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“Language Nationalism” vs. “Language Cosmopolitanism”: Divisions in the Attitudes towards the Relation between Language and National Identity

Abstract

The paper analyses the attitudes of the students of the University of Niš related to the strength of the link between linguistic and national identity (at the collective and individual levels), that is, the possible dependence of these attitudes on a number of demographic variables, such as the participants’ education and vocational orientation, sex, ethnicity, their place of birth, the education of their parents, and their degree of religiousness. The research instrument used in this study was a designed questionnaire, distributed to the students during the 2011/2012 spring semester, at four faculties of the University of Niš. The aim was to investigate which attitude or orientation towards the relation between language and national identity would be identified as predominant in the student population – “linguistic nationalism” or “linguistic cosmopolitanism”. The statistical analysis of the data showed that the most influential demographic variable was the participant’s degree of religiousness, as well as, to some extent, the participant’s education and vocational training.

Key Words

language, nation, identity, language nationalism/language cosmopolitanism, attitudes towards the relation between language and national identity

Introduction

Ever since the end of the 18th century (the time of authors such as Herder, Rousseau, Fichte, and, generally, the time of the French Revolution), it has been believed that language identity is not merely one of the layers of (individual and collective) identity that is on a par with other layers of identity, but rather that it occupies the central place among the different layers of identity, that it represents the “mirror of the people’s spirit”, and that it guarantees the identity and the prosperity of the nations that were formed at that time [Bugarski: 1996b: 171-176]. Hence the popular belief, that is often undermined by empirical data but, despite that, continues to be present in our society (e.g. in the attitudes of far-right organizations in Serbia, as well as in the general population), that a “Holy Trinity” of language, nation and state exists, i.e. that the three are crucially interrelated and interdependent, most often in the following manner: *one language – one nation – one state*.

In that sense, this paper aims to explore which attitudes the students of the University of Niš (from the English Department, Sociology Department and History Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, as well as from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Law) hold with regard to the given issue, i.e. to ascertain whether the given population holds the view that language and national identity are closely intertwined (which could be seen as an expression of its “*language nationalism*”), or that maybe such a close relation/connection between the two does not exist (which could be taken to represent its “*language cosmopolitanism*”). In addition, another aim was to analyse the possible connection between such attitudes, on the one hand, and various demographic variables, on the other.

The paper hypothesizes that *the students of the English Department, on account of their education which necessarily makes them acquainted with other cultures through a foreign language and literature, hold views dominated by “language cosmopolitanism”, whereas the other students lean towards views that could be taken as indicators of “language nationalism”*.

Theoretical Background

As terms such as *value judgments* referring to the relation between *language identity* and *national identity* (taken *collectively* and *individually*) are of great importance in the given paper, they will be defined here in greater detail.

Following Bugarski [2005; 2009] we consider identity¹ as consisting of a series of components, including the following: 1) its *levels*: identity as humanity, collectivity and individuality, 2) its *layers*: ethnic, religious, professional, social, territorial, cultural, political, generational, gender as well as linguistic, national and other layers of identity, and 3) *the degree of its strength*, i.e. strong, medium and weak identity [Bugarski: 2009]. The aforementioned first level of identity - *humanity*, is not relevant for this study because it has no otherness – this paper does not compare the human race with other living beings. However, all the other mentioned *levels* (identity shared within a community as well as an individual’s unique identity) are closely related, and by intertwining with the aforementioned layers and levels, they constitute an extremely complex structure, whose elements are almost all socially constructed and which are subject to change (*ibid*). In this sense, we shall consider the linguistic and national identity to be types of layers of identity that may appear at the aforementioned levels of collectivity and individuality (as the levels of interest in this paper), and which may be manifested in the degrees mentioned above.

Popular (i.e. layman) attitudes to language (and the attitudes indirectly associated with national and language identity) were analyzed by Bugarski [1996a]. There they are defined as anonymous and widely accepted general attitudes on language and languages that are passed down from generation to generation, usually in the form of common conversational clichés [*ibid*: 164]. A certain part of this linguistic folklore, according to the same author, even when it comes to pure prejudice and superstition, is completely harmless; however, among them there are some that may have serious consequences, and which should not be ignored.

