

Chapter 1:  
Serbian and Its Identity between *East* and *West*

## On the Identity of Serbian

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### Abstract

After a short introductory comment on the concept of identity in relation to languages, this article proceeds to examine the identity of Serbian before, within, and after its Serbo-Croatian phase. The discussion leads to the conclusion that despite all the historical changes a relatively straight line can be drawn from the foundation of standard Serbian during the 19th century to the present. Constant modernization, mainly due to contact with other cultures, is regarded as the most important single feature of its evolution in modern times. This ongoing process is illustrated from the author's research on word formation by nominal suffixation and blending, as well as accentuation, where a major role has been played by jargonisation of linguistic elements, especially in youth slang, as a modernizing aspect of linguistic creativity often prompted by the influence of other languages, particularly English.

*Key words: identity, change, modernization, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian.*

### 1. Introduction

In this article, by the identity of a language is meant the complex and continuity of features which define its profile, making it an established and named entity of its own, recognizable as such and different from similar entities. It has three main aspects: (1) structural or typological (what a given language is like); (b) genetic or evolutionary (how it evolved); and (c) functional or sociolinguistic (what social functions

it performs and how it is evaluated). In many instances (e.g. Japanese, Russian, Finnish, Turkish) the three aspects are in agreement, since these languages are distinct from others by each of the criteria and hence manifest what may be called single identity. But there are also cases (e.g. Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Norwegian, Serbo-Croatian) where these criteria disagree for different reasons, the language in question counting as one by some of them but as more than one by others, thus displaying multiple identity.<sup>1</sup>

Along each of these partly interlocking dimensions any pair or group of languages exhibits certain similarities and differences, both being matters of degree. Thus Serbian and Japanese are very different, and similar mainly in belonging to the class of natural languages, which implies sharing a number of universal features. Serbian and German are rather less different, both being Indo-European languages. Serbian and Russian are still less so, both being Slavic, while Serbian and Slovenian are even more similar, as South Slavic. Serbian and Croatian are yet more similar, to the extent that they are considered by many to be varieties of a single polycentric standard language, Serbo-Croatian.<sup>2</sup> But let us first take an initial glance at Serbian itself.

## 2. Serbian (1)

Before embarking on a more detailed presentation of certain features of contemporary Serbian, we may ask if and how this language has maintained its identity through time. Very briefly, the language spoken by the Serbs took many centuries to evolve into a definable and stable linguistic entity. Having originated as a group of South Slavic dialects, with the slow advent of literacy in the late Middle Ages it became a constituent in a succession of mixed liturgical and non-standardized literary idioms of the 17th and 18th centuries: Old Slavic, Serbo-Slavic,

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1 This division into three aspects is adapted from Katičić (1986); on language and identity in general, see Bugarski (2010b).

2 For detailed argumentation supporting that view see Kordić (2010) and Bugarski (2012a).

Russo-Slavic, Slavo-Serbian—all these in a markedly diglossic relation with the speech of unlettered folk. It was only during the 19th century that this split was gradually overcome, mostly thanks to the insistence of the language reformer Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) that the literary standard must be based on the language of the people, as reflected in the oral tradition of epic poetry.<sup>3</sup> Thus modern Serbian came into existence, and it is only from this point on that we may justifiably speak of an established standard language of that name, with an identity of its own which it will maintain throughout its future life, though naturally with modifications.

By far the most important of these occurred towards the end of the century, when Vuk's Neoštokavian Ijekavian standard, based on his own dialect of eastern Herzegovina, was accepted by representatives of the Pan-Slavic Illyrian movement in Croatia, led by Ljudevit Gaj (1809–1872), as the basis of a common literary language. This language was to be codified—initially by Vuk's followers in Zagreb, in dictionaries, grammars and stylistic handbooks—under the name of Serbo-Croatian (alternatively Croatian or Serbian, later on also Croato-Serbian). Broad new vistas opened up before it with the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918, when it became the Kingdom's official language—though artificially designated as “Serbo-Croato-Slovenian.”<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Serbo-Croatian

Now what about the identity of Serbo-Croatian? Its very name suggests a dual identity, composed of two subentities—Serbian and Croatian. These names, however, should be understood as linguistic terms, and not as popular designations implying that Serbian and Croatian are somehow the exclusive property of ethnic Serbs and Croats respectively. After all, there has never been a Serbo-Croatian nation, and the

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3 The main foundation stone for such a standard was Vuk's most important single work—indeed, often acclaimed as the greatest ever written in Serbian—his Dictionary (Караџић 1818/1852).

