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SERBIAN STANDARD LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY MONTENEGRO IN LIGHT OF NEW LINGUISTIC POLICY

Abstract: The article argues the premise that the Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro adopted on 12 October 1992 in paragraph starting with ‘Serbian language of (i) jekavian dialect shall be in official use in Montenegro was then formulated to best reflect cultural and linguistic realities in Montenegro of the time. This wording should have remained in the Montenegrin constitution of 25 October and the following sentence in the article 9 of the 1992 Constitution reading” The Cyrillic and Latin alphabet shall be interchangeable” would have better guarded the identity of Serbian language as a dominant language in past and present-day Montenegro had it read “the official alphabet in Montenegro shall be Serbian Cyrillic while Serbian Cyrillic and Serbo-Croatian Latin alphabet shall be in public and private use.

Key words: Serbian language, Serbian Cyrillic, Montenegro, linguistic legislation, jurilinguistics, official language, official alphabet

LINGUISTIC POLICY MAKING AS A FORM OF POLITICAL VOLUNTARISM

The science generally does not try to prove the obvious facts. However political circumstances may sometimes prompt the science to do exactly that. In every country, the legislature enjoys the supreme authority (has the right) to make decisions in the area of linguistic legislation which they deem would be the most suitable. However, it is also the right of every legal expert and linguist anywhere in the world to professionally and argumentatively scrutinize linguistic legislature. And if we deal with issues pertaining to the Serbian language it would be appropriate to have Serbian linguists, more than anyone else, voice their opinion on this subject.

From the first half of 2007 in Montenegro, there were stronger demands to take the name for the language spoken by the majority from the name of the country and have this new name put in an official use by introducing it into the new Montenegrin Constitution. These demands had also been sporadically present in the previous years. (Stojanovic 2007)¹. They were visible in print and electronic media close to the governmental structures and were supported from the very top of the political establishment. The first contours of such a political idea were seen during the Italian occupation of Montenegro in the World War II. The idea was part of a linguistic policy of the aggressor and it enjoyed support of a small number of Montenegrin separatists based in Zagreb from where, during the second Yugoslavia, it received support from an influential Croatian politician and communist official B. Bakarić (Brborić 2001, 59).

More tangible attempt to turn this political idea into philological reality was made at the end of 20th century by a historian of philology V. Nikčević (Nikčević 1993,

¹ In the last census in 1993, 63,5 % of population spoke Serbian as their mother tongue.

1993a). Nikcevic did a PhD thesis on the early works of Njegoš after which he taught Slovenian and other Yugoslavian literatures. Then, he tried to become a reformist of the language in Montenegro and a philological flag bearer of the new linguistic policy in this country. Even those few Montenegrin linguists who were motivated by the prospect of securing a lucrative position and who support the idea that Serbian language should not be spoken in the independent state of Montenegro (or that Serbian language should enjoy a subordinate status in Montenegro) seldom use Nikcevic's work to support their claims. They are probably aware that his professional reputation would hardly compliment their work. Also, they can't really refer to any other relevant findings to back up their hypothesis (since there aren't any such findings to be found) or use their own findings for that matter. All they have on their side is the political support which substitutes for their lack of professional experience and better argumentation. Their arguments are purely based on the stance of the political elite or on their own personal views. However, this type of reasoning is called voluntarism. Voluntarism can often be witnessed in politics but it has no place in scientific studies and thus understandably it shouldn't be present in what ought to be a sensible linguistic policy making.² Today, one of the most active advocates of the idea that Montenegrin language is different from Serbian language is a Muslim linguist Adnan Cirgic who was appointed the director of the state Institute for Montenegrin Language in Podgorica after having completed in 2007 his PhD in dialectology at the University of Osijek (Croatia) .

LINGUISTIC LEGISLATION AND THE RENAMING OF A LANGUAGE

The efforts to completely or partially rename the Serbian language in Montenegro can be viewed as prudently conducted ethnic engineering aimed at changing the national identity of Serbs in Montenegro. They have a number of causes and consequences. For the moment, I only wish to examine those causes that relate to the area of linguistic legislation i. e. which are a problematic of the new linguistic discipline called jurislinguistics. Jurislinguistics (Jurislinguistics 2005; Jurislinguistics 2007) is a new branch of study in what is becoming more and more versatile language science. It deals with a notion of a language in legislation (It primarily addresses the legal status of different languages and alphabets in multi lingual state but it also addresses different forms of language manipulation and misuse such as insults, slander, deceptions, false claims and promotion etc.) The emergence of this field of study is a testament to an increasing prevalence of this problematic which has previously more often been addressed from the legal standpoint³ as opposed to the linguistic one.⁴

Recently as a signal of growing new totalitarianism disguised under the name of democracy there has been a visible increase in attempts to penalize political verbal delinquency, questioning legally dubious convictions for genocide, publicly debating the issue of politically "inappropriate" statements and making hate speech. (Petrović & Petrović 2006).⁵

² See Radovanović 2006, 64-65.

