

**LANGUAGE AFFINITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE –
SOME THOUGHTS ON THE INTERRELATIONS OF GERMAN,
CZECH, SLOVAK AND MAGYAR**

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It was in 1884, when the truly European scholar and professor of the University of Graz Hugo Schuchardt published his remarkable study *Slawo-Deutsches und Slawo-Italienisches* and thus completely upset the up to then prevailing doctrine with reference to speech-mixture by stating that there was no language wholly unmixed. (Schuchardt 1884:5,127).¹ For the territory covered by his investigations, he – among other things – especially looked at the Slavo-German population of the Habsburg empire and their various products of speech-mixture, such as the wide-spread Slavic Austrianisms, the so-called ‘Kucheldeutsch’ of the Czech, the prominent Czech features in German as spoken in Bohemia as well as the leading Slovak elements in Carpatho-German of then Upper Hungary.

During the following years, a significant upsurge of interest among historical linguists and typologists in the interrelations of German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar (= Hungarian) could be discerned. New studies of different quality emerged that no longer dealt with these interference phenomena solely from puristic motive, but considered them as their main field of research. Eventually, in the thirties of the 20th century, the Prague Linguistic Circle coined the term *Sprachbund* or *language affinity*² in order to designate linguistic interference due to linguistic borrowing, mixing of languages or foreign influence in the more highly organized domains of language. In this respect, R. Jakobson (1938:52–53) anew referred to Saussure's term of *contagion*, which would take place whenever the trends of languages in contact were the same. Then, the discussion centred more or less on the so-called Eurasian *Sprachbund*. Here,

¹ See for example V. N. Jarceva (1956:8–32) for a positioning of Schuchardt and his theory in a broader historical context.

² N. S. Trubetzkoy used the French term *alliance* rendering the German term more exactly. (Vildomec 1963:110).

we cannot refrain from mentioning that the findings of German historical linguists concerned especially with the old Teutonic and old Indian languages were in part misused as a rather important ingredient of National Socialist ideology.³ To some extent, this fact also discredited parts of the theory which had been unduly made use of.

Therefore, after the war it became also a point of controversy among linguists when it would actually be proper to use the term *language affinity*. Some linguists such as T. A. Degtereva (1956:149) wanted it to characterize all sorts of interlinguistic influences without any further specification, whether and to what extent similarities and agreements among languages were due to the influence of a common prehistoric substratum or other linguistic factors and forms of language contact.⁴ But soon it became clear that the majority of linguists used the term *Sprachbund* solely to denote relatively recent, historical interference phenomena among languages as distinct to the term *substratum* referring to autochthonous proto- or prehistoric languages. (Vildomec 1963:110). Nevertheless, there is much confusion as to the terminology concerning various types of influences resulting from contacts or conflicts of languages up to this day.⁵

One linguist who just recently took up the idea of a Central European *Sprachbund* again, is the Czech Germanist Emil Skála (1992, 1998). He sees German and Czech in the centre of Central European language affinity. At the same time he puts the question, what is actually meant by a Central European *Sprachbund*, which languages and linguistic domains are involved. (Skála 1992:173,178; 1998:213). He gives no comprehensive answer, but points out that there are several parallel trends in the development of Czech and German, which simply cannot be ignored e. g. the Old High German diphthongization of $\delta > uo$ in comparison with the Old Czech diphthongization of $\delta / o > uo$, the Middle High German diphthongization of $\hat{u} > au$, $\hat{i} > ei$ compared to the Old

³ Cf. V. Vildomec (1963:120) and his unpublished doctoral thesis on *Some Modern Philosophico-religious Systems and Education* (University of London, 1962), especially his second chapter which among other things deals with J. W. Hauer and his Germanic or Indo-Germanic Faith Movement in greater detail.

⁴ "[...] что лучше было бы отказаться от термина 'субстрат' и оперировать термином 'языковой союз', который позволяет объединить все формы иноязычных влияний." (Degtereva 1956:149).

⁵ Interestingly enough, even the term *Mischsprache*, used especially in the late 19th century by linguists such as H. Paul (1886), H. Schuchardt (1884) or E. Windisch (1897), seems to see a renaissance. H. H. Munske for example just lately dedicated an article to the question whether German was a mixed language. (Munske 1988:46–74).

