Why the Slovak Language Has Three Dialects:  
A Case Study in Historical Perceptual Dialectology  
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linguists have long been aware that the ubiquitous distinction between "languages" and "dialects" has more to do with political and social forces, typically nationalism, than with objective linguistic distance. This article, an exercise in the history of (linguistic) science, examines political and social factors operating on other levels of linguistic classification than the "language-dialect" dichotomy. Nationalism and linguistic thought are mutually interactive throughout a linguistic classification system: political and social history not only affects a list of "languages," but also a list of "dialects."

Specifically, this article takes as a case study the processes through which Slovak linguists came to divide the Slovak language into Western, Central, and Eastern dialects. This tripartite division presently enjoys a hegemonic status, but a variety of historical sources suggest that observers classifying Slovak speech before the mid nineteenth century showed no awareness of it. Instead, they employed other classification systems, which reflected ideas about the Slovak linguistic zone that have since fallen out of favor. This essay derives the emergence of the tripartite division of Slovak dialects from a specific historical situation: the polemical needs of Eudovit Štúr, an important Slovak politician and language reformer.

This article takes linguistics as an object of historical analysis, but also seeks to engage with the discipline from a historian's perspective. I have found much common ground in sociolinguistics, the branch of linguistics devoted to the intersection of linguistic and social phenomena. Sociolinguists have long been aware that linguistic classification has a history, despite the popular perception that linguistic phenomena are timeless. Joshua Fishman, a giant in the field, once made the following remarks about the emergence of "national languages":

Today, in almost all of the Western world (and in the ethnopolitically consolidated and economically modernized world more generally), nothing seems more "natural" than the current linkage between a particular cultural identity and its associated language. For Frenchmen, that language is French and for Spaniards it is Spanish. What could be more "natural"? However, by their very nature,

cultures are primarily conventional rather than truly natural arrangements and, therefore, even these links, apparently natural though they seem, need to be examined more carefully, perhaps even more naively, and such fundamental questions as “Was it always so?” and “Why, when, or how did it become so?” need to be raised.3

Both of these excellent questions apply not only to the well-studied creation of a “language” from a set of “dialects,” but also to the emergence of a “dialect” from a continuum of spoken language. This article will attempt to answer them both for the case of the tripartite division.

Conceptually, a list of “dialects” within a given language resembles a list of “languages” within a given language family: both classification schemes divide a dialect continuum into implicitly homogenous regions. However, the political factors that establish a “dialect” are less dramatic than those that elevate a “language” from a “dialect,” since the political stakes are usually lower. The political and social issues at stake in disputed dialect classifications have, in consequence, attracted less attention. In consequence, the truth claims of a dialect classification are less frequently called into question. Nevertheless, the classification of dialects, no less than that of languages, has a cultural history and should be viewed skeptically.

If both “dialects” and “languages” are socially constructed, we would expect that the classification of a large language family, such as the Slavic language family, would differ considerably over time and between different observers. This is indeed the case. British Slavist Paul Selver, for example, noted that “in 1822 Dobrovsky, the practical father of Slav philology, divided [the Slavic zone] into nine tongues, Šafárik in 1843 proposed six languages with thirteen dialects, Schleicher in 1865 proposed eight, Miloslavich, a prominent Slovene scholar, decided on nine, Jagié, a great authority of European reputation, is in favor of eight. The reason for this diversity is that some philologists designate as a language what others will admit only as a dialect.”4 Selver’s passage is interesting not least because his figure for Dobrovsky (“nine tongues”) differs from that of Endre Arató: “F. Pelc, professor of Czech language and literature at the University of Prague, spoke of five main dialects [Russian, Polish, Serbian, Croatian and Czech], while J. Dobrovsky, the most outstanding scholar of Slavic linguistics of his age, spoke only of four [Czech, Polish, Russian and Illyrian].”5 My own count, from the opening pages of Dobrovsky’s Lehrgabe der Boehmischen Sprache, yields neither four, nor nine, but ten languages, with three subcategories of Slovenian.

Most linguists and historians agree that a linguistic collective achieves the status of a “language” through extralinguistic factors. The famous bon mot that “a language is a dialect with an army and navy,” usually credited to Max Weinreich, correctly leaves linguistic “facts” behind, yet this memorable formula does not accurately describe the allocation of linguistic status. After

3Joshua Fishman, The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival (Amsterdam, 1965), 77.
4Selver, Athenology of Modern Slavonic Literature in Prace and Vers (London, 1919), x.
6Dobrovsky’s languages were Bohemian, Slovak, Croatian, Slovene, “Serbian (Illyrian),” Russian, Polish, Upper Sorbian, Lower Sorbian, Slovak, and Old Church Slavonic. Perhaps Selver decided that Old Church Slavonic did not count since it is no longer spoken? See Joseph Dobrovsky, Lehrgabe der boehmischen Sprache (Prague, 1819), 4–5.
7Novom Chomsky, Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use (New York, 1980), 15, says that the quote is “attributed to Max Weinreich,” but scholars have had difficulty finding the citation from Weinreich himself. Joshua Fishman cites “Der yivo un di problemen fun unerd tseyt,” in Yivo-List, 25.11.13, 1945 (Mendele list, 28 October 1946). Tidnish-speaker Victor Friedman, suspecting that the quote is apocryphal, reports that some Scandinavian scholars attribute the quotation to Otto Jespersen; see his “Language in Macedonia as an Ethnic Construction Site,” in When Languages Collide: Perspectives on Language Conflict, Language Competition, and Language Coexistence, ed.

the partitions of Poland, Polish retained its recognition as a distinct “language,” even without a Polish army; neither Austrian German nor American English was proclaimed a distinct “language” despite significant military forces. The battle for the Slovak language had mostly been won before the 1938 Slovak state was founded; the existence of a Czechoslovak army, furthermore, did not noticeably assist the cause of the Czechoslovak language.

Historians of nationalism have focused on language codification as the decisive factor separating “languages” from “dialects.” Benedict Anderson, for example, focused on the invention of printing technology, while Mirosław Hroch developed a schematic five-part stage theory, stage three of which has six subdivisions.6 Sociolinguists have also done theoretical work on the processes through which “dialects” become elevated to “languages.” Einar Haugen, in his famous study of Norwegian,7 described a four-stage theory of language codification and systematization, which he then repackaged as a “Matrix of Language Planning Processes.” (Hudson later reprinted this matrix in his sociolinguistics textbook.)8 These various stage-theory frameworks are based on the observation that the classification of languages and dialects is based on more than objective linguistic facts. Any attempt to explain “how it became so,” must examine historical events: the writing of dictionaries and grammars, the emergence of newspapers or best-selling authors, the development of school systems and government administrations, and so on.

How and why a dialect gains popular acceptance, by contrast, is a question that has gone almost wholly unexamined. The main scholar working in this field, sociolinguist Dennis Preston, calls his stimulating work “perceptual dialectology.”9 Preston studied how Americans classify the dialects of American English by asking informants to sketch dialect zones on a map of the United States.

Linguists often take a dismissive attitude toward popular perceptions of linguistic phenomena. As Preston put it, “Folk linguistics has generally been reported anecdotally and serves usually as a foil to the ‘correct’ linguistics professionals want to present to neophytes.”10 Popular perceptions, however, constitute an important object of study in their own right, particularly for social scientists examining popular mentalities. Preston is right to make them a focus of research.

