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Vukašin Stojiljković

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Hg. v. Jürgen Spitzmüller, Mi-Cha Flubacher und Christian Bendl

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Kontakt: wlg@univie.ac.at

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Negotiating the Yat Border(s)

Vukašin Stojiljković*

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Abstract

Die Beteiligung von Linguist_innen an Registrierungsprozessen (Agha 2007) jat'-bezogener Unterschiede (phono-ideologischer Unterschiede zwischen einzelnen Varietäten des Serbokroatischen) lassen sich mindestens 200 Jahre zurückverfolgen. Gleichwohl hat der Zerfall Jugoslawiens zu vermehrten Untersuchungen über diese scheinbar kleinen Unterschiede geführt, ebenso zu heftigen Debatten unter Expert_innen und deutlichen Repositionierungen einiger ehemaliger jugoslawischer Linguist_innen. Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie sich serbische Linguist_innen der jüngeren Generation zu diesen widersprüchlichen Diskursen positionieren und untersucht dazu einen Auszug aus einem Interview mit einem besonders interessanten Akt der Positionierung. Mit Verweis auf ihr Spracherleben (Busch 2017) verhandelt die Interviewpartnerin die problematische Bedeutung einer aufgezwungenen jat'-bezogenen Kategorisierung und hebt einige standpunktgesättigte gesellschaftliche Diskurse hervor (Jaffe 2009a), die bei der Interpretation vieler sprachbezogener Phänomene in der konfliktgeprägten Region Ex-Jugoslawiens anscheinend einen nach wie vor

* Vukašin Stojiljković, Institut za srpski jezik SANU, Beograd,
stefanvukasins@yahoo.com

wichtigen Bezugsrahmen bilden. Die hier vorgestellte Analyse verortet sich in der Positionierungsforschung in Bachtin'scher Lesart.

Schlüsselwörter: Serbokroatisch, Ekavisch/Ijekavisch, ehemaliges Jugoslawien, sprachideologische Debatten, Positionierung, Stance, Spracherleben.

1 Introduction

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the new internationally recognized state borders between the former multiethnic Yugoslav republics have introduced prominent changes to the sociolinguistic field and opened up space for various metapragmatic discourses. One such discourse has the reflexes of the former Common Slavic vowel *Yat* as its object.¹ It can be argued that in the Serbian case the *Yat*-related standard sub-varieties Ekavian and Ijekavian² came under scrutiny like never before, ultimately leading to their obtaining the status of a “metapragmatic stereotype” (Agha 2007) of Serbianness of a particular kind, one being that of Serbia (associated with Ekavian) and the other that of the other newly-independent countries (associated with Ijekavian). Many Serbian linguists regard the existence of these two standard sub-varieties as unfavorable for ‘national unity’, so calls have been issued for ‘national homogenization’ through the acceptance of Ekavian as the nation-spanning standard variety (see e.g. Ivić 2014 [1995]). These appeals have encountered a

¹ To be more accurate, *Yat* denotes the letter <Ѣ> in the Cyrillic alphabet as well as the phonetic phenomenon/phenomena it (is believed to have) represented in Common Slavic/Proto Slavic. Assumptions about the (historical) phonetic form differ. *Yat reflexes* refers to (assumed) derivations of that hypothetical historical phonetic phenomenon in current Slavic varieties. See sec. 2 for details.

² Ekavian, Ijekavian and Ikavian are the varieties of Štokavian (a linguistic complex spanning a large area of the South Slavic dialect continuum) distinguished by their respective *Yat* reflexes (see footnote 2). While the dominant variety in Serbia is Ekavian, in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro Ijekavian predominates (see sec. 2).

fierce resistance on the part of some linguists, creating a deep rift among Serbian linguists (see Greenberg 2000).³

This paper follows Foucault in his insistence that it is necessary to “deal with practices, institutions and theories on the same plane” (1994: 262). Starting from a premise that a society’s knowledge about language does not exhaust itself in expert debates and scientific publications (see Foucault 1980; also Spitzmüller 2015 for the relevance of considering social stratification of knowledge in metapragmatic discourse analysis), this paper aims to contribute to a more profound understanding of the Yat debates and the stakes therein. It analyzes how Serbian linguists of the younger generation (i.e., PhD students) position themselves vis-à-vis these conflicting discourses on national identity, i.e., how they negotiate the ideological dilemmas these discourses pose. In particular, it elucidates how some membership categories are used and negotiated in discourse, as well as how widely circulating discourses are indexed in the context of interview interaction.

In the following sections, first a Yat-centered short overview of the sociolinguistic field is given, followed by an outlook on the issues proposed from the perspective of enregisterment theory. The ensuing two sections describe the collection of the empirical material and introduce the theoretical approach, which draws on positioning research read through a Bakhtinian lens. Then, in a next step, an interview excerpt dealing with an early stage researcher’s positionings vis-à-vis the Yat-related issues is analyzed, in which the interviewee first challenges a hegemonic way of talking about her relation to her language, and then addresses some powerful societal discourses closely associated with the language question in the former Yugoslavia. Finally, the last section is dedicated to a few concluding remarks regarding the analyzed excerpt.

