

BOOK REVIEWS

Philologists: Scholars or Politicians?

David L. Hoyt and Karen Oslund, (eds.), *The Study of Language and the Politics of Community in Global Context*. Lexington Books (A Division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), Lanham MD, 2006, viii + 258 pp.

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Since the early 19th century, language (construed as the vernacular of a polity's inhabitants, meaning 'nation') has been employed in Europe as, increasingly, the political instrument of statehood legitimization and state-building, and on the other hand, for delegitimizing and destroying non-national polities or regimes. This unprecedented politicization of language has faced the students of language (first known as 'philologists' [Greek for 'fond of words, speech, learning'] before they became 'linguists' [derived from Latin for 'tongue'] of today) with the problem of how to maintain objectivity of their research in the social and political context of the popular wielding of language as the weapon of state-making and of the destruction of polities. Furthermore, they could also succumb to the Faustian temptation of turning their academic knowledge of language into a springboard into politics. That is why, in Central and Eastern Europe so many scholars dabbled in politics (for instance, the Grimm brothers, Samuel Bogumił Linde, or Josef Jungmann), and quite a few successfully reinvented themselves as politicians (for example, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Ibrahim Rugova, or Franjo Tuđman). Conversely, many a leader followed the suit, and wanted to be recognized as linguists in their own right (for instance, Enver Hoxha, Iosip Stalin, or Turkmenbashi [Saparmurat Niyazov]). In a sum, objectivity has never become a leading goal, especially for these linguists, who prefer to call themselves 'philologists.'

The book under interview is a collection of closely interlinked and insightful essays that delve into the thorny issue of the involvement of philologists in politics and of politicians in the study of language. The first four contributions, penned by Tuska Benes (College of William and Mary, Williamsburg VA), Peter K. J. Park (University of California, Los Angeles), David L. Hoyt (a scholar from Chicago) and Karen Oslund (Towson University, Baltimore), analyze the question on the 18th- and 19th-century case studies drawn from Prussia, the then novel field of comparative grammar, France and Italy, and Scandinavia. Then, in the three final articles, written by Sara Pugach (California State University, Los Angeles), Derek R. Peterson (African Studies

Center, University of Cambridge) and Elisabeth Kaske (University of Heidelberg), these insights are applied to the analysis of language policies, as developed on these European models, and applied, at the turn of the 20th century, in colonial Africa, and China and Japan under Western imperial influence.

In their Introduction, the editors, David L Hoyt and Karen Oslund, point to the fact that Ferdinand de Saussure's program of making linguistics into an exact science failed to inspire, equally, his contemporaries and nationally-minded linguists nowadays. Since the turn of the 19th century, language has been time and again employed for nation- and state-building, and also for control of and shaping societies in colonies. Although historians acknowledge the significant role of language in national projects, they have not embarked on thorough research projects to dissect the plethora of mutual influences between the practice of linguistics (philology) and politics. Likewise, most linguists prefer to focus on their subject matter, and shy away from a reflection whether day-to-day politics may influence their findings and vice versa. The need of interdisciplinary research is paid lip service to, but hardly anything follows. A handful of studies that ventured into this under-researched field were authored by sociolinguists, (Fishman 1973) sovietologists, (Smith 1998) orientalists, (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001) language planners, (Asimova 1982) arabists, (Suleiman 2004) or even communist apparatchiks. (Isaev 1979) Recently, bona fide historians wrote precious few works of this kind. (Burke 2004) I can only hope that it is a beginning of a trend, which will be joined by linguists interested in a critical reassessment of their discipline, meaning the intimate involvement of linguistics in politics. (I wonder if it is just a chance that previously one of the leading linguists in the world, Noam Chomsky, devoted the second half of his life to the career of a political thinker and polemicist?)

