

Between Linguistics and Ideology: Lev Iakubinskii on Social Dialects

Original study

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Abstract: One of the central points of the sociolinguistic conception of Lev Iakubinskii (1892–1945) became the thesis about the differentiation of language in accordance with the social structure of society, leading to the formation of class dialects. The basic ideas of this conception were formulated by Iakubinskii in a series of articles published in the journal “Literary Studies” in 1930–1931 and in the collection “Essays on Language” (1932). In these works, Iakubinskii considers language as a heterogeneous formation, consisting of the languages of certain class groups (the language of the peasantry, the language of the proletariat, etc.), and also addresses the question of the formation of a united national language. The present article examines the origins and components of Iakubinskii’s sociolinguistic conception and considers to what extent his engagement with this topic was influenced by the complex political and ideological context of the early Soviet period.

Keywords: Lev Iakubinskii, sociolinguistics, social dialects, national language, Soviet linguistics.

The Russian linguist Lev Iakubinskii is known primarily as an active member of the group of Russian Formalists, who made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of poetic language, as well as a pioneer in the study of dialogic speech, which he worked on in the 1920s. His scholarship in the 1930s, when he focused on issues of language politics and social differentiation of language, received less attention. Although Iakubinskii is rightly regarded as one of the founders of Soviet sociolinguistics (Cf. Gukhman 1972; Brandist 2003), an objective study of his legacy from this period, obviously closely related to the political and ideological situation of the time, has long been hindered due to the constantly changing direction of the ideological vector in the Soviet Union.

This article attempts if only in a first approximation, to address this deficiency and consider probably the least studied part of Iakubinskii’s scholarship – his works on social dialectology, the field he actively explored in the 1930s. It will examine sources and component parts of his conception; consider, to what extent his turn to this

topic was due to the specific circumstances of the time and how it fitted into the general line of his own scholarly interests. It will also clarify the place of Iakubinskii’s conception in the context of the fierce linguistic-political debate of that time.

1. LANGUAGE AS A SUPERSTRUCTURE

One of the central theses of Iakubinskii’s sociolinguistic conception became the idea of language differentiation according to the social structure of society, leading to the formation of class dialects or even class languages. Evidently enough, the assumption about the specific languages of different classes derives from the premise that language belongs to the superstructure and that at each stage of social development the languages of respective social groups prevail. The view of language as a part of the superstructure has often related to the name of Nikolai Marr. In fact, approximately from the mid-1920s the thesis about the superstructural nature of language

became one of the cornerstones of Marr's conception of the "universal glottogonic process".¹ However, closer examination shows that this thesis cannot be regarded as specifically Marrist, and indeed, we could hardly expect Marr with his rather limited understanding of Marxism to be the primary or only source of it. Presumably, the association of this thesis with Marr occurred after the well-known Stalin's criticism, which declared Marr to be mainly responsible for the vulgarization of Marxism in linguistics and made him a whipping boy (in many ways, deserved) for the sins of all linguists who went too far in their revolutionary enthusiasm.

The notion of language as a superstructure should be considered in the broader context of the epoch. As Desnitskaia pointed out, "the ideas of this kind were primarily formulated outside the borders of linguistic circles" (Desnitskaia 1974, 399). We should not forget about such an influential group as Proletkult, which called for the creation of a specific proletarian culture, or the ideas about the formation of a new man of the future (which sometimes were even meant in a literal biological sense) (Zalkind 1928; Melik-Pashaev 1928).