³ In addition to the Yat reflexes, this ongoing debate among Serbian linguists revolves mainly around the issues of the ethnic provenance of the speakers of Štokavian, the name of the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian, and another controversial duality of Serbian, that of the two alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin).

2 Sociolinguistic Field: Yat Reflexes

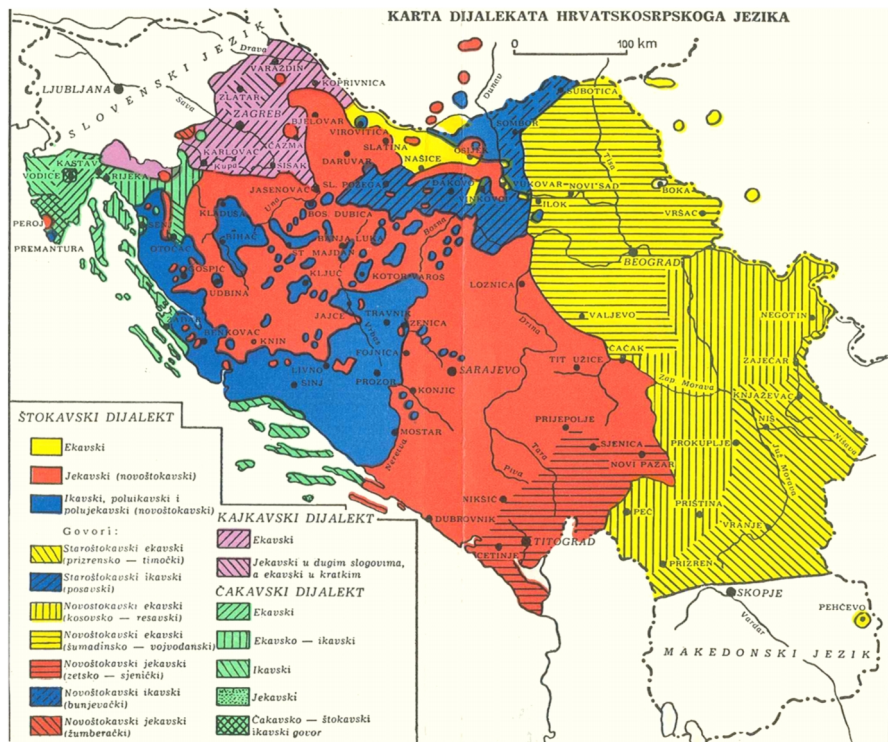


Figure 1: Map of the dialects of the Croato-Serbian language (from Brabec, Hraste and Živković 1970)⁴

In dialectology, the Yat reflexes have been one of the two main means for discriminating among Štokavian varieties, the other one being the type of accentual system. A word of warning is in order – both expert and lay language ideologies erase certain aspects of a given sociolinguistic field, as language ideologies in general “tend selectively to attend to only a few contrasts in any given case” (see Agha 2007: 133; see also Irvine and Gal 2000 on “eras-

⁴ In Figure 1 Ekavian is in yellow, Ijekavian in red and Ikavian in blue. The non-Štokavian varieties Kajkavian and Čakavian are in pink and green, respectively.

ure” as a language-ideological practice). In its crudest, yet most widely used version (shared by linguists and non-linguists), there are Ekavian dialects (where the reflexes are either [e:] or [e]), Ikavian dialects (the Yat has reflexed into either [i:] or [i]) and Ijekavian dialects (the reflexes of the Yat are either [ije]/[je:] or [je]). For instance, ‘river’ would be *reka*, *rijeka* and *rika* in Ekavian, Ijekavian and Ikavian, respectively.⁵

Except for Montenegro, where only Ijekavian is spoken, in the other three countries where Štokavian is spoken (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina [B&H] and Croatia), two or three of the Štokavian varieties can be found. Although spoken as vernacular in a large area by a considerable number of speakers (mainly in Croatia and B&H), Ikavian is not used as standard in any of the four countries. Ekavian is the dominant standard in Serbia. Of particular interest not only for this paper, but more generally as well, is Ijekavian: as vernacular, it is spoken in all the four countries by persons affiliating with different groups. Furthermore, what makes Ijekavian so special is the fact that, although the majority of its speakers at the vernacular level are Serbs⁶ (Brozović 2008; Kapović 2015)⁷, it is just one of the two Serbian Yat-related standard sub-varieties, and the minority one at that (the majority being Ekavian), while it is the only standard in the other three Serbo-Croatian standard varieties (Croatian, Bosnian/Bosniak⁸ and Montenegrin).⁹

⁵ Needless to say, the Serbo-Croatian dialectology books and articles depict the sociolinguistic field in a more complex manner (e.g. the so-called *mixed Yat varieties* and the so-called *varieties with the unsubstituted Yat* are also discussed), but the fact should not be overlooked that even the majority of linguists specializing in other areas, let alone the lay people, have a limited exposure to such material.

