

**Karl Marx and the language sciences – Critical encounters:  
introduction to the special issue**

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## Karl Marx and the Language Sciences – Critical Encounters: Introduction to the *Special Issue*

### 1. Introduction

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome readers to this Special Issue of *Language Sciences* dedicated to critical encounters with Karl Marx in celebration of the bicentenary of Marx's birth on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1818. I am particularly honoured to introduce this collection of papers from our assembled team of authors and to warmly thank them for their creativity, hard work and patient indulgence during a demanding review process. At the same time, I must take the opportunity to record the gratitude and appreciation of both Editor-in-Chief, Sune Steffensen, and myself for the work of our large team of reviewers who took on sometimes multiple reviewing tasks enthusiastically and in positive and comradely spirit.<sup>1</sup> The existence of this Special Issue is in fact due to a suggestion Sune Steffensen made to me in 2017. It seemed like a good idea at the time: our authors' collective, and the journal's readers, will be the judges...<sup>2</sup>

Readers relatively unfamiliar with his work and legacy may be puzzled by the dedication to Karl Marx of a Special Issue of a *linguistics* journal: what is linguistics to him and he to linguistics? After all, the allied fields of linguistics, semiotics and communication, as we have come to recognise them, did not exist in 1818. The research presented in this issue will, we hope, be the best way to answer that reasonable enquiry in some detail. We might begin, however, with some more expansive considerations.

With their *materialist conception of history*, Marx and Engels ignited a revolution which was to shake, literally and metaphorically, the whole foundations of human endeavour across the board. As Engels commented, 'this apparently simple proposition, that the consciousness of men depends on their being and not *vice versa*, at once, and in its first consequences, runs directly counter to all idealism, even the most concealed. All traditional and customary outlooks on everything historical are negated by it. The whole traditional mode of political reasoning falls to the ground' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 509). This new principle of historical understanding was pitched like a grenade onto the intellectual landscape of the time, offering a direct challenge to all contemporary traditions of thinking about humanity

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<sup>2</sup> I could perhaps add, on a personal note, that I have been struggling with these issues for nearly 40 years now, off and on. Having embarked on a linguistics PhD at the University of Cambridge in 1976, initially on a Chomskyan topic, my own political allegiances led me to search out Marxist thinking on language which I found in Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1962), in the tantalising eighth chapter of Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic* (Ilyenkov, 1977a), and in Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Voloshinov, 1973). And so, with the kind support of my doctoral supervisor, Terence Moore, I changed topic mid-stream. I was awarded my PhD in 1982 for a dissertation entitled 'Materialism and the Structure of Language' which, for its doctrinaire and mechanistic 'Marxism', makes excruciating, though salutary, reading today.

and human history, society and its origins, human institutions, the relations between the sexes, the mind, and intellectual and artistic activity generally.

This revolution could hardly fail to inspire new ways of looking at language and its place in human thinking and action. Indeed, the explicit statements and pronouncements by Marx and Engels on language, if relatively rare and quite gnomic all told, have generated a wealth of scholarly interpretation and engagement down the years – a tradition which we continue here. At least, if not more, important, however, is the fact that in developing his new perspective on human history and human progress Marx had to engage in critical dialogue with the language of the philosophical, scientific and political traditions of the time and, in so doing, had to find his own language in which to formulate and communicate that perspective (Ollman, 1976). For Marx and Engels, language was both ‘practical consciousness that exists’ for others ‘and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well’ (Marx and Engels, 1969: 32) and a principal vehicle for the ‘ideological forms’ in which people ‘fight out’ the ‘contradictions of material life’ (Marx and Engels, 1969: 504). How could such a position *not* matter to linguistics?

Here it is not my intention to provide a detailed account of the explicit linguistic and communicational engagement by Marx and Engels or a systematic survey of relevant contributions in the self-identifying Marxist tradition.<sup>3</sup> My aim, rather, is to offer a perspective, inevitably selective and limited by personal knowledge and theoretical preference, on the scope and significance of the problem space within which the Special Issue papers are located and, in so doing, to indicate some general lines of research in the fields of language and communication which appear particularly fruitful in exposing the limits and limitations of Marx’s legacy as well as in concretising, developing and extending most productively what Marx’s work gives and promises. Both questions lead us now, as they have led many others in the past, to confront theoretical and methodological questions and quandaries which are far from peculiar or unique to Marxism and cannot be ignored by anyone interested in language and communication.

## 2. *Marx and Marxism across the centuries*

‘Marx was before all else’, as Engels put it, ‘a revolutionist’. Engels goes on:

‘His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which *he* was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success such as few could rival’ (Marx and Engels, 1970:163).

Looking at the world 200 years since Marx’s birth (and 135 years since his death), the tenacious fighter could well find things much changed and yet depressingly familiar. He would be inspired, no doubt, by the extent of general social progress

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<sup>3</sup> The ‘Marxists internet archive’ ( <https://www.marxists.org/>) is an ideal source and resource for Marxist writings.

across the globe, the fruit of the monumental struggle for social and political rights in all spheres and for liberation from imperialist exploitation and oppression in all its forms. He would be sobered by what that progress has cost in human life and human potential and by the persistent blight of misery, destitution and violence.

Despite the familiar charge brought by critics and opponents, the continued existence of the capitalist mode of production is not in itself a disconfirmation of Marx's view, whatever his specific forecasts. If capitalism had been able to overcome hunger and want, to democratise itself, to end social division and conflict, to provide to all the means and opportunity for their self-realization, and to make the totality of the human world a harmonious and positive force within nature as a whole – only in this case would Marx's position be disconfirmed. In that light, the situation we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century shows us *why Marx was right*, as the title of Eagleton's book (2011) proudly proclaims. Furthermore, in an era when social inequality has reached record proportions (Piketty, 2014; Dorling, 2015), where living standards have still not recovered from the global capitalist crash (soon to be repeated?) of 2008, and where class-based politics (on both left and right) is back with a vengeance, we see a resurgent Marxist tradition (Therborn, 2008: 172) which has successfully weathered the theoretical storm of 'post-modernism' (Norris, 1990; Eagleton, 2003) or 'post-Marxism' (Ives, 2005) and is regaining the territory it lost in linguistics as well as in political and cultural theory (Ives, 2004; Brandist, 2015).

The key issue of the age remains the one to which Marx dedicated his life: the struggle to free the toiling many from their subjection and subordination to the predatory interests of the capitalist few. And while the intense globalisation of economic might, powered by the vertiginous technological advances since Marx's day, provide the ground on which to make the socialist vision a reality (Mason, 2015), 'the progressing human pack' (Marx, 1973), under its capitalist yoke, stumbles down the path to an exit of its own creation in the form of human-made climate change (Klein, 2015). To be or not to be? That is the question. Will humanity, this time, be able to resolve the problem it has set itself?