Czech diphthongization of $\acute{u} > ou$, $\acute{y} > ej$, the Middle High German monophthongization of $ie > \ddot{i}$ and $uo > \ddot{u}$ compared to the Old Czech monophthongization of $ie > \acute{i}$, $uo > \acute{u}$ (Skála 1998:220), or the parallel change of bilabial w into labiodental v (Skála 1992:175). Although these phonological changes seem to have emerged in each language autonomously, this does not challenge the fact that due to an intensive cultural-historical as well as socio-economical contact situation, both German and Czech have developed similar internal preconditions to be predisposed to these changes. The same seems to be true of the development of the New High German analytic future *werden + infinitive* in comparison with the analytic future forms in the Slavic languages (Leiss 1985)⁶.

However, not only German and Czech are affected. With regard to the phonological change $g > \gamma (x) > h$, for example, the Slovak linguist Ludovít Novák (1939/40) calls our attention to the developmental parallels of 12th and 13th century Czech, Slovak and Magyar in the heyday of German colonization. In this respect, Novák eludes the issue of direct linguistic influence by introducing the notion of *convergence* in order to denote parallel developmental changes, with Slovak and Magyar being originally both part of the Eurasian *Sprachbund*. Subsequently, Ladislav A. Arany (1946/47) demands to take the explanatory principle of convergence more strongly into account as far as Slovak and Magyar are concerned. Unfortunately, neither Novák's nor Arany's postulates seem to have been a factor of importance in post-war linguistic research. Only recently, Tilman Berger (1995)⁷ takes up some of Novák's theses again to discuss the analogous stress relations in Czech, Slovak, Magyar, Upper and Lower Sorbian as well as German. It is their similarity with reference to word stress which Skála (1992:221) regards as one important distinctive feature of the Central European *Sprachbund*. In this respect, František Daneš (1957) calls our attention also to the analogous intonation in German and Czech as another characteristic of Central European language affinity.⁸ Other important distinctive features are parallel surnames in German,

⁶ By reversing K. Rösler's *Beobachtungen und Gedanken über das analytische Futurum im Slavischen* (1952, WSIJb 2:103–149), E. Leiss (1985) even tries to explain the development of New High German *werden + inf.* by the influence of Czech.

⁷ In his well-grounded article, T. Berger introduces a new and plausible approach to the development of stress fixation in the West Slavic languages. In another article (1999), he even carefully proposes to regard vowel-mutation in Old Czech as a Slavic-German language contact phenomenon.

⁸ In a similar way, J. Pokorný (1936:70) refers to the Slavic intonation in Germanized parts of Old Austria.

Czech, Slovak and Magyar as e. g. *Gärtner – Zahradník – Záhradník – Kertész* (cf. *Gardener*), *Fischer – Rybář – Rybár – Halász* (cf. *Fisherman*), *Schmied – Kovář – Kováč – Kovács* (cf. *Smith*) and so on, resembling phraseological expressions such as *klar wie Kristall – čistý jako křišťál – čistý ako křišťál – kristálytisztá* (cf. *crystal-clear*); *guten Appetit – dobrou chuť – dobrú chuť – jó étvágyat* (cf. *bon appetit*); *nicht um alles in der Welt – za nic na svete – za nič na svete – a villágért sem* (cf. *not for the world*) and numerous proverbs common to German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar. However, these phenomena are not only typical of Central European language affinity, but of the whole so-called European Sprachbund with the master language Latin and later French.⁹

One of the most prominent features of Central European language affinity, however, is the great amount of German loan words and loan translations in almost all linguistic layers and social strata of Czech, Slovak and – to some extent also – of Magyar.¹⁰ Although the number of German loans is naturally higher in the colloquial variants of those languages as well as their several dialects, there are still innumerable loans which penetrated into standard Czech, Slovak and either directly or through Slavic mediation also into Magyar in the course of many generations. Already in Old Czech up to the year 1500, for example, we are able to make out about 1500 German loans (Skála 1992:176), mainly nouns. German loans in Old Czech, Old Slovak and in part also in Old Magyar can be identified among others in the following domains:¹¹

⁹ See for example H. Becker (1948:19–20) or the reports edited by G. Gréciano (1989).