⁶ Living in B&H, Croatia, Montenegro, and the western parts of Serbia.

⁷ I am deliberately referring not to Serbian but to Croatian authors here.

⁸ Bosniak linguists call the language spoken by Bosniaks – Bosnian, while the majority of Serbian and Croatian linguists call it Bosniak.

⁹ Note, though, that these standard varieties do not necessarily have to be regarded as intricately bound to specific regions (or states), as communicative actors might align towards specific forms depending on the group they affiliate with, their trans-local networks and/or their sociolinguistic biography, not

3 The Enregisterment of Yat

The fact that the Yat-related differences have been under scrutiny of both linguists and lay people for more than 200 years¹⁰ begs the question which role they play within the processes of *enregisterment* of the Štokavian varieties. By *enregisterment*, I refer to a concept coined by Agha. It builds on his observation that “[s]ociolects and dialects are routinely and readily converted into registers”, which he goes on to define as “culture-internal models of personhood linked to speech forms” (Agha 2007: 135). *Enregisterment*, then, denotes the processes and practices in which such registers emerge, “whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population” (Agha 2007: 81). So what, expressed pointedly, is a person ‘giving away’ when speaking Ekavian? Just his/her geographic affiliation (a rather broad one at that) or actually something else that got also attached to these “performable signs”?¹¹ My answer to this question, backed by the material I have collected and my ethnographic insight, would be: yes, there is ‘something else’, but its perception is quite unpredictable.

The processes of enregisterment of the Yat-related differences can be followed on two interconnected planes. The first one is concerned with how the borders of the imagined communities are constructed and how “the as-

(only) depending on their current affiliation. This alignment, on the other hand, might be constrained by specific regimes of language. All these issues, however, are out of the scope of this chapter and require thorough empirical examination.

¹⁰ In his *Serbian Dictionary*, Vuk Karadžić (1966 [1818]), a prominent Serbian philologist of the 19th century, has the entry of *šijaci* that, according to Karadžić, refers to both how Ekavian speakers call Ijekavian speakers and vice versa. This shows that the Yat-related differences had been registered by the population before they were embraced by the philologists. This, however, does not mean that these notions existed in the same sense that the dialectology books or the speakers themselves know them now.

¹¹ Such as his/her Serbianness in ethnic terms or non-genuine Croatianness.

signment of *stereotypic indexical values* to performable signs” (see Agha 2007: 81; emphasis bold in original) is negotiated and re-configured (e.g., re-indexed from a regional to a national emblematic reference). At stake here is whether a Yat-related variety becomes widely recognized as an important nation-defining feature (i.e., whether a variety is enregistered *as language* or *standard (sub)variety*). Serbian and Croatian linguists as well as non-linguists take part in a plethora of semiotic encounters that relate to this (from ‘simple’ everyday talk to discussions on the internet fora to media representations to ‘serious’ expert debates).¹² I call this plane the *enregisterment of languages*. One should be careful here not to jump to an essentialist conclusion that there exists some Serbian or Croatian position. On the contrary, this is a matter of social positioning in particular contexts (see e.g. Spitzmüller 2015). There have been, and still are, among both Croatian linguists (e.g. Brozović 2008) and non-linguists (as countless internet forum posts demonstrate), those who do not ascribe ethnicity-related social meaning to the types of Yat-related varieties; the same is true for the Serbian case.

The other plane can be defined nation-internally (or *language-internally*, if ‘language’ is regarded as an ideological concept that is bound to the idea of ‘nation’, see Gal 2006) and has to do with the fact that

once a distinct register is culturally recognized as existing within a language, the repertoires of that register can be linked through further reflexive activity by language users to a wider range of enactable effects. For example, the forms of its repertoires may be linked by further metadiscursive activity to stereotypic personae, or to ethical ideals associated with such personae, both of which can then be indexically invoked in discourse through the utterance of the forms. (Agha 2007: 82)

This plane I call the *enregisterment in language*. A discourse fragment from the interviews I conducted is quite illustrative in this respect:

¹² The most widely circulating formulas include: a) Ijekavian equals Croatian and Ekavian equals Serbian, and b) Ijekavian is genuinely Serbian, but appropriated by Croats.

IE: I've recently read a novel by a guy who was born in Belgrade and who for some reason wrote the novel in Ijekavian and when I asked him why he'd done that he said well that protagonist is an Ijekavian-speaker for me

IR: ((chuckles))

Although the excerpt¹³ tells us nothing about what kind of person the novel's protagonist is, it is rather clear that speaking Ijekavian makes him some kind of society-internally recognizable person, i.e., his uttering of Ijekavisms "indexes a stereotypic image of social personhood" (Agha 2007: 80; see also Spitzmüller 2015). Furthermore, the aligning laughter (chuckles) on the interviewer's part might arguably point in the same direction, since it seems to acknowledge this connection.