The classics of Marxism did not leave any clear instructions regarding the class character of the language. Thus, during the so-called "discussion on questions of linguistics" in 1950 the names of such high-calibre Marxist authorities like Marx, Engels or Lafargue were used both to support this thesis and to refute it. However, in the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s some remarks from Lafargue, Plekhanov or Bukharin were widely quoted, which apparently indicated, that these theorists of Marxism regarded language as a class phenomenon.² Among the linguists who studied the sociology of language in this period, we can hardly find anyone, who would deny the dependence of linguistic phenomena on the socio-economic basis. Just on the contrary, this assumption seemed to be evident not only to those, who sympathized with the ideas of Marr (like, for example, Zhirmunskii), but even to such uncompromising opponents of Marrism like Polivanov or the participants of Iazykfront-group.³

Thus, putting forward this thesis, Iakubinskii in no way associated himself with the ideas of Marrism. His interest in the social differentiation of language had another genesis and can be clearly seen from the very beginning of his work. Here we certainly have to emphasize that Iakubinskii was a student (one of the favorites – see Leont'ev 1986, 4) of Baudouin de Courtenay. He inherited his teacher's interest in widely divergent forms of language and language functioning in society. We can make an even broader generalization and assert that interest in linguistic heterogeneity was generally typical of Russian linguistics in the pre-revolutionary time – it will suffice to remind us of Shakhmatov's and Shcherba's dialect studies or the work of the Moscow Dialectological Commission.

2. FROM POETIC LANGUAGE TO SOCIAL DIALECTS

The early works of Iakubinskii on the poetic language are also to be seen against this background.

He was an active contributor to the first OPOIAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) collections, in which he linguistically elaborated and substantiated this concept, so essential to the theory of Formalism.⁴ For Iakubinskii, poetic language was just one of several language forms, which could illustrate the more general thesis about the coexistence of language of different functional systems. As Eikhenbaum pointed out in his retrospective review of Russian Formalism, "[...] linguists also became interested in the formal method because the facts of poetic language which were discovered by comparing poetic and practical language could be studied as a purely linguistic problem, as part of the general phenomena of language" (Eikhenbaum 1927, 121).

It is difficult to say now why at the beginning of his scholarly career Iakubinskii, who was interested in the study of the functional heterogeneity of language, turned his attention specifically to poetic language. Obviously, the general linguistic problems associated with poetic

1 Cf. his rather characteristic statements like "Language is the most complicated and rich in content category of the superstructure" (slozhneishaia i sodержatel'neishaia kategoriia nadstroiki, Marr 1936 [1933], 452) or "Language is of the same type of superstructural social value as painting or art in general" (iaz'k takaia zhe nadstroecnaia tsennost', kak khudozhestvo i voobshche iskusstvo, Marr 1936 [1927], 107). For a detailed account on Marr's linguistic and ideological position see Alpatov 2004.

2 Cf., e.g., Danilov 1928, 117–118. See also Lähtenmäki 2006, 287; Lähtenmäki 2010.

3 As Zhirmunskii pointed out, "the thesis about the class nature of language was shared, together with Marr and independently of him, by the majority of Soviet linguists [...]. 1950, by the time of beginning of discussion in *Pravda*, all its participants without exception, aside from I. V. Stalin, turned out to be the supporters of this 'formula', regardless of their attitude to the theory of Marr" (Zhirmunskii 1964, 101).

4 Cf. "Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka", vol. 1 (1916), vol. 2 (1917) and "Poetika" (1919). See the evaluation of Iakubinskii's role in the formation of the concept of poetic language and the theory of Russian Formalism provided by Tsvetan Todorov: "What might be called the 'standard theory' of poetic language in Russian Formalism appears explicitly in the movement's first collective publication, the first of the Collections on the Theory of Poetic Language (1916), in an article by L. Jakubinsky. Jakubinsky's participation in the Formalist group remained marginal, but at the time he provided a linguist's confirmation of the theses launched by his friends; his contribution is thus a major one" (Todorov 1985, 130).

language were highly relevant in Russia at the time of the emergence of Futurism and Formalism. Not only Iakubinskii, but a number of other young linguists (Polivanov, Zhirmunskii, not to mention Jakobson) also left a notable mark in this field. Even Baudouin de Courtenay himself found the time and motivation to take part in futurist debates (although his position there was rather sceptical, cf. Baudouin de Courtenay 1963 [1914]). Apparently, Iakubinskii's interest in poetic language was also encouraged, not least of all, by the fruitful discussion atmosphere of the OPOIAZ.⁵

