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ФИЛОЛОГИЯ ВОСТОКА
Языки народов мира

Vasily Abaev: the Russian Antistructuralist

Vladimir Mikhailovich Alpatov

Institute of linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia,
v-alpatov@iling-ran.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4323-2832

Abstract. Some linguists did not accept the structural ideas in the 1920s–1950s. One of the serious critics of structural linguistics in the Soviet Union was Vasily I. Abaev (1900–2001). His works on general linguistics were ignored or criticized though some of Abaev's ideas were interesting. He distinguished two sides of language: "language as ideology" and "language as techniques". According to him, every "element of speech" has a "technical and empiric nucleus" and an "ideological envelope" consisting of unstable "notions, sentiments and associations". He considered structural methods as convenient if this level of language is mainly systematic (phonology), however, did not see much use in them concerning syntax and semantics.

Keywords: structuralism, critics of; Abaev, Vasily Ivanovich (1900–2001); language as ideology; language as techniques; semantics

Василий Абаев: российский антиструктуралист

Владимир Михайлович Алпатов

Институт языкознания Российской академии наук, Москва, Россия,
v-alpatov@iling-ran.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4323-2832

Аннотация. Некоторые лингвисты не принимали структурные идеи в 1920–1950-х годах. Одним из серьезных критиков структурной лингвистики в Советском Союзе был Василий Иванович Абаев (1900–2001). Его работы по общей лингвистике игнорировались или критиковались, хотя некоторые идеи Абаева были интересны. Он различал две стороны языка: «язык как идеология» и «язык как техника». По его словам, каждый «элемент речи» имеет «техническое и эмпирическое ядро» и «идеологическую оболочку», состоящую из нестабильных «представлений, настроений и ассоциаций». Он считал структурные методы удобными,

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если этот уровень языка в основном системный (фонология), однако не видел в них особого смысла в отношении синтаксиса и семантики.

Introduction

The 1920s–1950s were a period of the predominance of structural linguistics in the world. Some scholars did not accept the structuralist ideas, however, considering them mainly from the positions of the 19th cent. language studies.

Remarkably, the most unexpected critical views originate not from Western scholars but from those in the USSR and Japan (M. Tokieda). The V. Voloshinov standpoint is well known. Another outspoken critic of structural linguistics in the Soviet Union was Vasily Ivanovich Abaev (1900–2001).

Abaev was an extraordinary person. Ossetian by birth, he spoke Ossetic as his mother tongue. Later he graduated from the Vladikavkaz gymnasium and then set off for the then Petrograd (nowadays St. Petersburg) University, where he read linguistics. He lived in czarist Russia, subsequently the Soviet Union and again in the Post-Soviet Russia for little more than a century. His long life was not rich in events. Subsequently to his graduation from the University, he had a career in research in various institutes of the Russian/Soviet Academy of Sciences. Among those are the Yaphetic Institute, Institute of Language and Thought (1931–1950), and finally Institute of Linguistics (since 1950). He lived and worked in Leningrad until 1951, and then moved to Moscow. As an active scholar, he had been working for almost eighty years. He was an outstanding specialist in the Iranian languages, especially Ossetic. At the same time, he was publishing research articles on general linguistics. His foundational works on the Iranian languages and cultures enjoyed great admiration both in Russia and abroad. One has to mention here, in particular, the "Historical-Etymological Dictionary of Ossetic" (4 volumes, 1958–1989). His works on general linguistics, on the other hand, did not match them in popularity. Some of Abaev's theoretical works were simply ignored, others like the polemical article "Linguistic Modernism as Dehumanization of the Linguistic Science" (1965) provoked fast and furious criticism. Contrary to Abaev's works on Iranian languages, these works generally remained practically unknown outside of the Soviet Union. The only exception here is perhaps the Japanese scholar K. Tanaka who considered the theoretical part of Abaev's heritage to be "the best achievement of the Soviet linguistics".

