

Forum

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Content:

Lukáš Novotný

“Unless all indications to now are lying, Czechoslovak domestic policy is on the path towards a gradual transformation of the nation state into a state of nations”

István Cserniczkó – Csilla Fedinec

The competition of languages in the Lingusitic landscape of Transcarpathia in Czechoslovak Republic (1919-1939): a partial analysis

László Gyurgyík

Quo vadis? The number of Hungarians in Slovakia based on nationality and mother tongue data of the 2021 census

Béla Mester

The Usage of the Common Sense in the Public Philosophy of European Modernity

Ahmet Kaan Akyüz

Robert College During the Years of Conflict 1908-1918

Radoslava Brhlíková

Citizens or non-citizens – discrimination against the Russian minority in the Baltics

Gábor Kovács

New Wine in old bottle? Classical notions of political philosophy in a changed political reality

Book reviews

2022

5

FÓRUM TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

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Content

Studies

NOVOTNÝ, LUKÁŠ

“Unless all indications to now are lying, Czechoslovak domestic policy is on the path towards a gradual transformation of the nation state into a state of nations.” German Activism in the 1920s in the Reports of the Austrian Minister to Prague, Ferdinand Marek 3

CSERNICSKÓ, ISTVÁN – FEDINEC, CSILLA

The competition of languages in the Lingusitic landscape of Transcarpathia in Czechoslovak Republic (1919-1939): a partial analysis 17

GYURGYÍK, LÁSZLÓ

Quo vadis? The number of Hungarians in Slovakia based on nationality and mother tongue data of the 2021 census 31

MESTER, BÉLA

The Usage of the Common Sense in the Public Philosophy of European Modernity 49

Central European Forum

AKYÜZ, AHMET KAAAN

Robert College During the Years of Conflict 1908-1918 63

BRHLÍKOVÁ, RADOSLAVA

Citizens or non-citizens - discrimination against the Russian minority in the Baltics 71

KOVÁCS, GÁBOR

New Wine in old bottle? Classical notions of political philosophy in
a changed political reality 91

Book reviews

Kontra, Miklós – Borbély, Anna (eds.): Tanulmányok a budapesti beszédről
a Budapesti Szociolingvisztikai Interjú alapján [Papers on Budapest
Speech based on “The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview”]
Reviewed by Veronika Jakab Dančo 98

Kollai, István: Szlovákia királyt választ [Slovakia Elects a Monarch]
Reviewed by László Öllös 101

Simon, Attila: Az átmenet bizonytalansága. Az 1918/1919-es
impériumváltás Pozsonytól Kassáig [The Uncertainty of Transition:
The “Change of Sovereignities” in 1918 and 1919, from Pozsony
[Bratislava] to Kassa [Košice]] Reviewed by Gergely Bödők 103

Holec, Roman: Trianon - triumf a katastrofa [Trianon - Triumph and
Tragedy] Reviewed by Attila Simon 107

Liszka, József: Monumentumok. Szakrális (és „szakrális”) kisemlékek
a Kárpát-medencében [Monuments. Sacred (and “sacred”) small relics
in the Carpathian Basin] Reviewed by Zoltán Magyar 112

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CSERNICKSKÓ, ISTVÁN – FEDINEC, CSILLA

The competition of languages in the linguistic landscape of Transcarpathia in the Czechoslovak Republic (1919–1939): a partial analysis

Abstract: The study analyzes the linguistic landscape of Transcarpathia in the historical context of the First and Second Czechoslovak Republics. By analyzing a few historical photos and documents, the changes in the political and linguistic relations of the region are examined and language dominance is explored. We show that qualitative analysis can provide useful information on the different situations of languages and their speakers in the community.

Keywords: Transcarpathia; Czechoslovakia; linguistic landscape; minority language; public space.

1. Introduction

While *linguistic landscape* (LL) has become the focus of a growing number of researches, its definitions and approaches vary immensely across studies; languages appearing on visiting cards and product labels (and more) are all part of it now (Backhaus 2006; Shohamy & Waksman 2009). If we use the analogy of a tree for LL, we can see that while the openness of the field of LL to new ways and approaches lets the branches of the tree grow freely and without limitations, it also prevents firm theoretical background to develop and in many instances fails to include important perspectives (e.g., diachronicity).

