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(Opole)

THE POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY OF LANGUAGE-MAKING IN CENTRAL EUROPE: THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAK¹

On Ethnolinguistic Nationalism

Most of canonical or near-canonical studies on nationalism (authored, among others, by Hans Kohn, Florian Znaniecki, Karl W. Deutsch, Hans Lemberg, Hugh Seton-Watson, Elie Kedourie, Miroslav Hroch, John Armstrong, Ernest Gellner, Eric J. Hobsbawm, Peter Alter, Liah Greenfeld, John Breuilly, Urs Altermatt, or Rogers Brubaker) took Central and Eastern Europe as their case study or proposed sweeping generalizations on nationalism drawing their foundational examples from this region. The worldwide character of nationalism, so visible after the 1960s wave of decolonization and the breakup of the Soviet Union (1991); has been more fully acknowledged in recent works on nationalism (for instance, those by A. D. Smith, Benedict Anderson, Paul R. Brass, Peter van der Berghe, Michael Billig, Thomas H. Eriksen, or Montserrat Guibernau). Nevertheless, the tendency remains to see the nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe as 'archetypal' of nationalism in general; or, in a more traditional vein, some claim that nationalism (implicitly defined as 'bad,' 'Eastern,' or 'ethnic') is typical of this section of Europe, while the rest of the world is relatively free of it.

Leaving aside the question of how to define nationalism, and whether a general theory of nationalism is possible at all, I propose that generalizing on nationalism with an eye to case studies from Central and Eastern Europe is at best misleading, if not altogether mistaken from the methodological viewpoint. Nationalisms extant in the region can be aptly described as 'ethnolinguistic,' which is atypical in the case of nation-states elsewhere in the world. (For the sake of brevity, from the argument presented in the paper I exclude the issue of stateless national movements or stateless nations, which by default have to be ethnolinguistic or ethnoreligious.)

The kind of nationalism as aspired to by national movements and nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by the isomorphism (tight spatial and ideological overlapping) of language, nation, and nation-state. In this ideological trinity, language is the foundational instrument of statehood and nationhood legitimization. The ethnolinguistic isomorphism characteristic of Central and Eastern European nationalisms entails, first of all, that, by definition, the nation must be monolingual. Second, the nation's language (that is, national language) has

¹ Originally, the article was delivered as a paper at the 38th National Convention of the AAASS, Washington DC, Nov 16th-19th, 2006. It greatly benefited from discussion, which followed.

to function as the sole official language of the nation's nation-state. Third, this language cannot be shared with other nations or nation-states in any national or official capacity. (This also means a strict prohibition on autonomous territorial entities with the ethnolinguistic nation-state's national language in other nation-states, or on such autonomies with other national languages in the ethnolinguistic nation-state itself.) Ideally, all members of the ethnolinguistic nation-state should live in 'their' nation-state, and members of other nations must not be permitted to stay permanently or obtain naturalization in the nation-state. (In other words, this ideal requires ethnic cleansing, that is, assimilation or expulsion of 'non-national elements' from the nation-state.)

Although the origin of ethnolinguistic nationalism is associated with the German and Italian national movements, neither Germany nor Italy has attained this elusive ideal so far. Italian is the national language of San Marino, and a co-national language in Switzerland; whereas German – the national language of Austria and Liechtenstein, and a co-national language in Luxembourg and Switzerland. The ethnolinguistic isomorphism has not been achieved either in Russia or Ukraine, which host autonomous republics with national languages other than the two nation-states' national ones. In Belarus Russian won the day, though officially it shares its co-official status with Belarusian. Moldova from which separatist and Russian-speaking Transnistria (Transdnistria) broke away, granted its Gagauz-speaking population with an autonomous republic. In the south, Cyprus and Greece share Greek as their national language, and the same status is accorded to Turkish in Northern Cyprus and Turkey. Croatian and Serbian function as co-official languages in Bosnia alongside Bosnian and English. Similarly, Albania and (officially, still Serbia's) Kosovo share Albanian as their co-official and official language, respectively. In the north, Finland has two co-official languages, Finnish and Swedish, which also excludes Sweden from the exclusive club of 'pure' ethnolinguistic nation-states. A similar reservation applies to Norway with its two national languages of Nynorsk and Bokmål (sometimes construed as varieties of an ideal, though non-existent unitary Norwegian language), and Denmark with its autonomous territories of Greenland and the Faeroe with other national languages than Danish.

