

Marin Mladenov
Faculty of Philosophy
Belgrade, Yugoslavia

UDC 376.744(497.11=867):316:80

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF BILINGUALISM AT THE SCHOOLS OF THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC GROUP IN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SERBIA*

Linguistic Situation

The area of Dimitrovgrad and Bosiljgrad and of a few villages in the commune of Pirot, Babusnica, Surdulica (southeastern part of SR Serbia; the territorial belt alongside the Yugoslav-Bulgarian frontier; about 50,000 inhabitants of Bulgarian ethnic background) - can be described as a typical diglossic-bilingual community. In other words, the local inhabitants of the Bulgarian nationality use the Bulgarian dialect of the western type ("sopski" dialect, "trnski" dialect, "čstendilski" dialect) that is rather remote from the literary Bulgarian language, being a characteristic feature also of the western dialects within the confines of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Even in the named zone there exist minor dialect differences between the dialect of Dimitrovgrad and of Bosiljgrad. For this area, the contemporary Bulgarian language, being the mother tongue of the inhabitants, holds the position of a microlanguage of a limited functionality (being linked to a small geographic zone and to certain fields of the social life - the elementary school, partially the secondary school, the mass media involving communication of the regional type, the cultural life, the literature in the Bulgarian language within the SFRY), while the contemporary literary Serbo-Croatian language, non-native to these inhabitants, holds the position of a macrolanguage with a broad functionality in all the fields, both in the local bilingual zone - administration, political life, secondary schooling, administration of justice, press, etc.), and more broadly, in SR Serbia and in Yugoslavia as a whole. This picture of the specific bilingual (Bulgarian-Serbian) zone is complicated also by the fact that it is in wide contact with the Serbo-Croatian language through a specific zone of the Serbo-Croatian language (Pirot, Babušnica, Surdulica; the so-called old-Stokavian and the archaic dialects of the Serbo-Croatian language) the dialects of which (the Serbian according to the ethnos) are rather remote from the literary Serbo-Croatian language, and thus there arises an unusual situation in which ethnically different groups - speak a similar language both when the original dialect is involved and in the case of the (uncertain) Serbo-Croatian literary language acquired later. In this area, therefore, where the Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian languages keep contact, a "mixed language" ("langue mixte") is frequently used, both in the interpersonal communication and often also (unfortunately) in the language of administration, public communications, and the like. (A classic instance: bilingualism in the denomination of the streets at Dimitrovgrad offers also the following example of the denomination of the main

* Original: Serbo-Croatian

street that is said to be "bilingual" - Ulica Marsala Tita (Marshall Tito Street). A number of similar instances can be found in the language of the administration, certificates, extracts from birth registers, and the like, in the language of the firms in the town, public advertisements, prospectuses, and in other texts).

School and Bilingualism

Legalized bilingualism in the area of the Bulgarian ethnic group, that is, the language equality rights (affirmed under the Constitution of the SFRY and under that of SR Serbia, upheld in numerous important political documents) has been developing since the year 1944, thus under the conditions of the new socialist community of the nationalities and ethnic groups of Yugoslavia. (A "bilingualism" of a special kind existed also before the War, starting in the year 1920 when this area had been annexed to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In pre-war Yugoslavia the Bulgarian ethnic group did not have a status of an ethnic group - national minority; they had no schools in their mother tongue and they had no right to use their native language in the social and cultural life either). Post-war bilingualism in the schools of the Bulgarian ethnic group has been realized by employing various methods. In the first decade after the War, elementary and secondary schools practiced a strict teaching in the Bulgarian language, and the Serbo-Croatian language was taught as a "state language." Later on, in the 1960s it was transformed into a more or less symmetrical "bilingual teaching" where elementary schools preserved the primacy of the Bulgarian language, and secondary ones (on account of the preparation for university) maintained the primacy of the Serbo-Croatian language. Today, Bosiljgrad keeps this model, and Dimitrovgrad is predominantly oriented towards the Serbo-Croatian teaching language while maintaining, of course, the compulsory learning of the Bulgarian language and literature (for the pupils of the Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian origin) from the preschool institutions to the final grades of the secondary school. The goal has been always the same: to master both the languages as required by the life, and, on the other hand, also by the fundamental ideological-political principles of our community.

