Words in Space and Time

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Preface

Until recently there was little dialog between linguists and historians. The former tended to see their field as a “science of language,” presumably governed by universal laws, while the latter rather unquestioningly accepted linguists’ proposal that languages are a product of nature, or even “living organisms.” In reality, though, only language understood as the biological capacity for speech (Sprache) is part of nature. Its actualizations—languages (Einzelsprachen)—are products of human history, invented and shaped by individuals and their groups. Languages (Einzelsprachen) are part of culture, like states, nations, universities, towns, associations, art, beauty, religions, injustice, or atheism. The renowned British historians of (Central) Europe and its culture, Peter Burke and Robert J. W. Evans, took a clear note of this problem. In response to this dilemma, they began analyzing languages as artifacts of culture and history, and have long appealed that historians cease taking Einzelsprachen for granted (Burke 2004; Evans 1998). On the other side of this disciplinary divide, linguists also followed their example, and today more of them study languages in the context of historical developments, as exemplified by the journal Language & History (founded in 2009), or the research of linguists like Tony Crowley (2008), Finex Ndhlovu (2009), Peter Mühlhäusler (1996), or Robert Phillipson (1992).

This integrated approach to the study of the human past is of crucial importance for an improved understanding of the history and present day of modern Central Europe. Uniquely from the global perspective, the political shape of this region has been increasingly composed of ethnolinguistic nation-states during the last two centuries. Hence, Central Europe’s current political order hinges on the myth that languages are natural entities. This myth constitutes the basis on which the region’s nations (not states!) have been constructed, and in turn demanded polities for themselves, that is, nation-states. As a result, the predominant rule is that each Central European nation-state aspires to possess a unique language (unshared with any other polity or nation), which defines its nation and simultaneously legitimizes statehood. In the Central European view, a proper nation is nothing but a speech community, or all the speakers of a single language. Hence, in many ways neither the region’s historians nor linguists (popularly known as philologists in Central Europe) are encouraged to debunk this myth or probe into it through the lens of the history of ideas. Obviously, in Central Europe, as elsewhere in the world, universities and research institutes are mostly financed by the region’s national polities. Hence, the disenchantment of the ethnolinguistic national myth that is employed to legitimate and maintain statehood in this region does not feature high on the official agenda of research priorities. However, some scholars from outside of Central Europe, equally versed in linguistics and historiography, significantly contributed to the analysis of the region’s ethnolinguistic nationalisms (cf Greenberg 2008; Judson 2006; Maxwell 2009). Finally, this example sufficiently impressed some Central European researchers to follow suit, despite a variety of difficulties faced at their home universities (cf Czesak 2015; Kamusella 2009; Kosi 2013; Vělovský 2014).

The tight spatial and ideological overlap of a language, nation, and state as the foundation of political order is highly counterintuitive and difficult to imagine in spatial terms. Therefore, Central Europe is also unique in the widespread use of the atlas of history as a required school textbook. In this region, children are typically provided with a wide choice of such school atlases of history, obviously closely at-
tuned to a specific version of ethnolinguistic history as espoused and taught in a given nation-state (Kamusella 2010). This type of school atlas is employed for instilling a state-approved national history in the minds of successive generations for the sake of reproducing a given ethnolinguistic nation and its foundational myth.

However, a change in perspective from the nation-state to Central Europe, and from national history to the comparative analysis of the construction and uses of languages and their scripts should cut on the ideological function of indoctrination and allow for an in-depth analysis of the rise and dynamics of ethnolinguistic nationalisms across the region. That methodological assumption was the starting point of this atlas. Another source of inspiration was obviously Paul Robert Magocsi’s seminal *Historical Atlas of (East) Central Europe* (1991, 2002, 2018) and the unduly neglected monograph *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* by H. R. Wilkinson (1951). No national project was ever directed at Central Europe as a whole, thus the choice of this geographical region for the atlas usefully reduces any national myopia. In addition, the choice of Einzelsprachen and the comparative history of their construction (and destruction) as the lens through which the story is reported in this atlas further distances it from Central Europe’s national master narratives. Such narratives treat the region’s recognized national languages as natural entities, which, in this national view, obviates any necessity of their analysis.