However, unlike, for example, Polivanov or Zhirmunskii, Iakubinskii rather quickly moved away from the specific problem of poetic language and turned to the more general issue of functional styles. Thus, already in 1919 – the year of publishing of "Poetika", which contained several articles by Iakubinskii on poetic language written some years earlier, he drew up a program for the Institute of the Living Word (*Institut Zhivogo Slova*), where a wide range of functional forms of speech to be studied was presented, but the poetic language was mentioned only marginally (Iakubinskii 1919, qtd. from Vinogradov 1953, 14). In his review of Zhirmunskii's book "The Composition of Lyric Verse" (1921), Iakubinskii further elaborates on his distinction between poetic and practical language (Iakubinskii 1986 [1922]).⁶ However, it refers mostly to the practical language, where Iakubinskii distinguishes several subtypes, the poetic language is not any more in the center of his attention. Besides this, Iakubinskii specially addresses the issue of poetic language only once, in a small essay "Where do poems come from?" (Iakubinskii 1986 [1921]), where poetic language is put in a broader context of linguistic forms, which share with it some similar features.

The next object of Iakubinskii's studies became dialogic speech. In the introductory part of his article "On dialogic speech" (Iakubinskii 1986 [1923]) he distinguishes between psycho-biological and social components of language and focuses on the study of dialogic speech as a specific form of social interaction. Thus, this article has already marked a turn toward the study of the functioning of language in society, although here still in the form of interpersonal communication rather than the interaction between social groups. Nevertheless, in this article Iakubinskii also pays attention to, as he put it, "the complex variety of dialects" of "different social groups" (territorial, national, state, professional) (ibid. 18). Iakubinskii quotes with interest Shcherba's remarks on the peculiarities of the language of a semi-urban

semi-peasant population interpreting it in a fully Marxist manner as an indication of the relationship of language and culture with "the economic structure of society" (ibid., 31). However, in this article the topic is limited to quoting Shcherba, Iakubinskii himself does not directly address this issue. While speaking of "social groups" and "economic formation", Iakubinskii here still does not use such notions as "class" or "basis", which would become common a few years later.

Very important in terms of explaining the evolution of Iakubinskii towards sociological (and frankly Marxist) linguistics is the article on the language of Lenin, published in 1924 (Iakubinskii 1924).⁷ As is often the case with Iakubinskii, in the introductory part he addresses general problems. He formulates linguistics's aims relevant to the country's new political circumstances. According to Iakubinskii, linguistics must focus first and foremost on concrete, praxis-related problems posed to it by society. He appeals "to give to the science about language that accent, to which it certainly tends in our time – the accent of appliedness, the accent of technology. The task of science is to investigate the reality and participate in its transformation" (Iakubinskii 1924, 71–72). In the socio-political context of that time, less and less room was left for purely academic theories that could not prove their momentary importance to the processes occurring in the country. In his later article on F. de Saussure, Iakubinskii formulated this utilitarian tendency in its most pointed form: "It is in vain to write the laws of the development of language if they cannot be executed in the corresponding practice. The question posed to every scientific discipline [...] 'What is it for?' is, in its philosophical essence, the most legitimate and most necessary question" (Iakubinskii 1986 [1929], 73).

Among the most important tasks of linguistics, Iakubinskii postulates the development of "linguistic instruction in schools" and organization of the "technical education in the field of speech", which would allow the effective "agitation through speech". Iakubinskii thus considers linguistics as a tool to develop a well-formed literary language and to enhance the effectiveness of speech to carry out agitation and propaganda.

It is not difficult to see that in this article Iakubinskii tries to adapt to the new social conditions and fit into the overall style of the era. A characteristic detail of the time is the emergence of ideological clichés like the "hangover of idealistic worldview" (*otryzhka idealisticheskogo mirosozertsaniia*) (Iakubinskii 1924, 72) and the accentuated affiliation with materialism and Marxism. This line of

5 Thus, in 1930, recalling the time of OPOIAZ, Shklovskii writes with nostalgia about his hours-long telephone discussions with Iakubinskii: "The best year of my life is the one when I talked for an hour, two hours a day by telephone with Lev Iakubinskii. We put small tables near the telephones" (Shklovskii 1930, 213).

