Migration, minorities and multilingualism in Europe: Language ideologies and the practices of language difference

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1 Introduction

I would like to start this chapter by reflecting seriously on the title of the volume –and Language and the Future of Europe. I need to do this in order to rethink the themes of my paper: migration, minorities and multilingualism. “Language, future, Europe” may seem self-evident to lay people and politicians. But for us they are not innocent or self-evident. They are a stimulating challenge. Certainly they are from the perspective of my own life and intellectual background.

For some thirty years, I have thought I was writing about language in Europe. But in a sense I was not. The parts of the world I have written most about – Austria and Hungary – have only very recently been admitted to the lofty regions that officially call themselves “Europe.” My chapter will therefore take an unabashedly eastern perspective. As to language: the linguistic practices of the populations I have written about most – Hungarian speakers in Austria, German speakers in Hungary – were hardly considered “language” by the speakers themselves, by their neighbors, and until recently by most linguists. They were not seen to merit the term language because the practices were supposedly mixed, chaotic, impure (hybrid) forms. By contrast, my scholarly discipline of linguistic anthropology puts such communities and speakers at the center of attention because it studies not languages but the linguistic practices of speakers in
interaction. My argument is that by rethinking the terms LANGUAGE and EUROPE we can draw additional attention to how people make social meanings and consequential social actions with the linguistic forms they use.

Yet I am also mindful of the third term: future and its invocation of time. When my parents and I emigrated from Hungary to the US in 1956, the future seemed logical, systematic: in western Europe the first treaties forming the Common Market were being launched, and the Cold War was splitting the world into vast opposing camps. Globally, there was troubled nuclear gamesmanship and peace in the north; there were many hot war zones in the decolonizing south. In the last decade, power balances have changed fundamentally. Today, the military adventurism and shameful foreign policy of my own country make the future much more dangerous than in the Cold War. And the world economy is more complexly interconnected. I will return later to this interconnectedness and will point out, as I go along, the way linguistic practices index or signal the future (modernity) and the past (archaic -- authentic).

2 LANGUAGE

Let us start with the term: LANGUAGE. It only seems odd to say so, but “language” was invented in Europe. It is not a feature of the natural world. On the contrary, the notion of a named language – English, French, Hungarian, Greek – of languages as countable, (a speaker can have more than one), as bounded and differing from each other, but roughly inter-translatable, each with its charming idiosyncracies that are typical of the group that speaks it, indexes, points to, a group that has an ethnonym (the Greeks etc) – all this is part of the language ideology produced by the European Enlightenment.
This invention has more to it: language is for naming the world (referential function); monolingualism is taken to be the natural state of human life; named languages are assumed to be relatively homogeneous; boundaries between languages are thought to be self-evident and based on lack of mutual intelligibility; and any social or ethnic group is thought to have a single quite distinct linguistic form that expresses the group’s innermost spirit. Furthermore, such groups, by virtue of this very homogeneity, are thought to deserve a state, a territory, or at least some kind of political autonomy. To call some practice a “version” or “variant” of something, is already to be in the Herderian discourse: If your language is a version of mine, then I can claim your territory as a part of my state. Linguistic practices – by seeming to be independent of human will or intent – are very effective in legitimating political claims and arrangements. Such a configuration of perfect homology among nation=state=language never existed in Europe, or anywhere else. It is an ideal and a powerful, generative projection.

One would discount this as all too familiar, as mere clichés. But they continue to be the basis of sociological and political theories (Anderson, Gellner), and they are still common all over the continent. Although linguistic nationalism is sometimes thought to be a special problem of eastern Europe, my colleagues Jan Blommaert and Jef Verschueren have done us the great service of showing, in an empirical study of the European press, that this set of default assumptions or folk ideas are very much alive in the west of the continent as well. And this is true not only of conservative or nationalist fringe groups, but also of mainstream and liberal newspapers of European countries.

For linguistic anthropology, such a configuration of views is an ideology of language, or cultural presuppositions about language. Ideology, because it takes a
perspective on the empirical world, erasing phenomena that do not fit its perspective; ideology too because it is linked to power and political positions. Cultural in the anthropological sense: it is a frame, not always conscious or within awareness, a set of assumptions through which we understand linguistic practices that are evident around us.