A caveat regarding the relative currency of defining phenomena "nation-internally" in this region should be kept in mind, though. For example, when Ijekavian is emulated by an Ekavian-speaking person to depict an easy-going character, one cannot easily tell if this should be interpreted as a performance of an Ijekavian-speaking easy-going character of Serb or of Bosniak ethnicity. To retrieve that kind of information, we need to attend to *text-level indexicality* (Agha 2007: 24–27). But in many cases, it should be noted, the national/ethnic background has no importance for the construal; all that matters to the performer and the listener(s) is the depiction of a relaxed character, so the co-occurring signs are relevant so long as they contribute to that.

4 Empirical material

The data for the analysis were collected¹⁴ through semi-structured interviews, within which one of the topics was related to the Yat-related issue(s). The

¹³ Serbian original: *Nedavno sam čitala roman dečka koji je rođen u Beogradu i koji je iz nekog razloga napisao roman na ijekavici i kad sam ga pitala zašto je to uradio on je rekao pa taj glavni lik je za mene ijekavac.*

¹⁴ As part of my dissertation project at the University of Vienna.

interviews were conducted in late summer 2015 with five early stage researchers (PhD students) specializing in Serbian philology.

In this paper, the interviews are treated as interactionally co-constructed texts (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012). That means that the interviewer's presence and activities are not to be ignored. The interviewer plays a co-authorial role, as s/he takes part in the negotiation of emergent positions in the situated interaction of the interview. Related to this, it is important to bear in mind that neither the interviewer nor the interviewees come to the encounter without assumptions since

the narrative interview itself is preceded by preparations, preconceptions, and possibly also prior encounters of interviewer and interviewee, which pre-position both participants reciprocally in terms of pragmatic, epistemic, normative, and topical expectations, competencies, goals, and emotional stances. (Deppermann 2015: 377; see also Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000)

The interviewees were known to the interviewer prior to the interview encounter and the interviewer had to play "the potentially divergent roles of colleague and researcher" (Baynham 2011: 71). Also, it should not be overlooked that for both the interviewees and the interviewer the institutional identities (both parties being professional linguists) were at stake to a certain degree. The interviewees were informed about the topic of the interviews in advance, i.e., that the interviewer would ask them to share with him a story of their choice related to their lived experience of language. The lived experience of language research (Busch 2013, 2017), as I had suspected and as they disclosed during the preparatory encounter, was not a strand of study they had previously come across.

5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical approach that has been used to analyze the interview is known as the *theory of positioning*. Since this is not a monolithic approach, it is important to disclose how this piece of research is framed vis-à-vis the cur-

rent discussions (see Deppermann 2015; see also the introduction to this issue). In doing so, I situate it within the closely-related, but wider, Bakhtinian outlook on existence and language.¹⁵

5.1 Bakhtin's dialogue of existence

Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (Bakhtin 1984: 252)

As Deppermann (2015: 370) points out, "Foucault's original idea",

[w]hen introducing the concept of 'subject positions' in discourses, [...] was to reject the notion of an agentive, teleological subject, who deliberately fashions and controls social behavior and the changes of knowledge formations.

The same can be said of Bakhtin's notion of the subject. Moreover, even though produced by language, Bakhtin's subject is neither a mere "effect[]" of linguistic systems or apparatuses of power/knowledge", as Gardiner and Bell (1998: 6) rightly note. Bakhtin's *subject* is of a fundamentally different kind and this difference is revealed in his unique understanding of language. "Anyone who speaks thereby creates" (Holquist 1983: 315) is Bakhtin's postulate, but it is far from being self-evident. For Bakhtin, existence is an event of co-being (see Holquist 2002):

Life knows two value-centres that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around all these centres that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged. (Bakhtin 1993: 74)

Furthermore, existence is discourse-bound, for Bakhtin it is "not only an event, it is an utterance. The event of existence has the nature of dialogue in this sense; there is no word directed to no one" (Holquist 2002: 26).

¹⁵ An important Bakhtin-inspired approach to positioning has been developed by Wortham (2001).

Due to its placement in the world and the “excess of seeing” (Bakhtin 1990: 25) it enables, the other has a constitutive role for the subject, or as poignantly put by Erdinast-Vulcan (1997: 256):

The impossibility of self-representation from within – whether spatially, temporally, or axiologically – requires the second constituent ‘movement,’ the gaze of the transgradient other/author whose position outside and beyond the subject entails an excess of knowledge.