Preston’s interview-based techniques, however, can only be applied in person, and therefore are only applicable to the present. Applying Preston’s research techniques to the nineteenth century would require time machines. This inability to discuss change over time prevents any historical discussion of cause and effect: the sociology of language, true to its name, generally draws on the methodology of sociologists. I believe, however, that historical techniques allow a historical perceptual dialectology. Drawing on research in Slovak intellectual history, this article examines texts by amateur linguists and language planners to show how Slovak perceptual dialectology has evolved over time. Historical perceptual dialectology, as practiced in this article, has nothing to do with the field of historical linguistics, which aims to discover how linguistic phenomena

have changed over time. Historical perceptual dialectology, however, can still make a significant contribution to the social understanding of language by linking changes in dialect perception to political and intellectual history. It can also provide new perspectives on Slovak history.

Situated methodologically between history and sociolinguistics, two disciplines not noted for their close collaboration, this essay shows some of the inherent weaknesses of a first attempt—that is, of a pioneering study. Historians, emphasizing depth over breadth, are less inclined to comparison than sociologists and sociolinguists. This article only examines a single case and may be influenced by the eccentricities of that case. Since historians analyze texts, their discussions rely on the perceptions of literate intellectuals, a social class that may have disproportionately influence but nevertheless remains representative for an illiterate and agricultural society. Nevertheless, the sources added below tell a coherent story. Both historians and sociolinguists would benefit from discussion across disciplinary boundaries. This essay, therefore, attempts to start a conversation.

The Tripartite Division of Slovak Dialects

Let us begin by examining how dialectologists look at linguistic diversity. One common technique is to draw a map of isogloss lines, that is, lines showing where a given linguistic transition takes place (examples will be given below). Linguist Ulrich Ammon suggests that dialects, here understood as geographically defined speech varieties, could be objectively defined in terms of "isogloss bunching." Representing a distinct linguistic variety in a linguistic space as a dot on a line, Ammon drew a diagram to illustrate his argument. I have reproduced Ammon's diagram as figure 1. Isogloss lines might be imagined as an invisible line lying in space between the dots.

![Diagram of Ammon's Classification of Varieties According to Distance](image)

In the first case (a), the four varieties on the center-right are close to each other and separated from other varieties, one might group them as a distinct "dialect." In the second case (b), the linguistic change is gradual and mostly continuous; here, Ammon concludes, one cannot meaningfully divide the varieties into "dialects" and must instead speak of a dialect continuum.

Ammon's diagrams, of course, are schematic and simplified, not least because they only represent those isogloss lines which support one's favored classification. Line (a) in figure 2 shows, for example, the varieties one might wish to highlight to reproduce Ammon's "dialects classifiable in terms of distance," line (a). The empty circles of line (d) represent varieties whose distinctiveness a dialectologist chooses not to highlight, the consequence of unexamined isogloss lines.

![Diagram of Varieties on a Language Continuum](image)

and "Southern" dialect zones, for example, would seem implausible. The tripartite division of Slovak dialects suggests that Slovak isogloss lines should bunch into two bands: one separating the Western and Central dialects, another separating the Central and Eastern dialects. In other words, the tripartite model suggests a figure quite similar to (a), though the far left dot, representing "Western Slovak," would have to be replaced with a clump of dots representing the internal diversity of Western Slovakia.

Several dialectologists, notably Jozef Štekl, Jaromír Bělíč, and Anton Habovská, have carefully studied the linguistic features of that section of the Slovak dialect continuum congruent with the Slovak Republic. Their research has uncovered a huge wealth of isogloss lines distributed mostly at random, implying a huge number of varieties, each virtually identical to those immediately adjacent. If linguistic uniqueness defines a unique "dialect," then a distinct dialect would have to be assigned to each town in Slovakia, or perhaps even to each individual speaker of Slovak.

Slovakia's linguistic diversity is theoretically unsurprising. Sociolinguists Jack Chambers and Peter Trudgill suggest that "any region that has a long settlement history will have "criss-crossing isoglosses separating even contiguous villages from one another and apparently describing a bewildering variety of dialect feature combinations." Slovakia is such a region, and it follows Chambers and Trudgill's rule. In any event, the number of distinct dialects is several orders of magnitude greater than "three."

The complexity of an isogloss map depends primarily on the effort expended by dialectologists in gathering data. If all the various isogloss lines printed in the works of Štekl, Bělíč, and Habovská were drawn on a single map, the result would resemble a plate of spaghetti. The Slovak case, then, resembles neither (a) nor (b); linguistic diversity does not clump, as in (a), but is too dense for (b). The Ammon-style diagram corresponding to the Slovak case would be (c), reproduced in figure 2.

Nevertheless, the results of dialectological research can still be used to support one or another classification scheme: One simply selects those isogloss lines which support one's favored classification. Line (d) in figure 2 shows, for example, the varieties one might wish to highlight to reproduce Ammon's "varieties classifiable in terms of distance," line (a). The empty circles of line (d) represent varieties whose distinctiveness a dialectologist chooses not to highlight, the consequence of unexamined isogloss lines.

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Playing with Ammon diagrams shows how the appropriate selection and omission of isogloss lines could support either a tripartite or four-fold division of the Slovak language continuum (figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Various Subdivisions of the Slovak Dialect Continuum

![Diagram showing various subdivisions of the Slovak dialect continuum.](image)

Isogloss maps corresponding to these revised Ammon diagrams are easily constructed. Figure 4 shows isogloss lines in support of the tripartite West-Central-East division, corresponding to line (e). Figure 5 supports the four-fold Far East—Near East—Near West—Far West division corresponding to line (f). The problem with such maps lies not in the information that they display, but in the information that they omit. The white spaces between isogloss lines create the illusion of relative homogeneity, when in actuality, linguistic diversity is continuous throughout the entire zone. Figure 6 provides a more accurate, if less clear, picture of the diversity of the Slovak linguistic zone. Note that the isogloss lines neither group naturally into any tripartite division nor, indeed, display any obvious bunching or internal cleavages.

Note also that gradual linguistic change extends beyond the borders of Slovakia. Slovak dialectologists generally define their research zone in terms of Slovakia's political frontiers. This presumably reflects how the Slovak Academy of Science, the organization that funds and publishes most Slovak dialectological research, defined its zone of competence. Bělic, a Czech scholar, has examined isogloss lines that cross the Slovak-Czech frontier in Communist Czechoslovakia, but to the best of my knowledge, no scholars have ever studied the transition between Slovak and Polish. Appropriate research might uncover isogloss lines that cross the Slovak-Polish or Slovak-Ukrainian (Slovak-Rusyn) frontier.

The main point of figure 6, however, is that linguistic change is continuous within the Slovak zone: isogloss lines do not bunch together. The chaos of figure 6 is best described as a dialect continuum. Various simplifying interpretations, whether tripartite, binary ("Eastern-Western"), four-fold, or anything else, are all equally indefensible.

I am not aware of any twentieth-century scholar of Slovak dialects who has so much as considered any classification scheme other than the tripartite (West-Central-East) division, much less gathered evidence in its defense. Miroslav Štefánik, in the *Malá československá encyklopédia* (Small Czechoslovak encyclopedia) (Prague, 1934), listed the West-Central-East dialects, as did American Slavist R. G. A. de Bray, British Slavist David Short, and linguists C. F. and F. M. Voegelin. In 1934, furthermore, Václav Váňa similarly posited West, Central, and East subdialelects of the Slovak dialect of the "Czechoslovak language." Citing other tripartite classifications of the "Slovak language" would be trivial. Whether as dialects of the Slovak language, or even as subdialects of the Czechoslovak language, "Eastern Slovak," "Central Slovak," and "Western Slovak" have a firm hold in the mental landscape of twentieth-century Slavists. At present, the tripartite structure is essentially taken for granted.

