Linguopolitical Montenegro: One Country, Two Factions, Three Points of View

Biljana Konatar
University of Kansas

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Presentation Overview

- Introduction/Background
- Methodology
- Results & Discussion
- Conclusion

Introduction/Background

- 2006
    - The Republic of Montenegro formally independent
- 2007
    - New Constitution adopted
    - The Montenegrin language pronounced official for the first time

Article 13
- The official language in Montenegro is the Montenegrin language.
- Cyrillic and Latin scripts are equal.
- Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian languages are in official use.

Introduction/Background

- 2008: Montenegrin language (re)standardization began
  - 13-member Council for the Standardization of the Montenegrin Language disagrees
  - 3-member Expert Commission for (re)standardization formed
- 2009: The Orthographic Manual and Dictionary (1st edition)
- 2010: The Orthographic Manual (2nd revised edition)
- 2010 (July 5): Grammar of the Montenegrin Language
- 2010 (July 29): Institute for the Montenegrin Language and Literature formed by the Government of Montenegro with the aim to study and affirm Montenegrin language and literature
  - 2014 – The Institute transformed into an institution for higher education and renamed into the Faculty for the Montenegrin Language and Literature
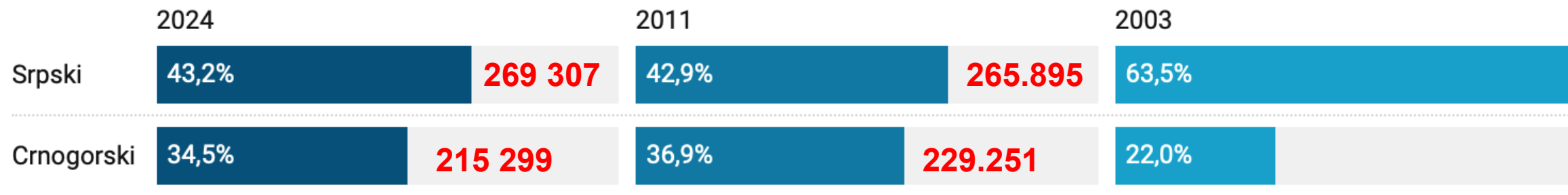
Introduction/Background

- I view the Montenegrin language as a pluricentric language with centers in Nikšić (Department of Montenegrin Language and South Slavic Literatures at the Faculty of Philology in Nikšić of the University of Montenegro) and in Cetinje (Faculty for the Montenegrin Language and Literature) as these two centers/institutions have two different approaches/philosophies toward standardization of the Montenegrin language.

- These two approaches/philosophies to standardization make something that's popularly called pro-Montenegrin faction in Montenegro.
    - pro-Montenegrin with the center in Cetinje – standardize the Montenegrin language (add jekavian jotation to the standard; *ś* and *ź* introduced to the alphabet).
    - pro-Montenegrin with the center in Nikšić – the standard needs to be based on the existing neoštokavian ijekavian, i.e., one that served as the base for the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian standards, as well. Opposed to adding *ź*, but *ś* would be acceptable in some instances.

- Apart from the pro-Montenegrin faction, there is also the pro-Serbian faction in Montenegro, whose prominent members are centered in the Department of the Serbian Language and South Slavic Literatures at the Faculty of Philology in Nikšić.
    - Montenegrin language doesn't exist. It is Serbian.

2003, 2011, 2023 Censuses, Mother Tongue

Popisi u Crnoj Gori, 2003-2023.

Maternji jezik

	2024		2011		2003
Srpski	43,2%	269 307	42,9%	265.895	63,5%
Crnogorski	34,5%	215 299	36,9%	229.251	22,0%

Census Results, Comparison

- The number of individuals declaring Montenegrin as their mother tongue in the 2023 census is 13,952 lower than in 2011, whereas the number of those declaring Serbian as their mother tongue is 3,414 higher than in 2011.

- The 2023 census included "Language Usually Spoken by the Individual" section in the questionnaire, where 36,23% (or 225 956) of citizens declared Montenegrin as the language they usually speak (as opposed to the 34,52% (or 215 299) who declared it as their mother tongue), whereas 43,52% (or 271 422) declared Serbian as the language they usually speak (as opposed to the 43,18% (or 269 307) who declared it as their mother tongue).

