

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ  
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N. A. Spasić | IS DIALECTAL SPEECH LESS WORTHY?

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**Abstract.** This study covers the topic of relationship between standard and dialect languages. The goal of this study is to express opinions of linguists and normativists regarding ideas closely tied with other language planning processes. What they all have in common is, the desire to get rid of the discriminatory approach to social power, social status and dialectal language discrimination based on incorrect ideological beliefs and stereotypes. Common suggestions regarding neutralization of this problem focus on limiting the principle of linguistic territoriality, that is lowering the importance of linguistic individuality, thus improving the perception of dialects and their respective speakers.

**Keywords:** standard language; dialect; inequality; differences; discrimination; poll; speaker statements.

Спасич Н. А. | К ВОПРОСУ О ДОСТОИНСТВЕ ДИАЛЕКТОВ

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**Аннотация.** Темой данной работы является языковой конфликт, который возникает в области отношений языковой нормы и диалекта. В работе представлены точки зрения лингвистов и специалистов в области языковой нормы по вопросам, связанным с языковой политикой. Анализ различных точек зрения позволяет прийти к выводу о наличии общего стремления устранить неравный подход к общественному статусу языков, избавить диалекты от дискриминации, основанной на негативных идеологических подходах и стереотипах. Среди общих рекомендаций по нейтрализации языковых конфликтов подчеркнута важность ограничения принципа языковой территориальности, что уменьшало бы значение лингвистической индивидуальности в целях улучшения восприятия и оценки диалекта и статуса его носителей.

**Ключевые слова:** стандартный язык; диалект; равенство; различия; дискриминация; анкета; выступления.

## 1. Introduction

*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

„And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. We shall confound their language’...“ (Old Testament). It is with no doubt that there was a lot for humans to build on their way to the throne of God’s when the Lord decided to step on Earth and divide people by bewildering their language.

In the Tower of Babel we see the roots of division among people. This biblical story explains the diversity of languages and races. Multilingualism, so as any other form of diversity, implies conflict. There is no linguistic contact without linguistic conflict – „First Neldeov law“ [Salverda, p. 130] due to linguistic competence and a different social, political and economical mindset. The most common conflicts arise when criteria of national identity and mutual understanding fail to succeed. <...>, and there are a lot of cases where political, ethnic, religious or some other form of identity forcibly creates division where a linguistic and language division don’t exist. [8, p. 284].

With that being said, we start our talk about the division among nations, languages and lastly dialects, as the root of the problem which create disagreements and intolerance to anything that stands out as different. The nature of the language conflict is necessarily sociolinguistic and most research based on conflict situations reveal a series of sociolinguistic discriminations closely tied to political ideas.

“One of the most representative aspect of cultures is the human language. The languages are something that’s the most humane in

humans. What do we preserve, by defending them? – Our kind, the way it was brought by the language <...> Defending our language and it’s diversity, especially preserving it from domination of certain language, is more than the preservation of our culture. That is the preservation of our life” [3]. There is no official compliance on how many languages, dialects and speakers are on earth. D. Crystal claims there are over 20 000 dialects in the Voegelin's Classification and index of the world’s language (1977), and they are contained in approx. 4500 languages [8, p. 285]. According to some forecasts, it is expected that the number of languages will halve in the next fifty years<sup>1</sup> and about three hundred languages will survive. The growing trend of accelerated death among smaller languages gives foundation to a pessimistic vision of the linguistic world.

### 1.1. The object, goals, hypothesis

*Language possesses performative power.*

John Austin

„It is usually said that humans are defined by language. We express our feelings and thoughts through it, it has granted us the knowledge and accomplishments of our ancestors, and our descendants will succeed us through it. The language is the most valuable asset of humanity, however as the humanity is a mosaic of nations with personal histories and cultures, so is the human language a mosaic of national languages. That is why language is sacred to every nation. Native language is also sacred to an individual, it serves as an umbilical cord between an individual and his nation. It can be said that the native language serves as a home to the human spirit, no matter where it lives, at home or in the unknown”<sup>2</sup>.

By taking sociolinguistic properties in mind, researching the conflict becomes doable through language: the state of minority

<sup>1</sup> With the alarming trend of language extinction, UNESCO signed the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – ICH in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Deset teza o hrvatskom jeziku Dalibora Brozovića [Online], URL: <http://www.sspakrac.hr/index.php/odabrano-mainmenu-32/tekst/393-deset-teza-o-hrvatskom-jeziku-dalibora-brozovia> (accessed: 26.09.2017)

languages compared to the standard or to the dialects, the state of dialects compared to the majority speaking language, the state of languages and dialects among the diaspora, the state of the regional language (as a result of the migrant crisis of recent years), the differences among urban and rural settlements, the state of languages formed as a result of “newly” formed countries etc. Stating that the Serbian language is dialectic, prof. Bogdanović reminds that the standard form of speech is just one of the chosen dialects that corresponds to certain linguistic rules<sup>3</sup>. With that in mind, we have included respondents from all dialectic areas on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. This research is focused on the relationship between standard and dialectic speeches, while giving more significance to the dialects of the southern and southeastern Serbia due to their specific location and the attitude towards them. We will examine is there any discrimination, in which areas, how it’s manifested and what are the statements and experiences of their speakers. The topic is approached from an ideological standpoint, while the attention is given to the stereotypes and “power” relations. South/southern dialects (and their speakers) are singled out and special in the classification system, which is a clear case of an ideologically based classification, instead of linguistic (taking dialect into account) and geographical (southern part) criteria, considered by Petrović [14]. Stereotypes rely on several simple, lively, easy-to-remember characteristics of a person. These stereotypes judge the person based on these characteristics. They are emphasized, simplified and focused, defining the person permanently [4, p. 258]. Once they are determined, stereotypes are difficult to change, they divide social groups into those who are “normal” and into those who are different, and therefore unaccepted and singled out... Stereotypes occur when there is a lack of “power-strength” equality, with the power usually being aimed against the singled

out group [4, p. 258]. Social reality is conditioned by power relations. Power is scattered throughout the entire body of society and all subjects that enter into interrelationships, enter into the power relations as well (Foucault). Power relations are not constant and are subject to change.

