

# LITERARY LANGUAGES BETWEEN CHOICE AND IMAGINATION

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Avtorica v prispevku predstavi idejo o tem, da jezikovna politika v končni fazi temelji na jezikovni kulturi, tj. sklopu vedénja, predvidevanj, kulturnih oblik, predsodkov, sistemov ljudskih verovanj, odnosov, stereotipov, načinov razmišljanja o jeziku in na religiozno-zgodovinskih okoliščinah, povezanih z določenim jezikom. To je razlog, zakaj morajo načrtovalci jezika upoštevati zgodovino oblikovanja knjižnega jezika, zlasti nedavno zgodovino, kot neizogiben del dejanske rabe jezika, ki izvira iz jezikovne kulture. V tem oziru je hrvaški primer še posebej nazoren, ker jasno kaže na to, da gre lahko jezikovna skupnost, ki temelji na komunikaciji, svojo pot, medtem ko gre lahko skupnost knjižnega jezika, ki temelji na tradicionalni jezikovni kulturi, po drugi poti. Poleg tega ta zglede kaže tudi na to, da skupnost knjižnega jezika temelji na jezikovni kulturi oz. literarnih tradicijah, ki so hkrati zamišljene in zgodovinsko utemeljene. Ker tega ljudje, ki so predstavljali javno jezikovno politiko po razpadu Jugoslavije, niso prepoznali, številne predlagane spremembe niso bile razumljene in sprejete.

knjižni jezik, slovenščina, hrvaščina, jezikovna politika, jezikovno načrtovanje, jezikovna kultura

The author presents the idea that language policy is ultimately grounded in linguistic culture, that is, the set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes and ways of thinking about language, as well as the religious-historical circumstances associated with that particular language. For that reason, the history of literary language formation, especially the recent history, has to be taken into account by language planners as a necessary part of actual language usage grounded in linguistic culture. In this respect, the Croatian example is especially illuminating because it clearly shows that a language community based on communication may follow its own path, while the literary language community based on a traditional linguistic culture may go a different way, but also that the literary language community is based on a linguistic culture and traditions which are at the same time imagined and historically justified. Since this was not recognised by those who represented overt language policy after the break-up of Yugoslavia, many changes that were proposed missed the point and were not accepted.

literary language, Slovene, Croatian, language policy, language planning, language culture

## 1 Historical settings

It is well known that dialects and languages, as well as dialect continua or other types of speech communities, do not represent real-world entities. They are, on the contrary, essentially sociolinguistic constructs, despite the popular tendency to think of them

as otherwise. This applies to all the aforementioned entities, not just literary languages. Nevertheless, the reconceptualisation of contemporary literary languages, especially in terms of language policy and linguistic culture,<sup>1</sup> enables us to see that we have to redefine their *status* and *corpus*.

1 Both terms are outlined in Cooper 1989, Tollefson 1991, and Spolsky 2004, and especially in Schiffman 1996 and Wright 2004.

In this regard, I adopt the view expressed in Schiffmann (1996:5 ff) that language policy is ultimately grounded in *linguistic culture*: that is, the set of behaviours, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes and ways of thinking about language, as well as the religious-historical circumstances associated with a particular language. That is, the beliefs (one might even use the term myths) that a speech community has about language (and this includes literacy) in general and its language in particular (from which it usually derives its attitudes towards other languages) are part of the social conditions that affect the maintenance and transmission of its language. For this reason, categorising language policies without looking at the background from which they arise is probably futile, if not simply trivial.

Both Slovene and Croatian as literary languages emerged from the South Slavic dialect continuum. Both languages experienced a centuries-long process of literary language creation, during which the choices that were made, as well as the hierarchy of what was perceived as central or peripheral, changed a number of times. Despite their long, rich literary traditions, the final choices of basic parameters, such as the choice of a dialectal basis for Croatian and the orthographic systematisation for both languages, were made relatively recently, during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Also, over time both languages developed hierarchically dependent relations towards other languages: neighbouring South Slavic languages, as well as non-Slavic (mostly already literary) languages.

