Behind and beyond the Lexicon: Anglophone Terminology and Western Balkan Realities

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ABSTRACT

When considering how the Western Balkans and their current circumstances have been imagined by outsiders, the linguistic and semantic difficulties begin with the very naming of the region(s) under scrutiny. Neither previously published reference guides nor analytical essays serve adequately to clarify the nuances of contemporary usages and the complex, shifting state of affairs they refer to. Working from a lexicological perspective and an 'outsider' stance, this article highlights some contemporary issues by citing examples of keywords used recently in geopolitical, diplomatic and popular discourses. The article tracks transitions that have taken place in representation, focusing in turn upon the language used to describe progression towards Europeanization, upon terms which may be perceived differently by those within and those outside the speech communities in question, and upon changes in meaning and interpretation of key terms, as well as the generation of relevant new terminology taking place in the Anglosphere, but yet to be disseminated across global English. A conclusion briefly notes some lexicographical projects in preparation in the Western Balkans and suggests that these need to be complemented by further analysis of the lexicon of geopolitics and integration.

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Introduction

When, in a 2010 article entitled 'The Souring of Turkey's European Dream', Nobel literature laureate Orhan Pamuk lamented a growing callousness on the part of Europeans towards migrants and minorities, he invoked an older, more positive imagining of 'Europe' by him and his fellow Turks. Pamuk's meditations, coming soon after Angela Merkel's intemperate remarks on the supposed failure of multiculturalism, made however no distinction between states inside the EU which pursue very different policies on immigration and enlargement (the UK as opposed to Germany, for instance), and seemed to ignore altogether those states which belong to the imagined continent but remain for the time being outside the European Union.

If a certain 'fuzziness' can be forgiven in a *littérateur*, far greater fuzziness obtains in the Anglophone nations where those European, yet outsider, states are concerned. The fact is that the Western Balkans, (unlike, increasingly and incidentally, Turkey) are in the currently fashionable phrase, 'off the radar' for all but a few specialists. They do not form part of the national conversation in any part of the Anglosphere, most 'native –speakers' (to used a contested term) of English are ignorant of their geography and history, their current circumstances are under-reported in the media and when mentioned at all, they are frequently subject to stereotyping.

Ignorance and indifference is evidenced -or compounded –by confusion over primal categories, over the very naming of the region –or sub-region- in question. Eastern and Southeast(ern) Europe are themselves unstable designations. In a lighthearted challenge to readers of the *Economist*, Edward Lucas dismantles the stereotypes of a Europe divided crudely on post-cold war lines between 'West' and 'East', reminding his audience in the process that 'western' Greece lies 'in the continent's far southeast'. (Lucas 2011)

Balkanism and Balkanization

The word Balkan itself is freighted with all kinds of associations, beset by multiple potentials for misunderstanding. Of what do the Balkans consist? How far do they stretch? I remember Slovenia being explained as 'the Sweden of the Balkans' at the time of independence; more recently it was

dubbed 'the Surrey of the Balkans', after the part of Southeastern England that scores highest in wealth and quality-of-life surveys. In branding or rebranding exercises employing the discourse of travel and leisure, Macedonia, Albania and Croatia have all recently proposed themselves, or have been proposed as 'the pearl of the Balkans', but the ambiguous 'wild Balkans' has been used both to promote adventure holidays and to characterize sensationalist reports by outsiders which are based on preconceptions and inaccuracies (Knaus 2010).

'Balkanization', of course, is a well-known pejorative in popular, journalistic and official registers, based on a continuing notion of, in the words of one commentator, 'a concatenation of quarrelsome peoples endlessly embroiled in obscure, yet intractable wrangles' (Batt 2009), though an internet search shows that it is now more commonly applied to locations outside Europe, and even more frequently in French than English. Interestingly, an attempt has recently been made (in the field of spatial planning and architecture) to reinstate an appreciative sense of the same word, (Weiss 2008) illustrating the mutability of even the most contentious categorizations, a theme that will be taken up below.

In historical, literary and cultural studies there have been several notable attempts to track and analyse 'western' constructions and representations of the Balkans by focusing on rhetorical and discourse strategies, yielding a notion of 'Balkanism', by analogy with Said's 'orientalism' and revealing a sometimes (though not uniformly) insidious intellectual tradition that has gone largely unquestioned. (Todorova, Goldsworthy). Meanwhile, in linguistics, 'Balkanism' can refer to shared features of grammar and vocabulary which originated through close contact, ironically, under conditions of predominantly peaceful coexistence.

