes occur in the natural order of development (evolution) only after changes in the economic state of society” (Iodko, “Esperanto before the Court of Science”). To Iodko language is not solely an economic tool, nor is it solely a social tool, for language is also a mechanism for forging ideology. Thus, language seems to play, at least in part, the role of mediator between base and superstructure. It is the mechanism by which economic realities are expressed in the world of ideology, the tool that turns the economic practice of capitalism into the values and beliefs of the

bourgeoisie. Iodko doesn't seem to believe that language has a single function. Rather he points out one of the many functions of language - that it can serve both economical and ideological production.

Like Drezen, Iodko posits a dialectical relationship between ideology and language. Iodko believes that the conservative elements of society - those who have a lot to lose from revolutionary change - will always be opposed to language change. They recognize that changes in language can cause changes in ideology and vice versa. Thus, it seems that, to Iodko, language doesn't just serve the function of producing ideology, but language can even determine ideology. Iodko doesn't give a robust account of just how this process works, but rather suggests that the relationship between language and ideology is one reason why many are as vehemently opposed to ideological changes as they are to language reform.

Unlike the Prague school linguists, the Esperantists never wanted to flesh out a rigorous theory of the functions of language. However, they adopted a functionalist perspective by talking about their language as a tool. The parts of the Esperantists' texts that draw parallels between their language and tools are those parts that aim at answering philosophical questions. By thinking about the function of their language and its role in human interaction, the Esperantists became amateur philosophers of language. Some, like Varenkine and Andreev, used the analogy literally - they believed that, like a tool, the purpose of language was to facilitate economic production. Others drew the analogy to make less concrete arguments about the role of language in human interaction. In either case, the Esperantists committed themselves to the position that their language was a means to an end, a mechanism for achieving the greater goal of coordinated human activity.

I propose two explanations for what motivated the Soviet Esperantists to draw on

linguistic functionalism when talking about Esperanto. First, they might have cast themselves as linguistic functionalists for political reasons. If the Soviet government was going to be swayed to adopt Esperanto, officially or unofficially, its leaders would need to be convinced that the language served a practical purpose. By comparing Esperanto to a tool, the Esperantists cast their language as a practical endeavor and distanced it from the intellectual pastime it had been in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Furthermore they likened it to the locomotive, the radio and other technological innovations that were regulated and produced by the government. The functionalism of the Esperantists may have been motivated by their desire to have Esperanto viewed as a technology. If the Esperantists were going to make good on their claim that Esperanto was a technological invention like the telegraph or the radio, they would have to explain the language's function.

But there also may have been something innate in the Esperanto movement that led the Esperantists towards a version of linguistic functionalism. Esperanto was an invented language. It was invented when the problem of inter-human communication had already been solved, at least in part, by the natural languages. The Esperantists constantly felt the need to justify their language, to explain why it was worth their time and devotion. They had to think, constantly, about the *purpose* of Esperanto, they had to think about its *function*. At the beginning of the movement, the function tended towards international pacifism, but in the Soviet Union, the function of Esperanto was explained as contributing to the organization of the world proletariat and the spread of Marxism and Leninism. Esperantists were very aware that their language had such a function, and they were constantly trying to convince the government that their language could perform such a function successfully. It is not hard to imagine that for the Esperantist who constantly thinks about the function of

her language, functional questions arise almost immediately when she considers language, generally. The questions that each Esperantist had to answer about his or her own choice to study Esperanto lead to the common comparison between Esperanto, language, and tools.