Contemporary Slovak linguists also project the tripartite linguistic division back in time. In 1980, Lubomir Štúrovič divided written texts from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Slovakia into "cultural West Slovak" and "cultural Central Slovak"; in 1996, Mark Lauersdorf added "cultural East Slovak" to the list. In 1997, Rudolf Krajčovič described the "basic division in West Slovak, Central Slovak and East Slovak" as "pre-historic inheritance." In 1999, Pavol Žigo...
dialectical frontiers: the word is used in both the "West Slovak" counties of Trenčín and Hlohovec, and the "Central Slovak" county of Nitrianska. Since Ripka describes the extent of individual lexical items in terms of Slovak counties, his reproduction of the tripartite division is doubly puzzling. Why not stick with county-level náreťa? The tripartite division served no apparent analytical purpose.

Given that Slovak dialectologists understand the complexity of the Slovak linguistic reality, why are they so extraordinarily attached to the tripartite division? The answer to this question lies in the history of how the Slovak dialects have been classified. The lively nineteenth-century debate about whether Slovak was a "language" or a mere dialect of Czech—or of Slavic—provides abundant sources that discuss and classify the "dialects" of Slovak. Historical research easily traces Slovak historical perceptual dialectology back to the late eighteenth century.

Several early classifications of the Slovak speech in northern Hungary, the territory which subsequently became the Slovak Republic, were not tripartite, but dual: the territory was divided into Czech and Polish spheres. For example, the seventeenth-century Neue und Kurze Beschreibung des Königreichs Ungarn described the Slovak language spoken in Košice (in eastern Slovakia) as "Polish," but claimed that many inhabitants of the Hungarian kingdom could speak "the Bohemian language... pretty fluently." This implicitly divided Slavs in the north of Hungary into Bohemian speakers and Polish speakers. Strictly speaking, this classified "languages," not "dialects," but the main point is that the territory of the future Slovakia was divided into two main linguistic regions, not three.

Grellmann's 1795 Statistische Aufzählung über die Einzelnheiten und Gegenstände der Österreichischen Monarchie listed Hungary's "Slovak" languages as "Bohemian, Moravian, Croatian, Serbian [Serbsische oder Raetsche], Wendic, Dalmatian, Russian, and quasi-half Polish." To interpret this list for the Slovak linguistic zone, we must first discount the non-Slovak territories: Grellmann's Wendic, Croatian, and Serbian languages are South Slavic; Russian refers to the Ukrainians (Rusyns) of Transcarpathia; and "Moravian" probably refers to communities of Moravian Brethren. This leaves the territory of modern Slovakia divided into Czech and "quasi-half Polish" linguistic zones, much as in the Neue und Kurze Beschreibung. This Polish-Czech Menkena schema survived into the nineteenth century. Therese Pulszky, the Viennese-born wife of a Hungarian nobleman, divided the Slovak zone into Czech and "Polish" halves in her Tagesbuch einer ungarischen Dame: "[The Slovak] population dominates; in the west, these belong to the Czech-Moravian race... The Slovaks in the districts of Zips, Záros, Abaj, Zemplin, and Torna are much more closely related to the Poles than the Moravians in language and customs. They are more indolent and their schools are worse equipped than those of their western brothers... Just as in the northwest, individual Slovaks, in their language and customs, resemble the Bohemians, and in the north the Poles, so in the northeast all are of the Ruthenian race."

Pulszky divided northern Hungary's Slovaks into Czechs, Poles, and Ruthenians. Assuming that Pulszky's Ruthenians are the Ukrainians (Rusyns) of Transcarpathia, it seems that she

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24Anonymous, Neue und Kurze Beschreibung des Königreichs Ungarn (Nuremberg, 1664), 21, 15.
25Grellmann, Statistische Aufzählung über die Einzelnheiten und Gegenstände der Österreichischen Monarchie (Göttingen, 1795), 1580.
26Grellmann may very well have seen Czech and Moravian as separate languages, but it is difficult to see how this would affect the classification of Slavs living in Hungary. Alternatively, Grellmann might have seen Slovaks as "Moravians" and referred to a community of immigrants when speaking of "Czechs." Either way, this divides Slovaks into two categories.

and Rudolf Krajčovič classified texts from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries into "Cultural East Slovak," "Cultural Central Slovak," and "Cultural West Slovak," though they felt the need to subdivide the latter into northern and southern halves. Curiously, Slovak dialectologists even reproduce the tripartite classification scheme when discussing linguistic features that fail to conform to it. Ivoaščić's Šlovenština (Bratislava, 1984); Ivoaščić's Šlovenština (Bratislava, 1986); and Hans Konečný, "Jakovská moravská krátkost?" in Slovina: slovenský slovníček (1996), 323.
divided the ancestors of today's Slovaks into Czechs and Poles, yielding two linguistic zones. This classification differs from modern perceptions not just in the failure to divide Slovak into three dialects, but in the failure to acknowledge a Slovak nation or, indeed, a Slovak “tribe” or any other Slovak ethnographic collective. The recurring perception that Eastern Slovaks were “Polish” is also striking, though modern scholarship has frequently discussed the nineteenth-century tendency to classify the Slovaks as a variety of Czechs.

The three sources cited above come from non-Slovaks. Outsider perceptions are relevant, particularly given the influence of German ideas on Slavic thought in Central Europe. However, the self-perceptions of Slovaks prove more important for the history of the tripartite division. Slovaks themselves, at least the educated Slovaks who have left behind texts to analyze, tend not to favor the dual classification schemes popular among non-Slovak outsiders.

Slovene, however, show no awareness of the tripartite division of Slovak dialects until the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, most lack any conception of “the Slovak language,” preferring instead to see all Slavdom as a single linguistic collective. Any subdivisions within Slovak under this interpretation would not be “dialectical” but “subdialectical.” I have not found any Slovak authors who divided northern Hungary into Polish-speaking and Czech-speaking zones, as the German observers cited above did, but several Slovak literati replicated the Polish and Czech subdivision in subdialectical terms.

The most famous of these is Jan Kollár, the greatest of Slovakia’s All-Slovak poets, Ján Kollár, in the edited volume Hlasové o potrebnom jazyku a jeho osobnosti (Voices on the need for a unitary literary language for Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks), divided the Slovak linguistic region into seven zones. The original text reads considerably; the following quotation gives only Kollár’s numbering system and geographic designations, all of which refer to Hungarian counties:

1) Slovak-Czech, that is, literary language ... on the Moravian border in Slalice, Holíc, as well as some villages in Malohont and Gomera counties.
2) The Slovak dialect proper, or, as foreigners prefer, Slovak [Slovakia] ... Martin, Liptov, and parts of Orava, Trenčín, Nitra, and Zvolen counties.
3) The Polno-Slovak dialect ... Šariš, Spiš, and Orava counties.
4) The Russian- or Ruthenian-Slovak dialect, ... Abaújvár (including Kolôie), Žemplín, and Brečice counties.
5) The Serbo-Slovak dialect of the border of Serbia, mainly in the Bôhské county and in many other Serbian-Slovakian villages, and for example in Buda, in Szentendre, etc.

6) The German-Slovak dialect, mostly in mining towns and cities, in Štajersk, in Kromerízk and, on other areas...
7) The Hungarian-Slovak dialect, mainly in lower Hungary ... in Novohrad, Pest, and Békés.