In the view of the aforesaid, perhaps, it comes as no surprise that the contributors to the volume under review are a group of academic 'oddballs,' who ventured outside the narrow confines of their respective disciplines in search of a broader unifying theme for their research. They include historians, an independent scholar, an Africanist, and a Scandinavianist. Another strength of the team is that they share among themselves a plethora of languages (classical and standard Chinese, Danish, Faroese, French, German, Gikuyu, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, or Swahili), which enables them to peruse literature and documents in them. (Their hold of sources is meticulous and quite masterful, for instance, Derek R Peterson combed through archives in Birmingham, Cambridge, Dar es Salaam and Dodoma in Tanzania, Edinburgh, Kew, and Nairobi and Othaya in Kenya.) This adds a much needed depth to their analysis, which frequently misses from works of this kind authored by monoglots and scholars preoccupied exclusively with a single discipline. The contributors read and commented on their colleagues' articles included in the volume, which allowed for genuine comparativeness, which is frequently absent from edited collections of papers. This alone is a novel quality in the study of politics of language, since case studies predominate in this field.

The scope of comparisons is vast and daring. It ranges from France, Germany and Italy to Eastern Africa, China and Japan. As their period they took the span from

the 1740s to the 1940s. The second half of the 18th century saw the gestation of the ideas about language, which have been utilized for various national projects across the globe, and the volume stops short of the virtual boom in nation-state-making, which came after World War II with the rapid process of decolonization. It is a pity that the editors did not comment on the caesuras explicitly.

In the opening contribution, Tuska Benes analyzes the rise of philology, meaning the study of language. At the turn of the 19th century, language was defined as the spirit of a people (nation) in Prussia. Significantly, this coincided with the transition from the belief into the perceived universalism of French to the replacement of this language with German in Prussia's royal court, state administration and the army. The momentous change was precipitated by Revolutionary France's destruction of the Holy Roman Empire, the defeat of the Austrian and Russian empires, and the near-destruction of Prussia. The change in language was perceived as patriotic and commenced the rise of German nationalism. This phenomenon constituted a departure from John Locke and Étienne de Condillac's Enlightenment understanding of language as a perfectible and transparent means of interhuman communication to the Romanticism of Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder, who imagined languages to be living beings with their own laws of historical development given by God to human communities as the sign of their difference and specific creativeness entailed by this difference. Apart from their pietism they also drew on Étienne de Condillac's idea that a language is the symbol of a nation's genius (*génie de la langue*). This concept, filtered through Johann Georg Hamann's and Johann Gottfried Herder's writings inspired Georg Wilhelm Hegel's 1801 coinage of the seminal term *Völkerggeist* (the fact of which is not mentioned in the book). In 1805, Johann Arnold Kanne proposed that Greek was the oldest and most perfected language, while from Europe's languages German was closest to this 'prototype of all languages,' because not mediated via Latin, especially like the Romance languages were. Five years later, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn recommended the study of language for German cultural reconstruction. Johann Gottlieb Fichte agreed and saw language as the preserve of the German nation. In this view language alone would allow the Germans to survive the French onslaught. Friedrich Schlegel added another vital myth, claiming that the Germans are the direct descendants of the Indians, that is, the speakers of 'the oldest and most perfect' language of Sanskrit. Bearing this in mind, it comes as no surprise that by the mid-19th century, the equation of language with nation had become part of received knowledge in Prussia (Germany) and elsewhere in Central Europe.¹

In another article, authored by Peter K. J. Park, the contributor traces the intellectual and academic career of Franz Bopp, which evolved from the Romantic national belief in language as the 'spirit of the nation,' as encapsulated in Friedrich Schlegel's works and Georg Wilhelm Hegel's proclamation that 'human thought had reached its highest development and perfection in the modern Germans,' to a more rigorous and objective study of language, under the influence and thanks to the support of Wil-

¹ An interested reader may learn more on the spread of linguistic nationalism from the German-speaking polities to elsewhere in Central Europe (a subject not covered in the volume under review) from the following succinct work, Sundhaußen 1973.

helm von Humboldt, who secured a chair for Franz Bopp at the University of Berlin. Significantly, in the age when religion was part and parcel of politics and everyday life, Franz Bopp's progression toward an Enlightenment-like objectivity necessitated conversion from Catholicism to Lutheranism, which was a mirror image of Schlegel's way of life from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Although Franz Bopp, as the founder of historical linguistics, proved that Friedrich Schlegel's theses on language belong to the realm of myth, this did not change the already established political equation of language with nation in Central Europe.

