



Tomasz Kamusella

School of History  
University of St Andrews, St Andrews  
tdk2@st-andrews.ac.uk

# The History of the Normative Opposition of "Language versus Dialect": From Its Graeco-Latin Origin to Central Europe's Ethnolinguistic Nation-States<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The concept of "a language" (*Einzelsprache*, that is, one of many extant languages) and its opposition to "dialect" (considered as a "non-language," and thus subjugable to an already recognized language merely as "its" dialect) is the way people tend to think about languages in the West today. It appears to be a value-free, self-evident conception of the linguistic position. So much so that the concept of "language" was included neither in Immanuel Kant's system of categories, nor in the authoritative *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*. This paper sketches the rise of the "dialect vs language" opposition in classical Greek, its transposition onto classical Latin, and its transfer, through medieval and renaissance Latin, to the early modern period. On the way, the Greek and Latin terms for "language" (and also for "dialect") sometimes functioned as synonyms for peoples (that is, ethnic groups), which – importantly – contributed to the rise of the normative equation of language with

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nation in the early nineteenth century. It was the beginning of the ethnolinguistic kind of nationalism that prevails to this day in Central Europe.

**Keywords:** Language, dialect, a value-free, Immanuel Kant, classical Greek, classical Latin, renaissance Latin, ethnic group, Central Europe.

## “When” is a language? Questioning naturalness

The concept of “a language,” in the sense of “one language among many” (*Einzelsprache* in German) as opposed to “language” in general, with no article preceding the word (or *Sprache* in German), is an artefact of culture, so much internalized by centuries of unreflective use that it appears to most of us to be “natural.” This perceived naturalness of the concept of a language is ingrained to such an extent that it (or its general counterpart of “language”) did not make an appearance among Immanuel Kant’s categories of the understanding (Kant, 1781) nor in the eight volumes of the famously authoritative reference *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Brunner, Conze, & Koselleck, 1972–1997).

But because language is the very medium of culture (as the primary basis for group formation and the maintenance of group cohesion) and of communicating ideas from person to person, there is a need to probe into the history of this concept and into the history of its social, intellectual and political functioning. With the dynamics of the term’s functioning explicitly uncovered (or “denaturalized”), it may become clear why people in the West, or intellectually influenced by it, tend to rationalize about languages in one way or another.

Prior to delving into the historical roots of the Western concepts of “language,” “a language” – and that of “dialect,” so inextricably connected to them – and into their coalescence as ideas and their subsequent uses, I believe it may be useful to scrutinize the Western practice of conceptualizing about the linguistic in terms of discrete and enumerable languages and dialects. In order to avoid tautology, alongside emotive and normative shades of meaning implicitly present when one speaks of dialects and languages, I propose to use the thus-far neutral term “lect” when speaking of any language variety.

The word “lect,” not (yet?) featuring in the popular Western discourse on the linguistic, allows for speaking dispassionately about language varieties: equally about those known as “languages,” and thus perceived positively as “true” and “legitimate,” and also about those pushed into the netherworld of often generalized contempt and neglect, branded as “dialects.” The

term “dialect” in popular speech carries negative connotations, while the concept of “a language” has positive connotations. No middle ground is conceded between them, and the two terms appear to function as a pair of binary oppositions. The rigidity of this normatively “negative–positive” dichotomy is underlain by the implicit normative principle that a dialect already “belonging to” a language cannot, or should not, become a language in its own right. Furthermore, this line of implicit thinking about the binary opposition appears to propose that in the modern (Westernized) world, there is room for languages only; hence, dialects must be slated for extinction.

The concept of “language” does a lot of insufficiently acknowledged spadework in Western thought. In general, it maps the linguistic in all its appearances. Foundationally, “language” (*Sprache*) denotes the biological capacity for oral communication through the production and reception of discrete, specific and repeatable articulated sounds that carry meaning; linguists term these “phonemes.” It appears that this capacity is truly present only in modern humans, though in the past it might have been shared with other hominoids. Elements of the capacity can be detected also in other species, but as far as we know, only humans have been capable of such widespread, intensive and continual employment of language so as to produce culture (cf. Lieberman, 1994, p. 126). In other words, culture is social reality (Searle, 1995), which has facilitated the broadening of the initial – quite limited – environmental niche of the *Homo sapiens sapiens* (*vel* modern humans) to almost the entire landmass of Earth, with the notable exception of the ice-bound Antarctic (cf. Bogucki, 1999, pp. 79–126; Cavalli-Sforza & Cavalli-Sforza, 1995, pp. 188–202).

The capacity for language can be actualized and practiced only with other people, that is, in groups. (It appears that human groups as we know them can be formed and maintained exclusively thanks to language, which operates as “social glue” that keeps them together [Dunbar, 1993].) Therefore, its actualizations differ from group to group, giving rise to different language varieties, or lects. The totality of lects in time and space can be construed as “the linguistic.” (To a degree, the linguistic is identical with social reality, if the former term is employed also to denote the multifaceted uses of the linguistic that become and/or generate social reality.) The term “lect” emphasizes the discrete character of language varieties; “the linguistic” stresses their continuousness and togetherness. Lects rarely get separated from one another for good, being a function of relations of respective groups that spawned and use them mainly for creating and maintaining social cohesion, alongside in- and inter-group communication. Neither a man, nor a group, nor its lect is an island. And importantly, lects are not

entities in their own right, but depend entirely on the human groups that produce and utilize them – primarily for creating social cohesion, and also, though it is a secondary function, for communication.