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Methodology

- Fieldwork conducted in summers 2022-23 and, among other things, consisted of:
  - A demographic questionnaire
  - Face to face interviews with educators (university professors, high school teachers, primary school teachers), students, journalists, and state administration employees
  - Number of Participants: 66 (demographic questionnaire; 61 interviews)
  - Age: 20-73

  Focus Questions: What is your mother tongue? What do you think about the current situation in Montenegro where there are two standard variants? Which of the two standard variants, non-jotated and jotated, do you use and why?
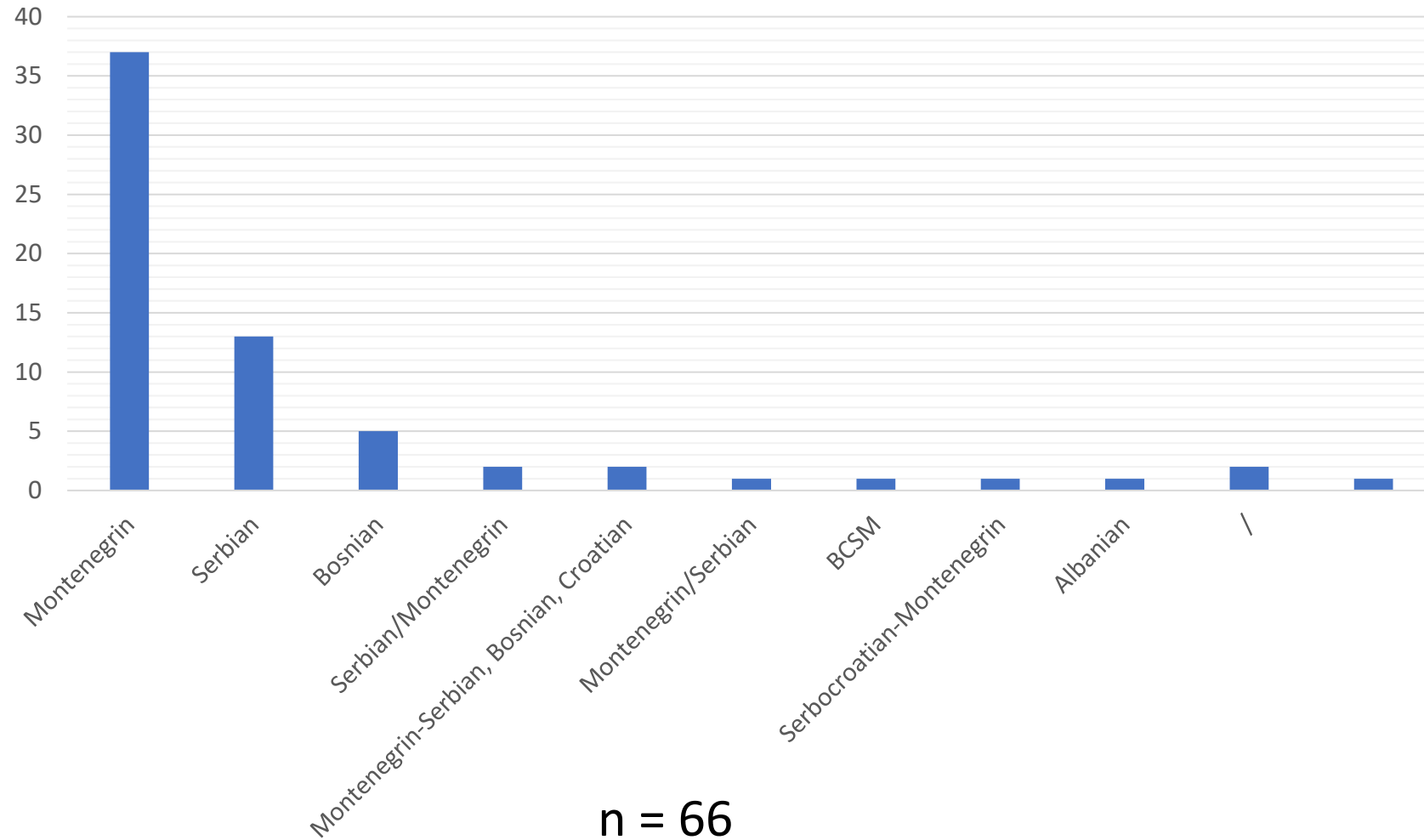   - Non-jotated variant (e.g., *djevojka [girl], tjerati [to chase], sjutra [tomorrow], zjenica [pupil]*)
    - Jotated variant (e.g., *đevojka [girl], ćerati [to chase], śutra [tomorrow], źenic*a [pupil])
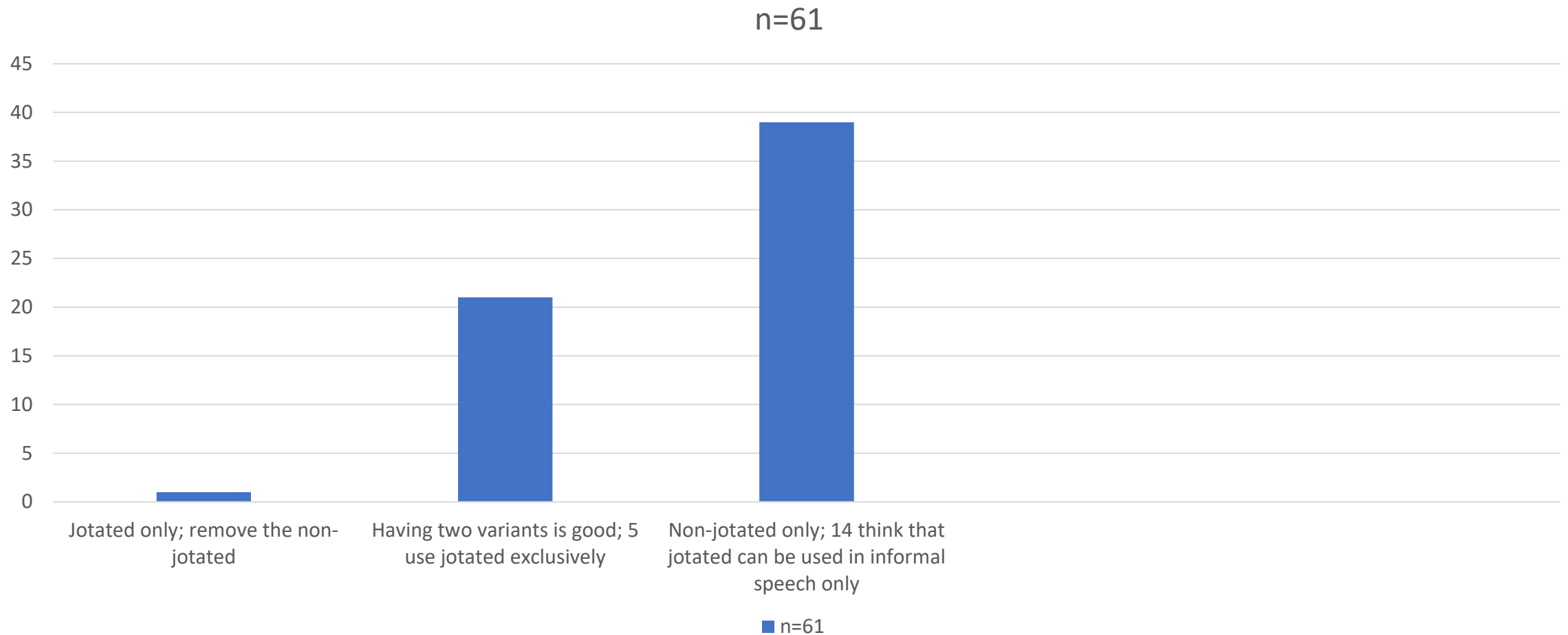
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Respondents by their Mother Tongue (Demographic Questionnaire)

