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## DEFINING THE LINGUISTIC AREA/LEAGUE: AN INVITATION TO DISCUSSION

### 1. General remarks

The whole point of defining a given entity is to make it distinguishable from any other entity – we need to be able to decide whether this entity still counts as a representative of a certain category or falls outside it. In view of the lack of clear-cut boundaries in reality, we need to invent these. This simplification is necessary. Such idealized concepts help us classify and organize our knowledge of languages and processes that cause their change.

In this paper I am going to discuss the problem of defining the term *linguistic league*. In the first section I will present a brief survey of the problem, including a historical sketch on how the study and the notion of linguistic leagues developed over the years. This is followed by a (mostly) theoretical discussion concerning the criteria used in the former definitions. First of all, these criteria need some ordering. It should be realised that, because we work intuitively, without formal definition, the term *linguistic league* tends to be applied to a great variety of phenomena. I will try to show that we need some other criteria in order to make the decision whether something qualifies as a league or not less arbitrary. Finally, I am going to verify the new definition on the basis of the Balkan league.

### 2. Introduction to the problem

#### 2.1. Why do we need the definition?

In the case of *linguistic league* the definitions that have been proposed so far are either imprecise or, if they attempt at a more detailed formulation, they usually depend on very arbitrary parameters. It is perhaps to avoid this impasse that Campbell (2006: 7) assumes that “there is no significant difference between borrowing in general and areal linguistics in particular” and does away with almost all the requirements and criteria on the account that they are “superfluous”. However, in such a case the very existence of the term *linguistic league* be-

comes superfluous – there is no need to apply two names (i.e. *borrowing* and *linguistic area/league*) to one and the same notion. Yet many linguists still employ the term and most often they use it to denote groupings of *several* languages which share *several* features. The parameters used in such a formulation are indeed imprecise, but getting rid of them altogether, as Campbell wants, is not a solution. Instead, some clear-cut, stable and precisely formulated criteria should be found, discussed and possibly generally accepted.

The name *linguistic league* (*linguistic area* or *Sprachbund*) has been widely used in linguistics. On the one hand, it has often functioned as a cover term for groupings of languages which share some similar features and these features have not been inherited from a common ancestor. Faced with a group of languages that occupy a certain area and exhibit a number of similarities, a linguist has four ways of explaining these similarities. If we rule out language universals and chance, the other two form a continuum with one extreme being language family and the other linguistic league. Because divergence and convergence are in fact two sides of the same coin, and complement each other, it is often virtually impossible to conclusively classify a given grouping as a league or a family (at least in the present state of our knowledge). The same grouping will often involve both divergence and convergence. If languages spread from one ancestor but remain in adjacent areas and subsequently develop close contacts it is very difficult to distinguish between inherited and borrowed features.

On the other hand, the term has been also used for smaller-scale phenomena. Entities like Karelian Sprachbund have been proposed (Sarhima 1991). In this particular case only two languages are involved as members of the league: the Karelian language and the northern varieties of Russian. What is more, sometimes the term *league* was applied to areas where only one feature was shared – for example, the Baltic area comprising Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German, Kashubian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian which share one common feature, called by Jakobson “Polytonie” (Jakobson 1931: 137–138).

Furthermore, the term has often been mentioned together with such notions as substrate or adstrate, language shift, isogloss, isopleth, or, as evidenced by the above quotation, borrowing.

This indicates that the term *linguistic league* does not clearly stand out from this background. It is, then, necessary to distinguish it from all these terms.

## 2.2. Terminology – league vs. area

There are two traditions as far as the name for the concept is concerned. In Europe, after the Russian linguist N.S. Trubetzkoy (1928) the name *Sprachbund* and its various translations (*linguistic league*, *linguistic union*) have been used.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Franz Boas, the pioneer of areal linguistics in America, studied the diffusion of morphological traits and spoke of “the areas of distribution of features” but had no particular term to describe groups of languages that

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<sup>1</sup> The name *linguistic union* (or *unité linguistique* in this case) was used by Sandfeld (1930: 6) among others. However, Sandfeld used it in a slightly different way – it was an equivalent of Trubetzkoy’s “Sprachgruppe” rather than “Sprachbund”.

displayed such similarities in structure. However, almost half a century later, Emeneau (1956) popularised the name *linguistic area*, which has gained a widespread acceptance, at first in America and subsequently in Europe.

It is worth to note the difference between *linguistic league* and *linguistic area*. The first one emphasizes the close relationship, close bonds between languages that form the group, whereas the other emphasizes mainly the geographical aspect. This difference will become relevant later in this paper.

### 2.3. A historical sketch

The study of groupings today known as linguistic leagues developed separately in Europe and in America. In Europe it was in progress already in the nineteenth century. The first to be studied was the Balkan league (cf. Miklosich 1861). These works concentrated mainly on the identification, description and classification of features as well as attempts to explain their origin. The question of how to classify and define the phenomenon itself was not mentioned. The nineteenth century work was summarized and complemented by Sandfeld (1930).

In America, the origins of the concept as we know it today can be traced back to the famous dispute between Boas and Sapir, concerning the origin of American Indian languages. Initially quite conservative in his views, Boas gradually came to question the traditional claim “believing that the establishment of linguistic features would normally be possible only for less distant relationships” and thus he “came to emphasize the difficulty of distinguishing between the effects of borrowing and the effects of inheritance, thus favoring areal linguistic research” (Campbell 1997: 72). Unlike Sapir, he argued that morphological traits can and are quite frequently borrowed, and similarity in morphology between languages is not necessarily a sign of genetic relationship. He tended to view these languages not as groups that *diverged* from common ancestors, but rather *converged* to share common sets of features.

At that time Boas’s quite radical views (“morphological hybridization” of languages) did not receive much acceptance among the American linguists. However, the idea of the diffusion of features across language boundaries was developed in Europe, especially by the Prague Linguistic Circle.