The desired bilingualism is differently implemented in the area of the Bulgarian ethnic group, both in the field of schools and in those of the social, economic, political and cultural life. This "ideal bilingualism," at least in principle, is most completely implemented in the schools (inclusive of extracurricular activities, cultural manifestations, and the like), in the mass media using the Bulgarian language (the weekly information paper *Bratstvo*; the bi-weekly paper for children *Drugarice*; the quarterly literary magazine *Most*, the transmission in the Bulgarian language of Radio Nis, the transmission in the Bulgarian language (bi-weekly) of Television Belgrade), in drama societies, publishing and at formal (official) meetings and ceremonials (cultural and political ones). In all the other spheres of life (interpersonal communication within families, in the street, in pubs, shops, offices of public services, in the extracurricular communication between the pupils and teachers, and so on) - the dominant part is played by the local speech,

enriched by new words and phraseological units from the Serbo-Croatian or Bulgarian languages, depending upon the situational context and the topic of conversation.

The results of the bilingual teaching at Dimitrovgrad and Bosiljgrad have not been scrutinized. The grading which starts from the pupil's marks obtained at school is satisfactory. There is an unofficial opinion (elementary and secondary school teachers, publishers and editors) that the grading criterion is considerably lower than that in the corresponding all-Serbian environments or than that in the PR Bulgaria, respectively. Also, the results of some competitions for university enrollment or for the choice of the translator from Serbo-Croatian to Bulgarian (on the radio, in journalism, public services) confirm this opinion.

To obtain accurate indicators for the outline of the level of our bilingualism, we organized a small test in four sections of the elementary and secondary schools of Dimitrovgrad (5 September 1985): the pupils were given three lexically and syntactically simple sentences in the local dialect, with the task to edit, "translate" them into a) literary Bulgarian, b) literary Serbo-Croatian. The pupils reacted quickly and within 10 to 15 minutes produced the variants required (without using dictionaries, without consulting each other. The texts concerned were checked and the mistakes arranged in three categories: vocabulary, syntax, spelling. Statistically, the deviations from the literary standard (Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian) appear as follows:

	Vocabulary (%)	Syntax(%)	Spelling(%)
Bulgarian language	325	171	155
Serbo-Croatian language	140	165	26

There follows a clear conclusion that the basic errors committed by the users of the Bulgarian language are in vocabulary.

Statistically, this means 3.25 mistakes per person but only 1.40 in Serbo-Croatian. Linguistically, this is something unexpected (the mother tongue being involved), but the social context has made itself felt, i.e., the lack of a daily contact with the living Bulgarian language is obvious, while on the other hand, there is a daily contact with the Serbo-Croatian language (television, radio, films, sports, entertainment and magazines, comic strips, readings and other literary works, an increased number of the users of the Serbo-Croatian language in the town itself- border services, army personnel, railway employees, frequent visits of theatres, singers, sports groups, etc.). Perhaps, the psychological factor is at work here as well: the local word, i.e., "our word" is accepted easily also as a literary word of the Bulgarian language. Thus, the local word *kavtor* (in Serbo-Croatian it means *peć*, *štednjak*, *šporet* - oven, stove) remained in the tests of the majority of the participants, while in the Serbo-Croatian texts it was replaced by *peć* and *šporet*, but they did not remember the Bulgarian (Slavic) word of the same root - *pečka*. Similarly, the adverb *kodža* (a Turkish word) was replaced in the Serbian variants by *mnogo* and *puno*

(very much), whereas it was kept in the Bulgarian one. In other words, at least in the sphere of vocabulary, the difference between Serbo-Croatian and dialects is greater, clearer than that between the local dialect and the literary Bulgarian language. (A practical lesson for the teaching practice: it is necessary to insist even more on the teaching in the grammar handbooks and readers, of the vocabulary, this having already been the practice or tendency so far, but the publication should be considered of a Bulgarian-Serbo-Croatian School Dictionary and a Serbo-Croatian-Bulgarian School Dictionary, comprising at least ten thousand most frequently used words in both languages).

