

Meaning and Importance of Language in Hegel's Philosophy and its Transformations in the Soviet Times

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Résumé : Le représentant de l'idéalisme allemand, Hegel, estime que la langue, comme acte d'intellectualité, a pour fondement la pensée. La langue est une catégorie absolument nécessaire pour la pensée et, de ce fait, elle est toujours analysée en rapport avec la pensée. La langue, en plus d'être reliée à la pensée humaine, a également la fonction de lier « Je » avec l'« Autre ». Par conséquent, la langue, pour Hegel, appartient toujours à une certaine nation.

Les marxistes soviétiques ont complètement déformé et politisé la philosophie de Hegel. Tout en interprétant du point de vue marxiste la compréhension hégélienne du rapport entre la pensée et la réalité, ils ont attribué à la langue le statut de superstructure. À l'époque soviétique, cette période est liée à la théorie linguistique de Nicholas Marr. Même si, dans les années 1950, Staline a mis fin à cette époque, cela n'a jamais contribué au processus de libération de la théorie linguistique ou de la philosophie de Hegel d'une idéologie.

Mots-clés : philosophie; Hegel; Marx; marxisme soviétique; Marr; Staline; langue

Abstract: A representative of the German Idealism, Hegel, believes that language, as an act of intellectuality, is based on thinking. A language is an absolutely necessary category for thinking and can solely be analyzed through its association with thinking. Apart from being connected with human thinking, language also has the function of linking «Me» to the «Other». Hence, language, for Hegel, always belongs to a nation.

The Soviet Marxists distorted and politicized Hegel's philosophy completely. They gave language a superstructure function through Marxist interpretation of Hegel's relation between thinking and reality. Soviet times referred to the linguistic theory of Nicholas Marr. Even though Stalin brought an end to it in the 1950s, Hegel's philosophy was never freed from Soviet ideology.

Keywords: Philosophy; Hegel; Marx; Soviet Marxism; Marr; Stalin; language



The article consists of two parts. The first part refers to the definitions of language, it includes discussions on the place and meaning of language in Hegel's philosophy; in the second part I shed light upon transformations Hegel's philosophy and his thoughts about language went through under the Marxist orthodox thinkers and how Hegel's philosophy turned out to contribute to the construction of the Soviet Space in the hands of Marx and the Soviet Marxism.

Hegel's Understanding of Language

In *Philosophy of Mind* dating back to 1830 Hegel writes: «In Logic and psychology, signs and language are usually foisted in somewhere as an appendix, without any trouble being taken to display their necessity and systematic place in the economy of intelligence¹». The passage highlights the following: 1. The role of language is more essential to Hegel than it had previously been regarded, and 2. The meaning of language is determined by its link with «economy of intelligence²». Intelligence is, in its turn, connected with thinking and the mind. Hegel as well as the other representatives of the Idealism based their philosophic systems on the principles of the mind. This main idea of the German Idealism was further and thoroughly developed

¹ *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind. Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 213.

² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

by Hegel: «Mind [...] is unity of all realities¹.» With his philosophic system Hegel strives to prove that any indication of reality is closely linked with the mind and that it is principally perceived with the mind. Knowledge though to Hegel is not given but should be acquired.

There are no agreed on ideas about the place of language in Hegel's philosophy. The difficulty with regard to assigning a certain place to language in Hegel's philosophy can be explained by the fact that he had never singled out the philosophy of language as a separate sphere just like he did with the philosophy of history and that of religion. Hegel, like Leibniz and Kant, never perceived the philosophy of language as an independent part of the philosophic sphere². Hence Hegel's thoughts about language are dispersed in his various works. This kind of irregularity when discussing the language does not mean that the issue was of less importance to Hegel though.

Hegel discusses the language in his lectures delivered in 1803/04 in Jena. He also refers to the language in *Phenomenology of Spirit* published in 1807 and in the third edition of *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (Part 3 – The Philosophy of Mind)*. In terms of discussions about language the *Philosophy of Mind* is regarded as being the most important. Hence in my article I will derive my arguments from this work.

With the purpose of the article in mind, when discussing language in Hegel's philosophy I will focus on the following issues:

- The place of language in Hegel's work *Philosophy of Mind* and
- How language is related to thinking.

Hegel discusses the language in the first part of *Philosophy of Mind* when he transitions from Imagination, §455 to Thinking, §465 through Memory, §461.

