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# SNEŽANA PETROVIĆ: SVEST ‘CONSCIOUSNESS’ AND SAVEST ‘CONSCIENCE’ – SLAVIC LAYERS IN THE SERBIAN LEXICON

**Abstract:** The paper presents the methodological approach of identifying Slavic layers in the standard Serbian lexicon, applied in the “one volume” *Etymological dictionary of the Serbian language*, through the case of two Serbian words: *svest* ‘consciousness’ and *savest* ‘conscience’. The presented language material shows that in the Serbian Slavic and Old Serbian sources, the word *сѣвѣсть* was used in texts with Gospel content in the meaning ‘conscience’, and in a legal context in the meaning ‘consciousness’. In addition to their phonetic and orthographic forms being identical in the past, their meanings also intertwined through history – both words used to mean ‘knowledge in general, consciousness’ and ‘moral knowledge, conscience’. Over time, one word in three orthographic variants (*сѣвѣсть/сѣвѣсть/сѣвѣсть*) developed two separate forms (*svest* and *savest*) the semantics of which narrowed and specialized, thus resulting in the creation of two independent lexemes at the standard Serbian language level. **Keywords:** Serbian, etymology, *svest*, *savest*, PSl. \**svěstь*.

1 This paper is based on the experience of working on the “one volume” *Etymological dictionary* in which the basic vocabulary of the Serbian language is analyzed. Unlike the *Etymological dictionary of the Serbian language* – a thesaurus, whose corpus is intended to cover both the standard Serbian language and its dialects, the “one volume” dictionary presented its authors with some new, primarily methodological tasks.<sup>1</sup> One of them is the identification of Slavic layers in the standard Serbian lexicon, as well as the connection of important points in the historical development of each word that led to its contemporary meaning and form. The methodological approach applied will be presented through the case of two Serbian words: *svest* ‘consciousness’ and *savest* ‘conscience’. Even though they both derive from the Proto-Slavic \**svěstь* < \**сѣ* and \**věstь* < \**věděti*, *věd-ть* ‘know’ (Skok 1971–1974, 3: 209 s.v. *savijest*), the appropriate interpretation (corresponding to the “one volume” dictionary) should also offer an explanation of reasons for semantic and formal differences between the two lexemes in the Serbian language.

2.0 Since it is not always easy, or even possible, to separate *svest* from *savest* in the Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) language, especially in historical perspective,<sup>2</sup> the attestations from the historical sources are divided by the semantic criterion, while the words standardized in lexicographic sources, mainly from the

1 Cf. Бјелетић – Влајић-Поповић (2013: 173).

2 In historical sources the word is recorded in two forms: *сѣвѣсть* and *сѣвѣсть*, which makes it almost impossible to determine when it was pronounced as *sv(ij)est* and when as *sav(j)est*.

19th and 20th centuries, are given as they were recorded in the dictionary, according to their orthographic form.

2.1.1 In written sources, *съвѣсть* ‘consciousness’, Serbian Slavic *свѣсть*, is attested in *Hilandarski tipik* of Saint Sava in 1206: *съ нѣменовоу свѣстнѣю* (Савић 2013b: 196). In Old Serbian the word appears in a phrase *u svesti* ‘to do something with somebodies own awareness, knowledge’ in two sources: *Svetostefanska hrisonulja* of king Milutun from 1316: *съвѣсть: оутврждени писаныхъ хрисовоуль оу свѣсть мою ни кдиноу чрьте не изехъ ни разорихъ посланемъ развѣ коупакни и замѣне вол’не*, and in the Jefimija’s Will in the 14th century: *ѡ ни хъ свѣсти* (RJA).

2.1.2.1 Most attestations of the word *sv(ij)est* ‘consciousness’ in the RJA are from the west of the Serbo-Croatian language territory, dated in 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and also from western and Dubrovnik literature. In vernaculars this word appears in the phrases: *biti ili ne biti pri svesti*: *No ako se dokaže, da testament nije učinjen ... da nije bio pri čistoj svijesti, onda se testament može ispraviti Riječka nahija, Montenegro* (RJA), and *ne biti u svijesti, izgubiti/prevrnuti/popiti (kome) svijest* (Караџић 1898); *Đavo mu beše popio svijest; Blago onomu koji u takvom metežu ne izgubi svijest svoga plemena; Prevrne mu svijest, te opali puškom iza pasa u svoju ženu Popular tale* (RJA).