By linking Esperanto to the economy, the Esperantists conformed to the norm of Soviet linguistics from the mid 1920s to the early 50s. No doubt, this move put them in better standing with the official linguistic institutions of the Soviet Union, and therefore, in better standing with the Soviet government. In Marxist fashion, they discussed the relationship between language and the economy, creating a “material” interpretation of the human communicative process. But, as this chapter has shown, the materialistic linguistics of Marr may not have been as original as he claimed. All of the formal claims of the Esperantists can be reduced to functionalist language – in fact, the “materialist linguistics” or Marr, Loya and the Esperantists ought to be viewed as functionalism with a Marxist face. Traditionally, scholars perceive Soviet linguistics to have veered away from its western counterpart during the first half of the 20th century. The linguistic theories of Marr set it on a crooked path that wasn’t straightened until Marr’s sudden posthumous fall from grace in 1951, they claim. While Soviet linguistics was distinctive in some respects, it may have been closer to western linguistics than many believed. The writings of the Esperantists reveal that, under the hood, the materialistic paradigm was very similar to the functionalist one. Both sought to understand the linguistic act in terms of the communicative process, and both placed linguistics within the broader context of history, sociology, and material economy.

Chapter 5

Purging the Linguists

Sadly, the Esperantists shared the fate of most of the intellectual movements in the early Soviet Union. The vitality and energy they displayed in the 1920s was slowly crushed over the course of the 1930s and finally stamped out forever in the purges of 1937-38. As the Soviet government became more and more distrustful of foreign influence, the Esperantists came under suspicion, due to their constant contact with foreign Esperantists. Beginning in 1929, Stalin began to vocalize his own vision for a future world language, and his theories were at odds with Esperantism. Furthermore, friction began to mount between the SESS and the SAT. Each of these factors hurt the Esperanto movement for a mix of political and intellectual reasons, and cumulated in 1936 when the first Esperantist was arrested at the start of the great purges.

Before 1929, when Stalin discussed language, he did so almost exclusively in the context of minority language rights. Because Esperanto was supposed to be an auxiliary language, the Esperantists didn't have to worry too much about running afoul of Stalin's agenda. However, in 1929, Stalin began to articulate a new philosophy that combined minority language rights with a semi-utopian linguistic vision. In "The National Question and Leninism" published in 1929, he asserted that the future of world languages would occur in two stages. The first stage would be "marked by the growth and flourishing of the formerly oppressed nations and national languages [and] the consolidation of equality among nations" (Stalin, "The National Question and Lenninism). It would not be until socialism had spread over the entire globe that the languages would start to merge:

[In the second stage] something in the nature of a common language begins to take shape ... It is possible that, at first, not one world economic centre will be formed, common to all nations and with one common language, but several zonal economic centers for separate groups of nations, with a separate common language for each group of nations, and that only later will these centers combine into one common world socialist economic centre, with one language common to all the nations. (Stalin, "The National Question and Leninism")

Stalin predicted that the world language would not resemble any current language. Rather, it would be a mix of the world's dominant languages: English, Russian, French and German. Although Stalin had studied Esperanto as a young revolutionary, he never mentioned it publically in speeches or written work during that time, and certainly not in the context of the world's future language. The Esperantists tried to work their language into Stalin's vision by claiming that the widespread adoption of Esperanto would help the merging process. In an article in 1932, Andreev claimed: "We can say with full confidence that the role of Esperanto will gradually become more serious and more significant, and that in the near future it will reveal its advantages as a cultivator of the international language" (Andreev, "Soviet Linguistics for 15 Years"). But at best, Esperanto was relegated in this vision to an intermediary step, a language that would be forgotten with the advent of the world language (Green).

Not only ideologically, but also politically the Esperanto movement ran into trouble during the mid 1930s. Members of the SAT wanted to hold a world congress in Moscow in