³ Cf. Matulović 1986; Leč 1987; Basta et al. 1989; Viskovic 1989; Rasmussen 1990; Begović 1991; Jovičić 1995; Krivokapić 2004; Mićović (ed.) 2006.

⁴ About juridical style see Luković 1994.

⁵ In relation to manipulation of charges for the so called hate speech see Piper 2004 p. 88-98 : in relation to hate speech see Milinković 1993, Čok 1995, Slapšak et al. 1997, Tolerancy 1997 and others.

This emergence of jurislinguistics in Slavic studies is caused by the dissolution of the three federal states with majority Slavic population at the end of 20th century on one hand and by the growth of the European Union on the other. EU's proclaimed aspirations to promote multicultural and multilingual society have their own complex legal dimension. It is impossible to address these issues without referring to the concepts and terminology of modern sociolinguistics (the language policy, the language planning, the state language, the official language, the language in public use, the language of nominal ethnic group etc.).

MULTINACIONALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM

If a multinational state truly aspires to reach those standards found in democratic societies, which majority of European Union countries at the beginning of 21st century claim they instill, it must take into consideration the best practices in the area of language legislation. A state must also take a cue from other European countries in particular from those that have a multinational character and strive to achieve the highest European standards in that field. (See Basta et al. 1989 and Krivokapić 2004). Clearly, this can only be done under the assumption that those standards are universal and that Europe would not deliberately promote one set of democratic values for some countries and another for the others.

There are many examples of binational or multinational countries where people speak two or more languages. Each of those countries is specific in its own way which is why their language legislation differs in the part relating to the official language use, state language, language of nominative ethnic group (Piper 2004, 26), language in public use and so forth. What these countries have in common is that their legislation has taken into account the fact that people speaking different languages wish to use their native tongue not only privately but also in a social sphere and incorporated it into relevant laws. Above all, this means that the language that majority of population sees as their native should have a status of an official language while minority languages should have their status defined proportionally to the usage of such language on that territory.

Respecting the will of citizens is one of the central political principals today. Such principal is also reflected (or it should be reflected) in language legislation. That's why generally the official language used in a country is the language spoken by the majority of people living in that country. In Montenegro this language was and it still is- the Serbian language. The efforts to take the title for the language from the name of a country and contrary to the will of the majority rename the existing language (in this case Serbian) are rarely seen anywhere else in the world. They are not common because they run contrary to the very principle of democracy and democratic decision making since the opinion of a minority is being endorsed at the expense of the majority population simply because the minority enjoys support from the current political establishment.

As a sociolinguistic category language identity can be defined by analyzing the opinions on the language (also a sociolinguistic category) in question held by the majority of speakers. This would also include analyzing how they feel about the title

of their native language. It also includes analyzing their attitudes on number of issues such as what the native speaker should call his/her own language, what do native speakers of other languages call that language, what the official title of that language is, what are the colloquial terms used for such language etc.

According to the figures from the 1993 census the absolute majority of people in Montenegro (63,5%) feel that Serbian is their native language and language they use in literature. Such feelings come from a long cultural tradition that can be observed both in linguistics (the literally language of Serbs outside of Montenegro is identical) and in the Montenegrin Constitution from 1992. It is also a part of the tradition of a language related legislation in Montenegro (Serbian is either the only title for the language or a first in the title of a more compound title of the official language in Montenegro (Vukic, 2007) and a part of overall Montenegrin legal terminology. Valtazar Bogisic points to this in his renowned work *Common Property Law in Dukedom of Montenegro* (Lukovic 2004, 268-269). The majority of population in Montenegro (with the exception of the Albanian minority) has always referred to their native language as Serbian language.

