

Gyula Décsy (in collaboration with John R. Krueger), *The Linguistic Identity of Europe*, Bloomington, 2000—2001. 503 pp.

Part I "The 62 Languages of Europe Classified in Functional Zones" is an areal-typological description of languages based on solid comparative-historical grounds. The undertaking is not without fore-runners, suffice it to mention only the major opera of the past century: Antoine Meillet's "Les langues dans l'Europe nouvelle" (1928), Ernst Lewy's "Der Bau der europäischen Sprachen" (1964) and the author's own book "Die linguistische Struktur Europas" (1973). What makes this part of the present book unique is not so much its typological and/or areal classification (which undoubtedly has its specific values), but rather its complementaries contained in chapters "Introduction" and "The Linguistic Past of the European Continent". Specifically, the chapter "The Origins of Human Speech and European Pre-History" opens the door to a dimension which has been until recently beyond comparatists' reach, yet well inside the boundaries of what we usually call human language. The author's old interest in paleolinguistics is amply testified by his two books ("Sprachherkunftsforschung I. Einleitung und Phogenese/Paläophonetik" (Wiesbaden 1977) and "Sprachherkunftsforschung II. Semogenese/Paläosemiotik" (Bloomington 1981)). Apart from physiologically determined conditions as classified in (palaeo-) phonetics the author emphasizes the importance of play in the creation of language: "The invention of language (and/or of linguistic elements) was and is one of the most beloved games of men (*homo ludens*)" (p.17) and not independently of this its role in establishing units of what human society builds up (couple, family, clan, tribe or, using more modern terms, church, denomination, sect on the one hand, nation, party, club on the other): "For language is not only a means of communication but a force which builds community and supports it, with extraordinary social binding power (social glue), which produces feelings of belong-

ing together and advances groups employing the same language to a commonality of interest capable of action" (p. 22).

The author, being aware of the paradox that although human language has a much longer history than what comparative-historical research can detect, proposes a partition discerning three different phases of linguistic history where each of the phases demands its own different methodological approach: "... for the last thousand years (in the case of Latin and Greek, 2000), linguistic history is trustworthy, as it works chiefly with written linguistic monuments. The period of time between 1000 A.D. and some 3000 B.C. is investigated by comparative linguistics, as up to now. Everything lying prior to some 4000 B.C. in time belongs to the domain of the tasks of palaeolinguistics, the methods of which received enhancement during the last twenty or so years in the United States. In no event can palaeolinguistic research be conducted with the methods of classic comparative linguistics. In the linguistic early past (the time prior to 4000 B.C.) the processes of linguistic formation were guided by other principles and by a differing tempo of development than in the last five thousand years. Far-reaching methodological consequences derive from this fact..." (p. 22). Although I agree with Gy. Décsy's opinion that "palaeolinguistic research can not be conducted with the methods of classic comparative linguistics", I can not share his view concerning the causes of this approach. If we accept the view that speech (~ human language) is older (by several tens of thousands or even a million years) than any proto-language we are able to reconstruct, we can not hypostasize languages prior to these proto-languages as ones "whose formation could have been guided by other principles than in the last five thousand years". In my opinion, it is not "the principles of linguistic formation" that differentiate between pre-proto or

pre-pre-proto-languages and the reconstructed proto-languages we have by now at our disposal, but the nature of linguistic material they are built upon. In case of accepted proto-languages we have concrete — should I say "audible" — linguistic material (sounds and words), both as inputs and outputs of our reconstruction, whereas in case of pre...-proto-languages we have to lean on and be satisfied with the intelligible constituents of linguistic sign more abstract by nature (morphophonemes and sememes), and we have to ask help from related disciplines like physical and human anthropology, social and cognitive psychology, mythological and folklore studies, to mention only a few important fields connected with linguistics and with prehistory of language.

The major part of linguistic prehistory of Europe is not retrievable by methods of comparative linguistics as the still unsolvable enigma of Basque, the only living remnant of prehistoric European linguistic panorama indicates. The smaller part of linguistic prehistory of Europe is, on the other hand, well known and is summarized by the author as the twinship of two European proto-languages, Indo-European and Uralic.