1930, but Drezen, who was angry about the organization's desire to remain independent of the Communist International and worried about their anarchist tendencies, wouldn't allow it. Furthermore, the Soviet government owed the SAT for subscriptions for magazines and other periodicals. But the government, upset by the actions of the SAT, absolved themselves of all debt. The SAT was furious; they wanted their money. That year, the congress was held in London, and the Soviet Union did not send a delegation. The feud marked an unofficial split in the Socialist Esperanto movement, which became official in 1931 when Drezen contacted the German Esperanto League to organize a Moscow-based conference to which the others would not be invited. The Moscow conference was never realized, but the Soviet Union banned the main SAT publication, *Sennaciulo*, and formed the *Internacio de Proletaroj Esperantistoj* (International of Proletarian Esperantists or the IPE) – their own version of the SAT. The IPE was overtly pro-Moscow and communist. Its aim was to forge connections between the Soviet Esperantists and the Esperantists of capitalist countries. But as it was founded only in 1931, its membership and foreign influence was not nearly as large as that of the SAT. Thus, the Esperantists were not able to fulfill their most important mission for the government, that of producing and writing international propaganda for the communist movement (Forster, 200-203).

Seeing that Esperanto had started to slip from favor in the eyes of the government, Drezen tried to reformulate the language and prove its usefulness. As the Soviet leadership attempted to standardize scientific and agricultural terms across the USSR, hoping that their standardization would become accepted in Western Europe as well. Drezen got himself appointed the head of the Technical Code Commission, charged with international scientific-technical code based on the Latin alphabet. He included lots of Esperanto

grammar, particularly prefixes and suffixes, in the code, hoping that the success of the code would mean, in part, a success for Esperanto. He presented the final version in 1935 with support from the Soviet government. But his success was short lived. In the late 1930s, as tensions mounted in Europe and foreign influence fell under more suspicion, the Latin-based code was replaced with a Cyrillic standardization (Smith, 155-156).

Despite their slip from favor, the Esperantists weren't targeted in the purges for ideological reasons. Although individual ideology was cited in show trials and internal NKVD reports as the reason for imprisonment and execution, the real target of the Great Purges was Soviet civil society. Describing the purges in the Caucasus, one scholar concludes that their purpose "was to replace loosely controlled social organizations founded by private citizens with the party-organized public organizations, ... allowing the communist ruling elites to control and manipulate the Soviet society" (Aliyev, 81). The SESS was one such "loosely controlled" organization. It was funded, in part, by membership subscriptions, and had a complex internal system of governance and communication. While many on the SESS executive committee were members of the CPSU, some of the moment's leadership was unaffiliated with the Community Party, and some – such as Intsertov – had been expelled from it. This, more than the Esperantists' ideology, led to their nearly complete destruction in 1937-38.

The Esperantists also fell under suspicion because they had strong international connections. In 1927, Great Britain cut off diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, and the executive committee thought war with the west was imminent. Although no such war erupted, the Soviet authorities began to be more suspicious about foreign influence inside their country. In 2007, when the Russian civil rights society 'Memorial' published a

chronology of the Great Purges, the first event on their timeline was the 1936 resolution of the politburo of the CPSU “on measures of the preservation of the USSR from spy infiltration, terrorist and sabotage elements” from foreign governments.”¹¹ The soon-to-be leader of the NKVD, Yezhov, set up a commission to cleanse the Soviet Union of such foreign undesirables (Okhotin). The commission was certainly not set up to purge the Soviet Esperantists, but because they had so many foreign contacts, the Esperantists were some of the first to be targeted. In search of such foreign spies, the NKVD arrested Herbert Ilyich Muravkin on the night of November 21st 1936. Muravkin was a German Jew who had lived in both France and Germany, where he participated in Esperanto congresses. He had immigrated to the USSR in 1933 to work as an electrical engineer in Moscow. But during his interrogation he confessed to moving to the Soviet Union to spy for the German government. He also admitted to having participated in a foreign-led plot to distribute Trotskyite propaganda through the SESS. He gave the names of Drezen and Intsertov, the two most powerful Esperantists, as the plot’s chief organizers.