But, one may well say, the European Union is something else again. In its roundabout, bureaucratic and not entirely democratic way, it is nevertheless working against the hegemony of linguistic nationalism: in the studies it funds, the policies it recommends, and in the practice of its own fonctionnaires. 2001 was the European Year of Languages. The EC established, and the EU supports, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. A recent Action Plan for 2004-06, a Communication from the Commission to the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions bravely and clearly calls for “Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity.” A recent large tome commissioned by the Language Policy Unit of the Directorate for General Education and Culture, although mostly about “regional languages,” nevertheless, and to its credit, also calls for “support for minority languages in Europe” and the “promotion and protection of linguistic diversity.” Indeed, there is a 1992 “Charter of Regional and Minority Languages” which supports the maintenance of territorial as well as non-territorial languages, and even languages of immigration. Finally, the Council of Europe is calling for more and better language teaching from earlier grades, and most strikingly, a plan for the future in which each European “citizen [will] be able to communicate in a minimum of two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue.”
As many have pointed out, the emphasis on diversity in the EU’s documents is deceptive. There is room for only one kind of thing: true, there is talk of national language, minority language, regional language, foreign language, migrant languages, third-country languages, mother tongue, sign languages, lesser used languages, ethnic minority languages, indigenous languages, non-territorial languages. This would seem to cover all possibilities, but it does not. We can argue about which ones “count” as languages, how many there are. But the basic Herderian assumptions remain that there are naturally existing, separate linguistic units, that exist independently of scholarly or speakers’ perspectives, that they have clearly delineable linguistic boundaries, that they are linked to distinct and countable populations.

As I have said, Herderianism is a European invention. But a fundamentally different set of perspectives on linguistic practices has also been created in Europe: the approaches of Franz Boas (a migrant from Germany to the US), Mikhail Bakhtin (a Russian), and the Prague Circle, as developed further in the US in the work of John Gumperz (himself a migrant from Germany) and Dell Hymes and younger generations. For these scholars, the folk category of “language” is a cultural construct, a reification, a product of the institutional and cultural process of standardization. For those living in standardized linguistic regimes – as we do – orientation towards standard forms and valorization of them makes all others seem inadequate, unimportant or simply invisible. In one of my early fieldwork experiences, people in Oberwart/Felsoor, Austria (a town on the border of Austria and Hungary) claimed, using linguistic forms that I as a speaker of Hungarian could understand and recognized as Hungarian -- that they could “not speak
Hungarian at all.” Knowing they were not reaching a standard, they denigrated their own forms to the level of non-language.

For scholars too, it is hard to even talk about the linguistic situation in Europe today without using named languages (and their multiples) as descriptive terms, as units of analysis (and so I will have trouble!) Yet I think the effort is imperative, in order to grasp phenomena that Herderianism erases – makes invisible. So, I turn to this alternative tradition of linguistic study.

Bakhtin’s notion of a centripetal process of regimentation, limitation and control of linguistic forms is an apt characterization of standardization. For him, it was a process always opposed by and occurring simultaneously with centrifugal processes of increasing differentiation, invention, and intermingling of forms that standardization tries to keep apart. The Prague Circle made the process of standardization an object of study, rather than taking it for granted. More recently, scholars are studying standardization as a cultural process: It is not a matter of speaking the right forms – few if any people always or usually speak regimented standard languages – but rather of orienting to and accepting some state-sanctioned denotational code as a correct and high status norm. Speech communities bring people together who use linguistic forms of different provenance, and it is in these heterogeneous institutional settings that linguistic communities are formed.

Linguistic communities are groups of people oriented (more or less) towards the correct use of some denotational code, imagined as a single entity. Powerful institutions such as universal education, language academies, press capitalism, linguistic science, and linguistic markets create standardization in this sense of an orientation towards and acceptance of the authority of forms defined as denotationally different. Furthermore,
standardization happens in a world of standards, which are then in a field of contrast with each other. Even though standards are culturally constructed and more an orientation than a form, they have enormously important social consequences.

