



Introduction to Special Issue

Language Boundaries in Different Multicultural Spaces

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Linguistic demarcation, the distinction between 'we' and 'others' based on linguistic differences, is not a new phenomenon. The biblical book *Judges*, which goes back to the time around 1200 to 1000 B.C., tells of the "Shibboleth," which later became proverbial. The story is about a fratricidal war between two Israelite tribes or tribal groups east and west of the Jordan River. Members of the defeated tribe of Ephraim tried to flee across the Jordan, but the victorious Gileadites tested them with the famous speech sample of the Shibboleth.

And the Gileadites took the passage of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. (Judges 12, 5–6 [King James Bible])

Gileadites and Ephraimites spoke the same language and belonged to the same people who had to assert themselves against other peoples in the region. Yet, in an internal conflict, a slight difference in pronunciation was enough to decide whether someone was either friend or foe and thus to decide whether he would live or die.

This scene has replayed many times throughout history. In this Special Issue of *J-BILD*, *Boundaries and Belonging: Language, Diaspora, and Motherland*, our focus is on a modern civil war: the war in the former Yugoslavia, which was also fought with linguistic means. In this Issue, the Slovenian political and cultural scientist Gal Kirn examines the complicated web of belonging and demarcation in the history of the former Yugoslavia, which he analyzes as a collective paradoxical experience of the diaspora in the motherland (Gal Kirn: *New Yugoslavia as diasporic State?*). In this experience, the question of linguistic unity and linguistic difference plays a significant role. A network of linguistic varieties, which was declared a standard language in the 19th century with the name Serbo-Croatian, and since 1954 had been the state language of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia and respectively since 1963 of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, disintegrated as a result of the wars of the first half of the 1990s into the titular languages of the independent states of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. During the wars, pronunciation variants between the varieties and later languages, such as the pronunciation of certain front vowels as *je*, *e* or *i* became shibboleth. However, there is a difference between the biblical narrative and the events in Yugoslavia. There is not yet any



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dispute between the biblical Gileadites and Epharaimites as to whether their language is one language or instead falls apart into two languages. The difference in pronunciation between the voiceless postalveolar fricative *sch* and the voiceless alveolar fricative *s* is also not identity-forming and is not evaluated. It is only a practical distinguishing feature in the situation of war and has no ideological weight.

Another much more famous biblical story about linguistic differences leads back to the mythical prehistoric times: the well-known story of the Tower of Babel from Genesis. There, it is told that originally there was only one language on Earth, but when people started to build a tower that should reach up to heaven, God is said to have intentionally “confused” their language so that they could no longer communicate and work together. God speaks to Himself in the tale: “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7 [King James Bible]). In this way the construction of the tower was prevented, and the different languages and peoples are said to have been created.

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11, 8–9 [King James Bible])

In both biblical narratives, language is an indexical sign of distinction and separation. Linguistic difference marks the enemy (shibboleth) or is a feature of the distinction of peoples (in the narrative of the Tower of Babel). But it is also interesting what is not told and said in the stories, namely, the languages are not evaluated. In *Judge 12*, there is no evaluation of language and linguistic difference at all and in *Genesis 11*, the separation of languages, that is, the diversity of languages is evaluated negatively, but there is no distinction between good and bad languages that are particularly valuable or less valuable. These changes only later in the history of religion, especially in the distinction between sacred and profane languages in the Christian Middle Ages (Kusse 2012 & 2017; Richter, 2006). However, even with this distinction, language remains an indexical sign. There is no evaluation of the properties of languages connected with it. Sacred languages (especially Latin and Greek) refer to the sacred and are supposed to be used for communication with the sacred, but they have no particular grammatical or lexical characteristics that are considered as such.

Only in modern times has a different model of linguistic distinction emerged, in which languages are firstly evaluated on the basis of their characteristics and secondly associated with ideas of identity, national self-determination, or even imperial domination (Kusse, 2020).

The best known is the romantic linguistic model of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), which is still cited today in debates on the question of language and identity, especially in Eastern



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Europe. Humboldt metaphorically described the connection between language and identity as spinning. Speakers produce threads of speech and simultaneously spin themselves into them.