Even though the topic of the relationship between standard and dialectic languages dates back to ancient times, it has become especially topical in linguistic circles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It doesn’t only intrigue professional and teaching staff, the topic includes “ordinary” people who have been the victims of their “odd” speech. Are they, in fact, marked by their place of birth, origin, and the affiliation of a dialectical area that was not taken as the basis of the Serbian language? On the basis of personal experience, we assume that most of the speakers, originally from such a dialectic area, were at least once in a lifetime exposed to ridicule, teasing and, we will be inclined to say, discrimination based on language, i.e. speech.

## 2. Standard - dialect

*Control your tongue, keep to your house and weep  
over your sin.*  
Mohammed

Many societies speak more languages or use multiple language varieties. Such multilingual societies must choose a language policy, that is, they must make a number of decisions favoring or at the expense of the use of certain languages.

The standard language is the language of a particular state and serves to communicate among people on a wider scale. It is a polyvalent, multifunctional, supraregional language used by all layers of society. Its rules are prescribed by the normative manuals: grammar, spelling and vocabulary. The creation of a standard language largely depends on the social and political conditions

<sup>3</sup> Jezik se često menja, ali dijalekti ostaju, *Večernje novosti* [Online], 20.09.2008, URL: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:223219-Jezik-se-cesto-menja-ali-dijalekti-ostaju> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

that were responsible for the characteristics of the Serbian language during its development. Serbian is a standardized language, and the process of standardization has been ongoing from the first Serbian written monuments to date. To understand the standard Serbian language, we need to know the development of the Serbian language, on the one hand, and the existence and distribution of Serbian folk speeches on the other.

We will not focus on the development timeline of the Serbian language, nor the details of the dialects. We will only emphasize that, originally, the dialect indicates a language that is realized as a transpersonal act in the dialogue. It is the language in which an individual reveals his sociolectic, regiolectic or idiolectic character in contrast to the neutral, non-personal, transregional standard language.

We live in a time of ever-growing strength of local speech. This is a process that began along with the democratic changes in our country at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when national self-esteem and awareness of the importance of maintaining dialects began to intensify. In the beginning, this was a kind of response to a political attitude that, more or less openly, degraded linguistic compositions that were not Neo-Shtokavian, condemning them with each new generation to an ever-decreasing number of speakers. Serbian scientific and artistic circles showed efforts to preserve the dialectic heritage, but these efforts always remained on the margins of those standard languages. In addition to dialectological discussions that, in addition to dialectologists, few read, the activities were reduced to dialectical dictionaries that were still interesting to a large number of people, and to the writing of dialectical literary works, mostly poetry, rarely prose or drama. If we exclude respectable writers who wrote on the

dialect (Stevan Sremac, Borisav Stankovic, Dragoslav Mihailovic)<sup>4</sup>, the dialectical word was largely reduced to folk art, mostly of entertaining character. In the last few decades, we have witnessed the birth of TV series containing the Kosovo-Resavian dialect ("Selo gori, a baba se češlja" – director Radoš Bajić) and the Torlakian dialect ("Bela lađa" – Mihailo Vukobratović, according to Siniša Pavić's script). We must note that the series "Bela lađa" is an indirect sequel to the film series "Tesna koža", despite the realistic representation of a society, with a great deal of irony and mockery, as the actors are often portrayed as uneducated and simple-minded. The situation is similar with some individual actors of the "Porodično blago" series (Directors: Aleksandar Djordjević, Mihailo Vukobratović, scenario: Sinisa Pavić and Ljiljana Pavić), in which Tika and Đoša left an indelible mark. A fortification of that statement is also made by jokes at the expense of people from this region, with phrases like "što južnije – to tužnije" (the southerner – the sadder). However, these people are often characterized as insightful and resourceful.

We will see how this problem is presented in literature and media in the following part.

## 2.1. Longing for the South!

*Once you forget about your homeland, you don't  
know who you are!*  
Aboriginal saying – Australia

If you were to ask someone in Niš which language they speak in, the answer would without doubt be "Serbian", and the Serbian language would imply all the linguistic forms that the Serbian people use. However, if you were ask someone from Belgrade for instance, what language is spoken in the south of Serbia,

<sup>4</sup> „It is well known that Stevan Sremac depicts southern mentality, spirit and temperament, and the attitude towards love, as well as a very successful revival of archaic Niš speech and customs. He also thinks that the success of the novel *Zona Zamfirova* originates from the humorous nuisance of the writer, as well as from the lively speech, from the way in which his characters think and communicate their thoughts.” – Stari Niš u romanu *Zona Zamfirova*, *Artnit.net* [Online], 14.07.2013, URL: <http://www.artnit.net/pero/item/729-stari-nis-u-romanu-zona-zamfirova.html> (accessed: 05.11. 2017).



you would undoubtedly get a multidimensional answer, probably with some form of mockery<sup>5</sup>. Vuk Karadžić haven't taken the southern and eastern part of Serbia into account while doing his work on the classification of Serbian dialects. It is up to linguists and especially dialectologists to correct this mistake<sup>6</sup>.

As the written and electronic media were the most accessible to us at the given moment, we checked how do they shed light upon this issue. We emphasize that the linguist, as one who is most competent to speak about language, is interested in linguistic reality and all possible variants of speech and expression of thought, while the standard language is the domain of language politics and planning and is in conjunction with the linguistic ideology (and the linguistic ideology is simply defined as "the ideas people have about language – about what it should be"). In the linguistic ideology of the Serbian language speakers, grammatical cases and accents, according to Tanja Petrović, are lingual categories which play an important role in creating a perception

and hierarchy of dialects and their speakers. With that being said, speakers who use different dialects are perceived as "less worthy", "broken" or "incorrect".