Furthermore, in Autumn 2007 the decision to what extent the laws should allow roughly around only a third of population to have their native tongue (which historically and linguistically is the Serbian language) named Montenegrin ultimately rested with the lawmaker. In making his/hers decision the lawmaker could either rely on the subjective opinion shared by a minority of people who, contrary to linguistic facts, claim that they don't speak Serbian or he/she could rely on some of the criteria mentioned in this text. It would appear that the former approach outweighed the latter during the adoption of the new Montenegrin Constitution (taking effect from 25 October 2007) and one could conclude that the political will outweighed the historic and scientific reality.

Despite the general consensus today that the human rights should always be upheld and respected, in practice this fundamental principle is often applied in a selective manner. And if moreover this selective approach has no objective justification, it becomes arbitrary or even worse it is applied with ulterior motives. The examples of such behaviour can be found in constitutions and language policies of the Baltic states Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia (Krivokapić 2004) where the Russian language suffered a legal and political discrimination despite the long tradition in those countries (the tradition much longer than the time of Soviet Union). More importantly this occurred contrary to the will of a large number of citizens expressed during census time. But if the legislative and judicial authorities of these countries base their russophobia on linguistic differences between the Russian and their respective home languages one must pose a logical question: "From a strictly linguistic perspective, what is the basis for the potential discrimination of the Serbian language and its renaming in Montenegro?" The answer is: It is based on nothing else other than a political will which disregards common sense and scientific linguistic arguments.

TRADITIONAL AND POLITICAL LANGUAGES

Sometimes one of the side effects of a significant geopolitical change is the emergence of political languages (i. e. Moldavian) which come as a result of renaming a traditional language (i. e. Romanian) spoken on the newly created

territory. This is complimented with efforts to introduce at least some characteristics into the new language which would make it appear different from a traditional language to which it linguistically belongs to. While traditional languages forge their identity out of a durable process of standardizing the literature of a language in question, political languages are initially founded on a legal basis and only then can we see attempts to create their (usually poor) linguistic identity. These facts must be kept in mind when debating the issue of Serbian language and Serbian alphabet in light of current and future language legislation in the Republic of Montenegro.

The renaming of the Serbian language in Montenegro helped institutionalise one more political language. This type of language differs from a traditional Serbian language which most of existing standard languages claim to be. As the traditional languages develop, their norms get defined by law which leads to the standardization of this language. In contrast, the creation of a political language is driven by a sheer political agenda. Later on, this “illegal linguistic construction” is “legalized” through the process of fabrication of language’s history which in reality does not exist and by fabricating dissimilarities to other languages which in truth are nowhere to be found. Political languages usually tend to last as long as the political authority that created them lasts. Good examples of this can be seen in a short lived attempt to create Bosnian language in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908–1914) during the time of the Austro-Hungarian protectorate or in a feeble attempt to create the Montenegrin language in Montenegro during the Italian occupation in the Second World War. Political languages are languages without a linguistic identity (or with forged identity) and are used mainly or solely for political and not linguistic purposes.

SERBIAN AND SERBO-CROATIAN LANGUAGE

When examining the issues of the name of official and literary language in Montenegro at the start of the 21st century it would be advisable to observe the relation between the Serbo-Croatian and Serbian language. As opposed to political languages, Serbian language is a historic language. The framework of the Serbian language largely served as a foundation for Serbo-Croatian language. At the end of 20th century the Serbian language resumed its separate development while preserving the legacy from the period when it was called Serbo-Croatian only this time under the original name Serbian language. Such language had always been spoken by the Serbian people.

Serbo-Croatian language ceased to be a standard south Slavic language at the end of the 20th century. The language split in two separate language forms which both today enjoy the status of standard languages. This, however, did not cause the disappearance of the Serbo-Croatian language. The language did change its status but it was still alive and well and spoken in practice. However this language had lost its legal and political attributes which are a precondition for a standard language. Also, its own name had completely disappeared from both official and unofficial use on the territory where this language enjoyed the status of a standard language. The resemblances between all modern south Slavic languages today like Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian (structurally they are almost identical and content wise they are very similar) are a testament to the existence of the Serbo-Croatian language regardless of whether one wishes to name it differently (Piper 2007) .

This idea of the existence of contemporary Serbo-Croatian language has been explored by Snježana Kordić in a number of her works. She however claims that Serbo-Croatian exists in the form of a polycentric standard language (Kordić 2004) which makes her thesis slightly different to the abovementioned argument. The small and superficial number of structural differences between Serbian and Croatian can be further studied in the work of Piper 2008.

