

Marxism, Language, and Literature: Rethinking the Early Marxist Literary Criticism*

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I. Introduction

In his classical work of cultural materialism *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams said that, emphasizing the rising importance of language in the philosophical and cultural discourses of literary criticism at that time, “A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world”(21). What Williams meant by this declaration has been yet somberly valid since the way how to define language works as a barometer of defining human beings as well as of characterizing widely different tenets of literary criticism. Therefore,

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literature, a form of art that is primarily made of language, also concerns more or less “a definition of human beings in the world” in many direct or indirect ways. In other words, literature deals with, first of all, the diverse conditions of human life in this world, regardless of whether it is concerned with creative fantasies or reflective facts. Since both literature and language pay decisive concerns to human beings, it could be said that an attempt to define language inevitably accompanies the definition of literature to a considerable extent. The fact that literature uses language as its primary medium more than any other forms of art fortifies the legitimacy of this proposition. Therefore, it has been taken for granted that the problem of language should serve as a formulating impact to most contemporary theories of literary criticism ranged from post-structuralism and semiotics to Lacanian psychology and cultural studies.

In case of Marxist criticism, however, there seems to be a longstanding consensus that language has been peripheral to its main praxis of literary criticism. Moreover, such limited opinion that the founders of Marxism Karl Marx and Frederick Engels has rarely revealed their thoughts on language enforces the prejudged misconception that Marxist criticism has simply treated language as a passive, reflective mirror of the material conditions of a society. In my opinion, this oversimplification has not been gained from precise and meticulous studies on Marxism but from prejudices against the widely condemned dogmatism in some branches of Marxism, especially the doctrine of socialist realism in the Soviet tenet.

However, if we follow the transition faithfully in the thought of language in Marxism from the mid 19th-century initial stage of Marx and Engels to the early 20th-century developing stage of V. N. Volosinov and critics of Russian Formalism, it is possible to track down the genuine and substantial discourses of language even in the early tradition of Marxism. Moreover, in my opinion, those discourses could suggest a breakthrough against

dogmatism into which some of Marxist literary theories have been lapsed. Besides, if a literary theory of Marxism has been built around the philosophy of language, it is also able to surpass the textual limitations of Formalism as well as dogmatism by way of bridging literary texts over socio-historical and economic conditions of the world. This paper is trying to prove it, since the philosophy of language has played an essential and decisive role in constituting the theory of literature. Therefore, after discussing the early thoughts of language in Marxism, including those of Marx and Engels, and the Russian Formalism, this paper is to present Volosinov's philosophy of language as a significant case of the literary theory of Marxism.

II . Language and the Early Marxism

During the initial phase of Marxism, the two important issues in the philosophy of language were of interest to Marxism: the first was on language as activity, and the second, on the historicity of language(Williams 21). These are reverberated through *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels reveal their thought of language as part of their critique against abstract idealism of German philosophy.

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, *the language of real life*. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people. ... Consciousness can never be anything else than

conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process. (36)

Here, Marx and Engels argue that all the mental activities of human being originates from “the material activity and the material intercourse of men,” and this active materiality corresponds with “the language of real life.” Language is regarded as an activity inseparable from the actual life process determined by “the mode of production in material life.” Although they do not directly mention language itself linguistically, it is enough to infer from this passage that they emphasize the active aspect of language, that is, the constitutive function of language in human life. Language in their thought is clearly different from the language as an autonomous, objective system separated from real life. And it is also different from the idealist notion of language: language as a providential entity predetermines the consciousness of human beings.

