

# Multilingualism and Banal Nationalism

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normally research on theoretical linguistics, language typology

- sentence structure (syntax)
- structure of words (morphology)
- meaning (semantics)

# Today's topics

- What is (a) language?
- notions of nationalism
- the role of symbolism
- multilingualism


# Introduction

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What do we see here?



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- inconspicuous assumption: one flag/one nation → one language
- monolingual ideal of nations

## Imagined Communities

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**Gellner (1983:1)**

“Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”

**Anderson (2006:5f.)**

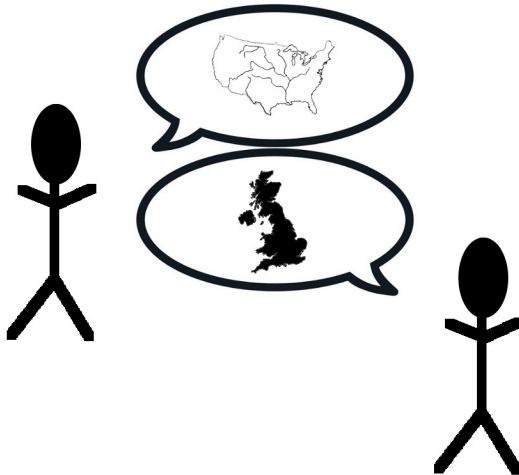
“In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”

### **Banal Nationalism (Billig 1995:8)**

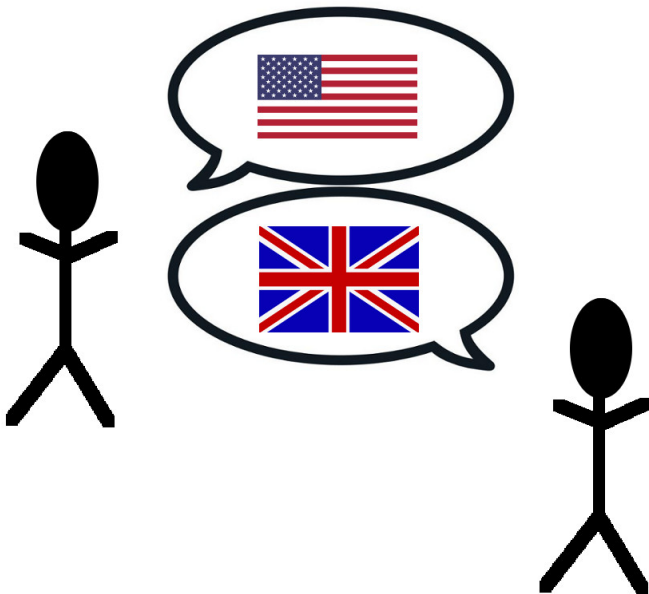
“In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.”

- Anderson points out significance of cartography for development of post-colonial nationalisms in SE Asia
- potentially significant for maintenance of “national conscience” in stable nations, but:

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## Competition?



## Notions of language

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# What is a language?

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Max Weinreich quoting a member of audience of one of his talks:  
*A sprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un flot.*

“[...] the commonplace notion of language has a **crucial sociopolitical dimension**. We speak of Chinese as ‘a language’, although the various “Chinese dialects” are as diverse as the several Romance languages. We speak of Dutch and German as two separate languages, although some dialects of German are very close to dialects that we call ‘Dutch’ and are not mutually intelligible with others that we call ‘German’. A standard remark in introductory linguistics courses is that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy (attributed to Max Weinreich). That any coherent account can be given of ‘language’ in this sense is doubtful; surely, none has been offered or even seriously attempted. Rather, all **scientific approaches have simply abandoned these elements of what is called ‘language’ in common usage.**”

# What is language?

## Chomsky (1986)

**E-language** *externalised* language

- “a collection (or system) of actions and behaviours of some sort” (S. 20)
- independent of mental state of language user

**I-language** *internalised* language

- mental state of a competent language user
- “some element of the mind of the person who knows the language, acquired by the learner, and used by the speaker-hearer” (p. 22)

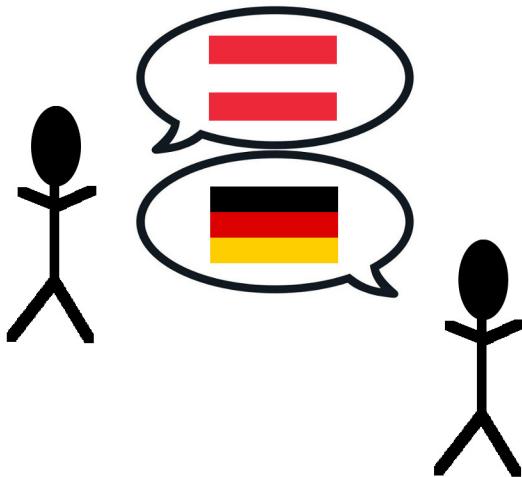
Atkinson (1992:23)

“What, then, are we to make of the claim that someone is a speaker of English? This now becomes a **sociopolitical assertion** which could be recast as follows: the person in question has an internal system of representation (an I-language), the overt products of which (utterance production and interpretation, grammaticality judgements), in conjunction with other mental capacities, are such that **that person is judged (by those deemed capable of judging) to be a speaker of English.**”

“[...] national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today's common-sense belief that discrete languages 'naturally' exist. It might seem obvious that there are different spoken languages; but, **this assumption itself is an ideological notion**, which has been vital for the achievement of order and hegemony in modern nation-states. The assumption that different languages 'naturally' exist illustrates just how deeply nationalist conceptions have seeped into contemporary common sense.”