David L. Hoyt moves the focus westward by showing how the practice of national philology, as developed in the German-speaking polities, became the model copied in France and Italy. Likewise, the German model of university seminar in philology became a basis for the development of the modern institutions of higher learning in both nation-states. Until the 1860s, the politics and study of language in France was largely limited to the continuing conviction in the universal perfection of French and the suppression of the official use of other languages than standard French, as commenced by the revolution in 1794. A shock that changed all that came with the Prussian victory over France in 1871, which hoisted into being the German Empire, believed to be the first step to a 'true' German nation-state that would encompass all the German-speakers. French scholars-turned-statesmen thought that the apparent superiority of German philology, as translated into a deepened ethnolinguistic unification of the nation, was responsible for the Prussian victory. According to them a modernization of France in order to make it a power on par with the German Empire, required the development of national philology in France. First of all, it meant the 're-taking' of Romance philology from the hands of German scholars, as conducted by Michel Bréal and Gaston Paris in France, and Graziadio Isaia Ascoli in Italy. The nationalization of philology in France was conducted in line with the revolutionary approach to language, which emphasized the primacy of the written (standard language) over dialectal differences, and extinguished the brief revival of Provançal (southern French) literacy, embodied by the poet, Frédéric Mistral. In 1904, he received a Nobel Prize in Literature for his contributions to literature and philology, not thanks to a French compatriot, but due to the support accorded by German Romance philologists. Likewise, the very study of language and regulations on language use were centered in Paris, making the study of regional dialects languages a pastime of amateurs with no practical or political consequence. Conversely, in Italy dialects continued to be studied and cherished (when they could be credibly defined as 'belonging to the Italian language'), because the German model of philology, complete with its acceptance of dialectal-cum-regional difference, was adopted there.

Karen Oslund brings the discussion on the politicization of language to Scandinavia. She shows how language was used to establish the national separateness of the Faroese vis-à-vis the Danish in the Kingdom of Denmark. Historical linguistics and the views of German and Western European scholars, who identified the Norse language of medieval sagas with Icelandic, were instrumental to this end. During the 19th century, a popular belief emerged in Scandinavia that Icelandic was the original

Scandinavian language characterized by stability and purity that was missing from other Scandinavian languages. Hence, in the 1830s, the Norwegian nationalists used language to demonstrate the un-Danishness of the Norwegian nation. From scratch, they codified Nynorsk (New Norwegian), proclaimed to be as close to Old Norse as Icelandic. In the second half of the 19th century, Faroese nationalists followed a similar path. But unlike the Icelanders they could not fall back on the tradition of literacy identifiable as Faroese, or on the tradition of statehood as in the case of the Norwegians. But changes in orthography, which made Faroese graphically different from Danish, and the existence of an Icelandic saga with its plot set in the Faroe Islands allowed for the emergence of Faroese as an accepted language, which gained a foothold in the islands' educational system in 1899.

Sara Pugach takes the analysis of political philology to colonial Africa. Her case study is the relatively unknown German missionary, Carl Büttner, who became an academic and a colonial governor. As a convinced German nationalist, he was appalled by the fact that most information about Africa, its peoples and languages was available via English-language books only. He toiled tirelessly for the German colonial effort after the scramble for Africa opened in 1884–85. By the close of the 19th century, almost single-handedly, he established the discipline of *Afrikanistik* (that is, the study of African languages and cultures). The desire to 'civilize' 'degenerate' (or at an 'earlier stage of development,' as compared with Europeans) Africans by christianization and modernization, entailed the late-19th-century rise of the scholarly hierarchization of African languages and the tendency to associate linguistic attributes with physical and racial characteristics. From this colonial legacy the ethnonational enmity of genocidal scale arose between the Hutu and the Tutsi in the originally German colonies of Burundi and Rwanda (a fact not mentioned in the book). Last but not least, thanks to Carl Büttner's endeavors, more books on Africa had been published in German than in any other language by the first decade of the 20th century.