6 For more on this issue, see Ivanova 2008, 99–101.

7 After the first publication in the journal "LEF" this article was never published again in the Soviet Union. According to the testimony by A. A. Leont'ev, the editor of Iakubinskii's "Selected Works" (Iakubinskii 1986), an attempt to include this article in the volume was banned by the censorship because Iakubinskii quoted in it some Lenin's texts that were regarded as "non-canonical" (Leont'ev 2003, 158).

behavior was not unique to Iakubinskii alone. Interestingly enough, Marr also starts using Marxist ideology around the same time. To survive and make a career in those conditions, the scholars had to emphasize their loyalty to the regime and stress the relevance of their research. We should not forget that by 1924 Iakubinskii was already a prominent Soviet functionary, one of the heads of the Leningrad Branch of Glavnauka (Central Administration for Scientific, Scholarly-Artistic, and Museum Institutions) (Leont'ev 2003, 157). In the following years, this ideological strain in Iakubinskii's work would increase, coming to its climax in the early 1930s, when he begins to deal intensively with social dialects.

Yet it would be a considerable simplification to explain the transition of Iakubinskii to the problem of social dialects only by ideological pressure from above. As we have shown, from the very beginning of his career he was interested in various manifestations of language heterogeneity. The underlying motive for this interest was the belief, that, as Iakubinskii put it, "there does not exist anything like language as a whole" (*nikakogo iazyka voobshche ne sushchestvuet*) (Iakubinskii 1986 [1922], 197), and that the aim of linguistics is to study "language variations and variations of these variations" (*rechevye raznovidnosti i raznovidnosti etikh raznovidnostei*) (Iakubinskii 1924, 71). In the context of this scholarly interest, the choice of social dialects as an object of study seems to be quite logical. This was the topic, which, at the same time, belonged to the sphere of Iakubinskii's own interest and was ideologically acceptable from the point of view of the state power. Iakubinskii's statements about the social usefulness of linguistics and the active role that it should have in the process of language change are also quite organic for a student of Baudouin de Courtenay, for whom language planning represented a legitimate and necessary application of the linguistic knowledge. Consider his well-known statement, which sounds quite Marxist: "*Language is neither a self-contained organism nor an untouchable fetish; it is a tool and an activity. Man not only has the right, but also the social duty to improve his tools in accordance with their purpose, and even to replace the existing tools with better ones*" (Baudouin de Courtenay 1972 [1907], 255–256, *emph. in original*).

Thus, we can see that Iakubinskii's evolution toward the study of social dialects was a bidirectional process, where his personal interest in linguistic heterogeneity and the pressure toward social problems exerted from above were organically interwoven. It is interesting to note, that two other well-known linguists, who were close to OPOIAZ in their early career, Evgenii Polivanov and Viktor Zhirmunskii, have passed through the same evolution

by the 1930s and came to the study of social dialects, leaving a notable contribution in this field.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF IDEAS ON THE SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION OF LANGUAGE

Iakubinskii's main works on social differentiation of language were first published in 1930 – 1931 as a series of articles in the journal "Literary Studies" (*Literaturnaia ucheba*) founded by Maksim Gor'kii. From the very beginning, Iakubinskii was a regular contributor to the journal, a little later became a member of the editorial board as head of the linguistic department (V'iugin et al. 2012, 830).

In his articles, Iakubinskii considers language as a heterogeneous body consisting of the languages of different social classes. However, he takes a much more moderate position on this issue than Marr or some theorists of *lazykfront*, who proclaimed a sharp difference in the class languages or even their complete autonomy.⁸ In this sense, such titles of Iakubinskii's articles as "The language of the peasantry" or "The language of the proletariat", which suggest the existence of independent languages of different social groups, can be misleading to some extent.

