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(selected issues)

**Author:** Maria Cichońska, Vesna Jovanović-Mihaylov

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## Serbian and Croatian Language Discourse in the Twentieth Century (Selected Issues)

**1.0.** In the discussion on the identity of Slavonic nations that took place in the twentieth century, one of the most prominent seems to be the discourse on the subject of the Serbo-Croatian language. The literature on the phenomenon of this language is vast, and can be found in first of all so-called Yugoslavian sources that were created during the existence of the state of Yugoslavia and secondly, in the sources created after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The latter are the works already written in the national languages, Croatian and Serbian, but also in other Slavonic and non-Slavonic languages. It seems that this subject proved to be quite popular and was the focus of work of many well-known linguists as well as of non-professional outsiders. Unfortunately, this literature is not easily accessible (especially for the foreign researchers) as it tends to be dispersed in many publications<sup>1</sup>.

**2.0.** Looking at many different interpretations and approaches to the analysis of the origins of the Serbo-Croatian language and also its use, one can distinguish many different views; ranging from the one saying that it is still one language – the works of Serbian linguists, might be the prime examples of this attitude to Serbo-Croatian, to the opinion “that it

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<sup>1</sup> It has to be mentioned that the Institut für Slavistik in Gratz gathered and published works edited by Prof. dr Branko Tošović and dr Arno Wonisch, that contain most of the dispersed literature on that subject. The authors of this paper also based their analysis on those publications.

was only the virtual language and the result of Serbian nationalism and imperialism combined with Croatian naivety”<sup>2</sup>.

**2.1.** The researchers of today might have it easier to describe this language phenomenon, which unfortunately seems sometimes to be done in a bit simplified way. Serbo-Croatian is a language of quite complex origins dating back to the nineteenth century at least and the language which is also connected to the historical and cultural events that occurred in many countries and nations of the former Yugoslavia and other European nations.

**2.2.** We think that the time came to take a proper look at this already historical discourse and to conduct a proper in-depth research to be able to assess it objectively. Additionally, this study will allow us to see how that language (but in fact often a metalanguage) of the contemporary discourses expressed what was so important for Yugoslavia in the period between the two world wars and also after the Second World War.

It will be useful for the analysis of the similarities and co-existence of the two languages; one of the Serbian and the other of the Croatian in the issue of the phenomenon of the Serbo-Croatian language and also for better understanding of the nineteenth century Slavonic national discourses. This type of research is still neither commonly carried out nor easily accessible.

**2.3.** The linguistic publications dated from the period after the Second World War, together with the discourse that originated around the time of the Novi Sad Agreement in 1954 (before and after it was signed), will constitute the essential background for the analysis of the selected issues relating to Serbo-Croatian discourse. The discourse of that time has not been studied properly and is rather relatively unknown.

At the end of the Second World War and immediately after it, the language issue was not dominant in the political and social life. In 1944 the AVNOJ (The Anti-Fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia), which propagated the idea of forming a federal state called Yugoslavia, announced that all decisions and proclamations have to be published “in Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Macedonian” and that these four languages have equal rights throughout the territory of Yugoslavia<sup>3</sup>. In the Constitution of the FNRJ (Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia) from 1946, there was only a mention about the language

<sup>2</sup> CZERWIŃSKI, 2005: 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Odluka o objavljivanju odluka i proglašava AVNOJ-a (Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije, njegovog Pretsjedništva i Nacionalnog komiteta na srpskom,*

without a defined name, whereas in the Constitutions of the four Republics it was called as follows: in Serbia and Montenegro as Serbian, in Croatia as Croatian or Serbian, in Bosnia and Herzegovina as Serbian or Croatian. At that time, the inhabitants of the FNRJ who spoke that language did not conduct any language policy. At the beginning of the 1950s the language issue in the new state was solved.

In 1953 Matica Serbska carried out the inquiry into “our literary language” (*naš književni jezik*) in the form of discussion based on the survey data, whose results were to determine the fate and language policy of the language common to Serbian and Croatian nations.