Note that this “Slovak” ethnolinguistic territory covers most of the Kingdom of Hungary, including Slovak colonies in the so-called dolnô zem. Note, part of Yugoslavia. One contemporary British scholar, David Short, mocked the “hybrid dialects” of this “pseudo-classification.”

Why Short feels so strongly about the subject is unclear, but Kollár’s division of the Slovak dialects certainly contradicts the modern tripartite consensus: ignoring regions outside the territory of modern Slovakia, Kollár posits five dialects.

Kollár’s habit of creating dialect names by combining two ethnonyms was not an original contribution. Pavel Šafařík’s Jazyky slovenského a uherského (Slovakian and Hungarian) (Secular songs of the Slovak people in Hungary) contained no formal classification of Slovak dialects, but it did include songs in the “German-Slovak,” “Polish-Slovak,” and “Serbo-Slovak” dialects. One of the “Polish-Slovak” songs is worth reproducing:

Slovaki [Slovakia] Wsee ste zem! Who are you? By what name? Wsee by what name! Slovaki [Slovakia] [perhaps, “Slavs! Slavs!”]
You are all identical as if you all had one and the same mother.

The All-Slovak sentiments in this song suggest that the frequently ascribed “Polish” character of what modern linguists would probably designate the “Eastern Slovak dialect” had no impact on the national affiliation of the people speaking it. Proponents of a “language” usually posit a nation bearing the same name, but this link does not hold true for “Slovak.”

In 1847, M. M. Hodža divided Slovaks into four dual-ethnonymic dialects: Czechoslovak, speakers in Moravia, Silesia, Brezová, Nitra, and Trenčín; Polnoslovak, in Spiš, Sárej, and parts of Zemplín; Rusynoslovak, in Gomera; and Slovak proper—also known as New-Slovak—in Martin, Liptov, Zvolen, and Novohrad. Note that Hodža’s geographical descriptions differed from Kollár’s: Hodža assigned Nitra and Trenčín to “Czechoslovak,” while Kollár considered them “Slovak proper.” Note also that Hodža’s implicit Slovak geography differed from Kollár’s: Hodža neglected Buda, Pest, and the dolnô zem.

23Jan Kollár, Hlasové o potrebnom jazyku a jeho osobnosti (Voices on the need for a unified literary language for Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks) (Prague, 1844), 102-4.
25Pavel Šafařík (Pavel Jozef Šafařík), Jazyky slovenského a uherského (Secular songs of the Slovak people in Hungary) (Pest, 1827, 164). The word Slovak was used to mean both “Slovak” and “Slav” in the early nineteenth century. Ibid.
26In the nineteenth century, this city had several names: Pozsony, Pressburg, Presbourg, and Pressburg. Some Anglophone historians prefer Pressburg when referring to the pre-Czechoslovak period. My use of the name Bratislava in this article is anachronistic routine Slovak usage of this name dates back only to 1919, though variants of the name Bratislava date back to Slobodovci and Slováci. The various national claims to the city are, however, beyond the scope of this article, so I have decided to use the name that readers would be able to find in a current atlas. See Peter Bagoly, “The Making of a Slovak City: The Czechoslovakian Naming of Pressburg/Pozsony/Presburg, 1918-1919,” Austrian History Yearbook 35 (2004): 205-27.
27New Slovak” was new because Ladovit Šťaľ had recently codified a literary language based on it. M. M. Hodža, Dobrovo slovo slovakom [A good word with a Slovak] (Levôč, 1847), 91. See also Vlaha, “Náščel slovenské,” 223.
Other Slovaks dispensed with dual-ethnonymic collectives and identified Slovak dialects by place names. Such a system, perhaps, comes closest to the linguistic reality: it grants unique linguistic properties to every point on the dialect continuum; the number of dialects increases with the number of places one is prepared to list. An open-ended list of this sort need not contradict the tripartite division: modern dialectologists Stolc and Ripka combined a county-level classification system with the tripartite division. However, place name classification, like linguistic reality, is compatible with nontripartite classifications, as Kollár and Hodža showed by combining their four- and five-fold divisions with county-level classification.

Ignač Baja classified Slovak dialects by place names in his 1789 pamphlet, "Antifændly," which attacked the proposals of Juraj Fándly and was published anonymously. Baja attacked Anton Bernolák's 1790 standardization on the grounds that no standard literary language could capture the diversity of Slovak colloquial speech. Significantly, Baja's argument applies not only to Bernolák's standardized language, but to any standardization of Slovak. In the following quotation, all the Slovak words can be translated as "speaks": "You have another practical difference between pronouncements. We homorite differently around Trnava, they rikaj or milvaj differently in the White Mountains, they vrav differently in Orava, they hitan differently in Šariš and in Spiš, and elsewhere they rozpravaj differently. And in Naháš... you never homorite, never rikajte, nor milvite, nor vravite, nor rozpravite."26 This open-ended list, naming the various dialects after Hungarian counties, does not result in a formal classification scheme, but the implicit division of Slovak "dialects" is clearly not tripartite.

A few decades later, similar arguments appeared in opposition to Ludoví Štúr's standardized grammar. Ján Zachorovský, in Kollár's Homoslov, posited at least a four-fold classification: "Now, well, you want to Slovak turn away from the Czech language and write in Slovak; but which of the Slovak dialects do you want to elevate to a written language? Perhaps Liptovská? Trenčínska? Šariñska? Gemeríška? Or God-knows-what-else-ška [štúr zná jaka jehošč-šial]?"27 In the same volume, J. Pavel Tomášek listed six dialects, defined by county names: "Here one must consider that the Zvolen-Liptov dialect [the basis of Štúr's codification] is not general for Slovaks; certainly for Bratislavans, Nitrans, Gemerians, Spišská, and Šariñská, and their neighbors, it is less easy to understand than Czech."28 Tomášek and Zachorovský have similar lists: both posit Gemer, Šariš, and Liptov, for example. However, their lists are not compatible. Tomášek combined Liptov and Zvolen into a single collective; Zachorovský treated Liptov as a free-standing unit. Nevertheless, neither Zachorovský, with four dialects, nor Tomášek, with five, replicated the tripartite division.

Baja, Tomášek, and Zachorovský shared a similar political stance: all three wrote to oppose an attempt at codifying a standard written language for Slovaks. Fishman has pointed out that the argument "its internal diversity makes it inherently unstandardizable" is frequently used "against languages whose opponents would prefer to see them dead and unstandardized," but Fishman's observation must be qualified in this instance. Baja, Tomášek, and Zachorovský saw Slovak as part of a larger linguistic collective extending to Moravia and Bohemia. They believed that Slovaks already had a standardized script: Bíblitčina (often confusingly described as Biblical Czech).29 These Czechoslovak-mined Slovaks did not wish to see Slovak "dead" any more than Bavarians who accept High German as a standard language nurture a death wish against Bavarian. Most Americans see themselves as speakers of "English," but this does not make them any less loyal to their accents or spelling. Czechoslovak-minded Slovaks should be presumed equally loyal to their distinctive linguistic characteristics. Nevertheless, Fishman would be right to observe that Baja, Tomášek, and Zachorovský had political—that is, extralinguistic—motives for emphasizing the internal diversity of the Slovak language. Their diversity-emphasizing classifications of the Slovak linguistic zone clearly reflected a political stance.

