

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORICAL LANGUAGE CONTACT BETWEEN SLAVIC LANGUAGES AND AUSTRIAN VARIETIES OF GERMAN: THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS, METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND GENERAL RESULTS

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Abstract: Undisputedly, Slavic languages have had a considerable influence on German and the attitudes towards multilingualism in Austria. This article portrays theoretical reflections, new findings and innovative methodological approaches to the reconstruction of historical language contact between Slavic languages and Austrian varieties of German. These approaches were jointly developed within the task cluster on language contact of the Austrian special research programme “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception”. In this context, the implications of historical and recent Slavic-German multilingualism on German in Austria are of special interest. The paper concludes with an overview of preliminary research results, methodological lessons learnt and considerations for further sociolinguistic research in historical contexts.

Keywords: historical language contact, Slavic languages, German in Austria, historical sociolinguistics, contact linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Juraj Dolník is not only a leading representative of theoretical linguistics and philosophy of language in Slovakia, but among the most inspiring personalities engaged in general linguistics. In his internationally received scientific work, he addresses a broad range of issues, from language acquisition to language functions and forms, from the discourse on standard language to alternative ways of understanding language in its natural relationships, and finally, among many others, also sociolinguistics and language contact.

It is from this last area from which I want to present current high-profile linguistic research at the University of Vienna. Specifically, this article portrays reflections, findings and methodological approaches to the reconstruction of historical language contact between Slavic languages and Austrian varieties of German. These approaches were jointly developed within the task cluster on

language contact of the special research programme (SFB) “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception” (FWF 60-G23).¹ This task cluster, which I am privileged to lead as principal investigator, deals with the contact of German in Austria with other languages, especially Slavic ones, and its effects on recent language use, systems and attitudes. It was originally divided into two project parts: (a) one on German in context with the other languages in the Habsburg Empire and in the Second Republic of Austria, primarily dealing with questions of the sociology of language, and (b) another on German and Slavic languages in Austria from the viewpoint of sociolinguistically oriented language contact. Both research strands and methodological approaches were merged into a joint project part in the second half of the research programme term starting January 1st, 2020.²

Three staff members in particular must be mentioned who have made decisive contributions to the theoretical and methodological anchoring of our project work: Agnes Kim, Katharina Prochazka and Maria Schinko. It is above all their research that I can draw on and refer to in my remarks here. With their help it was possible to show how the deficient data situation not only in historical sociolinguistics (cf. Hernández-Campoy – Conde-Silvestre 2012; Auer et al. 2015; Nekula – Newerkla 2022), but even regarding some contemporary aspects can be addressed through the linked critical analysis of different, historically contextualised sources.³ Furthermore, we were able to exemplify how multilevel corpus linguistic procedures, which often rely primarily on recent language data, can contribute to perspectives on historical language contact. For the contextualisation of the theoretical considerations we understandably draw on the area investigated within the framework of the overall project “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception”, i.e. the territory of present-day Austria, and extend it to other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to account for the historical perspective (cf. Newerkla 2022).

2. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In our joint research, we started from the assumption that the social as well as individual multilingualism of the Habsburg Empire has left traces in several respects

¹ The currently approved funding period runs from January 1st, 2016, to June 30th, 2023.

² For a detailed description of the entire special research programme “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception” in English, see Budin et al. (2019), in German, see Budin et al. (2018) and Lenz (2018).

³ In order to make the data collections of our research accessible to as broad an audience as possible, an “Information System on (Historical) Multilingualism in Austria” (MiÖ for short) was designed as part of the special research programme’s “Collaborative Online Research Platform German in Austria”. All information and data integrated in MiÖ are recorded, linked and thus made searchable in their contexts on three content levels, namely with regard to their genesis over time, with regard to their distribution in space and with regard to their (re)presentation in sources and other literature. The goal is to establish MiÖ as a platform that publishes research data and results on multilingualism in Austria in the form of individual modules and links them across modules as a research tool (cf. Kim et al. 2018; Prochazka et al. 2019).

in the (constructed) social as well as individual monolingualism of the Second Republic of Austria (Kim – Prochazka 2019, p. 2): On the one hand, it has shaped the handling of and attitudes towards multilingualism, but also towards German in Austria itself; on the other hand, it has led to linguistic contact phenomena in the studied varieties and registers (from dialects to standard) on all linguistic levels, which distinguish Austrian from other varieties and registers of German (in other countries). In combining macro- and micro-sociolinguistic approaches our research tries to venture beyond existing studies in order to uncover the impact of historical multilingualism on the linguistic structure of German in Austria.