2.1.2.2 The same word connected with adjectives *grešan* ‘sinful’, *kriv* ‘guilty’, *nečist* ‘impure’, *prijek* ‘short-tempered’, *zao* ‘evil’ means ‘conscience’, exclusively in texts related to Bible subjects in the western parts of the Serbo-Croatian territory: *Videćemo kako zla svijest muči Kajina; Mučilo je grišnoga Kajina iznutrnje poznanje iliti grišna svijest; Mučila ga je njegova grišna svijest; Sadašnjoj zakletvi ne tribuju nego tri stvari: šešir pod pazuhom, tri zdrava prsta I nečista svist; Jadni aga jaderno se odziva, jer zlotvora prige (tj. prignu) svijest kriva; Nema zaspat ... jer sjen svijesti zle ga stravom kruži; Ah, sad mu se javi strašna jeka sudnjeg dana, a svijest mu sama slovi prijeka* (RJA). The same meaning of the word *sv(ij)est* is recorded in phrases with the following verbs: *iskusiti* ‘to tempt’, *ispitati* ‘to test’, *skrušiti*, *namiriti* ‘to settle’, *umiriti* ‘to calm’, *karati* ‘to scold’, *kriviti* ‘to blame’, *klati* ‘to slaughter’, *gristi* ‘to bite’, *peći* ‘to burn’. Only one example is found in a source from Montenegro: *Grizla ga je svijest, da mu je oca umorio*<sup>3</sup> (RJA).

2.2.1 The first attestation of the word *с(ъ)вѣсть* ‘conscience’ in Old Serbian also comes from Jefimija’s Will: *осоудена ксм свѣстнѣю мою* (RJA), while in the Serbian Slavic an adverb from the *Hilandarski tipik* of Saint Sava

3 The example is from the short story of S. M. Ljubiša and can be related to the territory of Montenegro.

(1206): **СЕВЪ СВѢСТНО МНИ МИ СЕ И БРАТИМЪ** (Савић 2013б: 373) has the same meaning.

2.2.2.1 The word *sav(j)est* ‘conscience’ has significantly less attestations in the RJA than the word *sv(ij)est*; most of them are from Vuk Karadžić’s translation of the New Testament from 1847. Most of the examples in which this word appears in the translation show that it was used as an equivalent for the Latin *conscientia*, which supports the explanation of *sav(j)est* being a calque from the original Greek or Latin word: *čista savjest* = In conscientia pura; *dobra savjest* = Et conscientia buona; *slaba savjest* = Conscientiam eorum infirmam; *svaka savjest* = Ad omnem conscientiam hominum; *zla savjest* = Conscientia mala (RJA). The only example from vernacular language is from the phrase: *Ali je teže, kad mori savjest ali ljubav* (RJA), attested in a popular tale.

2.2.2.2 On the basis of some examples from Vuk Karadžić’s translation of the New Testament, the meaning of *sav(j)est* in RJA is also defined as ‘consciousness’: *A slaboga u vjeri primajte lijepo, da se ne smeta savjesti; Kad ... ne bi vise imali nikakve savjesti za grijehe.*

2.3 The RSA material records form *совѣсть* from 1854, which was loaned from Russian Church Slavonic or (Slavonic-Serbian) and belongs to the group of inter-Slavic borrowings.

**3** In the “one volume” Etymological dictionary of the Serbian language, the origin of these words is explained in a slightly different way: the word *savest* is directly linked with CSL. **СВѢСТЬ**, while the word *svest* is derived from PSL. \**svěstь*, and then compared with OCSL. **СВ(Ъ)ВѢСТЬ**. This assumes that *savest* entered the standard/literary Serbian language from Church Slavonic, whereas *svest* is a result of regular development in Serbian from the Proto-Slavic form.