The first to introduce and define the concept of linguistic league was N.S. Trubetzkoy. He made the first reference to it in Trubetzkoy (1923), but that was only in passing and the definition he provided was quite vague (cf. definition 1 in Appendix). Consequently, what is more widely known and usually recognized as the first definition is Trubetzkoy’s *Proposition 16* (Trubetzkoy 1928). In his definition we can find a reflection of the Sapir-Boas dispute. Trubetzkoy proposed to classify language groupings (*Sprachgruppen*) into two categories: language families (*Sprachfamilien*) and language leagues (*Sprachbünde*). According to his definition the categories are disjunctive – a grouping is either a family or a league.

Sooner or later more studies followed. Within the Prague Circle, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson began studying phonological leagues (cf. Jakobson 1931, Trubetzkoy 1931). They pursued the idea of analyzing the geographical spread of phonological traits across regions. They developed the concept of a phonemic

atlas that would contain maps with isoglosses that encircle the areas with a particular feature.<sup>2</sup> They never implemented this project but their idea was later taken over by Masica (1976), who applied the principles of dialect geography to the study of the South Asian league.

Masica was a representative of the revival of the areal studies in America. As mentioned earlier, after Boas this branch of linguistics was forgotten in the USA. The change came with Emeneau (1956), who proposed a revised definition of the term and, as remarked earlier, popularized the name *linguistic area*. Since then American linguists, together with the name itself, have become dominant in the field of areal linguistics and the study of linguistic leagues.

### 3. Parameters of the definition

Before suggesting a new definition of linguistic league I would like to offer a brief survey of the parameters taken into consideration in some of the former definitions. Certain criteria are more frequent than others and are often considered inherent features of a linguistic league. It seems, therefore, necessary to recognize them and take them into account in our discussion. An overview of other criteria is equally important – I will try to show that it is in fact the use of these particular criteria that causes so many disagreements among linguists. I will concentrate only on those definitions that have received wider recognition and gained the status of “classical” ones, although I bear in mind that this does not do justice to all the details of the whole discussion. Being one of the basic notions in linguistics, the term has been defined numerous and in many different ways. However, all those descriptions usually refer to the criteria mentioned in the classical definitions, which are presented here.

A summary of the different criteria used for defining linguistic league is given in Table 1. It follows from it that the point of departure is almost always the assumption that a linguistic league is a geographically delimited area in which due to language contacts a group of languages have come to share a number of structural features. Only two definitions do not mention geography and five other do not specify the type of similarities (whether structural or lexical) necessary to speak of a league. Four of the definitions do not mention language contacts or borrowing as the source of common traits. Nevertheless, I assume that these constitute the basic criteria for defining linguistic league and should be included in any definition of it.

This basic description is the starting point for more elaborate definitions, which with varying results specify the entities recognized as linguistic leagues. Their restrictive value depends on the criteria included and these are sometimes significantly different from each other. In the following subsections several such criteria are discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> Such an idea is by far nothing surprising. By that time several linguistic atlases of Europe had already been published: from the earliest one, *Sprachatlas von Nord- und Mitteldeutschland* (1881) by Georg Wenker, followed by the famous *Atlas historique de la France* (1902–1910) by Jules Gilliéron and Edmond Edmont, up to several atlases describing particular languages or regions (for a reliable survey cf. Jordan 1971: 217–409).

### 3.1. The number of languages and the number of traits

Initially, the proponents of the definitions were usually satisfied with vague expressions such as *several*, *a number* or *some*, no additional specifications were introduced. However, later on these two parameters – the number of languages and the number of traits – became decisive criteria that determine the existence of a linguistic league, which made it necessary to establish some minimum values, especially in order to have means of deciding whether some grouping is “already” a linguistic league or not (cf. definitions 8, 9, 11, 12 in the Appendix). On the other hand, Campbell (1985: 29–30) claims that: “in principle there is no meaningful way of distinguishing LAs [linguistic areas] defined on the basis of several features from those based on but a single shared trait”. This consequently leads to the conclusion that linguistic leagues are everywhere. Campbell is aware of this but he does not seem to see any problem with such an all-inclusive definition. Instead, he views linguistic leagues as entities that can be placed on a scale of “strength” – some linguistic leagues are better established than others.

However, what Campbell fails to notice is the fact that assuming a single shared feature as a sufficient criterion rules out the requirement of mutual influence. Although as may be inferred from Table 1 it is not a widely accepted criterion, it is in fact one of the fundamental features of leagues. Mutual influence is what significantly distinguishes between a league and an ordinary two-language contact situation. In the latter the influence is usually unidirectional, i.e. there is no partnership. The name *league* (G. *Bund*, F. *unité*, Rus. *sojuz*, as well as another English term, *union*) tacitly assumes partnership, which may be considered a *sine qua non* condition for mutual influence. Hence, if we allow one as the lowest number of shared features for a grouping to be qualified as a league, we actually disturb the very foundation of the concept.

Campbell’s observation that leagues can be placed on a scale is inevitable given the nature of these two criteria – they are scalar parameters. There is a major problem related to this. One has not only to accept the relevance of these two criteria for the existence of a linguistic league, but also establish some minimum values that will constitute boundaries beyond which there is no speaking of a linguistic league. Choosing these boundaries is very subjective. Consequently, classifying a particular grouping as a league is also subjective. This makes the definition arbitrary. In order to make the notion of linguistic league less arbitrary, but at the same time not all-inclusive, it seems necessary to provide clearer, more cogent and better-justified criteria, whereas so far, as shown in Table 1, the number of languages and the number of traits have either been established chaotically or not proposed at all. An extreme example is provided by Katz (1975, see definition 8), at least as far as the passage quoted in Campbell (2006). It follows from his definition that two languages that share one trait are sufficient to form a league.<sup>3</sup> Such a formulation blurs the boundary

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<sup>3</sup> Katz’s (1975) formulation is very different from all others, yet quite explicit. Although he does not give any exact minimum numbers of languages and of traits, they can be inferred from his definition, precisely because of his explicit formulation.





between a league and a sporadic linguistic contact. What is more, because he assumes the necessity of geographical proximity, but does not mention linguistic contacts, his definition may very well include two neighbouring languages that are genetically related to each other (although such languages would probably also have *more* than one common trait). Thus the difference between genetic and areal relationship vanishes. The analysis of this single definition is sufficient to see that using incautious criteria may entirely obscure Trubetzkoy's idea, and in consequence move linguistics back to the period before the 1920s (cf. 2.3 above).