Since the 1990s, research on historical multilingualism in the Habsburg monarchy has provided valuable insight into the interplay of officially imposed language regulations and unofficial multilingual practices in the domains of administration, the judiciary and education (e.g., see Burger 1995; Fellerer 2005; Newerkla 1999) and has enjoyed renewed interest in recent years (e.g., see Kim – Newerkla 2018; Nekula – Newerkla 2021; Newerkla 2018; Prokopovych et al. 2019; Scheer 2020; Wolf 2015). Rosita Rindler Schjerve (2003) explored in one of the ground-breaking research initiatives in this respect, how the struggle for power was reflected in attempts to control language use and how language became a prominent site for interethnic controversies and conflicts. Amongst others, these findings constitute the framework for our joint research project as it will be elaborated on in the following sections.

2.1 The polycentricity of German in the Habsburg state

Multilingualism in the Habsburg state encompassed individual as well as societal multilingualism. Depending on the local hegemonic and linguistic constellations, it resulted in different forms of diglossia or even polyglossia specific to each crown land, in which German had a share either through a German-speaking majority or minority, or at least in its function as (primary) dynastic language (Rindler Schjerve 2003, p. 314). German in the Habsburg state was thus shaped in its status, functionality and structural heterogeneity by the demographic, legal and historical conditions prevailing in the diverse centres of the crown lands. Seen in this light, it was polycentric in the sense of Stewart (1968, p. 534). Stewart's approach postulates several centres, which are not primarily defined by national boundaries or states and do not provide explicitly national varieties as in the concept of "pluricentricity" (Clyne 1989). According to Ammon et al. (2016, p. XXXIX), a language is pluricentric, "if it is in use in more than one country as a national or regional official language and if standard linguistic differences have developed as a result." Stewart's definition, on the other hand, emphasises less the state-spatial boundedness of such standard varieties, but rather the fact that different sets of norms exist and are recognised simultaneously in one area. Considering that the concepts of nationality and nationalism began to develop and gained importance

during the 19th century, it is therefore adequate to speak of polycentricity rather than pluricentricity in this specific historical context.⁴

2.2 The social and individual multilingualism of the Habsburg state

In the Habsburg monarchy, German was embedded in a state that was characterised by social and individual multilingualism on a communicative and discursive level and this was reflected in its language policy. It stands to reason that in the 19th century, when language was understood as an “objective” characteristic indicating nationality or nationhood, language policies became the arena and venue for conflicts over hegemonic claims between the non-national Habsburg state and the increasingly important ethnic groups, especially in the traditional power domains of education, administration and jurisdiction. Whereas the non-German-speaking nationalities of the Habsburg state attempted to redefine their status by demanding recognition of their languages and cultures, German-dominated state nationalism tried to re-establish its endangered hegemony by granting linguistic and cultural autonomy to the various ethnic groups. Thus, diversity management from above and below shaped cultural encounters in place and time (cf. Rindler Schjerve – Nelde 2003).