The majority of scholars who can boast a long and fruitful career did not completely stick to their views expressed at the beginning but revised them and

to some extent changed. Abaev was different in this regard. He changed his views only once, which happened at the beginning of his career. Being a pupil of Nikolaj Marr (1865–1934), in the 1920s he was significantly influenced by his "New Doctrine". However, later in the 1930s he had gone away from it and became independent of his teacher's ideas, long before they became subject to Stalin's criticism. Since that time his principal ideas did not change, even remained expressed in the same words. He criticized the ideas of Marr; his article on Marr's doctrine [1] is the best publication on this subject till now. However, he also rejected both the conceptions of the Neo-Grammarians and F. de Saussure's theory.

In one of his early articles [2], he criticized them, saying that all these scholars "were afraid of difficulties" and can be identified as those who have "an unrestrained tendency towards cowardly and wingless hairsplitting".

Abaev juxtaposed them to the scholars of the first half of the 19th cent., especially to W. von Humboldt. He held in great esteem the "science and scholarship of founding fathers" because v. Humboldt and his contemporaries had enough of "courage of thought, breadth of views" and have a highly developed ability to "generalize" the phenomena. Therefore, they were not afraid to attempt to answer fundamental questions [3, p. 18]. However, Abaev admitted their "liberty with facts" and called up to combine their "courage of thought, breadth of views" with scientific strictness and support on facts [3, p. 18].

"Language as Ideology and Language as Techniques"

Abaev's outstanding article "*Language as Ideology and Language as Techniques*" was published in 1934 [4]. The ideas outlined there were subsequently developed in another article of his "*Language as Ideology and Language as Techniques Once Again*" [5]. The author identified two sides of that phenomenon, namely, "language as ideology" and language as techniques". This was not like distinguishing between the form and the meaning, since the form is always a technical phenomenon and the meaning (significance) can be both of technical and ideological nature. According to Abaev, ideology is not just an "ideology in the usual sense", however, the everyday concepts and notions or, using the definition by Voloshinov, the "everyday ideology". Abaev's expression "language as ideology" described what is nowadays called "the linguistic worldview". According to him, the dictionaries reflect the technical semantics but the "ideological semantics" is reflected in nomination, figurative meanings etc. The technical semantics connects a word with its denotation and the ideological semantics reflects the way of its nomination. The ideological semantics is closely connected with the Weltanschauung (ideology) of the corresponding social environment. Every "element of speech" (including words) has a "technical and empiric nucleus" as well as an "ideological envelope", which consists of unstable "notions, sentiments and associations" [3, p. 30].

The correlation between "nucleus" and "envelope" is not stable and subject to changes, since some elements of "envelope" can go to "nucleus". This process

Abaev called технизация "technization" (i.e., the technical aspects of the language). Thanks to this "technizaton", elements of speech can be preserved despite the ideological changes and languages are transferred from one epoch to the other one as well as between various social groups. The acme of "technization" can be described as "grammaticalization" (a process of language change by which words representing objects and actions (i.e. nouns and verbs) become grammatical markers (affixes, prepositions, etc.)), the process, which Abaev compared to the transition from the golden coins to the banknotes [3, p. 30–33].

Abaev saw in the primordial language a kind of "ideology by her own", which little by little became transformed into a technique to express various ideologies. This resulted in his suggestion to segregate the "ideology in language" (Russ.: "идеология, выраженная в самом языке") from the "ideology by language" ("Russ.: идеология, выраженная с помощью языка") [3, p. 35]. In fact, this view was not dissimilar to that by W. v. Humboldt, who distinguished between the "Weltsicht" and "Weltanschauung" (Russ.: мировидение and мировоззрение).

In these articles Abaev although did not discuss Saussure's ideas, however, he called the idea of phoneme "bright". Contrary to Voloshinov he did not reject structural analysis completely, but saw it as inadequate since it dealt with the language only "in a technical sense". According to Saussure, the language universe (fr.: langue) concerns "technique", and "notions, sentiments and associations", which is the sphere of speech (parole); to this sphere A. Séchehaye, the pupil of Saussure, relegated the process of nomination.