Schaller (1975: 101ff) – after discussing various views in favour of and against qualifying the Balkan languages as a league – divides their features into primary and secondary. Primary features are those which fully meet the requirements of his definition of linguistic league (see definition 9 in the Appendix), whereas:

Zu den "sekundären Balkanismen" gehören solche Übereinstimmungen, die der Sprachbundesdefinition nicht entsprechen, also z.B. nur in zwei Balkansprachen auftretende Übereinstimmungen, wobei es sich bei den beiden Balkansprachen nicht um Mitglieder einer Sprachfamilie handelt, z.B. Albanisch und Rumänisch.

A survey of the "primary features" is quoted in 7 below.

### 3.2. Distant genetic relationship

Distant relationship between languages has been sometimes proposed as a necessary condition for establishing a linguistic league. It usually took the form of the restriction that languages should come from different language families. However, let us take a look at the prototypical linguistic league, i.e. the Balkan league. If we exclude Turkish from this league (which indeed is reasonable, cf. below) we are left with a grouping of languages that belong to one family – Indo-European. Does this mean that the Balkan languages do not form a league? Such a conclusion would be hardly acceptable – the Balkans is the most firmly established linguistic league.

Unfortunately, unlike biology, linguistics has not established clear taxonomic terminology. *Family* may mean both "IE languages" as well as "Slavic/Germanic (etc.) languages". If the proponents of this restriction meant "a smaller family", the Balkan league meets this requirement, because not all of its languages are Slavic. But to draw such a conclusion we would have to assume our *own* favourable interpretation of the term *family*. If we insisted on the necessity of this criterion, we would have to determine in advance (if only for the sake of our definition), what degree of genetic relationship we refer to when using the name *family*. Nevertheless, the term *macrofamily* cannot be applied here, because this would clash with the established convention of using it with reference to even higher level of relationship, e.g. Nostratic (NB. at this level Turkish and the IE languages belong to the same family, the Nostratic family, and in consequence, the Balkan league no longer meets this criterion).

What is more, it is a serious mistake to apply the categories used to describe the genetic affiliations within the Indo-European group of languages to other



groups. In other words, the meaning of *family* in the ‘Indo-European’ sense is not directly transferable onto, for example, the Altaic<sup>4</sup> ground, because in both contexts it will indicate a different degree of similarity and relationship. Changing the name *family* into *genetic stock* or *branch* (cf. Masica 1976: 4) is not a solution to this problem, though it would perhaps “save” the Balkan league. The only solution is to abandon the requirement that languages should not be related or should be distantly related. To distinguish between similarities within a league from those within a language family it will be sufficient to prove that the former are a result of borrowing, whereas the latter have been inherited from a common ancestor.

### 3.3. The nature of traits

Most often lexical similarities are considered insufficient to speak of a linguistic league. Even Campbell (2006), in his liberal approach, does not seem to question the necessity of structural borrowing. Thomason (2000: 312) notes:

Using vocabulary as a sole criterion would therefore trivialise the notion of a linguistic area, and we’d need to invent a new term for those rather special contact situations that have traditionally been called linguistic areas.

However, there are cases such as the Carpathian languages (Czech, Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Romanian; cf. e.g. Helimski 2003 and Stachowski 2005). Although they are usually disregarded as linguistic leagues, because they display hardly any structural similarities that would be due to contact, there are a large number of lexical similarities between them, especially in the domain of shepherding. This certainly points to a significant language contact that must have taken place in some period in the past. It would be very desirable to take such a type of grouping into consideration.

On the notion and definition of lexical Carpathianisms cf. Stachowski (2005).

On the problem of “league vs. area” in the context of the Carpathian studies see Stachowski (in press).

### 3.4. What counts as influence

Even if we limit ourselves to structural traits only, there is still the question of what constitutes a trait. This may seem self-evident yet it needs some explanation. Janhunen (2005) gives the following classification of innovations within a linguistic league:

- a. active positive (developing a new trait)
- b. active negative (loss of a trait)
- c. passive positive (retention of a trait)
- d. passive negative (not developing a trait).

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<sup>4</sup> Here I do not mean “the Altaic language family” but “the Altaic languages” as a convenient term for the Turkic, Mongolic and Manchu-Tungus languages. I am not taking any stand concerning the supposed genetic relationship between these groups.