The simultaneously discrete and continuous character of lects / the linguistic can be likened to bodies of water in their natural state, which sprawl, intersect, overflow, are scarce at times, evaporate and are returned to earth from the sky as rain. Streams may serve as a metaphor for smaller lects (that is, spoken by fewer individuals, fewer groups). The bigger ones are rivers, while dynamically spreading languages of commerce may be seen as waterfalls and torrential downpours. Smaller *linguae francae* confined to well-defined areas appear to be rather like landlocked seas or motionless lakes. Interactions of human groups create linguistic deltas, oceans, straits and gulfs, sometimes calm, at other times rough, long-lasting and short-lived, and in essence as unpredictable and contingent as decisions of the humans and groups that speak these very lects.

Somewhat separable lects emerge and persist for longer or shorter periods of time in larger or smaller spaces, but more often than not it is impossible to say when a single lect comes to an end and another commences. (That is why the number of human languages [*Einzelsprachen*] can never be exactly established, lects being only “semi-countable.”) In this respect, they exemplify the continuousness – some may say “nebulosity” or “cloudiness” – of the linguistic. There was no clear cut-off moment in time when Latin was replaced by French, Italian and other Romance languages. Likewise, on the spatial plane, it is hard to say where German stops and Dutch begins, or Ukrainian morphs into Russian.

Such changes are gradual, and become clear-cut only with the privilege of hindsight, when one has at one’s disposal a *longue-durée*-style picture of the change, and chooses to glide over the details that annoyingly blur the edges of the picture. The jealously guarded and hard to penetrate frontiers of the twentieth-century nation states in the Soviet bloc separated languages in an unprecedentedly sharp manner, leaving many with the false feeling that they are naturally separate entities. Until the enlargement of the Schengen Area in 2008, one needed just to step over the frontier line separating Slovakia from Poland to “tangibly” experience that Slovak stopped at this line and Polish immediately began across it.

On the other hand, intersections of clearly different and discrete lects result in pools of multilingualism or polyglossia. For instance, in the lowlands around Preßburg (or today’s Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia), between the seventeenth and early-twentieth centuries, there were multilingual villages, in which illiterate but multilingual peasants spoke to one another in Slavic (similar to present-day Croatian or Slovak), Hungarian

and German(ic) (Liszka, 1996). With time, distinctive lects may merge into brand-new syncretic lects, known as pidgins and creoles. They soften the sharp edges between distinctive lects, as the famous Mediterranean Lingua Franca did by creating a common space of communication among the speakers of Romance, Arabic, Turkic and Greek (Dakhlia, 2008).

The story of English itself is similar, the language being a Germanic-Romance hybrid (creole), which emerged – beginning in the late eleventh century – in the wake of the intensive interaction between the Anglo-Norman elite of Romance-speakers and the Germanic-speaking Anglo-Saxon population subjugated by the former. Latin as the official language of the Western Christian world bound the two intermingling speech communities together even more. Hence, in written records, until the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, it is often difficult to decide whether a sentence is written in (Medieval) Latin, (Norman) French or (Middle) English. All three lects cohabited closely then, to the point of being identical at times, before going their own separate ways later on (Catto, 2003, p. 36).

## The complication of writing

Western-received knowledge includes treating writing as part and parcel of a language. Yet writing is a technology of graphic representation of language; it is neither language itself nor part of it. The relationship between writing and language is similar to that between a person and a photograph of himself. The photograph is not the person and does not constitute part of him. However, a link exists between the picture and the person. The photograph captures an image of the person which he wants to make known to others. Or it may be that he was caught unaware by a camera-wielding *paparazzo*, so that the image of the person is what he looks like in the eyes of other people. The link between the person and his image captured in the aforesaid picture may be of such social importance (cf. Edelman, 1979; Gaines, 1991) that the person concerned may try his best to remove it from public circulation with all the available force of the law. On the other hand, the photograph may become his badge of distinction, a logo, thanks to which he will become immediately recognizable to many.

Likewise, the link between writing and a lect is not a necessary one, as attested by the existence of more than 6,000 languages with no graphic representations of their own ("Ethnologue," 2012; "Languages and Scripts," 2011). However, let us consider the popular *topos* of an undeciphered script or language. If we know which lect is represented by this undeciphered

script, it is possible to decipher it. And vice versa, if we understand a script in which an unknown lect is recorded, it is possible to reconstruct such a lect. But should it happen that we know nothing about the encountered script and about the language it represents, then we cannot decipher the texts.

Hence, just as light and its reflections visible to the human eye constitute the link between a person and her image captured on a photograph, the connection between a lect and its graphic representation (or writing) is not arbitrary. It appears that regularities governing the link were identified in a scholarly manner for the first time in 1901 (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1901; Ruszkiewicz, 1981, p. 21). The technology of writing reflects regularities present at different levels in the structure of language, but exclusively at the levels that are directly connected to the conveying of meaning (Rogers, 2005, pp. 13–16).

In popular Western thinking, it is writing that makes lects into *bone fide* languages. This technology dams, orders, regularizes, channels and standardizes the aforementioned “sprawling and unrestrained natural water bodies” of the linguistic into consciously man-made “canals” and “pipes,” designed to serve specific needs and goals of human groups, in most cases construed as “states.” (Typically, these are large and intricately structured human groups that in numerical terms can be much bigger than groups with no knowledge of writing. This is because the technology of writing allows for regular and intensive non-face-to-face communication by detaching the message from the speaker and conveying it to listeners or readers who may never have a chance to meet the speaker in question, due to the sheer spatial and/or social distance separating them.) The end effects are languages, or lects shorn of their regional or social irregularities. These lects, in the process of becoming languages, are imposed or adopted as official languages. They become increasingly the sole channel of communication among a state’s inhabitants through the system of popular education, ubiquitous state administration, intrusive mass media and compulsory military conscription for all (or at least all males). This imposition takes place in areas belonging to a given state where lects are very different from the state / national language (and thus, construed as “foreign languages”), or quite similar ones (then dubbed “dialects”).