'Western Balkans' as a subdivision is very rarely encountered in popular discourse. Possibly the only significant current example of the formulation is in the title of the Lonely Planet guidebook to the area; '…that sassy chunk of southeast Europe knows how to thrill a traveller: Croatia's glamour coast, Serbia's wild music festivals, Belgrade's nightlife and more… get to grips with some of Europe's most fascinating up-and-comers.' Ironically, the latest mention by news media has been the announcement that the BBC World Service is stopping its broadcasts to the region as part of a cost-cutting exercise.

If we try to apply a lexical analysis to discussions of the Western Balkans, we are not without resources in the form of pre-existing glossaries and lexicons. The EU's bureaucracy is necessarily conscious of the particularity and importance of its jargon, if not of its ideological baggage, and provides a number of guides (ec.europa.eu). Published lexicons treat the language of international relations in general and in specific sub-fields such as peace-building and aid provision (Chetail 2005). The cultural analyses, however, take us only up to the beginning of the last decade, while the glossaries remain at the neutral level of offering ostensibly stable definitions without examining connotations, ambiguities and context-specific interpretations, let alone changes of meaning over time.

It can be fruitful, then, to concentrate on discourse and rhetoric in close-up, specifically considering the keywords and 'buzzwords' employed in English, in order to surface assumptions made and to question the stances adopted in constructing the Western Balkan narrative. Such an essay, necessarily brief in this context (and perforce tentative since undertaken by a linguist rather than a specialist in geopolitics), may complement and update those larger-scale historico-cultural analyses referred to above, and can begin to assemble a lexicon that is more nuanced and more highly contextualized than the glossaries mentioned previously.

The Language of Transition and Enlargement

In the words of blogger Gerald Knaus, 'As numerous European leaders are looking for excuses to slow down the EU accession path of Western Balkan nations it becomes all the more important to be extremely precise when it comes to describing the problems of the region.' We can track the fraught progression towards integration through its phases and bifurcations by looking at some of the keywords most commonly associated with it.

In the official jargon, **peace-keeping** and **conflict prevention** gives way to **peace-building**, **state-building** and **capacity-building**. **Stabilization** goes unquestioned, despite the hints of **social engineering** and **predatory reconstruction** that sometimes adhere to it. The word, exotic to most Anglophones, **lustration**, makes a brief appearance. As a main imperative **containment** yields to **integration**. The notion, emphasizing order and regularity, of enlargement **waves** or more usually **rounds** gives way to the idea of **tailormade enlargement** or **tailored country strategies**, more

recently recharacterized as the **regatta approach**, with its implication of
'every man for himself.' Metaphors assuming unhindered progression
along a pre-existing route – **path**, **road map**, **accession track**, **milestone** –
are replaced by more neutral terms like **(accession) package** and the realist
Americanism **catch-up**. Relationships to be mended rely less on reconcilia-
tion or **rapprochement** than (a vogue term of the moment) **re-set**.

In 2006 CEFTA was seen as a way of inculcating a spirit of collaboration in
parallel with the political processes, in the words of one EU diplomat, a way
of turning 'spaghetti to lasagne' (McTaggart 2006). Optimistic vocabulary
was widespread pre-2006; the Western Balkans were for the World Bank
'Europe's next highgrowth business location'…. 'dynamic' was a favoured
adjective. Five years later progress is most often described in negative
terms, repetition resulting in cliché: a frequency count across a selection
of texts brings up a distinct set, among them **constraints**, **stalled, unre-
solved, stalemate, bottleneck**, and, notably, many instances of the word
intractable. After something of a hiatus since the time of actual fighting
there are now recurrent instances of immoderate language: Kosovo is de-
scribed in 2010 as a 'black hole'; most of the region continues to be threat-
ened by 'the dark hole of ethno-nationalism.'