By the same act whereby he spins language out of himself, he spins himself into it, and every language draws about the people that possesses it a circle whence it is possible to exit only by stepping over at once into the circle of another one. (Humboldt, 1999 [1836], p. 60)

In this model the language becomes iconic. It becomes the essence of its speakers and reflects their thinking and mentality for the observer. Humboldt still sees the choice between different forms of being through the learning of foreign languages and thus, in contrast to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, evaluates linguistic diversity positively. Many languages allow the choice between different identities and therefore represent a cultural wealth.

However, this model can also have consequences that lead not only to identity formation, but also to separation from others, hostility, and claims to dominance over others. This is the case when the differences between languages are evaluated and some languages are considered particularly valuable in comparison to others, for example when a language such as Russian is given the attribute 'great' (*velikii*) and related languages such as Ukrainian or Belarusian are devalued as 'inferior' dialects of that language. In such a case, the romantic model is combined with an imperial one. The better language is conceptualized in this ideology as the language of better people, from which the right is derived to dominate, prohibit, and ultimately eliminate other languages. This imperial and colonial ideology distinguishes between high-level languages and primitive languages and aggressively opposes the latter. Throughout history, this has occurred in all colonial empires and conquests, especially in the displacement of indigenous languages (linguicide). But the history of Ukrainian and Belarusian has also been exposed to such colonial repression, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, and similar things can be said about the history of Occitan or Catalan. In this Special Issue, Liudmyla Pidkuimukha deals with the preservation of language under the conditions of language repression (*Language Tenacity of Ukrainians in the 20th Century as a Means of National Self-assertion*).

Another consequence of the romantic model, which became dominant in Europe in the 19th century and still leads to language conflicts today, is the close connection between language, nation, and territory. The ideology is that one language should be spoken on one territory claimed by one nation. Models of multilingualism, like the one in Switzerland, are considered the exception rather than the rule. This consequence of the romantic model of language is visible in all the linguistic ideologies that can be observed in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Ukraine. The contributions of Alla Nedashkivska (*Native Language Activism: Exploring Language Ideologies in Ukraine*), Nadiya Kiss (*Bloggers as Social Actors in Language Policies Debates in Contemporary Ukraine*), and Marianna Novosolova (*The Instrumentalization of the Language Issue in Ukraine*) are especially dedicated to these conflicts and related language ideologies to them. Chantal Tetreault's contribution, which examines the role of Arabic and the "Islamolinguistic-phobia" in France, is another example of conflicts rooted partly in



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linguistic ideology. Arabic is both ignored and feared as an expression of the maximally foreign and is often associated with Islamism; that is, Arabic is perceived by its opponents not only indexical as a sign of the foreign, but also iconic, as a sign of dangerous thinking and acting (*What is Arabic Good For? Future Directions and Current Challenges of Arabic Language Educational Reform in France*).

In fact, the language communities cross over each other and only partially correspond to the physically delimited spaces between states. In these communities, language becomes an instrument of demarcation, drawing symbolic boundaries between language communities. Therefore, languages can be part of virtual borders that traverse societies alongside administrative borders that physically separate states or territorial units.

Languages are often not only official languages and dominantly spoken languages in one state. German exists not only in Germany but also in Austria and Switzerland; French exists as a state language in France and Switzerland, as an official language Belgium and Quebec, and is internationally used in the Francophonie. English has its varieties in Great Britain, the USA, Australia and many other countries around the world where the so-called New Englishes or World Englishes have emerged (Bolton & Kachru, 2006; Kachru, 1992). Russian is a language widely spoken beyond the borders of the Russian Federation in a number of post-Soviet republics. Within states there are nowadays mostly numerous languages often with considerable numbers of speakers, such as Turkish and Russian in Germany, Arabic in France, or Russian and Hungarian in Ukraine, as well as the numerous diaspora languages in countries such as the USA or Canada. There are also minority languages recognized within the states, such as the Sorbian languages in Germany, and there are minority languages which are ignored, not appreciated or even suppressed like a huge number of indigenous languages, especially in former times. In a number of cases, the status of a language is controversial, whether it is a language or a dialect or a regional variety. All this can lead to language conflicts or accompany political conflicts, as in the case of Ukrainian, which for a long time in the Russian Empire was considered only a dialect of Great Russian.

