

SERBIAN AS A MINORITY LANGUAGE IN CROATIA

This paper describes the constitutionally protected language rights of the Serbian minority in Croatia today. Further, it discusses the newly formed sociolinguistic context following the breakdown of the SFRY, as well as the status and use of the Serbian language among Serbs in Croatia. The essay spotlights the Serbian language in the Croatian school system, the features and specifics of the language the Serbs in Croatia use privately and publicly; ultimately, the author hopes to describe the complexity of defining the term the language of Serbs in Croatia.

Key words: minority language, Serbs in Croatia, Serbian language, language of Serbs in Croatia, language politics

When the Republic of Croatia declared independence in 1991, what followed was the breakdown of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and military conflicts (1991 – 1995). As a result of these events, the Serbian people no longer hold the status of a constitutive nation in Croatia. Instead, they are classified as a national minority.¹

Citizens who previously belonged to the nations of the former SFRY were now included in the newly formed national minorities. Croatia faced an issue – how to define the status of citizens who no longer belong to the majority (Croatian) people, but have so far not held the status of a minority.²

Once the Croatian language was declared the official language in the Republic of Croatia (the Constitution was signed in December 1990), the Serbian language became a minority language:

(1) The Croatian language and the Latin script shall be in official use in the Republic of Croatia. (2) In individual local units, another language and the Cyrillic or some

¹ According to the *Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities*, “a national minority (...) is a group of Croatian citizens whose members have been traditionally inhabiting the territory of the Republic of Croatia and whose ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious characteristics differ from the rest of the population, and who are motivated to preserve these characteristics” (*Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities*, 2002, Article 5, <http://www.vsrh.hr/>, access 1/7/2018). Members of national minorities came to the Croatian territory as economic migrants, migrants from areas under military conflict (following one of the World Wars), or are members of the autochthonous national minority (Serbian, Italian, Hungarian, German or Ukrainian).

² “Pojavile su se nacionalne manjine obuhvaćajući građane koji su prije pripadali narodima bivše SFRJ. Hrvatska se tada našla pred pitanjem – kako u novim uvjetima definirati status građana koji ne pripadaju većinskom hrvatskom narodu, a dotad nisu imali status nacionalnih manjina.” Siniša Tatalović, “Nacionalne manjine u Republici Hrvatskoj”, *Politička misao*, XXXVIII/3, 2001, 95-105, 96.

other script may be introduced into official use along with the Croatian language and the Latin script under conditions specified by law.³

1. Serbian national minority in the Republic of Croatia

The population census of the year 2011 shows that 90.42% of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia declared themselves as Croatian.⁴ The rest of the citizens are members of national minorities. The Croatian constitution recognizes 22 such minorities,⁵ with the Serbian minority being the largest (186,633 citizens, or 4.36% of the population). In some parts of Croatia, this minority constitutes the ethnic majority.⁶ Additionally, according to the latest population census, the Serbian minority exceeds a third of the population in 21 municipalities and two cities. Since 2002, requirements for the official use of a minority language at any local administrative unit state that the 33% of its population must belong to the corresponding minority (according to the previous legislation, this limit stood at 50%). The Serbian national minority constitutes an absolute majority (more than 50% of the population) in 17 municipalities and a relative majority (34-45% of the populace) in four municipalities and two cities. According to the data analysis, only 28.44% of the total number of the Serbs in Croatia live in the 21 municipalities and two cities mentioned above, leading us to conclude that 71.56% of the Serbs in Croatia are not able to exercise their official legal right to use the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script.

Since the last population census before the breakdown of the SFRY (conducted in 1991), the number of Serbs in Croatia decreased by 67.91%. The table below shows how the Serbian minority was represented in the three most recent population censuses.

Table 1. The share of members of the Serbian national minority in the Republic of Croatia population throughout the last three population censuses

1991.	2001.	2011.
581.663	201.631	186.633
12.2%	4.54%	4.36%

³ *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia*, 1991, Article 12, <http://www.constitution.org/cons/croatia.htm> (access 1/7/2018)

⁴ *Croatian Bureau of Statistics*, <http://www.dzs.hr> (access 1/7/2018)

⁵ In alphabetical order: Albanian, Austrian, Bosniak, Bulgarian, Czech, German, Hungarian, Italian, Jewish, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Rusyn, Slovak, Slovenian, Serbian, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vlach.

⁶ Specific municipalities in the Central and Eastern Lika, Kordun, Banovina, Knin frontier, Bukovica, Western and Eastern Slavonia and Baranja (detailed data available on the web pages of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics).

The Republic of Croatia inherited the national minority rights model from the former SFRY.⁷ Following the declaration of independence, it acknowledged these rights to the existing national minorities, as well as to the members of the “new” ones (the Serbs, Slovenes, Bosniaks, Macedonians, and Montenegrins, who were up until then regarded as constitutive peoples). By accepting the international obligations relating to national minority rights and with the help of the international community, the Republic of Croatia reached better normative terms for the realization of minority rights and also their protection. These conditions indicate the level of the democratization of the society – a condition for integration into the EU.

The Constitution of Republic of Croatia, Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, as well as the other laws⁸ and conventions (that the Republic of Croatia has ratified) guarantee Croatian citizens national equality and forbid discrimination on a national level. Special legal protections of national minorities allow them to preserve language, culture, religion, and identity in Croatia – establishing their full equality with the majority nation.⁹ The following chapters focus on the language rights of the Serbian minority in Croatia.

