
Central European Convergence Area:
Theoretical and Methodological Considerations
Srednjeevropska jezikovna zveza: teoretično-metodološki premisleki
Legu linguistica mitteleuropea: alcune riflessioni teorico-metodologiche

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Abstract

The article approaches Slavic languages from the viewpoint of areal linguistic typology. The main question addressed is how these languages developed within the individual convergence areas, using the theory and methodology of historical linguistics. As far as the *Sprachbunds* in relation to Slavic are concerned, some scholars define the so-called *Central European convergence area*. The theoretical and methodological approach in defining this linguistic league is critically assessed, offering a methodologically more solid framework and the main objectives in the investigation of this phenomenon.

Keywords: Slavic languages, European linguistic area, Central European convergence area

Izvlček

V prispevku so slovanski jeziki – pojem jezik je tu razumljen kot zemljepisna jezikovna pojavnost (geolekt) in ne zgolj kot *knjižni/standardni jezik* (sociolekt) – obravnavani v kontekstu arealne jezikovne tipologije. Z vidika teorije in metodologije zgodovinskega jezikoslovja se odgovarja na vprašanje njihovega oblikovanja znotraj jezikovnih zvez. V zvezi s slovanskimi jeziki se v jezikoslovni literaturi namreč omenja tudi *srednjeevropska jezikovna zveza*. V kritični pretres je vzet teoretično-metodološki pristop pri določanju te jezikovne zveze. Predlagana so nekatera teoretično-metodološka izhodišča za dopolnitev raziskovanja na tem področju.

Ključne besede: slovanski jeziki, evropski jezikovni prostor, srednjeevropska jezikovna zveza

Sintesi

Il presente contributo si pone lo scopo di esaminare le lingue slave – in questo caso il termine *lingua* è da intendersi come entità linguistica geografica (ovvero *geoletto*) e non come *lingua letteraria/standard* (ovvero *socioletto*) – nel contesto della tipologia areale delle lingue. In particolare verrà esaminata la loro formazione all'interno di possibili aree linguistiche dal punto di vista dell'apparato della linguistica storica. In relazione alle lingue slave viene infatti definito anche il cosiddetto *mitteleuropäischer Sprachbund* ovvero la *lega linguistica mitteleuropea*. Nell'articolo verranno illustrate alcune modificazioni del concetto di quest'ultima.

Parole chiave: lingue slave, area linguistica europea, lega linguistica mitteleuropea

Introduction¹

In genealogical linguistic research within Slavic comparative linguistics, the genesis of the individual Slavic languages and their dialect macro-areas have been relatively well researched.² However, many questions remain unanswered concerning the formation of the Slavic languages within the different hypothesized *linguistic* or *convergence areas* (German *Sprachbund*, Italian *lega linguistica*, Russian *jazykovoju sojuz*). Apart from the evolution within the Slavic *dialect continuum*, the Slavic languages allegedly form a part of different *convergence areas*. As far as the ‘major’ linguistic areas are concerned, Slavic is supposed to belong to the so-called *European linguistic area* or *Standard Average European* (SAE), with West Germanic, Gallo-Romance and northern Italo-Romance playing the role of ‘core languages’ and sharing most of the defining features, while other European languages seem to take on a ‘peripheral’ position (Haspelmath 2001, 1493). As far as ‘minor’ European linguistic areas involving Slavic are concerned, at least two have found their way into scholarly discussion, namely the *Balkan Sprachbund* and the *Central European convergence area*. The former has actually been present in Slavic studies since the beginning (cf. Kopitar 1829; Miklosich 1861), while the latter has been receiving heightened attention since the 1990s (cf. Kurzová 1996, 2019). In addition, attempts have been made recently to also include in the list the so-called *Alpine convergence area* (German *Alpensprachbund*).³

1 The present contribution builds on some of the considerations on this topic that were partly presented in Šekli (2020, 2021 and 2022).

2 For a more accurate presentation of the formation of Slavic languages and their dialect macro-areas as well as for the criteria of their genealogical linguistic classification see Šekli (2018).

3 The *Alpine convergence area* would comprise some Romance, German and Slovenian varieties in the Alps (cf. Gaeta and Seiler 2021). One of the more conspicuous characteristics of this convergence area is allegedly the venitive passive, present in Romance as well as Bavarian and Alemannic varieties of German, and some Slovenian dialects in contact with Friulian and Italian, e.g. dial. German *Dã kummt de nei(e) Schul gebaut* = Italian *Qui viene costruita la nuova scuola*, ‘A new school is being built’, dial. Slo-

This article aims to provide a critical analysis of the theoretical and methodological approach in defining the Central European convergence area. First, the structural linguistic features of the languages of this hypothesized linguistic league are presented in an overview. In addition to that, the definition of the Central European *Sprachbund* is critically assessed from the viewpoint of historical linguistics. In direct relation to this, the theory and methodology of genealogical linguistics and areal language typology are confronted. Last, some theoretically and methodologically justifiable objectives in the investigation of the convergence phenomena in Central Europe are delineated.