There were two points in the history of both the Slovene and Croatian literary languages that most strongly influenced their status and corpus. The first is the fact that they

both belonged to the sphere of *Slavia Romana*, and were therefore strongly affected by Latin, but also by a specific relation to the so-called Illyrian language. The second is that they both belonged to a number of different state formations during their histories, often the same ones.

The fact that Latin was an official language in *Slavia Romana* from the very beginning and served the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church is well known, but it has to be remembered that as early as the 16th century the specific importance of the language labelled as Illyrian was recognised. This language, or more precisely, this concept with an open meaning, for some very broad and for others very narrow, was recognised as a medium that could serve the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church in a way that no other national language could. By asserting this I do not intend to imply that the Catholic Church encouraged the idea of Illyrian as a common language for Slovenes and Croats. I just want to say that there was an understanding that the scope of the Illyrian language, or the idea of an Illyrian language, was much broader than the scope of any other South Slavic language for the purposes of the missionary activity of the Catholic Church up until the 19th century.

For this reason, when speaking of connections to other South Slavic languages, it should be particularly emphasised that Slovene, through the idea of Illyrian, as well as because of its geographical proximity to Croatian, developed specific relations to the latter, more than to other South Slavic languages.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it has to be said that Croatian and Slovene belonged to the same states in recent history, beginning with Austro-Hungary and ending with Yugoslavia, which also, to some extent, influenced both their status and corpus.

2 This situation changed somewhat when Croatian itself became part of what was officially labelled Serbo-Croatian for most of the 20th century, thus acquiring closer relations with the sphere of *Slavia Orthodoxa*.

Slovene also developed relations to other literary languages – most of all German, but to some extent also to Hungarian and Italian. Croatian, at the same time, developed relations of a different kind, since the borderline between Slavia Romana and Slavia Orthodoxa divided the Štokavian dialect and thus the South Slavic dialect continuum into seemingly two clear-cut traditions – eastern and western. Since Štokavian at the same time belonged to two neighbouring, yet different traditions and linguistic cultures, Serbian and Croatian, they combined only in the 19th century when part of this dialect was chosen for the basis of the common literary language. Prior to that, Croatian developed close relations with German, Hungarian and Italian, and Serbian developed close relations mostly with Turkish and Greek, for which one can still find many examples.

Apart from the previously outlined differences, it is very important to note that the relations of both Slovene and Croatian towards non-Slavic languages, at least when we speak of literary and/or standard languages,<sup>3</sup> were always unilateral, while the relations towards the South Slavic languages were for the greater part of their histories, at least until the national revivals and standardisations of the 19th century, reciprocal. The first claim can be proved by the significant number of German, Hungarian and Italian traces in Slovenian and Croatian, and the insignificant number of Slovenian or Croatian traces in German, Hungarian or Italian.<sup>4</sup> The second claim is far more difficult to prove. Throughout the centuries, the South Slavic languages developed non-hierarchical mutual relations because, as vernaculars just entering

the league of literary languages, they were all in an unequal position compared to the more prestigious German, Hungarian and Italian. The relevant change in hierarchies happened in the second half of the 19th century, after the rise of the idea of nationhood and national languages, although the tendencies of hierarchical relations existed long before that. Suddenly, the need emerged to define the borders of literary languages. This resulted in purely political battles and arguments for many years, even decades. The consequence was that by the end of the 19th century and for the greater part of the 20th, the South Slavic literary languages were afflicted by mutual struggles for power built on hierarchies established through political decisions.

As a result, the language policies that immediately followed the independence of the Slovenian and Croatian states in the 1990s emerged as a reaction to the language ideologies of the 20th century. This resulted in actions that must have been to some extent expected. The critical fact here is that the starting point of these policies was no less ideological than before. The only difference was in their orientation. The ruling ideology throughout most of the 20th century treated all four languages that were given »civil rights« in both Yugoslavias as localised literary languages or as mere variants (with respect to Croatian and Serbian), and then they suddenly gained the status of official state languages. The result was the rise of a nation-state concept that had been suppressed for decades.

In consideration of the fact that within this framework the language is treated as a primary marker of national identity, it is subject to national(ist) ideology, national(ist)

<sup>3</sup> On the differentiation between literary and standard languages see Peti-Stantić 2008: 74–78.