Languages are thus used in very different social, political, and cultural contexts. A language can be a state language and the dominant spoken language in a state (German in Germany, French in France, Russian in Russia, English in England, the USA, Canada, Australia, etc.). In exceptional cases, however, a state language can also be a secondary language in use (Belarusian in Belarus, Irish in Ireland). A dominant language is not the state language in some areas (e.g., Spanish in some areas of the USA or Russian in some areas of Ukraine). Within states, certain regions are often home to minority languages (e.g., Kashubian in northern Poland, the Sorbian languages in eastern Germany). Especially in the USA and Canada, diaspora languages have high numbers of speakers in certain regions. In linguistically overlapping spaces, there can be language competitions and language conflicts as well as the formation of mixed varieties (Matras & Bakker, 2003; Thomason, 2001). In the process of



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global migration, a strong dynamic of linguistic migration and mixed varieties can be observed, which can emerge quickly, but of course also disappear again (Piller, 2016). In traditionally multilingual societies and in established diaspora societies, certain language competitions can become entrenched as well as mixed language varieties. In the Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking Ukraine as well as in the Russian- and Belarusian-speaking Republic of Belarus, for example, mixed vernaculars have developed that are metaphorically referred to as 'compound feed': *Surzhyk* and *Trasjanka* (Hentschel, 2013; Hentschel & Zaprudski, 2008).

In our Special Issue entitled "Boundaries and belonging: Language, Diaspora and motherland", the articles are organized in two main sections, the first which is devoted to language in the motherland and romantic language ideology. The second includes articles that deal with linguistic forms and language attitudes in different diaspora situations. This includes mainly questions of linguistic identity, but also language development and language mixing.

The Ukrainian-Russian *Surzhyk* is addressed in the contributions of Alla Nedashkivska and Nadiya Kiss. Maria Lieber and Christoph Oliver Mayer describe Italian in Quebec as a vital diaspora language that is seen by some speakers as competing with French and has at the same time developed hybrid forms with English, the so-called *Italianese* ("*Italianità*" as *Transcultural Identity in Quebec*).

These linguistic phenomena are accompanied by the formation of cultural and national identities. Social communities express themselves by the language they use, but they also express the separation from others. The relationships between the language preferred by one group and other languages and communities of speakers can be described with the terms *identity*, *loyalty*, *separation*, and *hostility*. Linguistic identity can correspond to a state language and the dominant spoken language in the environment of the speakers. It is of particular interest that in many Slavic countries where the spoken language or linguistic variety differs from the official state language, the speakers explicitly call their languages "our way", "our", etc. (see Gal Kirn's contribution in this Special Issue). Also in other constellations of demarcation, such as Ukrainian versus Russian, it is often emphasized that the language used is "our language" (see the contribution by Alla Nedashkivska).

On the other hand, the example of Italian, which is examined in Lieber and Mayer's contribution, shows that the speakers of a language do not only need to be connected to their local community. At the same time, they can develop global identities. In the case of diaspora situations these global identities connect communities to the 'motherland', where the language is mostly used and usually has an official status. Furthermore, linguistic identity is not necessarily bound to one language, as seen in the example of *Italianità* in Quebec. Lieber and Mayer speak of a transcultural identity in which the Italian language and culture are connected primarily with the English-speaking environment. Thus, the integration of the Italian-speaking community is not achieved by abandonment, but precisely by preserving the linguistic and cultural heritage in a multicultural society.



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In diaspora societies, one can usually observe a connection between linguistic identity in the language of origin and linguistic loyalty to the dominant language of the environment, which can lead to a language shift or to transcultural identity in two (or more) languages. While *Italiantà* is an example of transcultural identity, Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain and Grit Liebscher, in their study of identity images among German heritage speakers in Canada, shows that linguistic and cultural origin can become a mere memory construct and can have a very different value between generations (*Constructing the Motherland: German-Canadian Positioning and the Places Left Behind*). Srilata Ravi meanwhile presents an example of conscious language shift. In her article *Writing, Memory and Place in Shumona Sinha's French language novel, Calcutta*, Ravi analyzes how the French-Indian writer remembers her parents' house in Calcutta not in her first language Bengali, but instead in French. Shumona Sinha lives in Paris, but her choice of language has not only pragmatic reasons. Above all, the language defines a distance to the writer's own past. Individual language identity is thus not gained by retaining the language, but by changing it.

