New Histories of Politics - Topics, Theories, and Methods in the History of Politics beyond Great Events and Great Men

PAPER PRESENTATION

Proposed title: "A nation may be said to exist in its language": Linguistic purism and the rise of language movements in Hungary and in the circum-Pannonian region (1772 – 1872).

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My paper will explore the relation between intellectuals and the sphere of politics, in particular how intellectuals gained access to authority and power in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) through promoting a particular set of attitudes towards language in the wake of nationalism and modernity.

Purism is a universal factor in the standardisation of languages. It is concerned with imposing a code of linguistic behaviour on a contemporary speech-community.[1] Language is also a 'fearsome resource'[2] because of the role it plays in maintaining the position of elites in society. In the West, the socio-economic institutions of the middle-classes ensure that their own way of speaking affirms the values associated with success in the community. The rationale for language engineering and purist activity shows a different pattern in CEE, where a particular group of intellectuals, linguists, writers and *hommes de lettres* define their role in society as 'the owners of language'[3] to this day.

It is impossible to understand the phenomenon of linguistic purism by exploring the changing pattern of purist tendencies in a single speech community

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[1] George Thomas, *Linguistic Purism*, London and New York, 1991, p.190.
[2] Ruqaiya Hasan, 'What kind of resource is language?', in Hasan, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Meaning,* p. 34.
[3] See the definition of *nyelvi norma* ('linguistic norm') in: *Nyelvművelő kéziszótár* (Manual of Language Cultivation), Budapest, 1996, p. 422.

only. A comparative, and not only historic, approach is needed because purism – albeit a universal factor among attitudes towards language – has different causes, characteristics, and influence in various speech communities. Even within a genetically related branch of languages, such as the Romance or Slavonic languages, there are various kinds of purisms depending on socio-cultural, historical and other language-external factors, such as the status of a given language in a community, whether it is used as the official language of a community, whether it is taught at schools, whether it has a written variety, and so on. My paper contrasts Hungarian linguistic purism with two discrete speech communities of the region of Central and Eastern Europe, namely Czech and Romanian, in which a language movement occurred in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The analysis will also pinpoint features of West European linguistic purism, mainly in sixteenth-century France and Germany, thus sketching the background of the language movements of Central and Eastern Europe, and showing how the rise of the latter was intertwined with, and rooted in, the emergence of purist phenomena in the West. The primary aim of the contrastive analysis is to show the differences and similarities between attitudes towards language in the three Central-East European speech communities, and to explore the role played by men of letters, writers, grammarians, and linguists in the promulgation of the idea of purity with regards to language. The secondary aim or rather a by-product of this contrastive analysis is a more finely-grained approach to the understanding of Hungarian linguistic purism. An in-dept analysis of Czech and Romanian linguistic purisms remains beyond the scope of this paper.

It is instructive to contrast Hungarian linguistic purism with Czech and Romanian because these languages belong to widely divergent branches of Indo-European (Slavonic and Romance), thus they are both genealogically different from Hungarian which is a Uralic language, with Obi-Ugrian languages being its closest relatives. However, all three are spoken in the same geographic area, and consequently display differences as well as similarities in the pattern of linguistic

purism, depending on whether language-external, regional features or language-internal, typological features are at the heart of the contrastive analysis. This will also allow delineation of potentially universal categories which might then be applied to the analysis of attitudes toward language in other speech communities. Romanian and Hungarian are comparable because they are the two main non-Slavonic languages of the region, and they were both spoken on the territories of two great empires in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Ottoman and the Habsburg, respectively. As a consequence of the language polities of these Empires, both Hungarian and Romanian were under strong pressure from dominant foreign languages (German and Greek, respectively). On the other hand, Romanian was able to embrace its linguistic affinity to other, prestigious Romance languages of Europe, and find anchorage through the increasing awareness of the genealogical relatedness to such a 'great ancestor' as Latin. The Hungarian language movement had no comparable potential for anchorage.

The fact that both Czech and Hungarian were spoken in the Habsburg empire accounts for the similarities between the motives of their language movements, namely, that the threat that figures in the history of both languages is oppression by mainly German, the official language of the Empire. At the same time, Czech, unlike Hungarian, was not only able to ground itself in the tradition of a codified, literary standard language from the 13th century, but also to strengthen its status through its linguistic affinity to Polish and other Slavonic languages of the region, the role of which should not be underestimated in the period of the awakening of the Pan-Slav idea. On the other hand, the Czech language movement, like the Hungarian, evolved largely on the model of German linguistic purism, both in adopting ideas of word formation and in the structure and aims of the movement.

I shall address the following questions: what are the dominant political, historical, national, ethical and aesthetic ideologies underlying purist attitudes in CEE and what are the origins of the privileging of conscious and planned intervention into language change.

Language movements and language ideologies are a quintessentially political issue, inasmuch as they are a mediating link between social structures and language use. Thus, in order to tackle the above questions, I shall discuss the key-role that intellectuals played in defining a national community through the formulation of a 'national language' in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in CEE. First, I shall look at the historical conditions that brought about the first wave of conscious and planned intervention in the development of Czech, Hungarian, and Romanian. Second, I shall contrast the motives and activities of three emblematic personalities, the three most prominent leaders of the language movements in question: Josef Jungmann (1773 – 1847) in Bohemia, Ferenc Kazinczy (1759 – 1831) in Hungary, and Ion Eliade Rădulescu (1802 – 1872) in Muntenia. Finally, I shall address the question of how, and to what extent, language acquired the status of being a symbol of the privileges of political and intellectual elites in the three speech communities. My conclusions will have some bearings on how the purist endeavour of intellectuals ensured their position in society as 'moral legislators' responsible for the maintenance of 'the national language': a symbol of the worthiness of a community, which legitimates the claim to recognition in the wider world.