According to one of the broader definitions and interpretations of LL, in addition to public signs, it encompasses the analyses of additional elements, such as photos, documents, visiting cards, and product labels, as well as symbols appearing in clothing, eating, music, and architecture—all of these shape LLs through people (Shohamy 2015). The development of the field and the inclusion of a wide range of materialities inspired the emergence of new research areas, such as the study of the material culture of multilingualism, which focuses on language-defined objects that encompass “a meaningful wholeness of material and verbal components considered as a representation of its user or users, or sociolinguistic environment” (Aronin & Ó Laoire 2012: 311,

2013: 230). As for the approaches, LL studies (LLS) show a colorful picture similar to that of the definitions. Most research tends to adopt a “snapshot” approach; some focus on the dialogical relationship between powers in space captured in or by signs; and others try to track its dynamic nature. A large amount of research is interested in the commodification of languages as it appears in the LL, which is a good indicator of economic and demographic changes (see e.g., Blommaert & Maly 2014; Marten et al. 2012; Cserniczkó & Laihonen 2016; Bányi 2014). Quite recently LLS have undergone a quantitative qualitative shift that gave the contextual elements more weight, and the descriptive and distributional approaches became less important (Moriarty 2014).

While public space undergoes a continuous transformation and is in constant mobility—probably due to the image capturing a particular moment in time—the investigation of LL is of a synchronic nature; researchers characterize the written signs and languages in a symbolic space within the context of a certain moment or era. Capturing change, however, also has a great potential for LL research. Among others, research done by Aneta Pavlenko proves that LL is dynamically changing (Pavlenko 2009). “To date, the field has been dominated by synchronic investigations that focus on a single point in time, thus implicitly treating public signage as static. In what follows, I approach LL not as a here-and-now phenomenon but as a process to be examined diachronically and in the context of other language practices” (Pavlenko 2009: 253). She emphasizes the need to examine linguistic landscapes diachronically as a dynamic phenomena (Pavlenko 2015). Pavlenko and Mullen (2015) point out that our interpretation of signs is based on cognitive processing abilities (automatic pattern recognition, automatic categorical perception, and interpretative ability; i.e., previous experiences with other signs), which are diachronic in nature. Accordingly, the analyses of LL elements is highly dependent on what was normative at a particular time and space, what made them salient, and what kind of values and/or meanings were attributed to these elements. Pavlenko and Mullen also note that while several studies make an attempt to read “back from signs to practices,” as Blommaert (Blommaert 2013: 51) suggested, they lack diachronicity, so the “results flatten the complexity of centuries” (Blommaert 2013: 119). They suggest to integrate the temporal dimension in LLS, which helps us to examine social, political, and economic changes through the signs.

In connection with the dynamics of LL, another approach has emerged, which takes LL as a site in which mobile linguistic resources are distributed and mapped; thus some researchers analyze the consequences of these mobilities on language ideologies, discourses, and practices (Stroud & Mpendukana 2009; Moriarty 2014; Pietikäinen 2014). To some extent our way of advancing LL is in this paper similar to this approach, since the linguistic resources that we analyze are also in a state of translocality, which means that they move across time and (to lesser extent) space (Johnstone 2010). It is however important to note that the influential direction is the opposite in the case of the present study: it is rather language policy and linguistic ide-

ologies that have an impact on LL than vice versa. Linguistic resources in Transcarpathia were mobilized for mainly political purposes, so the indexical value of languages changed according to power changes (Csernicskó & Beregszászi 2019). Leeman and Modan (2009) also point out the importance of a qualitative approach that links the analyses of LL elements to socio-geographical and sociohistorical processes and contexts, thus making it possible to understand the larger socio-political meanings of LL.

Many researchers (e.g., Shohamy 2006, 2015; Spolsky 2004) claim that LL is a component of language policy. Dal Negro (2009) argues that LL makes a “language policy [...] immediately apparent” (Dal Negro 2009: 206). Following this line, we define language policy as the intervention to language relations and communication traditions, usually based on some ideological background (Blommaert 2006), and LL is one of the many sites where explicit and implicit policies are realized, where the display or non-display of languages can tell a lot about power relations. However, it is important to note that interdisciplinary dialog is important to avoid false pictures that LL on its own can provide. There are plenty of examples when the languages of minorities are not proportionately (or not at all) displayed in the LL (Marten et al. 2012, Laihonon & Csernicskó 2017).