Defining the *Central European convergence area*

In the context of areal typology of European languages, the languages in Central Europe are supposed to belong to the so-called *Central European convergence area* (Kurzová 1996, 2019; Skála 1998, 1999).⁴ In the following paragraphs a brief summary of the definition of the latter will be given, as formulated in Kurzová (1996) (with some additions published in Kurzová (2019)).

According to Kurzová, the *Central European convergence area* would include German and Hungarian as well as the so-called *Central European Slavic languages*. Amongst the latter, Czech and Slovak would represent ‘core’ languages of the purported linguistic league, while Polish and Slovenian would take a ‘peripheral’ position, with ‘Serbo-Croatian’ representing a transitional language zone between the Central Europe-

venian (precisely, the Slovenian dialect of Rezija/Resia in the locality of Osojane/Oseacco) *Injãn tve dugave ni parhaã zapisane od avokatã* = Italian *Adesso I tuoi debiti vengono annotati dall'avvocato*, ‘Now your debts are being put down by a solicitor’ (Pila 2021). However, from the cited examples it is evident that what we are dealing with here is simply the unilateral influence of Romance varieties on German and Slovenian dialects!

4 In the original papers on the topic the following terminology is used: *Sprachareal*, ‘linguistic area’ (Kurzová 1996), *Sprachbund*, ‘linguistic league’ (Skála 1998, 1999), and *convergence area* (Kurzová 2019).

an and the Balkan Slavic languages.⁵ The decisive criterion here would be the placement of the accent, namely on the first syllable in the ‘core’ languages (i.e. German, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak) and not on the first syllable in the ‘peripheral’ ones (i.e. Polish, Slovenian).

The Central European linguistic area is to be delimited in relation to the Western European, North-Eastern European (among the North-Eastern European languages Polish, Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian as well as Lithuanian and Finnish are mentioned), and Balkan linguistic areas. First, in relation to the so-called Western European languages, which have an analytic nominal ‘declension’, the Central European languages can be distinguished by their retention of a synthetic nominal morphology. This is the case of word inflection (German *Wortflexion*) in German, stem inflection (German *Stammflexion*) in Slavic, and agglutination in Hungarian. It is assumed that German retained the synthetic declension due to contact with Slavic languages and Hungarian. Second, from the so-called North-Eastern European languages, which display various types of sentences other than those with finite verb form and the agent and the patient in the nominative and accusative case, respectively (Polish *Gotowano obiady I wieczrze*, ‘Lunches and dinners are being pre-

pared’, literally ‘(It is) prepared lunches and dinners’, *Tak mu się to powiedziało*, ‘He told so (involuntarily)’, literally ‘So was this said to him’, Russian *Mne zevaetsja*, ‘I am yawning’, literally ‘It is yawning to me’), the Central European languages are to be distinguished by the predominant absence of such sentence structures. Sentence structures with a finite verb form and an unmarked subject-verb-object word order are predominant in the Western European languages, which is thought to be a consequence of the emergence of analyticism within the nominal and pronominal systems.⁶

According to Kurzová (1996 and 2019), the individual features of the languages of the Central European linguistic area are supposed to be as follows: A) on the phonetic level: 1) the placement of the accent on the first syllable; 2) a phonologically relevant quantitative opposition; and B) on the morphosyntactic level: 1) synthetic nominal inflexion; 2) synthetic comparison of adjectives and adverbs; 3) a simple three-tense verb system (consisting of past, present and future) without any formal and semantic (functional) distinction between the different past tense forms; 4) periphrastic future with an auxiliary verb with an ingressive meaning (i.e. German *werden* ‘to become’, Slavic **bqd-* ‘to become’, Hungarian *fog* ‘to grab, grasp’); 5) periphrastic passive; 6) bicentric sentence structure with an unmarked subject-verb-object word order; 7) limited use of participles; 8) relative clauses with relative pronouns, originating from interrogative pronouns; 9) productivity of prefixation and, consequently, high frequency of prefixed verbs.

