

## **Biljana Konatar**

“Linguopolitical Montenegro: one country, two factions, three points of view”

The linguistic situation in present-day Montenegro, as it has been developing ever since the adoption of the most recent constitution in 2007, can be seen as a battleground of sorts of three major points of view. One point of view is advocated by the so-called pro-Serbian faction, whereas the so-called pro-Montenegrin faction is, in my view, represented by two distinct branches. Conditioned by powerful ideological positions, all three sides argue that the existence of an official standard language under a particular name, respectively, Serbian or Montenegrin, is crucial for legitimizing the nation’s identity. The question of identity in Montenegro is as complex as everywhere else. As the last conducted census in 2023 yet again showed, the question of geopolitical identity is complicated by the question of linguistic identity. According to the publicly reported census results, Montenegrin citizens declared twenty-three different languages as their mother tongue, as opposed to eighteen different languages in the previous 2011 census. Twelve of these twenty-three could be argued to have been offspring of once omnipresent Serbo-Croatian. Interestingly, 269 307 individuals declared Serbian to be their mother tongue and 215 299 – Montenegrin. Additionally, the number of those declaring Serbian as their mother tongue is 3.414 higher than in the 2011 census, whereas the number of those declaring Montenegrin is 13,952 lower. In the present paper, I explore how the names of languages, primarily Montenegrin and Serbian, as well as the existing standard language varieties, have been used for symbolic manipulation in the identity (and nation-) building project. Specifically, I examine the leading public figures’ focus on language name(s) and language standard(s) usage in their public appearances in the past five years and findings on my own from the fieldwork I conducted in Montenegro in the summer of 2022. During that time, I interviewed prominent public figures in Montenegro, including journalists of a few of the leading newspapers in order to understand their attitudes regarding the language situation since 2006 and the way it affects them. I also explore whether there are any actual differences in language usage of the figures/media in focus.

My research allows for an in-depth understanding of: (1) how discourses on language ideology in Montenegro influence one another; (2) who has the agency within the reception of a discourse, i.e., what makes a discourse domineering, and (3) how this affects those who are subjected to it (Bourdieu 1991; Kroskrity 2000).

References:

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