

THE SERBIAN LANGUAGE IN KOSOVO AND METOHİJA AND SOME RELATED TASKS OF SCIENCE *

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Abstract. *The author points out the situation of the Serbian language in the contemporary conditions of life in Kosmet (Serbia) and suggests some of the tasks for the linguistic science, the realization of which would help preserve the value of Kosovo and Metohija vernacular for the history of the Serbian language in general.*

Key words: *Kosovo and Metohija, Serbian language*

The vernaculars of the Prizren-Timok region of Serbia, which used to spread over most of Kosovo and Metohija, depend to a great extent on the historical circumstances that have been inducing migrations of the population and shifts of nations around these areas, in which this dialectal complex had been formed during almost the whole millenium. The dialectal map is now with broken isoglosses in many parts, while in other areas the number of speakers, i.e. dialect advocates, has drastically decreased.

The stratiform divisions are also strong: the most significant dialect characteristics belong to a thin layer of ever-older (and the oldest) Kosmet village dwellers, the majority of whom (if there is any sense at all in using the term "majority") have entered the new millenium displaced, in the areas of other dialects or in the environments much more urbanized than their homeland. At the same time, the youth from Kosmet operate with more idioms or styles, having a specific relation towards both the dialect and the standard language.

Science was expressing proper interest in their structural characteristics in the course of the previous century, but the time has probably come to redefine certain tasks whose objectives had until recently been clear and precise and, maybe therefore, postponed for some other moment. However, this moment has never happened, this time would never come again, as the most famous man from Vranje, sored with life, once sighed¹.

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¹ "Tuj pesmu, toj vreme da mi poješ. A toj vreme više ne dodje" (Sing to me this song, this time. But, this time has never come again) – Mitka in the drama "Koštana" by Bora Stanković.

The grammatical system of the dialect idiom has almost become strange and its vocabulary unintelligible to the young. The monographs on particular vernacular types, although representing serious and reliable linguistic acts, are turning more and more into the mementos of the vernaculars that have been fading away, probably forever. When the first Serbian linguistic atlas finally appears (if it appears), it shall be anachronous – no Serbs have remained living in many points of that, long ago conceived, foundation of the Serbian vernacular.²

Circumstances have been the most drastic in Kosmet, equally bad in the zones of Balkan or Kosovo-Resava type, especially after the last exodus of Serbs from these areas³, departure of Catholic population and establishment of foreign administration over the Province.

The meaning of eventual discussions on the Serbian language status in Kosovo and Metohija correlates with the question of the fate of Serbian population in this region under contemporary conditions. The news coming from these areas give but little right to hope, to believe that the situation will change and get better.⁴

I have been occupied by thinking of the Serbian language in Kosovo as a monument of previous times, and these times, together with Kosovo and all the events happening there, are crucial for understanding the Serbian people, their history, culture, religion, morals, views of the world. As for the local vernaculars - they were not in the main courses of evolution. The structure of the modern Serbian language, its form and aspect underlying the standard literary language; the language that is now official and cultural expression of the Serbian nation wherever the Serbs may live (and this also seems to be time-restricted, geographically determined, followed by multiplying names, maybe grammar, most probably orthography as well; accompanied with easy and offhand legalization of any separatist trends), this vernacular is being formed for centuries in the areas aside of Kosovo and Metohija. In contemporary conditions, the Serbian population that has remained in Kosovo and Metohija may be regarded as belonging to the matrix of the vernacular on which the standard Serbian literary language is based only in case this complex is comprehended as a whole. At present, the connection of these Serbs with the dialects making the basis of the standard may be possible only across the border crossing points guarded by double or triple lines of armed fellows (and occasional girls) from the countries of other languages.