However, throughout this century, no fixed fronts can be drawn between the conflicting parties. Rather we see a wide variety of fragile and only temporarily upright models of equilibrium in the execution of political power. The double function of language(s) as a politically charged label and at the same time as a means of communication in the Habsburg discourse on multilingualism has already been dealt with in numerous individual studies.⁵ Nevertheless on such a basis, the actual language competence of certain population groups or individuals can only be inferred indirectly. Drawing on the studies by Czeitschner, Fellerer and Newerkla in Rindler Schjerve (2003), Rosita Rindler Schjerve and Eva Vetter conclude that in the Habsburg state other vernacular languages, i.e. geographically neighbouring languages, were acquired and learned, whereas German also had the function of a *lingua franca* in public contexts (Rindler Schjerve – Vetter 2007, p. 67). Against

⁴ Despite the definitions given by Clyne and Ammon, some scholars do use the term “pluricentricity” in English even when one cannot speak of a “national” variety per se (e.g. Langer 2021). Moreover, the term “polycentricity” tends to be used today rather in Blommaert’s and not Stewart’s sense (Blommaert et al. 2005).

⁵ See Rindler Schjerve (2003) and the studies in the corresponding volume by S. M. Newerkla on the school system in Bohemia, J. Fellerer on the administration in Galicia and S. Czeitschner on the judiciary in Trieste; furthermore Goebel (2008) from a general point of view; studies on the school systems of Prague (Havránek 1996), Brno (Schinko 2019; Němec 2020), Plzeň (Newerkla 2018), Znojmo (König-Hollerwöger 2009), Galicia (Ptashnyk 2018), Zagreb (Pranjić 2017) and in general (Binder et al. 2003); Kim (2018; 2019) and Schinko et al. (2019) on topics related to Wenker’s questionnaires; Prokopovych et al. (2019) on language diversity in the late Habsburg monarchy; Scheer (2020) on multilingualism in the military; and Wolf (2015) on translation.

the background of the strong regional differentiation of the diglossic situations, it remains a desideratum to support these findings with studies on further crown lands and domains and to attempt to classify them in a scenario-specific typology in the sense of Muysken (2010). The acquisition contexts of the first, second and further languages as well as the intra-linguistic variation should also be considered in order to be able to make statements about the individual characteristics under certain conditions of social multilingualism.

2.3 Traces of historical multilingualism in Austria and (Central) Europe today

A central motivation of the studies in Rindler Schjerve (2003) was to gain insights for the multilingual Europe of the 21st century by analysing in particular how state actors deal with multilingualism in historical situations (Rindler Schjerve 2003, p. 1). Current historical-cultural studies approaches, which belong to the paradigm of similarity (e.g., Bhatti – Kimmich 2015), also pursue similar goals, but shift the focus to the level of everyday practices of cultural encounter, which have been lost from view under the auspices of thinking in terms of differences (Feichtinger – Uhl 2016, p. 15). This brings several individual aspects of multilingualism to the fore, which are oriented towards everyday communication (e.g., cf. Mannová – Tancer 2016). Given the basic assumption of contact linguistics with the multilingual individual as the locus of language contact (Weinreich 1979, p. 1), this is an indispensable prerequisite for researching the traces left by this kind of multilingualism in Austria and (Central) Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, due to the limited accessibility of data on individual language use, historical language contact scenarios pose a particular methodological challenge, which must be taken into account through extensive consideration and the linking of diverse quantitative and qualitative data sources (on this aspect see section 3).

2.4 Attitudes towards and handling of mono- and multilingualism

In the ideological framework of “one language equals one culture equals one nation” that was dominant in Central and Eastern Europe from the mid-19th century onwards, language use is directly related to cultural attachment, usually understood as belonging to a certain nation. Thus, multilingualism signifies multiple attachments or a non-national conception of the self. This connection between language and culture was especially important in an explicitly multicultural and multilingual entity like the Habsburg state, where German was a *lingua franca*, while other languages played significant roles locally and were used as a means to create group identities by several ethnic groups (e.g., see Binder et al. 2003; Evans 2004; Goebel 2008; and Judson 2006).

In contrast, present-day Austria is largely viewed as a monolingually German-speaking state, although (individual) multilingualism still exists and the linguistic make-up of the state keeps changing, e.g., through immigration which brings in non-

indigenous languages (Koppensteiner – Kim 2020). In addition, language as social practice provides access to ideologies and the ways people draw on, reproduce or create knowledge (Heller 2001, pp. 214–215), especially language ideologies and linguistic knowledge (e.g., see Daskalov – Marinov 2013; Dorostkar 2014; or Hentschel 1997).