Outsiders react with impatience verging on disbelief when confronted with
the FYROM/Macedonia nomenclature issue. As one commentator asserts,
'It is hard … either to understand the depth of the passions involved, or
to avoid calling down a 'plague on both your houses' for a dispute which
nationalist politicians in both countries have exploited with self-serving
short-sightedness.' Controversies around the status of the name Kosovo
have been equally exasperating.

In that pivotal area of state-building and consolidation, from the crude
epithet of **failed state** we move to the more suitable, yet equally damning
unfinished states and the concept, variously stated, of **virtual statehood**,
unresolved statehood, **diminished statehood**.

Enlargement fatigue on the part of potential hosts begins to be mirrored
by **accession fatigue** on the part of candidates. Ironically, pejorative terms
such as **spillage**, **spillover**, and **externalities**, formerly describing the threat
of dangers spreading beyond normal confines, may take on a positive sense
of the achievement of critical mass yielding benefits available for sharing
and advances in one place influencing neighbours.

Europeanization, once employed widely and unselfconsciously despite its lack of specificity (not to mention its condescending exclusivity), now seems to demand more care in its application: does it imply an imagined set of values to be emulated, simply mean stricter conformity with EU criteria, underline the diminution of direct US influence – or all of the above? **Euroization** – adoption of the single currency – suddenly seems a distant prospect again, this time not only due to internal factors but to yet more uncertainty in the Eurozone itself. Undeterred, those oriented towards a wider western perspective continue to exhort the countries of Southeast Europe to embrace – or be embraced by - **the Euro-Atlantic community**.

'Terminological Inexactitudes'

In his own defence Winston Churchill memorably used the humorous euphemism 'terminological inexactitudes' instead of 'lies'. The phrase should more properly denote misunderstandings arising from ambiguities of language, and it is these are under consideration here.

Conditionality (let alone **functionality of conditionality**) is a term which still provokes consternation in some circles in the UK. Though it has in fact a long pedigree in formal English it sounds to non-specialists like a *calque*, a translation/borrowing from French, and symbolizes the alienating workings of the Euromachine. In this case, for once, we have a jargon item whose denotation and implications will be clearer to inhabitants of the Western Balkans than to bemused members of the UK public. Seemingly less complicated words, when deployed in this complicated environment, begin to lose their clarity: what exactly do **consolidation**, or **deepening**, or **European vocation** mean in the WB context? Where and what is the **periphery** – or should it be '**the periphery of the periphery**'? And are such designations neutrally objective or openly or covertly derogatory?

The semantic field which includes what locals have referred to as '**connections**' (again, for outsiders a relatively lightweight term, but here carrying a particular contextual charge) entails degrees of semantic fuzziness as commentators struggle to characterize various forms or levels of corruption. The predominantly British **cronyism**, the mainly US **patronage**, a WB favourite, **clientelism**, and occasionally the more usually neutral or appreciative **mutualism** (see below), have been applied without any

distinctions between them being addressed. **State capture** (as opposed to the Anglosphere collocation **regulatory capture**; the neutralizing of independent watchdogs by industry or government) describes the 'grand corruption' that occurs when oligarchs or pernicious interest-groups manipulate policy formation and suborn officials, thereby perpetuating weak governance.

The current catchword **resilience** (US **resiliency**) denoting the ability of capitalism to survive recession, in the Western Balkan context refers to the resilience of ethnic tensions and illiberalism in general. **Minority**, **ethnic grouping** or **bloc**, **ethnicity**, **interethnicity**, even **clan** and **tribalism**, are terms that western commentators feel able to apply to 'alien' contexts, but which sound outmoded and too contentious for domestic consumption (see the remarks on **multiculturalism** below). A distinction between **plurality** and **pluralism** is not always observed, but this in fact reflects the overlapping or ambivalence that have continued to beset the words since they were employed by Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt.

Absorption capacity was previously assumed to refer to the EU's readiness to integrate new members, while it now refers to the potential for absorption of funds by aspirant members. When **integration capacity** (on the part of the EU only) is substituted there seems to be a subtle shift in emphasis towards the fraught and problematical.

Inflow, of capital/investment in particular, has given way to **outflow**, sometimes **exodus**, of media, for instance. **Innovation**, the catchword or *sine qua non* of late modernity, is frequently addressed in terms of **innovation determinants** and **innovation outcomes**, invariably seen by external assessors as problematical and deficient.

