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“Beyond Politics: Rethinking Differences between Croatian and Serbian?”

The disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia had a substantial impact on language policy and language practices. What used to be known as Serbo-Croatian in international terms is now officially and in a politically correct manner regarded as separate standard varieties – Serbian and Croatian, together with the two smaller and previously unnamed varieties, Bosnian and Montenegrin. This has been quite a fruitful sociolinguistic topic not only locally but also internationally. However, although the topic is quite popular in sociolinguistics, the exact differences of (Standard) Croatian and (Standard) Serbian have never been researched in detail. Locally, there are 3 *razlikovna rječnika* (differential dictionaries), Krstić & Guberina 1940, Brodnjak 1991, Samardžija 2015, but all of these were written by Croatian linguists alone (often with an implicit political agenda), are frequently not too reliable, contain many imprecisions, and are at the same time both just lists of words (Brodnjak 1991 tries to implement a classification of “Serbianisms” but not very successfully), clogged with rare and archaic words, and normative rather than descriptive. No serious and objective description of the actual differences between Croatian and Serbian language usage exists – mainly due to political prejudice and political issues precluding collaboration. This is problematic because such differences do indeed exist and most of them are not of prescriptivist/artificial nature. However, in order to present the actual differences of contemporary Croatian and Serbian, simple word-lists are not enough – differences are indeed sometimes simple (e.g. *kino* ~ *bioskop* ‘cinema ~ movies’) but often it is more complicated (e.g. *tenisice* ~ *patike* ‘tennis shoes ~ sneakers’). In this presentation, we shall try to illustrate how such a description should look like, what the problems are and how a complex sociolinguistic and political situation influences the issues.