His examples come from what he calls Amdo Sprachbund, which comprises languages of four stocks (Tibetan, Sinitic, Mongolic and Turkic). More specifically, the examples are several constructions from two Turkic languages that belong to this league – Sarygh Yughur and Salar. Janhunen’s classification (cf. item d. on his list) implies that the lack of a trait may also be a trait of a league, which at first glance may seem overzealous. On closer inspection, however, his assumption turns out very interesting. First of all, it is obviously not true that according to this classification a lack of *any given* trait is a trait. The classification is carefully formulated and includes the lack of such traits that would appear if the language did not participate in the league (e.g. such traits that *did* appear in other languages of the same family but did *not* appear in this particular language due to the influence of the other members of the league). Secondly, Janhunen is perhaps the first one to notice that the influence of one language on another may not be limited only to cases of borrowing a feature from the former to the latter, but may as well include the suppression of the development of a feature. To be sure, I have not encountered any actual examples of such a type of influence. Usually (just as in Janhunen’s examples) the lack of one feature (either its disappearance or its failure to appear) is a result of appearing of another, or, conversely, a new trait appears to compensate for the lack of some other. Yet this does not mean that examples of developments of the type d. do not occur. It might be useful to survey the linguistic leagues identified so far in terms of the presence of such a type of development. This could change our perspective on the whole concept of linguistic league. However, because such a type of influence has not been studied thoroughly, I will limit myself to the cases mentioned in Janhunen’s a., b., and c. (i.e. borrowing,<sup>5</sup> loss and retention of a trait).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Some linguists (e.g. L. Johanson among those cited here and E. Csató) prefer the term *copying* to *borrowing*, because the latter implies giving back, whereas a language does not return what it has taken. This, on the other hand, would require using the term *borrowing* in such contexts where *Rückwanderung* occurs, e.g. Pol. *bicz* ‘whip’ was not *copied* but *borrowed* by German, because later on, G. (< Pol.) *Peitsche* returned to Polish, where it took the form *pejcz*. This distinction seems a bit pointless hair-splitting. As Blokland (2004: 134) points out: “Csató uses the concept of code-copying, where ‘elements of one code are copied and the copies inserted into another code’. As she admits this is just another term for ‘borrowing’ or ‘interference’ and I fail to see the benefits of using this term”.

<sup>6</sup> Sometimes it may be difficult to prove that the suppression is due to contact. As we have seen, theoretically we may have two situations: either there is not or there is an accompanying development of a feature to remedy the suppression of another. Let us imagine three languages – *A*, *B* and *C*. *A* and *B* are closely related to each other and initially occupy neighbouring territories (they may well be treated as dialects of the same language). At some point the speakers of language *B* move away from their territory and settle in the proximity of the speakers of *C*. At the same time, language *A*, which remains in the original territory starts developing a certain feature *f*, which originally was alien to all three languages. If language *B* does not develop this feature it is quite difficult to determine whether it is so due to the proximity of language *C* or the distance from language *A*.

On the other hand, if there exists a certain feature *e* which is formally different, but analogous to feature *f* as far as relations within the system are concerned (so that, typologically, they are in a way complementary – a language has either *e* or *f*) and *e* is present in language *C*, then it may be easier to accept that the suppression of feature *f* in language *B* is due to influence of *C*. Here languages *A* and *B* in their initial stage again possess neither feature *e* nor *f* (if they possessed feature

There is one additional remark to be made here. We need to formulate explicitly what we mean by the influence of one language onto another. Understanding this should be purely intuitive – it means that one standard language influences the standard variety of another. In other words, the features shared only by dialects ought to be excluded as the features of a league. It is obvious that border dialects of two neighbouring languages will share more features than their respective standard varieties – this results from the phenomenon of dialect continuums. If we were to include such types of contact situations as linguistic leagues, instead of dealing with several larger leagues we would have to do with thousands of minute leagues. Without the above-mentioned simplification we would trivialize the category. That is why the Turkish dialects discussed in Friedmann (1982) would have to be ruled out as members of the Balkan league, and the conclusion would be that Turkish does not belong here. At the same time the significant influence of Turkish on the lexicon of the Balkan languages cannot be denied. The abundance of Turkish borrowings in all the Balkan languages is an important factor that unifies them and contributes to the fact that they are perceived as a league. Consequently, Turkish cannot be overlooked when discussing the Balkan league, but at the same time cannot be referred to as a Balkan language. Schaller (1975: 91) solved this apparent contradiction by writing that Turkish is “keine Balkansprache, sondern eine Sprache des Balkans”.

### 3.5. Borrowability and the significance of traits

It has been suggested by some scholars (cf. Campbell 2006: 17 for discussion) that some traits are more easily borrowed than others, and those that are less borrowable define more “legitimate” leagues than others. Such a criterion presents only problems. First of all, establishing an objective hierarchy of traits according to their borrowability is virtually impossible, because we have no means of measuring borrowability. What is more, even if we came up with such a scale, deciding where a linguistic league starts on this scale is arbitrary to the same extent as establishing the minimum number of languages of traits that define the league. Consequently, the criterion of borrowability should be abandoned altogether.

## 4. The scope of linguistic leagues

So far I have not discussed an alternative way of determining what qualifies as a linguistic league. Instead of assuming a formal definition, some linguists decided to trace the scope of the actual linguistic leagues on maps. This approach

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*e*, we could only speak of the retention of this feature in *B*). In such a case language *A* develops feature *f*, whereas language *B*, under the influence of language *C*, suppresses this development and develops feature *e* instead. Because we have feature *e* as the reference point, we may claim that the development of feature *f* was suppressed in *B* due to the influence of *C* (which has feature *e* instead of *f*).

subsequently resulted in the core-periphery view of these entities. The scope of leagues can be determined on the basis of:

- a. isoglosses (cf. e.g. Trubetzkoy 1931, Jakobson 1931, Masica 1976)

The procedure involves establishing the lists of features that define a particular league, and examining the territorial scope of each feature and, finally, marking this scope with isoglosses on the map. The area where isoglosses bundle is the core of the league; the further away from the core, the fewer isoglosses bundle.

- b. isopleths

The first step is to establish the list of features that define a particular league. Next we examine how many of these features a language has; isopleths are the lines that encircle those languages that have the same inventory of features from the list. The languages that have *all* the features on the list will constitute the core of the league. The rest forms the periphery, the further away from the core, the lower the number of features of the league that a language has.

Both of these procedures are based on a subjective assumption – the decision which features to include in the list (cf. e.g. the different lists of Balkanisms proposed over the decades). This decision affects the territorial scope of the league as well as the size of the core.

## 5. How do linguistic leagues arise?

### 5.1. The role of substrate and adstrate

A substrate or an adstrate have occasionally been postulated as a possible source of similarities between members of a given linguistic league. I would like to argue here that neither can give rise to a linguistic league on its own. They may be contributors to the league (cf. the case of Turkish in 3.4. above) but not the only factors responsible for its formation.