Linguistic genealogy vs. areal linguistic typology

From the above survey of the structural linguistic features of the languages of the hypothesized *Central European convergence area*, the overall theoretical-methodological approach in de-

5 In the framework of genealogical linguistics, ‘Serbo-Croatian’ has been replaced by the more appropriate term, namely *Central South Slavic*, cf. Croatian *srednjojužnoslavenski jezik* ‘Central South Slavic language’ (Lončarić 1996, 29), Russian *srednejužnoslovjanskije govory* ‘Central South Slavic varieties’ (Obščeslavjanskij lingvističeskij atlas 2006, 158), etc. This geolect (i.e. a geographical linguistic phenomenon) encompasses the following dialect macro-areas: Kajkavian, Čakavian, Western Štokavian, and Eastern Štokavian. On the basis of the Eastern Herzegovinian dialect (*istočnohercegovački dijalekt*), a literary language was formed in the mid-19th century – cf. the Vienna Literary Agreement (*bečki književni dogovor*) from 1850 – called *srpskohrvatski* ‘Serbo-Croatian’ or *hrvatskosrpski* ‘Croato-Serbian’. After 1991, the standard language in question split into four independent standard languages, i.e. sociolects (note here that sociolects are social linguistic phenomena and have little or nothing to do with geneolinguistic classification), Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin. Thus, the term ‘Serbo-Croatian’ has the value of a historical denomination, i.e. it refers to the historical literary/standard language (c. 1850–1991) that took shape and was in use in the entire Central South Slavic linguistic area.

6 However, the Central European convergence area seems to be open mainly to the Western European and North-Eastern European linguistic areas, but not to the Balkan one.

fining this linguistic area in Kurzová (1996 and 2019) can easily be deduced. The methodology of the areal linguistic typology, at least in this case, resembles that of linguistic genealogy, which, however, is not justified on all counts. The definition of the Central European linguistic area within European languages is based on the geographical distribution of linguistic phenomena, which is a well-known principle in linguistic genealogy, cf. the *wave theory* (German *Wellentheorie*), explaining the spatial spread of linguistic innovation within a *dialect continuum* (Schmidt 1872, 27). However, unlike linguistic genealogy, the areal linguistic typology presented by Kurzová does not take into account the (relative and absolute) chronology of the emergence/formation of the linguistic phenomena under consideration. In addition to that, the linguistic criteria for the delimitation of the Central European linguistic area in relation to the neighbouring areas, as well as the criteria for the internal diversification of the analysed area itself, are rather heterogeneous and without a clear hierarchy. The criteria seem to span the domain of morphology (the type of nominal and pronominal inflexion, comparison of adjectives and adverbs, system of verbal tenses), syntax (the type of sentence structure), and phonetics (placement of the accent).

Table 1: The morphosyntactic features of 'Balkan' and 'Central European' Slavic languages

'Balkan' Slavic languages	'Central European' Slavic languages
analytic nominal and pronominal inflexion	synthetic nominal and pronominal inflexion
analytic comparison of adjectives and adverbs	synthetic comparison of adjectives and adverbs
complex system of verbal tenses	three-dimensional system of verbal tenses (past-present-future)
presence of formal and semantic (functional) distinction between different past tenses	absence of formal and semantic (functional) distinction between different past tenses
peripheral future with a volutive auxiliary meaning 'to want'	peripheral future with an ingressive auxiliary meaning 'to become', 'to grab'

Finally, the defining Central European morpho-syntactic features seem to have been inspired by the model of, and in contrast to, the features of the Balkan languages (cf. Table 1: Morphosyntactic features of the 'Balkan' and 'Central European' Slavic languages).⁷ The problems that such methodology creates are perhaps best addressed by contrasting the approach of linguistic genealogy with that of linguistic typology.

Linguistic genealogy

Linguistic genealogy groups idioms, i.e. linguistic systems and diasystems, within a linguistic *continuum* (originally geographical, secondarily social as well) of genetically related idioms according to the degree of their *genetic affiliation*, i.e. genetic identity in diachronic perspective. The theory and methodology of genealogical linguistic classification have been most precisely elaborated in the comparative linguistic studies of the Indo-European languages, as well as in the comparative linguistics of the individual Indo-European branches, including Slavic.

Linguistic genealogy takes into account divergent linguistic change in a linguistic continuum – usually referred to as *dialect continuum* – whereby from an 'ancestor' idiom several 'descendant' idioms arise. A common linguistic 'ancestor' gradually transforms into smaller 'descendant' idioms due to geographically limited linguistic innovations. Consequently, because of language change, linguistic diversity of genetically related idioms arises. In order to designate the genetic relationship between idioms, linguistic genealogy uses terms such as *proto-language* (German *Ursprache*, Italian *protolingua*, Russian *prajazyk*) and *language family* (German *Sprachfamilie*, Italian *famiglia linguistica*, Russian *jazykovoe semejstvo*), *language branch* or *language group*, *language*, *dialect base (macro-area)* or *dialect group*, *dialect*, *local dialect*.⁸ Genealog-

⁷ For linguistic Balkanisms cf. Banfi (1985); Asenova (2002); Mišeska Tomić (2006); Fiedler (2009). For Balkanisms in Macedonian and Bulgarian cf. Šekli (2018, 51–72).