In the field of syntax (here including also the morphological categories) the situation was almost identical (171 : 165%), which does not mean that we should be satisfied with it. Certain delimitation should be made here, too, concerning the errors made in either language. The errors made in the Serbo-Croatian language are more tolerable, i.e., in most cases they involve word order in the sentence, while the corresponding syntagmas are correct (there is involved the syntactical impact of the local and Bulgarian languages). In the Bulgarian language, the errors are more serious, i.e., committed just in constructing syntagmas.

The greatest surprise (negative for the Bulgarian language) was found to be the spelling mistakes (150% in Bulgarian and only 26% in Serbo-Croatian). Thus, we could be quite satisfied with the spelling in Serbo-Croatian. It is natural that the phonetic Serbo-Croatian spelling suits better our pupils tested, for it is easier for them to write in the same way as they pronounce. The Bulgarian language has an etymological type of spelling, i.e., there are differences between the pronunciation and spelling. When these two types of spelling clash, of course, the losing party is the etymological one. However, the difference is great and unexpected. Future writers of grammars, readers and methodological instructions should pay more attention to it (There are lots of simple spelling mistakes, perhaps under the impact of Serbo-Croatian: thus, let us say, a number of the participants spell Bulgarian words in the Serbian way: *cjala*, *nošt*, etc. - i.e. they do not use the corresponding letters for *št* and *ja*. An example of a specific interference in the sphere of spelling!

It would be useful to compare these or similar data furnished by future investigations with the data derived from other types of Slavic bilingualism in this country (Slovak, Czech, Ruthenian and Serbo-Croatian), and to make the corresponding conclusions the reform).

Bilingualism and Interference

Bilingualism in both the teaching and then in the social life (political life, press, radio, television, publishing), in addition to the realization of the desired communication and social integration, creates the conditions for interference on all the levels of the linguistic structure. In other words, the pupils, and later on the citizens, form specific variants of the Bulgarian or Serbo-Croatian languages, respectively, each with its specific elements (as to vocabulary, syntax, stress). The

small area inhabited by the Bulgarian ethnic group does not present an opportunity for a larger number of ideal bilinguals. This is, in the main, implemented in the sphere of education, in journalism, cultural activities, in translation and literary creations. The majority of the educated members of the Bulgarian ethnic group live and work in their homeland, where the Bulgarian language either ceases to be cultivated or is preserved in the consciousness as the "bad" Bulgarian language, while the Serbo-Croatian language is cultivated only to the extent required by the professional and social context. Thus, those living and working in the eastern part of Serbia will go on maintaining worse Serbo-Croatian (as the environment and profession do not require more), while those who work in the western part of Serbia or in Bosnia or Croatia will be forced to successfully build up their Serbo-Croatian, this being required by the new sociolinguistic context. It has been observed that those who ideally master the Serbo-Croatian language, preserve even better the literary Bulgarian language - learnt at school - because of the increased possibilities, in that case, of a better differentiation between the two literary languages.

The language of the Yugoslav Bulgarians (literary language) displays the following deviations from the contemporary Bulgarian language:

- an increased use of the perfect tense (under the impact of the Serbo-Croatian language), and thereby a diminished use of the aorist tense (a typical feature of the Bulgarian language);
- a declining use of participial forms and of indirect speech;
- a decrease in the use of neologisms and phraseology of a more recent date;
- a decrease in the reduction of the unstressed vowels, and increased use of the suffix -me in the first person plural, present tense;
- the creation of a new vocabulary for expressing the substance of the socio-political and economic system of the SFRY.

