

Accent shifts in South Slavic dialects: The significance of retraction

The accentual patterns of South Slavic languages and dialects present one with a rich and diverse picture. Perhaps the best known – and at the same time most mysterious – is the “four-accent system” of the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian, in which a historical change known as the “neoštokavian retraction” has created a system of new tonal oppositions and the “accents” referred to as “long falling, long rising, short falling, and short rising”. In fact, however, the process of retraction has been at work in other, less obvious ways in other areas of South Slavic.

The lecture has three major goals. The first is to give a non-technical explanation of the neoštokavian accentual system which lies at the base of today’s canonical Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin, and to demystify the complexity which seems to baffle not only foreign learners but also native speakers. This explanation will also include a discussion of current issues connected with accent codification in the post-breakup period.

The second is to show how accentual shifts (which almost always consist of displacements towards the beginning of the word, hence the term “retraction”) are relevant in the historical description of South Slavic languages and dialects to the south and east of the neoštokavian region. This overall region, generally referred to by the cover term “Balkan Slavic”, contains several quite different accentual systems. Yet on examination, it can be seen that the historical process of retraction has been important in the development of each one.

The third is to demonstrate the critical role of dialectal data in studying these issues. For nearly a century now linguists have been discussing the theoretical aspects of these various retractions, not only the neoštokavian set which is the base of the core grammar common to Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin, but also those of the several Balkan Slavic linguistic systems. Linguistic material from actual living dialects bring all these issues into much better focus, both by giving concrete evidence of intermediate stages but also (and most critically) by allowing one to track presumed stages of development through the ordered geographical progression of the data. This stage of the lecture will include the presentation of as yet unpublished dialectal data from the author’s own field work.

Borders and identity in post-breakup Yugoslavia: Is Ivo Andrić still relevant?

During the entire span of Yugoslavia's history, from 1918 to 1991, only one writer from that country received the Nobel Prize for literature. This was Ivo Andrić, whom many in that country saw (and some still see) as their primary cultural representative. He was committed to the idea of Yugoslavism; he wrote about deep themes at the level of the common man; and he set his narratives in Bosnia, which functioned as a clear symbol of the delicate balance between East and West which Yugoslavia not only symbolized, but needed to practice at a very concrete level if it was to survive. Andrić was also in very real terms a "Yugoslav", in that he was born a Catholic Croat, grew up a Bosnian, and spent his adult life as a Serb.

The breakup of Yugoslavia dealt a serious blow to the idea of Yugoslavism and to any and all of its concrete implementations. Whereas all three republics (Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia) tried to "own" Andrić while Yugoslavia still existed, each of the three new post-breakup states categorically "disowned" him, each finding different reasons to call him a traitor. One might well think that Andrić's time has past, and that he is no longer relevant in the post-breakup world.

The lecture will first discuss the breakup of Yugoslavia, and identity issues in the context of the new borders, after which it will argue for the continued relevance of Andrić in the current post-Yugoslav space. Evidence will be drawn from Andrić's three best known (and most frequently translated) works: *Na Drini ćuprija* (*The Bridge on the Drina*), *Travnička hronika* (*The Days of the Consuls**), and *Prokleta avlija* (*The Damned Yard***). Each of these three masterworks develops, albeit in very different ways, the theme of "the other". Although life is of course highly complex everywhere, humans tend very often to see it in binary terms, separating into groups associated with "us" which as distinguished primarily because they are different from those associated with "them". Obviously this theme is highly relevant in today's world. The lecture will show how Andrić accentuates this theme not only through the content of his prose but also in certain very striking elements of its form.

* also translated as *Bosnian Story* and *Bosnian Chronicle*

** also translated as *Devil's Yard*

Bulgarian dialectology: A living tradition in the digital age

All languages have different regional forms known as dialects. In areas where traditional rural cultural patterns are still alive (even if only in relic form), the linguistic diversity displayed by these different systems is rich and striking, and extremely valuable for historical and typological studies. Among the Slavic languages, Bulgaria represents one of the richest sets of dialectal data. On the basis of these data, Bulgarian dialectologists have produced a comprehensive multi-volume dialect atlas which allows one to track in considerable detail the diversity with respect to phonetic and lexical elements of interest.

Detailed and valuable as it may be, the atlas mode of presentation, which concentrates on elements present in single words, bolsters further the common perception that dialects are primarily repositories of archaic pronunciation features and quaint word forms. But dialects are much more: they are fully functioning, internally consistent linguistic systems which serve as the mode of expression of a particular community and its world view. It is important to recognize this fact not only in abstract principle but also in concrete practice. When linguists work with dialectal recordings of natural continuous speech, they are able to focus not just on linguistic phenomena beyond the level of the individual word (such as word sequences, intonational patterns, and discourse structure) but also on the content of a rapidly disappearing traditional worldview.

Recent advances in digital technology have made it possible to do what could not be done in the earlier days of dialectology, namely to carry out precise comparative analyses not only of dialect data at the word level but also of these more extended recordings. Accordingly, the project named “Bulgarian Dialectology as Living Tradition” has been created. The central database is drawn from field recordings made by the author and her colleagues throughout rural Bulgaria over a 15-year period, and comprises 150 textual segments representing 62 different Bulgarian villages. The database system itself is described briefly on the homepage of the project’s URL, which is

<http://bulgariandialectology.org>

The lecture will describe this system in some detail and demonstrate both how data are being processed and what search procedures will be available to the interested public when data entry is completed.