¹⁰ On German loan words in Czech see e. g. Mayer (1927) and Schneeweis (1912) [both outdated], on German loans in Slovak see e. g. Rudolf (1991) [outdated], on German loan translations in Czech see e. g. Reiter (1953), on Slavic loans in Magyar see e. g. Kniezsa (1955).

¹¹ The following table contains solely a representative selection of examples. They are cited in their respective standard forms of today. Since it is irrelevant to the point of this study, we did not differentiate between German loans that were mediated to Magyar directly (such as *erkély, kehely, ...*) and those that came to Magyar obviously through the medium of a Slavic language (e. g. *konyha, malom, ...*). All examples were verified in Machek (³1971), Mayer (1927), Rudolf (1991), Benkő (1967–1976; 1993–1995) and others such as SSSJČ, SSJ, Jungmann etc.

domain	Czech	Slovak	Magyar	modern meaning
nobility and public authorities	šlechta hrabě herský ^{dial.} rychtář šoltys	šľachta gróf herský richtár šoltys	gróf	nobility count lordly, manorial reeve (village) mayor
chivalry	rytíř kavalír knap ^{coll.} oř turnaj cíř klenot puklice hurt ^{coll.} rej tanec	rytier gavalier knap ^{coll.} <i>paripa</i> turnaj cieľ klenot puklica hurt ^{coll.} tanec	gavallér <i>paripa</i> torna cél tánc	knight cavalier, gallant page steed tourney, joust aim, target, butt jewel, gem lid, dish-cover vehemence round dance dance
stock-farming	bachyně †meryně	machna ¹² †merhyňa		(wild) sow whore [orig. mare]
ornithology	bažant páv šněp ^{coll.}	bažant páv, páva šněp ^{coll.}	<i>fácán</i> (< It.) páva	pheasant peacock snipe
cooking	kuchyně kuchta spíže, špiže pekař pánev cukr moždíř, hmoždíř talíř žemle †calta lektvar ^{coll.}	kuchyňa kuchta špajza, špajz pekár panva cukor <i>mažiar</i> ¹⁴ <i>tanier</i> žemľa calta lekvár	konyha kukta pék cukor <i>mozsár</i> <i>tányér</i> zsemle lekvár	kitchen messy cook ¹³ larder, pantry baker pan sugar mortar plate (Vienna) roll gingerbread electuary / jam ¹⁵

¹² This form is used in colloquial Czech to denote – in a pejorative way – a fat woman.

¹³ The Magyar word has still the meaning of Old Czech *kuchta* (= kitchen-boy).

¹⁴ Slovak *mažiar* is derived from Old Magyar *mazsár* still in use in some dialects.

¹⁵ The meaning of the loan in Slovak and Magyar (= jam, stewed fruit) is different from the one in Czech (= electuary, nostrum, concoction).

	fazole vikev kapusta	fazuľa, pasula ^{dial.} vika kapusta kel	paszuly káposzta kel ¹⁸	string bean ¹⁶ vetch cabbage (kale) ¹⁷ kale
herbalism	libeček lekořice pižmo baldrián	ľubček ^{coll.} , lipštiak ^{dial.} , lekorica ^{coll.} pižmo baldrián	 pézsma	lovage liquorice musk valerian
trading and commerce	halět †věrdunk, †věrduňk cedule žold žok funt činže kartoun barchet	halier verdúnok ^{dial.} ceduľa žold žoch funt činža kartún barchet, barchan	 cédula zsold zsák font karton barhent	heller quarter of a pound slip of paper pay sack pound rent calico, chintz fustian
archi- tecture	došek, doch arkýř cimbuř loubí	doch ^{dial.} arkier cimburie <i>filagória</i>	erkély <i>filagória</i>	thatch oriel, bay battlement, pinnacle arbour, pergola
mining	žumpa žula cín zinek cinobr huť štola fládr havíř	žumpa žula cín zinok cinóber huta, hút štólňa fláder haviar / <i>baník</i>	zsomp cinn cink cinóber huta <i>bányász</i>	sump, sink, cesspit ¹⁹ granite tin zinc cinnabar smeltery tunnel, adit vein getter, hewer ²⁰

¹⁶ Cf. also non-German loan *bob* in Czech, *bôb* in Slovak, *bab* in Magyar < Latin *faba*.