Theoretically speaking, let us assume a situation where a group of different languages meet in a territory occupied by a substrate. When these languages absorb the speakers of the substrate they take over certain of its features, which, as a result, they come to share. Without any further contacts between these languages and with lots of independent changes they subsequently go through, the number of shared features would probably shrink. In the case of an adstrate, the situation would be parallel. Even if there is a language that due to its dominant role exerts influence on others, this situation does not last forever. After the adstrate stops to be the dominant language the situation becomes parallel to that of a substrate – without any contacts, the similarities gradually disappear. Such a situation is exemplified by the history of the influence of Russian on the languages of the former Soviet Union. Veenker (1967: 16ff) introduces the term “Perstrat” (plus the adjective “persternentiell”) here: “*Perstrat* nenne ich die sprachliche Überfremdung einer Sprache X durch eine kulturell überlegene Sprache Y. [...] der Wortschatz der Sprache X wird durch zahlreiche *persternentielle Fremd- und Lehnwörter* [...] aus der Sprache Y bereichert.

Perstratwirkungen lassen sich recht gut beobachten an den Sprachen der kleinen Minderheiten in der Sowjetunion [sic!], die einem permanenten russischen Einfluß unterworfen sind”.

From a more practical point of view, the hypothesis that a substrate language was the source of similarities within a given linguistic league is usually unverifiable. Even if historical and archaeological data point to the possibility of the existence of a substrate in a given territory, linguistic data are usually quite scarce – a substrate is usually poorly attested. Consequently, we are not able to determine which features, if any, may have been borrowed directly from it.

There is yet another problem related to substrates – the size of their territory. This can be illustrated, for example, by the Romance substrate on the Croatian island of Krk. For ages this substrate (the last speaker of which died in 1898) influenced the Croatian dialects that gradually deposed it. However, only one dialect was changed to the extent of being lexically and structurally<sup>7</sup> distinct from the others (Boryś 2000: 27, 41). As we can see, the substrate influence did not extend over the whole island, which is not very large, after all. If the formation of a whole linguistic league was to be triggered by a substrate, it would have to occupy a significant territory, which would mean that once it must have been a fairly familiar and important language. This is contradicted by the fact that so far we have not found for any league such a substrate that would be sufficiently familiar and would occupy a sufficiently large territory.

In the case of an adstrate the situation is less hopeless – we have access to direct evidence of possible influence. However, there are no clear cases where the adstrate alone caused the formation of a league. Instead, we find examples of the situation where, despite its prolonged privileged position, it failed to give rise to a league. A very telling situation is that of the Hungarian influence on e.g. Slovak and Ukrainian. For about eight hundred years Hungarian was the language of the ruling class in these territories. However, its impact was restricted mainly to dialectal vocabulary and did not give rise to a linguistic league. A similar status was that of Turkish in the Balkan league. During the centuries of the Ottoman rule, Turkish was in a privileged position, and as a consequence exerted an enormous influence on the languages of the region. Yet as in the case of Hungarian, this influence was restricted mainly to the lexicon – there was hardly any structural interference. Turkish certainly reinforced the language contacts in the region, but it was not a decisive factor in the formation of the Balkan league. If it wasn't for the prolonged language contacts in the Balkans, the structural similarities would not arise between these languages.

To sum up, the only situation from which a linguistic league may form is that of mutual influence. Neither a substrate nor an adstrate alone are sufficient for establishing a linguistic league, though they may catalyze its formation or strengthen an existing league.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the superlative prefix *sion-* < Substr. Romanic *\*sūn* < ?Lat. *summus* ‘the most prominent, the main’ – cf. Boryś 2000: 31.

## 5.2. Between diachrony and synchrony

The question of substrates introduces the problem of historical perspective. The status of linguistic leagues from the point of view of diachrony should be determined. A league is definitely a synchronic construct – we describe leagues on the basis of synchronic evidence of similarities between languages. But this assumption alone would suggest that league is merely typology viewed through geography, which is not true. For example, Czech and Slovak possess initial stress, so does Hungarian, which is spoken in adjacent areas; yet this does not automatically mean that the three languages form a linguistic league. Hungarian has inherited the initial stress from the Proto-Uralic times, whereas Czech and Slovak developed it as a secondary feature – the similarity is a pure coincidence. Here we encounter a problem: if *mutual* influence is a prerequisite for a linguistic league, then those features that are due to independent developments (as the stress in Czech and Slovak, and Hungarian) are not features of a league. Nevertheless, such features make the languages of a particular area more similar to each other. Therefore, they are not features of a league but features that reinforce our perception of them as a league. Consequently, this case seems typologically similar to that of Turkish in relation to the Balkan languages (cf. 3.4).

In the area of diachronic examination of languages, the study of linguistic leagues is also related to genetic linguistics; they complement each other in the same way as the processes of divergence and convergence do.

## 6. A revised definition

### 6.1. The new definition

As remarked earlier, several names have been used to refer to such phenomena, but they generally fall into two contrasting categories: *linguistic area* (*diffusion area*, *convergence area*) vs. *linguistic league* (*language union*, *Sprachbund*). It has also been said that they emphasize different aspects – the first one is typically areal (in a simple geographical sense), whereas the other concentrates on the relationship between the languages that form the league. It would be perhaps useful to draw on this difference and make a distinction between two types of grouping – one would be a less closely related *linguistic area* and the other, *linguistic league*, would refer to such a grouping which may form in a linguistic area if the languages that occupy it start to interact with one another closely enough. Making terminological distinction between “strong” and “weak” leagues has already been suggested by Birnbaum (1983: 19), but he offered no formal means of distinguishing between them. Here, I would like to suggest such a distinction on more formal grounds.

