Words in Space and Time

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Published by Central European University Press

Kamusella, Tomasz.
Words in Space and Time: A Historical Atlas of Language Politics in Modern Central Europe.
Project MUSE. https://doi.org/10.7829/9789633864180.

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The political map of Central Europe remained relatively stable following the partition of Poland-Lithuania in the late eighteenth century, apart from the continuing territorial losses of the Ottoman Empire to the Habsburgs and the Russian Empire. The Napoleonic wars disturbed this political order for a decade and a half at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. However, the Congress of Vienna (1815) largely recreated the region’s political map as it had been before. The biggest political change that stayed was the disappearance of the Holy Roman Empire. It dissolved in 1806, while the Habsburgs’ hereditary lands, in anticipation of such a development, had been made into an Austrian Empire in 1804. But European monarchs and diplomats assembled at Vienna in 1815 patched up the loss of this empire with a German Confederation. A more noticeable political change of a permanent nature was that of Sweden’s loss of Finland to Russia, followed by Denmark-Norway’s loss of Norway to Sweden.

The stirrings of nationalism, in emulation of the political and military success of revolutionary France made into a nation-state, were quite successfully suppressed in Central Europe after the Congress of Vienna. But the idea of ethnolinguistic nationalism, as firmly formulated during the last leg of wars against the Napoleonic Empire (1812–1815), remained, and its popularity steadily spread across the region split among the studiously non-national empires of the Habsburgs, Ottomans and Romanovs. The Hohenzollerns of the burgeoning Kingdom of Prussia also pledged to maintain this status quo. Worryingly, the German Confederation had the national adjective “German” in its name, but none of this Confederation’s monarchs wished to act on behalf of German nationalism. They preferred to safeguard their monarchies. The 1848 revolutions (known collectively as the “Springtime of the Nations” in the region’s teleologically-minded national historiographies; the term initially appeared in German-language publications as Völkerfrühling), which were mainly national in their character, ratted the Austrian Empire, Prussia, and the rest of the German Confederation, but did not spill over either to Russia or the Ottoman Empire. None of these national revolutions was successful in establishing an independent nation-state in accordance with the tenets of ethnolinguistic nationalism. The Hungarian-speaking coalition of nobles and burghers were the closest to achieve this goal during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–1849 (also known as the Hungarian War of Independence in Hungarian national historiography). But Russian intervention squashed Hungary’s national revolutionaries and saved the unity of the Austrian Empire.

The failure of the 1848 revolutions is well remembered to the neglect of the fact that as part and parcel of some of these revolutions, and on their own, peasannies rebelled on an unprecedented scale. In Central Europe, from the grassroots perspective, these 1848 revolutions were more anti-serfdom in their character than national. Nationalism was of acute interest to the estates of nobles and burghers, alongside the underemployed intelligentsia (stemming mainly from these two groups), but not to the peasants. However, at that time peasants added up to about 90 percent of the region’s population. The 1840s potato blight and unseasonal weather deprived peasants of the usual volume of crop several years in a row, which did not stop noble landowners from extracting the same amount of agricultural produce or monetary payments due from “their” serfs. This led to widespread hunger, malnourishment, and epidemics that killed hundreds of thousands. These developments triggered the Great Irish Famine, remembered and commemorated because it was made into one of the founding myths of Irish nationalism. On the contrary, the continental famines are largely forgotten, because the peasants who suffered hunger and their descendants were fashioned into Central Europe’s nations which were largely shaped by nobles, burghers, and intelligentsia. These national elites did not share with the peasant masses the memory of the 1840s famines and hunger. But in 1848, these unprecedented privations made serfs rebel across many areas of Central Europe. In the German Confederation they found a vocal advocate in the person of Hans Kudlich. In the Austrian Reichstag (Imperial Parliament) he drafted and ensured the passing of an act that abolished serfdom in the Austrian Empire. Most revolutionary measures were revoked after the failure of the 1848 revolutions, apart from the abolishment of serfdom. This success earned Kudlich the nickname Bauernbefreier (Liberator of Peasants) and the lasting hatred of the ruling estate of nobles. In 1917 he died as an impoverished émigré in the United States. During the long six decades after 1848, he was never allowed to travel, even for a brief visit, to the Austrian Empire (Austria-Hungary), Prussia (German Empire) or elsewhere in the German Confederation.