There are interesting examples, too, of English, or at least English-sounding oddities being used locally; **tycoonization**, **tycoonery** and **destructionology** are instances. The exact provenance of these terms is unclear, but in the case of the last two may been influenced by the language of online gaming. Invoking the neologism **humanitarization** (a notion with some similarities to Naomi Klein's **disaster capitalism** and the related **predatory reconstruction**) BiH, according to Mujkić (2010), is reimagined as disaster zone: not *terra nullius*, perhaps, but *tabula rasa*, its weakness in the face of outside interference leading to the **depoliticization** of local actors; the national entity and the individual citizens.

A Lexicon for the Future

Just as we become comfortable with language encountered during the past decade or so, that language is destabilized: familiar terminology mutates or is supplanted by an onrush of neologisms. In the speech communities in which they have originated, in the Anglosphere itself, a number of relevant keywords are already undergoing subtle transformations of meaning. Other potentially useful terms have been coined but may have yet to be taken up by users of the lingua franca of global English.

A case in point is the use in the Western Balkans and elsewhere of the related terms **social** and **human capital** and of **soft power** (the absence of the latter being lamented, for instance). These expressions retain their validity but in the case of soft power have been revisited by luminaries such as Joseph Nye Jr who re-emphasises the 'power' element, reminding that what matters is not just cultural affinity but a state's ability to persuade, attract and, crucially, set the terms of debate. The appearance of the collocation and seeming oxymoron **soft dictatorship** complicates things further. All three of the terms in question have been subsumed in some recent discussions into the idea of the **intangible infrastructure**, in other words a nation's capital structure viewed as its potential in education, healthcare, communications, legal compliance and **transparency**, opportunities for women, etc. rather than its industrial capacity. The extent to which the **emerging economies**, in the first instance the **BRIC** bloc (Brazil, Russia, India and China), have, or have not developed such 'invisible' potentials is said to be pivotal to their future prosperity. Credit Suisse has formulated a set of indices for potential investors by which a nation's **II** can be measured, while other specialists apply the concept to corporations as well as political entities. The phenomenon whereby refocusing on **intangibles** and boosting **post-industrial technocapitalism** and new **business ecologies** can move wealth from where traditional industries have been based to completely new, formerly peripheral locations, is known as **regional inversion**.

To take another example from the UK, the terms making up the semantic field of ethnic, national and local identity have undergone some interesting transformations in recent years. The once central term **multicultural(ism)** had ceased to feature in official discourse (surviving only in the mocking demotic 'multiculti'), until David Cameron resurrected it in 2011 only in order to repudiate it. As with 'minority' and 'community' before it, those the designation was designed to boost or patronize turned against it, while

observers began to equate it with **ghettoization**, first prompting some specialists to replace it with the rather ambiguous variant 'multiculturism' and refer to workers in 'western' societies, 'living in multicultures in conditions of hyperdiversity.' **Diversity** itself remains a central tenet of public sector and corporate practice and retains its importance for discussions of political contexts overseas. However, as long ago as the early 1990s US Human Resource manuals were discussing where diversity training had gone wrong and why the term **difference** was to be preferred. According to Christopher Metzler of Cornell University; '...diversity has become a pejorative and must be replaced by the word 'inclusion', which business executives believe drives a different philosophy.' Politicians have realised that diversity can emphasize separateness and in some contexts are 're-purposing' as alternatives **cohesion** or **convergence**, in doing so risking yet further difficulties of interpretation.

The long-serving UK Labour government was adept at coining resonant neologisms to describe a succession of theories and policy initiatives: seeking to export such novelties as **PPI** and **PFI** (**public-private initiative** and **private finance initiative**, in other words partnership financing), the never-quite-defined **third way**, emphasis on **the third sector**, and more recently **flexibilism** and **mutualism.** The former denotes trust-based partnerships between employee and employer offering new and creative alternatives to Fordist manufacturing philosophies, command-and control business models and the 'nine-to-five' office routine. Not just, it was claimed, a coping mechanism in the face of economic meltdown, the willingness to embrace unorthodox working hours and radical new patterns of employment was given a positive spin, but was derided by critics as **flexploitation**, a feature of **recessionomics** whereby employees are forced to take pay-cuts/work longer hours/pay back bonuses/relocate, etc. Some pundits suggested facetiously that flexploitation would result in **freakoutonomics**; civil unrest among the disadvantaged, among whom may be counted **NEETs,** the acronym coined by the UK government in 2009 to designate those 'not in education, employment or training' (replacing the clumsiness and lack of specificity of 'unemployed'). Slightly more soberly the commentariat invoked the notion of the **precariat**, the term used by NYU professor Andrew Ross to describe a rootless, uncontracted pool of workers most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of recession and globalization. Members of the precariat may come from the highly mobile specialist or creative sectors, or belong to the huge reserve of migrant, semi-skilled, unskilled or deskilled workers on which the global economy increasingly relies.