Nevertheless, in 1861, Daniel Lichard, who used and campaigned for a standardized Slovak literary language, gave an open-ended, county-based list of Slovak dialects: "This enormous [Slavic] nation is divided according to dialects more or less into tribes, or nations, such as the Russians, who are the biggest, and then the Poles, Czechs, Croats, Serbs, we Slovaks [my Slovak], etc... However, with the passage of time... their language changed, but they all speak one and the same language; there are only sundry variations just as exist among us Slovaks, insofar as in Trnava and Skalica they speak differently than in Liptov, and differently again in Šariš and Spiš—but everybody understands each other fine."30 Lichard, like Kollár, posited a single Slovak language, thus implicitly downgrading standardized written Slovak to a "dialectical" status. Trnava, Skalica, Liptov, Šariš, and Spiš refer to subdialects of the Slovak "dialect," not the dialects of the Slovak "language." The important point, however, is that despite promoting a codified Slovak literary language, Lichard gives an open-ended, county-based classification without showing any awareness of a tripartite division.

Thus, it is not a coincidence that the overwhelming hegemony of the tripartite division in the twentieth century is a historical development. We can confidently answer the first of Fishman's questions in the negative: no, the tripartite division was not always so. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, some observers classified the Slovak zone as half Czech, half Polish. Others posited four- or five-fold classifications defined by dual-ethnonymic dialects (Pomolov-Slovak, "Rusyno-Slovak," "Czecho-Slovak," etc.), and still others used open-ended county-name systems (Liptov, Šariš, Zvolen, etc.). Of these, only the open-ended scheme is still in use today, and that only as a system of subclassification within the tripartite system. The tripartite division did not acquire its hegemony until the twentieth century.

But what of Fishman's second question: why, when, and how did it become so? Why did Slovaks begin to propagate the tripartite division? When did it become hegemonic? How did it supplant its rivals? Historical linguists can never tell us when the Western, Central, and Eastern Slovak dialects were differentiated, nor when the Gemer, Liptov, and Šariš dialects disappeared: the various points on the Slovak dialect continuum have always retained their individual peculiarities. The sudden emergence of the tripartite classification does not reflect changes in Slovak speech patterns, but rather a change in how those speech patterns were perceived. In short, this problem does not belong to historical dialectology, but to historical perception dialectology. The next section provides an explanation for the success of the tripartite division.

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26Quoted from Ivočko Kerán, Bratislavské povesletky [Bernolák's pomesletky] (Bratislava, 1966), 33.
27Kollár, Homoslov, 89.
28Ibid., 199.
29Ibid., 5.
31I believe that the terms Czech and Biblical Czech are misleading and analytically harmful, since they imply that authors who wrote texts in this standard had some sort of Czech consciousness, whether national or linguistic. The many contributors to Bíblitčina, variously described the script as "the biblical language," "our beautiful pure Biblical Slovak," "Czech," "Slave-Bohemian," "the Czechoslovak dialect," "the Biblical or Czech language," and "the Czechoslovak Biblical language..." this diversity of terminology suggests that Slovaks of many national affiliations—Slovak, Czechoslovak, and Czech—used this script. Bíblitčina makes a neutral analytical term. See Kollár, Bíblitčina, 184, 150, 7, 102, 112, 222, 197, respectively. A. W. Semberger's 26 February 1846 letter to Kollár, Jan Štefan, Matej Bells 1746 introduction to Dološki grammar, Jáná Zachorovský's 1845 letter to K. Frifispaty, Kollár's O Kazošoškovej jednošči = Želi v n literattre, Želi Bajža, M bkay Linder.
32Daniel Lichard, Rechnov o Mamorvanské nivóda slovenského [Discussion of the Slovak Memorandum] (Buda, 1851), 20–21.
A Brief History of Slovak National Language Planning

Modern Slovaks differ from their ancestors in the way they subdivide the Slovak speech collective, but they also differ in their ideas about the relationship of Slovak to other linguistic collectives in the Slavic world. While modern Slovaks argue that Slovak is a "language," distinct from other Slavic languages, Kollár, Tomášek, and Záborský posited a special relationship between Czechs and Slovaks. Kollár, Lichard, and M. M. Hodža, furthermore, believed in the existence of a "Slovak language". This is not a coincidence: the acceptance of the tripartite division was part of the struggle to establish the Slovak "language" in the taxonomy of the Slavic languages.

The tripartite division was devised for a specific historical situation, namely, Ladovšťík Štúr's attempt to introduce a panconfessional Slovak literary language. It gained acceptance as Slovaks adapted Štúr's legacy to their political needs. Štúr, a Lutheran, justified his script as the "Central Slovak dialect," dismissing the script of his Catholic rival Anton Bernolák as "Western Slovak" and the Calvinist "Hungaro-Slovak" or "Polno-Slavic" script as "Eastern Slovak." The tripartite division was a claim to geographic centrality that justified panconfessional orthographic unity without challenging confessional pride. The tripartite division is Štúr's most enduring linguistic legacy. This account should be noted, fundamentally contradicts the traditional narrative of Slovak language planning.

The traditional account of Slovak language planning has two heroes and one important footnote. The traditional narrative begins in 1787, when the seminary student Anton Bernolák wrote a grammar book based on "Western Slovak," Dissertatio Philologico-Critica de Litera Slovavorum, which was the basis of a 1790 textbook, Grammatika Slovavca. Three generations of authors used Bernolák's script, the so-called Bernolákovačina, as their standard language, though Luthersacks with their similar language, based on the Reformation-era Kralice Bible used in Lutheran church services. Increasing national tensions between Slovaks and Hungarians during the early nineteenth century eventually inspired Štúr to codify the "Central Slovak" dialect in 1846. Štúr's standardization attracted panconfessional support, but encountered some resistance on technical grounds, so it fell to Martin Hattala, with some assistance from the above-cited M. M. Hodža, to revise Štúr's work. Hattala's standard was also based on "Central Slovak" but took a more etymological approach to spelling. Modern Slovaks write in Hattala's standard, but they honor Štúr as the founder of the national language.

The Slovak national linguistic faith, Bernolák plays John the Baptist to Štúr the savior, while Hattala plays, perhaps, the perennially underestimated role of Saint Peter. This dogma has long satisfied the faithful. This story, however, takes the objectionable existence of "Western" and "Central" Slovak dialects for granted. It further assumes that nineteenth-century Slovaks understood and used these concepts as analytical terms. This story requires substantial reworking if it is to be reconciled with the nineteenth perceptions of Slovak dialects that dominated the early nineteenth century.

Let us begin with Bernolák. Today, the speech Bernolák codified is classified as "Western Slovak" and therefore as a variety of "Slovak"; several scholars treat Bernolák as "the first codifier of the Slovak language."40 Problematically assuming that Bernolák possessed a specifically Slovak linguistic consciousness, several scholars then conclude that he and his followers wrote from specifically Slovak nationalist motives. Dušan Kováč, for example, has written that "Slovak Catholics, from the very beginning, had the concept of an independent Slovak people." Peter Petro similarly wrote that Bernolák's followers "did not suffer from the Czech complex," transforming any resistance to Bernolák's standardization into pathological Czechophobia.