2. Disintegration of the SFRY: The newly formed language situation

In December of 1990, the new *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* was adopted, proclaiming Croatian as its official language. In 1992, the republics of Serbia and Montenegro together established a federation: The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Its first constitution declared the Serbian language (both *Ekavian* and *Ijekavian* variants) as its official language. The constitution of the independent Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1993 is the last legal act in which the terms *Serbo-Croatian* or *Croato-Serbian language* were used. As early as next year, these terms were no longer in official use. This development has been reflected in the results of the last three population censuses in the Republic of Croatia; these results are listed in Table 2.

⁷ These rights encompassed education and information in the language of the national minority in official use, the possibility of preservation of the national minority's ethnic, language and religious identity, and the representation of its interests.

⁸ The legal framework that regulates the rights of national minorities consists of *The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, Law on Education in Languages and Letters of National Minorities, Law on Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities, Act on Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, Law on the Election of Members of Representative Bodies for Local and Regional Self-Government, Judiciary Act, Act on the State's Attorney Office (Akcijski plan za provedbu Ustavnog zakona o pravima nacionalnih manjina, 2009, <http://public.mzos.hr>, access 1/7/2018).*

⁹ Davorka Budimir, “Predstavljenost srpske nacionalne manjine u političkoj eliti Hrvatske”, in: *Ustav i demokratija u procesu transformacije*, ed. Milan Podunavac, Beograd 2011, 269-284, 271.

Table 2. The percentage of citizens who declared Croatian, Serbian, Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian as their native languages in the last three population censuses

	1991.	2001.	2011.
Croatian	81.99%	96.12%	95.60%
Serbian	4.33%	1.01%	1.23%
Croato-Serbian	3.49%	0.05%	0.07%
Serbo-Croatian	6.03%	0.11%	0.18%

Serbo-Croatian or *Croato-Serbian* as a linguistic term has been in use since the nineteenth century. The term, in its widest sense, denotes the common language of the Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks and Montenegrins. In the SFRY, along with the Macedonian and Slovenian languages, *Serbo-Croatian* or *Croato-Serbian* had the status of an official language. Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin have all been declared separate official languages within newly-formed, independent states, and presently, expert opinions on the terms *Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian* differ. As an example, here are two conflicting interpretations of the term:

(1) According to one group of linguists, *Serbo-Croatian* or *Croato-Serbian* is a political, artificial construct – a name for a mutual language of the nations of the former SFRY, a language which officially no longer exists. For example,

Never in their history have the Croatian and Serbian literary language been a single language which separated in two.¹⁰

It is illogical to talk about the “breakdown of the Serbo-Croatian”. Only that which naturally exists can be broken down.¹¹

(2) Another group of linguists use the term *Serbo-Croatian* or *Croato-Serbian* to denote the existing, mutual, polycentric standard language with its four variants (Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian). They consider this notion to be relevant even today, although *Serbo-Croatian* has been divided into four separate “political” languages.¹²

¹⁰ “Nikada hrvatski književni jezik i srpski književni jezik u svojoj povijesti nisu bili jedan jezik koji se onda raspao na dva.” Stjepan Babić, “Kako stranci vide našu jezičnu problematiku”, in: *Identitet jezika jezikom izrečen*, ed. Anita Peti-Stantić, Zagreb 2008, 43-48, 44.

¹¹ “Nelogično je govoriti o ‘raspadu srpsko-hrvatskoga’ [standardnog jezika]. Raspasti se može samo ono što prirodno postoji.” Josip Silić, “Neetnički i etnički identitet”, in: *Ibid.*, 57-62, 60.

¹² See e. g. Snježana Kordić, “Policentrični standardni jezik”, in: *Jezični varijeteti i nacionalni identiteti*, eds. Lada Badurina – Ivo Pranjković – Josip Silić, Zagreb 2009, 83-108; Ranko Bugarski, *Jezik od mira do rata*, Beograd 1994. It is worth noting that this was the topic of a recent public discussion the former SFRY territory, one held following the proclamation of the *Declaration on Mutual Language (Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku)*, signed by 8.516 endorsers (1/7/2018). The declaration was created by 30 linguists from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, who participated in the project *Language and Nationalisms*. Information on the declaration and the project is available on the web-site: <http://jezicinacionalizmi.com>. Individual participants at the conferences that were held before the proclamation of the declaration discussed the name of the mutual language. For example, the Croatian linguist Mate Kapović proposed the term *Shtokavian standards (štokavski standardi)* as a substitute for the politically charged terms *Serbo-Croatian* and *Croato-Serbian*.

Serbo-Croatian could have been administratively abolished in each sovereign state that emerged on its territory, and this indeed happened, but it does not mean it automatically ceased to exist as a linguistic entity (with a number of still living native speakers). As I stated many times before, languages as communication systems are neither created nor dissolved by a political decree.¹³

It is understood in linguistic circles that there are no universal, objective criteria for setting the boundaries between languages. Some linguists consider structural characteristics and a level of mutual intelligibility to be the crucial criteria, while others also take into account various social and political circumstances, as well as speakers' attitudes. Although the question of whether Serbian and Croatian are linguistically (in)separate is not the subject of this paper, the nature of their structural resemblance and mutual intelligibility is important to understand the sociolinguistic situation of the Serbs in Croatia:

(...) structural differences between the Croatian and Serbian language standard can be considered slight, while in most part the grammatical structures of these two languages are identical. Therefore, a complete understanding between the speakers is expected.¹⁴

Despite the purists' efforts and the Croatian language policy, which led to an increase of the differences in relation to the Serbian language norm, the Croatian and Serbian speakers find it easy to understand each other. In that sense, the status of Serbian as a minority language in Croatia is specific – its function is not primarily communicational (as the case would be with Italian or Hungarian, for example); it is primarily symbolic.