This short overview indicates that at least nowadays the extant 'pure' ethnolinguistic nation-states are limited to East Central Europe². They include 11 polities: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia³. Although, perhaps, as many as 12 similar ethnolinguistic nation-states also made their appearance elsewhere in the world, these are quite exceptional, as they are not crowded together like those in Central Europe. The ethnolinguistic nation-state is the sought-for norm of legitimate statehood in Central and Eastern Europe, while quite an exception in other areas of the world⁴. Interestingly, six of East Central Europe's 11 successful ethnolinguistic polities are Slavic nation-states. Hence, one can surmise that the ethnolinguistic fixation is characteristic of Slavic nationalisms, or at least

² Definitions of the territorial extent of Central, East, East Central, or Southeastern Europe are legion. For the needs of this paper I follow the concept of East Central Europe as employed in: Sugar (1974–).

³ In this enumeration one could have some reservations about Hungary and Slovakia, because the two states' national languages are co-official along with Croatian, Romanian, Rusyn, and Serbian in Serbia's autonomous Vojvodina. But Vojvodina rather than being a regular national autonomous republic is outstandingly multi-national and multi-lingual, indeed, a Central Europe in a miniature.

One can have another reservation about Poland. In 2005, the Act on the National and Ethnic Minorities, and the Regional Language came into power. In this act Kashubian was granted the status of a recognized regional language, but the Kashubs are construed as a mere regional, but otherwise integral part of the Polish nation. Hence, from the legal viewpoint the Poles are a bilingual, Polish-and-Kashubian-speaking nation. But the number of people speaking Kashubian on everyday basis is tiny, 50,000 according to the 2002 census.

⁴ One ethnolinguistic nation-state exists in Western Europe (Iceland), two in Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia), one in the Middle East (Israel), one in Central Asia (Turkmenistan), one in South Asia (Bhutan), one in the Far East (Japan), and five in South-East Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam), 12 in total outside Central and Eastern Europe. On non-Central and Eastern European ethnolinguistic nation-states see: Kamusella (2006).

the Slavic national movements were most successful at achieving the ideal of the full ethnolinguistic isomorphism.

The Czechoslovak Language and the Normative Irresistibility of the Model of the Ethnolinguistic Nation-State

Prior to 1918, existed only two of the aforementioned ethnolinguistic nation-states in Central Europe: Bulgaria and Romania. The region was dominated by the ideologically non-national (thus, multiethnic and multilingual) empires of Austria-Hungary and Russia⁵. But in the wake of World War I, the Allies split this region among a multitude of intended nation-states with the exception of the anomalous non-national polity of the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk). In this manner, the national principle was elevated to the sole foundation of legitimate statehood in Central Europe, whatever the vagaries of its actual implementation⁶. The fixation of the Allies and of the new nation-states on securing ethnolinguistic majorities for these polities, compounded with the elaborate international system of protection for ethnolinguistic minorities, endowed the national principle with a clear ethnolinguistic character. The isomorphism of language, nation, and nation-state became *the* norm of statehood legitimization. The Allies, initially quite enthusiastic about the solution, refrained from enforcing it elsewhere in the world, perhaps surprised by sheer human costs incurred by its application, and the inherent political, social, and economic instability, which it bred.

Willy-nilly, the founding of Czechoslovakia, as approved by the Allies, had to comply with this novel national principle of ethnolinguistic isomorphism. Prior to World War I, Czechoslovakism was a minority faith. The mainstream of the Czech national movement wanted the reestablishment of an administrative unity of the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and [Austrian] Silesia) within the Habsburg Monarchy. It would have produced an ersatz Czech nation-state, similar to the Magyars' Kingdom of Hungary submerged within the broader framework of Austria-Hungary. It was the Slavophone Lutherans from western and central Upper Hungary (today's Slovakia), Ján Kollár (Jan Kollár in Czech) and Pavol Jozef Šafárik (Pavel Josef Šafařík in Czech), who, in the first half of the 19th century, toyed with the ideas of a Slavic language (with Czechoslovak as one of its written dialects) and a Czechoslovak language (to be produced by an equitable fusion of the codified Czech language and Slovak dialects⁷).

Most Czech intellectuals were not interested in the Czechoslovak project and opined that the Slovaks should adopt Czech as their written language. In the second half of the 19th century, Czechoslovakism and the development of a codified Slovak language was limited to the elite of the Slovak Lutherans, who constituted a mere one-seventh of all Slovaks. The Catholic majority of the Slovaks did not make their voice clearly heard on the political plane until the interwar period. This tipped the scales of influence toward Slovak Lutheran proponents of Czechoslovakism, when at the Great War's end, Czech nationalists realized that the Czechs alone would have

⁵ The successful pre-1918 drive to create nation-states in Central Europe was limited to the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia), and was as much motivated by religion as by language, with the exception of tri-confessional Albania. Although the German Empire was established as a German nation-state, German nationalists saw it as a project in progress, which could not be complete without embracing all the contiguous German-speaking territories in Central Europe.