Such a regularized, standardized and normativized lect in the form of the sole national-cum-official language of a nation state can be likened to a straight pipe of wide diameter, or a broad-band optical fiber cable. A lect of this kind ensures communication that is instantaneous among all who speak and write it (and unhindered by differences present even in closely related lects). By the same token, these channels of communication also operate to

exclude outsiders by seeming to be opaque, difficult or impossible to enter. They appear to be like this to people who do not know the standard(ized) lect – or have just a nominal command of it. Such a nominal rather than a full command of the normatively “standard lect” is found where a speaker’s native lect has been subsumed as “just a dialect” of another lect that has been privileged by being declared the national language. The degree of such opaqueness, drawing a hard linguistic divide between “us” and “them,” is even higher in the case of ethnolinguistic nation-states, which require that their national languages be not shared by any other polities or nations. Opaqueness of this kind is a relatively low-tech cousin of China’s “Great Firewall” that filters “unwanted information” from the web, making only its ideologically sanitized version available to users in the country (cf. Gries & Rosen, 2010, p. 182).

This is not to say that unwritten lects are “natural” and regularized written ones – “artificial.” Both types are products of human groups, as in both cases it is human agency that arbitrarily ascribes certain meanings to certain sounds, and chooses to maintain this link as a prerequisite to effective in-group communication. From this vantage point, each lect is an artefact, similar for that matter to a teacup, a product of human effort and ingenuity. However, oral (unwritten) lects arise without the conscious intention of their speakers, being a function of the coalescence of a given group and its subsequent history. Its members speak to maintain the group’s cohesion and to communicate with one another. Most of them usually remain quite unaware that they speak something that can be rationalized as a lect, until the moment it is made into a visible thing with writing.

The conceptualization as a lect of the practice of speaking in a group is a recent phenomenon, most probably connected to the rise of writing. The scribe in the process of noting his and others’ words noticed that the same message could be expressed differently, and that preferring one word or phrase over others created texts conveying the same message, but different – sometimes starkly different – in form. Hence, not only did such (initially idiosyncratic and accidental) technological choices create written lects, but they also created the awareness that these choices could be controlled. This came with the realization that the resulting written lect may allow for a conscious reshaping of the actual practices of speaking in the original group of the lect’s native-speakers. This was usually in accordance with the wishes and needs of the group’s elite. Writing and the realization that lects can be shaped through writing became a source of power of the literati over the rest (cf. Biber, 2009; Goody & Watt, 1968; Kuckenburg, 2006, pp. 202–218). As a result, in highly literate societies writing shapes the linguistic as much

as, in reciprocation, the already “literatized”<sup>2</sup> linguistic predetermines and limits writing in a given speech community (group). Perhaps this leads to a symbiosis between the written and the linguistic that may be described as a coevolution of lects and writing (cf. Coulmas, 2003, pp. 226–227).

To put it in different terms, the biological (or evolutionary) capacity in humans for walking does not in any necessary or direct manner have to lead to the rise of motorways. The most modest path would suffice, as suggested by the cases of other earthbound animals. Likewise, the biological (evolutionary) capacity for language in humans does not in any necessary or direct manner lead to the rise of the artefact of a written lect (or a language). An unwritten lect (or a dialect), so similar in this comparison to an accidental path, would suffice.

Unlike paths, motorways do not arise “by themselves.” They are a result of conscious, concentrated and multilevel human choices and decisions that may be available only to some groups, known as “states,” typically due to their huge demographic size and intricate organization. In this, motorways are similar to written and standardized lects, which people in the West see as “proper languages.” For such a language to arise, the users of its original spoken lect(s), residing in a specific place at a specific time, must conceptualize it as a language, endow this lect with a writing system, and decide on its acceptable and unacceptable uses and usages. This, coupled with certain technologies (writing, printing, popular literacy, mass media, nation state, or the internet) reinforces and reifies this freshly-minted artefact of a language. Thus, it is partly detached from the human agency of the speech community, to allow for its improved control by the group’s elite. In turn, the elite deploys this standardized language – using all the aforementioned technological devices and channels – in order to intensify its use and circulation among the highly literate speakers. As a result, the homogenized and literatized lect appears to be an unambiguous “thing.” Before this development, one spoke to communicate; now one needs to speak a specific “thing” (lect), or artefact, shared and negotiated with the targeted interlocutor, before communication can even begin. The thus-created feedback makes this phenomenon gradually more evident and pronounced (Billig, 1995, pp. 29–30).

What is more, written lects are given a normative boost by the Western conceptualization of the linguistic in terms of the opposition between a language and dialect as the standard, normative way of thinking about lan-

<sup>2</sup> I allowed myself the freedom of coining the past-participle-style adjective “literatized,” from the term “literacy” in order to denote the spread of increasingly universal knowledge of reading and writing in a group that makes the group’s own bubble of social reality (that is, its linguistic / lect) increasingly conjoined with and co-shaped by the ubiquitous practices of reading and writing.

guage and its uses. This reinforces their perception as “proper languages,” further reifying their form, as intended by their shapers. Subsequently, increasingly official institutions, methods and devices emerge to flesh out and guard this normativity, such as language academies, authoritative dictionaries and grammars, state examinations, or parliamentary acts that introduce “language reforms,” ban “foreign languages” from public use, and elevate a privileged lect by declaring it to be an “official or national language.”