4.1 Word *savest* has parallels in East and South Slavic languages: Mac. *совест*, Bulg. *съвест*, OBulg. *съвѣсть* (БЕР 7: 646), Russ. *совѣсть* (Фасмер 1986–1987, 3: 705), Ukr. *совість* (ЕЦУМ 5: 342)<sup>4</sup>. Bulgarian dictionaries also consider this word to be borrowed from Old Church Slavonic, having no recording in the vernacular language (БЕР l.c.). The Ukrainian source describes it as a loanword from Church Slavonic into Old Russian (ЕЦУМ l.c.).

4.2 The word *svest* ‘consciousness’ is recorded exclusively in the South Slavic languages: Mac. *свѣст*, Bulg. *свят*, Sln. *svest*, and therefore its Proto-Slavic origin might be questioned.

4 Blr. *сөөвесць* and *сѳвѳісць* are not reliable parallels, being recorded only in ЕЦУМ (5: 342). Words with the same meaning in Belorussian are *сумлѣнне*, *сумнѣнне*, etc., according to ЭСБМ (13: 42–43).

5.1 On the basis of the attestations from both historical and lexicographic sources, it can be presumed that *svest* ‘consciousness’ was first recorded in Serbian as a part of jurisdiction terminology – *с(ъ)вѣсти* – and that it was used in vernaculars as well. The word *savest* ‘conscience’, on the other hand, is related predominantly with the Gospel content, and broadened its field of usage due to Vuk Karadžić’s translation of the New Testament. Since this fact is an important milestone in the history of the formal and semantic development of *savest*, we will present the first written attestations from the New Testament of the word *сѡвѣсть* ‘conscience’. In the selected Gospel of Nikola Stanjević, from the beginning of the 14th century, we find only one recording of the word *сѡвѣсть*: *Они же слышавше и сѡвѣстнѡ обличакмыи исхужаху кдинь по кдиномоу* (The Gospel of John 8 : 9)<sup>5</sup>. This manuscript is based on the Athonian A and Athonian B redaction, and was written by a Serbian copyist from the Hilandar monastery. In the second half of the 14th century the word is recorded in the Gospel of Tsar Ivan Alexander, and in the Chudovo New Testament. This chapter from the Gospel of John was translated by Vuk Karadžić as follows: *А кад они то чуше, и покарани будући од своје сав(ј)ести излажаху један за другим.*<sup>6</sup> In the Gospel of Banjiško and the Liturgic tetra of Serbian St. Sava from the 13th and 14th centuries, as well as in other texts from the same period, instead of *сѡвѣсть* we find *сѡвѣдѣник*. According to this data it can be assumed that the use of *сѡвѣсть* instead of previous *сѡвѣдѣник* originates from the South Slavic territory, being recorded in the manuscripts of Bulgarian and Serbian redactions.

5.2 Both OCSL *сѡвѣсть* and *сѡвѣдѣник* are calques from Gr. *συνείδησις*, or Lat. *conscientia*. In the contemporary translations of the New Testament into West Slavic languages, in the same passage and in the meaning ‘conscience’ the following words are recorded: Cs. *svědomí*: *A oni uslyševše to, a v svědomích svých obvinění byvše, jeden po druhém odcházeli* (Biblegateway), Sk. *svedomie*: *Tu sa v nich ozvalo svedomie a pomaly sa jeden po druhom vytrácali – najprv tí najváženejší, až zostal Ježiš so ženou sám* (Biblegateway) and Pol. *sumienie*: *Co gdy oni usłyszeli, będąc od sumienia przekonani, jeden za drugim wychodzili* (Biblegateway).<sup>7</sup> Being attested Pol. *świadomość* in the meaning ‘conscience’ and ‘consciousness’, West Slavic languages reflect continuants of OCSL.

5 In English translation, King James Version: *And they who heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the eldest even unto the last, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing in the midst.* (Biblegateway).

6 In other Croatian translation this word do not appear in the same passage of the John Gospel, cf. <http://biblija.biblija-govori.hr/glava.php?knjiga=Ivan&prijevod=sve&glava=8>.