¹⁷ The meaning of the loan in Slovak and Magyar (= white cabbage in the sense of Czech *zef*) is different from the one in Czech (= kale).

¹⁸ The Magyar word can not only stand for English *kale*, but also *savoy*.

¹⁹ The Magyar word denotes merely a *sump* or *sink* in mining, whereas in Czech and Slovak the loan in particular stands for English *cesspit*, *cesspool* or *lime-pit*.

	šachta trakáť	šachta trakáč	tragacs	pit, shaft wheelbarrow
cart- wrighting	líšeň lounek	ľušňa lónik		linchpin hub bolt, linchpin
joinery	skříň lišta truhla	skriňa lišta truhla / <i>láda</i>	szekrény <i>láda</i>	cupboard, wardrobe ledge chest
cooperage	putna kbelík, kbel úborek škopek	putňa gbel ^{coll.} úborka škop	puttony	(high) tub, vat, butt bucket, pail pail, bucket tub
weaving	valcha šlichta čaloun cíp	valcha šlichta čalún cíp vankúš	 vánkös	fuller size, dressing tapestry lappet cushion, pad
millery	młyn †žejbrovat	mlyn žubrovat', zubrovat'	malom	mill riddle grain
religion	almužna biřmovat kalich mnich papež žaltář žehnatí klášter kacíř	almužna birmovat' kalich mních pápež žaltár žehnat' kláštor kacíř	alamizsna kehely zsoltár kolostor, klastrom	alms confirm calyx, cup, chalice monk popé psalter bless cloister, monastery heretic

legend: dial. = dialectism, coll. = colloquialism, † = obsolete word, orig. = originally, It. = Italian; examples within the table quoted in *Italics* are not German loans, but Magyar words and Magyar loans in Slovak.

Unless marked otherwise, these loans are now fixed constituents of the mentioned languages' standard varieties. Native speakers of today normally use them without being aware of their foreign origin. Those examples cited which are obviously of Latin, Greek, neo-Latin or Romance origin (e. g. *kavallr*,

²⁰ The Magyar word *bányász* and the Magyar loan in Slovak *baník* have the more general meaning *pitman* or *collier*.

turnaj, paripa, tanec, bažant, páv, žemle, ...), were mediated through the medium of German, which was often the case with European internationalisms, though not always. The table also clearly shows the special position of Slovak taking loans both from German and Magyar, though to a greater extent from German.

Naturally, lexical borrowing took also place in the opposite direction. Especially Old and Middle High German dialects near German-Czech, German-Slovak and German-Magyar contact zones were affected, but just a few Slavic, Czech, Slovak and Magyar loans got really incorporated into the later German standard, e. g. *Kummet* (horse-collar), *Grendel* (plough beam), *Halunke* (scoundrel), *Petschaft* (seal, signet) or *Tolpatsch* (gawk).

In the following years to come, especially in the flowering period of the Habsburg Empire, the adoption of German loans increased even more. Up to the 20th century innumerable German loans (but also loan translations, loan renditions and loan creations, various hybrids and pseudo-translations)²¹ from domains such as the authorities, jurisdiction, education or the imperial and royal armed forces got adopted. Despite supreme efforts of purists to fight these influences tooth and nail, extralinguistic factors such as the consolidation of the Habsburg Monarchy and its long continuance as well as the busy migration of certain social groups like craftsmen, merchants, day-labourers, servants and others fostered the integration of expressions for things of everyday use and other terms referring to cooking, food and dishes, fashion and dressmaking, furnishings and so on. In this regard, Skála (1998:216) calls our attention to the fact that interestingly enough, many of the most common German loans in Czech²² can also be made out in other languages of Old Austria, especially in their colloquial variants. As for Slovak and Magyar, he mentions among others *Gesindel* – *ksindl* – *ksindl* – *kszindli* (scoundrels, riff-raff), *Rucksack* – *ruksak* – *ruksak* – *rukszak* (knap-, rucksack) or *Schwindel* – *švindl* – *švindl* – *svindli* (swindle, cheat).²³ (Skála 1998:217). However, not all

