

## **Kamusella, Tomasz, 2021. *Words in Space and Time: Historical Atlas of Language Politics in Modern Central Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press.**

**Reviewed by Anna Fenyvesi<sup>1</sup>, University of Szeged**

*Words in Space and Time* is an informative book by Tomasz Kamusella, a political scientist and historian at the University of St. Andrews, UK, and a leading expert on Central European history and nationalism, who is, however, not a linguist. It is both formidable and beautiful, printed on larger than A4 size sheets and with a nicely designed cover, licensed under a Creative Commons license, and thus legally downloadable section by section (<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/97875>). This work has forty-two short chapters with just as many maps (on pp. 1-176), followed by a fifty-two-page glossary (177–229), a bibliography (231–250), and an index of place names created by John Puckett and including cities, countries, regions, and political, administrative, and ecclesiastical entities, as well as geographical names (251–289). The volume grew out of Kamusella's work on the extensive, almost twelve-hundred-page 2009 monograph of *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe*. Although the Table of Contents does not indicate it (only the chapters and the book's website do), five of the forty-two chapters are actually written by authors other than Kamusella (chapter nine by Lav Šubarić, fifteen by Michael Talbot, sixteen by Agata Reibach, seventeen by Walter Želazny, and chapter forty by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov).

Kamusella's work is a large-scale overview of twelve centuries (from the ninth to the twenty-first) of the cultural and political history of Central Europe all from the point of view of languages, with primary focus on the period between the sixteenth century and the present, and the last ten chapters depicting various aspects of Central Europe in 2009. Most of the chapters are brief, between two and seven pages long, much like in Paul Magocsi's classic 1993 *Historical Atlas of (East) Central Europe* (2nd, revised edition 2002; 3rd, newly revised edition 2018), to which Kamusella's atlas provides the all-important language-politics companion volume. Organizing a massive amount of information and an expansive historical overview in maps and accompanying brief chapters is an excellent way of presenting the changing history, geography, and culture of Modern Central Europe.

The author's grasp of historical events and cultural and political processes is evident on every page, as he provides detailed insights into the political processes of the region that have linguistic relevance: the instalment and use of writing systems, social and religious movements,

---

<sup>1</sup> fenyvesi@lit.u-szeged.hu



independence movements, nationalism, the rise of nation states, and many other events, all described in copious yet relevant detail. What the volume lacks, however, is up-to-date underpinnings in (socio)linguistics, meaning the notions that the author uses and linguists whose work he refers to, and, just as crucially, others whose work he does not use. All these lacks or scarce references amount to a greatly misunderstood linguistic undercurrent that the discussions of the volume then float on. This lacuna considerably weakens the volume's overall weight and impact, which is a serious shortcoming, since, after all, this is a historical atlas of the politics of language.

Kamusella starts his Preface by stating that "[u]ntil recently there was little dialog between linguists and historians," ascribing to the former a perspective that neglects the fact that languages "are products of human history" and "part of culture" (xv). He then cites, as exceptions, works dealing with political aspects of language and the journal *Language and History* (which, in fact, is dedicated to the history of linguistic thought rather than to cultural or political aspects of language). What he neglects to mention is the entire discipline of sociolinguistics, including the branch particularly relevant for his topic, i.e., the sociology of language (which does study language policy). Other than of Dennis Preston's studies on perceptual dialectology, there is no mention of the important work of many sociolinguists from the past fifty years, for example Joshua Fishman, who spent his long life writing about language-policy aspects of language and ethnicity, or of J.K. Chambers and Peter Trudgill, who wrote extensively about dialects. In contrast to them, Noam Chomsky, a linguist whose work and long outdated 1960s concepts of *deep structure* and *surface structure* are not relevant at all to the topic at hand, somehow does gain recognition in the glossary of the *Atlas*.