These ideas had been developed by Abaev for many years, however, the terminology to some extent did change. In his post-war article [6] he distinguished between the "technical semantics" ("small semantics", russ.: "техническая семантика") and "ideosemantics" ("great semantics", russ.: "идеосемантика"), the latter corresponded to the "innere Sprachform" of W. v. Humboldt. The term "technical semantics" can be translated to other languages, however, but the "ideosemantics" is hardly translatable and forms the specific character of every language.

In his early works, Abaev connected the "ideology in language" with the Ancient languages (russ.: древних языках), which could be probably some residual of Nikolai Marr' theoretical heritage. However, by 1948 he admitted that both features can be found in every language. He also highlighted the important difference between ideology in modern languages and relics of former ideologies preserved in the "technique". He insisted that these phenomena should be considered separately.

Against the dehumanization

In the 1960s Abaev continued to stick to his views although the situation in Soviet linguistics has changed. The ideas by Nikolai Marr became considered obsolete and structural linguistics became the leading trend. However,

Abaev did not stop being sceptical concerning the new methods. He did not deny them completely, however, pointed to the fact that their application had certain limits. In 1960 he wrote that language is at the same time systematic and non-systematic and "the systematic character of language is proportional to its technization".

According to Abaev, structural methods are convenient, if this level of language is mainly systematic (phonology), but they are not useful for syntax and especially for semantics, because these levels are non-systematic to a certain degree [3, p. 103].

In the same article, Abaev criticized the opposition of synchronic and diachronic linguistics as suggested by F. de Saussure. He did not deny the purely synchronic approach but considered it as the "less perfect cognition" since it is possible to perceive a language completely only within the historical approach. Such point of view was a continuation of Ivan A. Baudouin de Courtenay's (Jan Niecisław Ignacy Baudouin de Courtenay, 1845–1929) ideas.

The above-mentioned article by Abaev [7] was published at the time of the discussion on the methodological problems of linguistics in the Soviet academic journal "Voprosy yazykoznaniya"[1]. Abaev re-iterated his previous ideas, however, expressed them more succinctly. He wrote about the decline of linguistic studies, which could be traced down from the times of W. v. Humboldt and J. Grimm. He wrote that the differences between the Neo-Grammarians and scholars in structural linguistics are secondary since the two trends represent different stages of the same general process of science dehumanization. He placed this process within the general cultural context. W. v. Humboldt and other "founding fathers" of the language science are compared there with the representatives of romanticism. F. de Saussure and his school are labelled as "Modernists" which did sound negatively. The common feature of these scholars was the "elimination of a human". Various structuralist schools are criticized for the immanent approach to the object of their studies, for the subsequent separation of their studies from their main source, i.e. the homo loquens and what he (or she) thinks. Abaev compared such an approach with the contemporary European modernist literature (A. Robbe-Grillet and others). The results, which yields this comparison are similar to those gained by Voloshinov, although it is not known (at least to me) whether Abaev studied Voloshinov's works. Besides, Abayev disapproved of the trend common among the scholars in structural linguistics to paramount usage of mathematical methods in every branch of language studies. He acknowledged the use of statistical methods, however, denied the significance of mathematics as a cognition tool for understanding the essence of language.

Such ideas at that time were unpopular in the USSR since they stood in clear contradiction with the mainstream. If in the 1930s the theoretical ideas

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[1] Available at: https://vja.ruslang.ru/en/about

of Abaev were simply ignored, in the 1960s they were openly rejected by the majority of Soviet linguists. Everybody who took part in the journal discussion subjected Abaev's theory to furious criticism. One of the scholars [8] even used in the title of his polemic article highly sharp cliches, i.e. word "obscurantism" and a "mask", which in the Soviet propaganda were used to indicate an enemy. In the 1960s, however, the political climate was mild and the editorial board changed the original title («Обскурантист под маской ученого» – "An obscurantist masked as a scholar") to something neutral. Nevertheless, Abaev was accused of non-professionalism, ignorance, etc. After being in the middle of such polemics, Abaev almost exclusively worked in the field of Iranian studies and very occasionally published his views on language theory.