⁶ Despite their clearly articulated wish, Austria, Germany, and the German-speaking regions of the Czech lands were not allowed to form a union, which would have yielded a genuinely ethnolinguistic German nation-state. The pruning of historical Hungary further than down to its ethnolinguistic Magyar-speaking core, left one-third of Magyars outside interwar Hungary. Apparently, the application of the national principle was withheld from the defeated powers (meaning Germany and the legal successors of Austria-Hungary, that is, Austria and Hungary).

⁷ By that time, a codified Slovak language had not emerged yet.

constituted a meager majority vis-à-vis Germans in a Czech nation-state. In a separate Slovak nation-state, the Slovaks would have faced a similar predicament vis-à-vis the Magyars. This undesirable possibility convinced Slovak Catholic leaders to side with the Czechoslovak solution⁸.

Independent Czechoslovakia was declared a nation-state of the eponymous Czechoslovak nation, much to the chagrin of Slovak Catholics who wanted an autonomous Slovakia within a federal Czecho-Slovakia. But a separate Czech nation would have constituted just a plurality in Czechoslovakia, followed by Germans as the second largest ethnonational group in the state⁹. The ethnolinguistic character of the national principle as applied in post-1918 Central Europe, required that the 1920 constitutional law on state language established Czechoslovak as the national language of Czechoslovakia. Similarly, in agreement with the same requirements of the ethnolinguistic isomorphism, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the 1921 constitution declared Serbocroatoslovenian as the national language of this intended nation-state. The difference was that the staunch opposition on the part of the Slovenes prevented the declaration of the Serbocroatoslovenian nation. In the kingdom's statistics and official documents the Slovenes were enumerated separate from the Serbocroats. On the contrary, in interwar Czechoslovakia the Slovaks were not allowed to emerge as a separate nation from the decreed commonality of the Czechoslovak nation. In official statistics, Slovaks were counted together with Czechs as Czechoslovaks.

For practical purposes of administration and education, the Czechoslovak language was interpreted as coming in two varieties: Czech to be employed in the Czech lands, in the army, and for statewide administration; and Slovak to be used in Slovakia. Apart from short (rarely in excess of a hundred small size pages) glossaries enumerating lexical and spelling differences between Czech and Slovak (cf. Tvrđý 1922), no genuine bilingual Czech-Slovak dictionary was compiled, perhaps, to underscore the legislated unity of the Czechoslovak language. The inclusion of the Slovaks' homeland in Czechoslovakia perhaps prevented their Magyarization, which might have been complete by the mid-20th century had Austria-Hungary survived. But the resultant national and linguistic emancipation of the Slovak nation entailed the Slovak leaders' growing opposition to Czechoslovakism, as well. This opposition became quite militant at the beginning of the 1930s, when Prague adopted the official rulebook of Slovak grammar and spelling, which was to progressively Czechize the Slovak variety of the Czechoslovak language (Vážený 1931). If the move had been successful, Czechoslovak would have become a Czech language under a novel name, and Slovak would have been edged out from official and written use for good.

This failure of the attempt at building a Czech-based Czechoslovak language entailed that Czechoslovak remained a legal construct, and no dictionary of this language was ever published. The same fate was shared by Serbocroatoslovenian, renamed the Yugoslav language in the wake of the 1929 royal coup, which turned the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes into Yugoslavia. When Czechoslovakia was dismantled in 1938–1939 prior to the outbreak of World War II, this event heralded the disappearance of the legally prescribed Czechoslovak language too. The separateness of Slovak was confirmed in wartime independent Slovakia, where it functioned as the sole national and official language. Interestingly, the wartime carving-up of

⁸ Due to the lack of space, I do not analyze the case of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was incorporated in Czechoslovakia to strengthen the Slavophone character of the polity vis-à-vis the huge non-Slavic minorities of Germans and Magyars. The Slavophone Ruthenians (Rusyns) were construed as a separate, though kindred 'state nation' (not a minority), which prevented their inclusion in the Czechoslovak nation. However, Prague did not allow for the development of the Ruthenian (Rusyn) language, first imposing Ukrainian, and later, Russian on the Ruthenians.

⁹ From the demographic perspective, the Slovaks were the third largest ethnonational group in interwar Czechoslovakia, followed by Magyars and the Ruthenians.

Yugoslavia also meant the disappearance of Serbo-Croatian, and the splitting of Yugoslavia's actual official language of Serbo-Croatian into Croatian and Serbian. These developments followed closely the normative stipulations of the isomorphism of language, nation, and nation-state. Following the emergence of independent Croatia and Slovakia as nation-states, their statehoods had to be legitimized by their own specific national languages, not shared with any other nations.