The main elements of Iakubinskii's conception can be resumed as follows. He argues that the language of the peasantry represents not a language of its own, but rather a collection of dialects, each of which is spoken only in a very limited area. Alluding to Marx's metaphor, Iakubinskii calls this stage of language development "a sack of dialects" (Iakubinskii 1930a, 86).⁹ Peasant dialects do not have written fixation and are limited with respect to speech genres, lacking all genres of public speech. With the development of capitalist relations, the circulation of the population and the growth of cities, mixed urban dialects emerge. They lead to the formation of the "city-wide spoken language" (*obshchegorodskoi razgovornyi iazyk*) that becomes the basis for the language of the proletariat. At the same time, ruling classes develop a common language, usually called the "all-Russian language" (*obshcherusskii iazyk*). Iakubinskii notes, that in the "all-Russian language of ruling classes, a variety of complex forms of written and oral public speech was developed, in particular, a rich literary language, the language of books and newspapers." (Iakubinskii 1930b, 41). This common language, for its part, has more impact on the language of the proletariat than on the language of the peasantry. Therefore, the former is closer to the all-Russian language. However, in a capitalist society, the bourgeoisie impedes the development of the proletarian language, hence some differences between it and the all-Russian language still persist. According to Iakubinskii,

8 See, e.g., the following passage of Marr: "National language, common to the whole nation, does not exist. It is class language that exists. Various national languages of the same class have identical social structure and have more typological affinity, than languages of different classes inside the same country, the same nation" (Marr 1936 [1928], 415).

9 This metaphor goes back to Marx's characteristics of small-holding peasants in France as a "sack of potatoes" (Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", Ch. VII).

these differences are of two kinds: firstly, the survivals of local peasant dialects, and secondly, the results of the insufficient mastering of the norms of all-Russian speech. These are the factors that hinder the unity of the proletariat and its revolutionary activity (Iakubinskii 1931a, qtd. from Ivanov, Iakubinskii 1932, 117).

This makes clear the task, which Iakubinskii sets before the language policy. On the one hand, this is the “eradication of peasant heritage in language” (ibid., 111 ff.) as unnecessary ballast of the rudimentary social class. This task was especially relevant in Soviet Russia, where, due to accelerated industrialization, huge masses of the rural population moved to the cities and still retained vivid ties with their peasant dialect. On the other hand, the task of the proletariat is the assimilation of the norms of the “all-Russian language” of the bourgeoisie. Referring to Lenin’s remarks about the importance of continuity for the proletarian culture, Iakubinskii notes: “The objective interests of the working class make it adopt different achievements of the bourgeois culture for its needs; this applies also to the bourgeois language culture” (ibid., 117). The succeeding abstract passages about a special “proletarian language ideology” or a “specific use of the all-national linguistic material” cannot conceal the fact that Iakubinskii took in his article a conservative stance of linguistic continuity and distanced himself from the radical appeals for the creation of a new proletarian language.

Interestingly enough, the conception of Iakubinskii continued to change as a series of his articles were published.¹⁰ The articles that appeared in 1930 and in the first half of 1931 had titles like “The language of the peasantry” and “The language of the proletariat”, thus directly emphasizing class differentiation. In contrast, at the end of the same year, the article “The Russian language in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat” (Iakubinskii 1931b) was published, wherein the aspect of linguistic continuity and community of language for all layers of the society was strengthened. Thus, speaking of the need for the proletariat to adopt a “cultural heritage” of the bourgeoisie in the form of a “united national language” Iakubinskii calls to focus on its more established forms, codified in the rules of the written language: “As the objective criterion of the norm for the

common language of all workers we should consider the norm of modern printed language” (ibid., qtd. from Ivanov, Iakubinskii 1932, 154).¹¹

The conservative position of Iakubinskii was even more strengthened in the book “Essays on language” (“Ocherki po iazyku”) of 1932 (Ivanov, Iakubinskii 1932). This book, which Iakubinskii co-authored with his doctoral student Anatolii Ivanov,¹² contained articles that had been published previously in the journal “Literary study.” However, some of the articles underwent revision. In particular, the journal article “The Russian language in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat” (Iakubinskii 1931b) appeared in the book under the title “National language in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Furthermore, the new article “Capitalism and the national language” was included in the book (Ivanov, Iakubinskii 1932, 60–84). The stress on the term “national language” is very characteristic. There is no longer a question about the “language of the ruling classes”, instead, the unity and continuity of language for the nation as a whole is emphasized.

4. THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE 1930S: A COURSE TOWARD LINGUISTIC CONSOLIDATION

The gradual evolution of Iakubinskii’s views fits in well with the changing political line of the early 1930s. After industrialization and collectivization had been substantially accomplished in the Soviet Union, a system was established, that had little interest to continue the radical experiments of the first post-revolutionary years. Hopes for a universal brotherhood of the proletariat and the world revolution did not come true, and the Soviet Bolsheviks were preparing seriously to fortify their dominance in a separate country they held in their hands. A new class of Soviet bureaucrats, already formed by that time, also craved established rules designed to secure its own leading role. The new policy indicated a course away from romantic international solidarity to a more pragmatic national cohesion.

Communist leaders identified two groups that could resist this course of national unification: numerous nationalities living in the Soviet Union and a regionally

¹⁰ On the evolution of Iakubinskii’s views, see Desnitskaia 1974.

¹¹ However, somewhat later Iakubinskii moderates his conservative position, indicating that the proletariat is not interested to assimilate the most complicated “caste” forms of written language, which are not understandable to the masses: scientific, juristic and – sic! – poetic: “The proletariat is really interested in destroying the caste languages of the bourgeois era [...] the proletariat wants that scientific works, laws and poems should not be written in their own ‘difficult’ languages, but in an ‘ordinary’ language. The proletariat merges these caste special languages into a really popular mass language, which it is constructing” (ibid., 157).

¹² There is very little known about this student and co-author of Iakubinskii. Anatolii Matveevich Ivanov was born 1904 in St. Petersburg, after the death of his father he was put into an orphanage. Having graduated from “Workers’ Faculty” (Rabfak), Ivanov studied linguistics at the Leningrad University and later wrote his dissertation under the direction of Iakubinskii, working at the same time in some scientific institutions of Leningrad (see Shilov 1999). It was not possible to find any mention of his career after 1935. Iakubinskii’s acquaintance with him dates at least to 1923 (the name of Anatolii Matveevich Ivanov appears in passing in the article “On dialogic speech” – cf. Iakubinskii 1986 [1923], 39).

fragmented peasantry. Apart from the purely political and economic measures for the neutralization of these groups, an important role in the fight against them was also assigned to the language. In the multinational Soviet Union, Communist leaders were well aware of the potential of language policy for promoting their ideology and influencing the process of nation-building, and they made extensive use of these opportunities. In the area of national policy, the widely known slogan of Stalin, proclaimed during the summer of 1930 at the 16th Party Congress, announced the “flourishing of national cultures, socialist in content and national in form” (Stalin 1949 [1930], 368). Lesser known is that in his article written in 1929, “The National Question and Leninism” Stalin first formulated the thesis of “zonal languages” – national languages, used in zonal economic centers by a particular group of nations (Stalin 1949 [1929], 348–349).¹³ At that time the article remained unpublished, it came out only in 1949, and soon its main points were repeated in the linguistic discussion of 1950. Apparently, in the late 1920s, during the process of collectivization, when discontent of national republics (in particular Ukraine) already threatened to spill over, the open expression of such views was considered to be inopportune. Nevertheless, the concept of linguistic Darwinism, which assumed the promotion of a strong zonal language and (in the long term) the dying out of languages, that turned out to be less fortunate – this conception began to circulate already at that time. Although Stalin did not mention any particular language in this regard, it is not difficult to guess which language was assigned to the role of the winner. The measures to strengthen the homogeneity and standardization of the Russian national language, which was intended to be a conduit of the “socialist content”, should be obviously considered in this context.