Insofar as Bernolák's patriotic feelings come through in his linguistic work, however, his loyalty adhered to a multietnic vision of Hungary. Historians call this the "Hungarian concept." Bernolák describes the Dissertatio as a grammar not for the Slovaks, but for the "Slavs of Hungary [Hungarian Slavonians]," alternatively the "Pannonian Slavs [Pannonii Slavv]".41 He described the language he codified neither as "Western Slovak" nor as "Slovak", but as "Pannonian Slavic [Pannonia Slavorum]," the Slavic language in Hungary [linguae slavorum in Hungaria], or simply, the "Slavic language [slavicae linguae, linguam slavorum]." Bernolák lived in an age when the concepts "Slovak" and "Slavic" were essentially conflated,44 which means that he may well have understood his efforts at organizing a Slovak Learned Society, the Slovenský uhelný tovarišt, as an expression of Slavic feeling. Even his rejection of Czech—he left "fully to his own will he who wishes to write in the Czech fashion"—could be read as a rejection of Lutheran Bibličtina, not as anti-Czech feeling. His language planning stemmed from Enlightenment pedagogical motives, not Slovak nationalism. In short, Bernolák did not believe himself to have codified the "Western Slovak dialect," nor indeed "Slovak," but rather "Hungarian Slavic." Most Slovak scholars, both historians and linguists, argue that the choice of the Central Slovak dialect explains the success of the Štúr and Hattala codifications and the failure of Bernolák's standardization. The geographic centrality of "the Central Slovak dialect" supposedly made

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42Note that the Hungarian concept was class inclusive, while the idea Hungarian was restricted to Hungarians' nobility. On Bernolák Hungarianism, see Daniel Kapan, Modernistische Bernoláková [Bernolák's Hungarianism] (Bratislava, 1980), 11; Lubomir Dvornik, "The Concept of Hungarian Language in the Nineteenth Century," 341-54. The concept of Hungarian has been used from 1825, when a dictionary gives the word "Hungary". On Hungarianism, see Michael Godrich, "The Hungarian Concept in Nineteenth-Century Slovakia," East Central Europe/Europo des Ceunen des: 45-58.


44The term "Hungarian" concept was class inclusive, while the idea Hungarian was restricted to Hungarians' nobility. On Bernolák Hungarianism, see Daniel Kapan, Modernistische Bernoláková [Bernolák's Hungarianism] (Bratislava, 1980), 11; Lubomir Dvornik, "The Concept of Hungarian Language in the Nineteenth Century," 341-54. The concept of Hungarian has been used from 1825, when a dictionary gives the word "Hungary". On Hungarianism, see Michael Godrich, "The Hungarian Concept in Nineteenth-Century Slovakia," East Central Europe/Europo des Ceunen des: 45-58.
Štúr’s standard more representative of average Slovak speech and thus attractive to the broadest spectrum of Slovaks. Historian James Felak, for example, argued that “[t]wo obstacles, however, prevented Bernolák Slovak from becoming the basis for the Slovak national movement. First, it was based on Western Slovak dialects. It found little resonance in Central and Eastern Slovakia. Second, the Slovak Protestant clergy regarded it contemptuously as a peasant jargon unbecoming persons with any pretensions to refinement.”46 Historian Joseph Mikus gave a similar explanation: “While Bernolák had based the written language on the spoken idiom of Western Slovakia, Štúr corrected this by basing it on that of Central Slovakia. It is actually through Štúr’s work that Slovak adopted its definitive form in which it continues today.”47 Linguist Kráľovič even indulged in grandiose language: “Štúr’s generation, unburdened by pitfalls, did not hesitate: they avidly and decided to elevate Central Slovak in its cultural form to the level of a literary language… Štúr’s generation remained unyielding in this struggle.”48 All these scholars take the factual existence of the tripartite division for granted. Mikus and Kráľovič, furthermore, treat its three components as implicitly homogenous; only Felak acknowledges that “western dialects” are plural. Nevertheless, the fact that nineteenth-century Slovaks showed no awareness of the tripartite division throws doubt upon the causal relationship: “Selection of Central Dialect” → “Successful Codification of Slovak Literary Language.” By pointing to confessional tension, however, Felak points toward a more profitable line of analysis.

Bernolák, recall, was a Catholic priest, and so were almost all the authors who wrote according to his orthographic conventions. Of the 105 authors who used Bernolák’s script, as listed in Imrich Kotvan’s exhaustive bibliography, a full 100 (95 percent) had religious training. Books published in Bernolák’ská slovotina were overwhelmingly clerical: of 326 authored books, 257 (around 75 percent) were clearly religious texts, such as sermons, catechisms, and hymnals.49 The Catholic associations of this script alienated the influential Lutheran intelligentsia.

Štúr, unlike Bernolák, was a conscious patriot and was part of this Lutheran intelligentsia. He had been educated in Biblíčtiina, written poetry in Biblíčtiina, and actively participated in Czechoslovak patriotic societies in his youth. In the 1840s, however, he reassessed his Czechoslovakism for two reasons. The first was that Czech language reformers showed little interest in accepting Slovakisms in their revised literary language. The second and decisive reason was the growing threat of Magyarization in Hungary. In 1843, Hungarian officials interrogated Štúr on suspicion of treason. No evidence was found against him, but Štúr was forced from his teaching post despite strong support from his students. The inability of Slovak Lutherans to resist Magyarizing Hungarians led Štúr to seek allies inside Hungary. He feared that orthographic divisions would prevent Slovaks from resisting Magyarization, so Štúr made Catholic-Lutheran accommodation his top priority. This meant, in Brock’s words, that “the ancient and close connection between Slovaks of the Protestant persuasion and the Czechs would have to be sacrificed. To sever this connection would certainly be painful. It was contemplated only because the alternative seemed worse: the ultimate dissolution of the Slovak culture of north Hungary in the rising tide of Magyarmod.”50

Locher correctly concluded that Štúr’s plan for a single Slovak orthography was “a concession to the spirit of Magyarmod,” and “a means to unify and strengthen his people and to strike a weapon (accusations of disloyalty) from the hands of its enemies.” While Locher believed that “Štúr in everything only concerned himself with the well-being of the Slovak people,” he also emphasized that Štúr and his collaborators attempted to win Magyar trust and friendship, since “denying this would mean to come into conflict with Štúr and Hurbán themselves.”51

How could the linguistic-confessional division between Bernolák Catholics and Biblíčtiina Protestants be overcome? Lutherans would not accept Bernolák’ská slovotina: it was too Catholic. But how could Štúr, a Lutheran, reject Catholic script without arousing the very confessional divisions he sought to overcome? In 1846, after consulting widely with Catholic Slovaks— notably Ján Holly, a Bernolák’ská poet and Catholic priest—Štúr unveiled his new literary language and began publishing a newspaper in it. Whatever the objective merits of Štúr’s standardized literary language—or of Hattalak’s revision thereof—over Bibliotíina or Bernolák’ská, one can be certain that they were irrelevant to Štúr’s success; failed attempts at rationalized or improved orthography litter the history of dozens of languages. As Sinetologist John DeFrancis so eloquently put it, “the success of an orthographic scheme is a function less of its quality than of the extent to which it is promoted.”52 How, then, did Štúr promote his script?

Štúr’s essay “Nárečia slovenského alebo potrebuje slovenský národe” (The Slovak dialect, or the necessity of writing in this dialect), like most polemics on script reform, praised the new system on so many grounds as possible. Štúr described it as the “purest” dialect of Slovak, the speech of the primitive Slovak homeland, the Tatras, and so on.53 Concerning the questions raised in this article, however, Štúr’s most important argument was that his script represented the “Central Slovak dialect,” whereas Bernolák’s was “Western Slovak,” and thus geographically marginal. To the best of my knowledge, Štúr was the first to classify Slovak dialects along tripartite “West-Central-East” lines.