The “canals and piping” of the linguistic, regularized and standardized through writing and political decisions, become languages (*Einzel sprachen*). On the other hand, the sprawling and unkempt waters of language (*Sprache*), still remaining in the “state of nature,” and as such beyond the regularizing and normativizing reach of the technology of writing (or expelled outside its pale), become (or, more correctly, get labelled as) “dialects.” Dialects appear to be dialects in the West from the vantage of the users of writing with standardized languages at their disposal. Frequently, speakers are conditioned by formal education to see dialects as something “lower” or “worse” than languages. Hence, dialects are often made into “*unter-languages*,” “kitchen-languages,” “non-languages,” “*patois*” – slated for, first, anachronistic subsuming under the “umbrella of a language,” and finally for oblivion and eventual extinction.

As a word of caution, I hasten to add that talking of language as “natural and regularized bodies of water,” “pipes and optical fiber cables,” or as “paths and motorways” is speaking in metaphors. Hopefully, the images evoked to illustrate our argument are less teleological than August Schleicher’s biological metaphor (quite unreflectively borrowed from Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution) that proposes to see languages as “living organisms” that are born, grow, live, propagate, and then die. Endowing languages thus with agency makes them appear to be independent of humans and their groups. Metaphors are props to thinking, but not the actual subject of the analysis. Beware of, or at least be aware and be wary of, metaphors (cf. Mufwene, 2001, p. 145). They can be easily dragooned into the service of this or that ideology as has happened to Schleicher’s *Stammbaum* (“genealogical tree”) model of language diversification, which easily lent itself to discourses and political ends propagated by social Darwinists and ethnolinguistic nationalists (cf. Alter, 1999; Schleicher, 1869).

### From Ancient Greek to medieval and renaissance Latin

Below I attempt a brief – and thus, by necessity, simplified – overview of the history of the concept of a language. In the Western tradition, resoundingly imposed on the rest of the world during the age of high

imperialism and in the course of the Cold War that coincided with decolonization, lects are classified either as languages or as dialects. This quite confusing opposition of dialect versus a language (*Einzelsprache*) arose in Graeco-Roman antiquity.<sup>3</sup> In Ancient Greek, the word *glossa* meant, first of all, the organ (muscle) of the “tongue.” This meaning is attested in Greek writings from the eighth century BCE. Three hundred years later, in the fifth century BCE, the word began to be employed for denoting “a language or dialect” (that is, a lect). In the third century BCE this new meaning was deployed for referring to peoples speaking different languages. Thus, the equivalence between the concepts “a people” and “a language” (that is, group and lect) made its first recorded appearance (Liddell & Scott, 1940, p. 353).

Later, but in parallel with the former term, the Greek word *dialektos* was coined. First, in the early fourth century BCE, it was intended to denote “discourse” or “conversation,” especially in the context of learned discussions conducted among philosophers and scholars (thence the philosophical term “dialectics,” of which Marxists tend to be fond). In the middle of this century, the term also began to stand for “speech,” “language,” and “common language.” In the second century BCE, *dialektos* came to mean “a language of a country,” thus becoming synonymous with *glossa* in this semantic field. And importantly for the rise of the current (Western) distinction between language and dialect, in the late first century BCE, *dialektos* was intended to denote “a spoken language,” as opposed to “a written language,” that is, *glossa* (Liddell & Scott, 1940, p. 401; Kamusella, 2015, pp. 11–12).

These semantic distinctions gradually brushed off onto the Latin language of imperial Rome, due to the cultural symbiosis with the Greek language and things Grecian that developed in the Roman Empire. The native Latin word *lingua* was attested, in the early second century BCE, to mean “the organ of tongue” and “the particular mode of speech in a given country or region” (Glare, 1982, pp. 1032–1033). These meanings corresponded closely to those of the Greek *glossa*, so with the rise of the intensifying Latin-Greek bilingualism among Rome’s literati, in the late second century BCE, *glossa* was marginalized in Latin as a term for “a collection of unfamiliar words” (that is, a “glossary”). And the neologism *glossema* was coined for “an unusual word requiring explanation” (Glare, 1982, p. 767).

In the 30s of the first century BCE, the Greek loanword *dialectos* was attested in Latin for “a dialect, a form of speech [hence, unwritten]” (Glare,

<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting to investigate how people and scholars classified lects outside the confines of the Graeco-Roman world and the West. That task, however, falls outside this article’s scope.

1982, p. 536). Thus, almost immediately, the Greek distinction of the late first century BCE, between “spoken language” (*dialektos*) and “written language” (*glossa*) was adopted by Latin writers, and duly reflected in the opposition between *dialectos* and *lingua*. The distinction was consolidated in the Greek texts of the first and second centuries CE that frequently were translated into Latin. The prime example of this Graeco-Latin bilingualism was the New Testament, composed in Greek during the first century CE and translated into Latin in the late second century CE, before the canonical Latin translation of the entire Bible (the Vulgate) was completed at the turn of the fifth century CE (Kamusella, 2015, p. 12).

In this way, in the world of Western Christianity (where Latin dominated for written purposes throughout the Middle Ages until the Reformation), the terminological distinction between those lects endowed with a written form and those without one became integral to the Western intellectual tradition. In addition, it was accompanied by the emergence of the equation of a lect with a people. A *lingua* (“language”) was associated with a *natio* (“people,” “race,”<sup>4</sup> “set of people,” “the people of a country, or state”) (Du Cange, 1885, p. 116; Glare, 1982, p. 1158), and at times with a *gens*. This last term (*gens*), in addition to the aforementioned meanings shared with *natio*, came to be used for referring to “a region of a country, occupied by a people.” In medieval Latin, it was also used (alongside *natio*) to denote such a distinctive people, living in a polity’s region, and differing from the rest of the country’s inhabitants in language, customs, religion, or, as we would say today, in ethnicity (Glare, 1982, p. 759). The most visible formalized use of this meaning was employed at universities, where students were subsumed under the rubric of this or that *natio* on the basis of language and territorial origin (cf. Kibre, 1948).

