

# Migrants and Their Languages in Historical Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

*Historical legacies of past migrations and linguistic practices have an impact on the concerns about current migration and mobility processes, reminding us that mass migrations are not a new phenomenon. Mass migrations from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th century to North America present an interesting subject in view of regulating moving speakers and their languages and their reception in the new country. Using discourse analysis of historical data from contemporary newspapers and other sources, the paper explores practices of inclusion and exclusion of Slavic speakers on the ground of social prejudice and legitimized ethnic and racial segregating practices. The results show that paradoxically, immigrants coming from the multilingual empire who were admitted (about 80%) after restrictive procedures, in the end faced the demanding issue of enforced linguistic and cultural assimilation in order to become accepted as loyal Americans. We use these pieces of historical memory of mass migrations as a resource to understand the present attitudes and policies toward migrating people, and their languages and cultures.*

**Keywords:** migration, linguistic practices, discrimination

## Introduction

Although it has always been an integral part of human life, migration has become particularly prominent as an issue of political significance in public discourse in recent years. Populist political options, buoyed by social media platforms, have been gaining ground in many countries, contributing to the reinforcement and spread of negative representations of migrants, particularly those depicted as very culturally different from the majority of the population in the host country. These representations are, of course, not altogether new; they draw from long-standing traditions of discursive, social and political practices of Othering, which have merely been somewhat diluted by political correctness and an apparent consensus regarding respect for cultural diversity. The USA is a prominent example of a country with, on the one hand, a strong and long-standing history of immigration from different parts of the world and, on the other hand, an equally strong tradition of nativist anti-immigrant attitudes. One of the most intense periods of immigration to the US was in the late 19th and early 20th century<sup>1</sup> (1880-1924). As Figure 1 shows, the total number of immigrants arriving in the US between 1820 and 1920 was 33,630,104, with a peak between 1903 and 1914, especially in the year 1907, when almost 1,300,000 people arrived<sup>2</sup>. As a reaction to this growing influx and to ever stronger nativist demands, the

legislative regulation of immigration became increasingly restrictive, adding more and more criteria as a basis for denying the right to immigration, culminating with the 1924 Immigration Act, which “effectively ended the great wave of ‘new’ European immigration that had begun in the last quarter of the 19th century”<sup>3</sup>.

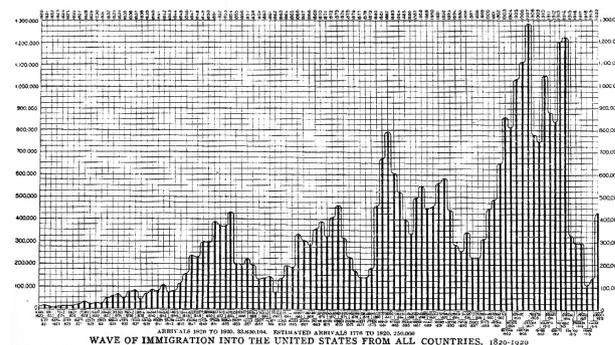


Fig. 1. Table showing the total number of immigrants arriving in the USA by year (1820–1920). Source: *Restriction of immigration*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1924.

The situation changed again with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which eliminated the national quota system and reintroduced a period of growing immigration. As a result, by 2015 the percentage of immi-

grants in the US population had again risen to 13.5, a number which had not been reached since 1920, accompanied by a renewed rise in the expression of nativist attitudes starting in the 1990's, prompting some authors to draw parallels between these two periods of intense immigration and to point out the persistence of nativism in the US<sup>1,3,4</sup>. One of the similarities in public discourses on immigration in the two periods is a concern regarding a shift in the dominant "racial categories" and cultural background of the immigrants: whereas the period starting from the late 1960's saw more arrivals from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by an increase in immigration from southern and eastern Europe (see Figure 2). In both cases these "new" immigrant groups are often considered too culturally different to be able to assimilate successfully in American society (which is expected of them) and are thus seen as a threat to the dominance of "American" (WASP) culture. They are also frequently depicted, in the media and other public discourses, as a significant contributing factor to many social, economic and political problems. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (and partly in the more recent period, as well), these included poverty, unsanitary living conditions, crime, moral decline, labour-related unrest, depression of wages, corruption, political disruption etc. These views were compounded by the racist idea of the biological inferiority of these groups in comparison to the "original" American "stock", made up of northern and north-western European populations<sup>1,5–7</sup>.