4 For an account of the origins and history of Serbian in its different forms and phases see Ивић (1998, 2001).

Serbo-Croatian language later on came to be spoken by Muslims and Montenegrins as well, officially recognized as nations in their own right. The very fact that it was spoken as a native tongue by the four national populations, with their often rather different cultural backgrounds and traditions, needs and aspirations, had serious consequences for the identity of Serbo-Croatian.

In a paper I read in 1990, at the annual meeting of the European Linguistic Society in Bern, I examined the situations of the languages of Yugoslavia from an identity perspective, provisionally postulating *inter alia* two levels of identity, strong and weak. In my analysis standard Serbo-Croatian demonstrated a strong external identity, in being clearly distinct from the surrounding languages, but a weak internal identity, in the sense of featuring two major dualities—of pronunciation (Ekavian vs Ijekavian) and script (Cyrillic vs Latin). By that time the common language of four Yugoslav nations had been officially recognized as having two main variants (Eastern or Serbian and Western or Croatian) and two less well-defined “standard-language expressions” (Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrin).

It is easy to see in this complex arrangement the fast-growing seeds of linguistic separatism, ultimately leading to the emergence and recognition of four national languages on the territory of Serbo-Croatian, as a result of the war which broke out there a mere year after my Bern analysis. The weak internal identity of Serbo-Croatian had yielded to pressure, and within some years the language ceased to exist as an administrative and legal entity, being replaced first by Croatian and Serbian, then also Bosnian, and finally Montenegrin as well. Thus the wheel came full circle, with the former variants and “expressions” successively raised to the status of distinct official languages.

In terms of the three aspects of language identity mentioned above, while the first two, strictly linguistic ones, still spoke of unity, it was the third, identified as sociolinguistic, that proved decisive in the process of dissolution. The results, however, remain controversial. While the nationalist political and cultural elites in the newly independent states, which had been in the forefront of these developments, tend to take it for granted that we finally have four distinct national languages and leave it at that for all purposes, many ordinary speakers are less impressed by

their separate status, and some of the leading linguists on all sides agree that Serbo-Croatian is not nearly as dead as often assumed.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Serbian (2)

Now the next question for us to consider under the new circumstances is that of the identity of Serbian itself. Applying the same analytical framework, one might say that this language suffers from a mild identity crisis on both counts, externally as well as internally. While in the case of Serbo-Croatian “external identity” meant principally “in relation to Slovenian and Macedonian” and could easily be qualified as strong, for Serbian this means “in relation to Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin”—and here the boundaries are by no means clear, despite a by now fairly long period of energetic linguistic engineering (on the part of these others, especially Croatian, rather than Serbian itself) with the aim of making the idioms as different from each other as possible. Indeed, as already stated, from a linguistic point of view a strong case can be made for continuing to regard the four as varieties of the officially defunct, though in reality still living, Serbo-Croatian.

And on the internal front, the present situation of Serbian does not differ much from that of Serbo-Croatian, as it has inherited both the dualities mentioned. It is mostly Ekavian but partly also Ijekavian, and it is definitely written in both alphabets, in spite of official and semi-official efforts to restrict Serbian to the traditional Cyrillic, the Latin frequently (and erroneously) being presented as alien to it. So in the final analysis, what we have before us is a Serbian language often difficult to disentangle from its closest cognates, and within itself incorporating the two dualities of pronunciation and script. This rather unusual situation is condemned by some as an outlandish mixture and a threat to national identity, but welcomed by others as an instance of healthy, enriching

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<sup>5</sup> I have myself examined the life story of Serbo-Croatian in this context in numerous publications; see most recently Bugarski (2010a, 2012a, b, 2013b), with references to earlier work. The historical development from Serbian through Serbo-Croatian back to Serbian, externally and internally, which cannot be dealt with in detail here, can be followed in Popović (2004) and Radovanović (2004).

diversity. In any case, we are now ready to consider some of the more recent developments within Serbian, all of them resulting from ongoing modernizing processes.