²¹ For reasons of space, we cannot really go into detail here. However, I want to hint out with Vildomec (1963:121) that some words, loans already in German, acquired there a sense quite different from the original meaning due to popular etymology, such as the French *Château Morelle* > German *Schattenmorelle*. The German word was then translated among others into Czech as *amarelka stinná*. This led eventually to the fatal mistake that in Central Europe, the tree was planted in places without sun, where it just would not bear any fruit.

²² This means that the use of a certain loan can be verified more than ten times throughout the whole Czech-speaking area. Skála counts more than 300 word units.

²³ The examples are cited in the following order of languages: German, Czech, Slovak,

of his examples are really conclusive such as e. g. *akkurat – akorát – akurát – akkurátus*. Whereas the Czech and Slovak words are colloquial adverbs meaning "exactly" – and only those forms are really German loans (Machek 1971:34) –, the Magyar word is not a German loan, but an international adjective meaning "accurate" (cf. Czech †*akurátní*^{coll.}, Slovak *akurátny*^{coll.} < Latin *accuratus*).

Certainly, Skála's remark has its validity, but I think he does not really get to the core of the whole thing by unluckily giving just a small number of rather atypical examples and omitting one very important differentiation. For if we take a more detailed look at the matter, we can determine a clear *convergence* of the vocabularies of Czech, Slovak, Magyar and the German standard as spoken in Old Austria. On the one hand many German loans of this time in Czech, Slovak and Magyar derive from German words which are still or at least were in use solely in the Austrian variety of High German. On the other hand, also many Slavic, Magyar and Romance words found their way into the German of Old Austria and thus set to a great extent the typical character of the Austrian variety of standard High German.²⁴ And many of these words were again passed on to other languages of the Habsburg Empire through the medium of Austrian German. The following table contains a representative selection of examples of all kinds:²⁵

Magyar.

²⁴ On the interrelations of the Austrian variety of German and Czech see e. g. Nagl (1887) [outdated and defective, but amusing] and Spáčilová (1995), of the Austrian variety of German and Slovak see e. g. Papsonová (1995), of the Austrian variety of German and Magyar see e. g. Nagy (1993). For more detailed information on the Austrian variety of German and also its interrelations with other languages of the Habsburg Empire see e. g. the reports edited by R. Muhr et al. (1993, 1995, 1997).

²⁵ The English equivalents are in succession of their appearance: *yeast pastries; hard smoked sausage; zip-fastener; automat; chauffeur; armchair; bed-sitter; wash-basin; ceiling; hand-brush; little kiss; 10 grammes = 154,324 grains (troy and avoirdupois); Shrovetide; smart; fun; (Vienna) roll; barrel-organ; celeriac; biscuits; cauliflower; mortar; pester; tobacco-shop; assistant director* (one of the innumerable titles of civil servants in the Habsburg Empire); *register; school-leaving exam; sell by auction; currant; spice with paprika; pancake; pancake with greaves; Indian corn.*