7 One Ukrainian translation records this variant: *А вони це почувши и сумлінням докорени, стали один по одному виходиши* (Biblegateway). It can be assumed that,

СВѢДѢНИК – a prevailing form in the 14th century Old Church Slavonic, while South Slavic СВѢСТЬ could be considered as an innovation, which successively became a dominant feature on that territory.<sup>8</sup> One of the reasons for entering of the word СВѢСТЬ into the Old Church Slavonic functional style could be the already existing СВѢСТЬ ‘consciousness’ in the South Slavic languages, cf. § 4.2.

6 After the first recordings in Old Church Slavonic and Old Serbian, another important point for the history of these words is the 19th century – the period of Vuk Karadžić’s language reformation and the constitution of the modern Serbian literary language – when evident semantic differentiation between *svest* and *savest* begins. The fact that the word *sav(j)est* in 17th and 18th centuries was recorded, according to RJA, dominantly in the western Serbo-Croatian territory, is probably because there were more translations of the New Testament into the vernacular language (or some very close variation of it) among the Serbo-Croatian speaking Catholics until 19th century, then among Orthodox Christians (Грицкат 1963–1964: 223). The first translation into Serbian based on folk speech among Orthodox Christians, was done by Vuk Karadžić, and published in 1847. The aim of this translation was “not to be read in church, but to be read as a book, so that people could comprehend better the Christian law and learn something, and that this translation could help them to understand the Church Slavonic translation” (Караџић 1974: 15). For that reason, he adapted many “Slavonic” (Slavonic-Serbian, Church Slavonic, Russian Church Slavonic) words, some of them co-opted, some created, so that “from this book, together with Holy Scripture, could be recognized our authentic, popular language” (Ibid.). Because Vuk doesn’t mention *sav(j)est* among any of these words, it cannot be decided to which of these groups it belongs (Id.: 15–16).<sup>9</sup> Most of the words, listed in the preface by Vuk himself, as well as many others, he incorporated into the second edition of *The Serbian lexicon* (Караџић 1898). However, the frequently used word *sav(j)est*, doesn’t appear in this dictionary. It remains unclear whether this is the result of a simple mistake or a deliberate omission, but despite that absence, *sav(j)est*

according to confessional, regional and language diversity in Ukraine, different words could be found in the same Gospel passage.

- 8 In some translations of the John Gospel into contemporary Slavic languages this word is absent, but the comparative analysis of such examples would not contribute to this paper’s subject.
- 9 Vuk also gives the list of used Turkish loan-words, words adapted from various older Slavic idioms (such as Old Church Slavonic, Serbian Slavic, Slavonic-Serbian, etc.) and ones created by himself (Ibid.). For Serbian Slavic words in Karadžić’s translation of the New Testament see Стијовић (2012).

begun to be widely used in the standard (literary) language in the east Serbo-Croatian territory precisely because of this translation.<sup>10</sup>

7.1 How did historical changes of OCSl. **сѣвѣтъ** result in the formation of phonetic doublets in standard Serbian? Form *svest* shows regular phonetic development in the Serbian language, where the semivowel disappears in a weak position. (Ивић 1975: 65). Form *savest* shows the Serbian-Slavic feature of transformation **ѣ > а** in prefix **сѣ-**. In Vuk's *Lexicon* from 1852, a significant number of words showing the same feature is recorded: *sabor, sav(j)et, savladati, samrt, sahraniti, sačuvati, savezati, sagaditi, sagledati, sagoditi, sadružiti, sakrojiti, sakrušiti, saložiti, satrošiti*, etc.<sup>11</sup> (Цветковић 2005: 97). In the Old Church Slavonic, the oldest literary Slavic language, semivowels were pronounced in every position, even in weak ones. Weak semivowels appeared in a word end, or within a word, before a syllable with full vowel or strong semivowel. From the 11th century they were not pronounced. Although, for example, **сѣвѣтъ** 'council' was pronounced in a same manner as **сѣвѣтъ** 'saint', the semivowel in prefix **сѣ-** was regularly written (in the Serbian reduction as **сѣ-**) and pronounced while read from the Church Slavonic text. Consequently, **сѣвѣтъ** in a vernacular language became **сѣвѣт** > *svi(j)est*, but Serbian Slavic orthography **сѣвѣст** was pronounced *sav(je)est*.