On balance, Marx would perhaps not be too surprised overall by state of the art humanity – 'the ensemble of social relations' - circa 2018. He would no doubt be astounded, however, by the explosion of research on language from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by the unimaginable expansion in our understanding of sociality and culture that has been achieved in the ensuing disciplinary development and differentiation. A thorough examination of this enormous collective labour of linguistic research in relation to Marx's legacy would constitute an extraordinarily difficult, though undoubtedly worthy, goal. There are, however, a number of important dimensions of linguistic enquiry which cannot be overlooked as they are intimately linked to social and political insurgencies which continue to pose a challenge to the relevance and coherence of the Marxian tradition overall, in particular through confronting what some have seen as its ethnocentric and sexist bias and failure to account adequately for racial, gender and sexual oppression.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the titanic struggles for women's emancipation from patriarchy, for freedom from racist

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion of Marx's thinking and legacy on women's emancipation, sexual oppression, gender and the family, see, for example, Bloodworth (2010), Brown (2012); on race and class see, for example, Roediger (2017).

domination and colonial oppression, for freedom of sexual and gender identity have succeeded in changing the world in ways that Karl Marx (and his daughter, Eleanor) could only dream of. These movements are at once struggles for foundational economic, political and social change and at the same time necessarily struggles *over* language, *about* language, *in* language and *for* language which enables and promotes the consciousness and organization upon which such transformation depends. These movements have, therefore, developed their own theorisations and generated their own diverse linguistic literature and traditions, including such contemporary trends as Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al. eds, 1995), raciolinguistics (Samy Alim, Rickford, and Ball, eds, 2016), Black Linguistics (Makoni et al, 2003), Feminist linguistics and feminist discourse analysis (Baxter, 2003; Cameron, 1992; Cameron, ed., 1998; Mills, 2008), Queer theory (Cameron and Kulick, 2003) and Transgender Theory (Elliott, 2012). Alongside and in connection with such movements is the emerging field of Disability Studies (and ‘disability stylistics’, Hermeston, 2017). At the same time these intellectual and activist movements have raised in dramatic fashion the central question of the relationship between ‘sectional’ struggles (and their theorisation) on the one hand and the struggle for socialism (and its theorisation in Marxism) on the other, with different positions – more or less aligned with Marxism and Marxism-Feminism (Mojab, 2010; Carpenter and Mojab, 2011; Carpenter and Mojab, Eds, 2011) – being advanced and contested.<sup>5</sup>

The sub-field generally known as ‘sociolinguistics’ (alternatively ‘social linguistics’ or ‘sociology of language’) has also undoubtedly brought extraordinary advances in our appreciation of linguistic diversity and its systematic ‘variation’ in relation to all dimensions of social life. At the same time, however, the broad field of sociolinguistic research has been criticized for the static sociological assumptions and categories through which such ‘variation’ is identified and presented and, most particularly, in the rejection or neglect of class conflict as a fundamental driver of sociolinguistic differentiation and prejudice (Cameron, 1990; Jones, 2012; Block, 2014). Marxist economic analysis is also proving invaluable in exploring the rise of ‘global English’ and the status of ‘English’ (or ‘language’ in general) as commodity (Holborow, 1999). At the same time, current scholarly attention towards the linguistic and communicational consequences and implications of increasingly globalized patterns of social mobility, migration and conflict has also challenged longstanding assumptions about the connections between place, people and language and the traditional linguistic categories through which these are described (Risager, 2006). Specifically Marxist influence is evident in the emerging subfield of ‘language ecology’ or ‘ecological linguistics’ (e.g., Steffensen, 2007) which advocates a broader perspective on the social and cultural embeddedness of language in human life and history.

Let us now examine briefly what we might find in Marx and Engels of relevance to the study of language and communication.

## *2. Language and communication in Marx*

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<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion of movements for social justice and equality and their relation to the Marxist tradition, see Stetsenko (2016).

## 2.1 Marx and linguistic philosophy

In any discussion of language we are immediately caught in the cross fire of longstanding traditions of linguistic thinking and philosophy, or 'ideologies of language' (Joseph and Taylor, 1990). As Laurendeau (1990: 208) reminds us:

'Since linguistics (like any science) is not a disengaged "free-floating" discipline, there is a close relationship between the dialectical tension of ideology/science in its content and the historicity of its emergence'.

Furthermore, ideas about language ultimately connect up with ideas about everything else. Identifying, following and unpicking the diverse philosophical and ideological threads woven into particular linguistic conceptions therefore involves lengthy and difficult, though necessary, work and often takes us on very surprising journeys of discovery in the work of particular authors or traditions (Nehlich, 1992; Brandist, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2015, 2017).

For their part, while making some effort to fit 'the language question' to their new conception of human history, Marx and Engels did not undertake either a reflexive and self-critical exploration of their own linguistic assumptions or a critical confrontation with the history of western thinking about language or its contemporary manifestations. Inevitably, then, they could not but bring their own ideological baggage along in the shape of particular traditions of linguistic thinking and philosophy. Marx's statements on language and (self-)consciousness, language and activity, and language and thinking, have 'an obvious Hegelian ring' (Samuelian, 1981). Indeed, Lepschy (1985: 201) attributes 'the marginality of language in Marx's thought' to 'its peripheral, background position ... in Hegel's philosophy.' At the same time, the influence of enlightenment thinking, specifically the speculative linguistic evolutionism, of the Humboldtian tradition, with all its ethnocentric assumptions and racist implications (Harris and Taylor, 1989, Chapter 12; Alpatov, 2000), is evident.<sup>6</sup> In that connection, Samuelian (1981: 59ff) extracts four principles from the statements of Marx and Engels which 'are most pertinent to linguistics': the idea that there are 'necessary stages' of historical development, that 'primitive societies' present 'a living museum' of earlier stages, that contemporary social behaviour includes 'social fossils and vestiges' of 'primitive' developmental stages, and that human social activity forms a dialectically interconnected whole. 'This line of reasoning', as Samuelian argues, led in Soviet linguistics to a sort of paleontology of language by which one tries to find vestiges of primitive ideology and mentality in modern languages' (1981: 94).<sup>7</sup> The fourth position ('the Truth is Whole') is particularly significant, as Samuelian (1981: 92) explains:

'It is part of the Hegelian bequest to Marxism and is all-pervasive. A corollary to it is that very different phenomena are manifestations of one and the same process. So, for example, language is a manifestation of the development of man in society, and

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<sup>6</sup> 'But although the most highly developed languages have laws and categories in common with the most primitive languages, it is precisely their divergence from these general and common features which constitutes their development' (Marx, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> One might also note the influence of these principles on Vygotskian psychology (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991).

change in language is a manifestation of the process of human evolution in society. For science it means that departmentalization of disciplines should give way to explicitly interdisciplinary study’.

In this respect we see in Marx the influence of the broader intellectual inheritance of classically derived Western culture in which language, specifically written language, always held a central place. This tradition ‘sees man essentially as a “logoid” animal, distinct from other animals which are not logoid, as Isocrates says’ (Harris, 1983: 14). Our ‘logoid nature’, Harris goes on, ‘is seen as manifesting itself in three distinct ways’:

‘One is the capacity of the human mind to think rationally. Another is the capacity to master a set of arbitrary verbal signs. The third is the capacity to interact verbally with others, to influence and be influenced by words’.

This ‘logoid’ perspective is pervasive in the familiar passages from Marx and Engels in which language is generally presented in connection with the development of human social relations, consciousness and rationality:

“If we analyse Marx’s and Engels’s statements about language, then we observe that in many cases their concern is not specifically linguistic issues; they touch upon questions of language as a way of better elucidating positions on the social sciences with which the classics of Marxism were primarily concerned: philosophy, political economy, history” (V G Gak in Alpatov, 2000: 174).

As a result: ‘what does come through undeniably clearly is the repudiation of reification of any human phenomenon, language included, and that is of undeniable consequence for linguistics, given the trend, which began in nineteenth-century language history and continued in structural and formal descriptions of languages, of treating the text as the language’ (Samuelian, 1981: 66).