² Among the monographs that encompass the first century of Serbian dialectology, a prominent position belongs to those dealing with the vernaculars of the areas which have rapidly been emptied, some of them having actually remained without any speakers of the Serbian language: V. Vukadinović: *Govor Crne Trave i Vlasine*, SDZb 42 (1966); S. Remetić: *Srpski prizrenski govor*, SDZb 42 (1996); Ljubisav Ćirić: *Govori Ponišavlja*, SDZb 46 (1999); R. Djurović: *Letnički govorni tip*, Priština 2000; J. Marković: *Govor Zaplanja*, SDZb 47 (2000); R. Mladenović: *Govor šarplaninske župe Gora*, SDZb 48 (2001).

³ "Particularly dramatic and tragic were the moments of exodus and sufferings of Serbs in Kosovo that had started immediately after the Serbian and Yugoslav army and police forces left the Province. [...] Thus, in June 1999, a sad flow of Serbian refugees started once again toward Serbia. According to the evidence of domestic and foreign sources, their number mounted to more than 200,000." - Djoko Tripković: *The culmination of the Kosovo crisis*; in: *Kosovo and Metohija in the plans of Albanian nationalists 1878-2000*; Institute of Contemporary History, Belgrade 2001, p. 226. Of course, this number has not included hundreds of thousands that had moved from the region in the years before the crisis turned into its war phase.

⁴ Shocking data on the life of Serbian population restricted to ever fewer ghettos across Metohija could also be heard at the meeting in Zvečan (November 2002), as documented in the Proceedings where this paper was published as well.

However, if the vernacular of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is not of highest importance for the contemporary situation, it is significant for the linguistic history. It is our impression that, except for onomastic research (in the studies of academicians M. Pešikan and M. Grković), science did not use the period of eight decades after the World War I to elaborate the history of language from the period of the Serbian medieval polity, just of the times when Serbian dynasties were seated in the areas of Prizren and Priština, Dečani and Zvečan, when Serbian despots were born and educated in native language near Raška or Novo Brdo. Such linguistic history might point out the relationship between the language of Serbian ruling offices and its vernacular basis, which is supposed to be close to the dialect of the population of Kosovo and Metohija of that period. One of our future tasks may actually be this - to establish the relation of preserved documents and the language that can still be read in the vernaculars of Kosovo and Metohija as the central place of the Serbian medieval state.

Another task, again related to dialectology, reflects in finishing the descriptions of vernaculars in order to create a dialectal picture from the period prior to the recent war and exodus of Serbs from the region of Kosmet, regardless of any future situation. Alongside with a complete bibliography, corpus of texts and phonographic records, this fund should include all the other material, it should be kept in one place and formed as a Fund for the Study of History, Culture and Language of Serbian Inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija. Sparring no efforts or means (yet we are aware that there are insufficient skilled personnel and that we could not expect any financial means, and I am afraid the disposition is not very high for this, either), we should record everything that could be recorded from the displaced population. Such fund would simultaneously represent a solid support for further scientific efforts and, alas, a memento of something that had been living for centuries and became now torn apart and scattered so easily and quickly.

The prospects of the Serbian linguistic atlas are still uncertain, getting perhaps more and more ambiguous. Thence, it might be possible to compile an atlas of the Kosmet vernaculars, or, even better, of the dialect of the Prizren-Timok region, based on the existing questionnaires, regardless of their condition, with a reasonable respect toward the accuracy of the gathered data. Anticipating the imperfection of such work, we nevertheless comprehend the scientific significance of the gathered data, although aware of probable discrepancies between the life as it is and the life that will be presented in maps, which have been so easily and without comprehension, and so humiliatingly for the Serbs, drawn by the recent history on the surfaces of many Balkan regions.

It is still possible to make a valid dictionary of the vernacular from this area. Having no other opportunities, we should maybe compile, but really urgently, several such dictionaries, regardless of their volume and by the most simple methods, for each of scarce enclaves where Serbs are still somehow enduring and preserving their tradition, religion, myths, lifestyle and attitudes.