As a matter of fact, the notion of activity is naturally accompanied with the concept of historicity. Therefore, Marx and Engels apply their material conception of history to their thought of language:

Only now, after having considered four moments, four aspects of the fundamental historical relationships, do we find that man also possesses “consciousness”; but, even so, not inherent, not “pure” consciousness. From the start the “spirit” is afflicted with the curse of being “burdened” with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and for that reason is really beginning to exist for me personally as well; for language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. (*German Ideology*, 43-44)

With an emphasis on language as practical and constitutive activity, Marx and Engels draw our attention to the historicity of language. What they saw as the essential character of language lies in its synthesizing processes of combining the diachronic movements and synchronic dimensions. In short, they define language in terms of historical flows and simultaneous totality. Thus, the diachronic movements are seen as “the fundamental historical relationships” and its synchronic dimensions are described as “moments” and “aspects.” Also their language is materialized with the physical substances of “agitated layers of air, sounds,” that is, the “appearance” of the “spirit” burdened with matter. Not separable from the production of material life, language originates from social relationships, “the necessity of intercourse with other men.” Moreover, human consciousness is of language: language is the practical consciousness of human beings.

It is obvious that Marx and Engels define language in terms of a dynamic and generative process. Language is always in the middle of creative and recreative process, sided with socio–historical transitions of society– historical changes in the modes and relations of production in the real life. Their philosophy of language seems to be in direct opposition to the structural linguistics initiated by F. Saussure. In the structural linguistics, the notion of system, backed by Saussure’s concept of “langue,” implies the impersonal and ahistorical autonomy of language. Although it is undeniable that Saussurean structuralism has contributed immensely to the understanding of language as a self–reflexive arbitrary system, it neglects the active and historical aspects of language. On the contrary, Marx and Engels see language as a social activity, above all.

Despite the dynamic and generative view of language by Marx and Engels, some tenets of Marxism reduce language into a mechanical and passive medium that is merely reflecting the material condition of society.

Thus, ironically imitating structural linguistics' separation of language from the real life, these reductionists embrace the reflection theory of language that estranges language from the historical process of material production and reproduction. This reductionism of language is, in part, coming of the mechanistic application of the binary scheme of the base and superstructure in the Marxist analysis of society. However, in *Grundrisse*, Marx clarifies that these two fundamental sub-structures of society do not correspond with a "symmetrical relationship, dancing a harmonious minuet hand-in-hand throughout history"(Eagleton, 14). Such superstructures as art, law, politics, and religion have their own processes of autonomous development, so that it would be a very limited scheme to reduce a superstructure to a mirror of the base structure. Likewise, it is also a crude reduction to define language as a passive reflection on the base structure of society.

Thus far discussed, the reflection theory and the structural linguistics share a common ground in their methods of reducing language to an isolated entity from the practical world. The structural linguistics only concerns a synchronic layer of language, excluding the diachronic historicity of language itself, while the reflection theory sees language as a mere reflection upon the material conditions. This ironical contradiction of reflection theory had been criticized by Marx himself in his argument on a defect of materialism:

The chief defect of all previous materialism ... are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the outside, in contradistinction to materialism, was set forth by idealism (*German Ideology* 6)

Although the reflection theory appears to be faithful to materialism,

according to Marx, it is in fact more closer to idealism in its way of treating language as static *a priori* being, neglecting the dynamic and generative activity of language in the real world.

Language, for Marx, is not a passive medium but one of the constitutive agent of society. However, if the constitutive activity of language itself is disregarded, the limited and partial understandings of language are inevitably produced, which Williams points out in his discussion of "expressivism" and "formalism"(Williams 165). According to Williams, expressivism, which sees language as an isolated medium reflecting reality passively, is likely to present literature under such trends as realism or naturalism. For example, socialist realism can be sorted out as a school of expressivism since it is based on the reflection theory of language. On the other hand, formalism would include critical tenets like Russian Formalism and New Criticism. Formalism tends to see work of literature fundamentally as a synchronic system of signs, and then, it delves into such an intrinsic issue as what the "literariness" of literature is, being severed from socio-historical contexts of the practical world. Therefore, in the next chapter, the critiques on socialist realism and formalism, especially Russian Formalism, are to be dealt.

III. The Reflection Theory of Language and Marxism

The well-known emphasis of socialist realism on the partisanship of literature originates from the reflection theory that limits language to a reflective mirror. The doctrine that literature should serve certain political goals has arisen with an assumption that literature is only the reflection or reproduction of social reality in a fairly straight way(Eagleton 37-39).