There is a further point to note, however, about Marx’s holistic, dialectical conception which, from our position in 2018, is of particular significance in estimating the implications of Marx’s view for language study: Marx has an *interactional, transactional, dynamic-relational* conception of human sociality (Ollman, 1976; Basso, 2012). Society ‘in whatever form’, Marx announced, is ‘the product of the reciprocal action’ of people’ (Marx and Engels, 1983: 7). More generally:

‘The social structure and the state *are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals*, but of individuals, not as they appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they are effective, produce materially, and are active under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will’ (Marx and Engels, 1969: 24, my emphasis).

More specifically in relation to the development of words and concepts:

‘what would old Hegel say if he learned, on the one hand that the word “Allgemeine” in German and Nordic means only “common land”, and that the word “Sundre, Besondere” only meant the particular owner who had split away from the common land? Then, dammit, all the logical categories would proceed from “our intercourse”’. (Marx and Engels, 1983: 130).

It is in the context, then, of this dynamic, interactional, 'holistic' perspective that Marx and Engels' well known statement that 'language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 32) should be taken.

## 2.2 *Sprachkritik* ('Critique of language')

'There are in the works of Marx and Engels, as Lepschy put it, 'many passages which can be considered belonging to a field of "Sprachkritik", in which they (but particularly Marx) make sharp considerations on the ideological implications of certain expressions' (1985: 203). It is certainly tempting to find a parallel between Marxian *Sprachkritik* and the whole contemporary field of critical discourse analysis or critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2000, 2001; Wodak and Meyer, 2001; Fairclough and Graham, 2002). This new field of critical language study has enormously expanded the potential, as well as the scope and systematicity of critical ideological analysis in the broad spirit of Marx. For some, however, including this author, (Jones, 2004), the temptation is to be tempered by a more searching comparison of the assumptions and aims of Marx's methodology with the view of language and its role in social processes adopted by particular strains of 'critical discourse analysis' (Collins, 1999; Jones, 2004; Collins and Jones, 2006). Marx 'criticised' the language of texts or of specific linguistic formulations for their factual, scientific and historical accuracy or for the aptness of their terminological/conceptual expression from his own theoretical standpoint or for the political clarity and communicational effectivity of the ideas expressed in relation to the concrete aims and goals of the working class movement. In that light, it is instructive that Holborow (2015) has preferred to stick with a more traditionally Marxist notion of 'ideology', rather than 'discourse', in her own extension of *Sprachkritik* to the analysis of the language of neo-liberalism.

## 2.3 *Literature and art*

Marx and Engels' important writings on literature and art have been the subject of voluminous exposition, interpretation, and analysis (e.g., Craig (ed.), 1975; Eagleton, 1976; Williams, 1977; Slaughter, 1980; Barański, 1985; Jackson, 1994). Indeed, their engagement with literary works provides in many ways the most substantial ground for a critical assessment of their views on the relationship between language and ideology more generally. As Krylov (1976: 17) argues: 'Though Marx and Engels have left no major writings on art, their views in this field ... form a harmonious whole which is a logical extension of their scientific and revolutionary *Weltanschauung*'. As Krylov explains:

'In their opinion, the essence, origin, development and social role of art could only be understood through analysis of the social system as a whole, within which the economic factor – the development of productive forces in complex interaction with production relations – plays the decisive role' (1976: 17).

In literature specifically, realism was held 'to be the supreme achievement of world art', not as 'a mere copy of reality, but a way of penetrating into the very essence of a phenomenon, a method of artistic generalisation that makes it possible to disclose



the typical traits of a particular age' (1976: 23). Analysis of literary production and artistic expression has undoubtedly been one of the most productive areas for the development and extension of Marxian thinking, including of course the celebrated contributions of Leon Trotsky (1960) and Walter Benjamin (cf Slaughter, 1980; Eagleton, 1981).

#### *2.4 Historical linguistics and comparative philology*

In his eulogy at Marx's graveside, Engels described him as 'the man of science', noting the 'independent discoveries' which Marx investigated in 'very many fields', 'even in that of mathematics' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 162). For Marx, science 'was a historically dynamic, revolutionary force' and Engels noted the joy 'with which [Marx] welcomed a new discovery in some theoretical science whose practical application perhaps it was as yet quite impossible to envisage' (1970: 163). In that regard, the emerging field of linguistic science held particular interest for the pair. Coincidentally, the year of Marx's birth was also the year in which Rasmus Rask published the data on which 'Grimm's Law' was based (Harris and Taylor, 1989: 169-170). As Lepschy (1985: 203), amongst other scholars, notes: 'Marx and Engels were interested both in the traditional questions of "philosophy of language"' as well as (in Engels' words) 'the "tremendous and successful development of the historical science of language which took place during the last sixty years"'. Alpatov (2000: 175) also notes that 'unlike most other Marxist theorists, Engels did turn his attention to linguistics. He even wrote a specialist work on the history of the German language, *The Frankish Dialect*, a 'striking work' (Lepschy, 1985: 203) which 'can be considered to be a forerunner of the methods of linguistic geography, and is still highly valued by leading specialists in Germanic philology' (Lepschy, 1985: 203).

As Samuelian (1981) notes, Marx and Engels also drew on existing Indo-European scholarship for insights into the history and inter-relation between communities and peoples. The historical and comparative linguistic perspectives and methodologies of the time offered a quite new way of glimpsing into the socio-historical development and interconnectedness of past and present human communities, their provenance, their technology, their social relations and identities, both confirming and amplifying Marx's overall perspective on the historicity of sociality and the driving forces of social development. For that reason, the study of language, for Marx and Engels, cast a broader shadow on historical science more generally, as well as the conceptions and methods of historical analysis, thereby setting up productive relations between linguistic study and other areas of knowledge and discovery. In that context it is worth recalling Engels' pointed criticism of Dühring with regard to language education:

'If Herr Dühring strikes out of his curriculum all modern historical grammar, there is nothing left for his language studies but the old-fashioned technical grammar, cut to the old classical philological pattern, with all its casuistry and arbitrariness, based on the lack of any historical basis. His hatred of the old philology makes him elevate the very worst product of the old philology to "the central point of the really educative study of language". It is clear that we have before us a linguist who has never heard a word of the tremendous and successful development of the historical science of language which took place during the last sixty years, and who therefore seeks "the

eminently modern educative elements” of linguistics, not in Bopp, Grimm and Diez, but in Heyse and Becker of blessed memory’.<sup>8</sup>

Little could Engels suspect that ‘the old-fashioned technical grammar with all its casuistry and arbitrariness’ would be accorded such a fundamental status, for an understanding of ‘mind’ as much as language, in the development of linguistics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *2.5 Human evolution and language origins*

The role of language in the origins and development of human sociality was a key theme for Marx and Engels. Engels in particular ‘continually discusses the development of languages in the transition from primitive to class society’ (Alpatov, (2000: 175) although such correlations between linguistic level or type and specific socio-historical ‘stages’ are compromised by an ethnocentric linguistic evolutionism, already noted, which finds no favour today. On the other hand, Engels also penned one of the most influential contributions to linguistic research in the Marxian canon in the shape of the account of language origins ‘in connection with work and social interaction’ (Alpatov, 2000: 175) in his famous short work, ‘The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man’ (Engels, 1936: 170-183). As other scholars have noted (Alpatov, 2000; Brandist, 2015), such a view had already been advanced by Ludwig Noiré in 1877, though the philosophical assumptions of Noiré and Engels are quite different, with Engels’ account an apt illustration of the interactional view of human sociality so central to Marx’s approach.

