Language in the Former Yugoslav Lands

Introduction

Language has played a crucial role in both the formation and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The fact that the majority of the inhabitants of the territories now known as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Yugoslavia speak essentially the same language was one of the key factors in the development of the 'Yugoslav idea' from the middle of the nineteenth century on. By the same token, after the Second World War political tensions, particularly between Croatia and Serbia, were often expressed in terms of language, exploited as a 'legitimate' and 'scholarly' focus of dissension. Debates about the status of Serbo-Croatian and its Serbian and Croatian components became increasingly acrimonious through the 1960s as a symptom of Croatian aspirations for greater autonomy that led to the so-called 'Croatian spring' of the early 1970s. The centrifugal forces, driven underground when this movement was suppressed, came to the fore again following the death of Tito and particularly as a response to Milošević's rise to power on a wave of populist nationalism in Serbia. The question of language became once again a vital tool in the expression of Croatian separatism. With the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Croatian authorities launched an intensive campaign to maximise the differences between the language spoken in Croatia and that of Serbia. Archaic words and expressions, supposedly more authentically Croatian, as well as new coinages were introduced into contemporary speech, differences in structure and word-formation were emphasised and the existence of a separate and autonomous Croatian language became one of the cornerstones of the new independent Croatian state. The consequent official separation of the Serbo-Croatian language into its Serbian and Croatian components has left post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina in a particularly problematic linguistic situation - with Bosnian Serbs using 'Serbian', Bosnian Croats 'Croatian' and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) referring to their language as 'Bosnian'.

This political division of the Serbo-Croatian language has had inevitable consequences for international institutions and diplomacy, and created sensitive problems for all concerned with South Slavonic languages and cultures. While the disintegration of Yugoslavia is a topic of considerable public interest, the role of language in the process and subsequent sociolinguistic developments in the region are largely unknown outside it. This book offers the international scholarly community a new perspective on one aspect of the problems of this troubled part of the world. In planning it every effort has been made to secure it the widest possible appeal, while at the same time bearing in mind the needs of specialists. The editors hope that the volume will be of interest to sociolinguists, to researchers and practitioners in the fields of language policy and planning, and to students of the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans and Southeastern Europe as a whole.

This publication is the result of a stock-taking project of reviewing the linguistic aspects of the breakdown of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, both as possible causes and as definite consequences, and presenting an overview of the current language situation, including problems of language policy and planning, in the new states emerging from the former Federation. The survey is undertaken on two levels, by country or region and by language, with a particular focus on areas of overlap especially that concerning Serbo-Croatian and its successors as now used in several of these states. Minority language issues are also addressed, as
well as those relating to the changing circumstances of the languages discussed in education, the media, standardisation procedures, normative handbooks and terminologies, to the relations between standard and non-standard varieties, etc.

The book has its origin in a conference organised by the editors and held at the University of London on September 8-9, 2000, which brought together some twenty invited experts, mainly in Slavonic and general linguistics and sociolinguistics, from all the successor states of Yugoslavia and from the UK, France, Austria, Sweden, Norway and the USA. The volume, however, is not a straight record of the proceedings but a fully structured book in its own right, aiming to present as coherent a picture as possible. Nearly all the papers read and discussed at the conference appear here, but all of them revised to a greater or lesser extent, in some instances involving a change of topic, and additional chapters filling a few gaps were commissioned from authors not attending the gathering.

While an independent publication in every respect, the present book may also be regarded as a sequel to a volume coming out of a conference held at the same venue and with some of the same participants in September 1989 - Language Planning in Yugoslavia, edited by Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth, Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1992. This turned out to be a linguistic record of the final stages of the former multiethnic and multilingual Federation; indeed, the book was unusual in that its nominal subject matter largely disappeared from the scene while it was in the process of production. The reader who wishes to consult it will find in it clear voices of warning and anticipations of forces that were to destroy the country. So our present volume picks up where the earlier one left off, attempting a new survey a decade later.

To this end the conference was carefully planned, with the participants being assigned topics in areas of their expertise so as to cover the field explored in a systematic way. We as editors then carried out some additional planning to produce out of this material a comprehensive account in book form. An introductory overview of the role of language in the disintegration of Yugoslavia is followed by sections on the present Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and on Slovenia, Macedonia and Kosovo. (The placement of Kosovo, officially a part of the Federal Republic, in this group was dictated purely by organisational convenience, since an expert was available to discuss Macedonian and Albanian in the same contribution, and should not be understood as implying a political stand on the part of the editors). There is then a section on Serbo-Croatian and its successors in selected countries abroad, providing information on the history and present dilemmas of the treatment and teaching of a recently decomposed language. The final section, possibly of more general interest, supplies a glimpse into the uses and abuses of language for propagandistic purposes and ends on a more positive note, suggesting ways of employing linguistic resources in the service of peace. The appended map of the region treated may help in the orientation of readers less familiar with it.

Coherence of coverage does not of course imply uniformity of views expressed, which are the personal responsibility of each author and are not necessarily shared by the other contributors or the editors. Particularly notable in this regard is the divergence of positions on the present status of Serbo-Croatian, both within and outside formerly Yugoslav territory. Still, it is our impression that the general tone of the contributions reflects in some measure the pleasant and constructive atmosphere at a conference devoted to a wide-ranging and complex topic with numerous
controversial and politically sensitive aspects to it. We believe that potential pitfalls of espousing essentially political agendas while considering linguistic issues have been successfully avoided in favour of a tolerant and stimulating exchange of scholarly opinions and perspectives.

The editors wish to thank several individuals and institutions without whom this publication would not have been possible. The conference out of which the book grew was generously supported by the British Academy Elizabeth Barker Fund, the British Council and the Diplomatic Service Language Centre of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Our special thanks go to Dr Vanessa Davies of the Diplomatic Service Language Centre for her unflagging enthusiasm and support from the first mention of our intention to hold the conference, with both the conference itself and preparation of the manuscript of this book. The publication has been generously supported also by the Language and Identity Cooperation Programme with South East Europe, financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We gratefully acknowledge permission from Mouton de Gruyter to reprint the chapter by Dubravko Škiljan, originally published in Multilingua, vol. 19: 1/2, 2000, and the final chapter, by Ranko Bugarski, originally published as the last section of an article in Folia Linguistica, vol. XXXIV/3-4, 129-45. We are grateful to all concerned at Slavica for including the book in their list and all their efforts involved in the book’s production. Above all, we wish to express our profound appreciation of the work of Radojka Miljević and John Andrew who undertook the typesetting of the manuscript and who have given exceptionally generously of their time and expertise, with unfailing cheerfulness and goodwill.

Ranko Bugarski
Belgrade/London, September 2002 Celia Hawkesworth