

HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL FEATURES OF LANGUAGE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosna Hersek'te Dilin Tarihsel ve Sosyo-Politik Özellikleri

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Abstract: *Bosnian language-for Balkans- has always been a very sensitive question. Therefore, this paper deals with the reasons behind dissolution of Serbo-Croatian language into three different languages from the historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives. This paper began with the historical background as inevitable introductory framework for an understanding of language changes and transformations. Then the second part of this paper analyzes socio-political developments and language that were conditioned by various historical processes. An attempt has been made to present how language was evolving from Medieval Bosančica to present day three constitutionally accepted languages namely Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. Furthermore, last part of the paper deals with the main characteristics of Bosnian language in comparison to Serbian and Croatian languages. Apart from indicating affirmed historicity of Bosnian language this paper holds that the development of different languages in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a result of a need for national identification. However, there are insignificant linguistic differences among three languages that are officially used in Bosnia-Herzegovina.*

Key words: *Bosnia-Herzegovina, Language, Bosnian language and Serbo-Croatian Language*

Özet: *Boşnakça-Balkan coğrafyası için- her zaman hassas bir konu olagelmıştır. Bu sebeple, araştırmamız Sırp-Hırvatçanın üç farklı dile ayrılmasının altında yatan sebepleri tarihsel, sosyo-politik ve dilbilimsel yönleriyle ele almaktadır. Araştırma, dillerdeki değişim ve dönüşümlerin anlaşılmasında vazgeçilmez bir giriş çerçevesi olan tarihsel arka planla başlamaktadır. Araştırmanın ikinci kısmı daha sonra çeşitli tarihsel süreçlerle şekillenmiş olan sosyo-politik gelişmeler ışığında, dili analiz etmektedir. Ortaçağ Boşnak Kril Alfabetesi'nden anayasa ile tanınmış olan günümüz Boşnakça, Hırvatça ve Sıpçasına dilin nasıl evrildiği ortaya koyulmaya çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca, araştırmamızın son*

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kısmı Boşnakçanın Sırpça ve Hırvatça ile mukayesesini yaparak bu dilin ana özelliklerini ele almaktadır. Boşnakçanın kabul edilen tarihsel gerçekliğini açıklamanın yanı sıra, bu araştırma Bosna Hersek'te farklı dillerin gelişiminin ulusal kimliklerin belirlenmesi ihtiyacından kaynaklandığını savunmaktadır. Ne var ki, Bosna Hersek'te resmi olarak kullanılmakta olan üç dil arasında dilbilimsel açıdan pek az bir fark bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bosna Hersek, Dil, Boşnakça ve Sırpça-Hırvatça

Historical Background

As early as in the 1137 historical official documents indicate that Ban Boric was the first ruler of Bosnia. After his reign Bosnia as an independent state continued to exist, that was verified by the Kulin's Ban Charter written in 1189. Then, the Ottomans ruled Bosnia from 1463-1878 and this period marked the new era in the Bosnian history. The changes in medieval Bosnian political and cultural characteristics were obvious; however Ottomans allowed the preservation of Bosnian Medieval identity and accepted it as an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. The population make up during Ottoman rule changed several times. A native Slavic-speaking Muslims community emerged and they become second largest ethno-religious group.

During the Austro-Hungarian rule (1878-1918), Bosnia had a unique position and was considered as a balancing Balkans country. Within Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bosnia had significant multi-religious and multiethnic legislative representation and coexistence. As a result, the citizens of Bosnia also identified themselves with the state and felt that they belonged to a great Bosnian nation. Actually, Benjamin Kallay, the Hungarian governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina attempted to create a single uniform Bosnian nation by uniting diverse nationalities of Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs. Due to such attempts the official language during this time was Bosnian and people declaratively stated that they speak Bosnian language. Therefore, the development of language was heavily shaped by the Habsburg Empire.

Due to the spreading of nationalism from the neighboring countries and the creation of the first unified South Slavic State on the ruins of the First World War Bosnian unifying national features including the language were greatly affected. After the First World War, Bosnia joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. During this period Serbs and Croats had upper hands in political decision-making. Later, the name Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes changed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Due to these changes, Bosnia as a separate unit almost disappeared (Malcolm, 1996).