Let us start then by considering sets of linguistic practices or linguistic repertoires as they are deployed by speakers in sociocultural and institutional contexts, and the ideologies or metapragmatic assumptions with which they interpret them. Registers, accents, voicings, genres are all terms that are in use to designate any set of linguistic practices that come to index (they point to, co-occur with, are metonymic of) some set of social relations, social identities, situations, and values. Linguistic practices can often bring about, through social interaction, the very social relations that they then index. Linguistic practices are pragmatic phenomena, patterns of language use. They are always and necessarily interpreted by speakers and listeners through language ideologies -- metapragmatic discourses. There is always some ideology that orients our views of linguistic practices.

In order to demonstrate this, I would like to briefly examine some ethnographic examples in which, on closer examination, the Herderian world dissolves, or more accurately, this linguistic ideology – far from being a description of practices – actually produces contradictions for those who hold it. These are contradictions or paradoxes that would be hidden if we believed the world to be Herderian. They reveal how linguistic ideologies work. This is the perspective from which I would like to discuss seven blatant IRONIES connected with my themes of migrants, multilingualism and minorities. My examples come mostly from the work of my fine younger colleagues and students, though I have also included some of my own research.
1 Ironies of minority travel  My earliest fieldwork, in the 1970s, was in an Austrian town, very near the Hungarian border: Oberwart/Felsoor. Until 1921 it had been part of Hungary, then post WW I border changes turned the region’s Hungarian speakers into a “minority” in German-speaking Austria. But they had long been a language island, surrounded by German-speaking villages, and there were many people who had learned both Hungarian and German in school. In the 1970s Austria was part of the capitalist world, Hungary part of the eastern bloc and relatively impoverished. The town’s folk spoke linguistic forms historically identifiable as – in part –Hungarian, but those who were educated had to go to the only schools available: German-language ones. Oberwarters considered themselves socially far above the “communist” Hungarians (a tense border, iron curtain, with guard posts). They went to Hungary to get cheap shoes and often cheap dental care. I was surprised to find that when they did so, the very people who at home were most fluent in local Hungarian never used Hungarian forms in Hungary. They spoke German and expected to be accommodated. So much for the referential function!

The reason became obvious when I went with them. When they used local Oberwart forms in Hungary, they were ridiculed by monolingual Hungarian-speakers. The linguistic practices of these Oberwarters – who were western, wealthy and educated in German – sounded to monolingual Hungarians like the utterances of hicks and rubes. Urban Hungarians heard the Oberwart pronunciation and non-standard lexicon as indexes of the past, in contrast to the newest urban slang and school-taught standard. The rural forms made the speakers sound “old” – or even worse, if they were perceptibly young,
they were indexed as stupid, backward, unsophisticated, the opposite of “modern”, leftovers from the past.

2 **Ironies of diasporic migration** Another village in which I did fieldwork provides a different kind of example. Located in southern Hungary (Boly), populated by the descendants of German farmers invited in the 18th century, by the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa, to settle in the depopulated area of southwestern Hungary after the Turkish wars. After WW II, a large part of the village’s German-speaking population was deported to east or west Germany, amidst (sometimes false) accusations that they had been Nazis. As a result, virtually every family had relatives in Germany when I first visited the village in the 1980s. Although by the 1980s it was once again politically permissible to claim a German-Hungarian identity in Hungary, there was virtually no higher education in German, so the people of Boly spoke their local, Boly registers (historically Germanic), and were educated in standard Hungarian schools.