n = 66

Respondents by Preference and Use of the Standard Variants (Interviews)

Jotated Variant Only;
Remove the Non-jotated One

n=1

Jotated Only; Remove the Non-jotated One
(n=1)

R008: By including these two letters [*ś* and *ź*], we have adapted to people, which means that these two letters have been incorporated in the Montenegrin standard according to all normal thinking. It is not normal that I say *śedi [sit down, jotated]* but have to write *sjedi [sit down, non-jotated]*. I would be much more radical when it comes to the Montenegrin standard because only the jotated variant would be used because it is the more correct one for the Montenegrin territory. I can tell you that I use the jotated variant exclusively at the university, with my friends, at home because it is more natural to me. However, I cannot use it at work because I am being corrected by the TV editors. Whenever I send a text written in the jotated variant, they send it back to correct it even though the editor's job title is "Editor of the Montenegrin language."

Two Variants - Good
n=21

5 of the 21 Respondents Use the Jotated Variant Exclusively

Two Variants = Freedom
n=21

- **R007:** I think the introduction of doublets is justified. This doesn't mean that anyone will force a person to use them or that anyone must use them. The Montenegrin language is both the non-jotated and the jotated variant. . . We would find much more exclusivity or ideological coloring if we denied something to someone, rather than giving them the possibility to use the variant they want with our standardological literature. I use the jotated variant. I think that the other variant is more political, and based on activism, rather than on scientific research.