Muravkin was kept in jail, and it was not until April 17th 1937 that the NKVD arrested Drezen and Intsertov. Drezen, seeing the change in government attitude, had resigned as the head of the SESS in August of 1936, leaving Intsertov to run the organization (Shevchuk). Both men were easy targets for the secret police. Although Drezen had served as a Lieutenant in the Red Army in 1917, he was a native of Latvia and a foreign national. Intsertov had served on the other side of the civil war, briefly fighting for the White Army in 1919 (“Intsertov”).

Members of the NKVD interrogated both men on the night of their arrest and on subsequent days. Many of the original charges brought against the pair had to do with their

distribution of “Trotskyist” literature to Esperanto groups in Ukraine, so the NKVD interrogators asked to extend the inquiry until after they could call their Kiev-based counterparts. The questioning began again on September 19th. It lasted four days, during which Intsertov and Drezen were interrogated in turns, each of their testimony used against the other. On September 19th Drezen confessed to sending Intsertov to the Donbass region of Ukraine to meet with local Esperantists and distribute Trotskyist propaganda. The next day Intsertov denied such claims but admitted that he had received material from the SAT through Drezen and that he did go to Donbass to meet with local Esperanto organizations (“Intsertov”). Although it seems Intsertov did not confess right away, by the end of the four days he had admitted to the accusations of Muravkin and Drezen. In late October the three men pleaded guilty to all their supposed crimes and were executed on the same day. Although the leaders of the Esperanto movement had been liquidated, the central office of the SESS stayed open and continued its operations (Stepanov).

The second stage of repression began in early 1938, when the NKDV began arresting the central committee and the operating officers of the SESS and many local organizations. Nikolai Zubkov, an Esperantist who survived the purges, recounted arriving to the office of the SESS on February 22nd, the night after the arrests:

One day I came [to the SESS office] to work, and on the door of the premises (which in those times was hardly ever closed during the day) there hung a big padlock. In response to a knock and questions, a janitor came out of the neighboring apartment and said that “last night everyone was arrested, the

door was closed and sealed, and therefore I should get out of harm's way if I didn't want any trouble. (Stepanov)

The office shipping clerk Gavrilov was sentenced to eight years of hard labor, and the accountant Samolenko was shot on October 4th 1938. From their documents, the NKVD was able to glean the names and addresses of practically every Esperantist in the USSR. Two weeks later, between March 8th and 19th, the addresses the leaders of local Esperantists were forwarded to provincial branches of the NKVD. Many Moscow-based Esperantists were arrested and held in prison until July 2nd 1938, when they were sentenced to eight years of hard labor en masse. It is likely that the NKVD needed the cells for the next round of political prisoners, so they simply charged everyone with the same crime and handed out the same sentence to everyone at once (Stepanov).

Although it was part of a highly mechanized repression, the purging of the Esperantists had a strange randomness to it, too. While membership in the SESS was enough to send some to the gulag camps, other known Esperantists were simply told to stop studying the language. One member of the NKVD who was an active student of the language before 1937 was told by his superiors to forward all letters in Esperanto to their office, but he was left unharmed (Stepanov).¹² Although the purges did not erase all the Soviet Esperantists, the death toll was brutal. Between 1937 and 1938 about 5,000 Esperantists were either killed or sentenced to hard labor (Smith, 163). Just a few years earlier the SESS had a membership of about 10,000, which means that about half of those people who actively expressed an interest in the language were purged.

By the end of the 1930s, there was practically nothing left of the Esperanto movement. Esperanto clubs, whether officially shut down or simply abandoned, had practically ceased to exist. The SESS was never officially dismantled, but with its staff murdered or in jail, official communication among Esperantists stopped along with their publications. After destalinization some Esperanto clubs reorganized themselves, and the Soviet Union even published a number of books and magazines in Esperanto. But the fervor of the movement was crushed in the 1937-38. The Esperantists no longer dreamed of their language spreading across the Union, or the world. Although they continued to meet, organize conferences and write letters in Esperanto, the language had become what the Esperantists had always feared – a hobby and an intellectual pastime.