Interestingly, medieval authors writing in Latin shunned the word *dialectos* and in its stead, at the turn of the thirteenth century, developed the neologism *linguagium* for a regional lect or a lect with no written form<sup>5</sup> (Du Cange, 1885, p. 117). The word “dialect” re-entered Western discourse in the Renaissance, though authors disagree as to whether this was by way of the renewed study of Ancient Greek or that of Latin mediated (or

<sup>4</sup> “Race” in this sense is an obsolete word in English, today usually replaced by the term “ethnic group.”

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this term was an inspiration for Greek Catholics (Uniates) conversant with Latin, who coined the derogative term *iazychie* (roughly “quasi-language,” or “corrupted language”), from the Slavic word *iazyk* (“language” and “tongue” as an organ), for referring to the written language of eastern Galicia, a language based on the regional Slavic lect and on Church Slavonic, with an admixture of Russian and Polish words. This language was employed in writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, and was reviled at that time as much as was Yiddish, known derogatively as “jargon” (cf. Rusinko, 2003, p. 234; Weinreich, 2008, p. A309).

not?) by French (cf. Ciorănescu, 2005, p. 291; *Dizzionario*, 2004, p. 152). For instance, in the 1570s, in the case of English, “dialect” was deployed to mean “a subordinate form of a language, a manner of speech peculiar to a group of people” (“Dialect,” 2012, p. 2; Murray, 1893, pp. 307–308). The word “subordinate” clearly indicates here a normativity built into the novel term “dialect,” necessarily requiring an “umbrella” of a respected language (an official written lect of a state and/or of the state’s elite) for the unwritten lect (“dialect”) of a region, of the peasantry or of a non-dominant ethnic group in a polity (Kamusella, 2015, p. 16).

## Nationalism and the concept of a language: The beginnings

With this development, the present-day Western understanding of a dialect appeared: a lect not endowed with a written form, spoken in a region of a polity, by the region’s inhabitants, or by an ethnic (ethnolinguistic) group living in the region. Interestingly, this lect defined as “a dialect” must be subjected to, or subsumed into, the official written lect (language) of the polity as the language’s “subordinate form.” On the one hand, this relationship is a reflection of the antique and medieval tradition of equating peoples (ethnic groups) with their lects (languages), and quite often, with specific regions, too. On the other hand, it is a reflection of the modern concept of exclusive (absolute) sovereignty that became one of the basic principles of modern statehood, originating with the rise of the territorial state (the direct precursor of today’s nation state) after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) (Kluetin & Schmale, 2004; Krasner, 1999, p. 11).

In this line of thinking, only one monarch, or one government, has the exclusive right of ruling the subjects living on the territory of a given polity, unfettered by any legitimate interference from any external authority. And in the case of making the decision that only one language could be official for the polity (as came to be prevalent among the Protestant states following the Reformation and became the norm during the Age of Nationalism that was ushered in Europe by the French Revolution), other lects spoken and written on the territory of a polity had to be either suppressed or at best redefined and demoted to being “just dialects” of the polity’s official or national language.

The French onslaught that destroyed the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 brought out an anti-French reaction in the polity’s predominantly Germanicphone population, though it was couched in the political vocabulary of the French Revolution. A novel German nation was proposed, to be set against the revolutionary French nation. The problem was how to define this German nation. There was no German state that could transform its

population into such a nation, as had happened in the case of revolutionary France, which had called the French nation into existence. In the absence of a state which could be credibly dubbed "Germany," the German(ic)phone elites settled on the German language as the foundational basis of the nation and its yet-to-be-created nation state (Greenfeld, 1992, pp. 89–188, 275–396; Schulze, 1991, pp. 48–55).

Intellectually, the development drew on the German language as the written language of the Holy Roman Empire. Between 1521 and 1534, Martin Luther translated the Vulgate (or the canonic Latin translation of the Bible) into the Germanic lect of Meißen (in Lusatia, Saxony). This city was then conveniently located in the very center of the German(ic)-speaking world that embraced most of the empire, alongside Prussia across the empire's eastern frontier, and the Baltic littoral, which was historically associated with the Hanseatic League. In today's geography, the empire and its Prusso-Baltic fringe were composed of a variety of (frequently multilingual and multiethnic) territories, extending from Estonia to Trieste and from Switzerland to Denmark. Despite the Catholic-Protestant rift splitting the empire and its territories, Luther's translation of the Bible established definitively what the German language should be. This Luther-inspired German was gradually accepted by both Catholics and Protestants, to the detriment of the standing of the Catholic "Common German," which had its dialectal basis in imperial Vienna. Luther himself and then subsequently publishers of the numerous editions of the "German Bible" selected words that were most intelligible to all the speakers of the variegated Germanic lects throughout this vast area. Moreover, they provided glossaries explaining less intelligible terms and expressions in words taken from the regional lects of targeted readerships (Bach, 1966, pp. 199–201, 209–210, 216–217, 278–281; Szulc, 1999, pp. 63–74, 81–84, 89, 94–95).