According to Pavlenko, “each instance of language choice and presentation in the public signage transmits symbolic messages regarding legitimacy, centrality, and relevance of particular languages and the people they represent” (Pavlenko 2009: 247). The LL reveals the linguistic ideologies that the policy-making body of language policy intends to project outwards (Kroskirty 2000). For Ben-Rafael et al. (2006: 8) and Vigers (2013), LL is interpreted as an emblem, a sign. If the elements of the LL are understood as signs with meanings, they are “markers of status and power” for minority languages (Huebner 2006: 32). Pavlenko points out that “The visibility of the public space and the fact that it is primarily shaped by public authorities makes it a central arena for enforcement of language policies, creation of particular national identities, and manipulation of public practices. An intended shift can be manifested in this symbolic arena in a number of ways, most dramatically through language erasure, that is deliberate removal of signage in a particular language” (Pavlenko 2009: 254-255).

With the examples from Transcarpathia (in Slovak and Czech: *Podkarpatská Rus*), we demonstrate how the political and linguistic changes can be tracked with the help of photos and historical documents. Instead of the frequently used quantitative research method, this study applies a qualitative approach (Blommaert & Maly 2014), analyzing the semiotic features of individual photos. The data were made accessible to us by the National County Record Office of Transcarpathia, the Record Office of the Reformed Diocese of Transcarpathia, and the news programs of the Archive of the Hungarian Television/National Audiovisual Archive. This paper looks at how the LL was manipulated in order to confirm hierarchies of languages in Czechoslovak Republic in the period of 1919–1939.

The photos used in the article were selected from material collected during the research project “Visual bilingualism: Language Policy in Photos” of the Antal Hodinka Linguistics Research Center.¹ In the course of the research project, nearly five thousand photographs were collected, of which approximately one thousand were taken during the examined period. From the database, we selected those photos which do not record a permanent situation, but which show the dynamic transformation of the language policy situation.

2. Historical background

The secession of nationalities, which led to the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, had no alternative reform until the political goal of dividing Austria-Hungary as a result of the First World War emerged in the circle of states hostile to the Habsburgs. Vienna tried to save the situation by proposing a federal structure for the monarchy, but this plan concerned only the Austrian part, and the Hungarian government immediately rejected the idea and attempted to accelerate the assimilation processes associated with modernization. However, it had the opposite effect: it broadened the social basis of the national movements (Michela 2016: 17).

The system of peace agreements that came at the end of the First World War made the war’s losers conclude treaties over which they had little or no influence. The redivision of Germany or Austria-Hungary took place partly on an ethnic basis. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was replaced by four independent states: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia (until 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes). Poland, Romania, and Italy also received parts of the former empire’s territories.

The peace treaties, which created new state borders, declared the right of nations to self-determination as decisive. However, other factors of an economic or strategic nature or simply the desire for more territory, were so often added to this principle that the new configuration of states in the region failed to follow ethnic principles, even where demographic factors made this possible (Romsics 2000: 213).

The First Czechoslovak Republic was founded in October 1918 as one of the successors to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and Milan Rastislav Štefánik played major roles in this process, and due to their active emigration, they earned the titles of officials. The peculiarity of the Czechoslovak state existed in the fact that the so-called historical countries of Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia became part of the new state on the basis of historical law; Slovakia,

1 Source: <https://hodinkaintezet.uz.ua/nyelvpolitika-kepekben/visual-bilingualism-language-policy-in-photos/> (last accessed 23.09.2022)

which did not have its own statehood, was included on the basis of natural law; and Transcarpathia (*Podkarpatská Rus*) was included on the basis of the right of unification in the form of a kind of indirect self-determination. The different legal bases were also reflected in the structure of the regions and in the ethnic composition of the country. The constitution of Czechoslovakia in 1921 declared the republic to be a nation state, with no mention of national minorities. Czechoslovakia was a nation state along French and British lines (Zeman 2000: 51).

The Allied states included provisions in the peace treaty to protect the rights of national minorities. This principle was also enshrined in the Treaty of Saint-Germain (1919). With the treaty Czechoslovakia secured formal control of Transcarpathia. These borders were finalized with the Treaty of Trianon (1920). The region settled down for a 20-year-long existence within Czechoslovakia (Stroschein 2012: 80).