Engels’ view of the role of spoken language in the labour process continues to attract interest and productive engagement for what in the end we may take as its remarkable prescience (e.g., Beaken 2010; Wolfson, 1982; Rees, ed, 1994), despite flaws and limitations due in part at least to the state of scholarship at the time. Indeed, the proposition that language is an essential communicational ingredient of the most fundamental human life activity – ‘labour in its distinctively human form’ (Marx, 1976) – was virtually axiomatic for Marx and Engels, given their new way of looking at human history. Where else could the power to communicate come from? Whatever the weaknesses of fact or argument, Engels had therefore put his finger squarely on the core of the problem from the Marxist standpoint: since human sociality is essentially co-operative then linguistic communication both presupposed and furthered co-operation in productive activity: ‘the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual’ (Marx and Engels, 1970: 68). And so, through this process, these people-in-the-making ‘arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other’ (Marx and Engels. 1970: 68).

Looking back, however, perhaps the most surprising thing is how little was done in the Marxist tradition specifically to put flesh on Engels’s bare bones account (though for later attempts see Wolfson, 1982; Beaken, 2012). What exactly was Engels saying about language? What did these people-in-the-making ‘have to say to each

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<sup>8</sup> From Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch27.htm>.

other'? Did Engels just mean that they had something to talk about round the campfire after a hard day at the flint face (cf Everett, 2012)? Engels's speculative story was largely taken quite uncritically in Marxist circles as an incontrovertible explanation of the distant *origins* of language rather than as a proposition about the *role of language in cooperative practice* to be investigated *empirically* in contemporary social contexts, whether in working environments or, perhaps most obviously, in the beginnings of co-operative life in childhood. Overall, then, Engels' outlook did not inspire concrete study of the ways in which co-operative activity was linguistically and communicationally organized, enabled and creatively transformed.

We have had to wait a long time in fact for close studies of the linguistic and communicational organization of working practices from an interactional perspective within contemporary 'Activity Theory' (Engeström, 1990) and 'ethnomethodology' and 'ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis' (Drew and Heritage, 1992; Garfinkel, 2017). Studies within the Activity Theory framework, however, have been criticised for their somewhat problematic relationship to Marxist principle and methodology (e.g., Jones and Collins, 2016) while the work in Conversation Analysis has largely proceeded pretty much independently of the main 'torrents' of Marxist-influenced work on language. And so despite their powerful insights into the complexities of linguistic and communicational organization of local domains of social practice, such explorations run the risk of painting a fragmented picture of the social process overall and, more particularly, of obscuring the fundamental (inter-) dependence of such local practices within and on specifically capitalist production (Jones, 2009; 2018a).

Meanwhile, without direct knowledge of or connection to Engels (although see Beaken, 2010), the link between language and communication and co-operative social activity has become a fundamental assumption and research interest across the human sciences (Enfield and Levinson, 2006; Tomasello, 2008, 2009). However, from the Marxian standpoint, there are fundamental problems in Tomasello's assumptions and claims, particularly as regards the role of a 'species-specific' adaptation for intentionality or 'mind-reading' in his explanation (Tomasello, 2008).

## 2.6 Communication

The whole subject of communication is of critical importance to Marx's thinking as has been convincingly shown by a number of scholars (e.g., Matterlart, 1996; Artz et al, 2006; Fuchs, 2010) in their focus on Marx's analyses of the history and development of the means of communication and the forms of communicational organization of capitalist production. Furthermore, Fuchs argues strongly for a proper appreciation of Marx's understanding of the emerging role of the media as part of the development of capitalist infrastructure production and at the same time as spheres of political and ideological activity:

'Marx should be considered as the founding father of critical media and communication studies and that his works can be applied today to explain phenomena as for example global communication, knowledge labor, media and globalization, media and social struggles, alternative media, media capital accumulation, media monopolies and media capital concentration, the dialectics of information, or media and war' (Fuchs, 2010: 34)

Though recent surveys of Marx-related publications in the field of communication and communication theory (e.g., Erdogan, 2012; Kayihan, 2018) paint a rather modest picture of the extent of Marx's influence and interest, they nonetheless show a continuing presence of explicit Marxian commitment and engagement amongst communication specialists, with a number of scholars producing work of significant and lasting value in that area (e.g., Matterlart, 1996; Mattelart and Sieglau, 1983; Castells, 2013). Mattelart has also drawn attention to the fundamental importance for the study of communication of Marx's concept of *Verkehr*, as he explains:

'The German term *Verkehr*, which at the end of the nineteenth century would be used by the strategists of the Kaiser's empire as a synonym for what the French called "communication(s)", was used by Marx either in the larger sense of the word "commerce", or in the sense of "social relations" (as in *Verkehrsform* and *Verkehrshaltnisse*, which will become in the Marxian opus the "relations of production", or *Produktionshaltnesse*). Thus, if one is bent on finding in Marx the traces of the term "communication" in its current meaning, one would have to include all the forms of relations of work, exchange, property, consciousness, as well as relationships among individuals, groups, nations, and states' (Mattelart, 1996: 101, my emphasis).

Marxian 'Verkehr', one might say, was and remains no respecter of contemporary or subsequent disciplinary boundaries. In that light, there may well be much more in Marx of relevance to communication theory, or semiology, than has been generally assumed. In fact, one crucial piece of the Marxist jigsaw has been generally overlooked by Marxist and non-Marxist scholars alike, namely Marx's analysis of *Verkehr* in the shape of the symbolic processes, practices and products through which *economic* activity is itself organized and conducted. '[E]xchange value as such', as Marx put it, can of course only exist symbolically' (Marx, 1973: 154). In *Capital*, in Ilyenkov's words, 'the dialectic of the transformation of a thing into a symbol, and of a symbol into a token, is [...] traced [...] on the example of the money form of value' (1977b: 273). Central to Marx's analysis, then, is the *symbolic* nature – itself a process and product of *Verkehr* - of the *economic* forms peculiar to bourgeois society, specifically *value* and the intensifying *forms of value* in the shape of money, capital, etc. (Jones, 2000, 2011). That Marx offers us a picture of economic activity itself as communicationally or semiologically organized gives us food for critical thought in relation to those scholars in the Marxist tradition who have used economic, specifically market, metaphors in order to understand language and communication, notably Rossi-Landi (1974, 1983; Bianchi, 2015) and Bourdieu (1991).<sup>9</sup> The point is also of key political significance given the post-modernist attempt to remove the primacy of the economic and, with it, social class from social and political theory (Ives, 2005, and see below).

While there is, therefore, no explicit *theory* of language (or communication) in Marx (or Engels), the pair demonstrated at least in outline how an essentially 'logoid' tradition of linguistic thinking could be adapted and remodelled for settling accounts with previous philosophical, historical and scientific perspectives as well as for pushing the boundaries of linguistic enquiry towards an interactional/transactional

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<sup>9</sup> For an alternative take on the relationship between economics and semiology, see Baudrillard (1981).

conception of language and communication. In the main, however, questions of language were largely taken on through the more 'practical' problems and tasks of political and professional life as well as in everyday living: finding a new language in which to accurately formulate the decisive conceptual or theoretical underpinnings of communism and a new language of politics to address socialist colleagues and working people; journalistic activity for a range of international publications; commentaries on literary works and political tracts; translations of foreign works and commentaries on the problems and issues in translations of their own work (cf Ives, 2004 for a discussion of the translation issue in Gramsci and Benjamin); the assimilation of writings on politics and economics of different historical periods or nations and communities in a range of languages (including Russian). How else could theory 'get a hold of' working people and 'become a material force'<sup>10</sup> for revolutionary transformation other than through this prodigious, creative linguistic and communicational labour through which collective agency becomes consciously organized and mobilised in struggle?