It is worth mentioning that the idea of a language survey was not a new one at that time as the survey administered was based on 1912 Slovenia Survey, which was published by VEDA journal and concerned the language norms and policies of the Slovenes, the Croats and the Serbs. It was a year later that a Serbian literary critic and culture activist, J. Škerlić, initiated a discussion on the topic of the Serbo-Croatian language as a basic language for literature. Around 40 persons did participate in that language survey that was published in 1953 by Matica Serbska, and sent in their responses the following year. Those who were in opposition to the Novi Sad Agreement either did not participate in the survey or their responses were heavily censored. However, it still remains unknown to what extent the results of that survey did really reflect the true opinion of the rest of the population that used Serbo-Croatian at that time due to the lack of any data. The material that was considered in the analysis came from the responses of only Serbian and Croatian authors, who participated in that survey.

The Novi Sad Agreement was signed in December 1954 between the representatives of the Serbs and the Croats. 24 signatories signed the Agreement: 16 Serbs from Belgrade and Novi Sad (among them there were 5 linguists), 7 Croats from Zagreb (among them there were 3 linguists), also 2 Serbs from Sarajevo (with only 1 linguist present).

The text of the Novi Sad Agreement concerning language policies consisted of ten points reflecting relevant language issues and was published in two languages: in Serbian and Croatian although it also mentioned the language used by Montenegro inhabitants. It omitted to mention Bosnian version of the Serbo-Croatian language.

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*hrvatskom, slovenačkom i makedonskom jeziku*). In: *Službeni list Demokratske Federativne Jugoslavije*, no. 1, 1.02.1945.

However, in the 10<sup>th</sup> point of the Agreement it was said that the document of the Agreement would be presented to the authorities of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Republic<sup>4</sup>.

Here it would be worth mentioning the Vienna Agreement and go back to some decisions taken a hundred years earlier in that Agreement (*Bečki dogovor*) which is described as “literary agreement” (*književni dogovor*). Although that agreement comprised only seven issues, for example it introduced the new spelling rules to replace the old, archaic ones, it was seen as a significant one, almost of mystical value and thus, prevailed in Slavic studies for tens of years. Looking critically at the text of the Novi Sad Agreement (presented below in its original language version), it must be said that it was not thoroughly prepared as it seems presenting issues in a very general way. It assigned an equal

<sup>4</sup> The text of *Novi Sad Agreement...* due to the lack of space – presented only in Croatian, as in the work of TOŠOVIĆ, WONISCH, eds., 2012:

Potpisani učesnici sastanka koji je sazvala redakcija LETOPISA MATICE SRPSKE na završetku ankete o hrvatskosrpskom jeziku i pravopisu poslije svestrane diskusije održane 8. i 9. prosinca u Novom Sadu donijeli su ove zaključke:

