Conclusion

Our study thus reaches its conclusion. The concept of hegemony remained a crucial, dynamic and multifaceted one in Russian Marxism for the first thirty years of the twentieth century, at the end of which it underwent a process of vulgarisation and ultimately became an irrelevance. Initially coined to delineate the leading role of the proletariat in achieving the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in the Russian Empire, a whole complex of issues began to coalesce around the concept, leading to complex and sophisticated analyses of the dynamics of revolutionary leadership. While linguistic and cultural dimensions were recognised and theoretically developed in the period before 1917, these remained subordinate to the immediate struggles of the day and few expected the revolution of February 1917 rapidly to lead on to a socialist revolution. When this did indeed occur, the idea of hegemony was transferred to the nature and maintenance of the *smychka* between the proletariat and the peasantry, in which the linguistic and cultural aspects that had only weakly been understood in the pre-October period demanded systematic elaboration. Now it was not only political leaders who were involved in reflecting on the various dimensions of hegemony, but fellow-travelling intellectuals, whose formation had taken place independently of Marxist theory and practice. These ‘traditional intellectuals’, in the Gramscian sense, brought a great deal of sophistication to linguistic and cultural analysis, informing and participating in the development of some of the most progressive social and cultural policy ever witnessed. For a brief period, Soviet linguists and literary scholars led the world in the development of sociologically based scholarship, precisely because the institutional framework that developed in the 1920s facilitated the Marxist reformulation of the leading paradigms of the time. The need to maintain proletarian hegemony in a predominantly peasant society and, further, in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-faith state in which the legacy of imperialism needed to be addressed, was fundamental in shaping the agendas of early Soviet scholars.

Among the many achievements of this time was the development of an elaborated form of sociolinguistics, an ideology critique of dominant trends in philology and the rise of new ways of conceptualising the relationship between structures of power and knowledge. But all this took place in an isolated and severely battered revolutionary state that was experiencing chronic institutional and political degeneration. In these circumstances, positivist and imperial trends, which had never been entirely expunged, gradually reasserted
themselves through a series of compromise formations that tended to subordinate open, flexible and detailed work to abstract schemata and *a priori* theoretical constructions. There was no simple reversion to earlier paradigms but, rather, emerging paradigms were forced into combinations with them, degenerating as if down a spiral. Marrism was an exemplary form of this, since from the outset it had been an eclectic combination of ideas which incorporated aspects of Marxism and then sought to subordinate Marxist work on language to its own agenda. This was largely achieved because Marr and his followers opportunistically made common cause with the emerging nationality policies of the Stalin regime. Even here, however, we find extremely valuable insights compromised by adherence to abstract schemata and *a priori* constructions.

As the Stalin regime moved toward final consolidation, we saw that the notion of hegemony was consigned to the realm of an allegedly ascendant proletarian culture, where it was vulgarised almost beyond recognition, before this itself gave way to the assertion of a unitary bureaucratic formulation. Meanwhile, in the work of Platonov, probably the most talented proletarian writer of all, hegemonic reflections in literary form not only traced the containment of proletarian culture by the bureaucratic apparatus, but the way in which the new hegemonic relationship led to moral and political passivity among the alienated masses. Such reflections could not but attract the ire of the self-proclaimed guardians of proletarian hegemony in culture. Yet even here, the notion of hegemony could not withstand the Party’s decision to implement socialism in the USSR. The concept lived on to some extent in justifications of the popular-front strategy then being promoted among Communist Parties abroad, but here too the class distinctions were ‘obliterated’ and alliances with ‘progressive’ elements of the bourgeoisie to safeguard the interests of the USSR were being advocated. It is from here that the seed of the Eurocommunist and ‘neo-Gramscian’ conception of hegemony was planted, but it had nothing to do with Gramsci.

**Beyond Gramsci?**

While adopting the surface of Gramsci’s terminology about hegemony, the dominant trend within cultural studies and post-colonial studies has been consciously to go beyond Gramsci. Assuming Gramsci had some new insights into the dynamics of popular consciousness and the exercise of cultural power, which he discussed under the rubric of hegemony, many have assumed that these insights need to be liberated from their residual Leninism, or even from Marxism in general, in order to be able adequately to account for the