Labor migration to west Germany was very attractive in those years, given the stark economic differences between Hungary and the west. Given the relative positions of Hungary and west Germany in the continent-wide status system of the Cold War, workers from Boly could not simply use their knowledge of Hungarian in Stuttgart and expect to be accommodated. But when they spoke their Boly-forms, rural and historically influenced by their Hungarian bilingualism, they were heard as foreign, backward, and unsophisticated. Once again indexicals of European periphery (rural and non-standard) were heard as time. These were often highly educated workers, themselves prejudiced against the Roms of southern Hungary. Imagine their horror when, in west Germany, they were stereotyped as “eastern gypsies.”
This late 20th century work migration – unlike the original 18th century one, was bidirectional – diasporic. People and even whole families who had gone to west Germany to work, went back to Hungary to buy houses and fancy appliances with their valuable deutschmarks. But when they used the linguistic forms, whole registers, and practices (e.g. filtered coffee, lighter hair dyes) they had learned in Germany, they were envied, but also ostracised for putting on airs; they were heard as condescending and vulgar.

Labels like multilingualism, minority language, simply will not tell us about the significance of their practices. The difficulties here had nothing to do with contrasts between named languages like Hungarian and German. Rather, each speaker’s history of education and travel is engraved in the shape of his or her linguistic repertoire. A kind of time-trace that creates a set of indexical signals and interactional metamessages. Registers e.g. school forms, local forms, indexed identities, which were then judged within the linguistic ideology of standard, in light of the relative status in the pan-European scene of Hungary and Germany as centers of economic and political power. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the interpersonal stakes, speakers became obsessively, painfully self-conscious of their own speech.

3 Boundary dilemmas Of particular obsessive attention were any practices that – from the perspective of the two standard languages involved – could possibly be heard as foreign, impure, other. And here we see that boundaries are dynamic, part of the very process of making separate standard “languages” in the first place. Boundaries are also matters of time: What the people from Boly and Oberwart had to watch more than anything else was the distinction between new and old borrowings (linguistically
identical markers; socially heard as “ours” vs. “foreign”), part of ideologies of purism that are well within the standardizing mode. Note, though, that contrary to the common belief, the impression of differentiation is created NOT by isolation and separation between linguistic forms, but rather by mixture and interpenetration that – given the right linguistic ideology – can create and highlight the distinctions that create the effect of separation.

Like the use of a word borrowed from an unfamiliar register or voicing, codeswitching too is a boundary device, although it seems like mixing. Speakers must hear the differences between codes in order for CS to have an interactional effect. And it is only codeswitching if speakers can and do hear it as such. So, paradoxically, the Herderian-purist anathema of mixing languages is part of the Herderian imperative of keeping them apart. As Alexandra Jaffe has shown for Corsican, translation and school instruction are also boundary devices that can work in paradoxical ways. The formal teaching of Corsican, for instance, involves juxtaposing French forms with Corsican ones, since they must be taught to students who consider themselves Corsican but cannot yet speak what is already named and standardized as Corsican. But the juxtaposition with the much more prestigious and already known French creates a situation in which any difference is seen as a lack or problem in Corsican, thereby demoting it in the eyes of the very people who would like to learn it better. Similarly, translation can be a double bind for minority languages. Jaffe argues that to translate literary works implies there are not enough such works in Corsican; but to fail to translate implies that Corsican cannot be used for the high art of other languages. Which brings me to the:
4 Paradoxes of standardization  For most of the post-WW II period, it was taboo to discuss, in Hungary, the linguistic practices of the Hungarian speakers outside the borders of Hungary, in Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Austria. In the late 1980s, I was there at the very first meeting – in Budapest – of Hungarian-speaking language-teachers and cultural specialists from each of these countries. All of them were bilingual in Hungarian and also in one other standard language. And I well remember seeing their shock at the discovery that the Budapest intellectuals – eager to impose the metropolitan Hungarian standard – did not understand the problems of the bilingual minorities in neighboring states as well as the leaders of those minorities understood each other – despite the great linguistic difference dividing them. What is at stake here?

In the attempt to gain recognition, state or suprastate support, and prestige for linguistic practices within the European regime of national languages, a common strategy is to try to make them into standards, using all the institutional techniques I adumbrated above. This issue is currently being discussed and faced vis a vis German forms in eastern Europe and historically Hungarian forms all around the Carpathian basin. Should there be a standard Hungarian in each of these countries, or only a single Budapest-based standard? Many of us have worked on just such projects. Many of what are now called minority languages have undergone or are now undergoing these regimenting steps.