2018 also marks 120 years since the premature death of Eleanor ('Tussy') Marx (1855-1898), the youngest daughter of Karl and Jenny (Holmes, 2014). Tussy was one of the foremost exponents of an all-round Marxist communicational art. Her daily workload combined theoretical analysis and exposition (including her revolutionary treatise on the 'women question'), trade union and political leadership and organization, mobilization against anti-semitism, agitation, public oratory and literary engagement, translation, interpreting and language learning, not forgetting her work on the *Oxford New English Dictionary* (Holmes, 2014: 163)! Her achievements are eloquent testimony to the power of Marx's thinking, extended, challenged, critiqued and 'vernacularized' in building the international labour and socialist movement. In her, through the literary and oral culture she helped to create, the interconnected battles for trade union and proletarian political organization and for race and gender equality found their single, and singular, voice.

### *3. Language and communication research in the shadow of Marx*

Opinion is divided on the scope, value, significance and implications of the explicit treatment of language in the writings of Marx and Engels. There are those, including Voloshinov (1973) for whom 'what we can learn about language and linguistics from Marx and Engels is not very much' (Lepschy, 1985: 204; and cf Alpatov, 2000) while many others have found more, sometimes much more, to go on, sometimes to the extent of extrapolating the basic principles for a Marxist approach to language or even a 'Marxist linguistics' (Lepschy, 1985; Alpatov, 2000; Brandist, 2005, 2015; Samuelian, 1981; Helsloot, 2010). An early attempt to extend a generally Marxist eye to historical semantics was published in 1984 by 'the first Marxist linguist' (Samuelian, 1981: 87), Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue (Lafargue, 1975; Jones, 2001). Other notable contributions to specifically Marxist linguistics down the years include Kudrjavsky in 1913 (Alpatov, 2000), Voloshinov (1973), Polivanov (Alpatov, 2000; Brandist, 2015), Tran Duc Thao (1973), Rossi-Landi (1974, 1983), Habermas (1979), Halliday (2015) (Lecerclé (2016), Pecheux (Helsloot, 2010), McNally (2001).

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<sup>10</sup> Marx, from 'The Introduction to Contribution To The Critique Of Hegel's Philosophy Of Right', (1843) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df-jahrbucher/law-abs.htm>.

### 3.1 *The Russian Revolution*

Without doubt, some of the most important and far-reaching contributions to Marxist thinking about language are intimately connected to that singular event of world-historical significance, the Russian Revolution of October 1917 (Samuelian, 1981; Phillips, 1986; Seifrid, 2005; Brandist, 2015; Brandist and Chown, 2011; Sériot and Friedrich, 2008).<sup>11</sup> As Samuelian (1981: 1) rightly comments: ‘Linguistics has never been pursued on a grander scale, with as many practical demands, as much political and cultural significance or as broad a range of languages and theoretical problems as in the Soviet Union’.

To drastically oversimplify, we might identify three tumultuous torrents of original linguistic thinking that emerged in productive though complex and problematic relationship with the political, cultural and intellectual landscape of post-Revolutionary Soviet society. One such torrent flows from the work of the linguists and literary theorists of the ‘Bakhtin Circle’, notably Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin himself; the second stems from the collective effort of Lev Vygotsky and his collaborators (notably Alexander Luria) to create a Marxist science of human psychology based on cultural principles; and a third gushes, somewhat belatedly, from the writings of linguist and communist leader Antonio Gramsci. The voluminous primary texts of each of these powerful – and still flowing – intellectual currents have generated their own formidable literature of exegesis, analysis, interpretation, development, application, and critique. Each of these streams also navigates in its own way the major transition from the overwhelming historical-comparative linguistic focus of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century study of language structure and use. Each has brought inestimable insights which move us well beyond the limited theorising of language in the work of Marx and Engels. Here I limit myself to a few observations on that theme.

We might argue that the fundamental importance of the first current is in its taking ‘the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances’ as the ‘actual reality of language-speech’ (Voloshinov, 1973: 94). In setting out this position Voloshinov’s book still reads like a thunderbolt of critical insight opening up a whole world of new perspectives and methods for understanding the nature of linguistic communication and its shaping by, and role in, conflictual social processes. Voloshinov demonstrates how only a methodology built around the ‘concrete utterance’ would allow language theory to escape the pull of a reified conception of linguistic communication – ‘abstract objectivism’ Saussurean style – a conception that effectively shaped the main lines of orthodox ‘synchronic’ linguistic theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The key to Voloshinov’s advance was the recognition of the interdependence between (conceptions of) language and (conceptions of) sociality. As Crowley (1990: 44) put it: ‘For Saussure it is the case that both language and society are aggregations of sameness; to use Marx’s metaphor, society for Saussure is like a sack of potatoes in which all the potatoes are the same size and shape’. For Voloshinov, on the other hand, the *social* nature of language was not to be found in an abstraction common to all speaker-hearers but in *the linguistic interaction between particular individuals in a concrete context*.

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<sup>11</sup> For an assembled selection of Lenin’s statements on language, see Lenin (1983).

In Vygotsky's case we have a pioneering attempt to place language at the foundation of a social theory of mind in the shape of an approach to children's psychological developmental approach informed by key Marxian assumptions and principles (e.g., Vygotsky, 1987; Joravsky, 1989; Newman and Holzman, 1993). The enduring value of Vygotsky's 'cultural' approach lay in its attempt to understand the role of linguistic *interaction*, and specifically the dynamics of verbal meaning, in the development of the thinking and conscious action of the child. The value and significance of Vygotsky's enormously influential work and legacy has become more controversial of late with criticism in some quarters of the soundness of Vygotsky's linguistic assumptions and relationship to historical materialism (for contrasting views see Stetsenko, 2016; Yasnitsky and van der Veer, 2016; Ratner and Silva, 2017; Jones, 2019).

Gramsci's innovations in linguistic thinking perhaps sit most clearly within the extending line of Marxist scholarship and political practice. A significant marker of Gramsci's strength and originality as a thinker was his critique of the mechanistic and reductionist tendencies within the Marxism of the Third International (Brandist, 2015) and his attempt to examine seriously problems of language theory and use in relation to cultural policy and political strategy and organization (Ives, 2004; Brandist, 2015). Indeed, Ives 'locate[s] in Gramsci's writings the tenets of a historical materialist approach to language and a linguistically concerned theory of politics' (2004: 3). For Gramsci, Ives argues 'language is continually involved in human production and is also a product of human activity itself', Gramsci therefore 'has no concept of a meta-language or a universal grammar of all languages' (2004: 12). Particularly striking, and prescient in terms of current tendencies in linguistic research, are his rejection of the conception of language as representation (or reflection), his rejection in principle of a distinction between the linguistic and the non linguistic, and his attempt to develop a notion of 'translation', inspired by passages in Marx, as a tool for understanding political organization and strategy in different social contexts (Ives, 2004, Chapter 3). On a lighter note, Gramsci's discussion of the grammar of 'The round table is square' makes interesting reading in relation to Chomsky's infamous grammatical example, 'colourless green ideas sleep furiously' (Ives, 2004: 40ff).