# Mutual intelligibility

- rule of thumb for distinguishing language vs. dialect in practice
- but cf. notion of *variety* especially in so called pluricentric languages





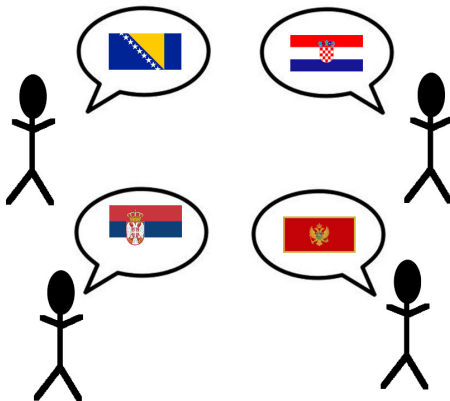
- notion of **a language** involves abstraction over linguistic knowledge systems of individuals  
⇒ potential loss of detail
- mapping parts of a continuum of “languoids” onto specific language units (“language”, “dialect”, “variety”) essentially arbitrary  
⇒ often influenced by sociopolitical considerations

### Roberts (1997:5)

“[...] whenever we use the terms ‘English’, ‘English speaker’, etc., we should bear in mind that these are **terms with no import for linguistic theory**.

What we’re really talking about are the mental states of people who are conventionally referred to as ‘English speakers’, etc. The term ‘English’, if it really refers to anything, refers to an E-language.”





Serbocroatian/Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS)

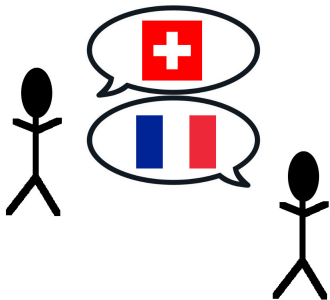
or

Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian?

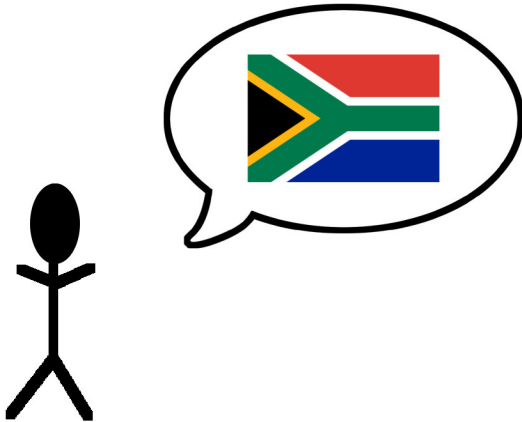
## The monolingual ideal

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- (one) basis of association of flag with language: assumed normality of monolingualism
- symbolism quickly reaches its limits





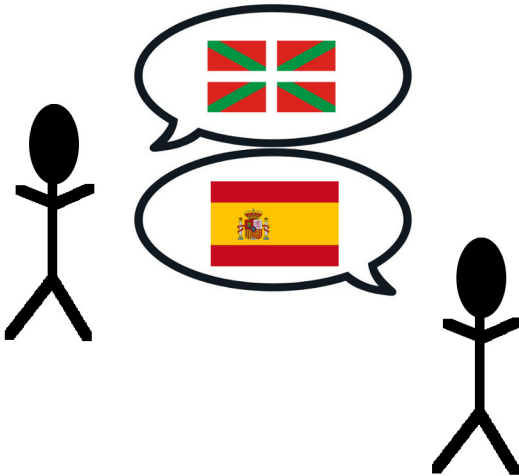


- South Africa: 11 official languages (Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, SiSwati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu)

## Languages with a nation but without a state



## Languages with a nation but without a state



- standardisation favours hierarchisation (not only in Basque)
- standard Basque (Batua) vs. different “dialects”

## Minority languages without national aspirations



- one of many examples:  
Aromanian/Vlach
- Romance language (related to Latin)
- speakers (on Greek territory) generally identify as Greek

(1) I voski ftiaksane psomi.  
the shepherds made bread

Greek

(2) Pikurar-li adrere pini.  
shepherds-the made bread

Aromanian

## Similarly Greek varieties in southern Italy

- Greko and Griko: varieties of Greek spoken in Calabria and Salento
- no significant *national* aspirations (in spite of flag)



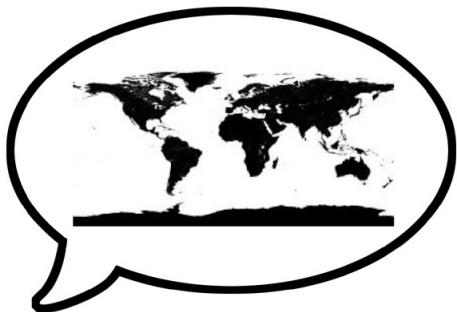
- monolingualism actually not that common in global perspective
- multilingualism in society:  
more than one language used in a society
- individual multilingualism (or bilingualism):  
an individual knowing more than one variety
  - sequential bilingualism:  
one mother tongue, acquisition of further languages later in life
  - simultaneous bilingualism: simultaneous acquisition of two (or more) languages  
→ often one dominant language

- last century: occasional reservations of bilingualism being problematic for children's (linguistic) development
- consensus among language acquisition researchers nowadays: bilingual language acquisition is not a (principled) problem for children
- according to some studies slightly slower acquisition of vocabulary than monolingual children (esp. in non-dominant language)
- studies point to higher mental agility in bilingual children

## Conclusion

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- “language” as subject of linguistic research  
≠ commonplace notion of language
- commonplace notion of “language” is subject to sociopolitical influences (potentially also their result)
- multilingual language acquisition is generally an opportunity, not a problem



**Thanks a lot  
for your attention!**

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