Sticking to our dialectological chores, we leave to others to formulate tasks related to modern communication in the multilingual circumstances, historical interference, developmental trends in the grammatical structure, teaching practice, linguistic policy. The

conditions, offered by the communication in the Kosmet situation, would surely be worthwhile, indispensable and instructive for both science and practice.⁵

My thinking points related to the Serbian language status on the level of its official use are not less gloomy, however.

So-called international peacekeeping forces are now regulating life, education, teaching contents, as well as language, in particular its official use, within a substantial part of the Serbian language territory (beside the Republic of Srpska, there is Kosmet, too). A coordination of such use cannot be expected in the entire Serbian ethnic and linguistic area. What should be expected is that these regulations be against the interest of the togetherness of Serbian people, even if such interest is not actually defined and officially formulated, regarding especially the fact that there are separatist trends both in the Serbian population and in the administrative offices in charge of certain parts of this area, either as governments or as parts of governments (the example of the so-called Bosnian language, alongside with occasional efforts to legalize the standard Montenegrin language). In the circumstances lacking any other issue that would be regarded by the Serbian people as a common notion, phenomenon, task or objective, no one has the right to accuse a small number of linguistic scientists for not being able to fulfill any task in a uniform manner - either in grammar or in orthography; in the sphere of writing or in the sphere of style. A sad and somber consequence has emerged of the country breakdown and of separatist, or if it should sound nicer: autonomy-determined, trends in the Serbian population.

The official use of the Serbian language in Kosovo and Metohija is performed in the conditions of multilingual administration.⁶ This differs from the official usage in the bilingual conditions that existed there prior to the arrival of international peacekeeping forces, or in the conditions of speaking different languages. We may not know the real state of affairs, but it is hard to believe that everything will be in order if an administrative officer is faced with a dialect speaker who is not fully familiar with the standard Serbian language, and the translator is someone whose native language is not Serbian. Although the translator may know the standard language to a certain extent, he/she could hardly understand the dialect that is often the only communication tool of the client. It goes without saying that every official communication participant knows the standard language that is used for official purposes. In Kosovo and Metohija, there is the problem of not knowing the official language form by the very administrative and judiciary authorities, as these are the members of the international peacekeeping forces.

We may assume the knowledge of English or Albanian concerning Serbs as translators, but it is very difficult to apprehend the level of fluency in Serbian related to the communicators of the other side, being that learning the language of the social environment has always been unsatisfactory and in certain periods almost totally ignored in Kosmet.

The right to fully use one's native language in official and unofficial occasions falls into the basic human rights. Instead of Serbian government agencies or educational bodies, this right is much more discussed nowadays by the so-called non-governmental organizations. It is not known to us whether any of them (of those operating outside Kosmet) has included the Serbian situation in its program.

⁵ The interrelation of languages in the environment is treated in the reports given in this meeting as well, even more than ever, but the somber reality is that there are no papers dealing with the influence of the Serbian language upon the languages of other national communities in the area of Kosmet. Or, is it unknown to us?!

⁶ See the paper of Branslava Dilparić in these Proceedings.

There are certain indications of abuses or violations related to the official use of the Serbian language in Kosmet: radical renaming (not only in orthography) of settlements, changing of original toponyms, erasing Serbian terms from the maps... It all leads to a deliberate extinction of the historical heritage and linguistic data of the Serbian population in this area, alongside with the destruction of some material objects mainly of the cultural provenience (cultural monuments, churches and monasteries, cemeteries...). In case it is true, it reflects an uncivilized process that is beyond the linguistics, even opposed to it and to the nation whose language we are discussing. Discussions in the linguistic meetings can do little, but silence is not a solution, as well.

SRPSKI JEZIK NA KOSOVU I METOHIJI I NEKI ZADACI NAUKE U VEZI S TIM

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U radu se govori o položaju srpskog jezika na Kosovu i Metohiji danas (u uslovima inostrane uprave u društvenim i državnim službama) i zadacima jezičke nauke u vezi s tim.