Of course, Abaev's views were non-flexible, neither he was able to appreciate the progressive features of structuralist studies. Moreover, occasionally he simplistically viewed the whole situation. For example, he was not able to appreciate the ideas of Noah Chomsky and wrongly considered him as a structural linguist; however, in this particular instance, he was not alone. This was a common opinion of his fellow Soviet scholars.

At the time of the acme of the Soviet structural linguistic studies, the ideas of Abaev looked very old-fashioned, not at least because he tried to continue many traditions of the scholarship of the first half of the 19th cent. and, therefore, did not accept the majority of theoretical ideas of the subsequent years. The development of scientific knowledge, however, cannot be seen as a headway, but rather as a spiral movement. Abaev pointed to some real shortcomings of the structuralist approach in linguistics; remarkably, some statements resemble the post-structural approaches of the present time.

For instance, in 1960 Abaev wrote that the success of the structuralist approach to linguistic studies was visible in phonological studies but not in the theory of syntax or semantics. The Soviet scholars in the field of linguists at that time could not agree with that, but Abaev was still right. What he did not know was that during the same years N. Chomsky created the theory of syntax outside the limits of structural methods. In particular, he insisted on the obligatory inclusion of the "speaker" and identified linguistic studies as a "special branch of cognitive psychology". By making that N. Chomsky raised fundamental problems and considered himself a continuator and intellectual heir of W. v. Humboldt.

Abaev and the New Linguistic Paradigm

Although three major books by Chomsky were translated into Russian in the decade between 1962 and 1972, the generative linguistics was not very popular in the Soviet Union and is not popular nowadays in Russia either. The leadership in generative linguistics, which used to belong to the structural linguistics was lost and subsequently passed over to different schools of func-

tional (post-structural) linguistics. The principal features of such a linguistic paradigm were outlined in the "Linguistic postulates", the article by the Russian scholar Aleksandr E. Kibrik (1939–2012) in 1983 (revised edition 1992).

Functional linguistics like the generative linguistics considers the descriptive approach to language as inadequate and searches for ways to build the explanatory linguistics, however, the search process itself is understood in a different way. Contrary to generative linguistics, semantics rather than syntax is considered there as the determining branch of linguistics. Studies in semantics did not yield satisfactory results both in the "traditional" linguistics as well as in the structural linguistics (as it was already highlighted by Abaev) and they became central only within the functional paradigm. Not only the general language features but also the specific language features are important for functional linguistics, which in its turn serves as a basis for typology development. "The domination of the so-called HOW-typology, – wrote Kibrik – is replaced by the explanatory typology, in other words, the so-called WHY-typology. The latter is designed to answer not only questions about existence of certain phenomena but also those regarding the reasons for their existence or non-existence[2] [9, p. 29].

In functional linguistics, the level of formalization is much lower in comparison to that in the generative linguistics and the usual task of building up a formal model is not considered as such by scholars who work in this field. The languages, such as Russian as well as other Slavic languages are often used there as the material or even as the base for theoretical constructions.

Unlike the generative linguistics, the functional linguistics does not limit its object and includes all phenomena connected with the processes of speech and audition in its research area. A. E. Kibrik wrote: "Something, which is considered as 'non-linguistics' at one moment becomes included in the general notion of 'linguistics'. The process of linguistic expansion can never be considered as complete. Generally, it tends to remove the *a priori* restrictions as well as justify the right of a researcher to explore such linguistic phenomena that are considered not always to be clearly observed and therefore recognized as unknowable and incomprehensible. Each time when the restrictions are eliminated the linguistic theory on one hand and the linguistic research on the other get a new impetus[3] [9, p. 20].

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[2] Original text: «На смену безраздельного господства КАК – типологии приходит объяснительная ПОЧЕМУ – типология, призванная ответить не только на вопросы о существовании, но и о причинах существования / несуществования тех или иных явлений».

