

Language Policy in Yugoslavia: Theory and Practice

Marilyn A. KALAN*

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INTRODUCTION

In Yugoslavia, the official language policy as expressed in the constitution is a reflection of the political realities of the country. The constitution describes Yugoslavia as "a federal state of voluntarily united and equal peoples." It is a "self-managing socialist community based on the rule of the working people" and on the principles of equality among the various ethnic groups. (*Yugoslavia in Brief*, p.1) The constitution not only recognizes the equality of the ethnic groups, but also provides a great deal of regional autonomy to them. In accordance with this respect for ethnic diversity, the constitution guarantees the right of each ethnic group to use its own language and script. In theory, then, language equality exists. In practice, however, contradictions are prevalent. "Any multi-ethnic system that takes its regional autonomy seriously, as the Yugoslavs obviously do, must also contend with a certain amount of risk and uncertainty concerning country-wide integration and stability." (Bertsch, p.99) In Yugoslavia, the threat to integration and stability was manifested in the 1970-1971 Croatian upheavals. The Croatians, sensing a contradiction between language policy and its implementation, turned language into a political issue. The aim of this paper, then, is to focus on the use of language in domestic politics.

ETHNIC BACKGROUND

The ethno-cultural complexity of Yugoslavia is best illustrated by the old cliché: "Yugoslavia is a country with six republics, five nations,¹ four languages, three religions, two alphabets, and one Yugoslav—Tito." (Bertsch, p.92) (see chart next page) The six republics of Yugoslavia are: Serbia Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, are found within Serbia. The major dimension of differentiation among the Yugoslav population, however, is not according to their residence in a particular republic, but rather according to their nationality, i.e. their ethnicity. At the end of 1977, Yugoslavia had a total population of about twenty-two million. (*Yugoslavia in Brief*, p.1) The five major ethnic groups are as follows: Serbs (40%), Croats (22%), Slovenes (8%), Montenegrins (2%) and Macedonians (6%). Recently, the Bosnian Moslems (8%) have been considered as a separate ethnic group. The ethnic groups tend to concentrate in their respective republics, e.g. 73% of the Serbs live in Serbia;

*Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences—Foreign Languages

¹Nation here means nation group, i. e. ethnic group. These terms and their derivatives, e. g. nationality and ethnicity, are used synonymously in this paper.

78% of the Croats live in Croatia. (1971 census figures from Tomasevic, p.9) The most numerous national minorities living in Yugoslavia are: Albanians (6%) and Hungarians (2%) followed by Turks, Slovaks, Romanies, Bulgarians, Czechs, Rumanians, Ruthenians, Wallachians, and Italians. (*Yugoslavia in Brief*, p.1)

In Yugoslavia, the prime indexes of ethnicity are language and religion. The Croats and Slovenes in the North are both predominantly Roman Catholic. The population of both ethnic groups is generally modern and Westernized, i.e. adopting traits characteristic of the Euro-American urban industrial culture. In addition, there exists cultural influence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which ruled the area for centuries. The two ethnic groups are primarily distinguished by language. Both

SIX REPUBLICS: Croatia

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Montenegro

Serbia

Slovenia

Macedonia

FIVE NATIONS: Croats

Slovenes

Serbs

Macedonians

Montenegrins

(Bosnian Moslems)

FOUR LANGUAGES: Serbian

Croatian

Slovenian

Macedonian

THREE RELIGIONS: Eastern Orthodox

Roman Catholic

Moslem

TWO ALPHABETS: Latin

Cyrillic

ONE YUGOSLAV:

Marshal Josip Broz Tito
(former leader of
Yugoslavia)



groups use the Latin alphabet; however, the Slovenes speak Slovenian, whereas the Croats speak Serbo-Croatian (alternately called Croato-Serbian). According to Bertsch, "the spoken and written word of Slovenian and Croatian are clearly distinct and require considerable training before proficiency is developed in the other's language." (p. 93)

In the South, in contrast, the population is more Easternized, due to the influence of the Eastern Orthodox church and inclusion in the Turkish empire for many centuries. The Serbs, though speaking the same language as the Croats, use the Cyrillic alphabet and are predominantly Eastern Orthodox. The Montenegrins share the same religion and language as the Serbs.² The Macedonians are also Eastern Orthodox but are divided from the Serbs and Montenegrins because they speak a separate language, Macedonian, and are closely related, historically and culturally, to the Bulgarians. The Bosnians, a mixture of Serbian, Croatian, and Turkish elements, were influenced by the Turkish religious affiliation and are predominantly Moslem.