7.2 This phonetic and morphologic model, although irregular in the Serbian vernacular language, wasn't unusual in Old Church Slavonic (Младеновић 1997), moreover it was recorded in the Serbian Cyrillic manuscripts in 1206 – **ваставити**, instead of **въставити**. This model is not only characteristic for the Shtokavian dialects, it is even considered to be its genuine feature (Савић 2013a: 84). This "irregular" morphological potential enabled a formal division of regular false homonyms – *svest* 'consciousness' and *svest* 'conscience' – and led to the creation of two lexemes – *svest* and *savest* – with separate and independent meanings in contemporary Serbian.

8.0 Even though these words designate abstract concepts, belonging to the literary Serbian lexicon, they have been recorded in the Serbian vernaculars in the territory of Serbia and Montenegro, as well.<sup>12</sup>

10 Cf. also Цвијић (1963–1964: 410).

11 The reason of this feature in case of every single word should be analyzed independently and considering the usage and context. For example, the majority of Vuk's recordings are from folk epic poetry, where vocalization of semivowel was necessary in order to fit the decasyllabic verse.

12 This list's aim is not to be exhaustive, but to illustrate forms and meanings in the Serbian dialects of the words analyzed. For this reason absent are forms such as *nesv(j)est, besv(j)est*, etc., having slightly different semantic.



8.1.1 The word *sv(j)est*: *svj'es* 'conscience [reason, sense]' in phrases *mrkla mu svj'es* 'he lost his senses', *okrenula/prevrnula mu se svj'es* 'id.' Uskoci (Станић 1990–1991); *svij'es* 'reasoning ability': *Dobro je kad je ostala u svijes poslije onoga što je snašlo Zagarač* (Ђупић 1997: 432); *sves* 'conscious', in phrases: *Pomrčil mu se sves*, *Padal be[z]-sves*, *Mrknul mu sves*, *svesan* 'conscious, reasonable, clever' Crna Trava (Стојановић 2010: 839); *svijesan* 'sensible, reasonable' Dubrovnik (Ђојанић – Тривунац 2002: 354); *svěsan* 'sensible, reasonable' north Metohija (Букумирић 2012); *svěs* in phrases: *Mrkne mi sves*; *Sves imaš li u glavu?* Kosovo (Елезовић 1935); *svijesan* in the phrase: *ni svjesni ni česni* 'know nothing about that' Piva and Drobnjaci (Вуковић 1940).

8.1.2 The word *sav(j)est*: *sòves* 'conscience, consciousness' Niš (Белић 1905); *sòvĕsan/sòvesan* 'wise, clever' Čumići (Грковић 1982: 146–147)<sup>13</sup>; *u sovjesti* in the phrase: *Čuvajte se u sovjesti* 'with common sense' second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, Levač (communicated by М. Ђинђић); *saves(t)* 'conscience': *Ondak tata kida, prvo njemu u tanjir, pa mami, pa svima redom, po savestu svima*; in the phrase: *Grize je savest*; *savestan*, *savesnost* adj. (РСГВ); *saves* 'conscience', *savesan* adj. 'conscious', towards parents Crna Trava (Стојановић 2010: 829 = СДЗБ 57); *sávljesan* adj. 'who acts wisely, reasonable': *Savljesna je ko da je starila pa mladila* Пива (Гаговић 2004: 235 = СДЗБ 51); *sáves* 'conscience': *Vaš me briga mene je čis saves*; *Da ima savesti ne bi tako radila*; *sāvĕsan* 'responsible, polite, kind' north Metohija (Букумирић 2012); *sávez*, *sáves* 'conscience': *Едън не моџ да спи што е болан, едън што му не čis savez*; *Miran mi na mene saves*; *nesávezan* 'conscienceless': *Ko moŝ da si tolko nesavezan, da propuštiš takvu priliku?* Timok (Динић 2008); *sávet* 'reason, intellect': *Nema on savet u glavu za tĕkvu školu!*; *sávetan* adj. (only in use with the negative form of the verb *to be*) 'reasonable, conscious': *Ti nesi, bre, savetan ko<sup>14</sup> zboriš toj ko po onaj sve[t] da ideš!?* Jablanica (Жугић); *svĕtan* adj. 'conscious' Vranje (Златановић 1998).