Conclusion

Ideological Linguistics

It is unlikely that if Drezen, Iodko and Intsertov had been born in England or Spain they would have adopted the hybrid philosophy of Marxism and Esperantism. Before the Revolution, most Russian Esperantists stayed well away from Marxism – they were pacifistic revolutionaries, not violent ones. When one looks at the Soviet Esperanto movement in its entirety, many of the Esperantists’ writings smack of opportunism. The Esperantists knew that Marxism was the dominant ideology, and they knew that to survive they would have to adopt an air of Marxism. Ultimately, the strategy failed; Esperantism was disposable to the Soviet state. Although Soviet Esperantism was not a philosophy produced in *good faith* but a worldview constructed to promote the spread of Esperanto under new ideological conditions, the story of the Esperantists gives us a fresh account of ideology production in the USSR. In this thesis I have argued that the Esperantists intermediary ideology shows a dialectic and complex relationship with the Soviet government. This can be seen not only in the content of the ideology – what the Esperantists said – but also in its sources. The Esperantists combined official ideological sources, such as Lenin and Stalin, with unofficial sources taken from the writings of pre-revolutionary and contemporary Russian and Western linguists.

As the traditional top-down model predicts, much of the Soviet Esperantists’ ideology came from official Soviet sources. Some of it was derived directly from Lenin and Stalin, but as we have seen, Marr impacted the Esperantists’ thinking more than any other Soviet intellectual. The prevalence of Marr’s thought in the Esperantists’ writings shows that,

during the 1920s and early 30s, correct thinking could come from diverse places in Soviet society. Often, it has been stressed that a few political actors working from within the central committee of the CPSU determined official ideology. But the writings of the Esperantists show that, at least within the Soviet linguistics community, Marr was treated as an official ideological commentator, one who had as much impact as Lenin or Stalin. This is not to suggest that if Marr's and Lenin's writings came into conflict Lenin would be discarded, but it does suggest that an "official" commentator need not come from within the central committee.

When the Esperantists mention an official ideological belief, they often cite the official ideologue from which it comes. Official ideology they incorporated was not derived from a school or a movement, but from the work produced by an individual. It seems that Marr's work was not evaluated on a case-by-case basis, each essay judged on how well it fit the Marxist model. Rather, once Marr had achieved the status of an official interpreter of Soviet ideology, whatever he said was taken to be correct and truly Marxist. The same can be said of Stalin and Lenin. Official Soviet ideology constituted those theories and ideas taken from the official interpreters of state ideology; it was the work of individuals who had been granted a special status in Soviet society.¹³

In addition to top-down sources, the Esperantists used thoughts, ideas, and models from people who had not achieved status as official interpreters of state ideology. These intellectual components should be seen as the Esperantists' unofficial sources. Unofficial ideology came primarily from Zamenhoff and the rest of the Esperanto movement, but also from Saussure, the Prague School functionalists, and Russian thinkers like Courtenay. Unlike the official sources, these intellectual threads did not originate with a single

individual, but with intellectual schools and clusters of interconnected thinkers. Formalism had its roots in Saussure's lectures, but his students disseminated his notes and their theories mixed with Courtenay's before reaching the Soviet Esperantists. The unofficial sources were more multi-faceted and less determined by the thoughts of a single individual.

The true ingenuity of the Esperantists was their ability to mix the official and unofficial in a synthetic relationship. They created a dual ideology – one that both served the interests of the Soviet state and furthered the cause of the Esperantists. The principle of the dialectic states that every synthesis is the result of two opposites: thesis and antithesis. Soviet Esperantism was certainly a synthesis, composed of multiple parts. But the parts, the mix of official and unofficial sources, do not seem to be engaged in a dialectical struggle, as Hegel or Marx would have us believe. The Soviet Esperantists were wide-ranging thinkers, and they were inspired in their writings by intellectuals who had orthogonal relationships with each other. Lenin and Saussure are not thesis and antithesis; instead, Lenin provides a thesis in one domain, while Saussure provides a thesis in a separate one. By drawing on different domains and interweaving thought from different disciplines, the Soviet Esperantists created a complex set of interconnected theses that informed the construction of their own synthesis, a unique ideology.