In its latest, British incarnation **mutualism** referred to co-operative ownership of an organization by its managers, its workers *and* those who use its services. Touted as the means whereby, 'progressives can recapture the ownership agenda', mutualism promised to '**embed** democratic accountability' and turn staff into '**champions** of reform'. The inbuilt contradictions – that stakeholders' interests may differ drastically, that mutualism should occur by consent and not be imposed, were glossed over.

 While two of New Labour's other key preferred locutions, **stakeholder** (economy) and **sustainability**, survive and thrive, those other formulations have been sidelined by the succeeding coalition government in favour of their own buzzwords which include Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's fashionable notion of **nudge economics** (for **nudge**, read subtle coercion), based on research into **cognitive bias** (decisions based on misunderstanding), **conformance** (bowing to peer-pressure) and **priming** or **wedging** (planting thoughts and opinions). A resultant practice is **choice architecture**; **framing** the choices presented to consumers, investors or stakeholders (by language, layout, number, the right to opt in or out, etc.) and/or providing guidance and support (in the form of supplementary information). The concept is a key component of so-called **libertarian paternalism** – simultaneously helping and persuading individuals faced with unlimited or complex choices, while maintaining **agenda control**. Its appeal (not least to the Obama administration, Britain's Tories and online marketing) may in part be that **behavioural economics**' grounding in psychology and statistics contrasts with the cruder persuasion techniques associated with the commercial sector's obsession with **branding**.

Conclusions

Fairclough (2003) and others have examined how social practices are discursively shaped, as well as the subsequent discursive effects of social practices, have highlighted the relationship between discourse and power and the critical analysis of discourse as a corrective to the perpetuation of unequal power relations at all levels of society. By concentrating on language in use, specifically upon the lexicon, we can surface and interrogate the assumptions behind rhetorical strategies and at the same time empower ourselves by expanding our own cultural repertoire. New lexis and the concepts it encodes can assist marginalized entities in increasing their visibility and in repairing their poor images. Many of the expressions

discussed here, some of them dauntingly modish and idiosyncratic at first hearing, have a resonance over and above their denotations and can serve as slogans or mantras, something which is often disparaged, if naively, by non-linguists (Poole 2006). Familiarity with them and with the concepts they encode, however, confers insider status and a sense of belonging; the ability to deploy them empowers their users. (Thorne 2006). The converse is also true: put more crudely, by an NGO director working on aid projects, 'If you don't know the buzzwords, you hardly have a chance to apply for funds' (Economist 2011).

At the end of the 18th century Daniel, a Vlach or Aromunian-speaking priest from Voskopojë, published a quadrilingual lexicon of the main Balkan languages 'to Assist the Learning of Young Philologists speaking other Tongues' (Tachiaos 1990). Its modern counterpart is the Balkan WordNet, a multilingual lexical database which aims to represent semantic relations between words in each Balkan language, but in its first stages concentrating on general rather than specialist vocabulary. A Serbian Lexicon of Economic Diplomacy and International Business is currently nearing publication, and there may be other wordlists and glossaries in preparation that have yet to be publicized. Given the need to share information in the medium of English, and to translate key concepts from English into local languages and vice versa, at the same time appreciating their cultural and ideological baggage, it would be very useful to produce a digitalised resource that incorporates the language of accession, enlargement and development and which takes account of the additional semantic features of such language. It is essential that local actors and stakeholders apply their own critical perspectives to the language which is being used – whichever language that is – to analyse their circumstances and make decisions about their futures. This article has merely glanced in passing at a very small sample of the terminology that matters: it is for others, 'insiders' from inside or outside the region, to take the process further.

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