⁸ The pairs *proto-language* – *language family*, *language branch* – *language group*, and *dialect base* – *dialect group* denote linguistic entities, the genetic relationship of which

ical linguistics comprises comparative linguistics, which traces language change from the proto-language to the nascence of a language, and dialectology, studying linguistic fragmentation of a language to its dialect bases, dialects, and local varieties. Thus, linguistic genealogy reconstructs divergent language change and the consequent emergence of linguistic diversity of genetically related idioms, and is therefore a part of historical linguistics.⁹

In the field of linguistic genealogy, the most important criterion in determining linguistic relatedness is *historical phonetics* (cf. Šekli 2018, 40–42). In the 1870s, the Leipzig Neogrammarian school of linguistics (German *Junggrammatiker*) came to the correct conclusion that sound change is by far the most systematic process among the changes that can affect a given language. Sound changes can be accurately captured by mathematically precise rules (rather appropriately, the Neogrammarians called them *Lautgesetze*, i.e. sound laws) (cf. Osthoff and Brugmann 1878, 13). In comparison to the (historical) phonetic criterion, the morphological and the syntactic criteria are less important, while the lexical criterion is practically irrelevant. In sum, the very basis of the genealogical linguistic classification of idioms are therefore the phonetic features (i.e. innovations and archaisms) of the idioms under consideration which have the value of genetic criteria. The morphological features can be added to phonetic ones, but only if the areas of innovation in the domain of morphology overlap with those involving sound change. In determining the genetic criteria, geographical distribution of linguistic innovations and their (relative and absolute) chronology are very important.

can be described as ‘ancestor – descendant’. Namely, a proto-language splits into a language family, a language branch gives origin to a language group, and a dialect base splits into a dialect group.

9 For the origins of (historical-)comparative linguistics and the development of its theory and methodology in the 19th century cf. Pedersen (1931); for the theory and methodology of historical linguistics cf. Hock (2021).

Areal linguistic typology

Areal linguistic typology groups idioms, i.e. linguistic systems and diasystems, within a linguistic *area* of genetically related and unrelated idioms according to the degree of their *structural similarity*, irrespective of their genetic relatedness (i.e. it clusters genetically related as well as genetically unrelated idioms into linguistic types). The theory and the methodology of areal linguistic typology (of European languages) were quite appropriately elaborated in the study of Balkan languages.¹⁰

What is relevant for areal linguistic typology is convergent linguistic change (linguistic innovation), which results in a greater degree of structural similarity. In parallel to divergent linguistic change in a *dialect continuum* of related idioms over a given period of time, convergent linguistic change can also occur in different idioms that are not closely genetically related, or even unrelated, due to geographical and social linguistic contact, which can result in linguistic influence and linguistic borrowing and imitation. These processes can usually happen in a given period of time within long-lasting multilingual political and consequently cultural regions, the result of which can be the formation of a convergence area (cf. Trubeckoj 1923, 116). Thus, areal linguistic typology uses the term *convergence area* (German *Sprachbund*, Italian *lega linguistica*, Russian *jazykovej sojuz*) to describe the result of convergent linguistic change in a given linguistic area. Accounting for the rise and the formation of a convergence area – i.e. linguistic influence and linguistic change within language contact as well as convergent linguistic innovation and common structural linguistic features – lies in the domain of historical linguistics (cf. Hock 2021, 659–724). In the following paragraphs some theoretical and meth-

10 The pioneer in the study of the Balkan languages was Jernej Kopitar / Bartholomäus Kopitar (1780–1844), who synthesized the structural similarity of Albanian, Bulgarian and Romanian as follows: ‘nur eine Sprachform herrscht, aber mit dreierley Schprachmaterie’ (Kopitar 1829). The scientific foundations of Balkan linguistics were laid down by Franc Miklošič / Franz Miklosich (1813–1891) (cf. Miklosich 1861).

odological considerations aiming to explain the rise of convergence areas are given from the vantage point of historical linguistics.

A convergence area is not limited just in terms of place, but in terms of time as well. In linguistic terminology, the linguistic term *convergence area* thus denotes a historical linguistic phenomenon that has a beginning and an end. The term has a historical linguistic value and as such cannot have a panchronic meaning. Namely, convergence processes in a given linguistic area involve different geolects (as well as their sociolects), irrespective of their genetic affiliation, and are characteristic of a limited period of time. They may last for different periods of time and depend on the interaction of a given language with other languages of the area.¹¹

Linguistic influence can be *unidirectional* (i.e. subversion) or *multidirectional* (i.e. convergence), whereby a convergence area is usually characterized by a multidirectional linguistic influence (cf. Hock 2021, 648–656). This results in a high degree of linguistic interaction between the members of a convergence area.