<sup>4</sup> When speaking of traces, it is clear that one has to take account of the relationships between centre and periphery. The number of traces of one language in another, neighbouring language, is much more significant in border regions where the languages actually interact on a day-to-day basis than when we speak of literary or standard languages. But the fact is that this interference in border regions did not significantly affect the language as a whole.

rhetoric and national(ist) language myths. All this gives rise to the imagined qualities of the language.<sup>5</sup> Since this was the most important ideological concept shaping the literary languages both in Slovenia and Croatia, the language policies that followed the formation of these states enforced abrupt changes and intervened in a linguistic culture that had, particularly in the case of Croatian, existed for at least a century. Thus the main concern of language policy makers was to convince the mother-tongue speakers of the existence of a »natural« and »ideal« state of affairs for both languages, which was in some respects different to the state of affairs in Yugoslavia, and for the Croatian language it was equated with a state prior to standardisation within Yugoslavia that should be re-established. Changes in both languages were primarily lexical and symbolic, without regard to other facets of the broad area of language policy and language planning. All this led to the current state of affairs, when these policies have proven to be inadequate and unsuccessful.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 (Mainly) symbolic changes

Given the fact that language policy is all about choices, and the existence of an explicitly codified norm is arguably the most important defining feature of a literary language as opposed to other language varieties, which may share some of its other characteristics

and functions, I will try to show how examples of recent practices serve as an explicit call to re-examine the choices open to literary language standardisation.

It is clear that the state formation in the 1990s was the macro-sociopolitical factor that led to an abrupt change not only in the status, but also in the corpus of South Slavic literary languages. For this reason a sociolinguist should observe this situation as a testing-ground for identifying and observing the interplay between linguistic culture, ideology, language policy and language behaviour.

Prior to the formation of independent states in the 1990s, for many decades the overt language policy in Yugoslavia was the creation of a single, unified Serbo-Croatian language as an official state language which would, together with the recognition of "the civil rights" of the four main languages, serve as the only language in some federal functions, for example in the army and federal parliament, but which would also serve as the only language for representing Yugoslavia in the outside world. Since Slovenian and Macedonian were obviously distinct languages and were acknowledged as such, they continued to be used for all purposes within the Republic of Slovenia and Republic of Macedonia as they had before. The status and corpus of Croatian was affected most of all because in building a single unified language

5 Johann Gottfried Von Herder (1744–1803) expressed this by saying: »Without its own language, a *Volk* is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms. For neither blood and soil, nor conquest and political fiat can engender that unique consciousness which alone sustains the existence and continuity of a social entity. Even if a *Volk's* state perishes, the nation remains intact, provided it maintains its distinctive linguistic traditions.« (Barnard 1965: 57–58). To illustrate this type of rhetoric in current language policy, one could cite numerous examples, but it will suffice to mention just one often repeated sentence of Miro Kačić, who was at the time director of the Institute for the Croatian Language, who said that the Croatian language, along with the Croatian army, is the guarantee of Croatian existence and independence.

6 One reviewer commented here that there is also another side to this – that statehood facilitated and is still facilitating markedly liberal and democratic language policies, which are inclusive and less negatively oriented towards others. He observed that such policies position themselves first as marginal ones and then became mainstream. To my understanding, the new political situation in both countries, Slovenia and Croatia, could have opened up such a possibility, but this did not happen, at least when speaking of official, overt and state language policies. It is true that more and more mother-tongue speakers tend to see things this way, but without quantitative research it is hard to say how many of them.

the language planners had to disregard the different centuries-old linguistic cultures of Serbian and Croatian.<sup>7</sup> The covert language policy in Croatia was at the same time both restrictive, prohibiting eastern or Serbian features, and liberal, allowing the whole range of Štokavian, Čakavian and Kajkavian features as stylistic variants, especially in literature. This dichotomy, which can be treated as a kind of *diglossia*, especially for the speakers of Čakavian and Kajkavian dialects, had a different impact on speakers, depending on their educational level, political beliefs or other social or political factors.