But a characteristic contradiction always arises: once some forms are chosen (through language planning) as the standard ones, speakers/users of other alternative forms that were not chosen are themselves demoted as speakers. Not only are they stigmatized (from several perspectives) as “second language speakers” of the national language, but now their minority linguistic practices are seen as unpure, inauthentic or
inadequate with reference to the standards set up for their “minority language” by professional standardizers. Sad to say: By the nature of the standardization process, every creation of a standard orientation must – perforce – create stigmatized forms, supposed “non-languages” among the very speakers whose linguistic practices it was supposed to valorize. Contrary to the Herderian view, there is no linguistic homogeneity, and standardization actually creates more heterogeneity, not uniformity.

This example also points up a classic social contradiction: The process of creating a minority “language” (now standardized), also creates speakers who want to stop using the doubly stigmatized forms. But the jobs of the minority-language standardizers depend on what they call “maintaining” the language, whole cadres of language specialists with social interests at odds with the supposedly unified group.

5 Neither/nor There are other ways of negotiating the space between two standard European languages, and the history of war, deportation and border changes in eastern Europe provides fertile ground. Elizabeth Vann reports on the complex situation of Opole Silesia, another border population, wooed both by the German state during the Nazi period but also by the Polish state during the Communist period, but generally suspicious of both these ideologies. The people of this highly industrialized district sometimes present themselves as Poles, sometimes as Germans. This, I think, is true of all such border minorities. But the Opole Silesians are different in that they also have a self-consciousness of being “Silesians” – neither Polish nor German – but at the same time tend not to use the term Silesian because of its war-time connotations. Yet their linguistic forms are not standardized, and the most vivid proof of their sense of separate consciousness is their linguistic ideology. In the face of standard, homogenizing
Herderian ideologies around them, Opole Sile sians, Vann reports, revel in mixing forms, in practices of cross-lingual punning, and question-answer sequences that violate the supposed boundaries of standard languages. As Vann says: Silesians elaborate multilingualism itself as a distinctive cultural identity. They see their linguistic system as inextricably a combination of German and Polish, and prize exactly that quality.

6 Killing the practices to save them The populations of Europe usually called Roms engage in a wide range of linguistic practices. For groups as far apart as Russia and the Czech Republic, there are many shared linguistic forms used, some of which are identified by linguists as historically Indic. Other linguistic characteristics are the results of large-scale borrowing from a great many historical traditions. Not all of these populations speak mutually intelligible forms, and all Roms also use at least one and often several national languages in addition to the linguistic forms they variously call Romani (among other labels). There are no monolingual speakers. Moreover, the linguistic practices are rarely written; in addition there are improvisational, oral narrative and poetic genres that are apparently without parallels in contemporary Europe. As Victor Friedman, Zita Reger, Alaina Lemon and others have wonderfully shown, for all these reasons, an interesting situation has developed. If – as is now increasingly happening – Romani is to be “reduced” to a standard language, the very differences that make it culturally itself, would themselves be lost. There would/will also be the fundamental transformation of a set of practices (and hence their loss) in the very process of trying to “save” them.

7 Exclusion traps Finally, let me turn to another kind of border, that crossed by third world or third country migrants into Schengen countries. Asylum seekers are very
often questioned and linguistically tested in what Etienne Balibar has called “filter zones”, such as airport offices and lounges, in attempts to establish proof of who they “are” and thus whether they merit or warrant entry into what has been called -- exactly on account of such procedures – fortress Europe. Language looms large in these “tests.” Christine Havelock has analyzed an interview with such a migrant, from someplace in Africa, in an agency in Holland. She shows the complex way in which the English-speaking migrant has to disguise his knowledge of English in order to persuade the Dutch authorities that he is genuinely and authentically the sort of African who is allowed entry. Yet if he speaks no English at all, he cannot communicate enough to persuade them of anything. This true double bind must be carefully and subtly negotiated by the interviewee. The overall problem deserves much more attention.