1. Narodni jezik Srba, Hrvata i Crnogoraca jedan je jezik. Stoga je i književni jezik koji se razvio na njegovoj osnovi oko dva glavna središta, Beograda i Zagreba, jedinstven, sa dva izgovora, ijekavskim i ekavskim.
2. U nazivu jezika nužno je uvijek u službenoj upotrebi istaći oba njegova sastavna dijela.
3. Oba pisma, latinica i ćirilica, ravnopravna su: zato treba nastojati da i Srbi i Hrvati podjednako nauče oba pisma, što će se postići u prvom redu školskom nastavom.
4. Oba izgovora, ekavski i ijekavski, također su u svemu ravnopravna.
5. Radi iskorišćavanja cjelokupnog rječničkog blaga našeg jezika i njegovog pravilnog i punog razvitka neophodno je potrebna izrada priručnog rječnika suvremenog hrvatskosrpskog književnog jezika. Stoga treba pozdraviti inicijativu Maticе srpske koja je u zajednici sa Maticom hrvatskom pristupila njegovoj izradi.
6. Pitanje izrade zajedničke terminologije također je problem koji zahtijeva neodložno rješenje. Potrebno je izraditi terminologiju za sve oblasti ekonomskog, naučnog i uopće kulturnog života.
7. Zajednički jezik treba da ima i zajednički pravopis. Izrada toga pravopisa danas je najhitnija kulturna i društvena potreba. Nacrt pravopisa izradit će sporazumno komisija srpskih i hrvatskih stručnjaka. Prije konačnog prihvatanja nacrt će biti podnjet na diskusiju udruženima književnika, novinara, prosvjetnih i drugih javnih radnika.
8. Treba odlučno stati na put postavljanju umjetnih prepreka prirodnom i normalnom razvitku hrvatskosrpskog književnog jezika. Treba spriječiti štetnu pojavu samovoljnog „prevodenja” tekstova i poštovati originalne tekstove pisaca.
9. Komisije za izradu pravopisa i terminologije odredit će naša tri univerziteta (u Beogradu, Zagrebu i Sarajevu), dvije akademije (u Zagrebu i Beogradu) i Matica srpska u Novom Sadu i Matica hrvatska u Zagrebu. Za izradu terminologije potrebno je stupiti u suradnju sa savezним ustanovama za zakonodavstvo i standardizaciju, kao i sa stručnim ustanovama i društvima.
10. Ove zaključke Matica srpska dostavit će saveznom izvršnom vijeću i izvršnim vijećima NR Srbije, NR Hrvatske, NR Bosne i Hercegovine, NR Crne Gore, univerzitetima u Beogradu, Zagrebu i Sarajevu, akademijama u Zagrebu i Beogradu i Matici hrvatskoj u Zagrebu, te će ih objaviti u dnevnim listovima i časopisima.

U Novom Sadu, 10. prosinca 1954.

status to both Serbian Cyrillic and Latin alphabets and two versions of pronunciation, the so-called *ekawska* and *ijekawska* pronunciation. The Agreement emphasised the language equality of Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrinians. At the same time only two centres – Belgrade and Zagreb are mentioned as involved in the Agreement. The remaining points of the agreement are related to the political and social situation and were task-related. The language norms were discussed only in a very general fashion, which was due to the complexity of the political situation at the time the Agreement was written up.

**3.0.** The definition of discourse and its methodology followed and used here are traditionally accepted in this type of research. We are fully aware that it is not possible to have just one definition of discourse. As we can see after some fifty years of attempts made in many different research methodologies and studies that were carried on, the definition of discourse lost its clarity and became somewhat ambiguous. The study of discourse is a vast area of research and still attracts many researchers around the world in the twenty-first century. The ambiguity of the definition of discourse may be largely contributed to the fact that the research was carried out in the last thirty years of the twentieth century in many European and non-European centres, which represent many different linguistic traditions specific to their own national linguistic preferences. Thus, it all contributed to the formulation of a multiplicity of definitions that were not identical in meaning and scope. This ambiguity may also be ascribed to a variety of the research methodologies applied. More recently the researchers crossed the borders of pure linguistics and developed a somehow interdisciplinary approach to the researching discourse.

The term of discourse itself became popular in the second half of the twentieth century when the study of the text became quite fashionable and the text was examined not only by using the linguistic means but it was also looked at from sociolinguistic, psychological, cultural, literary and philosophical perspectives, with each of researchers using their own specific methodologies applied to the text analysis.

**3.1.** Being aware of the vast literature and the on-going discussion on the definition of the term *discourse* and the directions of its evolution, it was decided here that our definition will focus on analysis referring to the text which deals with the issues of the Serbo-Croatian/Croatian language in the politically and culturally determined contexts and also in relation to the aims and causes of its own origin. The discourse seen in those texts can also be analysed in many different aspects and on

many different levels of the language. Here, the focus of analysis is specifically on the level of its semantic and pragmatic structures and more precisely, located in its political and cultural contexts. It is also analysed in relation to its semantic content, starting with the definition of the chosen subject of the analysis and its structure, type and the validity of argument. Additionally, the chosen elements of style are discussed. At the present stage of the research this kind of methodology seems to be relevant and valid in the analysis of the chosen material to be carried out. Irrespective of many different methodological orientations, some of the features of discourse seem to be constant.