3. Constructing a linguistic dominance in LL

The Republic of Czechoslovakia—born from the ashes of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy falling apart after the First World War—was awarded the area we call Transcarpathia today in the Treaty of Saint-Germain on 10 September 1919. The region became part of the republic under the name *Podkarpatská Rus*. This transitory period of power shift was captured by the Austro-Hungarian “*kaiserlich und königlich*” (in English: on behalf of the King and Emperor) postal stamp depicted in Picture 1. The words in black printed diagonally over the stamp as well as the date 1919 show that it was the postal authorities of the newly born Republic of Czechoslovakia that used the stamp of the dead realm, as it did not yet have its own state stamps. The stamp depicts the last ruler of the monarchy, known as Charles I in Austria and as Charles IV in Hungary. German, the most significant language of the declining empire, also appears on the stamp, as well as Czechoslovak, the official language of the newly born state.² Czechoslovak prevails over German, as the stamp demonstrates.

2 In the Czechoslovak Republic, the status of languages was regulated by the language law, which—based on § 129—was considered part of the constitution. Section 1 of the language law No. 122 (29 February 1920) declared that the Czechoslovak language was the official language of the state and—according to Section 4—in Czech regions Czech and in Slovak regions Slovak are the adequate varieties of the Czechoslovak language. Shevelov 1987: 198.

Picture 1.³

The next state affiliation shift in the history of the region occurred after the First Vienna Award. In November 1938, Hungary regained some of the southern territories of *Podkarpatská Rus*, mostly populated by Hungarians. Picture 2 presents an image of the building in Uzhhorod (Hungarian: *Ungvár*) from November 1938 originally dedicated to be the seat of *Podkarpatská Rus*. According to the recordings of the Hungarian news program of 10 November 1938, the facade of the building still showed the bilingual Czechoslovak–Rusyn/Ukrainian inscription,⁴ while the Hungarian soldiers and state clerks taking over the region were already hanging the Hungarian flag.

3 Record Office of the Reformed Diocese of Transcarpathia. (<http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Csehszlov%C3%A1kia>; last accessed 2021.10.21.)

4 According to Section 2 of the language law of the Czechoslovak Republic, in the administrative units of *Podkarpatská Rus* where members of the national minorities reached 20%, the given minority language could also be spoken in offices, in public life, etc. This is why Rusyn/Ukrainian (the language of the regional majority) could be read on the building facade. Cserniczkó & Fedinec 2014: 76–77.

Picture 2.⁵

This transitory period is also commemorated by the stamp and seal in Picture 3. The 2-koruna stamp depicting Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk below the inscription “Československo” was released on 14 September 1937 to pay tribute to one of the founders and the first president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. The seal, however, depicts the crown of Hungary’s first king, St. Stephen, and shows the date 1938 as well as the Hungarian-language inscription “Ungvár visszatért” (Uzhhorod has returned [to Hungary]). It shows that the dominance of the Czechoslovak language had by this time given way to the new official language: Hungarian.

5 Television news report on the arrival of the Hungarian Royal Army to Uzhhorod (*Ungvár*) and Mukachevo (*Munkács*) on 10 November 1938. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQRQKkTusuk&feature=related>; last accessed 2021.04.07.) Between 2’22” and 2’25”, the film shows when the Czechoslovakian coat-of-arms was hit off the building; the specific shot can be seen at 2’31” and 2’32”.

The shift in the legal status of languages also affected church registers. The Greek Catholic church register of the village Karatshin (Hungarian: *Karácshalva*) was originally bilingual: Rusyn/Ukrainian and Czech/Slovak. As Picture 5 implies, on 25 August 1938 (when *Karácshalva* was still part of Czechoslovakia), the church register entry was written in Ukrainian/Rusyn with Cyrillic letters, while on 13 November and 4 December of the same year (after Hungary had already regained the village), the church register entries were written in Hungarian with the Latin alphabet.

Picture 5.⁹

18
сторона
strana

Текущее число Bežnyj číslu	День, месяц и год. Deň, mesiac i rok		Имя Meno	Поль Pohlavie		Происхождение Pôvod		Въроиспо- вданіе Nab. znenstvo	Родн мя, фамилія, вѣро- меню, priezvisko, m
	впороженія narodenia	вкрещенія и в- рощованія krštenia i všrovania		муж. muž.	жен. žen.	казон. kazon.	неказ. nekaz.		
7.	20. август ma 1938	25. август ma 1938.	Андрей	муж.	казон.	казон.	казон.	гөр. мат.	Лагушак Евген
8.	1938. novem ber 10.	1938. novem ber 13.	Ferenc	муж.	казон.	казон.	казон.	гөр. мат.	Pák Laj gör. kat. f Kalmács
9	1938 novem ber 28.	1938. decem ber 4.	Erzsébet	жен.	казон.	казон.	казон.	гөр. мат.	Gelényi gör. kat. f Lóth Ma