Kamusella proposes to use, highly idiosyncratically, the German term *Einzelssprache* for "a language" to differentiate it from *language* meaning "the capacity for speech" – a polysemy that no linguist using English is bothered by – thereby introducing a superfluous distinction that is then applied throughout the work. Another major problem of definition lies in Kamusella's assumption that bilingualism is "the equally full command of two or more *Einzelssprachen* [= languages]" (178). While a definition of bilingualism as a "native-like control of two languages" was proposed in Leonard Bloomfield's 1935 classic, *Language* (56), no linguist who actually studied bilingualism in the past seventy-plus years defined their subject matter this way, and the 1998 *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (ed. Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones, published by Multilingual Matters) actually characterizes it as "severe and highly contentious" (4). In the first modern work on individual and societal bilingualism, Uriel Weinreich's 1953 *Languages In Contact*, the phenomenon of bilingualism is defined as the "alternate use of two languages" (1). Weinreich's definition is purposefully vague so as not to limit the notion by constraints such as proficiency level, order of acquisition, or skill. Similarly, in his 1953 work about *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior*, Einar Haugen defined bilingualism as ranging anywhere between "the point where the speaker of one language can produce *complete, meaningful utterances* in the other language" and the native-like command of both languages (7, emphasis in the original). The best-known European expert on bilingualism, François Grosjean, has been arguing since 1982 in all of his oeuvre (*Life With Two Languages*, 1982; *Studying Bilinguals*, 2008; *Bilingual Life and Reality*, 2010, etc.) that a bilingual is *not* the sum of two monolinguals but a speaker whose proficiencies in their languages can be greatly unequal but complementing each other across the various domains of language use in their life.

Another terminological confusion arises from Kamusella's definition of bidialectism (misspelled by him as *bidialecticism*, 178) as "the equally full command of two or more dialects, that is, Einzelsprachen". Bidialectism is the phenomenon whereby speakers of a regional dialect acquire the standard dialect of a language, typically at school, and then speak both (but usually not more) dialects, reaching a proficiency in the standard dialect to the extent that they are educated. These seemingly minor issues of how bilingualism and bidialectism are best defined are crucial because the outdated definition of bilingualism that Kamusella relies on and the idiosyncratic one of bidialectism that he provides make him distort the use of these terms even though they would be relevant.

Kamusella devotes a long portion (throughout pp. 1–3) to how, on the basis of his own multilingual experience and in the course of his work, he came to understand the distinction between language and dialect (i.e., his *Einzelsprache*), and how every language is basically a historical construct (a point well understood by modern sociolinguists). He then discusses the multilingualism of Central Europe in terms of dialects and dialect continua, using the latter term (sing. dialect continuum) to mean, again idiosyncratically, simply what is known in linguistics as dialect areas. However, at least since the 1980s, the term dialect continuum has been used in modern sociolinguistics to mean a chain of regional dialects spanning across language boundaries (as in the case of Dutch vs. German, French vs. Spanish, Slovak vs. Polish, etc.), rather than dialects of the same language. This entire terminological confusion becomes a problem when the author discusses dialect continuum in the case of one of the languages of the region under study, namely, Hungarian. No other Finno-Ugric language is spoken adjacent to Hungarian to truly provide a dialect continuum; yet, the Hungarian language area is marked as a "Finno-Ugric (Ugrian)" dialect continuum on the maps of the volume. The overuse of this problematic term, in turn, makes Kamusella's discussion cumbersome, as half a dozen of the chapters (and maps) are titled *Dialect Continua in Central Europe* [at time X], and the same term is repeated again almost 170 times throughout the book. Add to this the almost 500 occurrences of the linguistically unmotivated term *Einzelsprache* on the 229 pages of text and glossary, and the discussion becomes, terminologically speaking, rather unwieldy.

The glossary of the *Atlas* provides essential definitions and explanations of over two-hundred-and-eighty historical, political, cultural, and linguistic terms, making the book user-friendly for the yet uninitiated reader. The bibliography, however, would have been more useful had it been provided as one list, rather than in thirty-plus lists, a separate one for almost every chapter as well as for the glossary.

The timing of this historical atlas is (sadly) more perfect than the author and the publisher most likely ever wished for, as the war in Ukraine and the discussions of its languages and ethnicities in the news will probably bring many more people consulting this *Atlas* than would have been the case otherwise. As I stated at the beginning of this review, this is truly an important work and should be used by scholars and students from many fields and for many years to come. But readers should bear in mind that the volume's wealth of language data and insightful discussions of historical and political aspects of Central European language-policies all need to be supplemented by an updated sociolinguistic analysis based on updated professional linguistic sources.