The discourse as an act of communication can also be seen as a social and cultural phenomenon which performs a social role as one of its functions.

Both, the discourse production and reception are dynamic and under constant monitoring/control in the process of communication. For that reason, the discourse has to be viewed from this perspective, as some of its elements can cause or contain presuppositions. The discourse can also impose the style of expression and interpretation and it can be responsible for creating terminological varieties in the subject of communication. It can present quite complex structures and according to the author's choices can display descriptive, sometimes explicative or even interpretative, stipulative or instructive characteristics. Due to the limited length of this article, we will present only shortened analysis and the main points of our conclusions.

**3.2.** The analysis of discourse presented here follows to some extent the methodology applied by D. Brzozowska (BRZOWSKA, 2010). The aspects of the analysis of the material were purposefully chosen as in the best way expressing particular characteristics of the material. They consist of the selected semantic and pragmatic information that are part of its detailed characteristics, such as:

- 1) discourse *some of*;
- 2) discourse *about something*;
- 3) discourse *with something*;
- 4) discourse *of something*;
- 5) *something of* discourse;
- 6) *something in some* discourse<sup>5</sup>.

**3.3.** This article deals with the characteristics of the chosen aspects of discourse and as such it can be only treated as an introductory step to the

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<sup>5</sup> BRZOWSKA, 2010: 12–13.



further academic studies. It presents the results of the research in the area of semantics, pragmatics, social and cultural influences of the discourse. At the same time, it pays attention to the mental processes of discourse participants and thus, in some ways to its psychological aspects.

**4.0.** The linguistic discourse that was analysed according to the parameters 1–6 displays its complexity and multiplicity in the context of the analysis.

**4.1.** The analysis of the discourse in the case of 1/ discourse ‘*some of*’:

Bearing in mind that we deal here with a natural language that was also the official language for the most of the inhabitants of the former Yugoslavia after the Second World War and SFRJ (the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and the literary norm was supposed to be formulated by linguists, naturally one would expect to get proper linguistic analysis with the clearly chosen criteria relevant to the academic discourse. But it does not always fulfill the criterion of being an academic discourse; it often seems to be only a popularised “scientific” version, which fails to fulfill the standards of proper academic discourse. Although it deals with an academic subject, yet it only consists of a free personal opinion of the author without submitting any introductory proposition. It is also lacking in any thesis or defining any terms, and it does not present any final conclusions. It might quite often denote only emotional statements of the author which might be frequently noticed in Croatian discourse (BENEŠIĆ, 1954; BADALIĆ, 1954; HAMM, 1954).

**4.2.** The discourse is ‘*about something*’ while its subject – the language, is not always clearly stated or defined. The discourse has many aspects – it is set in the political *realia* of Tito’s communist state. It definitely reflects political correctness that prevailed at that time. In the discourse of Serbian authors such as BELIĆ, 1947 and STEVANOVIĆ, 1955, we can easily find the idea of national unity also at the level of language as expressed by the collocation *two brotherly nations* (*dva bratska naroda*) in STEVANOVIĆ, 1955: 251. Serbian writers emphasise differences in cultural and language traditions of the Serbs and the Croats, however they still seem to promote language unity.

Going back to the problem of defining the term *discourse* in the Serbo-Croatian context, we can distinguish the following approaches:

Did the Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian ever exist?

- No, it never really did. It was only the co-existence of two totally separate languages: one called *srpski* and the other *hrvatski*. That opinion is only represented by the Croatian linguists, such as CIPRA, 1941; GUBERINA, 1941 or BABIĆ, 1954.