medium	German as spoken in		Czech	Slovak	Magyar
	Austria ²⁶	Germany			
Cz./Slk.	Buchtel	Hefegebäck	buchta	buchta	bukta
Cz./Slk.	Klobasse	Dauerwurst	klobása	klobása	kolbász
En./Ger.	Zipp	Reißverschluss	zip	zips	cipzár
Fr./Ger.	Automaten- bufet	Schnellimbiss	automat, bufet	automat, bufet	automata büfé
Fr./Ger.	Chauffeur	Krautfahrer	šofér	šofér	sofőr
Fr./Ger.	Fauteuil	Polstersessel	†fotel ^{coll.}	fotel ^{coll.}	fotel
Fr./Ger.	Garçonniere	Einzimmer- wohnung	garsoniéra	garsoniéra	garzonlákás
Fr./Ger.	Lavoire	Waschbecken	lavor ^{coll.} , lavór ^{coll.}	lavór ^{dial.}	lavór
Fr./Ger.	Plafond	Zimmerdecke	†plafond	plafón ^{coll.}	plafon
Ger.	Bartwisch	Handbesen	†portviš ^{coll.}	portviš ^{coll.}	partvis
Ger.	Busserl, Bussi	Küsschen	pusa, pusinka	pusa ^{coll.} , -sinka ^{coll.}	puszi
Ger.	Deka ^{coll.}	10 Gramm	deko ^{coll.} , deka ^{coll.}	deka ^{coll.}	deka ^{coll.}
Ger.	Fasching	Fastnacht	fašank(y) ^{dial.}	fašiangy	farsang
Ger.	fesch	elegant, schick	feš ^{coll.}	feš ^{coll.}	fess
Ger.	Hetz	Spaß	hec ^{coll.}	hec ^{coll.}	hecc
Ger.	Semmel	Brötchen	žemle	žeml'a	zsemle
Ger.	Werkel	Leierkasten	vergl ^{coll.}	verkeľ ^{coll.}	verkli
Ger.	Zeller	Sellerie	celer	zeler	zeller
It./Ger.	Biskotten	Biskuit	piškot	piškóta	piskóta
It./Ger.	Karfiol	Blumenkohl	karfiol	karfiol	karfiol
It./Ger.	Malter	Mörtel	malta	malta	malter ^{coll.}
It./Ger.	sekkieren	belästigen	sekýrovat ^{coll.}	sekírovat'	szekálni
It./Ger.	Trafik	Tabakladen	trafika	trafika	trafik
L./Ger.	Adjunkt	Oberassistent	adjunkt	adjunkt	adjunktus
L./Ger.	Evidenz	amtl. Register	evidence	evidencia	evidencia
L./Ger.	lizitieren	versteigern	licitovat	licitovat'	licitálni
L./Ger.	Matura	Abitur	maturita	maturita	matura
L./Ger.	Ribisel	Johannisbeere	rybíz	ríbeze	ribiszke
Hu.	paprizieren	mit Paprika würzen	paprikovat	paprikovat'	paprikázni
Ro./Hu.	Palatschinke	Pfannkuchen	palačinka	palacinka	palacsinta

²⁶ Here, it is necessary to mention the fact that the words which in dictionaries are often simplistically marked as Austrianisms, are most typical of the German variety as spoken in the East of Austria and not always in use in the rest of Austria.

Ro./Hu. Tr./Ro.	Pogatsche Kukuruz	Eierkuchen Mais	pagáč ^{dial.} kukuřice	pagáč kukurica	pagácsa kukorica
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legend: dial. = dialectism, coll. = colloquialism, † = obsolete word; Cz. = Czech, Slk. = Slovak, It. = Italian, En. = English, Ger. = German, L. = Latin, Hu. = Magyar (Hungarian), Ro. = Roumanian, Tr. = Turkish

However, the vocabularies of German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar are not only distinguished by this manifest lexical convergence. The close contacts between those languages throughout centuries led also to many agreements among the distribution of semantic content in their word fields. Skála (1998:176) mentions for example the far-reaching conformity of the word field of the about 150 verbs of locomotion in Czech and German with regard to their word sense.

Yet, what about the other linguistic levels? It is often emphasized that in spite of the strong German influence on the lexical level, other levels such as the grammatical structure of Czech, Slovak, German and Magyar have never been decisively touched upon. But then, would it be justified to speak of true language affinity between German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar? Here, again, a differentiation is necessary to make in order to get to the core of the matter. For if we take a more detailed look at the Austrian variety of standard High German, the convergence of Czech, Slovak, Magyar and Austrian German becomes also manifest in the grammatical structure of these languages, although again on a deeper layer of semantic content.