In the eighteenth century, the reaffirmation of German as a language in its own right which should be equal to Latin and French led to the rise of an intellectual opposition to the French language as such and to French linguistic loans in German. This prepared the ground for making this language into the main anti-French ideological platform of German nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars (Bach, 1966, pp. 272–274). The ideas were espoused by many of the 300,000 to half a million members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (or the educated – that is, literate – nobles and burghers, together with their families). Out of the German language and literature these people fashioned their own niche of social reality in state offices, schools, law courts and merchant companies in the plethora of polities within the Holy Roman Empire, and in their successor states (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 61). The literati adopted the increasingly normative

equation of a language with a people, and then with a nation, especially under the staggeringly powerful influence of Johann Gottfried Herder's bestseller *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*). The philosopher-cum-early-anthropologist saw lects as constitutive and, in turn, a faithful reflection of the culture(s) of human groups speaking them (Herder, 1784–1792).

It was this ready-made intellectual kit that leaders of the early German national movement seized on at the turn of the nineteenth century as the instrument for defining the German nation and its intended nation-state. Most members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* concurred and in this way the ethnolinguistic model of nationalism emerged (cf Ergang, 1931; Jolles, 1936; Kedourie, 1993, pp. 53–54, 57). The suppression of German nationalism after the Congress of Vienna (1815) was in the interest of the reassertion of the monarchical principle of divinely legitimated power. At that moment, with Napoleonic France finally defeated, it was not necessary to invoke the novel creed of nationalism for mobilizing the masses. Indeed, it was actually perceived to be harmful to the dynastic interests of the monarchs ruling in Central and Eastern Europe. The masses were to be quiescent and it was this enforced quiescence that permitted the reversion to monarchical rule, substantially as it had been under the various *anciens régimes* of Europe.

However, the suppression of nationalists from above did not prevent the idea of ethnolinguistic nationalism from spreading in the German Confederation (or today's Germany, western Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovenia), and the Habsburg and Prussian lands outside it (that is, in present-day terms, Russia's enclave of Kaliningrad, northern Poland, Slovakia, southwestern Ukraine, Hungary, north-western Romania and Croatia). This thinking also reached the Baltic provinces of Russia, where a German(ic)-speaking nobility was dominant (in today's Estonia, Finland and Latvia). Carried by Polish- and German-language publications, it seeped into western Russia (or today's Belarus, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine). In books in German and in Scandinavian Germanic languages, it extended its influence northward to Scandinavia. The long-lasting dynastical, cultural and economic links between the erstwhile Holy Roman Empire (in 1804, partly replaced in this role by the Austrian Empire) and polities in the Apennine Peninsula contributed to the rise of Italian ethnolinguistic nationalism. In like manner, the political and intellectual retinues of German-speaking princes from the German Confederation who became monarchs of many freshly independent Balkan nation-states, from Romania to Greece, spread the ideas of ethnolinguistic nationalism southward, to the Balkans and Anatolia. As a result, aspiring leaders of

non-German-speaking peoples from Scandinavia to Sicily and Crete, and from the Netherlands and Denmark to the Black Sea littoral adopted this ideology (cf. Bittner, 1929; Mackridge, 2009, p. 222; Mauro, 1991, pp. 278–279; Sommer, 2009, pp. 168, 245; Sundhaufen, 1973).

But for the time being, it was a minority pursuit. The turning point came in the revolutionary year of 1848, which established ethnolinguistic nationalism as one of the accepted novel (modern) ideologies of statehood and of “peoplehood” organization and legitimization, alongside the equally novel socialism and democracy. The admonishment by Bernard Bolzano, the world-famous logician from the University of Prague, delivered poignantly in 1848, the year of his death, went unheeded. He believed it was not necessary to divide Bohemia between Czechs and Germans on an ethnolinguistic basis when a bilingual Bohemian nation could be proclaimed instead (Bolzano, 1849). Likewise, the leaders of the 1848–49 Hungarian uprising against the Habsburgs chose ethnolinguistic Hungarian (Magyar) nationalism rather than the territorial concept of a Hungarian nation speaking many Hungarian languages, of which Magyar would be just one, brushing shoulders with Croatian, Romanian, Slovak or Rusyn. There was no desire left for this centuries-old non-linguistically-based *Hungarus-Patriotismus*, steeped in the non-ethnically specific official language of Latin as its “social glue” (Maxwell, 2009, pp. 34–55).

Burgeoning ethnolinguistic national movements seized the political momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Kingdom of Italy and the German Empire were founded as ethnolinguistic nation states, in 1861 and 1871, respectively (Bach, 1966, p. 325; Mauro, 1991, pp. 1–9). Vienna, defeated by Prussia in 1866, conceded to the dissolution of the essentially multiethnic and multilingual German Confederation, and agreed to the transformation of the Austrian Empire into a Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The empire’s multiethnic character was preserved in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, though cultural-cum-political autonomies couched in ethnolinguistic terms had to be introduced in some of its crownlands (regions), for instance, for the Poles of Galicia and for the Czechs of Bohemia. On the other hand, much to the chagrin of non-Magyars, the Dual Monarchy’s Kingdom of Hungary was shaped into a *de facto* Magyar ethnolinguistic nation-state (*nemzetállam* in Hungarian) (Kann, 1977, pp. 521–560).

These changes eventually brushed off on the Russian Empire, where, beginning in the 1880s in its European section, Russian gradually replaced other languages in administration and education, making the imperial idea closely related to linguistic (if not ethnolinguistic) Russianism (if not Russian nationalism *per se*) (Miller, 2008; Staliūnas, 2007; Thaden, 1981; Weeks,

1996). In the wake of World War I, which wiped away the ideologically non-national empires of Austria-Hungary, the Ottomans and Russia, broadly construed Central Europe was divided among ethnolinguistically defined nation states, for which various national movements had agitated since the mid-nineteenth century (cf. Hroch, 1985). Likewise, Balkan nation states, which earlier had predominantly employed religion and ecclesiastical boundaries for nationhood and statehood building and legitimization, settled for language as the foundation of their nationalisms (cf. Kamusella, 2008, pp. 201–288; Mackridge, 2009, p. 283; Nikolova, 2006).