3. Serbian as a minority language in Croatia: Legal regulations and enforcement

Croatian language legislation is based on laws which regulate different activities and domains.¹⁵ Minority rights in Europe are based on the legal regulations developed in the middle of the twentieth century, after WWII and the establishment of the United Nations.¹⁶ Today, a number of organizations and institutions are engaged in protecting minority

¹³ "[Srpskohrvatski je] mogao biti administrativno ukinut u svim samostalnim državama izraslim na njegovoj teritoriji, i to je učinjeno, ali ovo još ne znači da je automatski prestao da postoji kao lingvistički entitet, koji uz to još ima živih govornika. Kako sam već više puta rekao, jezici kao sistemi komunikacije ne nastaju niti nestaju političkim dekretom." Bugarski, *Jezici u potkrovlju*, Beograd 2016, 206.

¹⁴ "(...) strukturne razlike između hrvatskog i srpskog standarda mogu se smatrati malenima, dok je najveći dio temeljne gramatičke strukture tih dvaju jezika podudaran. S obzirom na to, očekivano je potpuno međusobno razumijevanje među govornicima tih dvaju jezika." Anita Peti-Stantić – Keith Langston, *Hrvatsko jezično pitanje danas*, Zagreb 2013, 82.

¹⁵ *Constitution of Republic of Croatia, Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, Law on audiovisual activities, Law on electronic media, Law on Croatian citizenship, Law on education in primary and secondary schools, Croatian labor Act, Aliens Act, Companies Act, Law on science and higher education, Law on healthcare*. See more in: Sanda Lucija Udier, "I bez zakona o jeziku: hrvatsko jezično zakonodavstvo na početku 21. stoljeća", in: *Jezična politika između norme i jezičnog liberalizma*, ed. Barbara Kryžan-Stanojević, Zagreb 2016, 13-30.

¹⁶ Sue Wright, *Jezična politika i jezično planiranje*, Zagreb 2010, 192.

rights, with the Council of Europe leading the way. The Council follows and oversees the implementation of public policy and practice in all of the countries that signed two key documents: the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (in effect since 1992) and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (in effect since 1998). The *Convention* is the first multilateral, legally binding document dedicated to the protection of minority rights in Europe in general. While its support of the protection of language freedoms is rather symbolic (traffic signs with local toponyms in minority languages, use of personal names, etc.), the *Convention* is a document that promotes the use of regional or minority languages in education and the media; in legal and administrative systems; and in economic, cultural, and social life. Signatories of this document have thus made a commitment to ensure a minimal number of functions for the minority languages in these categories. The Republic of Croatia ratified the *Convention* two decades ago.

According to the Croatian Constitution, the Croatian language and the Latin script are in official use. Additionally, in individual local units, another language and script may be introduced into official use under conditions specified by the law. *Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities* (Article 12) requires equal official use of languages and scripts of minorities in local or regional self-government units where the minority members constitute at least one third of the population.¹⁷ The most recent population census (2011) in Croatia noted such a situation in 23 units of local self-government.

Several institutions and organizations have as goals the protection and promotion of human, civil, and national rights of Serbs in Croatia, concerning themselves with issues of identity and with issues of participation in and integration into the Croatian society. These include the Serb national council (*Srpsko nacionalno vijeće*), the Serbian Cultural Society *Prosvjeta* (*SKD Prosvjeta*), the Serbian Business Association *Privrednik* (*Srpsko privredno društvo Privrednik*), the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Joint Council of Municipalities (*Zajedničko veće opština*), the Serbian Democratic Forum (*Srpski demokratski forum*), Serbian representatives in the Croatian parliament, and others.¹⁸

Within the context of the discussion of the language and culture of Serbs in Croatia, it is worth noting that most of these institutions publish their own periodicals. *SKD Prosvjeta* publishes a bimonthly titled *Prosvjeta*, a children's magazine named *Bijela pčela*, and three yearbooks: *Ljetopis SKD Prosvjeta*, *Kalendar SKD Prosvjeta* and *Artefakti*. The Serbian Democratic Forum Zagreb publishes a bimonthly titled *Identitet*, The Serbian National Council Zagreb publishes a weekly titled *Novosti*, while the Joint Council of Municipalities Vukovar contributes with *Naša stvarnost* and the Serbian Business Association *Privrednik* joins in with their self-titled magazine. Unfortunately, a systematic linguistic

¹⁷ This same provision can be enacted under the following terms: when it is envisioned by the international agreements signed by the Republic of Croatia or when it is decreed by the municipal, city, or county administration (*Akcijski plan*, 2009, 7).