An indication that the Habsburg state and its multilingualism decisively shaped the (legislative) linguistic identity even of the Second Republic of Austria is already contained in Article 8 of the Federal Constitutional Law (*Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz*) and its history of origin. Paragraph 1, which declares the German language to be the state language of the Republic (“Staatsprache der Republik”), goes back word for word to the first Constitution of the Republic of Austria of October 1st, 1920, which was intended to emphasise the German-speaking and at the same time German identity of the state (de Cillia – Wodak 2006, pp. 25–26). The same paragraph also states that German is the state language without prejudice to the rights granted to the linguistic minorities by federal law (“unbeschadet der den sprachlichen Minderheiten bundesgesetzlich eingeräumten Rechte”), whereby these minority rights can be traced back to concessions made in the State Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. As a reaction to National Socialism, the early Second Republic of Austria endeavoured to bring forth – also linguistically – a specifically Austrian identity, but the rights of linguistic minorities remained the (not only discursive) centre of disputes in Austrian language policy until the 1990s (de Cillia – Wodak 2006, p. 29). In 2000, however, the protection of the so-called “autochthonous” minorities, which essentially already existed at the time of the Habsburg state, was included in Article 8 of the Federal Constitutional Law as part of a state objective provision (“Staatszielbestimmung”). Austria was thus legislatively (re)constructed as a multilingual state, whereby a specific historical component of multilingualism was focused on and recognised (Kim 2020, pp. 100–102).

2.5 Linguistic contact phenomena in contemporary German in Austria

It is a topos that the Babylonian mixture of languages of the Habsburg state also had linguistic effects on German in Austria. This topos has been continuously (re-)produced in linguistic as well as extra-linguistic, especially journalistic discourse since the 19th century. Most of the academic literature consists of the collection and transmission of certain – in many cases already canonised – alleged contact phenomena, so that studies that validly approach such individual phenomena or bundles of phenomena with current theoretical and methodological concepts of contemporary contact linguistics are still rare (e.g., see Kim 2020; Kim et al. 2020; Kim – Korecky-Kröll 2021).

In any case, it is important to keep in mind that individual and to some extent also societal German-Slavic bilingualism in Austria did not cease to exist after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian state in 1918, although the First Austrian

Republic declared German its state language (see above section 2.4). The 20th century, however, brought about significant changes in the legal and societal conditions for German-Slavic bilingual individuals. Additionally, a shift in the importance of certain Slavic-speaking groups can be observed. Whereas the strong influence of Czech and Slovak speakers declined, others – such as speakers of Polish (in particular after 1978) or South-Slavic languages (especially Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian) – gained in importance (cf. Newerkla 2013). Further groups, e.g., speakers of Slovenian or Burgenland Croatian, have remained of relatively stable regional relevance even though the sociolinguistic circumstances under which the minority languages are used have changed considerably (Neweklowsky 2018; Kinda-Berlakovich 2019). The altered legal and sociolinguistic circumstances brought about new dynamics regarding multilingualism and thus language contact. Besides covering language political and ideological aspects (e.g., de Cillia – Wodak 2006; Fischer – Doleschal 2013; Tyran 2015), research has focused on the acquisition of German as L2 (e.g., see Brizić 2007; Peltzer-Karpf 2011). Resulting L1 interferences and other contact phenomena in German in Austria in general and Vienna in particular, however, have not yet been analysed in detail. Concurrently, these varieties are still shaped by the effects of multilingualism during the Habsburg state. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation of contemporary Slavic contact phenomena in German in Austria needs to consider both historical and present-day language contact, which facilitates comparable, distinct or universally applicable aspects of language contact in the area. These include aspects of transferability of theoretic considerations regarding sociolinguistic contact scenarios as well as the question of linguistic convergence areas in Central Europe (Newerkla 2007 and 2020).