In the book "Srbija i njen jug" (2015), Tanja Petrović tried to shed some light on the ideological and cultural circumstances which lead to a coexistence of distinctively positive and negative evaluations of "southern dialects" and their speakers, and to answer the question as to how the territorially determined linguistic varieties (southern Serbian) were associated with categories of low cultural taste and a series of negative phenomena in Serbian society, while literary texts written on them, such as work of Stanković and Sremac, are regarded as top-notch art? "Southern dialects" are, according to her, types of speech characteristic to the regions of southern and southeastern Serbia. Although they are quite different, due to geographical, historical and cultural circumstances, speakers of language idioms with a higher social status classify them as "southern" and label them through some characteristics. A partial explanation is found in

<sup>5</sup> T.Petrović confirms this as there were situations escalating even at Universities between professors and students. [14, p. 15-16], as well as numerous discussions regarding lingual questions on forums (with some dialect arguments listed below):

- Well, i think most southerners are indeed simple and primitive (given the economic-cultural-social state of their territories). Because there is no exact measure that would apply to an entire area - if we consider "southerners" to be "lagging behind", we can't place them in the outermost domain of backwardness. Given the simplified picture that exists about the south, many would probably be surprised by the inner life of people in these environments. Secondly, obviously less important as there are individuals who rise themselves above the mass".

- What I underlined is precisely the example created by the society of imposed stereotypes, not the real state of affairs. Southerners are in no way less spiritually and culturally rich, they are just different. South is only economically more underdeveloped, certainly not culturally, socially or linguistically.

- "All dialects work perfectly as means of communication in the areas where they are spoken. Therefore, they are worth the same and they are natural, representative mother languages people living there learn. We all start from a dialect speech. The literary language is the construct, the product of a norm and agreement. By itself, it does not exist and is taught by every individual".

- "Our dialectic treasure fascinates me. It saddens me when my friends are not always ready to talk the way the talk in their native surroundings. I like to think about the little things which have influenced the progression of our language, to explore the logic behind some deviations, to listen to different melodies. It happened to me to hear conversations in public transport in dialects i am not familiar with, to which i would pull out a paper and write down what i heard. It saddens me that i have not travelled more across Serbia and learned about dialects to a degree where i could identify where i am just by listening to people talk".

<sup>6</sup> Jezik se često menja, ali dijalekti ostaju, *Večernje novosti* [Online], 20.09.2008, URL: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:223219-Jezik-se-cesto-menja-ali-dijalekti-ostaju> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

the disproportion in power relations between the center and the periphery. "The "Inland", "province", "southern line" are most often the names for the southeastern part of Serbia, for which the concepts of rurality, economic and cultural backwardness are linked to". [14, p. 11]. However, as Tanja says, southeastern Serbia shares the same fate as many other regions of Europe where language is "weirdly spoken" while this is more noticeable here due to the disproportion of economic and cultural power found in the capital city, which some critics call the "Belgradisation of Serbia" or "Beonarcizam" (Petrović according to D. Gruhonjić (2011) and I. Pavlović (2013) [13]).

Marjana Stevanovic, the author of the excellent article "Beonarcizam", first answers the question whether there is similar a discriminatory view towards dialectal speech which differs enough from the Standard language, as in Serbia. Based on the experiences of linguists who have spent some time in Germany, Slovenia, Italy – countries with many dialects, the standard language of these countries is, of course, obligatory in institutions, education and television, but the areas with different lingual characteristics are treated with far more respect and tolerance. There are, however, different views to this question as well. Statements from some European sociolinguists regarding dialects is particularly interesting [18]. The paper opposes homogenization and dialects, it critically refers to the way English is taught in English schools. There is a claim that the language is not respected, more precisely, its varieties except the standard written language, and the claim is more present among those who are the least expected to do so: the intelligent, writers, journalists and politicians. For them, minority languages and non-standard languages do not have value. This results in the decay of many languages across Europe at an alarming speed. Sociolinguists help vulnerable communities in passing on their language to

the next generation. One way to succeed in this is to form a positive attitude of the speaker towards his own languages and dialects. "The rapid disappearance of language is part of a wider phenomenon - linguistic homogenization; This includes the death of a dialect, which is a cultural tragedy. Dialects are also intimately connected with culture as well as languages" [18, p. 45]. Apart from symbolizing local cultures, there are other benefits of dialects. They contribute to the communication among communities in neighboring countries that are endangered by standard languages, because they interrupt the dialectic continuum. The disappearance of dialects, in addition to the perception of their social inferiority, is also supported by the claim that dialects are linguistically inferior, that they do not possess all linguistic potentials as a language, so people, even against their deeper feelings, move on to the standard language. The fight against dialectal discrimination is possible and most notable in developed countries such as Switzerland, Luxembourg and Norway, where dialects endure full use and cultivation. As said by Branimir Stanković, Norway has been successfully lecturing classes in local dialects in elementary and high schools, ever since 1878<sup>7</sup>.

A lot more attention is given to dialectal speech in Croatia too, as witnessable in books [i.e. 19] and various publications [16].