¹⁸ Information about all of the listed institutions can be found on the web pages of the Serbian national council at: <http://snv.hr>. A significant contribution has been made by the *SKD Prosvjeta* – this traditional cultural organization for Serbs in Croatia is dedicated to the exploration, development, and protection of their cultural and historical traditions. *SKD Prosvjeta* undertakes a number of activities, among which is the publishing of literature on the topic of the Serbs in Croatia. Several sub-committees of *SKD Prosvjeta* operate ethnic community libraries, whose task is to obtain, process, and disseminate Serbian library materials and to inform the public. See more at: <http://prosvjeta.net/>.

analysis of these publications or any of the publications of *SKD Prosvjeta* has not been carried out so far.¹⁹

3. 1. *Education of members of the Serbian minority*

The issue of educating the Serbs in Croatia and the degree of autonomy educational institutions have when teaching Serbs are regulated by the *Erdut agreement*, signed in 1995.²⁰ The legal basis for the rights of minorities to be educated in their native language and script can be found in the *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia*, the *Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities*, and the *Law on Education in Languages and Letters of National Minorities*.

The elementary and high school education of the Serbian children in Croatia is implemented using three possible models:²¹

Model A (classes in the language and script of the national minority). All lessons take place in the language and script of the national minority with compulsory Croatian language instruction (the number of hours is the same for the Serbian and Croatian languages). This model can be implemented in a special institution or in the language department of a school with classes in the Croatian language. Model A is prevalent in the Podunavlje region,²² while in other parts of Croatia, the Model C is more common.

Model B (bilingual classes). Teaching is carried out in the Croatian and Serbian languages. The natural sciences are taught in Croatian, and the social sciences or the national group of subjects is taught in the Serbian language. This model is implemented within special school departments.

Model C (nurturing language and culture). This teaching program runs an additional five school hours a week, along with a complete program in the Croatian language. The five-hour program covers the language and literature of the national minority, as well as history, geography, music, and art.

In addition to these three language teaching models, there are other, more specific forms of minority educational programs, such as summer programs or correspondence schools. The table below shows the number of students in each of the educational models in the academic year 2013/2014.²³

¹⁹ According to Čedomir Višnjić, a long-standing editor-in-chief of the *SKD Prosvjeta*, language use in 150 to 200 titles published by this society is diverse and cannot be listed under a common denominator (Višnjić in: Veronika Rešković, "Hrvatski standardni jezik isključuje Srbe", *Forum* (Zagreb), 23/11/2016, <http://www.forum.tm/vijesti/hrvatski-standardni-jezik-iskljucuje-srbe-4>, access 1/7/2018).

²⁰ *Erdut Agreement*, officially the *Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium*, was an agreement reached between the Croatian and the Serbian authorities during the Dayton negotiations. Signing of the agreement initiated the process of peaceful reintegration of the Podunavlje region into the Croatian legal and constitutional order ("*Erdutski sporazum*", *Hrvatska enciklopedija*, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?ID=18226>).

²¹ *Akcijski plan*, 2009, 17.

²² Podunavlje is the name of the Danube river basin regions located in Serbia (Vojvodina, Belgrade and Eastern Serbia) and Croatia (Slavonia, Sylvania, and Baranja). The area under discussion is the Croatian part of Podunavlje.

²³ The data corresponds to the results of the *The Analysis of Education in the Language and Script of the Serbian National Minority in Croatia*, conducted by the Serbian Democratic Forum in 2015 (*Analiza odgoja i obrazovanja na jeziku i pismu srpske nacionalne manjine u Republici Hrvatskoj*, Srpski demokratski

Table 3. The number of students enrolled in the listed educational models in the academic year 2013/2014

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION	-	431
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Model A	1897
	Model B	17
	Model C	671
HIGH SCHOOL	Model A	749
	Model B	-
	Model C	15
	TOTAL	3780

Following their high school education, students take the state exam on both the school subjects of *the Croatian language* and *the Serbian language*.²⁴

In regard to the academic education in/on the native language and culture, a study program about Serbian language and literature is available as part of the Study of South Slavic languages and literatures at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb.

Although the educational rights of Serbian minority members are formally and legally secured, a number of practical issues still arise from their implementation. *The Analysis of Education in the Language and Script of the Serbian National Minority in Croatia*, published by the Serbian Democratic Forum (2014), lists the following issues: the minority's right to use the minority language and script is not actually recognized, and the equal use of the official and minority languages is not encouraged. Legal regulations are misused or ignored, and adequate textbooks and other educational materials are lacking. Furthermore, there is a deficiency of competent educational staff.

Comparison of the current educational curricula for the two subjects, *the Croatian language* and *the Serbian language* (which students take concurrently), reveals certain incompatibilities.²⁵ Also, the subjects often contain overlapping content, but both lack the matter on the Croato-Serbian cultural relations. Furthermore, an analysis of the representation and methodological treatment of the Serbian language and literature within Croatian high school textbooks²⁶ reveals a complete absence of material covering the Serbian culture, language, and literature. National identity is strongly emphasized; the South Slavic language and literary context is omitted; and the Croato-Serbian cultural

forum, <http://www.sdf.hr/>, access 1/8/2018). In comparison, according to the 2011 population census, the number of members of the Serbian minority in elementary and high schools (in the 5-9, 10-14, and 15-19 age groups) was 16.883 (see *Croatian Bureau of Statistics*).