#### RELATIVE PROPORTION OF OLD AND NEW IMMIGRATION GROUPS

Decades	Old Immigration	New Immigration
	United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden	Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Jugo-Slavia, Poland, Russia, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Turkey
1860-1870	98.4	1.6
1870-1880	91.6	8.4
1880-1890	80.2	19.8
1890-1900	48.4	51.6
1900-1910	23.3	76.7
1910-1920	22.8	77.2
1920-1922	36.8	63.2

Fig. 2. Proportion of "old" and "new" immigrant groups arriving in the USA by decade (1860–1922). Source: *Restriction of immigration*. New York: H.W. Wilson, 19242.

However, since European immigrants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were less distinctive in their physical appearance (skin colour) in relation to the "white" population which considered themselves native, the role of the most prominent and marked characteristic that prejudice and discrimination were based on was often readily taken on by language as shown by Park and Miller<sup>a</sup> and other authors<sup>8,9</sup>. Language-related issues frequently occupied an important position in debates on immigration, which meant that they were largely articulated from the perspec-

tive of nativist attitudes and priorities. The question of literacy, i.e. a large proportion of southern and eastern European immigrants being illiterate, was mainly represented as an aspect of their overall cultural and biological inferiority to the native population and the old immigrant groups and their inability of becoming "real American citizens". Passing a literacy test (in any given language) as a condition of entry into the country was increasingly put forward as a simple and efficient way of screening out undesirable newcomers<sup>b</sup>. Immigrants were also often derided for not speaking English well enough or at all and for not making an effort to learn it, which was interpreted as proof of a lack of loyalty to the US and of a disinclination and incapacity to assimilate. As opposed to earlier times, when multilingualism was much more accepted or at least tolerated, toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "English fluency – and eventually monolingualism in English – [became] a constitutive aspect of an American identity" (p. 165)<sup>11</sup>. This development contributed to the rise of negative attitudes toward immigrants' languages, as well as toward multilingualism<sup>11</sup> (with particularly apparent effects on bilingual instruction in schools<sup>c</sup>). The idea of English as the only official language in the US has regained prominence in the 1990's with the *English Only* movement, which has links to nativist, anti-immigrant and racist organisations and attitudes and produces similar adverse effects on bilingual education<sup>12</sup>.

An interesting subgroup of European immigrants with regard to language issues are those from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This large political formation was home to a culturally and linguistically diverse population, spanning the (whole or partial) territories of present-day Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Slovenia, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. Due to the uneven economic development of different regions of the Monarchy, internal migration was very intense, with industrialised urban centres attracting the largest numbers of migrants looking for seasonal or more long-term work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup>, resulting in very diverse and dynamic urban populations. Some regions had already been culturally diverse for longer periods, particularly borderlands, such as the north-eastern and eastern Adriatic coast, where a centuries-long Venetian presence had co-existed with a Slavic population, or hubs of commerce, like Trieste<sup>14</sup>. These and other factors contributed to creating multilingual environments, where language varieties were often associated with particular social strata or groups and where a certain level of multilingual competence could be an important asset or even a necessity.

Thus, as mostly illiterate, unskilled labourers originating from rural areas of south-eastern Europe, with low

a Zimmerman notes that „The Park and Miller book was most likely written by [sociologist] W. I. Thomas, who was forced to resign his post at the University of Chicago – and to relinquish authorship of the book – in the wake of a sex scandal“ (Zimmerman 2002: 1402, footnote 52)<sup>9</sup>.

b The requirement was finally included in the 1917 Immigration Act, but with limited effect in terms of reducing immigration from southern and eastern Europe, since many immigrants from these regions in the following years were literate<sup>1,5,10</sup>.

c For a different perspective on this issue, emphasising the agency of immigrants in adopting English and not showing interest in first language schooling, see Zimmerman<sup>9</sup>.