The largely chronological flow of the presented story, first, focuses on Central Europe’s dialect continua, the emergence of states, and the spread of the technology of writing (Maps 1–10). On this basis, the rest of the atlas’s maps zoom squarely in on the last two centuries, presenting and analyzing Central Europe’s nationalizing and national language politics, alongside its effects. The main effect was the ideologically intended increasing correlation of the region’s nation-states’ frontiers with the boundaries of languages, dialect continua, and scripts. This tight overlap of political borders with cultural boundaries came at the expense of populations who spoke “incorrect” languages, wrote with the use of the “wrong” scripts, or professed “foreign” religions. Seen as “foreigners” or “minorities” in legal, religious, or cultural terms, they were the target of repeated acts of forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Unfortunately, this was the other salient effect of the employment of ethnolinguistic nationalism for building ethnolinguistically homogenous nations and their national politics in Central Europe.

Besides the Weberian-style disenchantment of Einzelsprachen, this atlas also aspires to denaturalize the very idea of ethnolinguistic nationalism and its history. Of course, there is no necessity for such an effort on behalf of readers from other parts of the world because the vast majority of the globe’s extant nation-states were not created and are not legitimized with the use of unique national languages. However, readers from Central Europe may need to take an intellectual leap to stop viewing languages as natural entities or “living organisms,” separate from humans and their groups. Only the latter enjoy agency in the realm of social reality, while the former would not have existed at all if people had not created and chosen to maintain languages as languages, that is, in accordance with the Western concept of Einzelsprache (Kamusella 2016). Ethnolinguistic nationalism is the norm of political thinking and practice in today’s Central Europe, as encapsulated by the handy algebraic-like formulation, Language = Nation = State. But outside of this region (with the exception of Southeast Asia, see Map 42), the norm is different, and ordinarily, State = Nation. Hence, this atlas helps scholars and interested readers from other parts of the world to better understand the typical Central European’s view of politics and history, and to see the region through the unusual spectacles of ethnolinguistic nationalism. This exercise reveals the ideological logic of Central European politics and history during the last two centuries, alongside the logic of the ideologized interpretations of the past, as commonly espoused in the region’s national master narratives.

From the perspective of the history of ideas, the atlas’s storyline opens with the eighteenth-century emergence of the Western European concept of the nation. It defines all the population of a polity as a nation; its members, from the legal perspective, are construed as citizens, all equal before the law. In turn, the nation was to provide legitimization for the government and statehood, instead of the traditional “divine right.” This ideal of what later became known as the ideology of nationalism was for the first time consciously implemented in the cases of the nation-states of the United States (1776), revolutionary France (1789), and post-slave Haiti (1791). After the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, during the Napoleonic wars, the nascent German national movement was unable to follow the typical, civic route of overhauling a polity’s population into a nation. According to German national activists, none of the post-Holy Roman Empire polities was sufficiently extensive in territorial terms to function as the desired German nation-state. As a result, in 1813, they developed and settled on a concept of ethnolinguistic nationalism, as captured by Ernst Moritz Arndt’s poem “Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?” (What is the Fatherland of the Germans) (Arndt 1813). In the wake of the 1848 Revolutions, ethnolinguistic nationalism spread across Central Europe as the leading political ideology of what then was seen as modernity and progress in this region. The ethnolinguistic nation-states of Italy and Germany were founded in accordance with this type of nationalism in 1861 and 1871, respectively. In 1872, at the Eighth International Congress of Statistics, held at St Petersburg, most European countries accepted the census question about respondents’ (“native,” “family,” or “common”) languages as the measure of nationality, or the presumed fact of respondents’ “natural” membership in ethnolinguistically defined nations (Labbé 2019: 53-56). Since the 1880s the language question has been consistently included in censuses, thus generating (or rather, creating) statistics about the number of people belonging to particular nations across Central Europe. The Balkan nation-states were founded on an ethno-religious base during the nineteenth century. However, beginning with this century’s last decades, they were gradually reshaped in line with the ethnolinguistic definition of the nation. In 1912, Albania became the first-ever Balkan na-
tion-state established on the basis of ethnolinguistic nationalism. In the late stages of the Great War, the United States geographer of Armenian origin, Léon Dominian’s, influential monograph *The Frontiers of Language and Nationality in Europe* (1917) informed President Woodrow Wilson’s understanding of Central Europe and its politics in terms of ethnolinguistic nationalism. Subsequently, Washington convinced all the Allies to accept the replacement of the region’s multi-ethnic empires and non-national polities with ethnolinguistic nation-states. As a result, from the interwar period to this day, ethnolinguistic nationalism has remained Central Europe’s sole accepted ideology of statehood and peoplehood formation, legitimation, and maintenance.

Last but not least, the atlas is appended with a Glossary of concepts, ideas, and phenomena from the disciplinary intersection of Central European history, linguistics, language politics, and the sociology of language. Some of these terms may not be familiar to historians, others to linguists, while yet others to scholars with no direct specialization in Central Europe.