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The Redrawing of Ethnic and Linguistic Borders in the Balkans: Implications for Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro

A. Introduction: Borderlands and the Western Balkans

1. Prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats, Muslim Slavs (Bosniaks), Montenegrins spoke a unified language called Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian or known locally as “Croatian” “Bosnia-Herzegovinian” or “Montenegrin” standard linguistic idioms; in Macedonia, Serbo-Croatian served as a lingua franca for the Macedonian and Albanian communities, while the Macedonian language was an official language of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.
2. With the creation of new political borders and new independent states, the previously unified language (Serbo-Croatian) is officially fractured into Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian; Serbo-Croatian ceases to be the lingua franca of newly-independent Macedonia.
3. In 2006, the Republic of Serbia recognizes as its minority languages (among others) the Bosniak and the Croatian languages. New borders create new “ingroups” and “outgroups.”
4. In 2001 in the aftermath of the ethnic Albanian uprising in Macedonia, the Albanian language gains in its stature and becomes nearly co-official with Macedonian; the two communities reject accommodation or assimilation as language policy paradigms

B. Theoretical Premises

1. Giles 1979 on Ethnic Speech Markers

In-groups and out-groups: complex implications for ex-Yugoslavia

Language choice, accommodation, and assimilation models in inter-ethnic communication

Intralingual or interlingual markers: important concept for Serbia and Montenegro

Ethnolinguistic vitality derived from language status, demographic and institutional support

The notions of hard vs. soft linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries

- Proposition 1: members of a subordinate ethnic group (e.g., Bosniaks in Serbia or Serbs in Montenegro) will accentuate their speech markers more in situations where they feel that the linguistic boundaries are soft.
- Proposition 2: members of a subordinate ethnic group (e.g., Serbs in Montenegro or Montenegrins in Serbia) will accentuate their speech markers more in situations where they perceive their non-linguistic boundaries to be soft.

2. Irvine and Gal (2000) on the ideology of linguistic boundaries:

The role of ideology in creating linguistic differentiation: ideology can harden the linguistic boundaries.

Ideological processes:

- Iconization: transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images they represent
- Fractal recursivity: involves the projection of some opposition onto another level.
- Erasure: the process whereby ideology renders sociolinguistic phenomena, persons, or fields to be invisible

C. The Newest Official Language: Montenegrin (declared 2007)

Main elements (least common denominators?):

1. Based on Štokavian-ijekavian dialect; the ijekavian reflex of the Common Slavic *jat'* is shared by all Slavic speakers within the borders of Montenegro no matter their national allegiances (Serb, Bosniak, Montenegrin, Croat).
2. Two new “Montenegrin” graphemes designating sounds typical of Montenegro and neighboring dialect regions: results of new jotations of spirants + *j* in examples of an originally short *jat'*, *yielding ś* and *ž*; e.g., (Montenegrin) *śedi* (< **sjedī*) ‘sit down!’ and *ženica* ‘pupil [of eye]’

3. bookish elements, especially the “hyper-ijekavianisms” typical of some northwestern Montenegrin dialects.
4. Parallels with the codification of the Bosnian language: inspiration from the writers of the past and a combination of some “typical” phonological features which are elevated to the status of as ethnolinguistic markers of Montenegrin identity.

D. The New Boundary: Serbia and Montenegro

1. Linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries are soft; therefore, ethnolinguistic markers are more salient or iconic. Montenegrin is the one new language that has created two “iconic” new letters in the alphabet: *š* and *ž*. *Additional new graphemes are still being contemplated according to the Minister of Culture (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4JvZHqRU8A>).*
2. Serbs are following the ideology of erasure vis-à-vis Montenegro. Pro-Serb Montenegrin linguists speak of “no border” between the Montenegrin and Serbian dialects. Most traditional dialect studies speak of this region as “Zeta-Lovcen dialects which extend into the Serbian Sandzak region. Main features including ijekavian reflexes of *jat*’ and new jotations occur across the political/ethnic boundaries. The whole region is “ijekavian,” including neighboring Croatia, Herzegovina, and Serbia. The new jotations are found in Southern Dalmatia/Croatia and in Herzegovina.
3. Serbia does not recognize Montenegrin as a language; the Montenegrin Constitution from 2007 declares the official language of the republic to be Montenegrin, and other languages “in official use” are Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. Montenegrin a latecomer in the region and still not officially recognized by other ex-Yugoslav republics as a minority language.
4. Conclusions: Serbia recognizes the Serbian/Montenegrin political boundary but many in Serbia still believe in a single Orthodox union of Serbs + Montenegrins and a single language for Serbs and Montenegrins. We have a hard political boundary but contested ethnic and linguistic boundaries

E. Serbia: Sanžak, Kosovo, and Southern Serbia

1. Muslim Slavs of the Sandžak region were designated as a Muslim national group in Yugoslavia and now identify as Bosniak. Serbia has recognized Bosniak as a minority language, but the boundary between Serbs and Bosniaks in the region is hardening, as Bosniaks in Serbia look to Sarajevo for linguistic/cultural guidance and Bosnian linguistic features are iconized in this region.
2. Northern Kosovo: The Serbs are guided by an ideology of erasure both linguistically and politically as they claim the Kosovo border to be illegal. Hard boundary between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs does not correspond to the political boundary but runs through northern Kosovo (e.g., Mitrovica). Serbs in the remainder of Kosovo are outgroups protected by Kosovo Constitution but mostly symbolically accommodated in the Kosovo state.
3. Southern Serbia/Eastern Kosovo: region of Serbia continually plagued by ethnic tensions. While Serbia has recognized Albanian as a minority language, the Albanians feel they are the outgroup grudgingly accommodating to the Serbian language in the region and lobbying for autonomy.

F. Macedonia: Linguistic Confederationism

1. After 1991, Albanian populations often did not learn the new lingua franca, Macedonian. Language grievances simmered for the first decade, exploding in the ethnic conflict of 2001. As a result of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Albanian has become a co-official language with Macedonian.
2. 2010: controversy over introducing Macedonian language classes in the first grade (rather than fourth grade) for members of the country’s subordinate ethnic communities, including Albanians.
3. 2006: should regulations in Law of Citizenship be changed, allowing for applicants to test in either Macedonian or Albanian?
4. Sept.2005: will use of Albanian be widened in the government and military??
5. Conclusions: there is a hard boundary between Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia; this boundary is not a political /military border. The Ohrid Agreement is an attempt at accommodation but both sides continually push the “language choice” model and the country is slipping into linguistic confederation could have implications for creation of new internal borders in the future.