To be able to understand the current state of affairs, one has to account for the fact that the individual linguistic identity of Croatian was for many years subordinated to that of Serbo-Croatian and was generally not recognised anywhere outside Croatia itself. The outcome of such a situation was that for many representatives of public opinion the existence of an autonomous Croatian language became a hallmark of Croatian national identity. Such a situation gave rise to a nationalist rhetoric centred on language. For that reason, a fair number of the most influential and politically very active language planners in the newly born state tried to make use of the dichotomy between overt and covert language policy in Yugoslavia. They chose to present the covert language policy as »natural« and the overt one as »enforced«. They also chose to believe that their task was not just to modernise, but to *restandardise* the literary language, namely, to rebuild its status and corpus. They chose to disqualify recent history and to present the distinct linguistic cultures of Croatian and Serbian as a starting point for

decision makers who would, based on this evidence, pass judgement on which words belonged to the Croatian tradition and which did not.<sup>8</sup>

Others, who were less influential in political circles, but are still influential among university students and Croatian language teachers, have adopted a more inclusive viewpoint. They have refused to define the Croatian language primarily in opposition to another (i.e. Serbian) language and insist on raising linguistic awareness and the culture of linguistic style among users of the language. In so doing, they repeatedly point out that the Croatian language is characterised by a specific linguistic culture, which survived even under the pressure of Serbo-Croatian, and that this part of the history of the Croatian language should not be disregarded and forgotten. Perhaps the most important point in such discussions is the fact that for almost 100 years during the 20th century no Croatian dictionary was published, but in spite of that many writers and speakers preserved an awareness of a distinct language, as well as its distinct vocabulary.

All this has resulted in heated debates on the literary language which have involved a variety of individuals and institutions with conflicting viewpoints and agendas, together with numerous discrepancies among recent dictionaries and handbooks that aspire to authoritative status, as well as differences between these sources and earlier standard usage. The final effect has been that even educated native speakers have started to doubt their own linguistic competence.<sup>9</sup> I see the main reason for such a situation in the fact that the language situation was presented as if

7 Serbian linguistic culture was primarily based on oral tradition and so had less respect for writing, while Croatian linguistic culture was primarily written, with a long literary history, and had great respect, if not reverence, for literacy and literature.

8 These linguists are advocates of a more rigid, purist approach; they tend to ignore stylistic differences between lexical items and grammatical variants and label forms as »non-Croatian« vs. »Croatian«.

9 For more on this topic, see Langston, Peti-Stantić (2003).

there were no choice but to follow the unsustainable nationalistic definition of the literary language, which was seen as a hallmark of national identity.

### 3 Choices open to literary language modernisation or (re)standardisation

As soon as one analyses the outdated hierarchy of social and functional styles, which does not take into account the changes in the society that the languages serve, it becomes clear that the aforementioned symbolic changes were possible because they strengthened the idea of the literary language as the main symbol of national identity. The Croatian example is particularly illuminating because it clearly presents at least two points:

1. A language community based on communication may follow its own path, while a literary language community based on the traditional linguistic culture may go a different way.

2. The literary language community is based on a linguistic culture/literary traditions which are at the same time imagined and historically justified.

Since Serbo-Croatian was an officially recognised, but never well-defined literary language (among other reasons, because it lacked the historical justification of a literary language community), it is clear that it had to change. The question is what types of changes were needed.

For this reason I believe there were lexical and orthographic choices that were open to language policy makers and language planners, through which they should have taken into account the structure of the literary language community in the social and historical context of the late 20th century. But the fact is that these choices were not taken into consideration, at least not in the overt language policy. Despite this, the actual language situation can be seen as an argument in support of the idea that the linguistic culture and the imagined space of a literary language proves to be

resistant to abrupt changes and to changes that do not take into account the existing literary language community, as well as those which do not take into account the language community based on communication. Thus many proposed changes missed the point because the language planners did not distinguish between these two types of communities while writers and speakers did not accept them.

For this reason, those who attempt to modernise or (re)standardise already standardised languages, or who attempt to control lexical and orthographic choices, should try to manage the public linguistic space, business and administrative language, as well as scientific language and the language of literature. They should also try to manage language policy (especially in schools) according to all the aforementioned domains of social roles and relationships, because literary languages are not (just) national languages par excellence, but languages that serve their language communities for many purposes other than national identification.

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