## 5. Modernization

In the tradition of Prague school linguistic theory, modernization is seen as a key dynamic attribute of contemporary standard languages, thereby meaning the constant provision of means of expression adequate to the changing needs of language users in urban cultures. This implies also a measure of reorientation, in that the increase of such means on one side is normally accompanied by loss on another side; that is to say, while linguistic means are enriched in areas of life vital for modern civilization, they gradually fade away in those of diminishing importance. This phenomenon is abundantly represented in Serbian by the well-known withdrawal of Turkish and other Oriental elements in its lexicon, which had entered it during the centuries of Turkish rule on most of the Serbian soil, before the advance of modern loans of Western, now mostly English origin. At the same time, and often under foreign influence, native language structures and ways of speaking and writing may likewise undergo changes and adaptations leading to greater flexibility and expressive power. Among the consequences of such modernization is a degree of convergence of standard languages, which in certain domains facilitates translation between them and enhances interlingual communication. In what follows we focus on several features illustrating this general trend. As is usually the case, innovations and changes which Serbian has been undergoing are most directly observable in its lexicon, so we take that as a starting point.

Among the different factors fashioning modernization processes, one has so far remained largely unnoticed, at least in this role: jargon. As used in the present context, this term deviates somewhat from normal English usage, which would often prefer 'slang'. In Serbian, however, the usual general term is *žargon*, encompassing a range of professional and subcultural varieties but focusing on youth slang. This choice is also dictated by derivational considerations, making it possible to talk about 'jargonisation', 'jargonism', etc; cf. below, and Bugarski (2006: 11–18)

for a discussion of terms and concepts. And the part played by jargon should by no means be ignored, as one of its principal tasks is precisely challenging the constraints imposed by the inherited and frequently unbending norms of the standard language, through free experimentation with new linguistic possibilities whose effect may well be evaluated as modernizing.

We shall now illustrate this thesis with selected examples of current Serbian jargon (in the broad sense just noted), beginning with word formation by nominal suffixation and blending. Most of these examples come from a comprehensive corpus collected in the course of my long-term research project dealing with linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of Serbian jargon (the entire two-part corpus is presented, analysed and classified in Bugarski 2006, 2013a). In the area of nominal suffixation, I ended up with a list of 65 different suffixes contained in a total of some 3,500 derived nouns, initially divided into two basic categories: those described as jargonised (i.e. present in the standard language as well but increasingly found in jargon), and those originating in jargon and restricted to it. For our present purpose it will suffice to illustrate only a few of them (English equivalents or at least rough glosses for the examples cited in the following sections will only be provided when these cannot be easily recognized under their Serbian guise).

**5-1. -ing.** This suffix, in the original English a colourless grammatical formant for deriving verbal nouns, when carried over into the context of another language—in this case Serbian—acquires a peculiar colouring. It appears in a whole array of terms used in various professions, but I have gathered well over a hundred words in relatively wide circulation, particularly in the media. All of them are loans recently imported from English with a minimum of phonological/graphological adaptation, and mostly with a distinctly modern, fashionable ring to them—such as *džoging*, *bodi-bilding*, *karting*, *friklaĵming*, *advertajzing*, *marketing*, *monitoring*, *konsalting*, *inženjering*, *skrining*, *šoping*, *bejbisiting*, *hepening*, *klabing*, *buking*, *čeking*, *bording*, *kruzing*, *piling*, *pirsing*, *stajling*, *brifing*, *brejnvošing*, *tajming*, *rejting*.

The virtual invasion of words like these, causing many a purist nose to turn up, tells us that “Mr -ing” has become a practically unavoidable segment of lexical items which nowadays name modern sports, items

and concepts from economy and business, technology and communications, travel, fashions, cosmetics, etc.—all these typical of life in urban civilization. In other words, its value in Serbian is far from merely derivational as in English, being symbolic in addition: it carries a self-styled message about the present phase of Serbian society and the changes it is undergoing in its aspiration to be “with it,” to join European and world-wide trends. The fact that the picture of Serbia which it offers is not to everyone’s liking, for linguistic or extralinguistic reasons, is of course no part of our concern here.