levels of education, hardly any savings at their disposal and no knowledge of English, Austro-Hungarian immigrants were a perfect target for nativist attacks, just like the other groups making up the “new” immigration around the turn of the century. However, those of them who had grown up or worked in culturally diverse and multilingual environments and acquired some communication skills in different languages and with people of different backgrounds might find themselves at an advantage in their new surroundings. This situates Austro-Hungarian immigrants in potentially ambiguous territory between nativist prejudice and more appreciative attitudes toward multilingualism and this territory is what we aim to explore in the present paper. Our aim in this paper is to see how language-related issues were articulated in the public sphere with regard specifically to immigrants from Austria-Hungary, during the most intense pre-WWI immigration period (1880–1918), which was marked by heated debate on immigration restriction and by rising nativism.

## Material and Methods

For reasons of space and focus, our primary sources will be limited to contemporary newspaper texts<sup>d</sup>, since they are rich both in quantity and variety and have an important role in shaping public opinion and other public discourses. Our approach is broadly inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>15,16</sup> and the theory of representation<sup>17</sup>.

There will obviously be differences, in terms of language use and representation, between e.g. newspapers for a Democratic or a Republican readership, between those in areas with more or fewer immigrants or between those catering to people of higher or lower socioeconomic status or education levels. Our concern here, however, is not to differentiate between these social categories and the types of discourses which address them, but to identify widespread discursive tendencies which can be observed regardless of these differences. Our selection of texts for the analysis is therefore based primarily on their relevance with regard to the topic of the paper, with the first step of the process being a search using particular keywords (“immigrant”, “Austria”, “language” etc.) on the online platform *Chronicling America*<sup>e</sup>, with no limits set on the results apart from the designated time period.

Some of the questions which guide the analysis are: What are the dominant frames of reference within which Austro-Hungarian immigrants’ first languages are situated and interpreted and how do they relate to common nativist and racist representations of immigrants themselves in that period? How is the immigrants’ (lack of) knowledge and use of the English language represented, with regard to the increasingly monolingual idea of American identity? Can the multilingual competences of some immigrants provide occasions for less prejudiced or even positive representations of cultural and linguistic diver-

sity? What can be inferred from the answers to these questions regarding the dominant ideological discourses governing the processes of representation?

## Results and Discussion

### *Linguistic prejudice*

The immigrants’ first languages and their skills in other languages are a topic which frequently comes up in newspaper articles. Languages represented as very different from English and therefore as unusual or exotic are a recurring object of interest for the English-speaking readership. Unsurprisingly, a lack of reliable information about these languages can often be observed, as well as about the people who speak them and their countries of origin, and this easily leads to the development of linguistic prejudice. For example, an article from the *Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT, August 16 1908) states that “the people of the two countries [Croatia and Serbia] speak the same language, Czech, with some slight difference in accent”.

The following is quite an extreme example of prejudice toward the Croatian language, additionally legitimated by being a quote from a person whose name is preceded by the title “Dr” and “who declares he can read 16 languages”. The quote also shows a clear lack of knowledge about the geographical position of Croatia, as well as cultural prejudice which prompts the comparison of Croatian people talking to dogs fighting.

“Croatia and Lithuania are Slavonic provinces on the Russian border. To properly articulate Croatian words one must have a rubber mouth, a rubber neck, and leather lungs, reinforced with patches on the inside. From the way it looks on paper, I am of the impression that writing it requires the use of both hands and feet”.

“On hearing two Croatians in conversation and not seeing them, one would imagine that there was a dog fight in the vicinity”.

“Wanted, an interpreter”, *Adair County News*, Columbia, KY, February 14 1900

The sound of the immigrants’ language is represented here primarily with reference to the immigrants’ *bodies*, to their physicality. These bodies are depicted as “unnatural”, monstrous, a form of hybrid of human and animal or even of a living body and an artificially produced object or machine. The image of dogs fighting connotes aggression, a complete lack of rationality and a savage state of being, bereft of any traces of human society and culture. The idea of writing with both hands and feet also suggests physical deformity or disability, incompetence, lack of education or messiness. This framing of immigrants (in this case via their speech and writing) as “less than human”, i.e. as animals or non-living objects, was very common in public discourses in the period under study. O’Brien<sup>18</sup> describes

<sup>d</sup> The texts were accessed via the online platform *Chronicling America* of the Library of Congress, which allows the material to be searched by keywords, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

<sup>e</sup> *Chronicling America*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers>

several conceptual metaphors frequently used with regard to immigrants at the time: they are depicted as objects (for example as raw material to be moulded), as diseased organisms (infecting American society), as natural catastrophes (e.g. a flood), as invading armies and as animals or other “subhuman” life forms.