Derek R. Peterson takes up the African yarn where Sara Pugach left it. He focuses on East Africa in the context of the 1927 proposal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IIALC, based in London, and today known as the International African Institute; facts not mentioned in the volume) to unify disparate African spelling systems, all of them derived from the Latin alphabet of the European colonists. The institute argued that such a move would make the task of education and producing publications in 'native' languages easier, while another, though not explicitly stated, agenda was to fortify indirect rule. It meant channeling all the contacts between the colonial administration and the local population exclusively via the medium of African languages, thus barring Africans from acquiring the languages of the colonial powers, which would allow them direct access to the Western press and enable them to question colonial rule itself. The proposal of the colonial all-African alphabet was accepted by the colonial administrations in West and Southern Africa, but their counterparts in East Africa opposed the move, arguing that the introduction of special phonetic fonts, not available in typewriters, would rather hamper than facilitate indirect rule. English administrators followed on their refusal by standardizing Swahili in line with their needs and wishes. A similar attempt with regard to Gikuyu

failed, because the Kikuyu had already enjoyed a well-developed merchant class, who by the use of private ownership and grassroots education impinged on the colonial project. In resistance to the idea of indirect rule based on the preservation of the 'purity' of African languages, the Kikuyu standardized their Gikuyu language with the conspicuous addition of numerous English lexical and syntactic loans, which, as a result, has allowed them to acquire the 'master language' of English more easily than in the case of Swahili-speakers.

Last but not least, Elisabeth Kaske has a broad comparative look at the role of language in the Western-style modernization of Japan and China at the close of the 19th and at the beginning of the following century. In the early 1870s, when the first national educational system (based on the Prussian model) was introduced in Japan, there was a wavering between the removal of classical Chinese from curriculum and the introduction of English as the medium of instruction. Another dilemma was the choice between Chinese characters and the Latin alphabet for writing Japanese. By the 1890s, a compromise had emerged, with standard Japanese, cobbled from the vernacular with a significant admixture of classical Chinese words and phrases pronounced in a Japanized manner. Since then the language has been written with the use of the traditional Japanese syllabic writing system but with the retaining of some Chinese characters, which can account even for half of a Japanese text. At the same time, the linguist, Ueda Kazutoshi, educated in the German Empire, transplanted the Romantic concept of language being the soul of nation to Japan. Chinese reformers followed into the footsteps of their Japanese counterparts, encouraged by the success of the Japanese nation-state. Regarding language, the modernizers proposed to replace classical Chinese with one or several Chinese vernaculars, and the writing system with a plethora of alphabetizing schemes, invariably drawn from the Latin script. At the turn of the 20th century, most vernacular periodicals were in Mandarin (or the Northern Chinese pronunciation of the Chinese characters), which could tip the balance toward the vernacular of Beijing. In 1911, Mandarin was introduced to schools, and a year later, Cai Yuanpei, who had spent several years in the German Empire, favored the concept of national language in his capacity as Minister of Education. In 1913, the prevalence of the script in the standardized northern pronunciation was approved so as not to alienate southern China by an introduction of the Beijing vernacular in the function of the national language. The 1918 promulgation of an alphabet for writing Chinese came to nothing with the growing internal commotion and discord in China.

The entire book is peppered with off-the-cuff stimulating pieces of information. For instance, Elisabeth Kaske traced the ranking of writings systems with the alphabetic on the top, syllabaries in the middle, and the morphemic (Chinese-style) at the bottom to an obscure 1868 article by the English social darwinist, Herbert Spencer. (pp. 242, 255) Peter K J Park discusses Friedrich Schlegel's forgotten typology of organic and mechanical languages (p. 62); and Tuska Benes usefully remarks that Johann Georg Hamann, in his 1784 review of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, rejected the philosopher's system of purportedly universal categories, having noticed that Kant completely disregarded the influence of language on human thinking and

perception of the world. (p. 53) In light of these rare qualities and the sustained intertextual dialog among the contributors, it is a pity that the volume was not appended with an index. This also makes it difficult to get hold of a wealth of ideas and concepts, whose development was presented and analyzed in detail, as well as meticulously referenced. Perhaps, I should not complain too much though, because almost no scholarly book published today in Poland brandishes an index.

In conclusion, I can only hope that more volumes of this quality and comparative breadth will appear in near future in order to present and analyze the political uses of philological and linguistic discourse in other areas of the world, where language became strongly politicized, especially in the service of various national projects. From the top of my head, I can point to the non-German-speaking areas of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia, and the wide swath of territory coinciding with the Turkic and post-Soviet states. Like in the case of the IALC's 1927 proposal of an all-African alphabet, the Kremlin attempted to introduce a similar all-Soviet alphabet for all the Soviet national republics in the early 1920s, and Ankara for all the Turkic nation-states in the mid-1990s.

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