**5-2. -er.** Another borrowed suffix, in earlier times largely found in German loans but now predominantly in English (or English-based) ones, likewise highly productive: nearly 150 items in the corpus, most of them taken from youth jargon. They refer to members of different juvenile gangs (*rejver, reper, brejker, darker...*), drug addicts (*droger, džanker, fikser, doper...*), computer enthusiasts (*haker, surfer, gejmer, bloger...*), practitioners of modern sports (*roler, skejter, bajker, fristajler...*), etc. Another large category identifies habits and features of people, usually negative (*cinker, gafer, fejker, luzer, kuler, loner, šlihter, šmeker, šminker...*). Here too we witness the domination of fashionable notions and nominations. English is a highly active donor, only this time—as opposed to the case of *-ing*—not necessarily of whole lexical items, but frequently as an inspiration for native derivational creativity which produces pseudo-anglicisms.

**5-3. -os.** This heavily jargonised suffix, originally present in only a few standard words of Spanish origin, is similarly productive (over 150 lexemes) and almost without exception found in youth jargon. It characteristically serves as a pill-sweetener, in that it neutralizes the negative expressivity of stems marking socially sanctioned categories and attributes of people and products; in other words, it takes the sting out of something undesirable by providing it with a carefree, jocular Spanish-sounding tune. Usually combined with stem-clipping, the stylistic effect is a combination of elevation and playful ironizing; thus the ordinary weather-beaten alcoholic (standard *alkoholičar*) appears in more presentable modern attire as *alkos*, the drug addict (*narkoman*) as *narkos*, the male homosexual (*peder*) as *pedos* or *derpos*, the female homosexual (*lezbejka*) as *lezbos*, etc. The same applies to drugs: *kokos, heptos, optos*

or *benzos* seem harmless enough, even downright friendly, compared to the stern standard *kokain*, *heptamin*, *optamin* or *bensedin*. A similar note of friendliness or endearment is also present in ethnonyms such as *Jugos* for *Jugosloven* (Yugoslav), *Montenegros* for *Crnogorac* (Montenegrin), *Grekos* for *Grk* (Greek), *Šipos* for *Šiptar* (Albanian), *Švabos* for *Švaba* (colloquial for *Nemac*: German), and in popular toponyms like *Ados* for *Ada*, a river island, or *Lidos* for *Lido*, a promenade and beach, both in Belgrade.

**5-4. -ka.** In sharp contrast to the preceding, this strictly native suffix (with an occasional plural variant *-ke*) occurs in hundreds of standard words, in several grammatical functions and semantic domains. At first sight a stylistically neutral, purely formal device, it has in recent decades exhibited a striking productivity in deriving jargonisms, typically with clipped stems, featuring speed and familiarity of communication among the younger generations. The corpus contains some 200 nouns stylistically marked in this way, only a handful of which can be cited here. Based on already traditional colloquial words for popular articles of clothing and footwear, such as different brands of fashionable jackets (*vijetnamka*, *rokerka*, *spitfajerka*...), jeans (*farmerke*, *leviske*, *dizelke*...) or leisure and sports shoes (*japanke*: beech sandals, *starke*, *najke*...), we find fully-fledged jargonisms like *mercedeske* or *ipsilonke* (girls' tanga slippers), *pederke* (mens' snakeskin boots) and *crnogorke* (mocassins: reflecting the popular humorous stereotype about Montenegrins as lazy people). Among the words for women are *tinka* (teenager), *fosilka* (old lady), *novka* (young prostitute), *šaška*, *bleska* and *lujka* (silly, stupid female); for youth parties, *žurka*, *đuška* and *treska*; for drug addicts' parties, *duvka*, *furka* and *cepka*; for idling, *blejka* and *gluvka*; for boredom, *smorka* and *zevka*; for sleep, *dremka* and *sovka*; for sexual intercourse, *ševka* and *snoška*; for alcoholic drinks, *šljoka* and *cujka*; for police, *murka* and *cajka*; etc. (The un glossed slangy items would be too tedious to explain, but the point of citing them should hopefully be clear enough even so).

This suffix demonstrates, then, how an ordinary grammatical mechanism, generally functioning as a marker of feminine gender, can be utilized in exploring new possibilities of linguistic expression, particularly including the distinctive jargon of contemporary urban youth. From this we see that modernization does not rely only on introducing new lin-

guistic elements, but also on utilizing already existing ones in new ways (which, of course, is an all-pervasive feature of linguistic creativity in general).

