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Workshop

Languages in Contact:

The Danube as a Cultural Space from a Linguistic Point of View

9–10 November 2016



Notes

Eszter Tarsoly

A Danubian Cultural Space: Language and Ideology

History, memory, and even some present-day investment strategies invite us to think of the Danube region as a united whole, in which a conspicuous diversity of languages, faiths, and political allegiances is underpinned by less obvious similarities in everyday practices and culture. But is it possible to think of the Danube region as a distinct area from a linguistic point of view? This interactive lecture seeks to answer the question by exploring the exceptional linguistic diversity of the Danube region in Europe, and by probing into the ways in which Danubian languages have converged as a result of contact between their speakers. Special attention will be given to Hungarian, the language which, on cursory inspection, stands out most both historically and structurally in the region. This angle will allow us to elucidate the impact of cultural contact and realignment on the profile of a language. Finally, the lecture will conclude with a discussion on the cross-linguistic diversity and convergence of beliefs about language in the region.

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Tina Parte

Talking about Language – Cultural Mediation

In this introductory session the common metaphor that a language is an organism, which has grown and evolved naturally, will be scrutinized.

By means of a thought-image taken from the German language it will be argued that any language is always embedded in a particular social context and is as much a product of its own internal development as well as determined by external circumstances. The vitality of a

language, for example, might be promoted or impeded depending on the prestige of the language it happens to come into contact with.

In short, languages are never quite what they seem to be. They are not monolithic and unchangeable entities embodying the nation state. A

national language has undergone a process of codification and standardisation, in which certain varieties and languages have been

chosen over others. When talking about a language, we should be aware of the extent to which it is always already socially and culturally mediated. As linguists as well as

language teachers we function as mediators, who make others aware of the complexity of talking about language in order to engage them in a productive debate about it.

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Jelena Čalić

**Nations Separated by
a Single Language?
(Serbo-Croatian and German)**

In this session overlaps and discontinuities in the *symbolic* function of language across the region will be presented through two case studies. Firstly, we will explore the link between nation building processes in the former Yugoslav states prior to and after Yugoslavia's break-up in the 1990s and the creation of discontinuity with a certain linguistic and language naming tradition in the Serbo-Croatian speaking area. Common narratives surrounding the description of fragmentation of Serbo-Croatian will be presented, among them the one that promotes the concept of "pluricentric languages". Secondly, the concept of "pluricentric languages" will be explored in a contrastive framework, using case studies from both the Serbo-Croatian language and the German language. The session will conclude with looking into regional perceptions of, and reactions to, pluricentric models for standard languages, which unveil continuities as well as controversies across the linguistic communities in question.

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Ramona Gönczöl

Words without Borders (Borrowing in Romanian)

This presentation will explain how Romanian has a unique place amongst other Romance languages due to its geographical position as well as cultural contacts it has had over time. Ramona Gönczöl will present examples of grammatical and lexical borrowings in Romanian that come from a variety of source languages. Slavic neighbours and various past invaders, Vulgar Latin through the Roman occupation, later French cultural influences as well as other sources are just a few of the examples that will be provided alongside the change in script from Cyrillic to Latin. Ramona Gönczöl will present lexical doublets and how words with the same meaning can coexist in Romanian and how they are used in different linguistic and cultural registers. The presentation is coupled with practical activities for the audience to get involved with.

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Lily Kahn

What makes a real language?
(Yiddish, Hungarian,
and Romani)

Yiddish, the traditional vernacular of Ashkenazic (Central and East European) Jewry, has a rich linguistic character reflecting a thousand years of Jewish history and culture in the region. This session will provide a historical overview of this fascinating language from its beginnings until the present day, including the scholarly debate regarding the origins and early spread of Yiddish; its characteristic fusion of Germanic, Romance, Semitic, and Slavic components; the development of medieval and modern Yiddish literature; and the status of Yiddish in the twenty-first century. The session will devote particular attention to traditional and current speaker attitudes to Yiddish, especially the common view that it is not a 'real' language. It will also discuss the process of standardisation that Yiddish underwent in the early- to mid-twentieth century, and consider the circumstances and significance of such a process in the case of a stateless language.