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND EMPIRICAL ASPECTS

Based on former research results and especially on the findings of our joint research, we so far have unveiled a continuity of views and attitudes towards German in Austria in the context of other languages that can only be explained by the historical legacy of the former multilingualism in the Habsburg state. In other words, we see that the former situation has had an impact on (a) German speakers' self-awareness and perception, (b) the political discourse concerning linguistic diversity, and subsequently (c) the language policies implemented in the domains of administration, the judiciary and especially education in the Second Austrian Republic.

However, our joint research advances beyond previous achievements in the field by providing longitudinal in-depth comparisons of the historical setting in the Habsburg state and the setting of German in Austria in the context of the other languages in the Second Republic of Austria. Thus, it has become possible to conduct comparative research in great detail and on a large scale. International research on

historical multilingualism will profit from this kind of findings and results, since our research tasks do not only comprise the analysis of the characteristics of a specific historical multilingual setting, but also deal with their lasting consequences by distilling the implications of this historical context on the language-specific attitudes of speakers of the varieties involved to this day.

These results can be achieved by blending a scenario approach in the sense of Muysken (2010) with a domain-specific approach in the sense of Rindler Schjerve (2003). Such a research design (as extensively described, e.g., in Kim 2021) allows to abstract specific language contact scenarios (i.e. outcomes and strategies of multilingual speakers to deal with multiple languages) from a given dataset and make predictions about possible effects of language contact. A further differentiation of these scenarios according to the individual domains of language use (i.e. which language is used in which domain) gives insight into the organisation of language use according to its functions.

In our analyses, we make use of a range of methods, both qualitative (e.g., critical discourse analysis, etc.) and quantitative (e.g., descriptive statistics, mathematical modelling, etc.). This mixed-methods approach and the combination of multiple sources is necessary because they provide a way to cross-validate findings and extrapolate data gaps which are unavoidable in longitudinal studies. However, sufficient (and representative) information on multilingualism with respect to both language knowledge and usage in present-day Austria is not available, either. The latest representative information on languages spoken in Austria and not only in specific domains stems from the last census conducted in 2001 and – *nota bene* – bears the problems inherent to the survey design of censuses (Prochazka 2018).

To allow for a thorough description of contemporary sociolinguistic contact scenarios in Austria, we will therefore conduct a representative survey on language use, linguistic competencies and attitudes in cooperation with the mentioned special research programme's project part on standard varieties from the perspective of perceptual variationist linguistics, the research department Variation and Change of German in Austria at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage (ACDH-CH) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Austrian opinion research institute OGM.⁶ A questionnaire for this purpose was drafted and pretested by the end of 2022. The main survey itself was carried out in the period between March 6th and 21st, 2023 and is largely funded by the project "Aspects of (Multi-)

⁶ OGM research & communication is a private research institute founded in 1976 and located in Vienna, Austria. The OGM team is made up of data scientists as well as sociologists, economists, historians, and political experts. They have their own respondents' panel with 30,000 people who are representative for the Austrian population and who are interviewed regularly by phone or online. The team of experts offers data analysis, full-service market and opinion research, geo-marketing and microtargeting, and political and media consulting. Because of the OGM's high-quality standards, most of the clients are from the public sector (such as federal ministries or federal state governments) and large companies.

Lingualism in Austria: Competence – Use – Attitudes” of the thematic platform on multilingualism at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The project team is currently busy analysing the data.⁷

The approach described above highlights the importance of the sociolinguistic contact scenario, i.e. the societal conditions that the multilingual individual is situated in, for the linguistic outcome, i.e. the linguistic features that are transferred from one language to the other.⁸ Our main goal in this respect is a comprehensive overview and detailed analysis of contact-induced Slavic influences on German in Austria over time, especially in the urban area of Vienna. We have already scrutinised the effect of language contact with Slavic languages on the different linguistic levels of German in the last decades of the Habsburg Empire (e.g., see Kim 2020; Kim et al. 2020; Kim – Prochazka 2019; Lenz et al. 2020; Kim – Korecky-Kröll 2021).