²⁴ *Pravilnik o polaganju državne mature*, MZOS, Zagreb 2012, Article 4, <https://www.ncvvo.hr/pravilnik-o-polaganju-drzavne-mature/> (access 1/7/2018)

²⁵ Both of curricula can be accessed via the webpage of the Ministry of Science and Education at: <https://mzo.hr/>.

²⁶ Dubravka Bogutovac – Virna Karlič, "Zastupljenost i metodička obrada srpskog jezika i književnosti u hrvatskim gimnazijskim udžbenicima", in: *Výuka jihoslovanských jazyků a literatur v dnešní Evropě*, eds. Elena Krejčová – Pavel Krejčí, Brno 2014, 367-377.

relations are presented in light of conflict. Following the conclusions of Čačić-Kumpes, the Croatian educational system – both the majority- and minority-oriented components of it – face numerous challenges:

Education is a sensitive field of cultural activity in which the selection of program contents and ethical values, as well as the formulation of tasks and goals, must find a balance between a multitude of cultural and educational traditions. As far as the Croatian education system goes – its development should certainly make use of Croatia's rich pluralistic tradition, in combination with gained experiences. This will not be easy, since the recent conflict objectively placed a strain on interethnic relations. The pronounced nationalist discourse in the last decade of the 20th century only fueled the fire, which now has to be patiently and carefully extinguished.²⁷

This example clearly shows how the implementation of legal regulations is fraught with difficult issues.

3. 2. *Regulation versus practice: the example of bilingual plates and subtitling*

Two of the second most prominent issues arising from the attempt to implement the legal language regulations include the case of bilingual nameplates in Vukovar and the case of subtitling Serbian movies with subtitles in Croatian. In short, the placement of the plates with both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts in 2013 sparked protests, during which many of these were torn down and broken.

In 2013, when bilingual signs were introduced on municipality buildings [in Vukovar], due to constitutional minority laws; people took the street and destroyed the "Serbian-signs". For a portion of the Croat citizens, the Cyrillic script reminds of the early 90s and the, what they call, "Serbian invasion." (...) The signs have still not returned and in the spaces where they should hang, only screw-holes and handwritten messages remain (...). The wounds are still too open to practice minority rights.²⁸

Many discussions on the topic of the rights of Serbian minority members, including language rights, followed the event. In 2015, the Vukovar city council voted to change the city statute to eliminate the requirement for bilingual plates. The situation has still not been resolved and is, in many ways, unclear.

The situation is so confusing that people no longer know if the state institutions should have bilingual nameplates or not. Thus, some of the buildings still hold the bilingual plates of the assigned size, some hold smaller plates covered by a Croatian flag, some have had the plates installed, torn down and never put up again and some have never had them put up in the first place.²⁹

²⁷ Jadranka Čačić-Kumpes, "Multiculturalism in Croatian Education", in: *Perspectives of Multiculturalism – Western and Transitional Countries*, ed. Milan Mesić, Zagreb 2004, 273-297.

²⁸ Coen Van de Ven, "Vukovar: Still divided by war", *Euroviews*, 10/4/2015, <http://euroviews.eu/2015/?p=697> (access 1/7/2018)

²⁹ "Situacija je toliko zbuñujuća da se više i ne zna trebaju li na zgradama u kojima se nalaze državne institucije stajati postavljene dvojezične ploče ili ne. Tako na nekim zgradama i danas stoje dvojezične ploče propisanih veličina, na nekima su postavljene male dvojezične ploče koje su prelijepljene hrvatskom zastavom, s trećih su ploče skinute pa nisu vraćene, a na četvrtima nikad nisu niti postavljene.

In the case of subtitling Serbian movies and television shows with subtitles in Croatian, the law has also been subsequently adjusted. In March of 1999, the Croatian public theater distribution featured a (subtitled) Serbian movie for the first time after the war – *Rane* (*The Wounds*) by Srđan Dragojević. This resulted in public ridicule, both because of the act of subtitling the movie and the way it was done.³⁰ The same problem occurred when Croatian television channels began to broadcast Serbian movies and television shows, which officially had the status of the program in foreign language, so the subtitling was required by law.

Croatia is discussing subtitling Serbian movies and TV shows again. The cause this time is the screening of the movie *Žikina dinastija 2* (*Žika's dynasty 2*) on the RTL channel. The members of the Council for the electronic media reacted to the screening, warning the RTL television of the infringement upon their stipulation which states that the media service providers are bound to feature content in the Croatian language or translate it to the Croatian language (...). The Council states they reacted because they are bound by law to follow regulation, no matter how absurd or vague it might be.³¹

As the presented example poignantly illustrates, the matter of bilingual nameplates in the town of Vukovar remains unsolved. However, the practice of subtitling Serbian films and television shows has since been abandoned.

The relation between theory (in this case, the legal norms) and practice can be an interesting one if we choose to observe the language of the Serbs in Croatia, especially its private, public, and official use.

3. 3. *The language of the Serbs in Croatia*

Which language do the Serbs in Croatia speak? What is this language like? The legal acts regarding minority language rights of the Serbs in Croatia do not tell us much about the actual language used by the members of this group, neither in their private nor public communication. Equally so, the results of the population census offer no information on this matter, but only reflect how the individuals name their native language.

For this reason, it is important to address and define the exact meaning of the term *the language of the Serbs in Croatia*, as well as to analyze the language practices of this group. The latter cannot be answered with high reliability, as no systematic scientific study has yet been conducted. Thus, the next step is therefore to offer the (more or less) scientifically based opinions of individual linguists.

