

Vladimir Alpatov

Inst. des Études Orientales, Moscou (Russie)

Polivanov, vie et travaux (introduction biographique)

Polivanov comme théoricien

dans le domaine des langues orientales

Evgenij Dmitrijevich Polivanov (1891-1938) studied at the Petersburg University and was the pupil of I. A. Baudoin de Courtenay. Since 1914 Polivanov published his first works, the majority of them were devoted to Japanese. After the February revolution Polivanov began his political activity, which finished in 1921 when he moved to the Central Asia. He was a professor of the new-organized Central Asian University. In 1926 Polivanov removed to Moscow and became the chief of the linguistic section of the Russian association of the research institutes of the social sciences. The situation changed after the speech of Polivanov against N. Ya. Marr at the Communist Academy in February 1929. Polivanov demonstrated the groundlessness of the Marr's doctrine but almost all the participants of discussion did not support him. In this situation Polivanov preferred to return to Uzbekistan (autumn of 1929). He lived in Samarqand (1929-1930) and in Tashkent (1930-1934) but was criticized as "bourgeois scholar" in Uzbekistan too. In 1934 Polivanov removed to Frunze (Bishkek) where he was arrested on the 1st of August in 1937. Polivanov was convicted as a "Japanese spy" since 1916 (not only against the USSR, but against the Tsar Russia too) and executed on the 25th of January in 1938.

As his teacher I. A. Baudoin de Courtenay Polivanov did not write any detailed statement of his theory as a whole although all his publications on special problems were connected with the linguistic theory. Polivanov aspired for creating of Marxist linguistics but the elements of Marxism in the field of linguistic structure come (at least in his published works) to the

reflection of the laws of dialectics in the development of the language. In the field of phonology Polivanov preserved Baudouin's psychological approach to phoneme unlike other Baudouin's pupils. He considered purely synchronous researches of languages rightful but he was against the isolation of synchrony from diachrony and any restriction of the linguistic research by synchrony. Polivanov emphasized that linguists must investigate the past, the present and the future of languages; Polivanov was one of the first scholars who raised the question of forecasts in linguistics. The main theoretical problem investigated in many works of P. was the problem of the theory of linguistic changes, especially the theory of their causes. The most detailed analysis of these changes concerned the sphere of phonology.

The social activity of Polivanov and his Marxist orientation lead him to the theoretical and practical investigations of the problems of the social functioning of language. He supposed that the outer causes do not influence on languages directly, they can influence on them only indirectly through establishment or stopping contacts with other languages or change of the set of their speakers ("social substratum"). In particular not only Russian but Standard Russian remained the same language after the revolution but the social substratum of Standard Russian changed significantly because many new speakers appeared after the revolution. The activity for the development of many languages of the USSR languages spread in the Soviet Union in the 1920th-1930th, it was named language building. Polivanov took part in it both in Moscow and in the Central Asia. He connected the problems of language building with the theoretical problem of consciousness and unconsciousness in the changes of languages.

Polivanov was the creator of the scientific studying of Japanese in Russia. He is considered in Japan one of the founders of the Japanese dialectology. Polivanov was the founder of the accentology of Japanese in the world science. His discovery of the new type of stress in Japanese Polivanov compared with

the discovery of a new biological species. P. elaborated an interesting grammatical conception on word and parts of speech in the grammar of Japanese (1930). Polivanov founded the scientific study of the generic relations of Japanese.

Polivanov studied different Turk and Iranian languages of the Central Asia since 1921 to the end of his life. His main publication on Chinese is “The Grammar of the Modern Chinese Language” (1930). In the last years of his life Polivanov studied Dunghan language (close to Chinese); his last book published in 1937 in Frunze was devoted to the phonology and orthography of this language. Polivanov had publications on Korean, Arabic, Georgian and other languages as well as on the comparative Indo-European linguistics. Thus P. was one of the greatest linguists of the 20th century; many of his ideas are used in the contemporary linguistics.