While employers in various types of industry, especially those related to mining or railroad construction, were ready to overlook the socially unacceptable qualities of incomers from Southern and Eastern Europe in order to provide the cheapest labour costs, a number of articles consistently continued to describe the United States as a garbage dump for Europe to ship all their undesirables, criminals, paupers, or politically dangerous such as socialists and anarchists. Such negative portrayals of European immigrants were frequently printed as cartoons like the one shown in Figure 3 with the telling title of “The unrestricted dumping ground”. This representation uses the metaphors of “garbage dump” and “pest infestation” and portrays immigrants as animal-like dangerous armed invaders, implying clearly that they are inferior to the civilized native-born Anglo-Saxon Americans, and unworthy of citizenship.



Fig. 3. “The unrestricted dumping ground” New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1903.<sup>i</sup>

Some of these metaphors are still common in discourses on immigrants in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>19</sup>. Such dehumanising representations serve as a call to and a justification for discriminatory policies aimed at immigrants, who are thus clearly set apart and excluded from an implicitly or explicitly constructed we-group (the “American nation”), whose identity is reinforced through this opposition<sup>19</sup> (p. 2–3).

Numerous contemporary newspaper articles contributed to Othering non-English speaking newcomers by describing incidents in various social contexts or institutions caused by their inability to speak English. The following examples show how the language issues played an important role even at weddings of immigrants or in performing citizen duties.

<sup>i</sup> General Research Division, The New York Public Library. “The unrestricted dumping ground” New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1903. Accessed July 7, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c146bf32-7fda-68d3-e040-e00a1806693f>

### A Slavonic Wedding

Justice Williams and a representative of the Review, under the guidance of a Slav miner, were taken to a house in Alum gulch, where a number of the Slavonic race were anxiously waiting the arrival of the justice..... A little difficulty presented itself when Justice Williams arose and solemnly opened his prayer book at the marriage ceremony. The English spoken by the groom was decidedly broken, while the lady knew only her own tongue. A friend, who was slightly under the influence of the product of the grape, volunteered to act as interpreter, but his efforts only tended to make matters worse, as the groom, who seemed to have made a study chiefly of the opprobrious epithets of the English language, promptly told him to “shut up, you no good,” and ordered his bride to say “yes” to everything Mr. Williams said, which she did.....

Cochise Review, Bisbee, Arizona, Friday evening, June 15, 1900

Last week an Austrian was arrested near Soquel for refusing to pay his poll tax. He was tried in Santa Cruz, and the jury found him ‘not guilty’. It was claimed that the man did not understand the language and had no intention of refusing payment. As the poll tax is the most unpopular tax imposed it would be a difficult matter under any circumstances to get a jury to convict a man for refusing to pay it.

The Pajaronian (Watsonville, Cal.), May 25, 1893

The example below is quite illustrative of daily problems encountered by immigrants due to their inability to speak English. It is a case of a hospitalized Croatian immigrant whose wife and kids came from Croatia while he was in hospital. Although they had not seen each other for eight years during which he stayed in America, they were not allowed to visit him because of the hospital rules for patients in the ward. The story apparently caught great interest, as the Salt Lake Tribune followed it for several days, retelling various details such as that the wife fainted, how they were dressed etc., and quoting various witnesses from the hospital.

### John Peterlic Says He Was Ignorant of Contents of the Paper He “Signed.”

John Peterlic, the Croatian labourer who for fifteen days was an inmate of St. Marks Hospital, whose wife and children arrived here Wednesday morning and were taken to the hospital by Nick Butkovich and as the latter alleged Wednesday evening, were denied the opportunity of visiting with the patient, yesterday in a formal statement in the presence of two witnesses denied, that the “denial” printed in Friday morning’s Tribune, and alleged

to have been signed by him, was made of his own free will or through any knowledge of his.