The concept (and reconstruction) of a proto-language is the product or the achievement of comparative linguistics. The number of proto-languages assigned for Europe seems very small, if one compares this number (2) with the possibly "very large number of languages of prehistoric Europe", yet it is — in contradistinction to the numerous, but extinct languages of prehistoric Europe — something real which can be measured and handled with scientifically approved methods. One has to keep in mind that before the establishment of comparative method reconstruction of proto-languages, i.e. language-forms without records, fell in the realm of phantasies, just like until more recently it was the case with the sustainability (and recoverability) of pre-proto-languages. Obviously, for bridging the gap between the assumption of existence of human race (~ language) that ranges from 4 000 000 to 35 000 years and the

age of recoverability of proto-languages (6000 years at most) new methods had to be invented. Palaeolinguistics or language origin research must lean — if possible, more than comparative linguistics, its "older brother" did — on disciplines like climatic history, palaeobotany and -zoology, demostatistics, ethno-linguistics, ethnography and folklore of native peoples of remote continents (Oceania, Australia, Greenland, etc.) and last, but not least, also brain research and cognitive science. The methodological rigorosity characterizing comparative linguistics, however, must be maintained also in language origin research, if we expect verifiable results. A keen observer of methodological rigorosity also in palaeolinguistics was Robert Austerlitz (1923—1994) whose article, "Language-Family Density in North America and Eurasia" must be mentioned among the first pioneering works that paved the way for this new discipline.

Greek and Latin as archetypical patterns still set the ways and means of cultural change and continuity in Europe. The roles — Greeks as inventors and of Romans as appliers and propagators of inventions — reappear throughout European cultural history in various casts as Catholicism of the South and Protestantism of the North in religion, as Italy and Flanders in art, as Great Britain and the United States in building and administering colonies and last, but not least, as the laborious preparations of the various national linguistic norms of the continent imitating the classical Latin and Greek canon.

In chapter titled "The Domain of Latin and its Division", Gy. Décsy identifies again two regions of Western European culture, a Mediterranean one which he calls *Welsch* "the Romance-region" and a Northern one, "a conglomeration of non-Latin tribal languages" which he calls *Deutsch* [*< early Germanic diutisk*]. Cultural history of Western Europe is nothing else, but an amalgam of these two which imply great changes in the background. For example, the name of one of the most "typical" Romance languages and peoples, French comes from

Germanic: Franks were barbaric Germanic tribesmen who occupied the northern part of present-day France previous to our age previously inhabited by Romanized Celtic ~ Gallic tribes. A parallel or similar process took place in Eastern Europe roughly a millennium later as discussed by the author in the next chapter titled "The Greek (Slavic) Domain and its Division". The spread of Eastern Orthodox faith through Greek and later Slavic languages was quickened by the explosion of East Slavonic in the ninth and tenth centuries. In the light of the metamorphosis of a Germanic tribe into a nation speaking a Romance language and acquiring a Latin culture, it is interesting to note that in Eastern Europe the Greek (Slavic) domain originating from south was extended through a conquest from north: the founders and organizers of the first Eastern Slavonic state, the Kievan Rus, were Viking conquerors; according to tradition its founder was Prince Oleg of Kiev (879—912), — eastern counterparts of their western and southern brothers, the Normans as the organizers of modern Britain and the Sicilian kingdom, respectively — both William the Conqueror at Hastings (1066) and Roger I, the conqueror of Sicily (1061), were Norman warlords.

According to Gy. Décsy four sets of languages are to be discerned in present-day Europe:

1. Five major languages of Europe as Standard Average European: German, French, English, Italian, Russian;
2. Seven zones: Viking, Littoral, Peipus, Rokytno, Danube, Balkan and Kama;
3. Four language isolates: Luxemburgish, Romansh, Sorbian, Gagauz;
4. Five diaspora languages: Yiddish, Ladino, Karaim, Romany (Gipsy), Armenian.