Branimir Brdarić, "Zakuhali dvojezični kaos pa ga zaboravili", *Večernji list* (Zagreb), 9/7/2016, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/zakuhali-dvojezicni-kaos-pa-ga-zaboravili-1098126> (access 1/7/2018)

³⁰ Ivo Žanić, "Titlovanje Rana – pokušaj načelnog pristupa", in: *Jezični varijeteti i nacionalni identiteti*, 457-472, 257.

³¹ "Ponovno se u Hrvatskoj pavela rasprava o prevođenju i titlovanju srpskih filmova i TV serija. Ovaj je put povod bilo prikazivanje filma *Žikina dinastija 2* na RTL-u, nakon čega su reagirali iz Vijeća za elektroničke medije, upozorivši RTL da su 'pružatelji medijskih usluga dužni objavljivati program na hrvatskom jeziku ili u prijevodu na hrvatski jezik'. (...) U Vijeću za elektroničke medije kažu da su reagirali jer su dužni raditi po zakonu, ma kako on apsurdan ili nedorečen bio." Milena Zajović, "Ko nas bre prevodi? – Vijeće zna da je zakon loš, ali ga ipak provodi", *Večernji list* (Zagreb), 27/1/2012, <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/ko-nas-bre-prevodi-vijece-zna-da-je-zakon-los-ali-ga-ipak-provodi-370505> (access 1/7/2018)

3. 3. 1. The Serbian language in the population census

In the period before the population census of 2001, a generally accepted hypothesis was that the majority of the Serbs in Croatia consider Serbian their native language, regardless of their lexical choices and the language norm used. This was attributed to the “language awareness of the Serbs in Croatia”.³² However, the population censuses of 2001 and 2011 showed that only a quarter of all Serbs in Croatia listed Serbian as their native language (see Table 1). Until a more systematic study can be conducted, we can only assume the reasons for such results. Here we will discuss the most prominent features of the language the Serbs in Croatia use, as well as their relation toward the Croatian and Serbian language standard.

3. 3. 2. On the term *the language of Serbs in Croatia*

The language of Serbs in Croatia is very broad and imprecise term. It incorporates many aspects of the language used by the Serbs in Croatia, both in the past and today – in private, public and official situations and in spoken and written production. The term is also very general, as it refers to the language of all Serbs in Croatia, regardless of its features or the name used to reference it.

(...) It is unclear what we refer to when we talk about the language of the Serbs in Croatia. Is this the language of the Cyrillic articles in *Novosti*,³³ or the language that the well-educated citizens of Croatia, who declare themselves as Serbs, use? Is this the language that a Serb from the Lika region uses, or the one a Serb in Zagreb uses?³⁴

From the diachronic perspective, this term refers to all of the types of literary texts that the Serbs in Croatia have produced throughout history. For example, in the second part of the eighteenth century the Slavoserbian language served this function,³⁵ until the literary language based on the language reform of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić supplanted it. According to Roksandić,³⁶ the Serbs in Croatia accepted and supported this reform in the mid-nineteenth century, meaning it was accepted by them sooner than it was by the Serbs living in Serbia. During the twentieth century the position of the language of the Serbs in Croatia shifted according to the political changes.

³² Milorad Pupovac, *Čuvari imena: Srbi u Hrvatskoj i raspad Jugoslavije*, Zagreb 1999, 50; Drago Roksandić, “Srbi u hrvatskoj i srpskoj historiografiji: problemi usporedbe dvije interpretacijske tradicije”, *Dijalog povjesničara istoričara*, 5, 2002, 211-230, 218.

³³ Publication of the Serbian national council, a newspaper of an informative nature which follows and critically reviews all the relevant political, social, and cultural ongoings.

³⁴ “(...) nije jasno o čemu se govori kada se govori o jeziku Srba u Hrvatskoj. Govori li se o jeziku kojim se pišu ćirilčni članci u *Novostima* o jeziku kojim pišu obrazovani građani Hrvatske koji se nacionalno izjašnjavaju kao Srbi, o jeziku kojim govori neki Srbin iz Like ili neki Srbin iz Zagreba?” Mate Kapović in: Rade Dragojević, “Jeziku Srba u Hrvatskoj ne treba standardizacija”, *Novosti* (Zagreb), 26/2/2011, <http://arhiva.portalnovosti.com/2011/02/jeziku-srba-u-hrvatskoj-ne-treba-standardizacija/> (access 1/7/2018)

³⁵ Slavoserbian is a hybrid literary language created in the second part of the eighteenth century, by combining elements of the Serbian vernacular (*Shtokavian* dialect), Russo-Slavonic, Russian, and Serbo-Slavonic languages (Александар Младеновић, *Славеносрпски језик*, Нови Сад 1989).

³⁶ Roksandić, “Srbi u hrvatskoj i srpskoj historiografiji”, 218.

From the dialectological perspective, the majority of the Serbs in Croatia use the *Shtokavian Ekavian* and *Ijekavian* dialects,³⁷ locally influenced by the Croatian rural and ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous communities.³⁸ The larger influence of Croatian idioms and the Croatian standard language are of a more recent date. The Serbs in Croatia have, until the beginning of the twentieth century, mostly been situated within reasonably ethnically homogenous villages.³⁹ The growth of the Serbian population in cities and mixed rural communities has strengthened the influence of Croatian local idioms and the language standard. The language assimilation/integration of the speakers is a result of complex sociolinguistic factors and should, as such, be systematically researched.