The two ethnic minorities that constitute 6% and 2% of the total Yugoslav population respectively, are the Albanians and the Hungarians. The former group resides in the autonomous province of Kosovo; the latter in Vojvodina. Both groups are defined as distinct from the other South Slavs by sharing the language, i.e. Albanian (non-Slavic) and Hungarian, of the neighboring countries.

LANGUAGE POLICY

No official language is designated in the constitution of Yugoslavia. Instead, the constitution recognizes the multi-lingual nature of the country. Article 41 of the 1963 constitution declares that "Citizens are guaranteed the freedom to express their nationality and culture, and the freedom to use their own language." (Durović, p. 47) Article 42 goes on to say that "the languages of the peoples of Yugoslavia and their scripts shall be equal." (Durović, p. 47) The principles of language equality are further guaranteed in Articles 43, 131, and 157, in Amendment 19 (December 1968), and in a Resolution of the Federal Assembly (April 1969) which provides the framework for policy implementation. Even though no official language is designated in the constitution, three Slavic languages are recognized for official government use: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian. (McDonald, p. 89) As a result of the above mentioned constitutional and governmental policies, the three major languages and fourteen other Slavic and non-Slavic languages are in regular use, i.e. for business purposes, state and legal affairs, education, self-management work organizations, and for the media. In education, for example, in addition to Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian, nine other languages³ are used as the medium of inst-

²"Since the second world war, the Yugoslav government has also recognized a Montenegrin nationality, comprising Serbo-Croatian speakers living in the territory of Montenegro. However, the Montenegrins differ neither in language nor in religion from the Serbs, and it would seem that there is no cogent reason to regard the Montenegrins as a major ethnic group separate from the Serbs. Most Montenegrins I have known have regarded themselves as Serbs." (Bidwell, p. 218)

³Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Rumanian, Ruthenian, Slovak and Turkish.

struction in primary, secondary, and vocational schools. (Farmerie, p. 145)

MAJOR LANGUAGES: DISTRIBUTION AND CHARACTERISTIC

The three major South Slav languages: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian, are distinct in their standard written form; however, the strict separation between the languages is blurred when one examines the dialects, i.e. the spoken forms. Thus, in respect to the distribution of the spoken variety, there are no strongly defined language boundaries. According to Bidwell, the South Slavic settlement area, which he defines as a semi-circular sweep from the Upper Adriatic and Slovenian Alps to the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea, forms a "continuum of mutually intelligible dialects." (p. 219) The *Area Handbook for Yugoslavia* mentions this as well, saying that Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian, which are considered separate languages, have only slight variation between, for example, Southern Slovenia and Northern Croatia. (McDonald, p. 92) The domain of the standard written forms are, therefore, determined largely by political boundaries.

Slovenian is spoken by nine percent of the population of Yugoslavia primarily in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, where it is the official language. As mentioned previously, Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian both use the Latin alphabet and "are closely related but sufficiently different, however, to be mutually intelligible only with difficulty to persons without some knowledge of both." (McDonald, p. 91) The *Area Handbook for Yugoslavia* states that few Serbs or Croats know Slovenian whereas most Slovenians know Serbo-Croatian as a second language. Slovenian has seven major dialects all mutually intelligible.

Macedonian is spoken by five percent of the population of Yugoslavia predominantly in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Most Macedonian speakers know Serbo-Croatian as well. The language was standardized and officially recognized as a language in 1943; the first grammar was published in 1948. Macedonian uses the Cyrillic alphabet. It is similar to Serbo-Croatian in the pronunciation of vowels, but employs special rules of accentuation. Its grammar is closer to Bulgarian than to Serbo-Croatian. (McDonald, p. 91) This similarity to Bulgarian is important on the political scene as evidenced in the following passage: "Bulgaria did not favor the development of a Macedonian language, since it had based a claim to the eastern section of Macedonia, in part, on the similarity between the local dialect and the Bulgarian language." (McDonald, p. 91)