In the final analysis this classification comes down to the well-known tenet of cultural change: centres are usually innovating, while peripheries are conservative. Obviously, the majority of the present-day SAE-languages, i.e. the centre (German, French, English) was once peripheral and, what is now peripheral (the Viking zone), was once, in a sense,

central. Diaspora languages can also be considered as the results or products of this pulsation between centre and periphery. By the same virtue, language isolates seem to be the residue of these changes. Needless to say, social and societal causes work in the background rather than linguistic ones: sedentary vs. nomadic way of life, dominant vs. oppressed population combined with and/or supported by infrastructures of religion. Furthermore, at least some of the present-day zones can be suspected of being former "Urheimats" of proto-languages (e.g. Kama-zone for Uralic, Danube-/Balkan-zone for Indo-European?), i.e. centres. One is tempted to play with the idea of approaching the two European proto-languages, Indo-European and Uralic as representing arche-types for centre and periphery now. Cultural history teaches us, however, that the zones once regarded as central (innovative) can turn peripheral (conservative) and vice versa. As far as Indo-European and Uralic are concerned both can be thought of as peripheral to the European centre prior to the 4th millennium B. C. represented by languages which disappeared without a trace (with the possible exception of Basque which is by now peripheral).

Part II again consists of two major parts, "Macrolinguistics of Europe" and "Demostatistics of Europe". Macrolinguistics is a combination of the external and internal study of large groups of languages in a given extended geographic area. The chapter "External Linguistics of Europe" covers quite a lot of topics from "linguistics boundaries" through "mutual intelligibility", "language and state", "language minorities", "diglossia", "language and dialect", "language mixing", "language and political integration", "language and historical personality" up to the question of "language planning". Almost all of the topics mentioned above are such that lie usually in focus of public opinion, i. e. interest not only professional linguists, but a much wider audience, which can be explained by the fact that most of these topics directly touch almost the entire population of East-Europe, which became turbulent

again after the fall of the Soviet empire in the early 90s of the past century. E.g. it is well-known that in most of the cases in the eastern part of the continent language boundaries do not coincide with state boundaries. From this fact may follow the deliberate or casual oppression of language minorities by members of the majority population, as well as the bilingualism of the people belonging to linguistic communities dominant in a neighboring state (Turks in Bulgaria, Greeks in Turkey, Germans in Italy, Italians in Croatia or, most recently, Russians in the Baltic states, etc.). In this context, let me mention Gy. Décsy's list of historical personalities in regard to the linguistic community (in this context, nation) they brought fame and glory/shame: Napoleon was of Corsican and de Gaulle was of Flemish-Breton origin, Piłsudski was of Lithuanian and Mickiewicz of Belarussian origin, Hitler was but "marginally" German, Stalin was born a Georgian, Kossuth and Petőfi were of Slovakian origin, etc. instead of being "pure" French, Polish, German, Russian and Hungarian. The list also gives an insight into the nature of modern nationalism that it is an acquired conviction rather than an inherited stand, on the one hand, and the sometimes exaggerated importance present-day Europe attributes to the so-called "fully developed [modern] culture languages", on the other. These circumstances explain why Janus Pannonius (~ Johannes de Chesmicze ~ Jovan Czezmicky ~ Csezmicei János) born in Slavonia in 1434, then a province of Hungary, were and still are monopolized as a great poet of their own by both Croatians and Hungarians, although he never wrote anything having literary value either in Croatian or in Hungarian being, as he was, a late, though excellent representative of mediaeval Latin poetry. Gy. Décsy pays attention also to such phenomena as stylistic distortions [in the recent past of Eastern Europe], cursing as part of culture, toponymics [of disputed territories specifically in Eastern Europe], etc., topics that have linguistic manifestations, while they are, in fact,

societal, cultural, political, etc. in the deep.

The sensitivity Gy. Décsy is showing toward problems connected with language, naturally leads him to gauge the linguistic future of Europe in a separate chapter. While I fully agree with his statement that "Auditory communication will first hold absolute priority in all levels of life, and deciphering of texts in written language will be a problem for many....."