The “urban” Serbs in Rijeka or Zagreb speak and write more or less as the Croats, with the caveat of small markers in their language, which point to them not accepting the changes made to the official standard.⁴⁰

The term *the language of the Serbs in Croatia* represents various idioms that developed in homogenous and heterogeneous rural and urban areas under different circumstances, which makes the task of finding a common denominator for these idioms a nearly impossible. The linguistic community, however, shares common opinions on the general features of the mentioned language:

Serbs in Croatia, the urban ones, but also those who live in compact rural communities, have not until recently differed in their language from the Croats. Language could not have been (nor it can be today in most cases) the identifying feature of the national affiliation for these individuals.⁴¹

(...) the language of the Serbs in Croatia, even when it is perceived and named Serbian, is not the same as the Serbian language in Serbia, but is in fact linguistically closer, if not identical, to the Croatian language. I believe this is especially true in the more western regions, as well as for a number of so-called “everyday speakers”,

³⁷ The subdialects of the Eastern-Herzegovinian dialect are used by the Serbs in Croatia in the following territories: Northern Dalmatia and Gorski Kotar, parts of continental Croatia, parts of Slavonia, Baranja and Žumberak, while the subdialects of the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect are represented by speakers in the far east part of Slavonia, between Osijek and Vinkovci (Miloš Okuka, *Srpski dijalekti*, Zagreb 2008, 56, 128).

³⁸ Pupovac, “Stavovi govornika hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika prema jeziku i pismu”, in: *Položaj naroda i međunarodni odnosi u Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb 1991, 165-183, 50.

³⁹ Roksandić, “Srbi u hrvatskoj i srpskoj historiografiji”, 218.

⁴⁰ “Urbani Srbi iz Rijeke ili Zagreba više-manje govore i pišu kao Hrvati, s time da imaju male markere u jeziku koji ukazuju na to da ne prihvaćaju promjene koje su nastale u službenom standardu.” Kapović in: Rešković, “Hrvatski standardni jezik isključuje Srbe”.

⁴¹ “Srbi u Hrvatskoj, prvenstveno urbani ali također i oni koji žive u ruralnim sredinama gdje su kompaktnije naseljeni, donedavno ni u kom pogledu nisu govorili jezikom različitim od Hrvata. Po jeziku se nije moglo, a niti se danas još uvijek najčešće može, ustanoviti pripadnost nekom od ova dva naroda.” Dubravko Škiljan in: Goran Plavšić: “Jezik prkosi puristima”, *Novosti* (Zagreb), 22/11/2016, <https://www.portalnovosti.com/jezik-prkosi-puristima> (access 1/7/2018)

with the possible exception of the elites in formal contexts, where the distinctiveness plays a more crucial role.⁴²

According to Škiljan, the Serbs in Croatia can choose between three options on the language-political spectrum:

The Serbs in Croatia, who have been intentionally left out of the symbolic space by the agency of [the Croatian] language politics, remain on an empty space, which can theoretically be fulfilled in various ways: through a longing to be integrated into the Croatian symbolic space, through a creation of their own symbolic space, or through connecting with the existing Serbian symbolic space.⁴³

Accordingly, Pupovac⁴⁴ cites the three language variants available to the Serbs in Croatia: (1) the former western variant of the Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian standard; (2) the variant based on the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect (currently used by the Serbs and Croats in the Eastern Slavonia territory), which is linguistically the closest to the Serbian standard; (3) the new Croatian standard language (which Pupovac describes as exclusionary to the Serbs).

Advocating for the creation of a unique symbolic space, Pupovac argues for a language policy that will lead to the standardization of the language of the Serbs in Croatia. This policy would be based on a flexible norm and on openness to external influences and the cultivation and development of language tolerance. The process of standardization has not been initiated so far, with opinions of experts and the public on the need for such a process varying greatly.

3. 3. 3. The Cyrillic script among the Serbs in Croatia

The traditional script of the Serbian culture is the Cyrillic script, which is considered to be a part of the national identity of the Serbs in Croatia. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, the Serbs have increasingly used the Latin script, the script becoming predominant after 1945. Roksandić⁴⁵ highlights the dual status of the Cyrillic script among the Serbs in Croatia today: on one hand, it is an almost forgotten script, and on the other hand, it signifies a strong connection to the Serbian national identity. Pupovac⁴⁶ considers the

⁴² "(...) jezik Srba u Hrvatskoj, i kada se doživljava kao srpski i tako zove, nije isto što i srpski jezik u samoj Srbiji, nego je zapravo u lingvističkom pogledu bliži hrvatskom jeziku, ako ne i identičan s njim. Mislim da ovo naročito važi u zapadnijim predelima, i za masu tzv. običnih govornika u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji, dakle eventualno isključujući elite u službenim kontekstima, gde distinktivnosti pripada važnija uloga." Bugarski, *Jezići u potkrovlju*, 206.