In proposing a new definition I would like to attain several goals. Firstly, as said above, because the number of languages and the number of traits are arbitrary criteria, they ought to be replaced by some more objective ones. Secondly, I would like to offer formal means of distinguishing between *linguistic area*,

which involves weaker relationship between languages and *linguistic league*, which assumes close contacts between languages. Thirdly, I would like to suggest less arbitrary criteria for distinguishing between the core and the periphery of the league.

The term *linguistic area* shall be defined on geographical grounds. A linguistic area is a geographical area where:

- a. languages (related or not) share some traits (either lexical or structural or both), and
- b. we can prove that these similarities are due to borrowing, and
- c. the number of languages and traits is irrelevant.

Such a way of defining the linguistic area is very much in the spirit of Campbell (2006). However, unlike Campbell, it abandons the requirement of traits being necessarily structural. Consequently, it includes entities such as the Balkans (with common structures) as well as the Carpathian area (without common structures).

Because the languages of the Balkan area seem to be in a stronger relationship with one another than those of the Carpathian one, it is very convenient to distinguish one from the other. For such groupings where the bonds are considerably stronger I suggest using the term *linguistic league*. As the ultimate criteria that will distinguish between these two I would like to propose: (1) common grammatical structures; (2) multidirectional influence, which is the most meaningful expression of close relationship between languages.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, a linguistic league shall be such a grouping of languages where:

- a. languages (related or not) share *structural* traits (cf. 6.2 below), and
- b. we can prove that these similarities are due to borrowing, and
- c. we can identify the core, which includes only those languages that contributed at least one *structural* trait and possess at least one other *structural* feature of the grouping, and
- d. around the core there is the periphery which includes all other languages that borrowed at least one *structural* trait from the core.

It can be inferred from the definition above that the minimum core of a linguistic league may consist of two languages (a minimum number necessary for borrowing to occur), at least two traits (a minimum number necessary to speak of mutual influence between languages), and at least one language in the periphery.

## 6.2. Consequences of the new definition

First of all, it follows from the definition that for a linguistic league to form, there needs to be a linguistic area. A league forms in such an area if there are sufficiently close contacts between the languages that exist there. This is natural: it seems unlikely for a group of languages to share solely structural traits, without any common lexical items. If we take into consideration that lexical items are easier to borrow than grammatical structures, we may safely assume that *any* case of structural borrowing will be accompanied by some cases of lexical borrowing. If there is contact strong enough to permit structural borrowing, some

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<sup>8</sup> On the importance of multilateral influence see also Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 95–97).

lexical items (even if scarce) will almost certainly be (or have been) borrowed as well.

The term *linguistic league* has a special status now – it cannot be used without hesitation to refer to any grouping of languages that display similarities in structure. Reducing the availability of the term has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it means additional work in establishing whether a particular grouping in fact qualifies as a linguistic league. In some cases determining the direction of influence may be difficult or even impossible due to insufficient linguistic evidence. *Linguistic league* is no longer a cover term that can be conveniently used when the genetic relationship of a group of languages is doubted, and there is still the need to account for the similarities between them.

The definition has, however, several advantages. The concept of league has certain limits and is not trivialized. There is no risk that at one of the extremes it will blend with the notion of borrowing. Due to the distinction between the *area* and the *league*, groups of languages that display particularly close contacts retain their special status in the linguistic world, on the one hand, and we still have a term that enables us to refer to smaller-scale and less intensive groupings such as the Karelian area, on the other.

What is more, we are able to recognize the significance of areas with common vocabulary, as in the case of the Carpathian area, but without putting them into the same category with the Balkans.

## 7. Verifying the definition

In order to verify the new definition I will analyze a firmly established league to see how the new definition succeeds in describing it. Let us take a closer look at the Balkan league.<sup>9</sup>

The Balkan league comprises the following languages: Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Croatian (all Slavic), Romanian (Romance), Albanian, and Modern Greek. Some linguists, e.g. Friedman (1982, 2000), include dialects of Turkish and Romani among the Balkan languages, but due to the assumption in 3.4 I am not going to follow this tendency. As far as the features of the league are concerned, several lists of those have been proposed, depending on the territorial spread of a feature assumed as the minimum for it to count as a Balkanism. The first such list can be found in Miklosich (1861). Today the following traits are typically quoted among Balkanisms (sorted according to their increasing geographical scope):

1. central vowel (Bulg., Alb., Rom.)
2. postposed definite article (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced.)
3. analytical comparative (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Greek)
4. short forms of pers. pron. in the function of poss. pron. (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Greek.)

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<sup>9</sup> A considerable amount of European material that should also be analysed in terms of the definition above is given in Haarman (1976). However, such an analysis deserves a separate monograph that, for the sake of comparison, would also include data from outside Europe.



5. syncretism of dative and genitive (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Greek)
6. absence of infinitives (Bulg., Greek., plus partially: Rom., Alb., Serb., Croat.)
7. numerals between 11–19 on the pattern ‘one on ten’ (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Serb., Croat.)
8. doubling of objects (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Greek, some Serb. and Croat dialects)
9. periphrastic future (Bulg., Alb., Rom., Maced., Greek, Serb., Croat.).

All these features form the group of “primary Balkanisms” as Schaller puts it (see 3.1).

It follows from the new definition that in order to establish whether the Balkans qualify as a league according to it, we need to find its core with sufficiently strong relationships. In turn, to find this core, we have to determine which languages were the ultimate sources of these common traits.

So far three competing theories as far as the origin of features in the Balkan league have been proposed. Originally, the substrate hypothesis was assumed – the Balkan languages were believed to have received their features from Thracian and Illyrian, whose speakers they absorbed. Up to the beginning of twentieth century this hypothesis was widely held (cf. e.g. “das alteinheimische Element” in Miklosich (1861: 6). Sandfeld (1930: 213) presented an alternative view on the formation of the league – he claimed that the main contributor of features was the Greek adstrate, due to its dominant status during the flourishing of Greek culture:

Abstraction faite de la postposition de l’article défini et de quelques points douteux [...] nous avons cherché à montrer que dans la grande majorité des cas il s’agit de particularités qui se sont développées en grec et qui se sont propagées de là dans les autres langues.

