

Creating Languages in Central Europe During the Last Millennium [EN]

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Tomasz Kamusella's name is definitely known to those interested in language politics and the relation of language to nationalist movements in Central Europe. His 1140-page monograph on that topic, published in 2009, gained positive resonance. [1] Since then he has been actively involved in research on language policy issues in that region with special attention to minority language independence movements, such as the Silesian variety in Poland. [2] Moreover, Kamusella's publications show his deep interest in how state-official languages are shaped and recognized. [3] Therefore, I was not surprised to find his monograph *Creating languages in Central Europe during the last millenium* which provides an overview of the rise of the multiplicity of languages in a region that might seem insignificant and small on the world scale, but which is a place of a highly convoluted history of population movements, border and power shifts, ethnic mixes and spreads of different religions; a place where dozens of language varieties from several language families meet. [4] Therefore, this 100-page monograph is by necessity only an introduction to the topic, an invitation to learn more about the linguistic history of the region.

Kamusella starts with an explanation of the complexity of two concepts fundamental in his monograph: the geopolitical one – Central Europe, and the linguistic one – language. He admits that his choice of region is rather arbitrary, dictated on the one side by the lack of capacities to cover all of Europe, and, on the other, his desire to include an area rich in diversity in terms of cultures, political influences and religions (p. 2). The area spreads roughly from the Netherlands to Turkey; still, he does not shy from world examples where suitable. Linguistically, Kamusella does away with the dichotomy "language – dialect" (pp. 11-14), introducing a threefold distinction instead: "language" – a human capacity to speak, "lect" – the actualization of "language" (p. 9), and "a language" – "a politically [...] empowered lect" (p. 19). His approach to language creation is that of Einar Haugen and Miroslav Hroch, namely that the rise of (standard) languages in Europe is best described by the comparison to the rise of nationalism (pp. 16-19). [5]

In the following chapters he proceeds to prove his thesis that languages shape politics and, simultaneously, languages are shaped to fit political goals (p. xi). He starts by showing how religious powers molded the linguistic stage in premodern Europe: the institutionalization of monolingualism with holy Latin and Roman script by Western Christianity, only later followed by the gradual introduction of vernaculars into religious

practice, and the religious multilingualism of Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity, where Greek and its script were quickly challenged by Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, Syriac, and Church Slavonic with their own scripts. Thus, Kamusella shows aptly that Central Europe is a melting pot of these two distinctive ethnolinguistic traditions, which defined the region's plural and heterogeneous character in early times. Only later, subjected to the growing influence of secular politics in the modern age, Central Europe gradually became an agglomeration of monolingual states. Approaching our times, he argues convincingly that Europe has returned to a depoliticized trade multilingualism; a multiethnic polyglossia but with a simultaneous pan-European suprastate monolingualism in English – a result of the West's cultural, scientific and economic imperialism (pp. 76-77 and 91). [6]

Importantly, Kamusella not only chronologically reports on facts but uses them to prove again and again his initial thesis that the process of turning lects into languages has a deeply political character, as Pierre Bourdieu and John B. Ferguson argued before him. [7] He shows convincingly that in premodern times languages evolved rather organically, often resulting in diglossia (religious languages vs. secular lects), only to develop into state dictated and maintained monolingualism in modern times.

It is clear from the text that Kamusella has a detailed knowledge of the linguistic history of Central Europe, which he seeks to transfer on a mere 100 pages. Owing to his broad education in philology, history, political and European studies, he manages to present it in a wide perspective. Each page is densely filled with facts and the analysis, which might make it a difficult read for some without prior knowledge of the ethno-political history of the region. Therefore, despite Kamusella's explanation why he refrained from doing so (p. 102), I wish there were graphics in the text for easier orientation. Although I appreciate the effort of compiling a long list of links to e-illustrations, it is useless in a printed version of the book without direct access to the Internet; retyping URLs is tedious, and several of them are already dead.