⁴³ "Intencionalno isključeni iz simboličkog prostora posredstvom djelovanja jezične politike, Srbi u Hrvatskoj ostaju na praznom prostoru koji teoretski mogu popuniti na različite načine: da teže za tim da se integriraju u hrvatski simbolički prostor, da stvore svoj vlastiti simbolički prostor, ili da se povežu s postojećim srpskim simboličkim prostorom." Škiljan in: Toni Gabrić, "Dubravko Škiljan: Nemoguće je dokazati da su hrvatski i srpski dva različita jezika", *H-alter* (Zagreb), 25/7/2007, <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/dubravko-skiljan-nemoguce-je-dokazati-da-su-hrvatski-i-srpski-dva-razlicita-jezika> (access 1/7/2018)

⁴⁴ Mario Jurčec, "Pupovac na Tribini o jeziku: Srbi bi na HRT-u trebali koristiti dva do tri jezična standarda, ali ne i hrvatski", *Maxportal* (Zagreb), 23/11/2016, <http://www.maxportal.hr/vijesti/pupovac-na-tribini-o-jeziku-srbi-bi-na-hrt-u-trebali-koristiti-dva-do-tri-jezicna-standarda-ali-ne-i-hrvatski/> (access 1/7/2018)

⁴⁵ Roksandić, "Srbi u hrvatskoj i srpskoj historiografiji", 219.

⁴⁶ Pupovac, *Čuvari imena*, 1999, 51.

coexistence of both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts to be an important right that should be ensured for all Serbs in Croatia. He argues that the Cyrillic script should be the bearer of national identity and a medium for communication, while the Latin script should be an element of interlingual language policy. Within the context of the discussion of the language of the Serbs in Croatia, Bugarski concludes:

The main difference can be observed in the script, rather than in the language. Discussions that frequently arise over the status of the Latin script in Serbia, and the nowadays more common discussions over the Cyrillic script in Croatia, are by all means overly politicized, in part due to the capabilities that the symbolic strength of "controlling" the written sign offers.⁴⁷

Bugarski's claims about the politicization of the Cyrillic script are best illustrated through the abovementioned bilingual plates (Latin-Cyrillic) situation in Vukovar. This situation is a result of understanding the script as a component of national identity, symbolizing both a symptom and a consequence of the social, political conflict.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that, unlike the language (which does not interfere with communication between the Croats and the Serbs), the Cyrillic script acts as a ghettoizing factor, especially for the younger Croats who have not been exposed to it in school. On the other hand, the Latin script acts as an assimilating force.

To fully understand the status of the Cyrillic script among the Serbs in Croatia, a thorough analysis of the local publishing policy (in relation to the two scripts) is needed and necessary. Additionally, research on the representation of the Cyrillic script in private use should be conducted.

4. Conclusions: At the crossroad between assimilation and ghettoization

Language is one of the cornerstone features of identity, as well as a formative factor and the carrier of the cultural content of the community of its speakers. Primary functions of language are communication and interaction, though its symbolic function plays an important role as well. The newly formed language situation, following the breakdown of the SFRY, testifies to the highly prominent symbolic value of language in these areas.

Ethnic and national minorities hold a specific position in Croatia, standing at the crossroad between assimilation and ghettoization in relation to the majority. The first option offers a complete merging with the majority, while the second option involves their exclusion from the mainstream of life within the larger, majority community. The position of the Serbs in Croatia is additionally specific because the use of native language does not disable or interfere with the communication (unless the Cyrillic script is used), but the ghettoization takes place exclusively at the symbolic level.

⁴⁷ "Glavnu razliku može predstavljati pismo, pre nego sam jezik. Česta sporenja oko statusa latinice u Srbiji i ona aktuelna oko ćirilice u Hrvatskoj svakako su odveć politizovana, zahvaljujući mogućnostima koje pruža simbolička snaga pisanog znaka." Bugarski, *Jeziči u potkrovlju*, 206.

⁴⁸ "(...) neither contact nor conflict can occur between languages; they are conceivable only between speakers of languages." (Peter Hans Nelde, "Language Conflict", in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Florian Coulmas, Oxford – Cambridge 1998, 197).

Any interlingual contact involves a certain conflict. In this case, the conflict arises from two connected causes: from the ethnic clash that caused the real conflict, but also from the language-political conflict that emerged as a result of that clash. A compromise solution to the language conflicts lies in integration that involves inclusion in the wider surroundings, but an inclusion in which the language and cultural specificities are preserved. Through such an undertaking, multilingual and multicultural tolerance can be created/strengthened. According to Peter Nelde,⁴⁹ such an inclusion can be fostered by achieving three key goals: (1) an institutionalization of multilingualism and the prevention of language discrimination in relation to the prestigious language; (2) a language policy which is not based exclusively on linguistic censuses carried out by the respective governments, but rather genuinely takes into account the situational and contextual characteristics of the linguistic groups; and (3) positive discrimination. In our case, only the first of these factors has been ensured, with the stumbling block being the absence of a language policy which would serve the goal of conflict resolution. Furthermore, the absence of studies on situational and contextual characteristics of the ethno-linguistic group is highly problematic, as those sorts of studies could act as the starting point for the establishment of an effective language policy.

The Hexacentennial tradition of language, literature, and general cultural wealth of the Serbs in Croatia remains an uncultivated and neglected area towards which the Croatian language science community has yet to articulate its position. This represents not only an oversight of Croatian science towards the tradition of the Serbs in Croatia, but towards its own tradition and identity.

⁴⁹ Ibid.