The extent and the degree of foreign language influence and of the consequent linguistic borrowing and imitation depend on the duration and/or the intensity of language contact as well as on the structural similarity of the influencing and the influenced idioms. Specifically, longer and/or more intense language contact means stronger linguistic influence, while greater structural similarity results in a lower degree of linguistic borrowing and imitation. As a rule, borrowing and imitation of vocabulary precedes the imitation of grammatical structures, following the principle ‘words first, grammar later’ (cf. Weinreich 1953; Thomason 2001; Trovesi 2004; Bayer 2006; Reindl 2008).

11 The Balkan convergence area is a historical linguistic entity, which started to dwindle with the ‘national revivals’ from the end of the 18th century onwards and the attempts to create ‘national states’ in the Balkans; the consequences of all of this are the homogeneity of the official languages in the newly established states as well as the transition from a collective multilingualism to predominant monolingualism achieved in the 20th century (Steinke 2012). Cf. also the term ‘Carolingian Sprachbund’ (Hock 2021, 659, 719–724).

Thus, commonly borrowed vocabulary usually means a lower degree of linguistic influence and convergence, while common innovations in the domain of grammar mean a higher degree of linguistic influence and convergence. A convergence area is therefore defined primarily on the basis of convergent grammatical innovations. Using mathematical terminology, it could be said that the linguistic influence on the vocabulary presents a necessary condition, while the influence on the grammar is a sufficient condition for the definition of a convergence area. Like in linguistic genealogy, it is the shared innovations and not the archaisms that are relevant in determining the putative convergent grammatical features of a convergence area.

In defining a convergence area, the relevant hierarchy of linguistic criteria must be established, i.e. which criteria are decisive and which are not. In contrast to linguistic genealogy, areal linguistic typology must ‘reverse’ linguistic criteria. In detail, within linguistic genealogy, linguistic criteria in defining a dialect continuum of genetically related idioms are prioritized following a ‘bottom-up’ principle, i.e. phonetics, morphology, and syntax. Differently, when defining a convergence area of genetically non-related idioms, it is more appropriate to proceed following a ‘top-down’ principle, as the linguistic influence and the consequent linguistic borrowing and imitation follow the principle ‘words first, grammar later’. It turns out that the syntactic and morphological level are more relevant in determining common structural linguistic characteristics of the languages involved in a convergence area, while the phonetic, more precisely its segmental level, is less relevant (cf. Birnbaum 1965, 43). However, common vocabulary, borrowed and/or calqued on a foreign model is an indicator of intense language contact, which is a prerequisite for the formation of a convergence area.

In addition to the synchronic aspect, the diachronic perspective, i.e. the chronology of the putative convergent linguistic innovations, is indispensable in understanding the formation of a

convergence area. Indeed, only the absolute and relative chronology of the emergence of single linguistic phenomena in the idioms involved reveals whether shared structural 'surface' linguistic features are really a result of language contact or are merely accidental. While the mere enumeration of common linguistic features of languages within a hypothesized convergence area is rather banal, explaining their origin is a significantly harder nut to crack in the historical linguistic interpretation (cf. Hock 2021, 724).

In linguistics, there is no uniform definition of the term *convergence area*. The following definition seems to be in accordance with the theory and methodology of historical linguistics: a convergence area can be defined as a group of languages in contact, belonging to at least three genetic stocks which display common innovations in grammar (as well in vocabulary) due to a long-lasting appurtenance to a political and cultural entity (in the past), which resulted in intensive linguistic contact and mutual linguistic influence and linguistic convergence. A convergence area is therefore defined primarily on the basis of those grammatical changes which have arisen secondarily as a result of linguistic convergence (convergent linguistic change and the resulting shared structural linguistic features). To conclude, a convergence area is defined, first of all, on the basis of those grammatical changes which arose secondarily due to convergent linguistic change. Depending on the number of these secondarily common structural linguistic features, the languages within a convergence area may be divided into 'core' and 'peripheral' languages, i.e. ones with a bigger or a smaller number of shared grammatical features of secondary origin.

Central European linguistic area: a convergence area?

The Central European linguistic area encompasses German, the so-called Central European Slavic languages and Hungarian.¹² The fact

¹² The term *Central European* must be understood in terms of linguistics and not perhaps in terms of geography, political or cultural history, or otherwise.

is that in the past there have been some convergent linguistic changes in this area which comprise languages and their dialects from at least three different genetic stocks. The question arises whether these dialect continua have really converged into the hypothesized Central European convergence area, at least to some extent comparable to the Balkan linguistic league. In the following paragraphs, the theoretical and methodological approach in defining the Central European *Sprachbund*, as presented in Kurzová (1996 and 2019), is critically assessed, offering a methodologically more solid framework and the main objectives in the investigation of this phenomenon.