We are also witness to the lack of discrimination among some other non southern dialects in Serbia, Herzegovina and Montenegro. In fact, we find the Herzegovian and Montenegrin dialects "entertaining" and "quirky" which raises the question as to why do we lack consideration for our southern accents as well. Is it the case of having a kinder view to something "foreign" or is it something else? "The problem lies in the fact that many serbian linguists having a derogatory view towards southern speech. For such reasons,

<sup>7</sup> "Nestandardni" dijalekti i jezička diskriminacija by Branimir Stankovic, *Danas* [Online], 05.05.2016, URL: [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/dijalog/quotnestandardniquot\\_dijalekti\\_i\\_jezicka\\_diskriminacija\\_46.html?news\\_id=319988](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/dijalog/quotnestandardniquot_dijalekti_i_jezicka_diskriminacija_46.html?news_id=319988) (accessed: 06.11.2016)

younger generations ‘forget’ their Leskovački dialect when they go up north because they are ashamed. That is how Mihajlo Šćepanović depicts the preservation or the abandoning of a dialect. For a person, speech is not only the means of communication, it is also a part of their personality, just like behavior or folk clothing. Language is a question of identity, he says. That is why the Bosnians or Montenegrins, even in Terazije, after half a century in Belgrade, continue to speak as if they came from their homeland yesterday<sup>8</sup>.

There is no basis for the belief that Belgrade's speech is in accordance with the norm. Such state is attributed to it, most likely because of cultural prestige and higher standards. The Belgrade Variety does not have all four accents (properly realized), nor post-accent lengths where it is described that they exist in the standard language. In practice, in fact, we have a split between the standards described by Vuk, followed by M. Stevanović in his *Contemporary Serbo-Croatian language* and many recent normativists and real situations in speech. Formally, the most correct speech is in Western Serbia because of the connection with the reform of Vuk, not the favored, Belgrade's speech. In “Politika”, we could have read that Rada Stijović, a linguist who is dealing with the norm, said that “the literary language is closest to the inhabitants of Valjevo, Čačak, Užice, and in other similarly talking areas, but it is important to emphasize that no dialect is in itself irregular. All are correct”<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.2. Nourishing the serbian language

*Speech is a human use of language.  
So human that we always see human in  
speech.*

*In the speech! Not in the language!*  
De Saussure

The perception of the dialect, as a less important communication medium, has contributed to implicit belief, which led to explicit claims that the spread of literacy in the literary language and the influence of schools, churches and the media would eventually lead to an end of dialect speech and that the literary language would prevail. In the Serbian literature, this was suggested by P. Ivić [6, p. 175], and in Croatia, D. Brozović [1, p. 7] who uses the metaphor of the dialect as a parasite in the literary language (and humans seek to get rid of parasites). This metaphor could be inverted, but we would not dare to write it.

In spite of this, professor of dialectology at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade M. Šćepanović thinks that the dialects will undoubtedly survive and with a very picturesque metaphor explains that “the cities are getting “thicker”, the villages are becoming “thinner”, so the language changes, but it is tough so we should not worry about its survival, “and that” the language is like a house, which can lose its facade, but still remain strong due to its structural integrity”<sup>10</sup>. Agreeing with this statement is prof. N. Bogdanović as he claims that despite the great influence of the media and the standard language, the dialect remains firmly in their position and will not be subject to change for a long time.

On the other hand, Niš faculty of Philosophy professor B. Arsenijević's statement in the paper *Danas* regarding the

<sup>8</sup> Jezik se često menja, ali dijalekti ostaju, *Večernje novosti* [Online], 20.09.2008, URL: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:223219-Jezik-se-cesto-menja-ali-dijalekti-ostaju> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

<sup>9</sup> A be, prase slonče, *Politika* [Online], 20.02.2011, URL: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/167963/A-be-prase-slonce> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

<sup>10</sup> Jezik se često menja, ali dijalekti ostaju, *Večernje novosti* [Online], 20.09.2008, URL: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:223219-Jezik-se-cesto-menja-ali-dijalekti-ostaju> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

„Nourish the serbian language“ campaign has received lots of attention and comments in media. He described this campaign as a “visually boring”, racist and manipulative action for which, as well as for the overall activity of a larger part of 'Serbian' linguists, it is difficult to determine to what extent is the expression of scientific backwardness and ignorance, ideological deprivation, and to what extent in terms of a conceived strategy of conquering and sustaining power<sup>11</sup>. He believes the campaign has wrong beliefs and narrow interests at its core. In the interview for *Južne vesti*, he went into details to explain his statements and epithety with which he described the campaign and expressed his desire for the involvement of all people who care about the language so they can express their opinions on the standardization of the language<sup>12</sup>. Professor B. Stanković also agreed with these statements, who says that neither language nor his study should be mixed with politics, nor economics, and this is something that happens through the various campaigns that “defend” the language. B. Stanković emphasizes that those who “struggle” to preserve the language do not understand that the speakers of the dialect have the advantage “because we understand and use both our dialect and yours”<sup>13</sup>. The biggest problem of this campaign is that it does not take into account the social reality – that is the Serbian language that is nourished is not only the standard language, and that serious social and political repercussions that are the result of standardisation should be taken into consideration<sup>14</sup>.

Perhaps are these conclusions too exclusive, but we must agree with the view that

the language existed even before the norm in the form, in which Vuk described and introduced it into several registers and that the language follows its independent dynamics and adapts to the specificities of its bearers: culture, society and the individual. Professor Arsenijević adds that the newspaper should not be fought because it is pointless, resulting changes will only sustain if they are useful. Arsenijević thinks that one should not blindly keep up with the grammar, vocabulary or spelling, but rather try to change the normativistic path and authoritarian spirit.