4. GENERAL SUMMARISATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

So far, the results of our joint research in relation to historical and contemporary language contact can be summarised as follows. Roughly speaking, we are confronted with two layers of “Slavic” contact phenomena in German in Austria: (α) phenomena that can be traced to the diverse and in some cases very stable scenarios of societal multilingualism during the Habsburg monarchy, in which especially the joint development of varieties of German and Czech in Central Europe (both convergently and in contrast to each other) played a significant role, and (β) phenomena that have emerged more recently in sociolinguistic scenarios involving the acquisition of German in Austria as a second language.

4.1 Linguistic levels and transfer types

Phenomena from layer (α) can be found on any linguistic level due to the diverse and complex contact scenarios throughout the Habsburg monarchy in general and the late 19th century in particular. Also, with regard to transfer types, we were able to identify both rather clear cases of matter borrowing and pattern replication in the sense of Matras (2010) besides quite abstract cases of language change in German in Austria. The latter were either catalysed or supported by interferences from the L1 within the L2 learning process. In contrast, phenomena from layer (β) probably mainly comprise (individual) L1 interferences on the phonetic (especially prosody and pronunciation) and syntactic (especially word order) level as well as the borrowing of identity marking and discourse structuring lexemes (especially particles), e.g., Serbian (x)ajde, Croatian (h)ajde ‘come on; let’s go’ and the like.

⁷ Principal investigators for the research period 2021–2023 are Alexandra N. Lenz and Stefan Michael Newerkla. The project staff are Agnes Kim, Wolfgang Koppensteiner, and Maria Schinko.

⁸ Cf. the similarities and differences of the research approaches by Muysken (2010); Onysko (2019); Schuchardt (1884), Thomason – Kaufman (1988); and Van Coetsem (2000).

4.2 Distribution and stability

Phenomena from layer (α) which are (still) present in contemporary German in Austria, are well integrated either across the whole vertical and horizontal spectrum of varieties and registers of German in Austria or at least into a certain (mainly geographically restricted) section of that spectrum. Accordingly, such phenomena are interindividually quite stable and vary along sociolinguistic criteria similar to “inherited” phenomena. In contrast, phenomena from layer (β) are rather restricted to certain registers, e.g., ethnolects and youth language. They also show greater interindividual variation and thus are less stable.

4.3 General insights

From what we have been able to find out so far, we can see that Slavic contact phenomena in Austrian varieties of German resemble each other rather regarding their transfer type than regarding their age, because universal cognitive aspects of language processing and production determine the linguistic course of contact-induced change. Thus, L1 interferences from layer (α) and layer (β) are more similar than pattern replications resulting from long-term stable bilingualism and L1 interferences from layer (α). This result seems to support a cognitively underpinned sociolinguistic scenario approach as proposed, e.g., by Alexander Onysko (2019).

Ultimately, we expect our research design to allow for the identification of comparable, distinct and/or universally applicable aspects of language contact in the area under investigation. In this respect, it can then contribute to general theoretical questions posed by (historical-)sociolinguistic contact linguistics.

5. CONCLUSION

In our contribution in honour of Juraj Dolník, we had set ourselves the goal of presenting current reflections, new findings and innovative methodological approaches to the reconstruction of historical language contact between Slavic languages and Austrian varieties of German. These approaches from the fields of (historical) sociolinguistics and contact linguistics were jointly developed within the task cluster on language contact of the special research programme “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception”. We are convinced that together, these approaches will be able to provide a holistic picture of (historical) language contact scenarios – in this case that of German with Slavic languages in Austria – by looking at its conditions, its effects and its perception both diachronically and synchronically.

Hopefully, we have been able to leave a favourable impression of our linguistic research enterprise on the jubilarian. At least we can count on his generous indulgence. Juraj Dolník is not only appreciated by his colleagues for his interesting lectures and respectful style of discussion, but also his constant willingness to respond individually to linguistic questions and concerns. Thereby, his untiring

commitment has earned him not only a scientific but also a high human reputation, which is known far beyond the walls of his home town. All the more reason for the entire Viennese research team to wish Juraj Dolník the best of health and creative energy for many more years to come. *Sto lat, sto lat, niech żyje, żyje nam!*

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