This “excess of knowledge” enables the parties in dialogue to be the co-authors of (each other’s) existence, “[e]ach side becomes itself through authoring or taking on aspects of the other side” (Nielsen 1998: 215). But the symbolic gift bestowed upon us and the dialogue it makes possible come at a price of our “answerable participation” (Bakhtin 1993). This answerability entails that when we are addressed by the wor(l)d¹⁶ (interpellated in a way), we have no other choice but to respond, since also a lack of response is a response. And it is within this response that creativity/agency lies: response is to be (re-)created and no two responses are identical. Through this response we create the world and ourselves. An utterance “always creates something that has never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable” (Bakhtin 1986: 119–120). This also means that the parties involved in dialogue undergo (at least a minimal degree of) change: “In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment” (Bakhtin 1986: 142).

But this self-authoring through dialogue, and this cannot be stressed enough, is not an act of “a freewheeling agent, authoring worlds from creative springs within” (Holland et al. 1998: 170) but the result of *heteroglossia*. Unlike the posited unity of national language, heteroglossia is “the natural state of language” (Wortham 2001: 38) and “the rule in social life” (Holland et al. 1998: 170):

¹⁶ “Addressivity means [...] that I am an event, the event of constantly responding to utterances from the different worlds I pass through” (Holquist 2002: 47).

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. [...] all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and coexist in the consciousness of real people. (Bakhtin 1981: 291–292)

So it is not some abstract language within which we have to orient, but our answerable participation is to be realized in the context of these myriad ideological languages: heteroglossia assigns us a place from which we are to give response when the world addresses us (see Holquist 2002: 165). Positioning, a concept that can, in many respects, be read as a contemporary translation of Bakhtin's ideas, is the topic of the following section.

5.2 Positioning

Our late modern/postmodern identity-related sensibilities and concerns have led to an increased acceptance of social constructionism in sociolinguistics. Within this approach, a view of identity “as an overarching, abstract, non-empirical, reflexive structure that integrates the experiences of a person and organizes his/her actions [...] characterized by normative notions of coherence and consistency” is rejected (Deppermann 2015: 369) and, instead, an anti-essentialist stance is assumed: identity is not given, it has no pre-discursive existence, i.e. it does not lie waiting to be manifested or revealed in discourse.

It is therefore inadequate to isolate subjects' identities from the context of the discourses in which they are embedded. Positioning theories, instead,

approach facets of identity in the way they are accomplished in and by discourse. (Deppermann 2015: 369)

This means that identity is a process; it is not one's property, something speakers possess. Despite the fact that "linguistic and social processes become reified as observable products that may be glossed by others as 'identities'" (De Fina et al. 2006: 4), identity is neither to be regarded as a product, it is best conceived as "in-the-making" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 379). Furthermore, as a discourse-bound phenomenon, identity is observable and subject to empirical investigation (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000). Positioning theories offer one possible way to empirically study identity.

Unlike the static and essentialist conceptualizations of identity, the study of positioning is practice-centered and fine-tuned to capture the ephemeral aspects of lived experience. As pointed out by Deppermann (2015: 370), "positions are situated achievements, which do not sum up to a coherent self. Positions give evidence of multiple facets of personal identity". Their main feature is their sensitivity to interactional contingencies; that is, they emerge from the flow of a semiotic encounter, which means that they are fluid and adjustable.

Although particularly sensitive to the micro processes of identity work, positioning theories do not lose sight of the powerful societal discourses that inevitably encroach on those. They take the middle ground in order to

find a balance between a recognition of the relative freedom of positioning that individuals have in interaction and the appreciation of processes of 'enregisterment' (Agha, 2003) of identities that happen at a macro social level. (De Fina 2013: 43)

The study of positioning, thus, is not only about how positions are artfully managed at a local level, but also the research of how more enduring, widely recognized identities and social positions affect these situated practices.

A particularly useful heuristic device for conceptualizing acts of positioning that will be part of this paper's analytical toolkit is the stance triangle, which was proposed by Du Bois (2007) within stance research, another prominent strand of positioning studies (see Englebretson 2007; Jaffe 2009b).

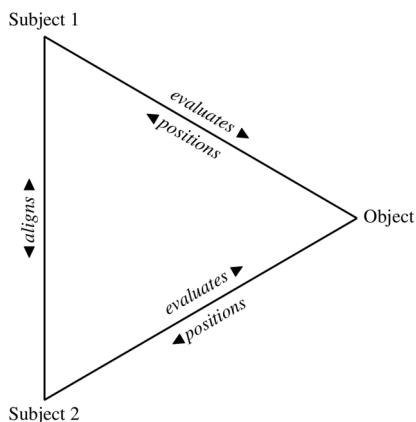


Figure 2: Stance Triangle (Du Bois 2007: 164)

The stance triangle (see Figure 2) is a geometrical image of Du Bois' (2007: 164) influential definition of stance:

Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

As implied above, there is a strong resemblance between Bakhtin's outlook on existence and those approaches to positioning that incorporate dialogical principle (see Du Bois' definition above): both perspectives share an anti-essentialist stance and acknowledge the fundamental role of dialogue/discourse and a social other in the matters of identity. If we recall that positions are *situated achievements* and that they are *achieved dialogically*, it might even be argued that positions are those events of co-being that *are* existence according to Bakhtin's ontology.