However, Marx and Engels never used “the metaphor of reflection about literary works”(Eagleton 49). It should be an irresponsible oversimplification, for example, to say that Marxist criticism equates literary texts with ideological products of social relations and productive force. Engels once said in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* that “art is far richer and more opaque than political and economic theory because it is less purely ideological”(qtd. in Eagleton 16). Besides, in his letter to Joseph Bloch, he condemned mechanistic application of social phenomena to productive relations.

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factors is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their form in particular. (39)

Engels's denial of the mechanical application of the base structure into the formation of diverse superstructures is also very valid for the critique of the reflection theory both in language and in literary criticism.

Moreover, Marx's famous discussion of the Greek literature denied the mechanical reflection of literature to the social development in the mode of material production. When Marx describes the relationship between the base and the superstructure in *Grundrisse*, he selected art as a typical example that shows an asymmetrical and autonomous complexity of the relationship.¹⁾ Marx explained “the unequal development of material

production and ... that of art” in terms of the Greek art that reached monumental greatness in an economically primitive society. He kept inquiring why its art was still regarded as great ideal, “the difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal” (35). Then, Marx continued to present his opinion, which invited controversial and indiscriminate attacks on it:

An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does the naivete of the child not give him the pleasure, and does not he himself endeavor to reproduce the child’s veracity on a higher level? . . . The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur (35).

Marx attributed modern appreciations of the Greek art to the nostalgia for childhood, which appears to be irrelevant and sentimental. However, if we consider his opinion in the context of *Grundrisse*, what he really meant is that “the Greeks ... were able to produce major art not in spite of but because of the undeveloped state of their society”(Eagleton 12). As a pre-capitalist era, the Greek society would achieve a certain harmony between man and nature, so its art could be seen as a product of this

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- 1) Marx said that, in *Grundrisse*, upon the unbalance between historical development and the evolution of art: “As regard art, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society, nor do they therefore to the material structure, the skeleton of its organization. For example, the Greeks compared to the moderns or also Shakespeare. It is even recognized that certain forms of art, e.g. the epic, can no longer be produced in their world epoch-making, classical stature as such has begun; in other words, that certain important creations within the compass of art are only possible at an early stage in the development of art”(34).

socio-historical environment, to which modern people of "transcendental homelessness" have been attracted.

IV. Russian Formalism and Marxism

As have been discussed so far, for Marx and Engels, art is not a direct product of the base structure of society. Considering their view of language as a dynamic and generative entity firmly interlaced with practical life, we come to know that, for them, literature, primarily made up of language, is not the passive mirror of the economic conditions of a society. With their refusal to see language as an inert system, they also denied the mechanistic reflection theory of literature. In this respect, Marx and Engels would have been very critical to the so-called vulgar Marxism since it is firmly bound up to the reflection theory of literature and language.

In relation to the limits of the reflection theory of the Vulgar Marxism, it is useful to look at an issue of literary criticism proposed by P. N. Medvedev: "the problem of specification"(Titunik 178). This is about how the domain of literature is different from the other domains of such superstructures as ethics, religion, legal system and education. However, for the study of specification in superstructures, the problem lies not in the specific properties of the superstructures but in the elucidation of which specification distinguishes one from others. The reflection theory, rooted in the mechanistic and ideological copy of the base structure, cannot offer any productive solution to "the problem of specification." Therefore, Medvedev suggested a way out of this impasse:

Each of them [superstructures], after all, commands its own

“language,” with its own forms and operations, and its own specific laws for the refraction of the unitary reality of existence. The specificity of art, science, ethics, and religion must not, of course, obscure their ideological unity as superstructures over the one, common basis, each of them infused with unitary socioeconomic coherency; but neither ought their specificity be effaced for the sake of general formulations of that coherency. (Titunik 178)

Especially in the domain of literature, the problem of specification is an essential issue than in any other domains of superstructure because, literature has "its own language" and "its own specific laws" in response to the socioeconomic base structure, as Medvedev suggested. In this respect, the literary theory of the “expressivism,” like the vulgar Marxist criticism, has a limitation in offering meaningful clues for the problem. However, if we draw our attention on the language of literature, that is, the literariness of language in the domain of literature, it is surely possible to find out a way of solution to the problem.