Peterlic who left the hospital Friday morning declares in his latest statement that he was told to place a “cross” on a paper as to the contents of which he knew nothing, merely being told that if he did so “It would be all right” and his wife and children would be cared for if they were sick.

The Salt Lake Tribune, Saturday Morning, June 17, 1911

Language barriers were often an issue in court proceedings involving non-English speakers, especially if they were also in the vulnerable position of defendant, while their social status, financial means and education levels also put them at a disadvantage in relation to other participants in the proceedings. In cases like these, cultural and linguistic prejudice works in conjunction with other aspects of the power relation. The following article with a revealing title “Mess Rather Than Mass of Testimony” clearly illustrates the difficulties encountered by courts in cases of crimes committed within a multilingual immigrant community:

Thirteen witnesses, in eight different languages, yesterday described in a dozen different ways just how the Novak murder happened. Such a mess of disconnected, unintelligible and contradictory testimony was possibly never before adduced at a murder trial in this county. It is safe to say the jury had a very decided kind of a reasonable doubt about Kohut's guilt even before the testimony for the defense was opened..... Polish, Mazur, Russian, Czech, Lithuanian, Slavish, Kroat and a mixture of Czech and Kroat were the languages interpreter Wojshner had to contend with yesterday.

The Scranton Tribune. (Scranton PA), February 02, 1898, Morning, Page 5.

Another case described by a letter to the editor of Evening Pajaronian shows that immigrants were easily accused of questionable crimes, such as following a woman. Interestingly the author shows sympathy for, in his opinion, a wrongly accused honest man. However, at the same time his perception of the man as a poor foreigner, unable to speak English, portrays him as ignorant and incompetent to function in the society.

A few days ago a poor, honest, hard-working man, of foreign birth, and unable to speak the English language, was arrested and brought to justice for the unpardonable crime of following a woman.

The charge may be true (?) but the poor ignorant man was made a victim of circumstances. He stated his case to me, and when I offered to go and speak for him he said he would not face the notoriety and would rather throw up his job, forfeit his bail of \$25

and leave town, which he did.....It is too bad that this poor ignorant mute, unfamiliar with modern ways and language, had to fall prey so that the dignity of the city might be exemplified, while the ‘Wise Guy’ who allows playing cards for money (not gambling), sells cigarettes to minors, deals in lottery tickets, violates the speed laws, expectorates on the sidewalks, and last, but not least, will beat you out of the sweat of your brow, goes unmolested merrily on, singing ‘I Love You California.’—J. S. KING.”

Evening Pajaronian, (Watsonville, Santa Cruz County, Cal.) 23 November 1916

The next example again illustrates the difficult court procedures with non-English speakers emphasizing the strangeness and incomprehensibility of their languages in spite of the help provided by interpreters:

When the case of the people vs. Pence Czerkl, disturbing the peace, was called in Judge Fritz's court the defendant pleaded inability to either speak or understand English and said he was a Russian.

... So the Russian interpreter was summoned, but he, although conversant with several kinds of Slavonic language, gave up Mr. Czerki's lingo as beyond his ken. Then the Japanese Interpreter was sent for, but he said that the foreign people whose tongue he has acquired are just learning to speak Russian, and he, too, is a beginner in the study. The Judge suggested, as a dernier ressort, that the German interpreter be requested to apply his linguistic talent to the task of ascertaining what Mr. Czerki had to say for himself, but a facetious attorney informed the court that the official translator of German was absent from the Hall of Justice. .... Finally the peace disturbance was so clearly proved without the aid of the defendant that the bench administered a fine of \$10, which was paid.

The San Francisco Call, 1 March, 1905



Fig.4. An immigrant at court with a strange “lingo” using mock English (The San Francisco Call, 1 March, 1905).

In this case, the text underlines the impossibility to understand the immigrant defendant's exotic language in spite of various interpreters called (who were *nota bene* skilful in other languages such as German and Japanese, but not in Slavonic languages), while the accompanying cartoon portrays him as a big, hairy man in worn-out clothes implying a sort of robust and almost savage nature and poverty.