On the other hand, monarchs’ rapprochement with nationalists was much swifter. The rise of ethnolinguistic nation-states (Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, Romania, or Bulgaria) in the Ottoman Balkans since the beginning of the nineteenth century was followed by the founding of the Kingdom of Italy and
Dialect Continua in Central Europe, c. 1910

- Residual presence of Greek-speakers
- Indic, noticeable presence of Roma

Languages:
- Germanic
- Finno-Ugric (Ugrian)
- Finno-Ugric (Finnic)
- Baltic
- Albanian

Settlements:
- Stuttgart
- Frankfurt am Main
- Hamburg
- Bremen
- Hannover
- Johannesburg

Regions:
- Vorarlberg
- Wald Eck
- Baden
- Stuttgart
- Norte y
- Sídney
- Lippé
- Lombardy
- Emilia
- Bregenz

Other:
- Residual presence of South Slavic-speakers
- Substantial presence of North Slavic
- Substantial presence of Turkic

Borders:
- Borders of autonomous entities
- Borders of autonomous regions, and Italian regions
- Jewish Pale of Settlement

Names of autonomous entities:
- Rhodope
- Aegean Sea
- Danube
- Elbe
- Weser
- Inn
- Danube
- Inn

Names of provinces other than capitals:
- Thuringia
- Saxony
- German Empire

Names of autonomous entities:
- Thuringia
- Saxony
- German Empire

Names of autonomous regions:
- Thuringia
- Saxony
- German Empire

Names of capitals:
- Bologna
- Athens
- Istanbul
- Belgrade
- Copenhagen
- Madrid

Names of natural regions:
- Adriatic Sea
- Baltic Sea
- Black Sea
- Tyrrhenian Sea

Names of provinces:
- Bremen
- Hamburg
- Hannover
- Johannesburg

Names of natural regions:
- Adriatic Sea
- Baltic Sea
- Black Sea
- Tyrrhenian Sea

Names of cities:
- Athens
- Istanbul
- Belgrade
- Copenhagen
- Madrid

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the German Empire as nation-states in 1861 and 1871, respectively. The creation of the latter national polity was preceded by the Seven Weeks’ War (1866) between Prussia and the Austrian Empire, fought in order to decide which state was the actual hegemon in the German Confederation. Vienna’s defeat opened the way for Prussia to overhaul the northern half of this Confederation into a German nation-state. However, the loss of legitimacy spelled by this defeat convinced the Austrian Emperor to introduce political concessions for ethnolinguistic nationalists. As a result, in 1867, the Austrian Empire was transformed into a Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The Kingdom of Hungary functioned as a largely autonomous Hungarian nation-state. Within this kingdom, in 1868, a similar national autonomy defined in ethnolinguistic terms was extended to the Croats in Croatia-Slavonia. In the “Austrian half” of the Dual Monarchy (often dubbed “Cisleithania,” but officially known as Die im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, or “Kingdoms and Lands Represented in the Imperial Council”), numerous crownlands (provinces) received ethnolinguistically defined autonomies, including the use of a variety of languages in administration and education. The main inscriptions on the Austro-Hungarian banknotes were in German and Hungarian, but also in Croatian, Czech, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Ruthenian (Ukrainian), Slovenian and Serbian. In 1907 full male suffrage was introduced in Cisleithania, which in turn fortified ethnolinguistically defined national parties, especially across the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy.