With regard to the language of literature, as well as the problem of specification, Russian Formalism arguably achieved a certain degree of success with its considerable insights into and theoretical sets of literary criticism. In short, Formalism was optimistic for sieving out the essence that constitutes the literariness of literature, the specific quality distinguishing literature from the rest of superstructures. Viewing literary text as self-valuable, self-contained, and self-perpetuating linguistic construction, it launched literary criticism as an objective science. Even though social forces and historical transitions could affect literature to some extent, according to Formalism, the essential nature of literature remained invariable, permanently built-in by its own exclusive internal law. Therefore, its critics claimed that the genuine study of literature is

possible only in terms of the immanent logic and components of literature itself.

Nevertheless, Formalism ought not to be understood merely as another case of “art for art’s sake” doctrine. One of its founders, B. Eichenbaum said about the critics of Formalism:

Neither ‘Formalism’ as an aesthetic theory nor ‘methodology’ as a finished scientific system characterizes us; we are characterized only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material.
(103)

Thus he also declared that “We are not ‘Formalists,’ but if you will, specifiers (specifikatory)” (qtd. in Erlich 171). Therefore, Formalism has two important perspectives of studying literature: the one is its “emphasis on the literary work and its constituent parts,” and the other, its “insistence of the autonomy of literary scholarship”(Erlich 171). Then it attempted to solve the aforesaid crucial single question of literary theory: how the domain of literature is different from other domains. In other words, it is to clarify what the nature of and where the locus of “literariness” is. Accordingly, Roman Jakobson specified the purpose of Formalism: “The subject of literary scholarship is not literature in its totality, but literariness (literaturnost), i.e., that which makes of a given work a work of literature” (qtd. in Erlich 172).

In relation to the grand goal of Formalism, one of crucial projects was to seek out the specificity of "poetic language" by which poetic language can separate itself from practical language. However, the project has been generally thought to be an unanswered and failed one. It is also very doubtful that there really exists such a thing as poetic language, in opposition to practical language. According to Medvedev, language cannot

be categorized clearly into the poetic and the non-poetic but can be differentiated in terms of its functions, so that poetic language is merely one of the various functions of language itself.

Poetic properties are acquired by language only in concrete poetic constructions. These properties belong to language in its linguistic capacity but precisely to the construction, whatever kind of construction that might be. (qtd. in Titunik 182)

What draws the poetic function from language is "the construction," that is, the work of literature, as Medvedev pointed out. Thus, Formalism has met an obstacle from its beginning; its tendency of severing language from its practical context spawned the obstacle. In other words, the specificity of literature, the literariness, cannot be simply reduced only into a unit of linguistic system, disregarding literary context inseparable from the context of the world outside. Subsequently, it is a general consensus that the difference between poetic and ordinary language comes from the difference of "social convention," rather than the essential one inherent in language itself (Tynjanov 73).

Leon Trotsky, one of ardent Marxist revolutionaries, also criticized Formalism in *Literature and Revolution*, saying that a poet selects certain formal aspects, intending to be understood by means of certain conventions of reading in order to "fulfill tasks which lie outside of him" (49), and "Artistic creation is always complicated turning inside out of old forms, under the influence of new which originate outside of art" (56). Attacking the linguistic and mock-scientific attitude of Formalism in the literary study, he emphasized the social context of literature and went on to say that "A new artistic form, taken in a large historic way, is born in reply to new needs." Therefore, Trotsky exposed the absurdity innate in the pseudo-scientific objectivity of Formalism in its analyses of literature.

The Formalist school seems to try to be objective. It is disgusted, and not without reason, with the literary and critical arbitrariness which operates only with taste and moods. It seeks precise criteria for classification and valuation. But owing to its narrow outlook and superficial methods, it is constantly falling into superstitions, such as graphology and phrenology. ... An apparent objectivism based on accidental, secondary and inadequate characteristics leads inevitably to the worst subjectivism. In case of the Formalist school it leads to the superstition of the word. (52)

Trotsky accused Formalism that, despite its insistence on scientific objectivism, it bore an ironic tendency of being superstitiously subjective. While mocking the unanswered overconfidence of Formalism, Trotsky recognized, nonetheless, that Formalism contributed to the systematic practice of analysing literature, admitting the autonomous dimension of literary criticism: "It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is by the law of art"(56).