It is interesting to observe that in the 1830s and 1840s, Slavophone scholars from the Austrian Empire, under the influence of German ethnolinguistic nationalism, proposed the concept of a Slavic nation and its Slavic language. This closely followed the model of the German language, as consisting of standard German based on the language of Luther's Bible, within which other Germanic lects (construed as dialects) were contained, but *not* employed in writing. The problem was that due to the absence of a state that would contain most or at least a plurality of the Slavic-speakers (as in the case of the Holy Roman Empire vis-à-vis Germanic-speakers), several written standard Slavic lects had developed with their own translations of the Bible, namely, Czech(oslav), Illyrian (Croatian and Serbian), Polish and Russian (Kamusella, 2008, pp. 224–229, 538–241; Maxwell, 2009, pp. 79–100).

The aforementioned nineteenth-century scholars saw these lects as equal “written dialects” of a single Slavic language, to be mastered in writing by all educated Slavs. In turn, the written dialects were seen to be composed of subdialects. But the lack of a common Slavic statehood or a historical tradition of such a statehood militated against the coalescence of an All-Slavic language. Furthermore, the religious differences symbolized and emphasized by the use of the Cyrillic alphabet by Orthodox Slavs, of the Latin alphabet by Catholic and Protestant Slavs, and of the Arabic script by Muslim Slavs made a merger of the different Slavic literary traditions next to impossible. The creation of bi-scriptural Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian as the language of Yugoslavia did not survive the breakup of that polity. It may be that if more than one script is used for writing a lect, it faces the very strong possibility of splintering into as many separate languages as there are scripts. On the other hand, it is possible for lects that differ from each other as much as German and French do to be fashioned into dialects of a single language when such a normative unity is enforced through a single script and long-lasting common statehood, as in the case of the frequently mutually incomprehensible dialects of the Chinese language (cf. Künstler, 2000; Maxwell, 2003).

## Conclusion, or fast forward to the present day

In the 1920s, linguists – building on the politically and emotionally charged two-tier classification of lects (entailing that the lect construed as the nation-state's “national language” should contain other lects spoken on the polity's territory as “dialects”) – proposed that languages (*Einzelsprachen*) are mutually incomprehensible lects, whereas dialects are mutually comprehensible (Bloomfield, 1926, p. 162). However, this approach raised many difficult, even paradoxical, questions. It could not explain why mutually incomprehensible Arabic lects should be dialects of standard Arabic (cf. Ferguson, 1959), nor suggest what to do about differing degrees of and asymmetric (in)comprehensibility among Scandinavia's Germanic lects (Haugen, 1966). It could not decide if Romanian and Moldovan (being identical) are one language or two, nor explain why Low German, which is incomprehensible to speakers of standard German, should be a dialect of this language rather than of Dutch, with which it is largely mutually comprehensible.

Soviet scholars did not participate in these Western theoretical discussions on the definition of “a language” (*Einzelsprache*) and its relation to “dialect.” However, taking their cue from Joseph Stalin's famous 1913 essay (Stalin, 1942) and following his orders in his capacity as the Soviet Commissar of Nationalities (Blank, 1994), they, together with Soviet politicians and doctrinaires, set out on an unprecedented campaign of language-building (*iazykovoe stroitel'stvo*, as the official Soviet Russian term had it [cf. Grande, 1939; Potseluevskii, 1935]). (They knew that creating languages was possible, as they were human artefacts [Peterson, 1927], from the influential and convincing example of the constructed language of Esperanto that was very successful with users [cf. Dr Èsperanto, 1887; Żelazny, 2012]. Western scholarship began to address and analyse this issue only quite belatedly during the 1970s [cf. Rubin & Jernudd, 1971].)

Through writing, impositions from above, grammars, dictionaries, (compulsory) popular elementary education and state offices, the Soviet apparatus constructed from scratch such languages as Azeri, Karelian, Turkmen and Uzbek, and destroyed those not fitting the Kremlin's ideological purposes, for instance, Chagatai, Hebrew and Persian in the Arabic script (insofar as the latter two existed on Soviet territory) (Edgar, 2004, p. 131; Hirsch, 2005; Smith, 1998, pp. 4, 157). Soviet language-builders often did not know or understand the exact linguistic mechanisms and processes that they were tweaking, even as they successfully implemented their decisions by mobilizing the full force of Soviet power. With their

feats of sociolinguistic engineering, or even derring-do, they proved that lects, especially those written and standardized into languages, are indeed artefacts, clearly being products of human will and inventiveness.

Kemalist Turkey followed a similar course by destroying the Arabic-script-based Osmanlica (Ottoman Turkish), and replacing it with a radically different Turkish in Latin letters, fashioned on the spur of the moment at the founding of a Turkish nation state and in its immediate wake (Lewis, 2002).

After World War II, the coalescing field of sociolinguistics (stemming from “language planning,” as pursued in many postcolonial nation-states [cf. Fishman, 1974; Jacob, 1946, pp. 21–24, 76]) proposed in the West that extralinguistic factors (usually political decisions) are involved in deciding which lect is a dialect and which a language (Weinreich, 1945). Thus, mutually comprehensible dialects may be made into separate languages (so-called “Ausbau languages” or “languages by extension”) through planned dissimilation or administrative *fiat*. On the other hand, absolute or relative incomprehensibility between lects may be reconfirmed by recognizing them as separate languages in their own right (so-called “Abstand languages” or “languages by distance”) (Kloss, 1967). In the latter case, however, mutually incomprehensible (Abstand) lects may also be made into dialects of a single language with the help of widespread diglossia buttressed by unitary statehood in the religious-cum-cultural tradition, as in the case of Chinese or Arabic (cf. Ferguson, 1959).