**5-5.** This last remark also points to a whole range of combinatory possibilities for units from a derivational repertoire. Even the few suffixes which we have briefly looked at reveal that modernization by means of borrowed elements admits of a stepwise analytical breakdown. At one end are lexical items simply taken over whole, as illustrated with examples under *-ing* and some under *-er*. We then register pseudo-anglicisms, whose elements are English but combined in a way nonexistent in that language, such as *džezer*, *bluzer*, *fenser* (“fancy” person), *striter* (stray dog), *mobilajzer* (cell phone). Next, stems and suffixes from two languages are frequently combined in a single lexeme. Thus *-er* or *-os* may be attached to native stems: *kavger* for *kavgadžija* (troublemaker), *siler* for *siledžija* (ruffian), *goler* for *golja* (pauper), *ćorker* for *zatvorenik* (prisoner); *đubos* for *đubretar* (garbageman), *babos* for *baba* (old woman), *seljos* for *seljak* (peasant), *dudos* for *duduk* (fool). And conversely, the native suffix *-ka* is occasionally added to foreign stems: *footka* for *fotografija*, *telka* for *televizija*, *neska* for *neskafa*, *kancerka* for *cigareta*. Such combinability is perhaps the best test of the flexibility of the receiving language, of its capacity to build something new into an existing structure, and in this way to overcome the simplified traditional division into “native” and “foreign” items of a language’s lexicon. And finally, at the other end of the scale are jargonisms made up exclusively of native material, such as many of those ending in *-ka*.

**5-6.** The second part of the project deals with lexical blends—again predominantly nouns, but with some verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and phrases. This rather extraordinary process of word formation, common and widespread in some registers of English (and increasingly so in many other languages under English influence) was virtually unknown in Serbian only some fifteen years ago, when I started collecting blends which were appearing on the model of well-known English creations like *motel* (motor+hotel) or *smog* (smoke+fog). Nearly all of them contain two constituents, combined in one of several possible arrangements to make up a new whole; for example, *mlekoteka* (mleko /milk/+diskoteka) ‘non-alcoholic discotheque’; *škozorište* (škola /school/+pozorište /theatre/)

‘school theatre’; *nimfomajka* (nimfomanka+majka /mother/) ‘nymphomaniac who has given birth’; *bliznismen* (blizu /near/+biznismen) ‘businessman privileged by his closeness to the ruling class’; *prihvatizacija* (prihvati /grab/+privatizacija) “‘wild” privatization’; *bleferendum* (blef /bluff/+referendum) ‘fake referendum’.

What I found most interesting as my collection grew was the fact that, while English blends went on being borrowed ready-made, native Serbian blends built on the same or modified patterns were gradually produced in ever larger quantities, which meant that a new and strikingly productive word-formation process had been triggered in Serbian itself. At present the corpus stands at some 1,300 blends gathered from various sources, most of which have been listed, analysed, classified and discussed in Bugarski (2013a). The title of that book illustrates its subject matter: *Sarmagedon* (sarma /cabbage rolls with minced meat/+Armagedon /Biblical toponym with catastrophic associations/) is a blend meaning ‘the consequences of eating too much meat, especially sarma as a favourite dish, during the festive season’. And *Mesopotamija*, the name of a restaurant in Novi Sad, quite exceptionally contains several layers: Mesopotamija (Mesopotamia), meso (meat), po(tamaniti) (wipe out), po(taman) (exactly right), manija (mania). The sudden influx of blends in different registers, from youth jargon to media, advertising and political discourse, can surely be regarded as another aspect of the modernization of Serbian as a whole, even though the majority of these mostly humorous creations are short-lived and only marginally affect the lexicon of its standard variety. Individual words may come and go, but the productive mechanism is apparently here to stay.

**5-7.** Back to suffixation for a moment, another relevant area where it has been blossoming and which must be mentioned under the heading of modernization is the derivation of neologisms for professions and functions when performed by women—a hotbed of ideological and linguistic controversy. As part of the general international trend of political correctness, gender-correct verbal communication soon found its vociferous advocates in Serbia too, but their energetic activities have so far been only partly successful. They naturally found many well-meaning ideological followers, and numerous neological derivations they introduced came to be more or less accepted by the media and the public at

large. To that extent, the frequently voiced charge that Serbian grammar and public discourse inherently favoured men over women seemed justified and was tacitly honoured.