On 2 November 1938, the First Vienna Award ceded to Hungary the southern plains of present-day Transcarpathia, where the majority of the population was Hungarian. The much larger northern and eastern parts of the region, which had a predominantly Slavic population, became part of Hungary again as a result of the military operation in mid-March 1939. The First Vienna Award, as well as the return of the southern lands to Hungary, took the ethnic principle into account: territories where Hungarians were eth-

9 The Record Office of the Reformed Diocese of Transcarpathia.

nically the majority were returned to the state. However, as a result of the military operation in March 1939, territories where the vast majority were Ruthenians/Ukrainians were also included in Hungary.

Picture 6 shows a Czechoslovak–Hungarian bilingual postcard overprinted with a postage stamp “Berehovo has returned” on 9 November 1938, commemorating when the Hungarian army entered the city. The over-stamping was a typical procedure at the turn of the state. The postal item was stamped to indicate that the Hungarian army had marched into Berehovo, which had been part of Czechoslovakia for 20 years.

Picture 6.¹⁰



The absolute majority of the population residing in the region we now call Transcarpathia has been Ukrainian/Rusyn (Kocsis & Kocsis-Hodosi 1998: 84-85; Kocsis & Tátrai eds. 2013). When the region was granted to Czechoslovakia in 1919, the treaty stipulated that the region would be given autonomy, but lawfully, autonomy was officially recognized by the Czechoslovak Parliament only as late as 22 November 1938. Then, by exploiting the international political situation, however, the government of the autonomous region strove to establish an independent Ukrainian state. Under the leadership of Agyustyn Voloshyn, the autonomous government adopted Ukrainian

¹⁰ Archive of the Antal Hodinka Linguistic Research Centre.

as the official language of the region and besides the name *Podkarpatská Rus*, also permitted the use of Carpathian Ukraine (*Карпатська Україна*). The short-lived microstate was founded on 14 March 1939 by the name Carpathian Ukraine with its seat in Khust but was invaded by the Hungarian army just two days later on 16 March (Csernicskó & Fedinec 2014: 88-90). The stamp shown by Picture 7 reflects one of the stages towards independence. On the top, the larger inscription says “Česko-Slovensko” in Czechoslovak, but below it, we can read the Ukrainian text “Карпатська Україна” (“Carpathian Ukraine”).

Picture 7.¹¹



4. Conclusions

This article demonstrated how after a shift in language hierarchy, the language of a new regime replaces its predecessor's formerly enjoyed supremacy, and how rapidly the transformation of language policies turn the previous language hierarchy and LL upside-down. It was also presented how a historical analysis of LL, by capturing the variety and change, could prove to be a research path that could help us interpret and understand social, political, economic, and linguistic processes.

In language policy research, a broadly understood LL could provide us with useful information not only about the hierarchical relations of individual languages but also about the dominance shifts between them. The qualitative description of LL and the

¹¹ (http://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stamp_of_Karpatska_Ukrajina.jpg; last accessed 2021.04.07.)

documentation of its changes can complement investigations of language policy (Shohamy 2006; Laihonen 2015a). By analyzing the semiotics of LL, not only prestige shifts of individual languages (Blommaert 2013), but also the status shift of languages and their speakers, the insecurity caused by the language policy status quo of a transitory period, the clash of norms (Pavlenko 2009), the changing process itself, and the transformation of political ideologies can all be tracked (Laihonen 2015b: 171).

By analyzing the LL of Transcarpathia from a diakronian perspective, we have demonstrated that “linguistic landscape has emerged as a space where language conflicts have become particularly visible” (Pavlenko 2009: 254). In the analysis, we have shown that linguistic conflicts can also become visible when some groups paint over or write over the language that they do not want with the languages that they think are missing.

The data suggest that the LL can be viewed as a dynamic space that is significant in indexing and performing language ideologies that are continually being contested and renegotiated (Moriarty 2014: 464). By presenting the permanent competition of languages and their speakers as well as the intensity of the continuous attempts to win in the dominance battle over the symbolic space, we can also understand better why it is essential for both majority and minority communities to have their languages presented in public spaces.

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