Both of these hypotheses would disqualify the Balkans as a league, but more recent research seems to favour another factor – mutual influence:

[I]t seems at best risky to assume a single source for them [the traits]. It is much more likely, given the population movements and the resulting intimate contacts, that features arose in different places at different times and then, as is common in linguistic areas, spread differentially within the Sprachbund (Thomason 2000: 318).

This mutual influence may be understood in two ways. One, as in the above quotation, assumes that the features originated in different languages and were subsequently borrowed by other members of the league. The other, presented for example in Lindstedt (1998) claims that the source of the features is not to be found in languages but in the linguistic situation itself, i.e. the features did not originate in any single language but arose because of the contact between languages. Yet as Johanson (2000: 166) points out “it would be a mystification to claim that there are no source languages for regional innovations of the ‘Sprachbund’ type, i.e. that a shared feature cannot be related to any triggering factor in the individual languages”. Even if we assume that the features arose solely because of the contact situation itself, there must have been one language where a particular feature developed and became dominant first.

This stands in concordance with the new definition proposed above. The problem is, however, that so far it has not been conclusively determined which languages were actually the sources of respective features. This situation results from the scarcity of the records we have of these languages at older stages of their development. The only ones that are attested for a longer period are Greek and Bulgarian. Others lack sufficient records, the first attested language being Albanian (15<sup>th</sup> century). Without more records it is impossible to determine the precise chronology and the direction of the process of borrowing. Given the new definition, this poses a serious methodological problem – without knowing the source of the traits we are not able to determine the core of the Balkan league, and consequently, are not able to speak of a league at all.

I am aware that a definition of the term *linguistic league* that is likely to disqualify the Balkans as a league is not going to find followers. Yet, it seems to me that it is not the definition that is wrong; the problem results from the state of our knowledge about the phenomenon itself. We must remember, however, that definitions should be independent of our actual limitations.

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## Appendix

1. TRUBETZKOY (1923)  
[...] besides such genetic grouping, languages which are geographic neighbours also often group independently of their origin. It happens that several languages in a region defined in terms of geography and cultural

history acquire features of a particular congruence, irrespective of whether this congruence is determined by common origin or only by a prolonged proximity in time and parallel development. We propose the term language union (*jazykovej sojuz*) for such groups which are not based on the genetic principle (quoted in Toman 1995: 204).

2. TRUBETZKOY (1928)  
Gruppen, bestehend aus Sprachen, die eine grosse Ähnlichkeit in syntaktischer Hinsicht, eine Ähnlichkeit in der Grundsätzen des morphologischen Baus aufweisen, und eine grosse Anzahl gemeinsamer Kulturwörter bieten, manchmal auch äussere Ähnlichkeit im Bestande der Lautsysteme, – dabei aber keine systematische Lautentsprechungen, keine Übereinstimmung in der lautlichen Gestalt der morphologischen Elemente und keine gemeinsamen Elementarwörter besitzen, – solche Sprachgruppen nennen wir Sprachbünde (quoted in Campbell 2006: 22–23, fn. 2).
3. JAKOBSON (1931)  
[...] gemeinsamen Erscheinungen [...] die in der Struktur benachbarter Sprachen vorkommen und nicht durch gemeinsamen Ursprung bedingt sind. Die Sprachwissenschaft muß aber neben den Sprachfamilien auch die Sprachbünde berücksichtigen, “Sprachbünde” – nach der Terminologie Trubeckoys, die auf dem Haager Kongreß angenommen wurde (Jakobson 1931: 234).
4. BECKER (1948)  
Unter einem Sprachbund verstehen wir eine Gruppe von Sprachen, die durch gemeinsame Schicksale im gleichen Kulturraum und durch wechselseitige Beeinflussung einander so stark angenähert wurden, daß man in jeder von ihnen ungefähr das gleiche auf ungefähr das gleiche Art sagen kann (quoted in Campbell 2006: 23, fn. 5).
5. MILEWSKI (1948)  
Jeżeli rodzinę lingwistyczną tworzą języki, których systemy gramatyczne składają się w zdecydowanej większości z elementów pochodzących ze wspólnego prajęzyka, jeżeli w językach mieszanych elementy gramatyczne różnego pochodzenia mniej więcej się równoważą, to do ligi lingwistycznej zaliczamy języki, których systemy tak gramatycznie jak i fonologicznie posiadają tylko pewne szczegóły wspólnego pochodzenia. [...] Ligi lingwistyczne mogą powstać bądź wskutek oddziaływania wspólnego substratu lingwistycznego, na który nawarstwiły się różne języki, bądź wskutek ekspansji jednego z języków ligi, który narzucił pozostałym pewne swoje cechy gramatyczne i fonologiczne, bądź wreszcie wskutek wzajemnego wpływu kilku języków na siebie (Milewski 1948: 6).
6. EMENEAU (1956)  
This term ‘linguistic area’ may be defined as meaning an area which includes languages belonging to more than one family but showing traits in common which are found not to belong to the other members of (at least) one of the families (Emeneau 1956: 16, fn. 28).