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Eszter Tarsoly, Jelena Čalić,
Ramona Gönczöl, Tina Parte,
Lily Kahn

Discussion Panel: Imagining the Other through Humour

In the last session our own reservations concerning the right choice of linguistic data will be shared and discussed. In which way should the relevant data be presented in order to foster a meaningful debate? We will explore how linguistic phenomena such as proverbs, collocations, and ethnonyms capture perceptions and stereotypes of the Other in various national and ethnic contexts. Jokes and humour, in turn, negotiate or subvert such stereotypes. This topic will be explored as a teaching methodological challenge, thus closing the workshop with further reflections on our starting theme: the "Languages in Contact along the Danube: Intercultural Frictions and Flows" course as an instance of cultural mediation. Our own teaching and preparation practice will be scrutinized as instances of negotiating various epistemological and ideological standpoints: we shall argue that various ways of "knowing", discovering, and negotiating constitute a form of knowledge which challenges existing stereotypes and received wisdom.

Curricula Vitae and publications

Jelena Čalić is a Senior Teaching Fellow in Serbo-Croatian language at University College London (UCL), School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), where she teaches courses on both undergraduate and postgraduate level. She taught Serbo-Croatian at University of Westminster and at the University of Uppsala. She designs exams and examines for Foreign and Commonwealth Office. She is currently completing her doctoral thesis titled "The Politics of Teaching a Language which is 'simultaneously one and more than one': the case of Serbo-Croatian". Her research interests are language pedagogy, language standardisation and standard language ideology, attitudes to language and translation.

Ramona Gönczöl has been teaching at UCL since 2000. She teaches all BA, MA and Evening classes. She has earned a BA in English and Romanian (University of the West, Timisoara, Romania), an MA in British and American Studies (University of the West, Timisoara, Romania), an MEd in Adult learning at University College London, and an MSc (ongoing) at University of Edinburgh in Digital Education. Her research and academic interest lie in the areas of e-learning, intercultural studies, translations and ethnography. She is working on an extensive e-learning project for learning Romanian. Her publications include: with Dennis Deletant, *Colloquial Romanian*, London 2002, last edition 2011; with Dennis Deletant (Eds.), *Romanian. An Essential Grammar*, London/New York 2008.

Lily Kahn is Reader in Hebrew and Jewish Languages in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL. Her main research areas are Hebrew in Eastern Europe, Yiddish, and other Jewish languages. She is also interested in multicultural Shakespeare, translation studies, comparative Semitics, and endangered and minority languages. Her publications include: with Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi, *Sámi: An Essential Grammar*, London 2017; with Aaron Rubin (Eds.), *Handbook of Jewish Languages*, Leiden/Boston 2016; *A Grammar of the Eastern European Hasidic Hebrew Tale*, Leiden/Boston 2015; *The Routledge Introductory Course in Biblical Hebrew*, London/New York 2014; *Colloquial Yiddish*, Abingdon/New York 2012; *The Verbal System in Late Enlightenment Hebrew*, Leiden 2009.

Tina Parte studied Modern Languages at the University of Vienna. As an undergraduate she spent a year at Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris. For her MA thesis she had the opportunity to go to Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz as well as Columbia University, New York. In her MA thesis she concentrated on the exploration of postmodern theory and the representation of the city as text in Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1987). While working as *OeAD-Lektorin* at the UCL German Department in London Tina Parte did an MA in Gender, Culture, Politics at Birkbeck College, London. For her MA thesis, which compared the representation of gender fluidity between the characters of a Chicano American graphic novel and a Japanese manga series, she received the Mary MacIntosh prize. She is currently doing her PhD on the political aesthetics of the *Berlin Wall* at the London Consortium. Her main research interests lie in gender studies, popular culture and critical theory. She has more than ten years experience in teaching German as a foreign language in the UK and the US. She has taught all levels and is currently teaching German ab-initio, German language-based content classes, German for academic purposes, translation and a class on contact linguistics at University College London, King's College and Birkbeck College, London. Her publications include "Mad, Maddening and Madly in Love: The Representation of Gender Fluidity and Desire in Jaime Hernandez's *Locas* and Akimi Yoshida's *Banana Fish*", in: *Critical Engagements 3.1: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, vol.III, no.1, Spring, London 2009.

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Eszter Tarsoly teaches Hungarian and courses in sociolinguistics at UCL, School of Slavonic and East European Studies. She has been a course leader on *The Danube: Intercultural Interaction* Global Citizenship summer school since 2013. Her research explores the cross-linguistic diversity of attitudes towards language and the social, cultural, and language typological factors that influence discourses of 'standard' language. She is also interested in endangered languages, language contact, particularly in the Danube region, the theory and practice of translation, and the non-trivial relationship between language and identity. Eszter's current projects include the translation, from Hungarian into English, of an ethnographic essay on the Surgut Khanty, an ethnic minority group in Russia, and of a Khanty shaman song. She is contributing to the linguistic commentary on the first Hungarian-language text (c12), while writing a book chapter on Hungarian and a paper on the language features of populist discourses in Hungary.