6 A lived experience of Yat

The following interview fragment is exceptional as it shows, within just a few lines, an act of struggle of a Serbian linguist of the younger generation against a Yat-related category selective in the representation of her lived experience

of language, on the one hand, and the fact that positioning on the Yat-issues is intimately linked with specific powerful societal, politically charged, “stance-saturated” discourses (Jaffe 2009a: 22), on the other.¹⁷

- IR: And now what about Ekavian Ijekavian
 since that's also that's also interesting to both linguists
 and the wider population
 ho- how do you perceive/experience¹⁸ that
 say you as an Ekavian speaker
- IE: I ... as an Ekavian speaker but as an Ekavian speaker whose
 grandfather [name] is from the border of Serbia and
 Montenegro
 that's [town]
 and there are many Ijekavian speakers there
 that is . Ijekavian is not in in in . it has not withdrawn
 under the at least not comple-
 I mean it's also withdrawing isn't it under the influence of
 the media
 but Ijekavian is close to me
 and I'm not an advocate of ... that Serbs are Ekavian speakers
 with the awareness that Serbs also live in Montenegro and
 parts of Bosnia who are still Ijekavian speakers
 and . if the Serbian language is the language of all Serbs
 not the Serbs of Serbia [Serb. Srbijanci] but also the Serbs
 west of the Drina
 it is clear to me that the Serbian language has two Yat-
 related sub-varieties

There are a few aspects of the question design that should be taken into consideration if we want to understand how the interviewer's turn influences the interviewee in formulating her responsive stance (see Haddington 2007 for how interviewers set up positions for the interviewees; see also Lampropoulou and Myers 2012). First, the preface of the question makes relevant two membership categories (Sacks 1992), i.e. linguists and ‘the wider population’, which puts the interviewee, a professional linguist (who was approached as such by the interviewer with a request to participate in the research), on the spot by making salient her professional background. The question is open,

¹⁷ The fragment has been translated into English and anonymized.

¹⁸ Serb. *Kako to doživljavaš* (lit. ‘How do you experience that’)

which, compared to yes-no questions, leaves much more liberty to the interviewees in the construction of their responses.

The use of the verb *experience* seems to have had quite a signaling effect for the interviewee. Namely, in formulating her answer to a question at an earlier moment during the interview, the interviewee, in her efforts to align with the interviewer's question, first reformulated the question as "What do I think", then interrupted herself halfway through and repeated the interviewer's wording ("How do I experience"), which indicates the markedness of the verb *experience* in this co(n)text. This verb is evocative of the discourse of *lived experience* of language to which the interviewee was introduced before the interview, and, as we will see, it seems to have had the capacity of a perspective-altering transredient element (see Leps 2004). It should be noted here that the discourse of lived experience of language and the discourse of the national language dialectology "belong to two different discursive realms, two conflicting vocabularies for articulating experience, two different ways of talking about oneself" (see Chase 1995: 11, as cited in Miller and Fox 2004: 49) and that this fact was not overlooked in my analysis of this act of positioning, because, to agree with Miller and Fox, "[i]t matters [...] which discourse we enter into to organize and make sense of the practical issues emergent in our lives" (Miller and Fox 2004: 43).

Finally, the last piece in the interviewer's setting up of a position for the interviewee is the membership category that the interviewer assigns to the interviewee ("you as an Ekavian speaker"), which can also be interpreted as the interviewer's taking an epistemic stance (Jaffe 2009a) on the interviewee's linguistic behavior.¹⁹

At the beginning of her turn, the interviewee immediately orients to this category assignment and the presupposition embedded in the question, and reformulates the stance terms, i.e. she will not provide her answer from some generic Ekavian point of view. The long pause before the recycled category-assignment items (for dialogic syntax, see Du Bois 2007) signals that the in-

¹⁹ It might even be argued that for the interviewer the interviewee's speech warranting the ascription Ekavian was not an object of reflection.

interviewee carefully aligns with the question. This partial alignment with the positioning of being just another Ekavian-speaker shows two important things. First, in contrast to the detachable and transportable categories used for the purposes of research, the interviewees tend to approach the categorization work with more flexibility, which is why their categories exhibit more fluidity and contingency (Myers and Lampropoulou 2012: 1216). Second, it shows that one's lived experience of language (germ. *Spracherleben*) makes a difference and the importance of Busch's call

to understand repertoire in its biographical dimension, as a structure bearing *the traces of past experience of situated interactions*, and of the everyday linguistic practices derived from this experience, *a structure that is constantly present in our current linguistic perceptions, interpretations, and actions*, and is simultaneously directed forward, anticipating future situations and events we are preparing to face. (Busch 2017: 352; emphasis mine)