Geographical and chronological delimitation. The languages of the Central European linguistic area were, in the past, part of multilingual political and cultural entities that were in the political-administrative sense part of Central European political formations with centres of power linked to the German linguistic area, i.e. first and foremost of the Holy Roman Empire and its continuations. The connection to the German-speaking territory lasted in the different Central European languages or parts of them for different periods of time, and, in some areas, it still does.¹³ The decline of this common cultural space for most Central European languages is most probably to be traced in time after the First World War when radical political and cultural changes took place.

Influencing and influenced languages. In the process of linguistic convergence in the Central European area, the German language played a unifying role. In the German Empire and its

¹³ For instance, the greater part of the Slovenian linguistic area was linked to the political entities of German culture in the period from the second half of the 8th century, when, at that time, the future Slovenian-speaking lands were integrated into the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne (reigned 768–814) (cf. the annexation of the Alpine Slavic principality of Carantania to the Duchy of Bavaria in 743–745 and the subsequent annexation of Bavaria to the Frankish Kingdom in 788, as well as the annexation of the Alpine Slavic principality of Carniola to the Frankish state during the Frankish-Avar wars in 791 and 795–796) until 1918, when the last major political formation in the area, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy under the Habsburgs, collapsed (cf. Štih, Simoniti, and Vodopivec 2016).

‘successor states’, German was a *lingua franca* for centuries, above all in the urban centres. Although it is possible that the linguistic influence was multidirectional, it is more probable that a unidirectional linguistic influence prevailed, viz. German was the influencing language while all the other languages were the influenced ones.¹⁴ The influence of German within the area, both on the level of vernaculars and the literary languages, can be perceived mainly in the vocabulary (cf. German loanwords as well as structural and semantic calques),¹⁵ and to a lesser extent in the domain of grammar (i.e. syntax and morphology).

Central European Slavic languages. According to Kurzová (1996 and 2019), the Central European Slavic languages include Czech and Slovak as the ‘core’ languages, Polish and Slovenian as the ‘peripheral’ group, and ‘Serbo-Croatian’ as a transitional zone between the Central European and the Balkan Slavic languages. Considering the historical facts and linguistic features of the examined languages, such a geographical demarcation appears to be oversimplified. As already pointed out, the Central European Slavic languages were all those languages which were for a certain period of time linked to the political centres in the German speaking area and were consequently influenced by German. These languages were Slovenian and Central South Slavic (at least its western part) in the south,¹⁶ as well as Czech, Slovak, Sorbian, Polish and Pomeranian (its easternmost periphery is represented by Kashubian and its northern-

most dialect, Slovincian) in the west. Most probably, Polabian, a West Slavic language, fragmentarily documented in the first half of the 18th century and extinct by the middle of that century, was part of this convergence area, too. Accordingly, the view ‘I do not pay systematic attention to Slavic languages (Sorbian, †Polabian) directly influenced by German as the dominating language, as this represents another type of language contact’ (Kurzová 2019, 262) is simply untenable if the Central European convergence area is to be understood as a chronologically delimited phenomenon. Indeed, until the end of the First World War, there was no difference between the influence of German on Slovenian (especially in the Central Slovenian area within the Inner Austria) or Sorbian, for example.¹⁷

The hierarchy of linguistic criteria. The hierarchy of linguistic criteria for determining the Central European convergence area and the internal division of Central European Slavic languages into ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ languages in Kurzová (1996 and 2019) lacks cogency. Namely, the placement of the accent on the first syllable, i.e. phonological level, is applied as the highest criterion. As it has already been mentioned, unlike in detecting linguistic relatedness, where the highest criterion is represented by historical phonology, the syntactic and the morphological criterion are more relevant in determining structural linguistic similarity. A different hierarchy of linguistic criteria would drastically change the subdivision of the influenced languages within the hypothesized convergence area into ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ ones.

Syntax and morphology. The common syntactic and morphological features of Central European languages should not be defined in relation and in contrast to the neighbouring linguistic areas, especially the Balkan languages, but should describe the specific linguistic features of the Central European languages. Such

14 In determining the mutual influences in the Central European linguistic area up to at least the end of the First World War, one must take into account other situations of language contact, namely, the influence on the level of literary languages, e.g. the influence of Literary Czech on Literary Slovak (as well as that of Literary Hungarian on Literary Slovak), the influence of Literary Croatian on Literary Slovenian, etc.

15 For German loanwords in Slovenian, the Slavic language that is/was in contact with German the longest, cf. Striedter-Temps (1963).

16 The Central South Slavic linguistic area in fact forms a transition between Central European and Balkan languages, which is confirmed by older German borrowings and later loans from Turkish in the domain of vocabulary.