Serbo-Croatian is spoken by three quarters of the population primarily in the Socialist Republics of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro; in these republics it is the official language. Serbo-Croatian serves as the lingua franca of Yugoslavia. (McDonald, p. 89) According to Stavrou, "its knowledge is essential for any social or political advancement." (p. 76) Further evidence of Serbo-Croatian's important role is given in Article 42 of the constitution, where immediately after saying that all languages are equal, the following exception is given: "In the Yugoslav People's Army, commands, military drill, and administration shall be in the Serbo-Croatian language." (Durović, p. 47)

In regards to the term "Serbo-Croatian", the *Area Handbook of Yugoslavia* explains that it was created in the nineteenth century by Western scholars to designate the language that South Slav scholars called either Serbian or Croatian. It was adopted by the Yugoslavian government in 1918 to "emphasize unity of language as a factor in amalgamating the Serbs and the Croats in the new state." (McDonald, p. 89) Unity, of course, is easier in theory than in practice. Although the languages are similar in grammatical structure, there are differences between Serbian and Croatian regarding pronunciation, vocabulary, and orthography.

First, in respect to pronunciation, three major Serbo-Croatian dialect are recognized: Kajkavian, Čakavian, Štokavian, classified according to which interrogative pronoun is used: "kaj", "ča", or "što". The Štokavian form is used by the majority of the Serbo-Croatian speakers and is the basis for the standard. The Kajkavian dialect, on the other hand, is used in the area surrounding and north of Zagreb, in Croatia. The Čakavian variety is used along the Adriatic coastline of Croatia. In addition, there are three subdialects: Ekavian, Ijekavian, Ikavian, distinguished by the allophonic variation of the phoneme "ě": "e", "ije", or "i". Thus, the Serbo-Croatian word for "milk" can be either "mleko", "mlijeko", or "mliko". Most Roman Catholics (i. e. Croats) and Muslims use the Ijekavian variety, whereas the Eastern Orthodox speakers use the Ikavian or Ekavian variety. Another difference in pronunciation is that as part of linguistic change, the accent on syllables shifted forward. Generally speaking, those speaking Kajkavian or Čakavian (i. e. Croats) show the unshifted accent or partial shift; those speaking Štokavian show partial or complete shift. Standard Serbo-Croatian was established using the Što-ije and Što-e forms with complete accent shift. The Croats use the Što-ije variety; the Serbs use the Sto-e variety.

Second, in respect to vocabulary, the difference between Croatian and Serbian lies mainly in borrowed words, although some words of Slavic origin are different, e. g. "bread" is "kruh" in Croatian and "hleb" in Serbian. Briefly, the Croats borrowed mainly from Romantic speech (now extinct), Italian, and Hungarian. The Serbs, on the other hand, borrowed from Greek and Turkish. There are also certain differences in "learned and technical vocabulary, particularly in abstract terminology." Bidwell points out that:

The Croats have tended to be more zealous in the replacement of foreign words with native coinages, usually loan translations from German or Latin, whereas the Serbs, less threatened with absorption by German culture, have been very tolerant of loans in this sphere. (p. 222)

Lastly, there is the difference in orthography between Croatian and Serbian. As already mentioned, the Croats use the Latin alphabet and the Serbs use the Cyrillic. Due to the efforts of two linguistic reformers in the nineteenth century, Vuk Karadžić (Serb) and Ljudevit Gaj (Croat), the orthography was reformed so that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the letters of each alphabet, i. e. they can be easily transcribed by mechanical substitution.

The resolution of differences between Serbian and Croatian and toward further standardization of Serbo-Croatian is an ongoing process conducted by linguists and grammarians of both ethnic groups. In 1960 an official orthography was issued; it functions as the official standard for education and publishing.

LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

During the post-war period, Yugoslavia was divided into six republics and two autonomous provinces. The basis of this division was made primarily on the concentration of the ethnic groups in those areas. Thus, the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins were each granted a republic. Bosnia-Herzegovina was established for the "uneasy mixture" of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in the mountainous region. Finally, Vojvodina was created for the Hungarians; Kosovo for the Albanians. Along with the acknowledgment and respect of each nationality went a guarantee that the groups could use their own language and script. This last guarantee was motivated by politics. It was an incentive offered each group to gain their support in building a unified Socialist Yugoslavia. Each republic, and their representative ethnic group, would have regional power; the Communist Party would be the unifying force.