While these three torrents of linguistic thinking might count as testimony enough of the intellectual impact of the Russian Revolution, more recent research, notably the exploration by Brandist and colleagues (Brandist and Chown, 2011) of the development of Soviet sociolinguistics, has begun to bring to light the fuller extent and significance of the work on language undertaken in the USSR in the inter-war period. In Brandist's words (2011: 2):

'One of the main findings of the project has been the multi-dimensional character of the linguistic innovations in the USSR between the two World Wars, which was conditioned by political changes, the rise of new paradigms in linguistics proper, the dynamics of the institutional locus of research, patterns of appropriations of philosophical ideas from abroad and the diverse character of the ethnic composition of the USSR. Not only were these factors always present, but relations within and between each of them were constantly shifting according to the huge socio-political changes that characterized that period'.

Furthermore, Brandist (2011: 1) explains that 'disciplinary boundaries themselves were still in the process of formation and so scholarship about language took place in a wide variety of disciplinary contexts, including what would now be covered by psychology, ethnology, sociology, literary studies and even disability studies and archeology'.

However, Brandist also comments (2011: 1):

'While there can be little doubt that the period between the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the outbreak of World War Two saw an extraordinary upsurge in innovative approaches to language in Russia and then the USSR, only isolated examples have reached an Anglophone audience beyond a relatively narrow circle of Slavists. This is especially regrettable since many of the questions that now occupy theorists of language and society were those with which early Soviet linguists grappled, and one can still learn a considerable amount, both positive and negative, from this experience'.

### *3.2 Marxism in linguistics?*

As noted earlier, there have been at various times, though most intensely in the early Soviet period, attempts not merely to consider linguistic methods and principles in Marxist light but to construct a 'Marxist linguistics' (Lepschy, 1985; Alpatov, 2000; Samuelian, 1981; Houdebine, 1977; Helsloot, 2010; Brandist, 2015). In terms of the intellectual plausibility of such an enterprise, the most sceptical voice belongs perhaps to Alpatov (2000) who has identified a number of aspects to the problem of which two are especially relevant here:

'The Marxist approach to the study of society does remain influential in the study of the problem of "language and society", but in the study of the inner structure of language, of human linguistic mechanisms, or in constructing models of the activity of speaker and listener, there can be no separate Marxist scholarship: all attempts to construct it have failed to yield convincing results. These dimensions, like the concerns of the natural sciences, are neutral in relation to Marxism, and to other comparable doctrines' (2000: 192-193).

A similar view on Marxism's relation to research on the 'inner structure of language' was also advanced by the Chomskyan linguist, F J Newmeyer (1986). The plausibility of this sceptical assessment clearly hangs on our willingness to accept that linguistic investigation is a natural scientific enterprise. If this worked for a Newmeyer, an advocate of innate linguistic universals, it could hardly work for a Voloshinov, a Vygotsky or a Gramsci.

At the opposite extreme, a large and disparate contingent of scholars have viewed language as the achilles heel of what they took to be Marxist orthodoxy. The 'fix' has generally consisted of re-working Marxist theory with imported intellectual systems, for instance Freudian psychoanalytic methods (Frankfurt School 'critical theory'), Searlean 'speech acts' (Habermas) or Saussurean (structuralist) perspectives on the linguistic sign (suitably expanded or modified, as in Barthes, Althusser, Lacan, and the Derrida). There is no doubt that this work has done much to identify and raise a set of important problems of obvious relevance to the Marxist tradition in relation to



language, ideology, consciousness, subjectivity and the relationship between the cultural and the political. 'Blends' of Marxian principles, Bakhtinian dialogism and contextualism, feminism and Lacanian psychoanalysis have also afforded rich insights into the linguistic and cognitive processes and practices through which our everyday experience is structured and gender identities constructed (e.g., Henriques et al., 1984; Walkerdine, 1988; Kristeva, 1969, 1986).

At the same time, however, many Marxist scholars have challenged the soundness of the theoretical presuppositions of such imported language theories and have raised serious questions about the overall implications for social life, and political transformation in particular, which linguistic or discourse-based theories bring (Anderson, 1983; Kellner, 1989; Norris, 1990; Collins, 1999, 2000; Eagleton, 2004; Ives, 2004). Collins (1999: 6) shows 'the potential methodological value of a critical reflection on linguistic processes to those who adhere to a historical materialist perspective' but 'without embracing the "linguistic turn"'. Ives is particularly critical of scholars, including Perry Anderson, Ellen Meiskins Wood, Habermas, and Bourdieu who have failed to 'prot[ect] Marxism against the deluge of so-called postmodernism' (2004: 3). Brandist (2011: 1) has also objected to the stereotypes of supposedly 'Marxist' theorising on language that have been used to justify the appeal to other theoretical systems:

'As the work of what have become known as the Bakhtin and Vygotskii Circles began to appear in translations in the late 1960s, structuralist and then post-structuralist approaches to language became dominant in Western scholarship in the humanities. This movement was led by scholars who often claimed to be giving due consideration for the first time, and who, polemically, presented previous approaches in caricatured form, as outdated and naïve theorizing that either unwittingly or willingly made common cause with Stalinist totalitarianism'.

#### 4. *The materialist conception of history and the base-superstructure distinction*

In celebrating the wealth of positive and productive contributions to the 'language question' within the broader Marxian tradition, it is also important to understand how language succumbed to what became one of the central problems of 'Marxism', namely the relationship between 'economic base' and 'ideological superstructure'. (Smith, 1996, Ollman). The problem became particularly acute in the Russian Revolutionary movement, as Brandist (2011: 3) has explained: 'The dominant form of sociology that developed in postrevolutionary Russia, under the leadership of Nikolai Bukharin, could only be regarded as fully Marxist with considerable reservations'....Bukharin's (1926) Marxist textbook 'presented a brand of positivist Marxism in which technology exerted a determining influence on social development and language was, for the first time in "Marxist" theory, assigned to the ideological superstructure that arises on the economic base' (2011: 3). Despite some criticism (eg Gramsci) 'this formulation was widely accepted by Soviet linguists as the model of Marxism to which their work needed to correspond' (2011: 3) and was institutionalized in the various projects of 'Marxist linguistics', notably in the infamous system developed by N I Marr which came to dominate linguistic research in the USSR until the 1950s. (And if the institutional and intellectual domination of Marrism – and with it the view of language as superstructural - was eventually terminated with

Stalin's direct intervention in linguistics in 1950, this was not a cue for the revival of creative Marxist work in language).<sup>12</sup>

Two complementary consequences followed from this formulation: the impoverishment of language by its expulsion from the sphere of economic (labour) activity, and the impoverishment of labour itself by the removal of its linguistic, communicational or symbolic qualities. The result was a grotesque mechanistic model of the social dynamic quite alien to the founders of Marxism with a correspondingly simplistic version of economic (and class) reductionism in politics and culture.