During the Second World War Kingdom of Yugoslavia was invaded by Germany and after the war country was united under the firm hand of Josip Broz Tito and the country changed the name once more; this time it was called Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tito managed to indoctrinate people into accepting “brotherhood and unity” as the declaration of all different religious and ethnic people in Federation of Yugoslavia. Since 1946, due to Yugoslav constitutional changes all laws and other legal decrees in Bosnia-Herzegovina were published in Serbo-Croatian language.

During the 1990s the Slovenian and Croatian independence too place and Bosnia-Herzegovina in this regard was at the cross-roads. Three predominant groups in Bosnia were influenced by spreading of nationalism in the neighboring countries and this resulted in the formation of three ethnically influenced social groups namely, Croatian, Serbs and Bosniaks. Croats and Bosnaks didn't want to stay in the completely Serb-dominant Yugoslav Federation and they opted for referendum (Imamovic, 1997). After the referendum, which was boycotted by the Serbs in Bosnia, the tensions escalated and the war erupted after the declaration of independence by Bosnian parliament. During the four year long period of war, many atrocities were committed and when a chance for the peace agreement materialized all sides signed the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in order to stop the war. After the war Bosnia-Herzegovina was divided into Federation of Bosnia and Republic of Serbs.

Language and Socio-Political Circumstances

Bosnia-Herzegovina has been dealing with many socio-economic, political and even linguistic challenges and difficulties. The main linguistic change was due to the above-mentioned historical developments that eventually affected national languages and their transformation into three different languages.

Usually discussions about how current Bosnian language evolved and developed are traced back to medieval times. *Bosancica* is the name for old Bosnian language that was used in Bosnia as early as from 10th century. *Bosancica* as a language and its characteristic phonetic features were used for almost 10 centuries throughout the region and especially in Bosnian (Halilovic, 1998). Kulin Ban wrote a document in *Bosancica* as the oldest document written in this language. Then, the Humac Tablet, one of the oldest Bosnian literary monuments was inscribed in *Bosancica* (Lovrenovic, 2001). The inscriptions on the tomb stones are also in this orthography (*stecci*). This script is very important to Bosnian linguistics and history because this script is primary source for the beginnings of Bosnian language.

Historical changes in the region further influenced language development. When Ottomans came to Bosnia in 1463 they had a great impact on the population from the social and linguistic perspectives. Over the period of 400 years rule many Ottoman words entered into dictionaries of Bosnian language. Islam that was introduced to Bosnia by the Ottomans also played a role in language development. Migration of people and mixture of different dialects as well contributed to language development and change in different directions (J. Donia, Fine, 1994). Historically speaking Bosnian language has its roots intertwining throughout political, demographical and linguistic aspects throughout the centuries on this territory. Perhaps Ottoman influences could be traced to the first official dictionary in Bosnia that was printed in early 1630s.

Serbo-Croatian language was the national language in former Yugoslavia, and it was used in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This language belonged to a South Slavic language group. The Slavs came to the Balkans (or alternately known as Illyria) around the seventh century. These tribes eventually split the Slovenes to the north and the Serbs and Croats to the south (Judah, 1997). With them they brought "Paleo-Croatian" a branch of "Paleo-Slavonic" and there was very little linguistic variation (Franolic, 1984). The standard variations of the three dialects are comprehensible, however they differ slightly from each other in different aspects of accent, vocabulary, phonetics, morphology and syntax. Bosnian language during the Yugoslav time was suppressed; however after the war Bosnian language was declared as a state language.

Before the dissolution of former Yugoslavia many debates were held among Serbian and Croatian linguists. They proposed that Serbian-Croatian language has to be separated and called either Serbian or Croatian language. Croatia was the first to make Croatian language as a state language and Serbia followed this example and made Serbian language official language of the state too. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the situation was somehow different mainly because of demographic composition of the population. Many uninformed observers would assume that Bosnian language never existed on its own and that Bosniak people just followed in the footsteps and demanded their own language based on previous decision of Serbia and Croatia. However, based on historical facts and evidences related to the history of Bosnian language linguists in Bosnia also made proposals and demands to make Bosnian language official language in Bosnia (Monnesland, 2005).