Thus far discussed, even though Formalism achieved a modest success in focusing literature exclusively as a self-contained linguistic construction, it eventually failed to articulate the specificity of literariness in literature. Its inability was mainly due to its definition of language as a static and self-sustained system severed from social, political, and economical forces of the world. In short, Formalism isolated literature from history and ideology.

V. Volosinov and the Marxist Philosophy of Language

The defects of the Vulgar Marxism and Formalism, as discussed so far, should be attributed to their static and limited philosophies of language: the former sees language as a fixed reflecting mirror, while the latter does it as a self-sustained and self-fulfilled synchronic system. It may not be an exaggeration to hail Valentin Nikolaevic Volosinov as a pioneering Marxist critic who suggested a very significant but mostly underrated breakthrough in his philosophy of language. Even though he had to admit that Marxist discourse on language had been virtually a rarity, Volosinov formed his philosophy of language under the main territory of Marxism. That is to say, he conceived language, first of all, as social activity. Therefore, he criticized the formalistic attempt of separating language from social activity, and he also rejected the reflection theory of language since he, first of all, saw language as a kind of dynamic activity, not as a passive and static entity.

Volosinov's philosophy of language could be seen as an outcome of his efforts to revive Marx and Engels's "language of real life": language as social activity forming practical consciousness of a human being. In other words, he worked hard to recover a full sense of dynamic sociality in the modern philosophy of language. For example, Volosinov's definition of human consciousness show a partial trajectory of this effort. He explained consciousness as a verbal and sign-created substance:

The only possible objective definition of consciousness is a sociological one. ... Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is

nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left. (13)²⁾

For Volosinov, consciousness itself is semiotic, made of signs, and signs are essentially sociological. An individual consciousness "nurtured" by "the material of signs" is also coming from the social one. Consciousness is, therefore, a product of dynamic interaction between an individual and the social. At the same time, "the material of signs," which indicates language itself, is formed in "the process" of "social intercourse." Consequently, language as the material of signs contributes to "the logic of consciousness" in terms of the ideological communication of society in which individuals and signs take part.

The separation of language from society, however, has a malign disposition of ignoring this dynamic process of social interaction. Formalism sees language as an isolate entity, which has its own laws and codes, separated from the practical activity of social intercourse. The reflection theory of language in the Vulgar Marxism also defines the system of linguistic signs as a lifeless entity reflecting passively the material conditions of society, ignoring the generative social activity of language itself. Contrary to them, Volosinov's philosophy of language acknowledges the dynamic and articulated social presence in language. It also recognized that the linguistic signifier is not equivalent to, nor simply a reflection of, the object or the quality that it signifies or expresses. Nevertheless, in the philosophy of Volosinov, language can be defined in

2) Hereafter, quotations from V. N. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* are referred to only page numbers.

terms of a dialectical activity, the activity of continuing social process into which language, as well as human beings, is born and within which it is shaped, but to which it actively contribute.

It may not be an irresponsible simplification to argue that Formalism has a microscopic perspective on literature, while the Vulgar Marxism can be regarded as better suited to a macroscopic analysis, wide as much as global capitalism itself, on literature but inept to finer literary details. In my opinion, Volosinov's philosophy of language could offer a way to overcome their limitations. In his view, art is not a different kind of thing, which Formalism tends to see, but a different way of looking at a thing. In the same way, a signification is not a thing in itself because "any physical body may be perceived as an image," which is "converted into a sign"(9). A sign, however, is an objective and real-world phenomenon: "A sign is a phenomenon of the external world. . . . It is fully objective and lends itself to a unitary, monistic, objective method of study. Both the sign itself and all the effects it produces . . . occur in outer experience"(11). By this simple assertion, Volosinov has established a link between literature and the world. Furthermore, his way of how to link literature, a public phenomenon, to a private and subjective world of an individual, including both the author and the reader, lies in his assertion that consciousness is essentially linguistic and sign-created. That is, if consciousness itself is semiotic, then there is no gap between an objective ideological text and a subjective mind of an individual; in the same manner, literary texts are also connected with social contexts.