17 Unlike other Central European Slavic languages, the entire Sorbian speaking area (like Slovenian in the Austrian part of Carinthia and Styria as well as Croatian in the Austrian part of Burgenland) (cf. Bayer 2006) remained in intensive contact with German even after the First and Second World Wars.

features could be, for instance, the formation of the preposed definite and indefinite articles (cf. the title of one of the first Slovenian books *Ena molitov tih kerszhenikou* (Vergerij and Trubar 1555), literally ‘one prayer of the Christians’, where the cardinal numeral *ena* is used as an indefinite article, while the demonstrative *tih* functions as a definite article (Orožen 1972; Trovsi 2004; Bayer 2006; Bažec 2012)), peculiarities of word order (infinitive clauses in literary Slovenian of the second half of the 19th century, following the model of the German *zu*-infinitive), the occurrence of preverbs with spatial meaning (cf. the Klagenfurt/Celovec or Rateče Manuscript from the 2nd half of the 14th century: 3sg aor. *gori wstaa* (III 6–7) = *gori usta*, i.e. *gori ustati*, ‘to rise’, a calque following the German model *auf-er-ste-hen*), typologically similar word-formation patterns (Slavic **-ar-* → **-ar-bstvo*, German *-er* → *-er-ei*, and Hungarian *-ász/-ész* → *-ász-at/-ész-et*: sl. **ryba* → **rybarb* → **rybarbstvo* > Slovenian *riba*, ‘fish’ → *ribar*, ‘fisher’ → *ribarstvo*, ‘fishing’ = German *Fisch* → *Fischer* → *Fischerei* = Hungarian *hal* → *halász* → *halászat*) (Šekli 2021).

The diachronic perspective. In Kurzová (1996 and 2019), the historical-linguistic aspect is almost completely neglected. For example, one of the salient features of the Central European convergence area is allegedly a simple three-tense verb system (i.e. past–present–future) without any formal and semantic (functional) distinction between the different past tense forms. A question arises whether there is a connection between the loss of the preterite and its replacement by the perfect in Upper/South German dialects (German *Oberdeutsch* or *Süddeutsch*) on the one hand and the loss of the aorist and the imperfect and their replacement by the perfect in the Slavic languages in contact with Upper High German on the other (Hammel 2020, 28). This question can only be answered by a careful linguistic analysis of the linguistic material in a diachronic perspective.

The geolectal and sociolectal perspectives. When describing and explaining the origins of common linguistic features in the vocabulary

and grammar of the languages in a given convergence area, it must be taken into account whether a given linguistic feature occurs in all the dialects of a given linguistic area or just in the literary/standard language (Hammel 2020, 23). In Slovenian, for example, ancient German loanwords occur across the entire linguistic area, including those dialects that are/were in contact with other neighbouring languages and their dialects (Slovenian borders on the Romance languages, i.e. Friulian and Italian (specifically its Colonial Venetian dialects), in the west, and on the Hungarian in the east); cf. the older loanwords from German in the dialect of Rezija/Resia in the west, and in the Prekmurje dialect in the Porabje/Rábavidék region in the east: Middle High German *vasche* → dial. Slovenian *fláša*, ‘bottle’, Rezija *flaša*, ‘bottle’, Porabje *flájša*, ‘flask’ (Šekli 2022). However, in the Central European languages the already mentioned word-formational pattern of the type Slovenian *riba* → *ribar* → *ribarstvo* is characteristic of literary languages rather than the dialects, since such derivatives are typical literary formations (with abstract meaning) pertaining to a learned culture.

Conclusion

Seen from the vantage point of the theory and methodology of historical linguistics, the definition of the *Central European convergence area* as presented by Helena Kurzová in her 1996 and 2019 works is problematic and should be sanitized. Methodologically justifiable objectives in the investigation of the convergence phenomena in the Central European linguistic area are, in fact, as follows: 1) A convergence area is not only a geographically but also a chronologically clearly delimited phenomenon; 2) The languages of the Central European linguistic area were shaped in the context of multilingual political and cultural/historical regions whose centres were under the sway of German, first and foremost within the German Empire and its continuations till the end of the First World War; 3) German exerted linguistic influence on the neighbouring languages, i.e. the so-called *Cen-*

tral European Slavic languages comprising all West Slavic languages and Slovenian (note here that Central South Slavic forms a transitional area between the Central European and the Balkan area), and Hungarian, be it on the level of vernaculars or the literary standards; 4) In the individual languages such monolateral linguistic influence surfaces in the form of German loanwords and is thus also clearly recognizable as such; 5) Only innovations can serve as a decisive criterion in establishing convergence phenomena in a *Sprachbund*, while all potential archaisms/retentions are in fact irrelevant; 6) Higher-ranking in the detection of grammatical phenomena that may be due to secondary linguistic convergence are syntax and morphology, while phonology plays a very marginal role; 7) To account for potential grammatical features a diachronic insight is equally important since only the relative and/or absolute chronological ordering of such linguistic changes will show whether these go back to language contact or rather represent chance similarities.