Because the Soviet Esperantists developed their ideology from a wide range of sources, they were able to use a diverse set of linguistics tools to describe both Esperanto and human language. They described what language is using structural methods, historical methods and functional methods. On top of their structural description, their historical description, and their functional description, the Esperantists layered a blanket of Marxism. The Marxist methodology did not determine what the Esperantists said, but they did relate

everything back to Marxism. For example, they did not merely describe Esperanto as a tool, but discussed it as a tool in the Marxist economy. By bringing in all these different sources, they were able to construct a multifaceted description of the role that language plays in social and economic interaction.

Soviet linguistics of the 1930s through the 1950s is often described as a dead-end field. According to popular belief, Soviet linguists were constrained by the oppressive dictums of orthodox Marxism and unable to incorporate western sources into their scholarship. During the middle of the 20th century, most western linguists described their Soviet counterparts as “backwards” and “provincial” (Alpatov, 159). Often, historians draw a parallel between Soviet linguistics and Soviet biology, which was dominated by the works of Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko believed that traditional Mendelian genetics were incorrect. When a giraffe stretched its neck to reach the highest leaves on the tree it passed that “stretchiness” off to its children. Heritable traits played no part. Those who draw the biology-linguistics analogy assert that both Marrism and Lysenkoism derailed their respective disciplines, turning them into ideologically driven farces.

By examining the work of the Soviet Esperantists, this work has shown that the field of linguistics was not so secluded and not as impoverished as many believe it to have been. In many ways, the Soviet Esperantists – partially inspired by the work of Marr – made arguments that would be echoed, years later, in Western academia. In the late 1950s and early 1960s American and European scholars began to combine the fields of dialectology, historical linguistics and bilingualism studies into the unified field of sociolinguistics. The sociolinguists argued that a person’s language was the result of educational, social and economic conditions. These scholars believed that language and dialect were not

communication tools but also a way to signal identity, and they began to study the relationship between language and personal identity in systematic ways (Koerner, 65).

Because of their commitment to Esperantism and their adherence to Marxism, the Soviet Esperantists articulated a number of analyses that seem very similar to the sociolinguistic writings of the 1950s and 60s. For example, by describing the way that the languages of Europe's major metropolitan centers had played a role in both the subjugation of the countryside and the subjugation of colonial territories, the Esperantists described the process of linguistic imperialism some time before the study of language and power structures was popular in the west. No doubt, the western linguists – particularly those who were also sociologists – would have been keenly aware of Marx's work. But the Western linguists did not make their sociolinguistic arguments because of their ideology, like the Soviet Esperantists. While at times the Esperantists were dogmatic, their writings are no farce. Despite Marr's overshadowing presence in linguistics, the Esperantists were still able to incorporate Western sources and still able to make arguments that differed from the official top-down ideology. Their proto-sociolinguistic arguments reveal a set of serious minds and an academic discipline that was not so dead as many believed.

The story of the Soviet Esperantists asks us to reconsider two widely held notions, one about the Soviet Union and the other about the study of language. First, it is widely believed that orthodox Marxism constrained scholarship and intellectual vitality in a purely negative way. The novelist and one-time Marxist Arthur Koestler described how Marxism reduced his capacity for creative thinking “until it became reduced to the strictly necessary minimum of stock-phrases, dialectical clichés, and Marxist quotations, which constitute the international jargon of Djughashwilese. To have shared the doubtful privilege of a bourgeois

education, to be able to see several aspects of a problem and not only one, became a permanent cause of self-reproach. [Marxists] craved to become single- and simpleminded” (*The God that Failed*, 49-50).¹⁴ Rather than constraining them to the point that they could not produce novel theories, Soviet Marxism placed a productive bound on the Soviet Esperantists. Their articles, speeches and lectures are more interesting, and more worthwhile precisely because they had to work within a Marxist framework. Marxism forced them to think in new ways about the relationship between seemingly unconnected phenomena, and forced them to draw connections that non-Marxists wouldn’t consider for another couple of decades.