It is worth mentioning Violeta Jović, who is not a linguist, and writing is not her primary interest, however, she caught our attention because of the great number of works written in the Svrljig dialect, a type of Torlakian dialect. She says that as a child, she went with her relatives to other villages and concluded that all people talk in the same way, understand and communicate even clearer, with much words than when speaking in standard language. She thinks that her mother tongue is a part of herself, her being, and if she gave up on it, if she gave up her origins and everything it is to her, she would not be herself anymore. Although she grew up in the countryside, she never had a complex of lower value, however, she says that she encountered many other people's “city” complex without apparent basis in many situations. She wrote about this in the novel “Druga”, but she said that she never accepted the fact that she was a lower class, that she should have minor rights and that she

<sup>11</sup> Malogradanska normativnost našeg mentaliteta, *Danas* [Online], 13.04.2015, URL: [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/kultura/malogradjanska\\_normativnost\\_naseg\\_mentaliteta.11.html?news\\_id=300264#sthash.cGrYxDJX.dpuf](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/kultura/malogradjanska_normativnost_naseg_mentaliteta.11.html?news_id=300264#sthash.cGrYxDJX.dpuf) (accessed: 04.05.2016)

<sup>12</sup> 15 minuta, *Južne vesti* [Online], 20 .04.2015, URL: <http://www.juznevesti.com/15-minuta/Boban-Arsenijevic.sr.html> (accessed: 04.05.2016)

<sup>13</sup> Novac i politika nasilno menjaju srpski jezik, *Južne vesti* [Online], 04.06.2015, URL: <http://www.juznevesti.com/Drustvo/Novac-i-politika-nasilno-menjaju-srpski-jezik.sr.html> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

<sup>14</sup> Južnjački dijalekti se ne doživljavaju kao kulturna vrednost, *Danas* [Online], 26.04.2016, URL: [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/juznjacki\\_dijalekti\\_se\\_ne\\_doživljavaju\\_kao\\_kulturna\\_vrednost.55.html?news\\_id=319593](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/juznjacki_dijalekti_se_ne_doživljavaju_kao_kulturna_vrednost.55.html?news_id=319593) (accessed: 10.05.2017).



should bow down to someone just because they were born in the city<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. Serbian dialectal speaker's thoughts

*The people are known by their language, like  
birds are by their voice.*  
Stjepan Radić

We have seen many times that speakers of any language do not always speak in standard language, but often use dialects, i.e. regional or class language varieties with different vocabularies, pronunciations or grammar, depending on the situation and according to the social position of the speaker. Differences can also be made between young people and the elderly, male and female speakers or among other social groups. The methods used to investigate language conflicts are heterogeneous and, most often, due to the empirical nature of the problems taken from psycholinguistics, sociology or sociolinguistics (like Lambert's *matched guise* method or semantic differentials) [12; 9, p. 44–51]. For the purposes of this research, a simpler form questionnaire was used.

#### 3.1. Methodology and the procedure

*You will get to know a person better by his  
pronunciations, than by his speeches.*  
Peter Tille

For the reasons given, we included people of different sexes, ages, and levels of education in our survey (not focusing on people who deal with linguistics in any form). The survey was anonymous and in addition to several general questions about gender and age, it contained a dozen short questions in which a linear scale should have been answered depending on the extent to which the respondent agreed with the

claim. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 signified no, I never feel like that, or I have never been in such a situation, 2 – no, 3 – sometimes, 4 – yes and 5 – yes, often (always). Some questions were of similar meanings, but the degree of the given feeling was different (pride or shame). Feelings ranged from "I am proud to have different speech" > "All dialects are equally worthy" > "I find it funny when I hear someone talk differently" > "I change my speech when I find myself in an unknown society" > "The fact that I was born in the Staroštokavski region is considered to be my biggest shortcoming" and even that my own origin is a reason for shame. In the end, there were two situations that were frequent and represent an insert from everyday life. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide suggestions at the end of the survey, as well as to describe a specific situation or to share their experience with the topic.

Since the periphery of other dialects (for example, those in the north or west of Serbia) does not have the same ideological consequences about their perception, we compared how those who originate from Staroštokavski region look at dialects, and those who have been born in the Novoštokavski region.

Also, as a rule, the hegemonic relationship between the periphery and the capital in the case of southeastern Serbia implies and demands a language assimilation: when someone from Vranje, Jagodina, Leskovac or Pirot comes to Belgrade, after a short time, they will adapt to the new linguistic environment (especially if its musical – M. Canić<sup>16</sup>), or otherwise they risk being labeled and ridiculed. We have been checking whether it's true.

<sup>15</sup> Violeta Jović – čuvar blaga srpskog juga kroz lepu narodnu reč, *NEGOSLAVA'S blog* [Online], URL: <http://negoslava.blogspot.rs/2013/12/violeta-jovic-cuvar-bлага-srpskog-juga.html> (accessed: 27.04.2017)

<sup>16</sup> A be, prase slonče, *Politika* [Online], 20.02.2011, URL: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/167963/A-be-prase-slonce> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

### 3.2. Research results

*Incurable wounds are those inflicted by tongue  
and eye, by mockery and disdain.*  
Honoré de Balzac

For the purpose of this research, we made a short questionnaire (Annex 1) according to

described criteria. The research has been conducted in May of 2016. Out of 190 respondents there were quite more females than males (76,2 % : 23,8 %) as shown on the upcoming graph (fig. 1).

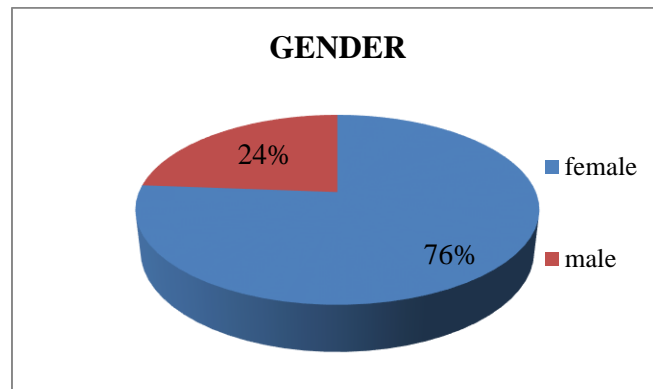


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

Рис. 1. Распределение респондентов в соответствии с полом

The average age is 32.41 years while the oldest respondent had the age of 70 and the youngest 11. We did not differentiate those who are students of philology or linguists by profession and those who are not because we wanted to test the linguistic sense and tolerance of all who are native speakers of the Serbian language. Among the respondents

there were mostly those who came from the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialectic region (56.97 %), followed by Prizren-Timok (28.48 %) and Kosovo-Resavian (8.48 %). There were also some respondents who speak eastern-Herzegovian and Zetian-South Sandžak dialects (a total of 6.06 %).