The prestige of the English language in the US in relation to languages of immigrants did not mean, however, that linguistic prejudice did not work the other way around, as well. The Hartford Republican in 1907<sup>f</sup> published an article on attitudes of different European peoples toward English, showing equal amounts of prejudice and in particular the idea of English being a confusing mixture of different languages. The article says that Europeans in general show little love for the English language; Germans thus apparently “speak of the English language as a monster having two mouths with one of which it speaks German and with the other Latin”, while “Slavonic peoples” have an interesting legend (“originally heard in Croatia”) of how the English language was created: God created the nations and gave each of them a slice of meat to use as a tongue, but the English came late and there was no meat left, so God sliced a little piece off every other nation's tongue and gave them to the English people to use as a tongue of their own, which is “why the English continue to the present day to speak in such a jumble”.

#### *Attitudes toward multilingualism*

Regarding the multilingual competences of some immigrants from Austria-Hungary, however, the tone of the texts is significantly more positive, presenting their language skills as a cause for admiration and as a (real or potential) economic resource. A certain amount of exaggeration can be presumed in some of these cases (in terms of how many languages a person speaks, for example), whether on the part of the author or the immigrant themselves, with the aim of producing a more interesting and impressive piece of news or perhaps promoting oneself on the labour market. The following article from the Hopkinsville Kentuckian is an example of this.

(...) The faculty comes to her as naturally as swimming does to a duck.

Her knowledge is not the result of teaching, but of association with people of every tongue. She speaks 11 languages fluently, yet she struggles over a washtub, in order that her six children can go to school. (...)

Aninina<sup>g</sup> was a town of factories, where people of every clime were employed. It was like the Babylon of old, so great was the confusion of tongues.

<sup>f</sup> The Hartford republican (Hartford, Ky.), May 10, 1907.

<sup>g</sup> The text is probably referring to Anina, a town in present-day south-western Romania, which was then a part of Austria-Hungary. It was an important centre of the mining industry in the region.

The children were strangers to each other because of this barrier of misunderstanding. Eventually the little ones succeeded in mastering the languages of their playmates. (...)

‘Nine languages I picked up with the children. (...) I was not the only child to do it. (...)’

Hopkinsville Kentuckian, Hopkinsville, KY, November 26, 1897

The commonly invoked topoi of Babylon and of a “confusion of tongues” indicate discomfort with linguistic diversity, based on the idea of homogeneity and effortless and complete mutual understanding as the ideal state. This article, however, shows that it is not only possible to achieve communication in a multicultural and multilingual environment (at least for children), but also that growing up in such an environment results in the development of significant linguistic skills. This result is not presented as an exception, but rather as the rule (“I was not the only child to do it...”). Articles on people speaking many languages, especially those without formal background who acquired their linguistic skills through travelling around the world or interacting in multilingual communities, were quite popular. Examples such as these seem to spark interest in immigrants' places of origin, in order to explain the development of such impressive multilingual competence. In this case, the explanation is offered that, rather than through schooling, the woman in question learned languages through association with other children. Although multilingual competence is clearly represented as a positive thing in the example above, the author of the text fails to take a step further and to suggest that a similar diversity of immigrant communities in American cities might equally benefit those living or growing up there.

The following example of the successful use of one's language skills to earn a living is met with admiration and approval.

Because this Toledo, O., newsboy Fred Franklin, only 15 years of age, can speak seven languages and write six, he has quit selling newspapers and blacking boots and has secured a steady job a [sic] interpreter at \$18 a week. Eighteen dollars a week is a lot more than thousands upon thousands of mature men work for, and, mark you, this boy is only 15.

The secret of it lies in the fact that he was born and educated in Hungary, where every school boy or girl must learn at least six languages. Fred understands English, Hungarian, German, Slavonic, Latin, French and Hebrew, and because of this ability a Mansfield, O., contractor, has engaged him at the above named salary to act as interpreter between the contractor and his foreign-tongued employees.