The interviewee's responsive positioning can be understood as her struggle to introduce the complexity of her lived experience of language, which cannot be exhausted in the generalized categories provided by theory (Smith 1998; see also Busch 2016). In an act of negotiation of identity discourses, the interviewee "exerts control over the meaning(s) of the membership category" (Tate 2007: 30). This reflexive act of 'reading' of an identity discourse through a lens of lived experience is an instance of what Tate (2007) has called "translation as reflexivity".²⁰

²⁰ Both Busch's and Tate's concepts have a strong Bakhtinian flavor. Bakhtin warns of the voice-suppressing nature of the theoretical knowledge: "Any kind of practical orientation of my life within the theoretical world is impossible: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to perform answerable deeds. In that world I am unnecessary; I am essentially and fundamentally non-existent in it. The theoretical world is obtained through an essential and fundamental abstraction from the fact of my unique being and from the moral sense of that fact – 'as if I did not exist'" (Bakhtin 1993: 9).



Figure 3 Map of Croatian and Serbian according to Matasić 1985

After a few lines where the interviewee justifies her taking the position of an “exceptional” Ekavian speaker²¹, she takes a complex stance, positioning herself not only vis-à-vis Ijekavian per se, but also some quite important Yat-related discourses. Her stance on Ijekavian is affective and epistemic at the same time (the fact that Ijekavian is close to her is related to her lived experience of language, which consists of both feelings and first-hand knowledge). The metapragmatic discourse she evokes and distances herself from (“Serbs are Ekavian speakers”) is the most extreme version of the Croatian nationalist language ideology²², which remodels not only the sociolinguistic map of Croatia, but also of the neighboring countries, Serbia including, and which has been identified by many linguists as dangerous propaganda (see e.g. Milosavljević 2012 [1998]). According to this depiction of the sociolinguistic field, all the areas where Ikavian and Ijekavian (either as vernacular or as standard) are spoken are subsumed under the Croatian language, rendering

²¹ And displays the entitlement to speak on the issue.

²² This does not mean the ideology of (some) Croats, but the ideology that aims at interpellating (some) Croats. The same is true for any other group of people and the associated ideologies.

Serbian Ekavian-only (see Figure 3²³). Another possible interpretation is that she positions herself counter to those who lack her Yat-related lived experience of language and unadvisedly take stances on things they know little about. The possibility of her stance being in dialogue with both cannot be excluded.

The ensuing statements serve to back her stance and contain a number of reference points quite prominent not only in the Yat discourse, but also in the other discourses on nation in Serbia. Within these discourses the non-coincidence of the nations and states in the region of the former Yugoslavia is an issue of great importance. In this case, as the fragment shows, the existence of 'still' Ijekavian-speaking Serbs in Montenegro and B&H should not be overlooked. There are two significant absences here. First, the Ijekavian-speaking Serbs of Croatia are not mentioned, as only those Serb populations that have a status higher than that of a minority are referred to, and, second, the Ijekavian-speaking Serbs of Serbia are also missing, both of which raise the question of their significance as a factor in the considerations of the Yat-related issues. This gets even clearer in the ensuing lines (*and . if the Serbian language is the language of all Serbs not the Serbs of Serbia [Serb. *Srbijanci*] but also the Serbs west of the Drina*), where she contrasts *Srbijanci* (the Serbs of Serbia) with the Serbs west of the Drina, and uses this contrast to justify the conclusion that Serbian has two sub-varieties (*it is clear to me that the Serbian language has two Yat-related sub-varieties*), thus once again erasing the fact that among the Serbs of Serbia themselves there is the minority of Ijekavian speakers. My other interview fragments also show that a 'small' number of speakers is in the correlation with the erasure of such speech communities, e.g. the Ikavian-speaking Serbs.

The interviewee's statement above is remarkable on many other grounds as well. First, the interviewee designs her response by using a conditional,

²³ It is interesting to note that the map (Figure 3) appeared in a textbook by a reputable publisher outside Croatia. The excerpt does not warrant a claim though that this particular text artifact has influenced the interviewee's position on this discourse or even that she is familiar with it.

which allows her to avoid claiming the stance just to herself, i.e. she does not fully commit to the proposition that the Serbian language is the language of all Serbs, which is indexical of her familiarity with a number of conflicting discourses on language, nation/ethnicity and the state in the territories of the former Yugoslavia.²⁴

Second, the designation *Srbijanci* the interviewee used is quite interesting for its indexicality. Namely, when used in a context such as the one above, it usually refers to those Serbs who live in the Republic of Serbia. In other contexts, it can serve as a designation for either the citizens of the Republic of Serbia regardless of their ethnic background or the inhabitants of Central Serbia (not necessarily of Serbian ethnicity), as opposed to the inhabitants of the province of Vojvodina – *Vojvođani* (again not necessarily of Serbian ethnicity). In this respect, the *only*-lacking construction (Serb. *ali ne Srbijanaca* instead of *a ne samo Srbijanaca*, ‘not [only] the Serbs of Serbia’) is a peculiar one and might be interpreted as the interviewee’s preemptive attempt to formally constrain the plurality of possible interpretations, and is indexical of her awareness of the indexicalities of the designations *Srbi* and *Srbijanci*.