Two Variants = Politically Correct
n=21

- **R041:** The language that I speak was being oppressed for years, but it has persisted. Not on its own, of course, but with the help of the team of people who recognized the main laws of linguistics. Having two variants is absolutely politically correct because there are people who use one and people who use the other. I think that the jotated variant is stigmatized here. Language is being misused for political purposes, so we will often see that if a politician in the Parliament is against Montenegrin, they will use the non-jotated variant, and the ones who are for it will pronounce the jotated variant in such an artificial manner that it seems forced. We should use language naturally.

Two Variants = Reflection of Reality
n=21

- **013:** The standard language in Montenegro is a question that is yet to be solved, in my opinion. I have a feeling that the solution lies somewhere between these two centers, Nikšić and Cetinje, but closer to Nikšić in my view. It is not a problem that the two graphemes were introduced for the voices that are being used. Whoever lives here hears this *ś* even from the people who negate the Montenegrin language. I live in a city that is not recognized for it as much as Cetinje is, for example. I live in Kolašin, but I cannot think of the time when I last heard someone saying, *"Dođi sjutra da sjednemo na kafu''* [non-jotated]. So, it is irrelevant what language someone declares they speak nominally, everyone will say, *''Dođi śutra da śednemo na kafu''* [jotated]. That is a part of the language that should be recognized. However, one should not insist on it and try to return something into the language forcefully. I think it is good that there are these options; that everyone can say *sjutra, sjedi* or *śutra, śedi* if they want to. We were always taught write as you speak, but we weren't allowed to write as we speak. . . We should not now use *iźđeljati, iźesti*, if no one speaks that way. I think we should keep *ź* for transcription purposes and reconstruction of the speech of our grandfather or grandmother, for example, but not force it where it is not used and where it is unnecessary.

Only Non-jotated Can Be Standard
n=39

14 of the 39 respondents think that the jotated variant can be used in informal speech only

Only Non-jotated Can be Standard; Jotated Ugly
n=39

- **R051:** I honestly think that our language sounds uglier and that the grammar of our language and all the peculiarities of our language, when it comes to grammar and how it sounds, are being lost. Here we're constantly inventing something new and adding to our language. It seems to me that everything new we add and everything new that comes out makes it less beautiful, less nicely sounding, and less correct. When I hear a child say *śutra, poneđeljak* [jotated forms] and so on, I'm the first to correct them. I tell them, say *ponedjeljak* [non-jotated].
Not that it's incorrect, but it doesn't sound nice, and I don't think it makes us any closer to the Montenegrin language than we are at the moment.

# Only Non-jotated Can be Standard; Jotated Forced
n=39

- **R024:** I still declare that I speak the Serbian language because that is what I studied in school and what I am used to. I use the non-jotated forms. I definitely do not agree with this now that they implemented as the Montenegrin language. I think that incorporating *ś* and *ź* was forced and for political purposes because they wanted to prove that Montenegro exists.

Only Non-jotated Can be Standard; Jotated Political
n=39

- **R044:** The non-jotated variant is the one I use. Not saying *đevojka* or *ćerati* does not mean that one is not speaking Montenegrin – it just means that it is not the language that some people defined as Montenegrin in the last couple of years. People who created the Montenegrin language after the independence were serving certain political parties or some powerful political figures who might have been the biggest Serbs in the 90s but are now the biggest Montenegrins. The question of language is misused, just like other identity questions.

You Can Use the Jotated Variant, BUT at Home
n=14

- **R053:** I think that the non-jotated forms are used much more, at least in formal communication. I also think that the existing standard is not being used. The non-jotated forms are used in public and local administrations, media, and education. Not everything we hear can become a part of the standard. With us, there was somehow an aspiration to standardize everything, whatever you hear, which can really cause confusion. . . I'm the first to use the jotated forms *ś* and *ź* and so on, but I don't use them in formal situations, because I grew up and developed on the Serbo-Croatian standard and that standard, I can say, unconsciously became the standard because I learned it that way throughout my schooling and sometimes it even grates my ears when I hear in the media some forced jotated forms which really don't have to be that. . . I want to emphasize that the standard cannot fully disregard the jotated forms because our reality shows that no one will say *djed*, but *đed*, not *djever,* but *đever*. These are the jotated forms that, in my opinion, don't even have a non-jotated doublet. So, we need to take into consideration the real situation, not what we want or wish, but we need to make the standard from the actual use of language and not create something artificial.