An excerpt from Hegel's work: «Language here comes under discussion

¹ Dina Emundts, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *G.W.F. Hegel. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2002, p. 10.

² See Josef Simon, «In Namen denken. Sprache und Begriff bei Hegel», in *Hegel: Zur Sprache. Beiträge zur Geschichte des europäischen Sprachdenkens*, Hrsg. von Bettina Lindorfer und Dirk Naguschewski, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, 2002, p. 33.

only in the special aspect of a product of intelligence for manifesting its ideas in an external medium¹». Thus language is important for Hegel as expression of economy of intelligence. Moreover, Hegel regards thinking as a form of language and expands upon this idea further in his philosophical system. Furthermore, to Hegel «Something that cannot be put into words cannot become part of philosophy²».

At this point it is important that we define the meaning of intelligence and an economy of intelligence. In the psychological part of *Philosophy of Mind* Hegel describes the process of self-perception by the mind that goes through various stages. Here will be emphasized only a relevant part of the Hegel's theory that is needed to explain meaning of language in philosophy.

Hegel states: «Mind [...] starts only from its own being and is in correlation only with its own features».³ Here he talks about progression of the mind that is named to be development according to Hegel. Aim and intrinsic purpose of development is provided in the mind itself. Transferring existing in the mind into the reality and getting back is realized by development.

The progress of mind is *development*, in so far as its existent phase, viz. knowledge, involves as its intrinsic purpose and burden that utter and complete autonomy which is rationality; in which case the action of translating this purpose into reality is strictly only a nominal passage over into manifestation, and is even there a return into itself⁴.

It became clear that, in the way of mind's development, economy of intelligence means discovery of mind for Hegel. Thus purpose of intelligence in the progression of mind is expression of intrinsic purpose of the mind.

«Its [intelligence's – N.R.] activity has to do with the empty form – the pretence of *finding* reason: and its aim is to realize its concept or to be

¹ *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind. Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 214.

² Josef Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

³ *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

reason actual, along with which the content is realized, as rational. This activity is *cognition*¹».

Intelligence gets rational nature of an object and by doing so reaches objective knowledge and becomes cognition itself.

Thus intelligence strips the object of the form of contingency, grasps its rational nature and posits it as subjective; and, conversely, it at the time develops the subjectivity into the form of objective rationality. Thus our Knowing, which was at first abstract and formal, becomes a Knowing that is filled with a true content and is therefore objective. When intelligence attains this goal set for it by its Notion, it is in truth what, to begin with, it only *ought* to be, namely cognition (Erkennen)².

We are talking about the fact that the main point of perception for the self-perceiving mind is intelligence. Hence, intelligence «is expressly that form of mind in which mind itself alters its object, and by developing it also develops itself into truth. Intelligence, in altering the external object into an internal one, inwardizes itself³». As we see Intelligence is an object itself and hence development here means that intelligence «inwardizes itself⁴» i.e. intelligence turns an outer object into the inner one. Ultimately intelligence coincides with cognition⁵». Therefore, «Intelligence is recognitive [...] It knows that what is *thought*, is, and that what is, only is on so far as it is a thought (cp. §5, 21); the thinking of intelligence is to *have thought*: these are as its content and object⁶». Therefore thoughts represent a content of intelligence whereas its essence is reasoning. The language as an activity of intelligence is based on thinking and not vice versa, a language though is an absolutely necessary category for thinking and it is solely analysed through its connection with thinking. This connection is essential in Hegel's philosophy in order to decipher the meaning of language. The language, apart from being in a relation with human thinking, also has the function of linking with the «other».

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Hegel-Lexikon, Hrsg. Paul Goebben, Darsmtadt, WBG, 2006, p. 277.

⁶ *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, op. cit.*, p. 224.

Habermas also writes concerning the issue: «Hegel [...] confines himself to the dialectic of the I and the other within the framework of the intersubjectivity of spirit, in which the I communicates not with itself as its other, but instead with another I as its other¹». Habermas concludes that in Hegel's philosophy «thus language is the first category in which is not conceived as something internal, but as a medium that is neither internal nor external. In this, spirit is the *logos* of a world and a solitary self-consciousness²». Hence, the language in Hegel's philosophy is a kind of mediation among individuals. It creates the space in which the conscience of an individual seeks a public recognition. This is the way in which a mutual recognition among individuals is possible. The language, on the one hand, has a mediatorial function between the human being and thinking. On the other hand, the language links multiple «selves».