On the other hand, however, stubborn insistence on attaching one of the available suffixes (the most common being *-inja*, *-ka*, and *-ica*) to every single noun of masculine gender, even when long established as neutral in meaning, i.e. covering both sexes, often produced forms which, besides being widely felt as unnecessary and forced, for purely grammatical or phonological reasons jarred on the ears of many traditionally minded and less motivated speakers. Some of these are *stručnjakinja* from *stručnjak* (expert), *borkinja* from *borac* (fighter), *sutkinja* from *sudija* (judge), *virtuoskinja* from *virtuoz* (virtuoso), *meteorologinja* from *meteorolog* (meteorologist), *zločinka* from *zločinac* (criminal), *moreplovka* from *moreplovac* (seafarer), *vodičica* from *vodič* (guide), *psihijatresa* from *psihijatar* (psychiatrist).

Additional problems soon surfaced in referring to persons of both sexes jointly, as in *građani i građanke* (citizens), *studenti i studentkinje* (students), *učesnici i učesnice* (participants). This artificial quest for exceptionless symmetry is cumbersome and repetitious, besides challenging the established grammatical logic by implying that female citizens, students and participants are something other than citizens, students and participants respectively, and must therefore be segregated from the traditional collective label while reducing this to male membership exclusively. Nor did attempts to “economise” in writing by producing curious malformations like *građani/ke*, *studenti/kinje*, *učesnici/ce* help much. Furthermore, some otherwise sympathetic observers have pointed out that pushing such feminine forms can in some contexts be directly counterproductive. For example, insisting that a certain lady is the most popular *profesorica* of the entire faculty is actually saying *less* in her favour than if the neutral form *profesor* were used, as the latter would comprise all the professors and the former only the female ones. Indeed, it would seem that absolute equality has its price!

So the matter remains unsettled as yet, with much vacillation. As these lines are written, the newly elected female president of the Serbian Parliament is variously referred to as *predsednik Parlamenta* and *predsednica Parlamenta* on the same page of the leading Belgrade daily,

*Politika*. There is apparently an unconscious clash in the minds of feature writers between the standardized name of a position and the gender of its new occupant. Only time will tell how issues like these are to be resolved and which of the currently controversial derivatives will make it in the long run.<sup>6</sup>

**5-8.** One further area that should be looked at in our context is accentuation. Standard Serbian normative prosody exhibits exceptional complexity, at least by European standards, with four accents (e.g. with /a/: short falling à, long falling â, short rising ù, long rising á) and two postaccentual degrees of length in its vowel system. Such a complicated arrangement can hardly be considered appropriate to the needs of contemporary life: it seems suited to the epic overflow of verbosity in times gone by, rather than to efficient communication in the age of electronic technology. It is therefore not surprising that the system, quite extravagant in terms of linguistic economy, has for some time now demonstrated a trend towards simplification at its two most vulnerable points. First, by obliterating the distinctions between the short accents, whose functional load is close to zero anyway, with only a few minimal pairs in the modern standard (e.g. *pàra* ‘steam’ vs *pàra* ‘coin’). And secondly, by neutralizing unaccented lengths, which are grammatically relevant in theory but resolved contextually (e.g. *Evo rādника* ‘Here comes the worker’ vs *Evo rādnikā* ‘Here come the workers’). But this process has called into question two fundamental rules of the idealized pattern of accentuation established in the 19th century by Vuk Karadžić and his follower, grammarian and lexicographer Đuro Daničić (1825–1882): one according to which the last syllable of a word cannot be accented, and another which posits that falling accents can only occur on the first syllable.

As opposed to the still officially valid norm, both these rules have long failed to reflect the actual linguistic practice of speakers (if indeed they ever did so to any significant degree). Thus, for example, both are “broken” in the normal pronunciation of words ending in *-ěnt*, such as *asistěnt* (assistant), *dirigěnt* (conductor), *recenzěnt* (reviewer), “instead of” the prescribed but artificial forms *asistent*, *dirigent*, *recězent*). And

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<sup>6</sup> The case for gender-sensitive language is most fully presented in Savić et al. (2009).

for illustration of the widespread “violation” of the second rule we may additionally cite only two frequent standard words showing disagreement in pronunciation: the normative *Jugòslavija*, *televizija* vs the far more common *Jugoslâvija*, *televîzija*. While grammarians of the standard language have for decades ignored linguistic reality in their efforts to preserve the petrified orthoepic norms, in recent years there have been isolated calls for reform—but these have yet to yield results.