Second, the story of the Soviet Esperantists asks us to reconsider our beliefs about the relationship between ideology and scholarship. Often undertaking analysis with a set of ideological preconceptions can bias research and simplify it. No doubt, the Soviet Esperantists overlooked many facets of their language because of their commitment to Esperantism and Marxism. But they also created new and interesting analyses precisely because they approached their study as Esperantists and Marxists. Although belief in a linguistic utopia seems antiquarian, the Esperantists do not deserve the ironic smiles their name usually induces. The Soviet Esperantists were passionate ideologues, and their unwavering belief in Esperantism combined with a clever mixture of Marxism produced a unique perspective in the history of linguistic thought. Through their devotion to Esperantism, and their spirited arguments, the Soviet Esperantists show us that it is worth our time thinking about language from the ideological perspective.

Notes

¹ Zamenhoff was not just a creative language inventor, but also a master of marketing. Along with each copy of *Unua Libro* he attached a promissory note. By signing the note, readers agreed to learn Esperanto if 10,000 others so promised. Zamenhoff understood that no one would want to learn a language if no language community existed. This early advertising strategy is one of the reasons Esperanto spread so quickly in its first couple of years.

² It is hard to estimate the total number of Esperantists in the Russian Empire, as no centralized organization tracked membership.

³ While it is true that the early Esperanto movement in Russian territories was marked by a pacifism, not all the Esperantists shared the same vision. In the first decades of the 20th century many Russian anarchists also spoke Esperanto, and they taught the language to fellow inmates in prison camps across Siberia. There are reports from 1910 and 1911 about Esperanto textbooks being distributed in prison camps in Yarensk, Kovono, and Narym, in Tomsk province. Famously, the young Joseph Stalin studied the language while in exile in Siberia, although he never became a fluent speaker (Sidrov). Famously, the young Stalin learned Esperanto when he was in exile in Siberia, although there remains some debate about his attitude towards the language. Stalin himself kept silent about the issue, and the task has fallen to biographers and critics to assess his enthusiasm. Volkogonov, the Soviet general and one of Stalin's first biographers, says that he wasn't a particularly committed student. Stalin was really addicted to fishing and hunting, "Yes, one time Stalin wanted to study Esperanto (one of the inmates brought a textbook) but he quickly forgot his studies" (Sidrov). Trotsky, writing in 1941 differs from Volkogonov. In "Stalin – An Appraisal of the Man and his Influence" he says Koba was a dedicated Esperanto student, although perhaps not the brightest: "In the Baku prison he began to study Esperanto as 'the language of the future.' That touch most instructively exposes the quality of Koba's intellectual equipment, which in the sphere of learning always sought the line of least resistance. Although he spent eight years in prison and exile, he never managed to learn a single foreign language, not excluding his ill-starred Esperanto" (Trotsky). In exile, disillusioned, angry the few times Trotsky mentions Esperanto it is always with the intent to ridicule Stalin.

⁴ Lanti, a devout anarchist and Esperantist, led a fascinating life. Constantly on the move, he made it his life's work to bring Esperanto to every corner of the European continent. Later in life he traveled the globe, eventually committing suicide in Mexico after contracting an incurable disease. His sister was married to George Orwell, who apparently hated Lanti's insistence that Esperanto be spoken at the dinner table. (Orwell didn't speak the language.) Some have suggested that, because of this, Esperanto formed the basis for Orwell's "doublespeak" in his novel, *1984*.