This is why Hegel perceives the language as being a possession of a certain people: «*Speech only is as the speech of a people, and understanding and Reason likewise. Only as the work of a people is speech the ideal existence of the spirit, in which it expresses what it is in its essence and its being*³».

At this stage we came across one of the most important aspects in Hegel's philosophy – a relationship between the mind and the reality. In his works titled *Philosophy of Law* and in *Science of Logic* which is first part of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* Hegel writes: «What is rational, is actual, and what is actual, is rational⁴». There is no denying of the fact that Hegel refers to the possibility of analysing the reality with the mind and in *Science of Logic* he speaks about the laws of thinking. In my opinion we can speak on a certain analogy here: Hegel descends from the assumption

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Labor and Interaction. Remarks on Hegel's Jena philosophy of mind, at: Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition: texts and commentary*, edited by John O'Neill, State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 126.

² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1979, p. 244.

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 33.

that reality is rational and therefore can be comprehended by the mind. Dialectical method that Hegel has created derives primarily from thinking. This point becomes particularly important when we start talking about the Soviet interpretation of Hegel's philosophy.

Transformations – Understanding of Language in the Soviet Reality

The following phrase by Hegel became popular in the Soviet space thanks to Marx and the orthodox representatives of Marxism. Marx writes in *Capital*:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurge of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought¹.

This passage from Marx reflects certain transformation of Hegel's statement: "What is rational, is actual, and what is actual, is rational". If the mind is substantial for Hegel, reality, material is substantial for Marx. Marx admitted Hegel's merit in the creation of a dialectic method but made a significant correction to it:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell².

In the Soviet Times this passage had many times been cited from the Works of Marx, Stalin also referred to it in his writing titled *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* that was published in 1938. This text laid the foundation for the state ideology and an official doctrine. Hegel's philosophy, and to be more concrete, his dialectic method, was transformed and spread in the

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Great books of the Western World, vol. 50, Chicago [u.a.]: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1989, p. 11.

² *Ibid.*

hands of Marxists «to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history¹» and it had been given much importance «the extension of the principles of the dialectical method to the study of social life and the history of society, and how immensely important is the application of these principles to the history of society and to the practical activities of the party of the proletariat²». Stalin thought that with this approach towards the society the science would acquire more precision³.

Hegel's philosophic system as opposed to his dialectic method was treated by soviet orthodox Marxists as a futile and a false theory. Though Hegel's dialectic method was also to be altered. To the Soviet Orthodox Marxists this meant the following: «Whatever is the mode of production of a society, such in the main is the society itself, its ideas and theories, its political views and institutions [...], whatever is man's manner of life such is his manner of thought⁴»; «if nature, being, the material world is primary, and consciousness, thought, is secondary, derivative⁵»; «the material life of society, its being, is also primary, and its spiritual life secondary, derivative, and that the material life of society is an objective reality existing independently of the will of men, while the spiritual life of society is a reflection of this objective reality, a reflection of being⁶», etc.

As we can see, Stalin regards nature, being and the material world as primary and objective while seeing consciousness and spiritual life as secondary, derivative and reflective of what is primary. Within this context the language as well as the art and science, was a superstructure in Marx's terms. The language, which in Hegel's philosophy is closely associated with thinking, became a mere superstructure and had a secondary importance for the Marxists. This kind of replacement was a logical continuation of replacing the mind and the reality that was requested from Marx.

¹ Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, <http://marxistphilosophy.org/stalin1938.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

The phrases about the material being primary, i.e. the basis, and the spiritual being secondary, i.e. a superstructure, as well as many other variations of this idea can be found in many Soviet texts. It makes no difference which sphere these texts refer to: they might be philosophic or related to science, arts, sports, etc. Recognition of Stalin's above-mentioned text as an official doctrine contributed to the creation of a controlled, centralized and unified space. From that time on the science (alongside with the arts and sports) was obligated to comply with the above doctrine. The Soviet government controlled the teaching process and scientific spheres in terms of their compliance with the doctrine. Furthermore, all the disciplines of science turned out to be ideologized and politicized.

The Soviet space detached itself from the west completely and created new contradictory terms: «Philosophy of Bourgeois and the Soviet Philosophy», «The Arts of Bourgeois and the Soviet Arts». All spheres of human activity, including a person and his private moral space, were in the service of the Party. Everybody complied with the following assertion: «you are nothing, your party is important¹».