No concessions, especially of linguistic character, were given to nascent national movements in the Russian Empire, where in the European part all local languages were banned from administration and education, fully replaced with Russian after the 1880s. The only exception was the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, where official Swedish and Finnish were ordered to be replaced with Russian in 1900, but this provision was breached, due to the widespread grassroots opposition. The 1905 Revolution in the wake of the empire’s defeat at the hands of Japan cut short this stalemate. Full male suffrage was introduced, alongside the freedom to use local languages in publishing and education, while also in administration in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Like in Austria-Hungary, numerous ethnolinguistically defined national parties entered the Duma (Russian Parliament). Despite these democratizing changes, the confessionally defined Jewish Pale of Settlement, as established in the late eighteenth century, remained in place, limiting the spatial mobility of Jews to the former Polish-Lithuanian lands and the Black Sea littoral won from the Ottomans.

The concession won for the use of previously banned or suppressed languages led to the resumption of publishing in Lithuanian and Latvian with the use of Latin letters (previously banned), alongside White Russian (Belarusian) and Little Russian (Ukrainian). Earlier any publishing in these two latter languages was banned on the understanding that they were dialects of (Great) Russian. After 1905 the official classification of Belarusian and Ukrainian did not change in the Russian Empire, but books and periodicals published in both languages firmly made them into recognizable and eventually recognized Einzelsprachen (language in their own right). Like in Austria-Hungary, Ukrainian was written and printed in Cyrillic, however, Belarusian-language publications were produced in “Polish” (Latin) letters for Uniates (Greek Catholics) and in “Russian letters” (Cyrillic) for Orthodox Christians. In Estonia and northern Lifland (Livonia), from which today’s Estonia is composed, publishing in Estonian in Latin letters continued as in the past (because no ban on the Latin alphabet was ever introduced in the case of this language). In Bessarabia (today’s Moldova), the use of the Moldovan language was allowed, but in Cyrillic, though some pro-Romanian nationalists managed to publish a handful of brochures in Latin letters, and openly referred to this language as “Romanian.” The liberalization broadened the use of German and Polish in publications. Although previously none of these two languages had been banned, the operation of German- and Polish-language publishers tended to be limited to certain provinces.

Tellingly, the post-1905 relaxation in political, social, and cultural control across the Russian Empire resulted in the decision to hold, in 1908, an international conference on the Yiddish language in Czernowitz (today’s Chernivtsi in Ukraine), or the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Crownland of Bukovina. The region was located close to Russia, Romania, and the Kingdom of Hungary, or in the very midst of the Yiddish-speaking zone, allowing all the interested parties to participate. This conference decisively rejected the traditional Jewish and goyim (non-Jewish) perception of Yiddish as an unworthy “jargon,” intimating that the terms “jargon” and “dialect” mean “nothing more than a language that gets no respect” (Lippi-Green 2012: 47). It was high time that Jews and goyim alike started respecting Yiddish. The conference’s proceedings paved the way for the standardization and unification of Yiddish and helped turn the Yiddish-speaking areas of Central Europe into Yiddishland, or the culturally and linguistically demarcated Jewish nation-state (Map 16). Crucial to achieving both ends was the founding of Yiddish YIVO (ייִדיעש ייווֹבוי Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, meaning Yiddish Scientific Institute) in 1925 in Wilno (today, Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania). It was the first-ever national Jewish academy of sciences, which followed closely the research-cum-political program of building, standardizing, and endowing a language with respect, on the model of Florence’s Accademia della Crusca or the Académie française. This aforementioned “cultural polity” of Yiddishland did not appear on any maps, its representatives (writers, poets, journalists, or researchers) did not claim this geographical space for exclusive use as a Jewish state. Sharing territory, regions, towns, and streets with speakers of other languages and the faithful of other religions was fine with most Jews. It was a late flowering of the Central European tradition of non-territorial autonomy. But all Yiddish-speakers knew where this Yiddishland was located in the geographical sense and whether a given city was part of it or not.