SERBIAN LANGUAGE WITH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ALPHABET

Serbian Cyrillic has a place in the nucleus of cultural tradition of Montenegro and is also a central part of the cultural heritage and identity of the majority of Montenegrin people just as much as the Serbian language is part of their tradition as a whole. The only difference is that negligence, deliberate neglect and ill intentions have contributed to Cyrillic being marginalized in Montenegro (in Serbia also) in favour of the Latin alphabet. This occurred despite the fact that the Montenegrin Constitution from 12 October 1992 defines the Cyrillic as one of two equal alphabets which shall be in official and public use in Montenegro. This clause was also preserved in the Montenegrin Constitution of 2007. Given that there are many Cyrillic and Latin alphabets in the Slavic world it would have been more accurate if the 1992 Constitution had formulated Cyrillic as “Serbian Cyrillic” and the Latin alphabet as “Serbo-Croatian Latin”.

This process of Serbian nation (unlike many other nations – Greeks, Jews, Arabs, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese etc) deserting their centuries-long alphabet has had two distinct phases and has lasted for over two centuries. Serbian writer and a distinguished cultural practitioner from the first half of the 19th century Jovan Sterija Popovic gives the most vivid account of the abovementioned phenomenon in two of his articles. One was published in the volume three of the Gazette of the Serbian Slavic Society (1851) and the second one can be found as a prologue to his collection of poems titled ‘Davorje’ (patriotic poems) (Sterija 1958, 9–13) printed in Church Slavic alphabet. In those two works Jovan Sterija Popovic explains his reasons why he felt that Church Slavic Cyrillic script, as the alphabet of literally Serbian language, should not be taken out of use.

While Sterija Popović stresses that preservation of old traditional customs should not be done at any costs and that reforms should be introduced in those areas where this would be most sensible “To deny the useful simply because of a blinded love for the old custom is a grave prejudice but it is also an unforgivable sin to introduce new customs and changes without a due cause and can only cause damage and create total confusion” (Sterija Popović 1958, 10–11) he still opts against the dual alphabet and deems the Church Slavic alphabet as the only alphabet of the Serbian literature. He notes that following the decision of Tzar Peter I to reform the Church Slavic Cyrillic (in other words to replace it) by modeling on the Russian common Cyrillic, the new reformed Serbian alphabet differed very little in terms of the shape of the letters. “Cyrillic alphabet has become a strange mixture. It’s neither Slavic nor Latin” (Sterija Popovic 1958, 10). To support the theory that using Church Slavic alphabet should not be put out of use he lists a number of reasons. One is the value of cultural heritage: “We ought to pay respect to our elders”. The second one deals with preservation of religious culture since dual language could alienate people from the Church (Since we are so attached to the Church and since the Church makes up half of our nationality and since every third word that comes out of a Serbian mouth is

“people and nationhood” than we ought to preserve this nationhood through our actions.” (Sterija Popović 1958, 12). The third reason is purely didactic-children would have needless difficulties having to learn two alphabets. The fourth and fifth reason are technical (it would make printers’ task more difficult if two alphabets ought to be printed) and functional (“We are creating confusion in the advancement of our literature” /Sterija Popović 1958, 12/). Finally, Sterija Popovic uses experiences of other nations to illustrate his point: “I’m not aware of any nation in Europe that uses different alphabet to print their religious literature other than the Russians and us. And we do this simply because Tzar Peter I felt that our alphabet should be Europeanized” (Sterija Popović 1958, 9); He goes on to add: “The letters in the Greek alphabet are not particularly nice and are probably worse than Slavic ones but you don’t see homeland loving Greeks pushing to create two alphabets by using foreign letters” (Sterija Popović 1958, 12).

Serbian language has had to deal with the dual alphabet for almost two centuries. It is worth noting that no other European nation ever ventured into such a difficult project. At the time when Jovan Sterija Popović was writing the main issue was how to have Slavic church alphabet (which had become marginalized) and Russian common Cyrillic (with half of its letters already being Latin) co-exist with each other. It was thought that this could be accomplished by simply defining the function and scope of the use of the respective alphabets. The reformed Cyrillic was to be used in the everyday writings while Slavic church was to remain in religious and church writings. Unfortunately, in practice this resulted in the reformed version eventually overshadowing the church Cyrillic both in public and the church. And although not all of Sterija Popovic’s arguments against the dual alphabet are equally convincing the end result did show that the application of dual alphabet tends to result in one alphabet eliminating the other. (Piper, 2007a)

