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The Language Management Approach to Border Studies: Central European Perspectives

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Although there have been many studies dealing with the relation between languages and borders, the topic of language is not yet fully integrated in contemporary border studies in general. Previous studies suggested that the unclear position of language in border studies may be caused by the fact that the role of languages with regard to state borders has become less prevalent. Mainly during the nineteenth and twentieth century, language often functioned as a demarcation between different ethno-politic entities and played an important role in the process of nation building. Most dominantly in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in other parts of the world, the ideology of “one nation, one language” was fostered. Currently, however, language comes less often to the forefront in state border claims. This paper takes up the insights provided by Daniel Baggioni (eco-linguistic revolutions), Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (language, nation and states) and Jiří Neustupný (typology of language related processes) on the changing role of languages, putting forward the argument that the apparent retreat of language from the political agenda does not mean the decrease of the relevance of language for border studies. Presenting and discussing research from German-Polish, Czech-German and Luxembourgian border regions, it shows that rather than being just a marker of group boundaries, languages are functioning as part and parcel of various [re-]bordering, trans-bordering and de-bordering practices. Paying attention to language management as an integral aspect of border management would contribute to a deeper understanding of the durability, permeability and liminality of borders in Central Europe and beyond.