A similar development was observed among European Russia’s Muslims. As in the case of Jews, the tsarist authorities did not intend to assimilate them because of the religious difference that in many ways was perceived as unbridgeable. On
the other hand, it was deemed possible to assimilate Christians of various creeds, hence banning their languages and replacing them with Russian for official use was seen as a good instrument to accelerating this process. In culture and education Jews and Muslims were left to their own devices. Neither Yiddish nor any Muslim language was banned in Russia before 1905. Jadidism (from the Perso-Arabic word جدید jādīd “new”), or the movement for propagating the “new method of teaching” by comprehension (not by rote) originated among the Crimean Tatars at the turn of the 1880s, leading to the standardization and secularization of the Arabic script-based Crimean Tatar, and its use in books and periodicals. Ismail Gaspirali created and directed this movement by establishing schools, newspapers, organizations, and a party. He himself became a de facto Crimean Tatar “academy of sciences,” thanks to his activities and lasting influence. On the other hand, the decade of the 1880s was the time when bans on the use of Christians’ other languages, except the imperial tongue of Russian, swept across European Russia in accordance with the policy of Russification. Hence, the changes brought about by the 1905 Revolution were not really so momentous for the Crimean Tatar language and the empire’s Muslims, as in the case of European Russia’s Christian national movements. However, these changes allowed for the intensification of publishing and education with the employment of Crimean Tatar, inspiring a similar cultural-cum-educational movements in the newly secularized and standardized languages of Tatar (in today’s Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the Russian Federation), Tatar-Turkic (Azerbaijani in the Caucasus), or Turkic (Uzbek, in today’s Uzbekistan).

Interestingly, also in 1905, due to prolonged constitutional crisis in Sweden-Norway, after a plebiscite, Norway gained independence from Sweden. Hence, Sweden lost its semi-imperial character and became a nation-state for the ethnolinguistically defined nation of Swedish-speaking Lutherans. Likewise, Independent Norway was fashioned into an ethnolinguistic nation-state for the nation of Norwegian-speaking Lutherans. Although the peculiarity is often overlooked by foreign observers, the Norwegian language comes in two different varieties of equal status, namely, Bokmål (“Book Language”) and Nynorsk (“New Norwegian”). This dual language constituted a vital inspiration for the creation of the Czechoslovak language (consisting of the two equal varieties of Czech and Slovak) for interwar Czechoslovakia and for the triple language of Serbocroatoslovenian (“Yugoslavian,” consisting of the two equal varieties of Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian, and the former’s two equal sub-varieties of the Cyrillic-based Serbian and the Latin alphabet-based Croatian) for the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (since 1929, Yugoslavia). It is often claimed that due to their composite character the languages of Czechoslovak, Serbocroatoslovenian, and Serbo-Croatian “had to” split. However, the equally composite language of Norwegian is still around.

Neither the rise and spread of ethnoreligious and ethnolinguistic nationalism across Central Europe during the nineteenth century, nor the founding of successive nation-states influenced in any substantial manner the pattern of the region’s dialect continua as obtaining since the late Middle Ages. The main change in this respect between 1721 (Map 7) and 1910 was the reduction in or the wholesale replacement of the Turkic and Caucasian (Circassian) dialect continua alongside the northern shores of the Black Sea with the North Slavic dialect continuum, due to the Russian Empire’s conquest of this area, followed by expulsions and even exterminations of the local Muslim populations. Similarly, the presence of Turkic-speaking Muslims was reduced in the post-Ottoman nation-states of Greece and Bulgaria. The abolition of Roma slavery in Walachia and Moldavia led to the creation or fortification of the diasporic presence of the Indic dialect continuum in Hungary and Russia. Nationalist movements appealed for ethnolinguistic homogeneity of nation-states, but mostly stopped short of executing the ideal, because it would require ethnic cleansing or genocide. Such methods of radical population engineering were then still deemed unthinkable in Europe, despite the Russian example, and colonial genocides regularly perpetrated by European powers overseas.