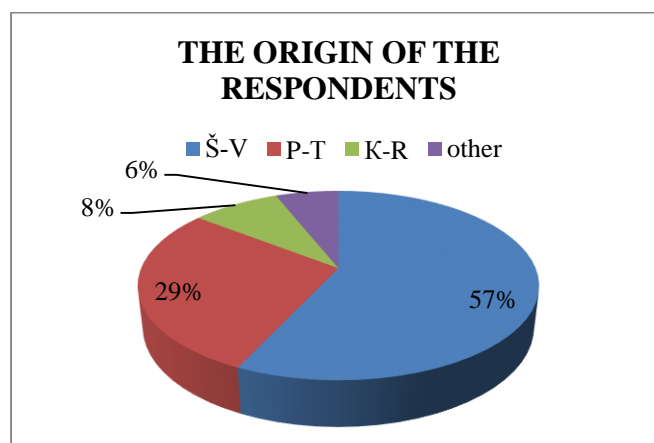


Fig. 2. Distribution of respondents by region of origin

Рис. 2. Распределение респондентов по регионам происхождения

Among the respondents there were mostly those who indicated that their permanent

residence was Belgrade, and then Niš, Novi Sad, Kragujevac etc. To one general question,

whether their speech belongs to the dialectic in the country from which they originate more than 60 % answered affirmatively (precisely 60.3 %), 28.5 % answered with no, and 11.2 % was not sure. The question was at first glance ambiguous, but we were interested in whether the respondents would have awareness that they are actually dialectically speaking or whether those who are from Neo-Shtokavian regions say their speech doesn't belong to a dialect, which was the case with most speakers. A large number (66.1 %) said that they are able to recognize when someone speaks in a dialect, and more than half of the respondents think that all dialects are equally worthy (5<sup>17</sup> – 56.6 %; 4 – 21.2 %). 21.9 % of respondents answered yes, and "often / always" 7% to whether they experienced mockery because of their dialect. 16.6 % of the speakers found themselves in this situation from time to time (so a total of 45.5 % of the respondents were at one time in such a situation), and only 9% answered that they

found it funny when they hear someone speaking to them with a different dialect. Obviously, we pay more attention to our feelings, because we better remember when we were those who are ridiculed. It is also possible that we are aware that this behavior is immoral and will show more tolerance in our answers, even if its an anonymous survey. The majority (78.4 % (1); 14.6 % (2)) does not consider the fact they speak in dialect as their biggest drawback, (46.2 % (1); 15,9 % (2)) would prefer to have been born in an area where a dialect has become standard language, (81.7 % (1); 9.1 % (2)) does not think they are less worthy because of their dialect and (94.1 %) never felt shame because of their origin<sup>18</sup>. However, a big number of respondents (38.5 % (3-5)) change their pronunciation when talking with someone who's not speaking in the same dialect. Why though? Especially as these respondents have said they are proud they speak differently (70.2 % (3-5)).

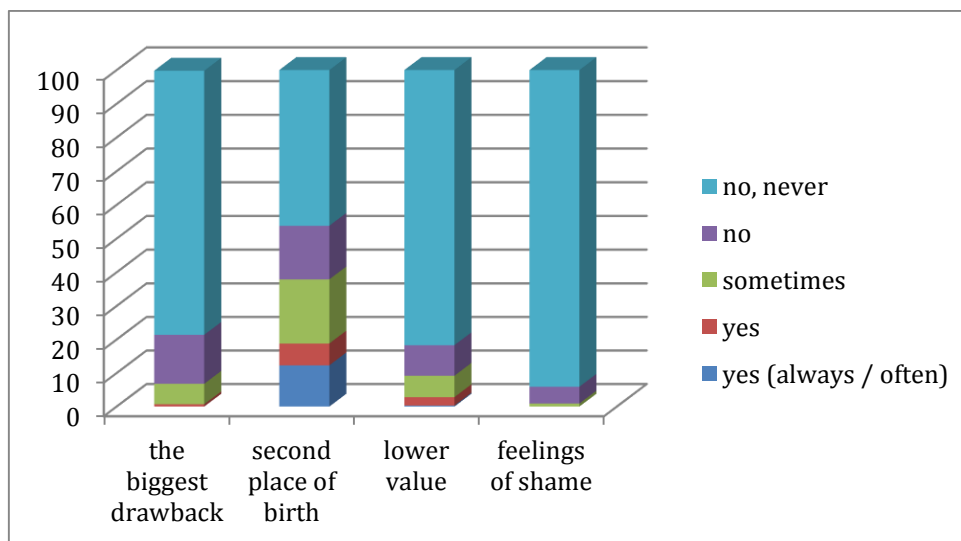


Fig. 3. Distribution of answers to questions  
Рис. 3. Распределение ответов на вопросы

<sup>17</sup> Numbers (1-5) are the labels for the linear chart.

<sup>18</sup> There questions look identical on first look but they carry an important difference in meaning. Therefore, we have shown the results, compared and presented in one graph (fig. 3).

We also see that 86.1 % (67 % never) did not have problems in school or at work because of their speech and that 88.3 % do not feel discriminated based on their dialect.