8.2 Dialectal attestations of the word *savest* are more interesting, for *svest* could be expected to appear in vernaculars, being recorded in the first edition of Vuk Karadžić's *Serbian Lexicon* from 1818. Variants of *savest* with the *o* vowel from Central and South Serbia, most probably reflect Serbian Slavonic (or Russian Church Slavonic) model. In the case of the forms *savet(an)*, *svĕtan*, it remains unclear whether they are the result of crossing with the word family of *savet*, *svet*<sup>14</sup>, or the consequence of authentic morphologic and semantic development, especially bearing in mind the related words

13 Cf. *сòвѣтоват* 'to advise', beside *свѣтоват* 'id.' (ibid.).

14 Cf. Бјелетић (2008).



*ka(ь)svetan*<sup>15</sup>. Some of the examples could be defined as recent loans from standard Serbian, but most of the dialectal words, especially ones attested in older dictionaries, share these common characteristics: their meaning is almost always ‘mind, reason’, not ‘conscience’, they usually appear as a part of phrasal expression, and they reflect different Slavic layers – standard language, Slavonic-Serbian, Church Slavonic, Serbian Slavic, etc.

9 The presented language material clearly shows that in the Serbian Slavic and Old Serbian sources, the word *сѡвѣстѣ* was used in texts with Gospel content in the meaning of the present day *savest*, and in a legal context in the meaning of present day *svest*. In both cases they could be considered as calques from Greek: *savest* < *συνειδησις* for certain, and *svest* < *κατά γνώμην* possible, even though the independent development in the vernacular language of the latter should not be disregarded. In addition to their phonetic and orthographic forms being identical in the past, their meanings also intertwined through history – both words used to mean ‘knowledge in general, consciousness’ and ‘moral knowledge, conscience’. Over time, one word in three orthographic variants (*сѡвѣстѣ/сѡвѣсть/сѡвѣтъ*) developed two separate forms (*svest* and *savest*) the semantics of which narrowed and specialized, thus resulting in the creation of two independent lexemes at the standard Serbian language level.

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15 Cf. *kàsvetan* ‘who is like everybody else, average, normal, polite’ Timok (PCA); *k’svetan* ‘inappropriate’: *K’svetan ti je po malko za tej rabote*, see *saglam* ‘false’ Leskovac (Митровић 1984); *kъsvetъn* ‘humble, courteous, polite’: *Nemoj da si ala, budi malko kъsvetъn Timok* (Динић 2008); *kъsvet* ‘common sense, wit’: *Ti nemaš ič kъsvet u tuj čuturu, ne moš takoј dete da biješ!*; *kъsvetan, -tna, -tno* (usually with the negated verb) ‘reasonable, sensible, smart’: *Ti nesi kъsvetna, takoј li se udara dete, da ga raščovečiš!?* Jablanica (Жугић); *kъsvetan, -tna, -tno* ‘who is like everybody else, sensible’: *Što zboriš toј? Kъsvetan li si? Vranje* (Златановић 1998).

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**Svest i savest – slovenski slojevi u srpskoj leksici.** U radu je, na primeru reči *svest* i *savest*, predstavljen metodološki pristup identifikacije slovenskih slojeva u standardnom srpskom vokabularu, koji se primenjuje pri izradi “jednotomnog” *Etimološkog rečnika srpskog jezika*. Analizirani material svedoči o tome da je u srpskoslovenskom i starosrpskom jeziku reč **сѣвѣсть** korišćena u jevanđeljskom kontekstu u značenju ‘savest’, a u pravnom kontekstu u značenju ‘svest’. Kao što su ortografski oblici ovih reči bili isti ili nedovoljno izdiferencirani, i njihova su se značenja tokom istorije preplitala – obe reči sui male značenje ‘svest, spoznaja uopšte’ i ‘savest, moralna spoznaja’. Vremenom su se od jednog osnovnog oblika u tri ortografske varijante (**сѣвѣсть/сѣвѣсть/сѣвѣсть**) formirala dva (*svest* i *savest*), čija se pojedinačna semantika specijalizovala, što je dovelo do formiranja dve samostalne lekseme na nivou standardnog srpskog jezika.

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