The mechanistic model could not but wreak havoc with the prospect of a linguistic theory in the spirit of Marx. Contrary to Helsloot's claim that '[i]n early Marxism, language is usually related to the ideological superstructure' (Helsloot, 2010: 233), for Marx, the 'economic base' was 'labour in its distinctively human form' – that is, a form of productive activity which was in itself fully conscious and socially orchestrated through language and other communicational means. Was this not, after all, the central point of Engels's origins account? At issue in the Marxian conception of 'superstructure', therefore, was not some ontological/epistemological separation of *language per se* (or 'ideal reflection') from labour or the economy (or 'material reality'), but the empirical question of the concrete forms of interdependence between different (and all quite *real*) *spheres of conscious activity* through whose overall relational dynamic capitalist production was (precariously and transiently) organized (and contested). More to the point, the analytical methodology of Marx and Engels allowed the blinding insight that the *all sided interaction of diverse linguistically/communicationally organized activities within the social totality* could only be accounted for in fact by *an ineradicable 'asymmetry' in the relation of dependence between the capitalist labour process on the one hand and all other spheres of activity*, however much these latter spheres appeared to be (and flattered themselves in being) absolutely independent or even primary. As Marx put it:

Every child knows a nation which ceased to work, I will not say for a year, but even for a few weeks, would perish. Every child knows, too, that the masses of products corresponding to the different needs required different and quantitatively determined masses of the total labor of society' (Marx and Engels, 1983: 148).

In the language of one contemporary approach to communication (Harris, 1996), the complex division of labour within society as a whole can best be understood and closely studied in terms of the interactionally accomplished *integration of activities* (both within and between different sectors or spheres) in accordance with pragmatic 'priorities of presupposition' i.e. in terms of *what* (factually, empirically) *presupposes what* and exactly *how* such activities and sectors fit (are *made to fit*) together in the production of particular outcomes or results (Harris, 1996: 43).<sup>13</sup> And since all activities of whatever kind in capitalist societies are all connected, however indirectly,

<sup>12</sup> For accounts of, and different perspective on, Marxism and Stalin's intervention, see Alpatov, (2000), Brandist (2015), Lepschy 1985), Samuelian (1981).

<sup>13</sup> Harris (1996: 43): 'from an integrational point of view perhaps the most useful way of considering their interrelationships is to examine what they presuppose. For in this way attention is drawn to the requirements, both overt and covert, which they impose on their participants and to the ways in which their operation is dependent on the situation obtaining'.

they cannot cut loose (except in the imagination) from *the one process they all presuppose* - the exploitation of one class by another in the production of surplus value. In this way, the class struggle at the heart of the capitalist production process '*communicates itself*' through the whole of society: *class exploitation is communicationaly organized*. Far from 'essentializing' social class in accordance with an economic reductionism or some dogmatic philosophical principle of 'representation' - the criticism levelled at Marxist politics by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), (cf Ives, 2005; Brandist, 2015) – the Marxian perspective is based on an empirical analysis of the interactional dynamic (or 'communicational logic') of *interconnectedness* within a social system in which capital (rather than human needs) is in the driving seat. Marx's position is based on *the connections between people* that constitute the motor of capitalist exploitation and, at the same time, on the way that people *must* connect – *must unite* – to free the incalculable power and potential of *humanly organized production* from the toxic confines of production for private gain. To reject class politics for its 'essentialising' tendencies, seeing class 'as a discursive construct' (Brandist, 2015: 5) is in effect, therefore, to deny the capitalist character of present day society.

The detailed development of a linguistic and communicational perspective which can do justice to the Marxian standpoint, however, requires us to move well beyond the 'logoid' tradition with its emphasis on rationality as well the crude 'materialist' version of this tradition in which language 'reflects' or 'represents' objectively existing 'reality'. The major failing of this 'representational' perspective, is its 'willingness ...to abstract from the flux of purposeful activity of which speech is part, and concentrate attention solely upon the connexions between, on the one hand, words, and on the other, the things or ideas or events or states of affairs which words supposedly stand for' (Harris, 1980: 87). To restore language to 'the flux of purposeful activity', then, means to begin to approach it not as a disembodied 'system of signs', or as a realm of ideological 'reflection' or 'refraction' of (social) 'reality, or as a coding system for the transmission of information between individuals whose relations and practices have already been formed. Taking our lead from Marx, by way of the productive development of Marx's perspective in Voloshinov, Vygotsky and Gramsci, we could perhaps say that *linguaging* belongs to, or *is*, *Verkehr*, i.e it is itself a form of *socially organized 'labour'*, of *active interpersonal 'relating' or 'transacting'* between concrete individuals in concrete circumstances through which 'the ensemble of social relations' is produced and reproduced from moment to moment.

Furthermore, it would be absurd to think that the 'reciprocal action' through which 'society in whatever form' was produced somehow stopped short at the boundary of actual everyday interactions at the interpersonal level. If reification of language (or any other human power) is repudiated at the 'big picture', 'macro' social scale it cannot be legitimate to apply a reifying or decontextualizing methodology at the 'micro' level of local relationships, of personal and collective identity. All such inter-individual communicational transactions are, as we tend to say nowadays, 'embodied' – that is, they are the creative work of particular flesh-and-blood people in particular circumstances which they cannot freely choose. It cannot make sense, then, as Voloshinov noted, to see the concrete linguistic interactions of individuals as mere projections, instantiations or realizations of an abstract, supra-individual linguistic 'system'. For the same reason, if we accept, as a matter of principle, that linguaging is socially organized, contextualized interactional/transactional activity,

then such a general principle cannot stop short at the so-called 'inner structure of language' (Alpatov, 2000). We must instead, in fact, submit the metalinguistic framework which licenses such a construct to ruthless criticism through the empirical investigation of the interactional generation of *all* aspects of language meaning and form (see, for example, Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson eds, 1996). Indeed, Voloshinov's proposed methodological programme for his Marxist philosophy of language included 'a reexamination ... of language forms in their usual linguistic presentation' (1973: 94-96), a task which he began with his work on indirect speech but had no opportunity to take further.

### 5. *Summing up*

On the basis of our brief review, one might easily conclude that it would be actually be very difficult today to find any current of thinking about language and communication which has *not* been influenced directly or indirectly, in one way or another, by Marx's views – in attempting to develop the Marxist tradition, in responding critically though positively to that tradition, or in rejecting the Marxian legacy altogether. In that sense, Marxist thought has become one of the most important foundations and constituents of the contemporary language sciences.

The distinctive challenge that Marxism has always posed for linguistic research is to see languaging as a communicational-interactive power of social individuals, one that is firmly situated in the concrete spatial and temporal dynamics of the 'material world' of human culture and, for that very reason, fundamental to the development, maintenance and transformation of social relations, identities and practices more widely. The challenge presents itself, methodologically speaking, in looking at language use in a way which captures the unique qualities of linguistic acts, or communicational episodes more generally, not in terms of classification by abstract or reified categories allegedly common to all, but in terms of *how* precisely these acts and episodes relate and connect the people involved, directly and indirectly, to others, and *how* the whole social fabric is therefore continuously woven and unwoven in and through these concrete, and very personal, transactions.

As Harris remarked in his critical account of the *social theory* implicit in Saussure's *linguistic* model: 'The basic questions the *Cours* deals with are questions which will arise wherever a discipline is concerned with elucidating the mechanisms by which the individual and the collectivity are mysteriously united in social interaction' (1987: 236). In looking at language in Marx in critical light, therefore, what is fundamentally at stake is precisely our understanding of and investment in these mysterious 'mechanisms' by which we are all, in one way or another, bound together and through which, consequently, we are bound to work out the future we want for ourselves. Ultimately, then, if the challenge may not be to develop a 'Marxist theory of language' per se, it is certainly to develop and refine a critical Marxist perspective on linguistic theory and methodology, to fully grasp the suffocating ideological limitations and socio-practical implications of reified perspectives on language, to open up new ways to explore and critique the linguistic and communicational organization of everyday life and society as a whole, and, most importantly, to better appreciate the ways we may develop our linguistic and communicational powers as a force for progressive social change.

And so, finally, onto the contents of this Special Issue.