Regarding the situation question, almost all respondents (in fact 97.9 %), replied that they would not hide their origin when asked where they were from. If they say where they are, they risk experiencing the same situation as Peter from the survey, as 58.3 % of the respondents were in the situation of being mocked. It's up to you to decide.

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to make suggestions and to indicate the situation in which they directly or indirectly participated. Since there were many useful and interesting answers, a large number of them are mentioned at the end of the paper (Annex 2).

#### 4. Conclusion

*Respect if you want to be respected.*  
Folk proverb

If we, as humans, continued to use one, universal language, we definitely would have avoided all misunderstandings and problems speakers of different languages and dialects experience, wouldn't simply exist. However, as such an utopian idea is not possible, all we can do is accept the reality and the fact that we can't have symmetrical multilingualism [10, p. 294], but, every dialect is equally important because without any of them, we would be deprived of great wealth because "not only ancient tribal connections, but also a long life within the boundaries of a political entity, leave inevitable traces of speech. Dialects provide innumerable data and amounts of previously unknown, sometimes unexamined truths" [7]. How is it that territorially determined linguistic varieties were associated with categories of low cultural taste and a series of negative phenomena in Serbian society? When it comes to the dialects of the

south and the southeast Serbia, in addition to the mentioned conditions of the ideological, geographical and political division of the state territory, the fact that the literary language was created on the basis of distant dialects was of particular importance, so that the convergence or merging of these two variants is difficult, perhaps impossible. Despite that, qualifications such as 'proper' or 'incorrect' in linguistics are not desirable. Such terms can only be found in normative grammar. A breakup in the society due to linguistic or other barriers leads to the deviation of that society.

The relation to dialects, their (concealed) prestige or the lack of prestige in certain situations, the dialect interface and the literary language, the question of the dialect and the identity of the speakers – all are extremely interesting sociolinguistic topics – were treated superficially and generally as issues of minor importance. Leading philologists did not give up the dialect, but its description succumbed to traditional dialectology, which sought for "pure" dialects, and stopped on the description and historical interpretation of them with legitimate methods, but in this work, little attention was paid to their synchronous communication role in speaking communities.

This is confirmed by the answers of our respondents. Although most claim that they are not discriminated against, a large number of them have been subject to mockery, almost half would want to be born in an area whose dialect was taken as the basis of the Serbian language and easily give up their dialectal speech. We can look at this as a desire to achieve greater results with less effort (i.e. to master the standard language more easily), and it seems that nobody have said that their language is important, legitimate, functional, rich and interesting.

Linguistics is not and can never be geography! We can't stress this enough. In order for the language to develop freely and change, it is necessary that those who deal with it, concludes prof. Stanković, and we agree



with that, understand that linguistics do not prescribe, but describes the language<sup>19</sup>.

It will be difficult and painful until this topic is imposed on our authoritarian population, but we consider it positive that after so much time a topic about what the language is actually is about, and what consequences the value definition of speech and dialect has for their bearers. Do not think that we are against the standard language, it must absolutely exist as a variation in every modern society. However, it must also be flexible and democratic. Especially when it comes to orthoepic norms. Normally, liberal standardization should be the starting point, and the next step would be to educate the population<sup>20</sup>, and the next step, all people who work with language. Unfortunately, the biggest consequence is discrimination and violation of one form of human rights.

It is true that language is a tool of communication, a means by which people understand each other. It is not all about understanding each other, people need to also have some understanding for one another. The truth (i.e. science) is not on the side of any of the opposed sides that strive to simplify, unilaterally and biasedly remove all of the issues that we have discussed here.

*Conflict of Interests: author has no conflict of interests to declare.*

*Информация о конфликте интересов: автор не имеет конфликта интересов для декларации.*

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<sup>19</sup> Novac i politika nasilno menjaju srpski jezik, *Južne vesti* [Online], 04.06.2015, URL: <http://www.juzne-vesti.com/Drushtvo/Novac-i-politika-nasilno-menjaju-srpski-jezik.sr.html> (accessed: 06.11.2017)

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the ideas of prof. Stanković can be an incentive: "To start the education of Leskovac youth" (and all other people from the dialectal area) "in their mother tongue on the local dialect, and by the end of elementary education, students make a transition to the standard variant, but in a way so that transition avoids unwanted transposition of the form of power" (Novac i politika nasilno menjaju srpski jezik, *Južne vesti* [Online], 04.06.2015, URL: <http://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Novac-i-politika-nasilno-menjaju-srpski-jezik.sr.html>). The possible solution might also be the teaching of dialects from the early stages of education, especially in Neo-Shtokavian regions.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1

The following survey is anonymous. Its results will be exclusively used in research purposes. Please be completely honest with your answers and fill out the questions.

Choose one number from 1 to 5, depending on how much you agree with the statement/question.

1 – no, never; 2 – no; 3 – sometimes; 4 – yes; 5 – yes, often (always)

Gender: M / F

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of residence: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Does your speech, in the country you originate from, belong to a dialect?:

YES / NO / DON'T KNOW

2. I can identify someones dialect by hearing their talk.

3. I think all dialects are equally worth.

4. Have you ever been a victim of mockery and ridicule because of your dialectal speech?

5. Speaking in dialectal is my biggest drawback.

6. I try to change my speech when I find myself in a group of people who speak differently.

7. I am proud to have different speech compared to others.

8. I think i'm less worthy because i speaking in dialectal language.

9. I would love to have been born in an area where dialectal speech has become the basis of standard language.

10. I find it funny when i hear someone talk with a dialect.

11. Have you ever experienced a problem caused by your speech in school, at work, etc?

12. I feel discriminated based on my speech.

13. I am ashamed of my origin.

14. Read the following situation: Miloš moved to Belgrade to continue his studies. He wants to assimilate into the culture as quickly as possible, so he won't tell anyone that he is from south/eastern/western Serbia. Would you do the same thing?