In the Serbo-Croatian language of the Yugoslav Bulgarians, the following deviations from the contemporary Serbo-Croatian language have been observed;

- expiratory stress is an expiratory one, lengths are rare;
- a minimal use of the infinitive and somewhat strengthened use of the pronoun for each person;
- vacillating use of the cases, a reduced use of the verb-modifying adverbs;
- cultivation of the ekavian pronunciation and of the vocabulary of the eastern variant of the Serbo-Croatian language.

Biculturalism in the Function of Bilingualism

In the area of the Bulgarian ethnic group (predominantly at Dimitrovgrad and Bosiljgrad), in addition to bilingualism, **biculturalism** is also being strengthened, being a peculiar symbiosis of the Yugoslav (or Serbian) and the Bulgarian cultures. This is mirrored in the school programmes (study of the Bulgarian literature, additional content in the art, music, history and geography lessons), in the cultural life, in the public information media, and in the publishing activities in the Bulgarian language. For instance, theatre societies cultivate the Yugoslav and Bulgarian repertoires, public performances (school ones and others) feature items of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian origin, and in the cultivation of cultural history there is an emphasis on the creators having contributed to the establishment of friendly relations between the Yugoslav peoples and cultures (for instance, Svetozar Marković, etc.) In the vanguard of such a bicultural activity is the bilingually educated intelligentsia (the post-war generation) in the fields of education, journalism, translation, and literary creation. It is to a considerable extent free from the traditional nationalistic prejudices and moves within a rather narrow space and interstate relations that have been in the recent decades often unfavourable and cool.

The positive elements of the interstate biculturalism, which have a positive impact on the maintenance of the equilibrium between the Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian languages, are follows: the traditional border meetings of the Yugoslavs and Bulgarians, mutual visits to the cultural ensembles in frontier towns, more frequent crossings of the border between Yugoslavia and Bulgarian (tourists, family meetings), schooling at the University of Sofia, common professional meetings of Bulgarian language teachers at Dimitrovgrad (Bosiljgrad), seminars for our teachers in Bulgaria (refresher courses in the mother tongue), etc.

In the upholders of biculturalism are mostly competent bilinguals, and many among them also trilingual persons (knowledge of a world language: Russian, English, German, French), but we must not forget that only one stratum is involved, and that there are in the population at large (of the middle generation) also uncertain bilinguals, and that users of the local dialect are the most numerous. Thus, the tendency of those who are prominent in the cultural activity, the tendency of the creators of the official programmes is towards an ideal **bilingualism** - i.e., to such a communication system in which the Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian languages coexist - cannot exist in all the strata of society and be uniformly endorsed by all, and nor can it always yield the same favourable results.

The efficiency of bilingual education and of biculturalism does not depend only upon well-conceived and progressively directed linguistic and cultural policies, but also upon a concrete socio-linguistic and cultural foundation of the population it has been designed for.

This field requires a **permanent monitoring and an accurate research**, which has not existed so far; this sub-field of linguistics and culture has been neglected on account of the raising of the material culture of this area that in economic

terms mainly belongs to the insufficiently developed regions of this country. The maintenance of the equilibrium in the use of the Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian languages in the area of the Bulgarian ethnic group presents a manifold complicated task, for it should not be forgotten that (in our conditions) the Serbo-Croatian language is the prerequisite and the means of professional and social progress. On the other hand, the ideological motivation that the members of the Bulgarian ethnic group cultivate "their mother tongue" as an element "of their national individuality," has been rather weakened, in particular today when a substantial part of the people of this country declare themselves to be of the "Yugoslav nationality" (i.e. unaffiliated to the nationality).

The motivation for learning the Bulgarian language as the mother tongue or as the language of the social environment (for the pupils of non-Bulgarian origin) must be built in a more concrete manner and must rely not only upon ideological bases, but above all upon the material, social, psychological and professional foundations. In this light, we should permanently analyze and consider the results of biculturalism, i.e., we should take into consideration not only the quantity of the activities performed in the Bulgarian language (school teaching, extracurricular activities, press, radio, television, literature written in the Bulgarian language in the SFRY, and the like), but also the quality, the form of the cultural-artistic communication and of the acquired school knowledge in the function of cultivating the accepted bilingualism and biculturalism.