

Multilingualism in the Habsburg Monarchy and Slavic Linguistic Heritage in German in Austria

Stefan Michael Newerkla

Multilingualism on the current territory of Austria has existed for a long period of time. Roughly since the 6th and 7th centuries, Slavs have settled in Central Europe, including much of present-day Austria. The subsequent expansion of the Magyars as well as the Bavarianisation of the area separated the northern and southern Slavs. For the former Habsburg state, we have to reckon with eleven main languages in addition to numerous smaller ones. Moreover, already the main languages represented a number of widely divergent languages: German; two Romance tongues, Italian and Romanian; a range of Slavic languages from all the three branches of that family — western, eastern, and southern; and Hungarian, or Magyar, from the Finno-Ugric group.

Now, due to the long history of mutual language contact, especially Slavic languages have had a considerable influence on German and attitudes towards multilingualism in Austria. Moreover, the Habsburg state's capital Vienna and its surroundings were multilingual not only due to migration movements triggered by the influx into the flourishing centre of the monarchy. A varying degree of German-Slavic bi- and multilingualism had been common in the rural areas east and north-east to Vienna for centuries. Therefore, we can conceive of this whole region as a micro-area of linguistic convergence and language contact within a larger Central European area.

With regard to the multilingual setting in the Habsburg state and its repercussions to this day, our talk outlines the basic assumptions, the methodological toolkit as well as the main general findings of our research projects on language contact in this area which have been running since 2016 as part of the special research programme (SFB) “German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception”. We conclude with possible implications for further linguistic research in multilingual historical contexts and some links to contemporary phenomena.

Selected references for further reading:

- Budin, G. – Elspaß, S. – Lenz, A. N. – Newerkla, S. M. – Ziegler, A., “The Research Project (SFB) ‘German in Austria’. Variation – Contact – Perception”, in: Bülow, L. – Fischer, A. K. – Herbert, K. (eds.), *Dimensions of Linguistic Space: Variation – Multilingualism – Conceptualisations. Dimensionen des sprachlichen Raums: Variation – Mehrsprachigkeit – Konzeptualisierung*. Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2019, pp. 7–35. (<https://doi.org/10.3726/b15250>)
- Lenz, A. N. – Fleißner, F. – Kim, A. – Newerkla, S. M., “Give as a PUT verb in German – A case of German-Czech language contact?”, *Journal of Linguistic Geography*, vol. 8, issue 2, October 2020, pp. 67–81. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 22 January 2021 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/jlg.2020.6>)
- Newerkla, S. M., “Germanic and Slavic Contact: Lexicon”, in: *Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online*, Editor-in-Chief: Marc L. Greenberg; General Editor: Lenore A. Grenoble. Leiden: Brill (6003 words). Consulted online on 12 December 2022 (https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-6229_ESLO_COM_035945)
- Newerkla, S. M., “Reconstructing multilingualism in the Habsburg state: lessons learnt and implications for historical sociolinguistics”, *Sociolinguistica*, vol. 36, no. 1–2, 2022, pp. 151–167 (<https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2022-0014>).
- Newerkla, S. M., “Linguistic Areas in East-Central Europe as the Result of Pluridimensional, Polycentric Convergence Phenomena”, in: Szucsich, L. – Kim, A. – Yazhinova, U. (eds.), *Areal Convergence in Eastern Central European Languages and Beyond* (= Linguistik International 44). Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2020, pp. 207–228 (<https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:1405252>)