After 1945, Yugoslavia was recreated as a communist federal state. The separate status of Slovenian was re-confirmed, and the Macedonian language was allowed to emerge from southern Yugoslavian, complete with its Macedonian nation (in line with the 1934 decision of Comintern [Banac 1984: 328]). In a similar fashion, in the place of the interwar Serbo-Croatian nation, the Croats, the Muslims (Bosniaks), and the Serbs were recognized as separate nations. But this came at the prize of having to share the recreated Serbo-Croatian language.

The story was different in postwar Czechoslovakia from which almost all Germans were expelled alongside numerous Magyars (and Subcarpathian Ruthenia with its Ruthenian nation was handed over the Soviet Union). Ergo, beginning in the late 1940s, the Czechs and the Slovaks constituted the clear-cut majority of the population in the Czech lands and Slovakia, respectively. The legal and statistical constructs of the Czechoslovak nation and language were gone, but not entirely. The 1948 constitution of communist Czechoslovakia recognized the Czechs and the Slovaks as 'two brotherly nations,' but defined the polity as a 'unitary state of the Czechoslovak people.' The presumption and practice of postwar Czechoslovakism entailed political domination of the Czechs in the state and a new wave of Czechizing measures aimed at the Slovak language, which had undergone the process of puristic re-Slovakization in wartime Slovakia.

In 1949, after the publication of the first volume of the first multivolume authoritative dictionary of Slovak (Jánošík 1946–1949), Prague discontinued this work on the ground of its 'excessive anti-Czech purism.' Hence, another authoritative dictionary of this language, which followed a more Czechizing line, was finally completed between 1959 and 1968 (Peciar). In the course of the publication of this work, the first extensive one-volume Slovak-Czech dictionary came off the press in 1967 (Gašpariková). The Prague Spring and the ensuing Warsaw Pact intervention in 1968 precipitated the federalization of Czechoslovakia, complete with genuine official bilingualism. In 1979, the first extensive one-volume Czech-Slovak dictionary was published (Horák). It was the practical end of Czechoslovakism, then followed by the 1993 breakup of Czechoslovakia into the separate nation-states of Czechs and the Slovaks (Janaszek-Ivaničková 1994: 172), with Czech and Slovak as their respective sole national and official languages¹⁰.

Conclusion

The normative isomorphism of language, nation, and nation-state (not encumbered by rhetorically anti-national communism any longer) triumphed again. Its legitimizing force has not been spent yet, despite the widespread criticism of ethnic nationalism after 1989. For instance, the breakup of Yugoslavia, was followed by a parallel breakup of Serbo-Croatian into Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian construed as separate national languages of the nations of the Bosniaks, the Croats, and the Serbs. In 2006, Montenegro left the confederal union with Serbia, and emerged as another post-Yugoslav nation-state. Grammars and histories of the proposed Montenegrin language were compiled already in the 1990s, and many Montenegrin leaders and even state

¹⁰ Only 11 years after the 'velvet divorce,' the first dictionary pairing Czech and Slovak came off the press (Balcová 2004). Importantly, it was compiled and published in Slovakia, which speaks volumes of the continued influence of Czech-language publications and culture in the state, while the opposite is not true of the Slovak-language counterparts in the Czech Republic.

agencies have already chosen to call their language 'Montenegrin' in order to create or widen the normative ethnolinguistic difference between their nation and the Serbs. If Montenegro officially adopts its own and separate national language of Montenegrin, it will mean that the legitimizing force of the ethnolinguistic isomorphism continues to keep in thrall elites and masses across Central Europe. But this is definitely not true of the majority of nation-states elsewhere in the world.

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SŁOWOTWÓRSTWO POLITYCZNE W EUROPIE CENTRALNEJ: CASUS CZECHOSŁOWACJI

Streszczenie

Podział Europy Środkowej na etnicznojęzykowe państwa narodowe nastąpił w zgodzie z politycznym twierdzeniem, iż język to naród, i że właśnie tak językowo zdefiniowane narody winny zamieszkiwać odrębne państwa narodowe. Powszechne przyjęcie izomorfizmu (ściśłego nakładania się na siebie) języka, narodu oraz państwa jako naczelnego normatywu porządku politycznego w tym regionie spowodowało konstytucyjnie usankcjonowane wyniesienie czzechosłowackiego do godności języka narodowego i oficjalnego w międzywojennej Czechosłowacji. Sprzeciw Słowaków wobec tego rozwiązania uniemożliwił faktyczne wytworzenie się takowego języka. Chociaż po II wojnie światowej Praga oficjalnie uznała istnienie języka słowackiego, polityczny czzechosłowakizm trwał aż do Praskiej Wiosny, a jego wpływ ostatecznie zanikł po podziale Czechosłowacji w 1993 r. Wyżej wspomniany izomorfizm został zastosowany ponownie na przełomie wieku XX i XXI, kiedy to rozpad Jugosławii pociągnął za sobą rozpad języka serbsko-chorwackiego.