The “centrality” of Štúr’s “Central Slovak dialect” was directed primarily against Bernolák’ská slovotina. The same line of reasoning, however, could also be invoked against the Calvinist orthographic tradition, since the Calvinist script could be reclassified as “Eastern Slovak.”54 No linguist ever wrote a grammar for the Calvinist orthography; this nascent script tradition posed less of a threat to Štúr’s project than Bernolák’s codification. Nevertheless, Štúr’s plan to create a panconfessional orthography in non-Cyrillic northern Hungary—and only in non-Cyrillic northern Hungary—benefited from a pseudo-objective linguistic reason to supercede the Calvinist orthography, particularly a reason that bypassed confessional differences.

Apart from the tripartite division, Štúr’s national arguments concerning “the necessity of writing in the Slovak dialect” have not proved particularly attractive to subsequent generations. Despite popular perception to the contrary, Štúr’s national concept bears little resemblance to


48Kráľovič, *Slovácké slovo* (Slovakia), 525.

49Kotvan, *Bibliotíina Bernolákůvského*, 265.


51Locher, *Nationale Differenzierung und Integration*, 103–64.


53The Tatran have become the most geographical symbol of Slovakia. Ladislav Siska even speaks of Slovak’s “trilingual” and dates “the mystical cult of the Tatras” at least back to Holly. Gogošák, however, claims that the Tatran myth originated with the Gogos, and was only introduced to Slovak poetry through Follovský’s writings. Gogošák credits Štúr with “reincorporating the Tatra idea to a concept of Slovak independence opposed to both Magyars and Czechs.” See Ladislav Siska, *Hlavný horizont* (Bratislava, 1947), 23; Gogos, *Ztšte*: *die Geschichte des slowakischen Volkes*, 246.

subsequent Slovak national ideas. Stúr divided his "national" loyalties into a Hungarian legal-political half and a Slavic cultural-linguistic half, seeking to win Slovak cultural rights within the Hungarian legal context. Where modern Slovaks reject the Hungarian legacy as a thousand-year nightmare in which Slovaks were a "nationally and socially oppressed ethnic community, subject to systematic and forced assimilation" and repression, Stúr sought equal citizenship inside Hungary: "We Slovaks form a special nationality [Volkerschaft] in Hungary, we are devoted to our country, and have rendered service to our fatherland from the earliest times up until today.... We always fulfilled our obligations to the fatherland as Slovaks, even because of this, we must possess full and equal rights with others, for obligations without rights is bondage."

Even more surprisingly, Stúr did not even claim Slovak "nationhood" within a limited cultural-linguistic sphere. Stúr's thoughts about Slovak's place within the Slovak world varied with time, but "Národa slovenskou" claimed only a "tribal" and "dialectical" distinctiveness: "We Slovaks are a tribe and as a tribe, we have our own language, which is different and distinct from Czech." This quotation deserves special attention. Stúr's essay is frequently described, in Emil Horák's words, as having "scientifically proven the independence of Slovak and justified the need to codify a Slovak literary language as an integral attribute of the Slovak nation." Samuel Cambel's Dejiny Slovenska (History of Slovakia) even dared to quote Stúr as having claimed "that Slovaks are an independent nation and as a nation have their own language" adding only parenthetically that Stúr in fact had used the terms "tribe" and "dialect" since that was "the terminology of the day." Historian Peter Brock translated Stúr's passage as "we Slovaks are a tribe and as a tribe we have our own language," a curious oversight, given that Brock himself notes that the word dialect is a "more exact" translation of Stúr's original národa. I suggest Stúr meant what he said: he did not believe in a Slovak "language," but rather a "Slovak dialect" of the Slovak language.

This unusual concept has its roots in Ján Kollár's theory of Slovak Reciprocity: Stúr and Kollár, despite their bitter polemic over the status of Slovak, had more in common than is popularly believed. Kollár saw the Slovak as one national speaking a single language, in which Russians, Poles, etc. formed distinct "tribes" speaking distinct "dialects." Kollár classified Slovaks as part of the Czech "tribe." Stúr broke with Kollár only in assigning the Slovaks a unique tribal/dialectical status. But Stúr continued to accept Kollár's belief in a single Slavic nation and language with component tribes and dialects: as Stúr put it, "the nation is one, but one with varieties."

In short, Stúr saw Slovaks as Hungarian citizens who spoke the Slovak dialect of the Slavic language. In an ill-tempered polemic against Kollár's Historie Slovenského národa, Stúr's collaborator Jozef Miroslav Hurban expressed a similar dualism: "We are a tribe in Slavdom, but we are also a tribe of the Hungarian state." By emphasizing Slovak autochthony in the kingdom, Stúr and Hurban hoped to convince Hungarian patriots of Slovak loyalty, thus making the policy of Magyarisztification unnecessary.

Such ideas have no following whatsoever among contemporary Slovaks, not least because they proved so ineffective. Even when Slovaks had switched to Hattala's literary language, the Hungarian government continued its attempts to assimilate the Slovaks linguistically, along with all the other nationalities of Hungary. Modern Slovak nationalism justifies an independent Slovak state and proclaims the existence of a distinct Slovak language.

Indeed, several Slovaks became disillusioned with Stúr's anti-Czech-Hungaro-Slavism in the nineteenth century. When Slovaks realized that Hungarians would never accept a Slavic culture in Hungary, many returned to Czechoslovak linguistic practices. In 1876/77, just after Kálmán Tisza came to power as prime minister, Hurban publicly returned to an openly Czechoslovak linguistic conception. "The nation is one from the Tatars to the Elbe. The philological quarrels are settled away," Stúr had died twenty years previously, and one can only speculate about his reaction to the Tisza government, but it is notable that Stúr himself published a book in Czech only six years after proclaiming "the necessity" of writing in Slovak. Slovak Czechoslovakism found organizational structure in the so-called Hattala movement at the turn of the century. Many Hattalaists played important roles in the first Czechoslovak republic, though they used Hattala's script.

Stúr did not enjoy much more success as a language codifier than he had as a Hungarian-Slovak nationalist. His script used a highly phonetic spelling and several new diphthongs; most Slovak literati preferred Bernolák's more etymological spelling. In 1851, recognizing that his script
conventions only enjoyed limited support, Štúr organized a meeting in the hope of achieving orthographic consensus. Several Slovak litterati attended, including Radlinský, a Bibličtina convert from Bemolňcová; Ján Palárik, a Catholic priest and proponent of Bemolňková; and the Lutheran patriots who had organized the Slovak volunteers: Hurban and Hodža, both advocates of Štúrova. Hattula dominated the discussion. Hattula accepted Štúr’s “Central Slovak” grammar and pronunciation, but suggested an entomological orthography resembling Bemolňková. When Štúr accepted this compromise, the Catholic clergy agreed to abandon Bemolňková.20 Hattula’s 1851 Kratica Mluviva slovenská (A short Slovak grammar) marks the end of both Bemolňková and Štvrova as distinct literary traditions, though Hattula’s Slovak successfully claimed the inheritance of both.

This leaves the tripartite division as the most enduring legacy of Štúr’s linguistic thought, though several modern Slovak intellectuals, as discussed above, praise Štúr’s groundbreaking innovation of linguistic beliefs that Štúr never actually espoused. The primacy of the Central Slovak dialect justified what Ammon calls “authorities of proscription,” an essential element in the creation of a literary standard. Slovak literati acquired the ability to stigmatize other literati for nonstandard writing without arousing confessional divisions. For example, in 1887, Samo Czambel could attack Viliam Pauliny-Tóth’s prose as “Trnavián” and “Western dialect.”21 The creation of a Slovak script, in turn, eventually brought about a sense of Slovak “language-hood,” with all the political consequences implied by the establishment of a national language. Belief in a Slovak language became both a cause of and justification for Slovak nationalism.