According to Volosinov, the meaning of a sign can be illuminated only with the help of another sign, so that there is no subject-object split, nor is the form-content dichotomy:

The understanding of any sign, whether inner or outer, occurs inextricably tied in with the situation in which the sign is

implemented. ... The sign and its social situation are inextricable fused together. The sign cannot be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign. Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation. (37, 95)

This statement can be interpreted as a direct denunciation of the aforesaid critical project of Formalism, “the problem of specification,” which aims to exclude non-literary social and ideological factors in literary criticism. Blaming the formalistic dichotomy, Volosinov firmly insisted on the “inextricable” connection between text and context.

Volosinov denounced the concept of literary language in Formalism, calling it “a ready-made” system: “Formal, systematic thought about language is incompatible with living, historical understanding of language”(78). He also criticized the Saussurean linguistics as a misguided model for the hidden purpose of salvaging text and for searching some abstract essence of langue art from fits instances of parole. His diatribe against them, in fact, can be also applied to the philosophical trend of linguistic dichotomy espoused by many historical thinkers from Descartes to Saussure, who had endowed a privileged priority with the synchronic analysis of language, downplaying the diachronic context of language.

By insisting on the diachronic context of language, Volosinov tried to reinforce Marxist criticism with some aesthetic features of Formalism in order to produce the literary criticism that is more balanced but still maintains marxist perspectives of political economy.

In this respect, his philosophy of language should be redeemed as a main prop of his project since it clarifies that the language of literature is not alien to ordinary language but is a kind of language only functioning in a different way from the ordinary one. Within its scope, Volosinov emphasized the literary context of literature, that is, the aesthetical

convention of literature, not the general linguistic characters of literature:

The forms of a literary utterance - a literary work of art - can only be understood in the unity of literary life, indissolubly connected with other kinds of literary form. When we relegate a literary work to the history of language as a system, when we regard it only as a document of language, we lose access to its forms as the forms of a literary whole. There is a world of difference between referring a work to the system of language and referring a work to the concrete unity of literary life (79).

Here, by "the unity of literary life," Volosinov indicated the aesthetical convention of literature as a practice of art. According to his argument, the literary convention as a whole, rather than the literary language as a flat system, is particularly important to the understanding of a literary text as a work of art. In other words, he emphasized the dialogic intercourse between a literary text and the literary convention as a whole; thus, he once said that: "Any true understanding is dialogic in nature. . . . Understanding strives to match the speaker's word with a counter word. (102)" A literary word, as he stated, could only be properly understood in literary context by a literary dialogue with other literary words.

As another case of accepting some critical points of Formalism, Volosinov insisted that not only is all language not equivalent to literature, but also is all history not literary history, giving attention to the autonomy of literature:

Any explanation must preserve all the qualitative differences between interacting domains. . . . If the specific nature of the semiotic-ideological material is ignored, the ideological phenomenon studied undergoes simplification. (18)

He recognized "the qualitative differences" of superstructures, being critical against the dogmatic mechanism of the Vulgar Marxism. He vehemently denied "the applicability of so inert a category as that of mechanical causality," opposing the simplistic socioeconomic generalization of literary phenomena by some marxist critics. For example, in refuting the mechanism of the vulgar Marxism, he discussed the evolution of the novel form:

Surely it must be clear that between changes in the economic state of affairs and the appearance of the "superfluous man" [a new novelistic feature] in the novel stretches a long, long road that crosses a number of qualitatively different domains, each with its own specific set of laws and its own specific characteristics. (18)

Volosinov recognized the importance of the socioeconomic base, while maintaining his vindication for the relative autonomy of the novel form "as a single organic unity subject to its own specific laws" and for the superstructural autonomy of the "whole field of literature as well"(18).