But how could the party call for unity among its peoples and still recognize their ethnicity? How could they solve this inherent dialectic? It would seem that one must be dominant and the other subordinate. This was the problem Yugoslavia faced, and the answer came in the form of promoting "Yugoslavism", which was a rather artificial 'higher' nationalism, and urging the ethnic groups to abandon their authentic ethnicity. "Yugoslavism ... was the only ethnic ideology not in contradiction with the principles of unity and brotherhood or Marxism-Leninism." (Stavrou, p.76) Herein lies the contradiction in the language policy. On the one hand, the Communist Party (renamed the Yugoslav League of Communists in 1953) was saying all languages and scripts are equal, and on the other hand, they were saying that ethnicity should be abandoned for "Yugoslavism", which, in reality, meant abandoning ethnic languages for the language of the dominant culture, i.e. Serbo-Croatian. The Yugoslavian party leaders and elites viewed language on the instrumental level—as a means of communication. They ignored the function of language on the symbolic level—as an index of a person's identity with an ethnic group.

The emphasis on "Yugoslavism" bothered the Croats in particular. As mentioned previously, when the Croats and Serbians united to form a state in 1918, their languages were declared as one, Serbo-Croatian, as a show of unity. From that time, however, the Croats felt that unity (that is, "Yugoslavism") was just a slogan for Serbian hegemony; therefore, the term acquired a negative connotation. When the policy of Yugoslavism was promoted again after World War II, the Croats, and other ethnic groups as well, were unclear as to what this higher form of nationalism actually meant. A meeting was called at Novi Sad, and the old issue of whether Serbian and Croatian could be considered as one language was again discussed. Fears

of Serbian hegemony were "brushed aside" and "under existing political centralization and the still prevailing Stalinism", the conference produced the following results:

The Serbian, Croatian, and Montenegrin languages were declared one and the same, and a commission was formed to produce a dictionary, which was put into use in 1960. (Stavrou, p. 77)

The results of the Novi Sad conference had a direct impact on the national minorities within the republics of Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro. Minority schools were merged with schools whose medium of instruction was the majority language; Serbs in Croatia studied Serbo-Croatian using the Latin alphabet, and Croats in Serbia studied the language using the Cyrillic alphabet.

The obvious contradiction between the language policy and its implementation might not have been so dramatic if the Yugoslavian government had been uniform in its enforcement. Another contradiction arose in the form of practicing ethnic repression in some areas of Yugoslavia while promoting ethnic diversity in Slovenia and Macedonia. Once again, the motives were political.

When Slovenia became a Yugoslav state at the end of World War I, 400,000 Slovenes remained in Italy and 90,000 in Austria. (Tomašević, p. 125) Despite the separation, a significant number of Slovenes, particularly in Austria, have maintained their culture. In 1919 and again in 1945, Yugoslavia tried unsuccessfully to claim the area of Carinthia where the Slovenes reside. By allowing the Slovenes in Yugoslavia to maintain their culture and language, despite the emphasis on Yugoslavism, the government was keeping alive the spirit of kinship with the Austrian Slovenes. Recently, the Austrian Slovenes have had to form their own Slovene Civil Rights Movement due to pressure to assimilate the Austro-German culture. The movement has received support from Yugoslavs, and some Austrians believe "that Yugoslav agitators want to 'Slovenize' the region so that Yugoslavia can again lay claim to it." (Farnsworth, p. 16) This expectation is considered unrealistic, however, because the treaty defining Austria's boundaries was signed by the United States, the U. S. S. R., Britain, and France. (Farnsworth, p. 16)

The Macedonians, like the Slovenes, were divided with neighboring countries: Greece and Bulgaria. Once again, as pointed out by Stavrou, "language, then, is a confirmation of their kinship and of their desire to unite with their kinsmen." (p. 77) Ethnic diversity was tolerated to the point that two districts of Macedonia, Dimitrovgrad and Bosiljgrad, even recognized Bulgarian as the official language.