This clearly political – or more exactly, ideological – concept of “a language” (*Einzelsprache*) (as developed in the West), well understood by sociolinguists, has not yet percolated from the scholarly domain to the general public. As a result, ethnolinguistic nationalism, perceived to be “normal,” remains, thus far, the sole ideology of statehood and nationhood legitimization in Central Europe. This view hinges on the seemingly “natural” belief that in order to be nations in the fullest sense, human groups must enjoy their own specific languages. The other component of this view is that there cannot exist “true” languages that are not spoken and “possessed” each by one nation only. Should such lects crop up, they must be redefined as dialects of extant national languages, or – which is an option that is generally resisted by existing recognized nations – the lects’ speakers should be fashioned (or ought to fashion themselves) into nations of their own. This logic leads to the observed reluctance, on the part of the state, to recognize Kashubian and Silesian as languages in their own right in Poland, or Moravian and Silesian in the Czech Republic. And by the same token, languages other than French, though indigenous to the territory of France, cannot be ethnic or minority languages; they may be only “regional

languages," if the traditional, though now pejoratively perceived, term *patois* cannot be applied to them any longer (Żelazny, 2000, pp. 302–313).

Talking of languages, as is done using the concepts that at present we have at our disposal in the Western intellectual tool box, is not a neutral discussion, let alone idle talk. Depending on which turn the discussion takes, it may mean: the unmaking of a language or the creation of a new one from a dialect; the demotion of a language to the rank of a dialect; or the subsuming of a "free flowing," "unmoored" dialect under the "umbrella" of an expanding national or state language, thus entailing the disappearance of the former. This is nothing new: lects did emerge and disappear before the rise of writing, modernization and nation states, as they undoubtedly will in the future. But before writing, the processes unfolded on the small scale of face-to-face human groups, perhaps without much awareness on the part of humans themselves, unless their own group happened to be wiped out and the lone survivor had to find refuge with groups speaking radically different lects. And this meant the end of the lect associated with her original group.

In the modern world, with the employment of the aforementioned unprecedented technologies and techniques, lects can be created, destroyed, spread or contained much more quickly and on a massive scale, across entire societies, states, and continents. This can require even tens of millions of people to alter their linguistic habits virtually overnight, as was the case with the introduction of Indonesian (Malay) in the overwhelmingly non-Indonesian-speaking Indonesia, or of Urdu in similarly non-Urdu-speaking Pakistan ("Population," 2012; Swaan, 2001, pp. 85–86). In Europe, the intergenerational transmission of German was extinguished among communist Poland's German minority of about one million in the span of a couple of years after World War II. As a result, the vast majority of the quarter of a million Polish Germans do not know the language (Kamusella, 2012a).

At present, the world's entire landmass (apart from the uninhabited Antarctic) has been strictly divided among nation-states in the wake of the decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century. The worldwide spread of the nation-state as the sole legitimate model of statehood and peoplehood also functions as the conveyor belt *par excellence* of Western-style modernity to each nook of the world (cf. Kohn, 1962). Integral to this is the concept of a language (*Einzelsprache*) in its dichotomous relation with that of a dialect. The contemporary world is characterized by instantaneous and increasingly borderless communication and by the continuous transfer of previously unimaginable amounts of information. In this new world, the concepts of a language (*Einzelsprache*) and dialect are rapidly normativized

and normalized. In turn, they are built into the very intellectual-cum-technological paradigm and infrastructure that underlie the software and the hardware of IT industry and of the internet. On the one hand, these concepts have become so much internalized as to appear invisible in their perceived “normality,” while on the other, they *de facto* banish and make illegitimate all alternative ways of thinking and conceptualizing on the linguistic (cf. Kamusella, 2012b).

Dùn Dè / Dundee  
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## Dzieje normatywnej dychotomii języka i dialekta: Od grecko-łacińskich źródeł po państwa etnicznojęzykowe Europy Środkowej

Pojęcie języka jako jednego z wielu (*Einzelssprache*) stawiane w diamentalnej opozycji do „dialektu” (czyli „nie-języka”, który normatywnie musi zostać przyporządkowany jakiemuś już wcześniej uznanemu językowi jako jeden z jego dialektów) stanowi formę pojęciową, poprzez pryzmat której postrzega się języki i dyskutuje o nich we współczesnym świecie Zachodu. Z powodu powszechnego uznania owa forma pojęciowa wydaje się tak oczywista i wolna od nacechowania ideologicznego, że Immanuel Kant nie uwzględnił języka w zaproponowanym przez siebie systemie kategorii filozoficznych, podobnie jak i autorzy niezmiernie wpływowego dzieła z zakresu historiografii i socjologii politycznej o znamiennym tytule *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*.

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiam wyłonienie się opozycji języka wobec dialekta w starożytnej grece oraz jego recepcję na gruncie łaciny od starożytności rzymskiej po okres nowożytny. W ciągu wieków utarło się używanie greckich i łacińskich terminów w odniesieniu do „języka” jako synonimów na określenie ludów (czy też grup etnicznych), co we wczesnym XIX stuleciu silnie wpłynęło na wykształcenie się normatywnego zrównania języka z narodem. Stanowiło to początek fenomenu znanego pod nazwą „narodowego etnicznojęzykowego”, który na poziomie państw dominuje po dziś dzień w całej Europie Środkowej.

### Note

Tomasz Kamusella, School of History, University of St Andrews, St Andrews  
 tdk2@st-andrews.ac.uk

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