- There is only one language Serbo-Croatian – that opinion is dominant in the discourse of Serbian authors (BELIĆ, 2011; STEVANOVIĆ, 2011; LALIĆ, 2011) and Croatian non-linguists (JURKOVIĆ, SIMIĆ, 2012).
- It is seen and accepted as something obvious, without any need for further definition (SEKULIĆ, 2012).
- The situation is not clear, the language is being defined as ‘*beogradski jezik*’ in opposition to Croatian; or in general as: *naš jezik* (our language), (JEŽIĆ, 2011; BELIĆ, 2012).
- The term of ‘*jezik*’ appears in the discourse but it is not clear what language does that term actually denote (Serbian, Croatian, or Serbo-Croatian), (KAŠTELAN, 2011).
- It is not explicitly clear what language denotes. It may be the ‘*beogradski jezik*’ in opposition to Croatian, described without any qualifier. Alternatively, the term ‘*jezik*’ on its own appears in the discourse (ANDRIĆ, 2012).

4.3. The discourse is being carried out ‘*with something*’, which was not clearly defined but judging from the *implicatura*, it can be assumed it is connected with the complexity of the language situation after the Second World War. In this case, the appropriate approach seems to be to try to establish the language norm for the autonomous Republics of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro. However, for various reasons (mainly political ones), the situation has not been properly diagnosed, and it was in the interest of the communist state to continue the pre-war language policy, for example in keeping the Newštokavian dialect basis, which was proposed in the mid-19th century by Vuk Karadžić. It can be observed on the basis of the studied texts that those who were in favour of that policy are participants in that discourse and entertain status and hold positions in the communist state. These are Serbian linguists and literary figures (e.g. BELIĆ, 1947). The texts representing discourse connected with the earlier mentioned survey (1953) came before the Novi Sad Agreement, which was signed a year later in December 1954. The discourse represented by Serbian linguists and writers expresses their belief in the need for continuation of the previous language policy, which is best seen in the texts of such linguists as A. Belić, M. Stevanović and also Serbian writers, R. Lalić and I. Sekulić. The latter, an acknowledged Serbian writer and the Serbian Academy of Sciences member, I. Sekulić expresses in her article with great affectation – which does not have much to do with an academic discourse – her positive opinion on the survey. The position taken by Croatian linguists, writers and other public figures was not so unanimous. They were di-

vided into two groups. The first group expressed their approval for the continuation of the old policy of promoting Serbo-Croatian based on the Newštokavian dialect, in other words, the language of the pre-war Yugoslavia (and earlier the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). The other group was in opposition to this view. For practical reasons, the supporters of the old norm did not want to break away from the old tradition and to impose something new on the Croats, which would be some form of revolutionary change in literary norm used. There were also political reasons for this attitude and fear that a different language policy would lead to disintegration of the new federal state, communist Yugoslavia. There was also fear of Josip Bros Tito, who did not approve of any changes. Of course, this is not a part of open discourse as presented in the texts of that time. Such opinions could only be expressed privately or in secret meetings. The opponents of the Agreement still remembered the proposals relating to language changes during the Second World War and to the idea of creating the so-called NDH (a separate state of Croatia, 1942–1945). However, some of them envisaged quite revolutionary changes in the Croatian language and suggested basing it entirely on the Kaykavian dialect. Those who expressed positive views about the survey and thus, accepted a unitary language policy were politically correct and needless to say, it was them who held high positions in literary and academic life of the country.