These circumstances, by all means, affected the language politics. The language like all other spheres became an instrument for fulfilling the party goals. The idea of a unified soviet territory entailed an idea of creating a unified language of communication for people living on that territory. The Russian language was certainly the only one to serve this purpose: «Russian language within Soviet Union was considered to be at least *lingua franca*²».

It should also be noted that the above turned-into-doctrine text by Stalin was published in 1938 and coincided in time with the years of «The Great Terror» or «The Great Purge» (1936-38). The politics of russification was also in progress during these years: at schools and universities it was mandatory to teach and learn the Russian language and to do the paperwork in Russian at state institutions.

¹ See Nikolaus Knoepffler, *Angewandte Ethik*, Köln Weimar Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2009, p. 66.

² See Gunner Wälzholz, *Nationalismus in der Sowjetunion, Entstehungsbedingungen und Bedeutung nationaler Eliten*, Heft 8/1997, www.oei.fu-berlin.de/politik/publikationen/AP08.pdf.

The doctrine of Stalin existed for about 12 years. It is interesting, in regard to this, to mention the fate of the language theory developed by Nicholas Marr that was first in harmony with Soviet ideology during the first half of 20th century but for some reason it was denounced by Stalin as being a false theory in 1950. This is good example of the situation when the first person of the country interfered with, determined and decided on the purely scientific discussions in accordance with his own purposes.

At first the theory of Nicholas Marr that perceived a language as a superstructure and «emphasised class as the dominant criteria for understanding language development¹» was thought to be safe for the ideology by the Soviet statesmen. Speech of Stalin made at the sixteenth Congress of Communist Party in 1930 was in compliance with this theory. According to the latter, in communism all languages will merge and become one single tongue. At that time the theory of Marr was considered to be an only truthful scientific theory in the Soviet linguistics.

This harmony lasted only till 1950 when the newspaper *Pravda* started to publish debates between Marrists and Antimarrists. These linguistic discussions ended with the text by Stalin in 1950. In *Linguistics about Marxism*, the text that had the form of unreal and fabricated questions and answers, on the question: «Is it true that language is a superstructure on the base?» Stalin unexpectedly answered: «No, it is not true²». From this point on the text is filled with the arguments about the language being an instrument: «Language exists, language has been created precisely in order to serve society as a whole, as a means of intercourse between people, [...] language does not differ from instruments of production, from machines, [...] Language [...] is connected with man's productive activity directly³», etc.

The debates were continued for a short time from this point on but they became tense and awkward since «there was no accepted method of continuing

¹ Ethan Pollock, «Stalin as the Coryphaeus of Science: Ideology and Knowledge in the Post-war Years», in *Stalin – A New History*, Edited by Sarah Davies and James Harris, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 274.

² Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, Digital reprints, 2006, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 6-9.

discussion after the time for official discussion had concluded. Stalin's decisive role only deepened the quagmire¹».

The above position of Stalin is at first sight closely related with Hegel's position even though Hegel never used the terms like «the basis» and «the superstructure». But Stalin never admitted that both thinking and the language are primary and important as long as the language is closely associated with thinking. He was more interested in giving a new life to sciences in accordance with historic realities of that time. He was aware of the crisis following World War II that in its turn resulted in weakening the Soviet ideology; the ideology and the science were no longer in harmony with each other. Hence he personally participated in scientific discussions on linguistics, economy, biology, etc. At this point of time he was often referred to as «coryphaeus of science»².

After the discussions that took place in the newspaper *Pravda*, «there were a number of administrative changes that highlighted an importance of national languages and most of all a significance of Russian. A Russian language specialist was appointed as a Director of the new Linguistics Institute, the Russian and Slavic languages specialist became the deputy head of the Institute, an editor-in-chief of the Linguistics Journal was also an expert in the Russian History³, etc.

It seems like Stalin understood an importance of language as it was closely associated with thinking and economy of intelligence but it is also clear that to him the Russian language was the main language-instrument. Stalin probably thought that in order for him to spread ideology through the whole territory of the Soviet Union it was essential for the people living on that territory to think alike, hence, they should speak the same language. Stalin's plans during the Soviet Times turned into reality and to a certain extent they are still alive today – representatives of the different ethnic groups who happened to live during the Soviet Times, mainly the old generation

¹ Ethan Pollock, *op cit.*, p. 282.

² *Ibid.* p. 271-273.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

who studied at Soviet schools where learning the Russian language was compulsory, still speak with one another in Russian. We might suppose that the ideological clichés learnt through the Russian language still determines the social consciousness of these people in Post-soviet times.

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