⁵ Marx actually does discuss language at length in two places: *The Grundrisse* and *The German Ideology*. However, he does not explain what language is, nor where it lies in

relation to the base and superstructure. Furthermore, both the *Grundrisse* and *The German Ideology* were left in manuscript form by Marx and Engels and only printed in 1939 and 1932, respectively. So for the turn-of-the-century Marxist, a sustained discussion of language was entirely absent from the texts of Marx himself.

⁶ While English does have some agglutination, for example the word unhappiness includes the prefix *-un* and the suffix *-ness*, Esperanto's agglutination is far more regular.

⁷ Forrester points out – rightly so – that this criticism is ridiculous. Similar attacks, based in a disgust of the ‘unnatural’, had been leveled against women's rights groups and advocates of interracial marriage.

⁸ It is true that, due to the processes of globalization, the number of languages is decreasing. Traditional languages are being forgotten in favor of economically advantageous languages like English and Spanish. Marr, however, argued that the number of languages has been decreasing since humans first started speaking. While linguists agree that language diversity may be decreasing now, they also believe that the world's languages first became more diverse before becoming less so. It is also interesting to note the Chomskian elements to Marr's theory: his universal sound system seems similar to a universal grammar.

⁹ Of course, the whole process was incredibly complex and tied up with the processes of nation building and population control. For a cogent analysis of the National Question in the early Soviet Union, see *Empire of Nations* by Francine Hirsch and *The Affirmative Action Empire* by Terry Martin.

¹⁰ For example, in 1929 the Soviet linguist K. A. Erberg wrote an article in “Language and Literature” on the function of verbs, in which he directly engages with and supports the functionalist agenda. The article can be viewed online at: crecleco.seriot.ch/textes

¹¹ The name of the decree is: “On Measures for the Preservation of the USSR from Spy Infiltration, Terrorist and Subversive Elements”.

¹² N. Stepanov recalls: “Alexander Yakovich Korotkevich told me that in those years he had been an employee of the military intelligence service. His directors knew about his Esperanto studies. But they advised him to cease studying Esperanto entirely (writing correspondence, meeting with Esperantists), and they told him to bring all mail sent to his address to the directors of the organization” (Stepanov).

¹³ For an extended elaboration of this thesis, see Yuri Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever Until It was No More*. In the work, Yurchak asks why the Soviet Union began to crumble in the in the late 20th century. He argues that it lost its way, in part, because it lost a leader who could interpret the state ideology. Stalin, Yurchak argues was able to stand “as a ‘master’ external to authoritative discourse” (Yurchak, 45).

¹⁴Koestler discusses the “international jargon” of Jdugashwilese (named for Iosef Jdugashwili aka Joseph Stalin) at length in his anti-Marxist essay “The God that Failed” and in his autobiography “Arrow in the Blue.” To Koestler, Marxist language was the prime way that pro-Soviet propagandists were able to convert new believers and justify the mass repression (and extermination) of the Soviet people. According to his autobiographical texts, Koestler escaped the numerical and calculating logic of Marxism in a Spanish Fascist prison where he experienced the infinite value of human life. These themes play an important role in his masterful novel “Darkness at Noon.”

A Note on Sources & Translation

All translations from the Russian are my own. I chose to use the Library of Congress transliteration system for the Russian.

Historical sources dating from the Soviet era come primarily from the *Centre de recherches en histoire et épistémologie comparée de la linguistique d'Europe centrale et orientale* (Research centre for historical and comparative epistemology of linguistics of central and eastern Europe) at the University of Lausanne, France. The archive of French, German and Russian linguistic texts, which was compiled and published online by scholars there, can be reached at crecleco.seriot.ch/texts. Other texts come from the Russian website historio.ru which was run by the Russian scholar Nikolai Stepanov (now deceased) and maintained Russian Esperanto Union, the largest contemporary Esperanto organization in Russia. Although these sources are markups of articles originally published in paginated journals, neither website includes page numbers with any regularity.

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