4.4. Discourse of *something* relates to unregulated or controversial language issues in the new post-war reality. The basic difference in attitudes is visible in approaches to the activities aiming at language unification of Serbian and Croat nations. In other words

- some of the activists proposed to allow the language to evolve on its own; such an attitude can be observed in statements made by Croatian linguists and writers, much more seldom is the case of Serbian participants in the Survey (e.g. STEVANOVIĆ, 2011);
- others suggested speeding up language integration processes without precisely stating and describing what it should involve; those were mostly politically engaged writers participating in the Survey;
- another group offered a compromise consisting in introducing gradual changes such as one alphabet and common writing and spelling norms (*Pravopis*), and also suggests carrying on with the unification process at a later stage (e.g. BADALIĆ, 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the analysed discourse also expresses attitudes to other languages of the former Yugoslavia – to the Slovenian language with its long tradition and the Macedonian language, whose

literary norms were introduced only in 1945. The authors who expressed their views on the language unification process treated these languages as unique to the Slovenians and the Macedonians. Some of them, however did not exclude totally some degree of standardization to make these languages closer to the Serbo-Croatian language.

4.5. *Something of discourse.* *Something of discourse* relates to sometimes unclear or even controversial language issues connected with language norm. It did not consider the complexity of language situation and it was superficial. Every normative decision required negotiation and compromise and it was not easy. The basic issue was the unification in a federal state such as Yugoslavia and language unification constituted its basis.

The discourse of that time expressed various attitudes to the unification processes, which resulted in a variety of proposals:

- to leave it to natural processes which is demonstrated in the discourse of Croatian linguists and writers such as PAVEŠIĆ, 1954; LALEVIĆ, 1954; KOLAR, 1954; KAŠTELAN, 1954 and some of Serbian ones (e.g. STEVANOVIĆ, 1955);
- to accelerate the unification, the view promoted by non-linguists and most of all Serbs;
- to keep a compromise position, in other words, first to unify the language by introducing common writing norms (*Pravopis*) and only then, to continue further unification process; this was the position of some of Serbian and Croatian linguists, who understood well the complexity of the language situation and consequences of radical changes in language norm and use.

Thus, language policy was not precisely formulated in this discourse, which was most desired and was unfortunately put off in time. It has to be added, that the discourse under scrutiny also exhibits attitudes to the other languages of the federation, Slovenian and Macedonian. Each of them was treated as a separate language, but enthusiasts of unification believed that it was necessary to make them closer to the language of the Serbs and the Croats.

4.6. *Something in some discourse* expresses the realisation in the linguistics discourse of the basic *topos* on which the concept of Federal Yugoslavia was built – the *topos* of brotherhood and unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). The common language was to establish a common space for multinational state. This utopian *topos* (though not seen as such at that time, despite a few opponents and sceptics) has had a long tradition going back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the times of so-called

ilirism. In the analysed texts, this topos does not have its name. In Serbian discourse it is national pride in survival in the post-war Yugoslavia and the belief in freedom and tolerance. It is most visible in the texts of non-linguists.

Nonetheless, the common grounds for realisation of the Novi Sad Agreement was too small. The common tradition was not enough to create something more stable. It still carried the burdens of the Second World War experiences and a critical attitude to the new political system. However, in the texts analysed, nobody spoke about difficult issues, the authors express optimism about the positive language realities. As can be assumed, such an attitude did not necessarily express individual views, but political correctness of the time.

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Maria Cichońska, Vesna Jovanović-Mihaylov

**Serbian and Croatian Language Discourse in the Twentieth Century  
(Selected Issues)**

## Summary

The article discusses selected aspects of language discourse present in Communist Yugoslavia after the Second World War, when the federation of nations was created by Josip Broz Tito. One of the major problems of that time that required regulation was the language situation of this multination state of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro, which before the Second World War (and earlier) used an ethnic language based on the Newštokavian dialect. A language survey was administered in the early 1950s with the aim of determining the future linguistic policy of Yugoslavia. It resulted in signing the Novi Sad Agreement, whose ten points are briefly presented in the article. An analysis of the discourse based on Serbian and Croatian authors (1947–1955) is presented in relation to its selected aspects, such as semantic and pragmatic ones as expressed by the framework of discourse, for example as *some of*, *about something*, *with something*, and *of something* among others.

Keywords: language discourse, Serbs, Croats, Novi Sad Agreement