[3] Original text: «То, что считается "нелингвистикой" на одном этапе, включается в нее на следующем. Этот процесс лингвистической экспансии нельзя считать законченным. В целом он направлен в сторону снятия априорно постулированных ограничений на право исследовать такие языковые феномены, которые до некоторой степени считаются недостаточно наблюдаемыми и формализуемыми и, следовательно, признаются непознаваемыми. И каждый раз снятие очередных ограничений дает новый толчок лингвистической теории, конкретным лингвистическим исследованиям».

Conclusion

"The competence of linguistic studies comprises everything, which deals with the origin and functioning of a language", wrote Kibrik in 1992 [9, p. 20]. Building up a formal model the principle common both for the late structuralism and the generative linguistics, which is, however, missing in the functional paradigm. Kibrik also pointed to the fact that "not all linguistic phenomena can be described with the help of prescriptive rules. It makes one to doubt the universal application of the algorithmic method of thinking and invites to build the language model as based upon the partial determination [9, p. 33].

Kibrik belonged to structural linguistics of the 1960s; both he and his colleagues did not share Abaev's ideas. Kibrik considered Abaev as a very "conservative" scholar. However, by the end of the 20th cent., Kibrik came to some of ideas expressed by Abaev without being directly influenced by him. Among them is that of the central role of semantics in linguistic studies rather than syntax as teaches the generative linguistics! In this context he wrote as follows: "At the very end the form is always motivated by the meaning. However, in the history of languages it also happens that this link is "erased" or "obliterated" and is "lacking any motivation". Then one has to look for the initial motivation" [9, p. 25].

The "initial motivation" is the actually what was described by Abaev as the "language as ideology" and the "erasing of the link" is that the phenomenon defined by Abaev as "technization". Cf. here again: "Every good formal description can be expressed also in informal terms" [9, p. 43]. This statement echoes that by Abaev who in 1965 wrote about "mathematical operations" in linguistics: "In the first instance, the efficiency of these operations is usually too insignificant in comparison with the time and labour spent… Then (and this is most important) the quantitative indices cannot reveal the main thing, i.e. the qualitative distinctiveness of phenomena [3, p. 121].

Still, the rejection of algorithms and formalization can lead to the opposite trend, i.e. the subjectivism and non-verified results. Linguistic expansion is undoubtedly necessary but it can lead to the refusal to establish the borders of research. Some of Abaev's ideas can be still very useful and important. Among them is the differentiation between the "ideology in language" and the "ideology by language". Many scholars who belong to the trend of 'the linguistic worldview' ("ideology in language") in fact, describe the "ideology by language" (ideas of Dostoevsky, Berdyaev for Russian etc.). In my view, the study of "ideology by language" is not the task of language studies but more broadly is the task of a complex scholarship in the sphere of humanities. Mixing of modern linguistic worldviews and relics of former ideologies has also to be taken into consideration as Abaev wrote already in 1948.

Abaev did not belong to any linguistic school (except the school of N. Marr at the beginning), he was an independent scholar. His ideas were not in harness with the dominating ideas of the structuralism epoch. However, the subsequent

development of linguistic studies has shown that they have lots in common with the scholarly concepts of today.

The theoretical articles by Abaev were posthumously published in Russian in a separate book "*Theory and History of Linguistics*" ("Statyi po teorii i istorii yazykoznaniya") in 2006.

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Информация об авторе

Алпатов Владимир Михайлович – академик РАН, доктор филологических наук, профессор, Институт языкознания Российской академии наук; член международного редакционного совета журнала «Ориенталистика», Москва, Россия; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4323-2832, e-mail: v-alpatov@iling-ran.ru

Information about the author

Vladimir M. Alpatov – Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr. habil. (Philol.), Prof., Institute of linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Member of the International Advisory Board of the *Orientalistica*, Moscow, Russia; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4323-2832, e-mail: v-alpatov@iling-ran.ru

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