Finally, the mentioning of the Drina (and especially the east-west relation it establishes), the river which has once again after the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s started to symbolize the great divide of the Serbian nation, can be easily interpreted as a marked choice in this context, especially when compared to alternative formulations such as the Serbs in B&H (and maybe Croatia) and the Serbs in the other ex-Yugoslav republics, even though the former is seemingly just a geographic term, while the latter ones have to do with political units. It should be noted that from a strictly linguistic point of view (as naïve as this might sound), the Drina has no such dialectological (i.e. Yat-related) importance as some other rivers (e.g. the Neretva), because both Ekavian and Ijekavian speaking populations can be found along

²⁴ Needless to say, the circulation of these (or similar) metapragmatic discourses is not limited to this region, since they are part of more broader (Western) meta-discursive regimes of language(s) and the epistemologies on which they are based (see Makoni and Pennycook 2007).

Serbia's banks of this river, that is, the Drina does not coincide with the Ekavian-Ijekavian isogloss.²⁵ This shows that the administrative, political (state) border takes precedence over the facts of the national language dialectology in this act of positioning taken by a linguist specializing in Serbian philology.²⁶

7 Final Considerations

In my analysis of this short excerpt, I hope to have offered deeper insight into a few important but easily neglected issues, which might introduce a trans-gredient element into the current debates. First, I hope to have provided yet another piece of evidence in favor of Bakhtin's (1981: 37) position that "[a]n individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing socio-historical categories". In the face of epistemological violence, my interviewee's self-authoring positioning reply shows the "human 'surplus' which splashes over the categorical brim" (Dentith 1995: 60) that Bakhtin holds so dearly. This seemingly non-porous membership category has been sustained through a variety of practices of national philology that "systematically form the objects [and subjects] of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49), regiment and discipline language and speakers, leaving much lived experience at the threshold of scientific ideology (see Burkitt 1998). This fleeting, easily unnoticed act of positioning demonstrates that even such 'objectively' established categories of national philology, such as Ekavian and Ijekavian (and Ikavian)²⁷, are "discourse notion[s] as much as anything else and [they are] to

²⁵ Except for the lower course of the river.

²⁶ The state border between Serbia and B&H is often regarded as the border between Ekavian and Ijekavian, probably because of the dominance of Ekavian in the media and educational system in Serbia and Ijekavian in the Republika Srpska entity of B&H. There is no variety preference in either political unit's constitutions.

²⁷ Further empowered by the fact that they easily cross the threshold of metalinguistic awareness (see Silverstein 1981).

be understood as the site of discourse construction and negotiation, rather than being treated as a given” (see Wilson 2001: 346).

A couple of words of caution are in order, though. First, my interviewee did not deny the relevance of the category or/and come up with an entirely new category to describe her lived experience of language. She just inflected it according to her practical concerns at that moment. This can be argued to have to do with the fact that the amount of negotiation at one’s disposal depends on how deeply entrenched a category is within a wider sociolinguistic field of meaningful contrasts. Second, we cannot detach this act from the context of its production and claim that this early stage researcher would or will position herself the same way in a different practice (see Moita-Lopes 2006). Otherwise, we would be leaving the realm of the theories of positioning and setting a foot in a more essentialist domain of research.

Furthermore, the interviewee’s stance on Ekavian and Ijekavian is far more revealing when analyzed from the perspective of enregisterment of the Yat-related differences (introduced in sec. 3) than from an essentialist approach to language varieties. From the latter, the interviewee repeated once again what every Serbian linguist is supposed to know as true: there is a plethora of people among the Ijekavian-speaking who call their language Serbian. The enregisterment theory sheds light on her act of positioning from another angle: this act is part of the enregisterment of languages struggle on the side that fights against the ‘attachment’ of ethnic/national prefixes to the Yat-related varieties.

The final thing about the analyzed excerpt I would like to point out is that, through an act of positioning vis-à-vis the Yat question, not only the link between language and nation was brought up, but also a discourse with serious political implications was addressed (i.e. [non]coincidence of the nations and states in the former Yugoslavia). This demonstrates that even today, many years after the conflicts that followed the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, such discourses provide a framework for interpretation even in

those interactions that have a seemingly only language-related question²⁸ as a topic, that is, in this troubled region small-scale interactions get easily invaded by these powerful discourses²⁹, which still keep a tight grip on the daily lives of people.

Transcription conventions

- ... Long pause
- . Short pause
- Self-interruption
- [] Transcriber's intervention

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²⁸ At least in perception of some people.

²⁹ I.e. the participants feel obliged to position vis-à-vis them.

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