“Newsboy Linguist Earns \$18 per Week”, The Spokane Press, Spokane, WA, June 4 1904

As opposed to the previous example, where multilingual competence was represented as something valuable, but still not necessarily recognised as such by others, here the boy's language skills have brought him significant benefits. Growing up and receiving an education in Hungary is in this case directly linked to a significant advantage on a multilingual labour market. The story is also very much in line with the "American dream" narrative of social and economic advancement from humble beginnings thanks primarily to one's own capabilities and perseverance. It is not surprising that due to the developments of the labour market, language and linguistic related skills became increasingly important for a large number of occupations. From the various topics written about in the papers, it can be concluded that every big railroad construction company had its interpreters who could speak the various tongues of the world, every large court had its court interpreters while the merchants in every considerable town had clerks who knew foreign languages. Many ads in the advertisement sections of the newspapers, like the examples below, reflect such needs either for an interpreter for different languages or multilingual persons for various, even simple jobs.

WANTED A situation by an interpreter and translator; speaks Russian, modern Greek, Servian, Italian, Croatian, Turkish and English. Address box 286. Call office.

The San Francisco Call. Thursday. September 28, 1911;

EXPERIENCED OFFICE MAN WANTS position as foreman or interpreter; speaks English. German, Italian and all Slavonic languages. Address Jno. Easković Bingham Canyon, Utah.

The Salt Lake Tribune, Wednesday morning, May 25, 1910;

WANTED A female servant for general housework, who can speak Polish, Slavish or Croatian. Apply at George Rastovski's saloon, 151<sup>st</sup> and Melville Avenue, East Chicago.

The Times, Thursday, 'August 6, 1903

Multilingual competence, especially if it leads to employment and financial gain, can thus serve (albeit in a rather small number of very particular cases) as a partial counterbalance to cultural and linguistic prejudice against Austro-Hungarian immigrants. These newspaper texts also provide interesting examples of an alternative to the increasingly prevailing anti-multilingual narrative of the English language as inextricably bound with a normatively framed, exclusionist idea of American identity<sup>11</sup>.

### *Illiteracy*

Regarding English language skills, the opinion that immigrants in the US should learn English, especially if they want to acquire American citizenship, is prevalent. As one article clearly says: "an immigrant who does not

learn our language remains in effect a foreigner" ("Process of Citizen Making", The Evening Star, Washington, D.C., April 15 1906). Looking at this issue from the perspective of Croatian immigrants, however, one can find answers to the question of why entire communities of immigrants who spent their whole lives in the US never learned to speak English or to read or write (in any language). An article in the New-York Tribune ("People of Croatia", September 14 1902) provides some of these answers. A lot of these immigrants worked in the mining industry, which meant that they lived in remote settlements near the mines, where it can be assumed that they had hardly any access to means of education or, most likely, the time or money to engage in it. They were hesitant to turn to Austro-Hungarian consulates for any kind of help, because they were aware that emigration was not looked upon with sympathy by the imperial authorities, who tried to put various obstacles in the path of those who wanted to emigrate. These communities were basically attended to only by mining labour unions and the clergy, which was sent there by church orders from the immigrants' home country, independent of the authorities. Of course, both the labour union representatives and the clergy spoke Croatian, which meant that there was no particular need for the community members to speak English in their daily lives.

Apart from this, according to the Croatian paper *Obćinar* from Zagreb<sup>h</sup> ("*Emigracija*", April 7 1900), most people emigrating to the US from Croatia go with the intention of earning a sufficient sum of money to allow them and their families a better standard of living in their homeland and do not intend to stay in the US. This is why they keep up a continuous relation with their home country, primarily by sending money to family members who stayed behind. It was more difficult to acquire citizenship for people who are illiterate and did not speak English, but since many people did not intend to stay in the US permanently, this was not an issue. In fact, it was primarily the labour unions and socialist workers' organisations in the US which tried to motivate the immigrants to become literate and to learn English, by offering literacy courses free of charge in Croatian and English language. This was not just in the interest of the immigrants themselves, but also in the interest of these organisations, because only people who were American citizens could vote and thereby politically support the socialist party which these organisations were affiliated with. The great efforts that are put into this show that it was obviously a long-term struggle against the daily needs and priorities of communities with low levels of education and no tradition or experience of participation in political life.