However, even more convincing evidence that a comprehensive process of change is under way is once again offered by jargon. Namely, the material referred to above contains one jargonised standard suffix (-*ânt*) and two playful suffixes, semantically empty but heavily marked stylistically, restricted to youth slang (-*iška*, -*õtka*). All three occur in numerous words which simply cannot be pronounced in the “standard” fashion, among them e.g. *izmotânt* (dodger), *folirànt* (fake), *zaf-rkânt* (teaser); *superiška* (super), *večeriška* (dinner), *dolariška* (dollar); *bezvezõtka* (something irrelevant), *izmišljõtka* (fabrication), *smrzõtka* (freezing cold). In any authentic setting, pronouncing such items with the normative accent (*izmòtant*, *supèriška*, *bezvèzotka* etc.) could only be evaluated as consciously ridiculing the standard norm. And when it comes to that, it is surely time for the models prescribed 150 years ago to be adapted to actual usage, and this not just in jargon itself—which by its very nature will not be ordered about in any case!—but also in the general spoken standard.

**5-9.** The data which we have looked at lead us to the following general observation. Due to its anonymity, spontaneous origin, freedom from standardizing control and fast changes, jargon is a reliable indicator—and not infrequently even a leader!—of the processes of change under way in the given language as a whole, including its standard variety. The difference is that in the latter such developments are more difficult to register, precisely because of the pressure of the explicit norms imposed on it. It is in this sense that jargon can play a notable role in adjusting a language to broader social trends. This includes such features of modernization as opening up to much-needed borrowings from dominant foreign languages on different levels of structure and use, activating native means and modes of expression under their impact, removing outdated or otherwise superfluous formal restrictions, as well as speed and ease of

communication. Here, then, are some good linguistic reasons for making jargon an object of serious study, thus overcoming the widespread prejudices about its allegedly low value.

**5-10.** Developments like these, most of which we have illustrated in the foregoing discussion, can be spontaneous, long-lasting and hence not readily perceptible; or they can be directed from the outside, so to speak—encouraged or discouraged by measures of language planning. In the present case, such planning has on the whole been quite moderate and unsystematic. Following the official dissolution of Serbo-Croatian, the state authorities have done practically nothing to differentiate Serbian from its congeners: there has been no “ethnic cleansing” of the language, no new, “nationally correct” grammars, dictionaries, usage manuals or reformed orthographies have been produced. The only—and partial—exception is script, where the Cyrillic has been increasingly favoured over the “Croatian” Latin, in defiance of the latter’s growing predominance in public use, which may be seen as a further aspect of spontaneous modernization.

In sharp contrast, the other three successors of Serbo-Croatian have indeed undergone measures of language engineering, motivated politically rather than linguistically or culturally and often artificial, designed to distance them from each other and especially from Serbian, and in this way to affirm their separate identities and, retrospectively, to justify their new official national names. So they set out on their own, each in another direction and producing corresponding publications of the kind just mentioned as lacking in Serbian. Croatian principally relied on purging its lexicon from actual or perceived Serbisms and from long-established internationalisms common in Serbian as well, replacing them with native regionalisms, archaisms and a flurry of neologisms. Bosnian revived features characteristic of its Oriental linguistic and cultural heritage, and Montenegrin turned to its history, dialects and folklore.

Unimpressed by all these developments, Serbian has remained on its own ground, as it were, to guard the once common hearth of the now dissenting brethren as its fully legitimate heir. But to descend from this elevated metaphorical phrasing to the ground level of linguistic fact, what we find there is a telling difference between Serbian and Croatian (leaving aside the other two, whose separate identities are more questionable

anyway). Namely, ordinary, non-technical texts spoken or written in the Serbian of 2014 do not as a rule differ perceptibly from those produced in the Serbo-Croatian of, say, 1950, whereas such texts in Croatian would demonstrate notable differences over the last quarter-century or so. In other words, Croatian has changed rather more than Serbian.