In certain situations, linguistic loyalty can turn into dissociation and even hostility. This was the case in the former Yugoslavia, when such loyalty to a politically desired standard language, Serbo-Croatian, was abandoned in the various regions and linguistic differences became features of demarcation in the various armed conflicts (see Gal Kirn's contribution).

In many cases, hostility is directed against minority languages. Xenoglossophobia is usually part of xenophobia when minorities are rejected as such. Chantal Tetreault describes this phenomenon as Islamo-linguistic-phobia, using the example of Arabic in France. In France, this fear of the foreign language is accompanied by an actual marginalization of a widespread idiom. The minor role of Arabic in official public life is expressed in the provocative question posed by a French educational specialist, "What is Arabic Good For?", quoted by the author in the title of her article.

In this Special Issue, four articles are devoted to Ukrainian and the language situation in Ukraine. The article by Liudmyla Pidkuimukha is mainly devoted to language suppression and language preservation, while the articles by Alla Nedashkivska, Nadiya Kiss, and Marianna Novosolova analyze language discourses and language ideologies. Remarkable in these discourses and ideologies is the continued role of the romantic linguistic model, which is still relevant in the language politics in other Slavic countries (Garvin, 1993; Yavorska, 2010). The romantic model leads to the ideology of one nation in one country with one language. This is the background to the conflict as to whether Ukrainian should be the exclusive state language in Ukraine and what status other widely spoken languages, especially Russian, but also Hungarian, should have. This dispute has now been resolved in Ukrainian legislation. Especially, the threat-scenario caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war has supported the decision for monolingualism as well as purism (against Surzhyk). But other language ideologies also played a role in the discourse.



Alla Nedashkivska names four ideologies: The ideology of language as a national and state symbol; the ideology of mother tongue or native language activism; the ideology of democratic linguistic bilingualism; and the ideology of plurilingualism and internal diversity (Nedashkivska, 2020). Among them, especially the ideology of mother tongue has, according to Alla Nedashkivska, gained popularity in recent years. This is also confirmed by Nadiya Kiss' study on the discourse of bloggers (freelance journalists) on language. In the texts she examined, a series of metaphorical concepts occur that can be assigned to the romantic ideology of the mother tongue, such as "Language is the genetic code of the nation", "Without language there is no nation". These conceptualizations have been instrumentalized in the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and this weaponization of language is expressed in slogans like "Language is our safety" or "Language is our weapon."

Forms of instrumentalization up to weaponization of languages examines Marianna Novosolova in her study *The Instrumentalization of the Language Issue in Ukraine*. The confrontation between the Russophone and Ukrainophone language ideologies has led to the weaponization of language during the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war, and to a special instrumentalization of the language issue in the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas. At least five tendencies regarding instrumentalization of language can be observed. Language is taken as (1) a precondition of the existence of the Ukrainian nation and state; (2) a tool to protect them; (3) a tool to raise a politician's own political image; (4) a tool to humiliate the image of political opponents; and (5) a tool to win the electorate.

This Special Issue, *Boundaries and Belonging: Language, Diaspora and Motherland*, contains articles on the languages of the former Yugoslavia, on language conflicts in Ukraine, on language shift using the example of French, on xenoglossophobia using the example of Arabic in France, and on the formation of linguistic identity in the diaspora using German and Italian in Canada. In this way, it sets aside a series of forms of linguistic demarcation and identity formation that express themselves as linguistic identity, linguistic loyalty, linguistic separation, and finally also as hostility towards languages. Looking back to the two biblical examples, the Shibolet and the Tower of Babel, and to the Romantic ideology of language, we also see in the phenomena of motherland and diaspora language as a feature of separation and enmity, language as a phenomenon of segregation of society, and language as a marker of identity.

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