It is worth noting that this is not a book written for linguists only. Kamusella relates the mechanics of language creation to major developments in culture, religion and statehood. He diligently explains all terms and concepts introduced in the book. One might wonder, however, whether it is necessary to (to give but one example) explain in detail the Greek etymology of "diglossia" and "polyglossia" in such an overview (p. 39). Moreover, although I do not doubt Kamusella's good knowledge of the languages he studies, he should be more careful in using Latin, since both proverbs he uses are written wrong: it should be "cuius regio eius religio" ("whose realm, his religion") (pp. 51 and 74), and "e pluribus unum" ("out of many, one") (p. 58). [8] To make matters worse, by switching "cuius" and "eius" the meaning of the phrase actually opposes Kamusella's argument, resulting in "whose religion, his realm." Despite these few shortcomings, it is a well-written overview of the topic with ample literature suggestions for further reading, in the form of extensive references in the text and an impressive 33-page bibliography at the end of the monograph.

Although the mere 100 pages barely scratch the surface, making me wish Kamusella reached at least a third of the volume of his first 1140-page monograph, and do not produce any new findings in the field, but rather summarize and contextualize the current knowledge on the topic, it remains a much needed historical overview of the linguistic situation in Central Europe. One can only hope that more is to come.

[1] Tomasz Kamusella, *The politics of language and nationalisms in Central Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Basingstoke 2009. See for instance the review: Tom Dickins, Review of 'The politics of language and nationalism in Modern Central Europe' by Kamusella, Tomasz, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review* 91 (4) 2013, pp. 870-872.

[2] Tomasz Kamusella, Poland and the Silesians: Minority rights a la carte?, in: *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 11 (2) 2012, pp. 42-74; Tomasz Kamusella, Motoki Nomachi, The long shadow of borders: the cases of Kashubian and Silesian in Poland, in: *Eurasia Border Review* 5 (2) 2014, pp. 35-60; Tomasz Kamusella, The changing lattice of languages, borders, and identities in Silesia, in: Tomasz Kamusella, Motoki Nomachi, Catherine Gibson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Slavic Languages, Identities and Borders*, New York 2016, pp. 185-205.

[3] Tomasz Kamusella, The global regime of language recognition, in: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (218) 2012, pp. 59-86; Tomasz Kamusella, The history of the normative opposition of "language versus dialect". From its Graeco-Latin origin to Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nation-states, in: *Colloquia Humanistica* (5) 2016, pp. 164-188.

[4] Tomasz Kamusella, *Creating languages in Central Europe during the last millennium*, Basingstoke 2015.

[5] Einar Haugen, Dialect, language, nation, in: *American Anthropologist* 68 (6) 1966, pp. 922-935; Miroslav Hroch, *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe. A comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*, New York 1985; Miroslav Hroch, *The social interpretation of linguistic demands in European national movements*, Florence 1994.

[6] A side note: Contrary to what Kamusella writes, linguistic purism in Germany and Czech Republic cannot serve as a symptom of the rejection of Western-style modernity anymore. The tendency to translate new terms of culture and technology is gone – both in German and Czech. Compare, for instance, the newest technology: Eng. "smartphone" – Ger. "das Smartphone" – Cz. "smartphone" (I am told that "chytrý telefon" is much less popular), Eng. "tablet" – Ger. "das Tablet" – Cz. "tablet", Eng. "selfie" – Ger. "das Selfie" – Cz. "selfie" (or "selfičko"). Sources: personal communication with native speakers, and additionally Duden (www.duden.de) for German.

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, John B. Thompson, *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge Mass. 1991; Charles A. Ferguson, Thom Huebner, *Sociolinguistic perspectives: Papers on language in society, 1959-1994*, New York 1996.

[8] Consequently, the spin-off of the first proverb should be "cuius regio eius lingua" ("whose realm, his language") (p. 74).



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