The language issues from the time of Jovan Sterija Popovic can to a large extent be replicated and seen today. The realm in which the Cyrillic alphabet is used is rapidly shrinking resembling the faith suffered by the Church Slavic alphabet. It wouldn’t be surprising if one day there was a collection of poems printed in Cyrillic which is just as uncommon as Jovan Sterija Popovic collection of poems “Davorje” printed in Church Slavic alphabet had been at that time. There were two different attempts to reform the Serbian Cyrillic and both can be regarded as efforts to Latinize Serbian culture. The first reform was undertaken under the auspice of Tzar Peter I followed by a further reform of that Cyrillic in order to better adopt it to the Serbian Language of the time. Tzar Peter I reforms accommodated half of the Slavic church Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet (later this alphabet was used in the Slavic-Serbian period of the history of Serbian language) while the second reform (which Jovan Sterija Popovic figuratively refers to as “the one that was manufactured in Amsterdam”) managed to even further distance the original alphabet from its Slavic Church origin.

The third phase of this process included making of the Latin alphabet equivalent to the Cyrillic in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians which was followed by the final phase – giving the Latin alphabet preference over the Cyrillic during the communist Yugoslavia. This pretty much meant that even though the Montenegrin Constitution of 1992 defined the Latin alphabet as equivalent to the Serbian Cyrillic in reality it was more widely used. This has remained the case till this day today.

Furthermore, as the Latin alphabet was becoming more and more present in the Serbian language, the cultural identity of Serbs and Serbs in Montenegro was undergoing changes. The Serbian population has been losing its national identity and cultural heritage. In order to reverse this trend it is an imperative to nourish Serbian culture and tradition by preserving Serbian Cyrillic while respecting other cultures and other alphabets. Serbian Cyrillic must enjoy a status of a traditional, primary and official alphabet. This does not suggest that Latin should be removed from public and private use. The Latin alphabet is already widely present in all spheres of public communication that any radical change in a language policy would hardly breed any results.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE USED IN RELIGIOUS SERVICE

The official language is a language a state uses to communicate with its citizens. It is the language of state administration, judiciary, schools, and army). As such, it is more prevalent than other languages that could be used publically and privately (and in some cases officially). In the European civilization it is generally a rule (with few exceptions) that this official language is simultaneously a language used by the Church which has enjoyed the longest tradition in a particular country and which has the greatest number of worshipers. In Montenegro, the most popular church has always been and still is the Serbian Orthodox Church. The official language used by the church in administration and in communication with the public is the Serbian language. The official alphabet is exclusively Serbian Cyrillic. During the religious service the Church uses both contemporary Serbian language and Church Slavic language which is slightly modified in its pronunciation.⁶ Religious service books and manuals are also printed on both aforementioned languages. The language used in religious service which is used by clerics and followers to communicate with the Lord is particularly important to people of faith. Societies which claim to enjoy freedom of religion should appreciate the value of a church language to its worshipers. Therefore, if the largest religious groups in Montenegro use the same name for the language they speak and for the Church they follow (Serbian language, Serbian Orthodox Church) and that language also happens to be the language of the absolute majority of population in the country, than the decision to rename the language is groundless. Not only was such a decision a prime example of political voluntarism with no linguistic justification it was also an act of intolerance and a violation of rights of many who wish to call their Church and their language as the generations of their people have called it before: the Serbian language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above outlined facts one can conclude that the Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro adopted on 12 October 1992 in paragraph starting with 'Serbian language of (i)jekavian dialect shall be in official use in Montenegro' was best suited to reflect cultural and linguistic realities in Montenegro of the time. This wording should have remained in the Montenegrin constitution of 25 October and the following sentence in the article 9 of the 1992 Constitution reading "The Cyrillic and Latin alphabet shall be interchangeable" would have better guarded the identity of Serbian language as a dominant language in past and present-day Montenegro had it read "the official alphabet in Montenegro shall be

⁶See Bajić 2007 about socio-linguistic impact of such phenomenon.

Serbian Cyrillic while Serbian Cyrillic and Serbo-Croatian Latin alphabet shall be in public and private use”.

The process of standardizing the Serbian language is an extremely delicate assignment. Only a joint effort of linguists from Montenegro, Serbia and the entire Serbian speaking region can result in this process being in accordance with the Serbian customs, culture tradition and interest of the Serbian people as a whole.

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