I hope I have given a sense of the kinds of issues – linguistic and sociolinguistic as well as political – that are made visible, opened up, by working with the notion of language ideologies as frames for various kinds of linguistic practices that have significant interpersonal and interactional consequences. Metadiscourses, ideologies, provide (whether we like it or not) NOT valid pictures of the linguistic world, but the means to interpret the social meaning of forms.

3 EUROPE and The FUTURE

Let me turn, now, much more briefly, to the notion of “Europe.” Europe is, of course, both an institutional structure, the European Union, and a longstanding geographical notion of one among several of the Earth’s continents. But both institution and geographical terminology rely on a cultural construction of Europe (after Christendom), a
self-understanding created by intellectuals that casts Europe as the seat of civilization, of modernity, development, and progress. In this guise, Europe is as much of an ideal as standard language is – and closely related. Indeed, Europe is a \textit{semiotic phenomenon}; it is a sign that only makes sense in contrast to a set of “Others.” These others are imagined territorial entities that never stay still, always shifting. One must invoke them from some determinate position or perspective, and -- like Jakobsonian shifters we/they -- their scope changes as one tries to grasp them.

Some years ago I wrote a paper about the notion of Europe in Hungarian public discourse. For Hungarians Europe contrasts with the east and Asia, from which their ancestors came. But the trans-Urals are only one version of Asia. Asia is also corruption and backwardness, Europe’s opposite. As a criticism of communism, Russia was often called Asia. And Asia can also start at home: It was only partly in jest that Budapesters often took visitors to Castle Hill, on the west side of the Danube, point down to the flatlands on the Pest, east side, across the river, and say: this is where Asia begins (and this, of course, is old: Prince Eugene of Savoy). But this border could change, depending on one’s perspective. Within any zone labelled as Europe, one can subdivide (for the moment) to call it “not really, or not even, Europe” because not civilized or developed. And people could even say, about their messy bedrooms: today my house is just Asia, or I am part European part Asian.

This discourse of an infinitely splittable. Europe exists in all the eastern countries. Macedonia, for instance, often called the Asia of Europe; in Russia as well, with its European and Asian soul; but also in Germany. And in the south of the continent, a quite
similarly fractal contrast with Africa. Sicily is called Europe’s Africa, in self-criticism. So the term is a fractal, splittable like geometric fractals.

Post-socialist migration in the former Soviet bloc has made these imaginary divisions applicable in a different way, just as it has long been in the rest of the continent: Urban areas are zones of what is perceived as foreignness, non-Europe: Populations of migrants from Hong Kong in Budapest, refugees from the Balkan wars in the south. Street by street and village by village there are tiny subdivisions of space that can be called Europe or not-Europe, with linguistic practices playing a role. The EU has produced masses of documentation on the “languages of Europe.” But with global labor migration and the empires striking back, it is surely true that there are virtually NO linguistic practices of the globe that are not somehow represented in Europe. But one can also say “languages” instead of linguistic practices, because European colonizers exported the notion of standard worldwide.

Perhaps better though to think outside of this discourse of Europe, to consider the cross cutting geographical affiliations of linguistic practices and the social groups using them. Diasporic populations are part of a European speech community, but their sense of linguistic correctness of a code links them, perhaps to Hindi, Urdu or Indonesian centers elsewhere. Moslem populations in Bosnia are, willy-nilly, being organized and linked to Moslem migrants in Paris and London. Groups such as the Saami, on the other hand, are being hailed, mobilized as “indigenous peoples” with new connections to international NGOs defending the territorial and linguistic “rights” of those now called indigenous peoples. My colleague Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, a Brazilian researcher working with native Amazonian populations, recounts the story of one tribal politico who said to her:
oh the Saami, they are the Indians of Europe! Indeed, and with some of the same controversies about what constitutes linguistic and customary “authenticity” (do you have to know some linguistic forms? which? or must you be a reindeer herder?) that constitute proof of indigeneity. Political lessons from indigenous Brazil are being used by activists in Saami politics, or also in Buryatia, Russia’s eastern republic.