As can be seen in the above discussion, the implementation of the policy of Yugoslavism by the government was not uniform. From 1945-1964 Yugoslavism was the dominant policy. Around 1959, Yugoslav authorities began to emphasize decentralization in political and economic affairs. By the time of the 8th Congress of the League of Yugoslav Communists, Yugoslavism was being heavily criticized, and in 1966 at the Brioni Plenum:

"unity and brotherhood" became a suspect slogan and unitarianism was defined as a harmful form of nationalism. The Serbians, the major

proponents of unity, were accused of misusing its meaning to their own advantage. Arising immediately after the decision by Tito and his colleagues to federalize the party and to introduce market laws in the economy, anti-unitarianism became a new faith among the academic elites. A favorite topic after 1966 was linguistics, culture, ethnicity, and the new Yugoslav reality. (Stavrou, p. 77)

After years of cultural and linguistic repression, the Brioni Plenum triggered a resurgence of national identity in Yugoslavia. In Kosovo, the Albanian dominated autonomous province, this meant use of the Albanian language. Albanian leaders, such as Mahmut Bakall, made demands for more autonomy, more books in Albanian, more jobs for Albanians, more courses in Albanian at the university et cetera. The ultimate demand was for Kosovo to be recognized as republic due to its unique linguistic make-up. (Stavrou, p. 78) In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosnian Muslims, led by Professor Muhamed Filipovic, demanded cultural autonomy from the Serbs and Croats. This demand was based on the above mentioned two primary indexes of ethnicity in Yugoslavia: religion (Muslim) and language (using scripts of Arabic). (Stavrou, p. 78)

The biggest controversy, however, arose in Croatia. On March 27, 1967 the magazine *Telegram* published a "declaration signed by nineteen Croat associations calling for official recognition of the Croat language as a separate language having equal status with the Serbian." (Stavrou, p. 78) The editor of the magazine, also a member of the Central Committee of the Croat League of Communists, was removed from both posts. According to Stavrou, "Tito called the declaration a 'stab in the back' and ordered an investigation to discover the source." (p. 78) The Croats, though, were not to be quieted. Their complaints went beyond language policy. As Mestrovic points out, the Croats were:

disillusioned with the slogans that were blatantly negated by the reality of Titoism: the endless talk about the rights of workers in a country where most of them earn barely subsistence wages; the slogan of "brotherhood and unity" in a country where all the nationalities are exploited in the interest of a swollen and mainly parasitic federal bureaucracy in Belgrade. All of this led the intellectuals to clamor for the implementation on the national level of the Marxist principle of, "to each according to his labor." But Tito regards these demands as "reactionary" and "counter-revolutionary" and a threat to Yugoslav unity. (p. 318)

Croatian students became involved in the protesting in the early seventies with the following results:

In four nights of fierce rioting in the Croatian capital of Zagreb three students were killed by police and several hundred more demonstrators were injured or arrested. The violence was sparked by Tito's dismissal of the popular and progressive Croatian leadership headed by Mika Tripalo and Savka Dabcevic-Kucar on charges that they had not proceeded with sufficient vigor to crush the counter-revolutionary and nationalist activities of Croatian intellectuals and university students.

(Mestrovic, p. 317)

Among the Croatians, there was talk of separtism, a right guaranteed them by the constitution. In the end, Tito had to call in the army to quell the so-called "counter-revolutionaries." In light of Tito's action, people have compared Croatia to Czechoslovakia and the experiments of Dubcek in 1968 which also ended in military occupation.

Though the problems of Croatia are still not settled, focus has recently shifted from Croatia to the Albanian speaking province of Kosovo. As mentioned earlier, the Brioni Plenum in 1966 sparked a resurgence of national identity in Yugoslavia; Kosovo was a prime example. In 1981, Kosovo is again an example. Just last month, what some have called the worst ethnic clash in Yugoslavia since World War II occurred in Kosovo. It began with student protests over poor food and housing in Pristina, the capital of the province, but led to violent rioting throughout the city. Again, banners were seen calling for Kosovo to be recognized as an autonomous republic. Again, Kosovo's unique linguistic make-up is fuel for those in favor of the establishment of autonomy. As in the Croatian crisis, the Yugoslavian army was called in. In the end, eleven people were killed; fifty-seven were wounded. Once again, government leaders, in this case Stane Dolanc, a leading member of the party's presidium, described the rioting as "a nationalistic, irredentist, and counter-revolutionary act." (Webb and Behr, 1981)

As seen by the recent events in Kosovo, despite military and police repression, the linguistic issue is still central in domestic politics in Yugoslavia. The problem is extremely complex, and it will remain in the fore as long as the political conflicts persist. As evidenced in the above discussion, linguistic issues are intimately tied to the current economic, social, and political problems in Yugoslavia. At this moment the Communist party leadership is facing perhaps the greatest challenges it has had since the death of Tito.

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