

Translation into Croatian

TWO FRENCH AUTHORS

by Ana Kapraljević

Extinction and Revival of Languages

Claude Hagège: *Halte à la mort des langues (Halt the Death of Languages)*

At the moment when he wrote this book and then in 2000 when he published it, the French linguist recorded an already ephemeral linguistic moment. Namely, language develops just as contemporary electronic technology does — while we are writing about it, it has already changed. This book undertakes a difficult and detailed task of systematising linguistic changes on a historical, political and economic level. What is more, the changes also involve certain historical, political and economic aspects of all mentioned countries and their languages, except for the Hebrew language that acquires special status on more than sixty pages.

The book begins with an abundance of terminology that in itself has an intention of becoming specialized. Certain terms are well-known in contemporary linguistics, but certain ones are merely the author's desire to achieve a more linear distribution of linguistic changes. In this plethora of subtitles and subterms the reader soon loses a sense of the intended matter. Namely, the contents are the following: the author wants to show how certain languages — which had many speakers — died, the factors that were the reason for it, and how they were either replaced by a new idiom that was slowly adopted by the former; or how a certain country made a concerted effort to resurrect its first and original language. The author also analyses ways of borrowing lexis from the dominant foreign language of a certain country into the native language, and a possible emergence of a new language if a foreign language penetrates its syntax and morphology. The analysis also covers bilingual speakers whose mother tongues are both the native as well as a foreign language of a country and those speakers who — for reasons of either their old age or isolation — speak already a dying language.

Language has also got a dimension of the identity of each of its speakers no matter where they are, which is why, in several separate sections, the author analyses the idea of identity and connection with the nation regardless of its remoteness from the speaker. The author links identity primarily with small and extinct nations, although great world powers have been — throughout the entire history — mostly relying on their own identity in the language. Both chapters, with which the book begins, are introductions into the identity and genesis, development and efforts of the Hebrew language at independence, perseverance, change, evolution, shape and its general dominance over the entire religious, i. e. the Jewish community within the period of more than three thousand years. The Hebrew language, its speakers and keepers, should be appreciated for one thing — which is also admired by the author himself — its powerful and active efforts, regardless of historical, political or economic situation — to preserve itself. It, existing solely as a liturgical language, survives in many countries in which the Jews are not, at the same time, also the dominant political nation. Although younger in origin than Chinese or Arabic, the Hebrew language possesses the capacity for rich development, and that is due to a very well-planned care by linguists and language historians to — originally and accurately, but also in an imaginative way and wherever necessary — enrich their language.

In the chapter eleven, the author returns to his systematisation of the language and refers to the influence of the Hebrew language on other languages. He describes the birth of creole languages that will most probably, in the near future of some two hundred years, entirely take over dominant major languages, since the population that speaks Spanish, English, French, and, first and foremost, the Chinese language, indescribably changes and blends with the native nations and also their languages. In the en-

tire expansion of new languages that emerge from the lexis of two idioms, the author could not escape his fear of dominance of the English language over French. In the conclusion, he romantically states that the French language fights for life, not only for its own, but also for the lives of other non-anglophone languages. Yet, insinuating that he is well acquainted with the South Slavic languages, he does not approve — in the same cosmopolitan spirit — of the development of the Croatian language. He claims that the Croatian language is merely a political idea and shows that he lived in another time — that for him the Croatian language remained unchanged in a certain, already finished historical period. On the contrary, the Croatian language is developing as quickly as all other languages.

Certain Cultures and Certain Barbarisms

Edgar Morin: *Culture et barbarie en Europe (Culture and Barbarism in Europe)*

Already on the first page, the author apprises his readers that the text included in this small book on some ninety pages of its Croatian translation is the content of his lectures from three conferences. The first rebuke that is imposed already by the title and that the reader has in his mind is the all inclusiveness of the topic "European Culture and Barbarisms", as it is logical to notice that such a great topic cannot be condensed into such a small space. However, it might be assumed that, just as in doctoral theses of famous physicists and astrophysicists, the topic is concise owing to new and still not prominent ideas. However, in his book, that great erudite person and intellectual only scratched the surface of this theme. He commences a presentation which he abruptly concludes, without finding solutions. No matter how short and unfinished the book is, three main ideas that he tries to analyse could be emphasised. The first is the difference between culture and barbarism and their necessary connection. The greatest cultural elites — that originate from barbarism — develop culture, while most nations choke up with barbarism. Therefore, cultural achievements necessarily stem from the barbaric human nature that — being saturated with savagery — searches for something new in order to rise above and create pleasure, a reason for living and finally — as a consequence — culture. Here he contrasts many barbarisms and certain cultures.

The culture that he definitely praises is French. And the barbarism that he condemns most is not the Soviet totalitarianism, but Nazism. Therefore, he necessarily shifts to Germany, and — without even being aware of it — he commences to compare Germany and France observing them as two opposite poles. He uses straightforward and necessarily powerful terms that are not alleviative, nor are they subtly nuanced. They are generalised and semantically marked due to the very nature of conference and oral presentation. They should have been systematised and mitigated for the written text.

The author's second tendency was to raise a question on the possibility of ethnic cleansing. The example of anti-Judaism provides only some statistical data. However, certain analysis of the idea is not insisted upon, nor is it explained. Nevertheless, the author firmly stands against every form of destruction of humanity, regardless of what it is. Among other things, he says: "One should be aware of the complexity of that gigantic tragedy. That awareness should include all victims: Jews, Blacks, Gipsies, Homosexuals, Armenians, all colonised people, from Algeria to Madagascar."

While attempting at summarising the entire European history — from the Greek and Roman beginnings to the twentieth century — it is impossible not to notice that the author — in his elaborate analysis of barbarism of both religious and national nature — forgets one key, latent barbarism that seems, in the European consciousness not to have happened at all, nor has it burdened any European consciousness. It is a barbarism that has been committed throughout centuries, in numerous imaginative ways. Namely, it is a barbarism towards an entire gender that has not been mentioned at all. Barbarism towards women has not only been committed, but in many European countries has been part of their European culture. Such barbarism is not mentioned in the book at all.

The scope of the book — that has not contributed to anything new on the level of analysis and awareness of the problem of culture versus barbarism and vice versa — is definitely enriched with the afterword by MILIVOJ SOLAR. However, on the barren Croatian translation scene that has been recovering for only several decades, every translation from French is very welcome in order to — if nothing else — encourage us to analyse ourselves, our values and attitudes as opposed to great, dominant European cultures.

- Published by Disput, Zagreb 2005, 316 pages, translated by Ivana Franić, ISBN 953-6770-67-9
- Published by AGM, Zagreb 2006, 91 pages, translated by Ivana Šojat-Kučić, ISBN 953-174-285-5