### 6. *Special Issue papers*

In their different ways, and from different perspectives, the papers which follow explore the significant issues which are at stake when we assess the value of Marx's work not simply for an understanding of language and communication but also for an appreciation of the relevance of an engagement with language for the social and political challenges of the day. Some papers aim to survey broad currents or trends of thought in the language sciences or to focus more narrowly on particular topics or the work of particular scholars. However, all papers seek to demonstrate how such a critical engagement with Marx can contribute productively both to our understanding of Marx and Marxist theory as well as to research in the language sciences.

*David Block* ('What would Karl say? The entrepreneur as ideal (and cool) citizen in 21st century societies') considers the contemporary phenomenon of the celebrity entrepreneur in relation to Marx's view of the individual capitalist as 'mere cog' in the wheel of capitalist production. Block examines how Spanish businessman Josef Ajram, deploys modern media tools for his 'discursive self-construction' as a 'nonconformist, rebellious and cool' role model, demonstrating, Block argues, 'the inherent capacity of capitalism to co-opt and assimilate what might otherwise be considered symbolic behaviour threatening to its survival'.

*Alessandro Carlucci* ('Marxism, Early Soviet Sociolinguistics, and Gramsci's Linguistic Ideas') offers a thorough re-appraisal of Gramsci's linguistic ideas and their relation to the Marxist tradition. Carlucci argues that it is mistaken to view Gramsci's linguistics as separate from his commitment to Marxist principles and analyses the original contribution, much ahead of its time, that Gramsci made to both linguistic theory and Marxism in his treatment of the consequences of contact between different languages, as well as between varieties of the same language, as dependent on social stratification and hierarchies of prestige and power.

*Tony Crowley* ('Marx, Vološinov, Williams: language, history, practice') offers an account of the development of Marxist thinking on language, concentrating in particular on the contribution that Raymond Williams made in the wake of Vološinov's earlier breakthrough. Crowley argues that Williams built on the understanding of the role of language 'as a creative, practical social force, in the everyday forging of ideological and hegemonic structures of power' with his own emphasis on language 'as a potential means of resistance to those power structures'.

*Jacopo D'Alonzo* ('Tran-Duc-Thao and the Language of Real Life') provides a thorough critical and constructive reading of the linguistic and communicational perspectives of the Vietnamese Marxist philosopher Trần Đức Thảo. In particular, D'Alonzo examines Thảo's work on language origins and his attempt to develop a 'semiology of real life' inspired by Marx and Engels' notion of 'the language of real life' in *The German Ideology*.

*Marnie Holborow* ('Language, commodification and labour: the relevance of Marx') provides a detailed critical examination of the strengths and limitations of the concept

of language as a commodity with specific reference to work situations. Holborow, bringing to bear all the analytical power and subtlety of Marx's analysis of the commodity, argues that contemporary attempts to reduce language to commodity status leave out the fundamental dimension of workers' creative resistance to the alienating processes of capitalist production and thereby run the risk of providing ideological support for current neo-liberal narratives.

*K D Kang* ('Language and Ideology: Althusser's Theory of Ideology') has a fresh look at Louis Althusser's conception of the relationship between language and ideology, focussing in particular on a critical examination of Althusser's principle of 'interpellation.' Kang argues that Althusser's linguistic approach to ideology, though departing quite radically from Marx, contributes something of significance in the shape of 'a broader concept of materiality'.

*Tae-Young Kim* ('A Political Economic Analysis of Commodified English in South Korean Neoliberal Labor Markets') provides a detailed analysis of the role of English Language tests and training on the South Korean job market. Kim draws on Marxian economic categories to provide insights into the process of 'commodification' of English and its consequent impact on the careers and quality of life of job seekers, with some recommendations for how the wasteful contradictions of the 'linguistic market' could be resolved.

*Fang Li and David Kellogg* ('A Science for Verbal Art: Elizabeth Gaskell's Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy') deploy the 'Marxist-inspired language science' of the late Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan to explore the industrial novels of 19<sup>th</sup> century English writer, Elizabeth Gaskell and their influence on the novel genre. The authors focus on the linguistic qualities of Gaskell's treatment of political economy and class conflict through a detailed comparison of invented expository dialogues by Marx with Gaskell's literary dialogue.

*Michael Pace-Sigge* ('How homo economicus is reflected in fiction: a corpus linguistic analysis of literary production in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalist societies') deploys the methods of corpus linguistic analysis in an innovative exploration of ideology and ideological change. Pace-Sigge attempts to investigate the possible degree of influence of Marx's economic and political discourse (in English translation) on the lexical choices of the writers of a range of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century works of fiction. The results may surprise you!

*Mikołaj Ratajczak* ('Language and value: the philosophy of language in the post-Operaist critique of contemporary capitalism') offers a detailed critical examination of the 'post-Operaist' tradition within Italian philosophy of language. Ratajczak argues that post-Operaism seeks to progress from a 'philosophy of language' to a 'philosophy of the linguistic faculty', viewing language as 'living, immaterial labour'. Ratajczak demonstrates how this perspective relates productively to Marx's critique of political economy and explores its implications for thinking about language in the context of 'the contradictions and antagonisms of late, cognitive, financialized capitalism'.

*Andrés Saenz De Sicilia* ('Production=Signification: Towards a Semiotic Materialism') sets out to develop a 'semiotic materialism' via a critical overview of the 'novel

synthesis of Marx with the work of Jakobson and Hjelmslev' in the work of the Mexican-Ecuadoran philosopher Bolívar Echeverría. Saenz de Sicilia argues that Echeverría's fundamental principle of the identify of social production/consumption and signification allows a productive new reading of Marx and offers new insights into human sociality more generally.

*Jeremy Sawyer and Anna Stetsenko* ('Revisiting Marx and Problematizing Vygotsky: A Transformative Approach to Language and Speech Internalization') provide a nuanced and highly sophisticated re-statement and defence of Vygotsky's account of the developmental progression from 'social speech' to 'inner speech' (via 'egocentric' or 'private' speech). While acknowledging scholarly criticism of Vygotsky's position, they seek to reaffirm its 'original Marxist orientation' through a reinterpretation of the process of internalization in the light of Stetsenko's 'Transformative Activist Stance'.

*William Simpson and John O'Regan* ('Fetishism and the Language Commodity: A Materialist Critique') wield the basic analytical concepts of Marxian political economy in contesting the widespread view of language as 'commodified', or as itself a tradeable commodity, within capitalist production. The authors carefully pick through the complex issues surrounding the place of linguistic and discursive activity in capitalist society, arguing that 'though language may appear to be a commodity, it is not one, as language itself is not a product of labour'.

*Kate Spowage* ('English and Marx's "General Intellect": The Construction of an English-speaking Élite in Rwanda') shows the relevance of Marx's concept of the 'General Intellect' for an understanding of the issue of 'global English', illustrating her position with an analysis of Rwanda's language-in-education policy. Spowage argues that Rwanda's policy, far from having social equality as its goal, represents 'a prioritisation of the requirements of transnational capital'.

*Alen Suceska* ('A Gramscian Reading of Language in Bakhtin and Voloshinov') argues that Gramsci's specifically *political* focus on language use allows a notable advance in our understanding of language over the unquestionable insights of Bakhtin and Voloshinov on linguistic stratification in relation to social division and social context. Suceska shows that Gramsci's 'politically practical push' in relation to the role of linguistic processes in a class-divided society affords 'a wider theoretical perspective which comprises what could in our view be described as a Marxist approach to language'.

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