The tripartite division, in short, took on a life of its own. It outlived the Hungaro-Slavic context for which Štúr devised it, legitimizing the aims of the Slovak national movement in unforeseen political contexts. It helped establish loyalties to a Slovak literary language and thus made an important contribution to the Slovak national movement. Its association with Štúr, whose extralinguistic political activity during the Revolution of 1848 cemented his reputation as a Slovak national hero, only enhances its legitimacy. The tripartite classification scheme, therefore, is a central feature of modern Slovak national mythology.

The true importance of Štúr’s language reform, then, lies in the arguments used to justify it. Štúr was the first Slovak grammarian to subdivide the Slovak dialect continuum into western, central, and eastern collectives. Štúr devised the tripartite division to justify a script imagined as a “written dialect” of the Slovak language, to be used by the Slavs of Hungary. The subsequent success of this script as the Slovak “national language,” used by members of the “Slovak nation,” then retroactively legitimized the tripartite division. The items in Štúr’s classification scheme have changed their status: once subdialects of the Slovak dialect of the Slavic language, they are now dialects of the Slovak language in the Slavic family of languages. Nevertheless, this classification system is supported by such a powerful political consensus that Slovak linguists have come to treat it as an objective “fact.”

Many scholars have noticed that nationalism and linguistic questions have an unusually close relationship in Slovak history, but they tend to eschew a unidirectional causality. Tibor Pichler, for example, has written that Slovak nationalism “was determined through language and culture.” Indeed, Pichler has claimed an extraordinarily categorical Slovak exceptionalism: “All nationalisms in the Habsburg Empire had a very strong linguistic ingredient, but Slovak nationalism was entirely language-based.”23 Hugh Seton-Watson similarly wrote that “the creation of a Slovak nation in the nineteenth century is essentially the emergence of a language group into national consciousness.” He described Slovakia as a sort of ideal type: “[T]here is no more striking example than the Slovak case of the role of language in nation-formation.”24 But while historians argue that the Slovak language created the Slovak nation, linguists have reversed the causality. Pichler derived the “contemporary linguistic border” from “the decisive age when modern nations crystallized.” In his essay on the Slovak language, Dušóvka was even more categorical: “[T]he formation of a literary language was the most evident symptom of the formation of their nation as a separate Slovak national entity.”25

The disciplinary division between linguistics and history explains these diametrically opposed conclusions. Historians, such as Pichler and Seton-Watson, understand that the development of a national movement depends on the actions and decisions of individual nationalists, but they take on faith the linguistic “fact” of a Slovak language with its three dialects. Sociolinguists, on the other hand, understand that the standardization of a national language depends on the idioms of individual grammarians and that subdivisions of a dialect continuum are arbitrary conventions, but take on faith the historical “fact” of a Slovak national movement. In reality, language planning and nationalism affect each other, and causality flows in both directions. Furthermore, linguistic and political concepts interact in several ways, not just through the frequently asserted and oft-studied link between “language” and “nation.” Linguists and historians must read each other’s work and consider each other’s evidence if either are to understand the complex causal relationships between nationalist language planning and national politics.

The unanimity with which modern Slovaks—both linguists and nonlinguists—proclaim the tripartite division derives from its importance to Slovak nationalist mythology. The legitimacy of Štúr’s codification, and thus of Hattula’s codification, and therefore of Slovakia’s “national language,” rests on the tripartite division. The universal acceptance it enjoys among the Slovak public reflects its political utility, not its scholarly merit. Most linguists would accept that social and historical factors affect perceptions of language, particularly regarding the “language-dialect” dichotomy. In practice, however, they show little interest in investigating nonlinguistic data. Understanding the classification of dialects, at the very least, calls for a more robust analysis of extralinguistic causes than a black box labeled “social and historical factors.” This approach offers significant potential gains. Does the importance of the “Southern” dialect in American perceptual dialectology, for example, derive from memories of the Confederate States of America? Does “Western Ukrainian” derive from Habsburg Galicia? Historical perceptual dialectology might provide evidence one way or another, enabling scholars to date a dialect’s emergence as an intellectual artifact. Similar questions may prove important in Yugoslavia, Turkey, Central Asia, and other cases unfamiliar to this author.


24 Dušóvka, Národné jazykovede, 10; Dušóvka, “Slovak,” 211; emphasis added.
The tripartite division first appeared in Slovak thought not in an impartial or "scientific" study of dialectological diversity, but as part of a polemic about script reform. Slovak linguists seem alarmingly uninterested in the danger that conventional wisdom may structure the interpretation of linguistic data. Anton Habovštiak, for example, presented his Slovak isogloss lines on a series of maps bearing the names of the tripartite division. Having been born and educated in twentieth-century Slovakia, Habovštiak had been taught the tripartite division from his early youth. If he had been taught some other classification, might he have structured his maps differently? What would his data suggest if presented in a nontripartite fashion? I cannot help but think that the unquestioning acceptance of the tripartite model should be re-examined, even if, in the end, Slovak dialectologists conclude that the tripartite division remains a useful shorthand.

The essential step in understanding the history of linguistic classification, whether of "languages," "dialects," or other levels of classification, is the recognition that linguistic classification is part of intellectual history. The narrative proposed in this article has little to do with the reality of spoken language, which linguists, even sociolinguists, usually define as their primary object of study. Historical perceptual dialectology is not a branch of linguistics but a subfield of the history of science: it constitutes the history of linguistic thought. The history of science has demonstrated that the analytical concepts used in physics, biology, and chemistry have social and political histories, and this insight also applies to linguistics.

Historians, unfortunately, appear to have been intimidated by the technical jargon of linguistics, leaving the study of linguistic classification to linguists. Linguists tend to evaluate linguistic classification schemes either as useful or not useful, as correct or incorrect. I cannot contain my skepticism about the analytic value of dialect classification, but I must also admit my ignorance of dialectology as a discipline: as a historian, not a linguist, I have little to contribute to the study of linguistic diversity. The history of Slovak dialectology, however, is more than the relentless uncovering of objective linguistic truth. Dialectology, like physics, chemistry, or biology, has a social and political history, not least because different conceptual frameworks legitimate different social and political claims. The study of linguistic concepts in their political and social contexts has much to offer.

Specifically, my research explains the codification of the Slovak literary language in a way that explains several otherwise curious statements in the documentary record. It is consistent with Stúr's Hungaro-Slavism and explains nineteenth-century observers' ignorance of the tripartite division. It also provides an alternative to the increasingly unsatisfying "national awakening" metaphor of Slovak history, which has too frequently derived Slovak nationalism from the "fact" of a Slovak language. Slovak historian Joseph Kirschbaum once wrote that "the claim that the Slovak language was never a part of the Czech or the so-called "Czechoslovak" language was proven correct by scholarly research beyond any doubt." Linguistic status, however, is by its very nature a convention that scholarly research does not prove but manufactures. Scholars of linguistic nationalism would do better to define their object of study as how, when, and why such a consensus comes to be manufactured.

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76Anton Habovštiak, Atlas slovenského jazyku.
77Joseph Kirschbaum, Slovakian Nation at the Crossroads of Central Europe (New York, 1960), 49.