15. Two men are talking at a bus station:

(1) Hi, i'm Sima, and i'm from Novi Sad. What about you?

(2) I am Petar from Niš (Ja sam Petar iz Niša) (Pirota, Vranja).

(1) You mean “from Niš” (Misliš iz Niš - dialectal) (Pirota, Vranje), hahahaha 😊

Have you ever encountered anything similar to this?

Note (if you want to write down something else regarding this topic or to describe a particular situation you've found yourself in) /

Suggestions & Constructive criticism

Thank you for your attention! 😊

## Annex 2

Note (if you want to write down something else regarding this topic or to describe a particular situation you've found yourself in):

- I've been born in the south of Serbia where we speak through a dialect. Through my education and studies i've corrected my speech and i think it's advisable to know proper expression and all 7 grammatical cases, however, i've never thrown away my dialect and i am not ashamed to use it when i am with my family and friends. During work, studies, communication with CEOs, professors...i've always used standard language.
- "Belgrade" speech is often mocked but i don't see how it's different from standard speech.
- Dialects should be preserved!!!
- I try to speak in standard language when it's appropriate to do so, but not to adapt to other non-standard speeches (sixth question).
- Even though i speak in dialect at home, i've used standard language during my studies and i use it during work. No one ever noticed i'm from a non-standard language speaking region.
- Since I am from Vranje, and i've studied in Kragujevac with colleagues from Čačak and Užice, they were bothered by my short accent and wording such as: *Idem si kući* (I'm going home – dialectal) I remember that. Over time i've learned to differ short and long accents and now i try to speak in standard language because i work at an Elementary school. People don't notice i'm from the South, anymore. Kids in class find it terribly interesting when i say something in dialectal speech though :)
- I've always found dialects interesting, and i enjoy listening to others speak in their dialects.
- I am proud to know both literary and my dialectal speech. I even understand and can speak Shopski. People who mock others usually only know the standard language and they don't realize the beauty and the countless possibilities of expressing yourself through a number of different varieties of your native language. :)
- People from central and southern Serbia always tell me they can hear me "dragging" words when i speak and i am from Srem, and we don't "drag" words as nearly as much as (not sure if we do at all) like people in Bačka and Banat.

- I speak standard language without issues and i use archaisms from Vojvodina, as well, depending on the type of surrounding i am in. I think dialects and archaisms are our cultural treasure and we should strive to preserve them. Naturally, we should also know how to speak in standard language too.
- My Seminar paper was declined, because the teaching assistant, who examined the paper did not notice i speak with an Iekavian dialect, called my paper a work of plagiarism. Thankfully, the issue was resolved in the shortest time.
- I am from Novi Pazar, where people use 2,3 grammatical cases and the accent is weird. I was mostly mocked for the way i say the word "Paprika".
- I am from Kraljevo, but now i live in Belgrade. In Kraljevo, the natural genus most often coincides with grammatical, which is not the case in Belgrade. Pera from Belgrade and Pera from Kraljevo are not of same gender (in Kraljevo, the nickname for Petar is Pero). This was a common discussion topic between others and me, not only people from Belgrade. I still think it's more grammatically correct to say "Božov auto" than "Božin auto", but i accept both to be correct.
- I think some people mind when others speak in a dialect.
- The questions could have been better. I am allergic to those who giggle.
- My dialect belongs to the group of eastern-Herzegovian dialects, but i've been using standard language for quite some time.
- During my studies in Belgrade, people found my Vojvodinian accent to be funny, and even attractive to some guys. My accent would give away my origin every time, they called it "singing", even though i don't speak with a typical Subotički accent, it's just characteristic to my region. Now i work for a local television and i've been asked not to "sing". It was incredibly hard for me to learn standard pronunciation. I got the hang of it, but only at work. When it comes to dialects, i think i could use the one characteristic to this region without any issues but i never did, because i think it's important to speak Serbian language the way we were taught in school.
- I've been honored to fill this survey 😊 i love this topic

- Interesting topic for research. Raising the awareness regarding dialects and reducing their discrimination is a must. At the same time, i agree on the adaptation of the norm.
- I only witnessed such “mockery”  
Suggestions & Constructive criticism (regarding the survey or the topic’s discussion):
- My example could be a solution for some individuals who wish not to forget their dialect. I think i’ve found the perfect counter-measure.
- The survey is excellent. We should raise awareness among people regarding the fact that accents are also a part of a language and that accents shouldn’t be a object for mockery.
- Some questions should have the answering option “i don’t know” like the question number 9
- Under “Gender” and the first question, we should’ve been given an option to choose multiple options.
- If someone answers that they don’t speak with a dialect, some later questions can’t be logically answered because they are targeted at dialectal speakers.
- Too many identical questions.
- We should give more attention to dialects in serbian literature classes.
- The media would help to promote the diversity of this kind. I think that the creation of educational programs for children and young people would help, advertisements too, tv shows that would talk about this topic would also have an impact, if anything, at least to think about it, even for a moment. A page on a social network regarding this topic would also help.

- Parenting and serbian literature teachers need a larger impact on the youth.
- The entire society and the educational system have to influence the youth in order to change this situation. “Language elitism” exists everywhere, but in our country, that quasi-elite is mostly half-hearted, without any culture or quality education.
- In the question whether we find different dialects funny...i find it nice to hear the southern dialects, macedonian as well, but not as in a way of mockery. I just think it’s funny in a good way.
- Tolerance is important. It’s important to have mutual understanding, the way we talk is less important. The diversity of our dialects is the virtue and the treasure of our language.
- No problems. They should just continue watching TV and listen to radio. They will learn it quickly (“Nema problem. Neka gledaju TV i slušaju radio. Brzo će se nauče” - dialectal speech)
- We shouldn’t label others.

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