Bosniak linguists also began to work on the revival of Bosnian language. For instance, "Grammar of Bosnian Language" that was published in 1890 was again re-published in 1994. In this publication there is a lot of indication that Bosnian language was not something new but it had provided permanence of a

concept of independent Bosnian language. Then, many linguists related their articles to the issue of historical continuity of Bosnian language. Among them was Dževad Jahić who in 1990 wrote an article entitled *On the Vernacular and Literary Language of Bosnian Muslims*. In this article he argued that the name Bosnian has its historical roots and that it is not related only to vernacular language of Muslim population but that the name has its historical support as being used by all people in Bosnia. Then, the symposium on the Bosnian language was organized jointly by the Institute for Language and Literature in Sarajevo, the government of the Unsko-Sanski canton, and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, and was held on September 7 and 8, 1998 in Bihac. The 1998 symposium could in this way be seen as the first Congress on Bosnian (Serbo-Croatian/Serbian/Croatian) language in its recent history (Ford, 2002).

The year 1992 was crucial to make a final decision to adopt Bosnian language as a state language when Serbs bombarded and shelled the Sarajevo National Library. Prominent linguists requested from President Alija Izetbegovic to issue an amendment to the constitution by which Bosnian language would be the official language in Bosnia besides Serbian and Croatian languages. The legal declaration of a separate Bosnian language occurred in 1993, when the language law declared that there was a single official language for Bosnians: "In the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ijekavian standard literary language of the three constitutive nations is officially used, designated by one of the three terms: Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian. Both alphabets, Latin and Cyrillic, are equal" (Bugarski, 1992). The process of standardization of Bosnian language throughout its history emerged and faded however it endured the most difficult times; it was further developed and preserved its name. Despite all the outside processes the language developed and evolved into a number of directions. The process of standardization of Bosnian language started in 1992. The Bosnian language as a separated Slavic one was officially inaugurated in 1996 by publishing the book S. Halilovic "*Orthography of Bosnian Language*"

According to this author Bosnian language is different in comparison to Serbian and Croatian because of the following reasons:

- The use of phoneme 'h' is used differently from Serbians and Croats. For example, word coffee is written and pronounced differently. Bosniaks will pronounce it as 'kahva', Serbs as 'kafa' and Croats as 'kava'.
- Using only one form of the future tense. For example, Bosniaks will say 'Ja su kupiti.' (I will buy). This form is used by Croats as well but the form 'kupicu' / 'ja cu da kupim' is not used by Bosniaks.

- The use of iekavian sub-dialect of stokavian dialect but not ekavian one of the same dialect.

Similarly Alija Isaković (1992), in his *Dictionary of Characteristic Words of the Bosnian Language*, defined Bosnian language: “The Bosnian language is not created within the framework of either the Serbian or the Croatian language. It is not derived from them, but is an objective parallel language. The Bosnian language had its own course of development up to the beginning of the twentieth century, when political circumstances changed its public status.”

Concluding Remarks

Today Bosnian language is one of the three official languages in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One can notice that throughout language reforms Bosnian linguists shaped the Bosnian language in a distinctive way. Semantically, Islamic-oriental loan words are used more frequently, while the phoneme ‘h’ has been brought back into almost all words with that sound inside phonetically. In the reformation process the attempts of Bosnian linguists was actually to show that Bosnian language is not just mixture of Serbo-Croatian language, but that Bosnian language has its roots deep down in history. There are many Turkish words in Bosnian language as a legacy of the Ottoman rule. It is interesting to notice that many *Turkisms* are also used by Serbs and Croats not only in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also in Serbia and Croatia. The reason for this widespread use of *Turkisms* is that they become very common words in everyday life of people and become part of their everyday language. *Turkisms* which have their equivalents in Croatian and Serbian are less used than the *Turcism* which do not have their equals in those two languages. However *Turkisms* are more often used by Bosniak people than by Croats and Serbs.

Overall this paper has indicated that Bosnian language has its own historicity. Bosnian language in the form of Bosancica dates back to the middle ages. On the other hand, Serbo-Croatian language that also has its own historicity, which clearly defined national identity of the Serbs and Croats. During the 1990s although the revival of Bosnian language didn’t gain much support today Bosnian language is vital for determining Bosniak national identity. Apart from national identification by language among Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, today in Bosnia-Herzegovina there are three constitutionally accepted languages comprehensible to all the citizens with slight variations in dialect, phonology, and phonetics.

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