Cultural illiteracy (analphabeticism) is going to spread in Europe approximately in the same proportion as is extant in America. This type of analphabeticism does not mean lack of education; on the contrary, it signalizes overeducation and acquired ability to use more sophisticated means of communication than writing (computer, internet, telephone, first of all the mobile telephone)" (p. 405), I cannot share his optimism he bears toward the common European second language, most probably English as a means for defusing language conflicts in the future. Since language is not only a means of understanding, but, in a higher degree, also an instrument of misleading, cheating, fooling others. Moreover, in case of a second language acquired artificially (in school or in courses, generally speaking, in "non-natural", i.e. in "laboratorial" circumstances), we have to reckon also with accidental and widespread misunderstanding. Furthermore, as the horrific events of the Balkan recently have shown, conflicts between different populations were not necessarily connected with language itself — since Serbians, Croatians, Bosnians who killed each other with ferocity unseen in Europe since the end of World War II are speaking basically the same language. If there was any hope for defusing (linguistic or other) international conflicts in Europe, then it was to be expected from good elementary and secondary schooling with teaching discursive thinking and languages (as many Standard European Average languages as possible including Latin and Greek and, last, but not least, languages spoken in neighbouring countries, which mean the so-called minor languages,

especially in Eastern Europe). In reality, we witness a process in education all over Europe which has other priorities than that: an approach said to be pragmatic stands in the focus, which includes more practical knowledge in informatics, communications, economics, statistics (~ adoration of quantity), an approach which can be shortly characterized as one that takes much care about the surface and neglects the deep resulting in "one dimensional man".

What concerns to English as a potential common European second language, it has already become a reality in many fields of life, especially in scholarship and science, but also in diplomacy, entertainment, communication, transport by now. English as common European second language is basically the result of spontaneous development in Europe, not unlike Latin was in its happy era we remember by the name *Pax Romana*. In accordance with Gy. Décsy's opinion as a counter-example I could mention Russian which was forcibly imposed upon the population of Eastern Europe and was, therefore, stubbornly refused by the nations of the region. The motto of the section "Demostatistics of Europe" attributed to Winston Churchill "I trust only statistics which were falsified by myself" ironically reminds us of the risks of being enthralled by numbers (i.e. quantity). And yet, the importance of such lists, tables and charts cannot be denied or belittled, since only through them can we have a glimpse of the proportions of peoples as related to one another, to territory, state, etc.

In a time when collecting fragments is identified — falsely — with scholarship instead of regarding entities conceivable in a wide perspective only through vision and imagination, Gy. Décsy's survey comes as a refreshing breeze of sanity and wholeness. Gy. Décsy's cultural

(and national) background and training explains, at least partly, this healthy stand. As a Hungarian born in between the two world wars — outside Hungary, in Slovakia (the Eastern part of the newly founded Czechoslovakia) — Gy. Décsy got a secondary school education which was at least as deeply embedded in classical studies (Greek and Latin) as Poland's, the other "Latinist" country of the XXth century "West" of East-Europe. As to his higher training, he is an absolutely competent scholar to deal with Europe's linguistic past being both an Indo-Europeanist and a Uralist. He started his career under the guidance and tutorship of the Slavist István Kniezsa (1898—1965) at Budapest University in Hungary and later, in his mature years, he worked as a professor Fenno-Ugric Studies in German universities (Munich and Hamburg). Therefore, it is no wonder that he finds Europe's, as well as his own cultural roots in Greek and Latin, the twin spiritual source of the present-day division of Europe into East and West. By the same virtue, it is no surprise that he regards Indo-European and Uralic as the two original proto-languages of Europe. In sum, Gy. Décsy's is a European spirit, in other words, he is an individualist with firm convictions who exerts influence on his reader so that (s)he also has to take a personal stand regarding the issue-in-question. What makes Gy. Décsy's book especially important and topical in Europe is that it addresses almost all the important questions concerning the linguistic aspect of the ongoing political process of European unification. Therefore, his book should be a recommendable reading not only for professional or amateur linguists, but also and, even in a higher degree, for Euro-bureaucrats who are making decisions in language matters.

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