VI. Conclusion

As discussed so far, the significance of Volosinov's philosophy of language can be found in its productive effort to achieve the dialogic synthesis that goes beyond the conflicting impasse between the asocial poetics of pure formalism and the dogmatic literary criticism of the vulgar Marxism. It brings attention to the importance of the balanced perspective of literary criticism between the specificity of literary text and the sociality of literary context, while opposing the reduction of a work of literature into a

lifeless formality or a dogmatic ideology. In short, Volosinov attempts to establish a productive ground of understanding a work of art for its own sake within the perimeter of his Marxist philosophy of language, which is fundamentally faithful to the original thoughts of Marx and Engels.

As a matter of fact, Volosinov's philosophy of language, however, has a rather critical weakness, which most thoughts of contextualism have: the difficulty of knowing the totality, in this case, the whole of literary and non-literary context. In other words, in attempting to evoke the whole in a part, anyone who values context as much as Volosinov does must overcome the problem of never being able to embrace the whole context. For example, if a critic wants to know the whole complete context of an individual work of literature, which is meaningful only in the context of others, he or she has no way but to bring up the aesthetical, social as well, totality of all literature. A part can be fully appreciated only by the whole.

Despite the difficulty of contextualism, Volosinov's attempt to produce a way of overcoming the confrontation between Marxist criticism and Formalism in terms of his philosophy of language is of large significance to literary critics, especially to the Marxist critics. It has been surely evident that many tenets of Marxist literary criticism have been most successful when they have not completely left from the traditional aesthetic territory of literature. In other words, they should acknowledge and recognize the specificity of literature as an aesthetic practice in the midst of many other practices of society. In my opinion, the specificity of literature lies in its language- not as a language of self-sustained static system, but as a language of a practical activity, that is, as a specific form of practical consciousness inseparable from all social material activities. Therefore, the language of literature is also a particular form of socio-historical language. In this regard, Volosinov's philosophy of language, which inherited the critical consciousness of Marx and Engels's thoughts of language than any

other theories, deserves to be reconsidered by many critics of contemporary literary criticism.

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Abstract

Marxism, Language, and Literature: Rethinking the Early Marxist Literary Criticism

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Since both literature and language pay decisive concerns to human beings, an attempt to define language inevitably accompanies the definition of literature to a considerable extent. Therefore, it has been taken for granted that the problem of language should serve as a formulating impact to most contemporary theories of literary criticism. In case of Marxist criticism, however, there seems to be a longstanding consensus that language has been peripheral to its main praxis of literary criticism. This oversimplified consensus has not been gained from precise and meticulous studies on Marxism but from prejudices against the widely condemned dogmatism in some branches of Marxism, especially the doctrine of socialist realism in the Soviet tenet.

However, if we follow the transition faithfully in the thought of language in Marxism from the mid 19th-century initial stage of Marx and Engels to the early 20th-century developing stage of V. N. Volosinov and critics of Russian Formalism, it is possible to track down the genuine and substantial discourses of language even in the early tradition of Marxism. If a literary theory of Marxism is built around the philosophy of language, it is also able to surpass the textual limitations of Formalism as well as dogmatism by way of bridging literary texts over socio-historical and economic conditions of the world. Therefore, after discussing the early thoughts of language in Marxism, including those of Marx and Engels, and Russian

Formalism, this paper presents Volosinov's philosophy of language as a significant case of the literary theory of Marxism.

The significance of Volosinov's philosophy of language, which is fundamentally faithful to the original thoughts of Marx and Engels, can be found in its productive effort to achieve the dialogic synthesis that goes beyond the conflicting impasse between the asocial poetics of pure formalism and the dogmatic literary criticism of the vulgar Marxism. The specificity of literature lies in its language- not as a language of self-sustained static system, but as a language of a practical activity, that is, as a specific form of practical consciousness inseparable from all social material activities. Therefore, the language of literature is also a particular form of socio-historical language. In this regard, Volosinov's philosophy of language, which inherited the critical consciousness of Marx and Engels's thoughts of language than any other theories, deserves to be reconsidered by many critics of contemporary literary criticism.

Key Words: Marxism, Russian Formalism, Philosophy of Language, Volosinov, Vulgar Marxism

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