7. SHERZER (1973)  
 A *linguistic area* is defined here as an area in which *several* linguistic traits are shared by the languages of the area and furthermore, there is evidence (linguistic and non-linguistic) that contact between the speakers of the languages contributed to the spread and/or retention of these traits and thereby to a certain degree of linguistic uniformity within the area. It is important to remember that languages which are unrelated or distantly related may very well and yet still [be] in the same linguistic area according to the above definition, since they share *several* traits (which one might want to call diagnostic traits). What is significant, then, is that linguistic structure, usually impervious to influences coming from the outside its own internal mechanisms, has been affected by linguistic contact (quoted in Campbell 2006: 4–5).
8. KATZ (1975)  
 Von einem Sprachbund kann man sprechen, wenn:  
 (a) zu einer gegebenen Zeit  
 (b) ein zusammenhängendes geographisches Gebiet, das  
 (c) von mindestens einer Sprachgrenze durchgezogen ist,  
 (d) von mindestens einer Isoglosse umspannt wird  
 (quoted in Campbell 2006: 23, fn. 6).
9. SCHALLER (1975)  
 Bei den Mitgliedern eines Sprachbundes handelt es sich zumindest bei einem Teil der Sprachen um solche, die nicht zu einer Familie gehören, die geographisch benachbart sind und aufgrund gegenseitiger Beeinflussung eine Reihe von gemeinsamen Merkmalen aufweisen, die sich auf den lautlichen, morphologischen oder syntaktischen Bereich der betreffenden Sprachen beziehen. Ein *Sprachbund* weist mindestens zwei gemeinsame Merkmale auf, die sich auf mindestens drei nicht zur gleichen Familie gehörende Sprachen erstrecken, um genetisch bedingten Ursprung oder einseitige Beeinflussung im Definitionsbereich des Sprachbundes auszuschließen (Schaller 1975: 58).
10. BRIGHT AND SHERZER (1978)  
 The term ‘linguistic area’ generally refers to a geographical area in which, due to borrowing, languages of different genetic origins have come to share certain borrowed features – not only vocabulary [...] but also elements of phonological, grammatical, or syntactic structure, which are less liable to be diffused in this way (quoted in Campbell 2006: 6).
11. CAMPBELL (1985)  
 Areal linguistics, as broadly conceived, deals with the results of diffusion of structural features across linguistic boundaries. As commonly viewed, linguistic areas are characterized by a number of linguistic features shared by various languages (some of which are unrelated or are from different subgroups within a family) in a geographically contiguous area... linguistic diffusion and AL [areal linguistics] are to be equated and cannot profitably be separated; i.e. I will argue that there is no sharp boundary be-

tween the two, that all areal linguistic phenomena involve diffusion and all structural diffusion involving more than two languages is areal (Campbell 1985: 25).

In principle there is no meaningful way of distinguishing LAs [linguistic areas] defined on the basis of several features from those based on but a single shared trait. Nevertheless, the question can be posed, not in the form, does or does not some entity qualify as a LA?, but rather as, how strong or weak is a particular LA? (Campbell 1985: 29).

**12. THOMASON (2000)**

A linguistic area is a geographical region containing a group of three or more languages that share some structural features as a result of contact rather than as a result of accident or inheritance from a common ancestor (Thomason 2000: 311).

**13. AIKHENVALD AND DIXON (2001)**

A linguistic area (or *Sprachbund*) is generally taken to be a geographically delimited area including languages from two or more language families, sharing significant traits (which are not found in languages from these families spoken outside the area). There must be a fair number of common traits and they should be reasonably distinctive (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2001: 11).

**14. CAMPBELL (2002)**

A linguistic area is a geographical area in which, due to language contact and borrowing, languages of a region come to share certain structural features ... Central to a linguistic area [are] ... structural similarities shared among languages of a geographical area (where usually some of the languages are unrelated or at least no all close relatives). It is assumed that the reason the languages of the area share these traits is because they have borrowed from one another (quoted in Campbell 2006: 7).

## Streszczenie

### Definicja Ligi językowej / Arealu językowego. Zaproszenie do dyskusji

Artykuł ten jest poświęcony dyskusji nad definicją ligi językowej. Choć pojęcie ligi / arealu jest szeroko stosowane w językoznawstwie, brak powszechnie akceptowanej definicji. Różni autorzy w odmienny sposób definiują to pojęcie, nierzadko myląc je z innymi pokrewnymi klasami pojęć (np. substrat, adstrat czy izoglosa). W konsekwencji jest ono często stosowane do opisu znacząco różniących się od siebie zjawisk. Aby uniknąć dalszego mieszania pojęć, konieczne wydaje się odgraniczenie ich poprzez zaproponowanie spójnej, przemyślanej definicji ligi / arealu.

W tabeli załączonej do artykułu znajduje się zestawienie czternastu klasycznych definicji. Tabela (w wierszach) analizuje definicje pod względem obecności w nich kryteriów najczęściej pojawiających się przy definiowaniu ligi (w kolumnach). Ma to na celu uświadomienie czytelnikowi, które z tych kryteriów mogą być traktowane jako inherentne elementy definicji

ligi językowej. Definicje uwzględnione w tabeli są zacytowane w załączniku na końcu artykułu. Szybki ich przegląd uświadamia, że użyte w nich wyrażenia są często nieprecyzyjne i nie zawsze przystają do formuły tabeli. Dlatego też autor w kilku miejscach był zmuszony dostosować te sformułowania do schematu tabeli, jednocześnie starając się ograniczyć interpretację, tak by nie zmienić sensu oryginalnej definicji.

Artykuł składa się z trzech części: w pierwszej (1–5) przedstawiona jest dyskusja kryteriów dotychczas branych pod uwagę przy definiowaniu ligi językowej. W części drugiej (6) zaproponowano nową definicję, która rozdziela pojęcia *areal* i *liga*. Pierwsze z nich autor rezerwuje dla grup składających się z dowolnej liczby języków, które zajmują określony obszar geograficzny i posiadają w wyniku kontaktów językowych między sobą dowolną liczbę cech wspólnych (przy czym mogą to być zarówno cechy leksykalne, jak i strukturalne, bądź też obydwa typy naraz). Pojęcie ligi odnosić się ma natomiast do grup języków, które mogą się wytworzyć w ramach arealu w wyniku bardzo silnego, wielokierunkowego wpływu strukturalnego. Innymi słowy, dla ligi konieczny jest wpływ strukturalny i oddziaływanie wielokierunkowe. W części trzeciej (7) autor dokonuje weryfikacji i oceny nowej definicji, opierając się na lidze bałkańskiej.