### **Conclusions**

We hope to have shown, through the use of numerous examples, that the representation of Austro-Hungarian, as well as other Eastern, South-eastern and Southern Euro-

<sup>h</sup> *Obćinar* – a weekly journal for public administration and security issued in Zagreb at the time.

pean immigrants in American newspapers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is informed mainly by a pronounced nativism glorifying American qualities and Western civilization, which is seen as threatened by degeneration due to these “new” immigrant groups. The prevailing newspaper discourses show a classic racialism characterised by highly stereotypical views of Austro-Hungarian immigrants and their languages and grounded in ignorance and pseudo-science: they are either depicted as exotic and irrevocably inferior in all qualities or, in the discourse of the “benevolent colonialist”, as simple people with a certain capacity to evolve, provided they are offered the right help.

Illiteracy plays a key role in these representations, serving as a clear marker which indicates the likelihood of other undesirable characteristics in immigrants and legitimising their exclusion from American citizenship and eventually from the right to immigrate at all. Knowledge of the English language was also expected, while the perspective of the immigrants themselves in this regard is generally not taken into account. Illiterate immigrants in particular were obviously faced with the extremely great linguistic challenge of both learning to read and write their own language, as well as learning English, and it is no surprise that they often had no incentive to undertake this huge effort, which unfortunately further encouraged prejudices of them as uneducated, intellectually inferior, lazy or disrespectful. Attitudes toward immigrants’ native languages are generally marked by prejudice and lack of information, which is only partly, counterbalanced by admiration of multilingual competences in particular individuals.

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Due to the emergence of one language ideology, that of English as the one and only language of American national identity, the linguistic assimilation of European immigrants eventually became a part of the American national identity narrative, but the enforced nature of this assimilation was conveniently ‘written out’ of the story<sup>11</sup>. Paradoxically, immigrants coming from the multilingual Austro-Hungarian empire who were admitted (about 80%) after strenuous procedures, in the end faced the demanding issue of enforced linguistic and cultural assimilation in order to become accepted as loyal Americans, while maintenance of their languages and multilingual competence became private issues, disconnected from larger sociopolitical contexts<sup>11</sup>.

To conclude, in this paper we use this historical memory as a resource to understand the present social changes and to counter present discourses about migration as a new phenomenon. The views on migrant workers that see them as a menace to European societies either as cheap labour or as culturally different migrants who are difficult to integrate, have shown to be remarkably consistent and durable throughout history. We can observe many similarities between these texts from more than a century ago and current discourses and attitudes towards immigration both in Europe and the US. However, whereas the discourses analysed here were in correspondence with received scientific views of the time, prejudices informing contemporary debates unfortunately persist in spite of having eventually lost all legitimacy in the discourse of the natural and social sciences during the past century.

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## **MIGRANTI I NJIHOVI JEZICI U POVIJESNOJ PERSPEKTIVI**

### **SAŽETAK**

Migracije u prošlosti i s njima povezane jezične prakse važne su za razumijevanje suvremenih migracijskih procesa jer pokazuju da problem masovnih migracija nije nova pojava koja se obično smatra posljedicom globalizacije. Masovne migracije iz nekadašnje Austro-Ugarske u Ameriku osobito su zanimljive s obzirom na regulaciju migranata i njihovih jezika i odnos prema njima u novoj zemlji. Uz pomoć diskurzivne analize povijesnih podataka iz tadašnjih američkih novina i drugih izvora, u radu se istražuju prakse društvenog uključivanja i isključivanja govornika slavenskih jezika na temelju društvenih predrasuda i diskriminacije s obzirom na etničku pripadnost. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju kako su oni migranti iz jednog višejezičnog carstva kojima je dozvoljeno useljavanje nakon restriktivnih postupaka (80%) bili podvrgnuti prinudnoj jezičnoj i kulturnoj asimilaciji kako bi postali priznati i lojalni američki građani. Ova povijesna sjećanja mogu pomoći u razumijevanju današnjih stavova i politika prema migrantima i njihovim jezicima i kulturama.