The policy of consolidation of the national language logically implied its unification and elimination of regional and social dialects. In 1931, the renowned Moscow Dialectological Commission was closed (cf. Avanesov 1958, 15–16). Literature played an important role in the support of language norms. It was not by accident, that 1930 the new journal “Literature Studies” was established, which had to complete an important didactic task of linguistic

education of new writers.¹⁴ The fight against the influence of the “peasant multi-voicedness” (*krest'ianskaia raznogolositsa*) was held also on the literary front. War was declared on the use of dialect elements in literature, all too common in the literature of the 1920s.¹⁵ The chef-editor of “Literature Studies” Maksim Gor’kii, known for his harsh attitude towards the peasantry (cf. Gor’kii 1922), played an important role here. The eradication of peasant dialects was recognized as an urgent task of language policy.

Throughout the 1930s, the policy of consolidation and codification of a single national language continued, taking more and more monumental forms. In 1932 the 17th Party Conference called to fight for the culture of speech and against “street language” and “hooliganism in language” (Smith 1998, 146). In 1934 the publishing of Ushakov’s “Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language” was started, and stability of traditional forms and correct usage were promoted through the press, literature, and radio. Very characteristic in this context is the pompous commemoration of the centennial of Pushkin’s death in 1937, who was celebrated as “the creator of the Russian literary language” (Orlov 1937).

Did Iakubinskii with his scholarly interests suit this trend? From the formal perspective – quite well. In 1930 he was entrusted with the reorganization of ILIAZV (Institute for the Comparative History of the Literatures and Languages of the West and East) to GIRK (The State Institute of Discursive Culture), where he was appointed to a leading position (Braginskaia 2006). 1932 a collection of his articles in “Literary Study” was republished as a separate book, signaling that his position enjoyed support from above. In a short remark, written in the 1930s, Ol’ga Fridenberg characterized him as a “handsome elegant man, a cynic” (qtd. from Braginskaia 2006). Was he an example of a successfully arranged conformist, who succeeded in the new circumstances? Obviously, it is not all that simple. Many facts of Iakubinskii’s life still remain unknown to us.¹⁶ But we cannot overlook an amazingly small number of scholarly publications after 1932. With few exceptions, until his death in 1945, only a few short essays in some newspapers and magazines for the general public were published. This silence is eloquent enough. As we have seen, the essence of the scholarly position of Iakubinskii

13 For more on this issue, see Gretchko 2010, 167–169.

14 Cf. programmatic words of Maksim Gor’kii in the preface to the first volume of the journal: “Our goal is to teach aspiring writers the basics of literature, the writer’s handicraft. [...] The writer is the eyes, the ears and the voice of the social class” (*Nasha zadacha učit' nachinauiushchikh pisatelei literaturnoi gramote, remeslu pisatelii. [...] Literator – glaza, ushi i golos klassa*) (Gor’kii 1930, 5).

15 On the campaign for language purification, see, e.g., Gorham 2000.

16 Among the group of Russian Formalists, Iakubinskii still remains an understudied figure. His life was not as rich in bright exotic events as, for example, the life of his fellow student Evgenii Polivanov, however it took many dramatic turns and was full of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions as well. He was a son of a general of the Czarist army and prominent Soviet bureaucrat; a student of Baudouin de Courtenay and follower of Nikolai Marr. He lived under permanent threat of purges, yet in 1937, at the height of the Great Terror, he was sent on a strange official mission abroad. Most of the known biographical information about Iakubinskii goes back to the short obituary, written by his wife and published four years after his death (Iakubinskaia-Lemberg 1949). Some more (but not many) details could be found in Leont’ev 1986; Leont’ev 2003; Ivanova 2012.

was always the attention to the heterogeneity of language, and the desire to distinguish and examine simultaneously sounding voices of different styles, groups, and individuals. In the monolingual discourse of dictatorship, established in the USSR, there was no place for him anymore.

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