Povzetek

Z vidika teorije in metodologije zgodovinskega jezikoslovja je teoretično-metodološki pristop pri določanju *srednjeevropske jezikovne zveze*, kakršen je predstavljen v Kurzová (1996 in 2019), pomanjkljiv in ga je treba v nekaterih točkah dopolniti. Predlagana teoretično-metodološka izhodišča za dopolnitev raziskovanja na tem področju so npr.: (1) jezikovna zveza ni zamejena le zemljepisno, temveč tudi časovno; (2) jeziki srednjeevropskega jezikovnega prostora so se oblikovali znotraj večjezičnih politično- in kulturnozgodovinskih regij s središči, vezanimi na nemški jezikovni prostor, v prvi vrsti znotraj nemškega cesarstva in njegovih »naslednikov« v času do konca prve svetovne vojne; (3) v tem prostoru je prevladovalo enosmerno jezikovno vplivanje: nemški jezik je bil vplivajoči jezik, vplivani jeziki pa so bili t. i. *srednjeevropski slovanski jeziki* (to so vsi zahodnoslovanski jeziki in slovenščina, medtem ko osrednjejužnoslovanski jezikovni prostor predstavlja prehod med srednjeevropskim in balkanskim jezikovnim prostorom) ter madžarski jezik, in sicer tako na ravni ljudskih kot knjižnih jezikov; (4) prevladujoči enostranski jezikov-

ni stik z nemščino v vplivanih jezikih potrjujejo nemcizmi na besedijski ravni; (5) za določanje morebitnih konvergentnih jezikovnih lastnosti na slovnični ravni so relevantne skupne inovacije, ne pa skupni arhaizmi; (6) za določanje morebitnih konvergentnih lastnosti znotraj slovnice sta pomembni skladijska in oblikovna ravnina, medtem ko je glasovna ravnina manj pomembna; (7) za pojasnjevanje morebitnih konvergentnih slovničnih inovacij je poleg sinhronega treba upoštevati tudi diahroni vidik, saj samo relativna in absolutna kronologija konvergentnih slovničnih sprememb razkrijeta, ali so te posledica jezikovnega stika ali so samo naključne.

Riassunto

Dal punto di vista teorico-metodologico della linguistica storica il concetto della *lega linguistica mitteleuropea* come concepito da Helena Kurzová nelle sue opere del 1996 e 2019 risulta avere delle carenze e andrebbe migliorato in alcuni punti. A nostro avviso, le indagini linguistiche di processi di convergenza nell'area linguistica mitteleuropea dovrebbero tenere conto delle seguenti riflessioni teorico-metodologiche: 1) una lega linguistica non è delimitata soltanto in termini spaziali, bensì anche in quelli temporali; 2) le lingue dell'area mitteleuropea si sono formate nell'ambito delle entità politico-amministrative e culturali multi- e plurilingui, legate ai centri di potere presenti nell'area di lingua tedesca, in primo luogo nel Sacro romano impero della nazione germanica e dei suoi 'successori' in un periodo di tempo antecedente alla prima guerra mondiale; 3) nella suddetta area la natura dell'influsso linguistico era prevalentemente unilaterale, in cui il tedesco era la lingua influenzante, mentre le altre lingue dell'area – vale a dire le cosiddette *lingue slave mitteleuropee* (che comprendono le lingue slave occidentali e lo sloveno, mentre il cosiddetto *srenjokužnoslavenski* 'slavo meridionale centrale' rappresenta un idioma di transizione tra l'area mitteleuropea e quella balcanica) e l'ungherese – erano lingue influenzate, sia a livello di dialetti che a quello della lingua letteraria/standard; 4) questo influsso linguistico prevalentemente unilaterale è confermato dai numerosi tedeschismi sul piano lessicale presenti nelle lingue influenzate; 5) nella definizione dei processi di convergenza sul piano grammaticale sono rilevanti soprattutto le innovazioni comuni e non gli arcaismi sebbene comuni; 6) per la definizione degli elementi costitutivi di una lega linguistica nell'am-

bito grammaticale sono importanti soprattutto il piano sintattico e quello morfologico, mentre è più o meno irrilevante quello fonetico-fonologico; 7) per una appropriata spiegazione delle innovazioni comuni occorre considerare non solo l'aspetto sincronico, bensì anche quello diacronico. Solo in base alla cronologia assoluta e relativa è infatti possibile stabilire se i tratti linguistici di natura tipologica in questione, osservati superficialmente, sono il risultato di contatto linguistico o sono solamente coincidenze occasionali.

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