Let's take for example the use of prepositions in Austrian German, Czech and Slovak as well as the use of the corresponding suffixes in Magyar: in English and in German as spoken in Germany we take an examination *in* a subject such as Russian, mathematics and so on (= *eine Prüfung in Russisch, ... ablegen*); however, the equivalents in Austrian German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar are in this succession: "*eine Prüfung aus Russisch, ... ablegen*", "*vykonat zkoušku z ruštiny, ...*", "*vykonat skúšku z ruštiny, ...*", "*oroszból, ... vizgázni*". The meaning of the prepositions *aus*, *z/ze* and *z/zo* as well as the Magyar suffixes *-ból/-ből* is the same (literally *out of, from, of*). Similarly, in English and German as spoken in Germany we sit *at* the table (= *am Tisch sitzen*); the equivalents in Austrian German, Czech, Slovak and Magyar are however: "*bei Tisch sitzen*", "*sedět u stolu*", "*sedieť pri stole*", "*asztalnál ülni*". The meaning of the prepositions *bei*, *u* and *pri* as well as the Magyar suffixes *-nál/-nél* is the same, again (literally *near, close to*).

A striking feature of Austrian German – especially of its colloquial variety – in contrast to German as spoken in Germany is also the extensive use of the

preposition *auf* (= literally *on, upon*): *auf der Universität, auf der Post, auf dem Hof, auf dem Konzert, auf dem Markt*.²⁷ In many cases, this special characteristic can once more be associated with the use of the preposition *na* in Czech "*na univerzitě, na poště, na dvoře, na koncertě, na tržišti, ...*" and Slovak "*na univerzite, na pošte, na dvore, na koncerte, na trhovisku, ...*" as well as the use of the Magyar suffix *-n* (*-on, -en, -ön*) with the same meaning "*az egyetemen, a postán, az udvaron, a koncerten, a piacon, ...*".

Obviously, all these examples seem to prove right assertions of the American sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1974) who claims that different languages can form a speech community under political and social influence. But already Roman Jakobson (1938:52) anticipated this idea by stating that the limits of language affinities seem to coincide strikingly with boundaries of physical and political geography.

Yet, profound and detailed studies of Central European language affinity on the territory of the former Habsburg Empire are still pending. Apart from the languages mentioned, such an investigation would also have to consider all the other languages spoken in Old Austria as well as the influence of Latin and French. Moreover, one would also have to take into account the special intermediary role of Yiddish as well as the specific development of Romani on the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Although up to now, many articles and monographs have emerged that analyse particular aspects of the matter²⁸, synthesizing approaches have been rare. Moreover, contrastive studies of German and Magyar, Czech, Slovak and other languages often suffer from the disregard of the pluricentricity of the German language.

One reason for this shortcoming may be the fact that – although important work has already been done so far²⁹ – there are just a handful comprehensive works of reference with regard to the typically Austrian norms of the usage of High German.³⁰ We still lack for example a comprehensive dictionary of Austrian German pronunciation, dictionaries of Austrian German for specific

²⁷ The English equivalents are: *at the university, at the post-office, in (on) the courtyard, at the concert, in (on) the market, at the station / stop*.

²⁸ See for instance the several important reports on language contacts in Central Europe in Goebel et al. (1996–1997: 1583 ff.).

²⁹ See e. g. R. Muhr (1993:124–132) for a bibliography of studies on German as spoken in Austria. R. Muhr also supervises an informative www-site on the standard variety of Austrian German (<http://gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/~muhr/oedt/>) with a bibliography of studies on Austrian German (<http://gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/~muhr/oedt/bibloede.html>).

³⁰ See e. g. R. Muhr et al. (1993, 1995, 1997), W. Pollak (1992, 1994) and P. Wiesinger (1988).

purposes (e. g. Austrian administrative language), dictionaries of Austrian idioms and phraseologisms, and a practically orientated grammar of Austrian German in use.

When in days to come, this drawback will have been removed successfully, we will not only once and for all be rid of our uncertainties with regard to the standard form of High German as spoken in Austria, but also be able to embark more safely on the daring project of analysing the interrelations of the Austrian variety of standard German and its neighbouring languages in greater detail. On the one hand, this would be of eminent consequence for a better understanding of Central European language affinity. On the other, it could once more display the leading role of Old Austria for the development of a typically Central European cultural area, being itself at the centre of the crossroads of cultures.

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