**5-11.** Returning to linguistic modernization in general terms, there is surely no need to stress its predominantly positive, indeed indispensable, impact on contemporary urban societies. A relatively small language like Serbian could hardly have joined European civilization and culture had it relied exclusively on its own means. Let us note only the evidently crucial role of originally foreign but gradually nativized linguistic elements in the flourishing new sciences and technologies with their terminologies, in banking, trade, commerce and international exchanges of all kinds, in diplomacy and politics, literature and the arts, sports and leisure, etc. Awareness of such a need was already present among the Serbs of Vojvodina, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in the 18th century, as demonstrated by the work of the leading Enlightenment figure, polyglot traveller, writer and educator Dositej Obradović (1739–1811), even as he insisted on vernacular education, in this respect foreshadowing Vuk Karadžić's comprehensive reforms of language, script and orthography. While the latter's already mentioned dictum that the literary language must be based on the natural speech of the uneducated checked such modernizing movements and for some time seriously impoverished the abstract, intellectual lexicon of Serbian, developments in the 19th century brought into it a host of words and terms derived from Greek and Latin roots. In the first half of the 20th century, a time when Serbian also adopted the Latin alphabet in addition to its traditional Cyrillic, these lexical units were joined by fresh borrowings from French, German and other languages, to be overrun from mid-century on by the influx of all-pervasive English loans.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed register and analysis of recent enrichments in the Serbian lexicon may be found in Клајн (1996), in a stock-taking collection which also contains overviews of innovations on other linguistic levels. Specifically on lexical loans from several languages, cf. also Планкош 1996. For a comprehensive up-to-date account of the anglicization of Serbian professional and public discourse see now Prčić (2014).

**5-12.** On the other hand, some foreign influences can be harmful too, if uncontrolled and carried to extremes. A traditional complaint is frequently voiced by purists attempting to fight off anything not home-grown, which of course is another extreme position. The favourite target these days are anglicisms, which have flooded certain registers of Serbian while also pervading much of the public language and discourse, to the extent that not only writers, journalists and other lay people but also some reputable linguists have issued loud warnings against the menace. Even the existence of a mixed Anglo-Serbian variety (*anglosrpski*) has been posited, with a published dictionary of its own.<sup>8</sup> It must be added, however, that the problem is not the prevalence of anglicisms as such, which are nowadays as unavoidable in Serbian as in other borrowing languages, but rather their excessive, inappropriate, indeed not infrequently semi-literate use, which speaks of the low level of the recipient language culture. Consequently, if Serbian is indeed endangered, as is often claimed, it is from within rather than from without.

## **6. Conclusion**

So what can we conclude about the identity of Serbian? Leaving out of consideration its medieval origins, as well as the mixed literary idioms of previous centuries, whose inherent fuzziness discourages such considerations, we find that the foundations of modern standard Serbian were firmly laid during the latter half of the 19th century, thus fashioning its stable initial identity. As a result of political developments setting in towards the end of that period this language became a constituent of a united (though never really unified) Serbo-Croatian, to be dissociated from the Croatian segment nearly a hundred years later, once again for political reasons. Whereas entering its Serbo-Croatian phase had marked a major enrichment in the life of Serbian, amounting to a new dual identity properly reflected in its new official designation, leaving that phase and returning to its original national name did not have any substantial consequences. What our overview suggests is that, despite all the changes registered, Serbian has maintained its recognizable linguistic profile,

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<sup>8</sup> Vasić, Prčić, Nejgebauer (2011); see also Prčić (2011).

and with it its identity, overtly single or dual, at least in broad outline. In this it has been assisted most recently by the absence in Serbia (as against Croatia) of the divergent language engineering which attended and followed the destruction of Yugoslavia and dissolution of Serbo-Croatian.

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Ранко Бугарски

## Об идентитете сербского языка

### Резюме

После изложения вступительного замечания о понятии языкового идентитета автор статьи рассматривает, в чем состоит идентитет сербского языка до, в рамках и после его сербско-хорватской фазы. Исследование приводит к выводу о том, что, вопреки всем историческим изменениям, стандартный сербский язык развивался относительно прямолинейно от времени его формирования, на протяжении XIX века, до настоящего момента. В качестве самой важной специфической особенности его развития в современную эпоху выделяется постоянная модернизация, происходящая, прежде всего, путем контактов с другими культурами. Данный актуальный процесс автор иллюстрирует примерами из своих исследований в области суффиксального словообразования существительных, ос новосложения и акцентуации. Особое внимание уделяется жаргонизации языковых элементов, особенно в молодежном сленге, под влиянием других языков, в частности английского. При этом жаргонизация рассматривается в качестве модернизационного элемента языкового творчества.

*Ключевые слова: языковой идентитет, сербский язык, сербско-хорватский язык, модернизация, языковое творчество.*