Institutionally it is surely true that the accession to the European Union has made, and will continue to make, a great deal of difference to the (new) countries of the former Soviet bloc. Largely this is the case because the EU and its multifarious NGOs provide forums for complaint and political pressure. One case in point is the Baltic states, where the large Russian-speaking populations, once the privileged speakers, are now in a supposedly marginalized position vis a vis Baltic language laws. Here the Herderian ideologies become entirely explicit political discourses. It is important to analyse how the terms “language” and “rights” and “Europe” are invoked. Are the Estonian speakers oppressed because their language was not official for many decades? Or are the Russian speakers oppressed because Estonian is now required for state jobs? Who counts as “oppressed” and discriminated against depends on when you start your story – there is time and future again. Estonian leaders justify their policies to voters inside Estonia in one way (our country/our languages), but they justify themselves to EU representatives and Russian minority representatives at EU forums in other ways (we ARE alert to minority rights). As one EU bureaucrat recently said: Before accession, the claims of Russian speakers in the Baltics were mixed up with Cold War defenses against Moscow; now they are internal EU questions of “language rights.” That plays only too well in the EU.
Let us analyze EU publications about language policy as discourse and language ideology. Linguistic differentiation and diversity presents a problem for those who want to build a united Europe (and, in Cris Shore’s work, these are the fonctionnaires of Brussels). Language diversity interferes with labor migration, another EU goal, and in Herderian terms states should be linguistically unified. But linguistic diversity is politically ineradicable in the EU. Thus, we find language (and here I mean exactly idealized, standards) and linguistic diversity are justified on neo-liberal economic grounds. (The rhetoric of these studies is exhortative, because the statistics show, in fact, that in many EU countries there is ever less language learning going on, less money for it, very little multi-standardism, and relatively little labor migration.) But the imagery is that multi-standardism is indispensable for high competitiveness in the global marketplace, in the great knowledge industry and economy of the future. Here there is a massive fudging, for there is no market for many languages – Basque, Saami, Romani – except a state-supported or bureaucratic one. Yet the discourse treats them as “property” or “objects” to which one can claim rights. Other languages (standards), by contrast, do have markets. They are very real commodities that are bought and sold as big business. Pay to learn English or German is a very big business in Budapest; Italian and French too, but less so.

In any case, the two plus one language formula now being advertised as the goal of EU language policy, the wave of the future, is for some speakers already an unavoidable fact: Albanians in Macedonia speak Albanian, Macedonian and learn English in school. But for those not in minority populations, native speakers of English, or French or Spanish or German, this is admirable, but possible only with an elite
education. And of course it is multi-standardism and not multilingualism that is being urged. Etienne Balibar and Umberto Eco, surely prime examples of such an elite, talk attractively about “translation” as the lingua franca of Europe. But, as I have already noted, this relies on eliminating real pragmatic difference, of creating a coercive isomorphism among standard languages. To play on the title of Eco’s recent book, that is perhaps the nightmare of a perfect language! What will it mean to go “beyond” standard language (and monostandardism) in Europe, where the very terms were invented and the processes have been going on for centuries?

Let me end on a more positive note, by recounting an event I recently attended that made me think of the many possibilities to be tried: A conference in Vienna, organized by the Institute for Uralic Studies on Gender, and funded by some EU organ. The organizational principle from historical/genetic linguistics, very old fashioned indeed; the subject matter of gender much less so. Participants were intellectuals who taught languages, usually Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian, Saami in all parts of Europe, but also delegates from Samoyed, HantiManci and other of the so-called “small” languages of the Urals. The official languages of the conference were German and English. This allowed these supposedly related speakers to actually communicate with each other. And the format was creative: those who spoke in English used German powerpoint, and vice versa, so that there was in fact multistandardism. In getting acquainted with the Cheremis representative I discovered that she is an activist for that language in Russia, but makes her living as an English teacher there: trilingual, as per EU imaginary. But her story was deeply Herderian nevertheless, and very much about imagined time. She told with amusement how much trouble she had convincing Russians that she was not faking or
lying. For her Russian colleagues were inevitably incredulous to find that she, the native
speaker of a primitive language (and therefore, by indexicality, a primitive herself) was
also a teacher and fluent, virtually unaccented speaker of that icon of modernity: English.