You Can Use the Jotated Variant, BUT at Home n=14

- **R018:** For me, Montenegrin language does not exist. That is simply Serbian. Therefore, there is no standard Montenegrin for me, there is standard non-jotated Serbian. Simply, the language was always divided into one that was literary, that was used in schools in education, there was always that one... there was also a different language that people used to speak in their free time that was not correct, it was not a literary language, grammatically correct or whatever, and now it's the standard. Now this one is more powerful in the socio-political sense because if the ruling party speaks it, it is correct. Everything that the ruling party imposes in Montenegro is correct, even if it is not. People do not have the courage to oppose due to their employment opportunities, i.e., unemployment.

You Can Use the Jotated Variant, BUT at Home
n=14

- **006:** I use the one that came from the Serbo-Croatian, the one where there are no *żenica* [jotated] and *śednica* [jotated] because that sounds primitive and cheap. I'm the first to speak and write those two additional letters, I use them, but never in an official setting, and never in an official text. I use them on social media and when I speak informally, but there are times when I avoid them because they do not sound serious enough even for some informal conversations. Through this doublet approach, this Montenegriness was being forced, the separatness. I do not oppose our nation and its historical importance, but this had a counter-effect. The official documents of the State Assembly that contained *ś* and *ź* during Ranko Krivokapić's time and that were extremely jotated cannot be read now from this perspective. Cannot be read. Simply no one wants to read them because they sound unprofessional, not serious and do not look like documents of a highest institution in Montenegro.

Linguopolitical Montenegro
Language Names and Montenegrin Politicians: Lines Blurred

- August 2024 – During the Western Balkans' EU Ascent panel at the Global Security (GLOBSEC) Forum held in Prague, Jakov Milatović, the current President of Montenegro, said the following: "You know that we all speak basically the same language…," to which the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić added, "Serbian language." Milatović continued, "Well, you know…", followed by Vučić's, "You speak Serbian language," to which Milatović responded, " I do. I do. And that's basically, linguistically, the language is the same, many people, you know, call it differently, but that's not really an issue." Vučić, "But that's Serbian language, yes."

- September 2024 – When asked what his mother tongue is in an interview in Montenegro, Milatović said: "All of Montenegro knows this – my nationality is Montenegrin, and I speak the Serbian language. However, I don't think that the people who speak the Montenegrin language loves this country any less and vice versa, that those who declare to be Serbs, love this country less. I just don't bring these things to the fore, but if someone asks me, I respond without hesitation. It is the right of every citizen in this country to say what language they speak… I was always transparent about this, as opposed to some other politicians who tried to avoid the questions.

  - December 7, 2024: Milatović announced that it is legitimate to open a public discussion on changing the Constitution so that the Serbian language gains the status of the official language in Montenegro.

- 2020 – Milo Đukanović, the former President of Montenegro and the leader of the pro-Montenegrin DPS said in an interview after losing the elections that, "The poet Matija Bećković, whose works are one of the rich treasures of the Montenegrin language, spent his whole life negating the only thing that is his authentic value. The language in which Matija Bećković writes is related to Serbian as it is to French - it's as understood there [in Serbia], as it is in Paris."

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Conclusion

- Kroskrity (2000):
  - Language ideologies are not monolithic or unidimensional. They should be viewed as a cluster concept consisting of a number of converging dimensions, including:
    1. language ideologies as multiple and grounded in social experience which is never uniformly distributed throughout polities of any scale = the case in Montenegro
    2. and language ideologies as bridging sociocultural experience and linguistic and discursive resources by constituting those linguistic and discursive forms as indexically tied to features of members' sociocultural experience.
       - Language names matter, BUT so does the standard variant.
       - Multiple points of view in the responses concerning the standard variants.
         - The educational/cultural connection of the people to the former, non-jotated standard, seems to make these linguistic features iconic of their sociocultural experience and prompts them to see them as the correct and beautiful ones, and jotated ones as incorrect and ugly (to be used in informal speech only).
         - Jotated variant, with *ś* and *ź*, tied to features of members' sociocultural experience (iconic representations) and their identities.
         - Both fine as long as they are not forced.

                                                                                    (Irvine and Gal 2000:37)

- **Politicians blurring the lines:**
  - Jakov Milatović, current president (2024): "We all speak basically the same language."
  - Milo Đukanović, former president (2020): "The language in which Matija Bećković writes is related to Serbian as it is to French - it's as understood there [in Serbia], as it is in Paris."

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

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