Bugarski classifies language attitudes based on three criteria: a) according to the subject, where the attitudes include an entire range of a language in general, via certain languages and dialects, to idiolects as individual speech; b) according to the type, language attitudes are classified into aesthetic, pragmatic, moral and social ones, and c) according to the direction, language attitudes may relate to one’s own or to a foreign language, dialect or idiolect. These divisions are closely related, and the author illustrates this point with numerous examples.

Moreover, he stresses that in all the listed attitudes there is a general tendency for declaring as normal *everything belonging to us*, whereas *everything belonging to them* is subject to ridicule or even anathemizing. Bugarski [1997b; 2009] also thoroughly analyzes popular beliefs regarding languages and nations, the “native” and “foreign” in a language, the social basis of linguistic conflicts and attitudes referring to language.

1 Moreover, the concepts of *people*, *nation*, *ethnic group/ethnicity*, *ethno-national consciousness* and *language* are used in this paper in the same sense that Bugarski uses them.

The issues of a relation between language and national ethnic consciousness, the issues of the relation between language and a nation in time and space, as well as issues of ethnic characteristics and nationalism in language, stand out in particular as significant ones [Bugarski: 1997a; 2002]. Attention is especially drawn to the two following important facts. Firstly, no fundamental link should necessarily exist between a language, nation and state, and therefore an ethnicity may be constituted as a nation even if it does not have its own separate, standardized, national language that would be used by all the members of the ethnicity. And secondly, it stresses the attitude that language and ethno-national consciousness do not have to be inextricably linked, i.e. that the ethno-national consciousness may well develop without a national language, which, therefore, does not necessarily have to constitute support for and guarantee its preservation, nor need it constitute “the essential embodiment of the very soul for the ethnicity in question”. This is exemplified by a number of empirical facts, which, for limitations of space, cannot be cited here.

In that sense, an essentially romanticist, mystical and mythological attitude regarding the close connection between language, nation and state, i.e. the idea that overall identity may be reduced to the ethnical background embodied in the mother tongue, as well as the attitude that mankind is naturally divided into nations each having its own particular and unique character, where language is a guarantee for that uniqueness, may be called “*linguistic nationalism*” [ibid:60] And vice versa, for an attitude that denies the aforementioned, and that may be regarded as rational, cosmopolitan and future-oriented, in this paper we use the term “*linguistic cosmopolitanism*”.²

Authors that also discuss the presented issues, would, among others, include: Edwards [2009]; Fought [2006]; Greenberg [2004]; Joseph [2004]; MacGiola Chríost [2003] and Fishman [1999]. They discuss issues referring to the relation between language, on the one hand, and national, ethnic and religious identity, on the other, as well as issues referring to the relationship between language, nationalism and ethnic conflict, both on the territory of the former Yugoslavia [Greenberg: 2004], and in other parts of the world (other listed authors), paying specific attention to their close connection and the consequences of that connection.

In addition, local sources that deal with similar issues include: Kovačević [2005 and 2004]; Đorović [2004]; Ignjačević [1998]; Vlahović [1997, 1990 and 1989]. These sources studied the attitudes of both students and the general population

2 Regarding the abovementioned term (*language comopolitanism*) we wish to emphasize that the given author never used explicitly this term in its entirety, as opposed to the term *language comopolitanism*. However, he regularly in all of the specified places the term *nationalism* in opposition to the term *cosmopolitanism*, and therefore, for the purposes of this paper, we coined the phrase *language comopolitanism*.

– speakers of Serbian/Serbo-Croatian - regarding their relation towards foreign languages (e.g. the importance of foreign language learning and its popularity), their relation regarding the varieties of Serbian/Serbo-Croatian (i.e. the literary language/native speech), and similar issues.

Methodology

As a basic instrument for the research presented in this paper, a questionnaire was developed, which, in addition to questions about demographic details, consisted of a total of 19 statements with offered alternative (*yes / no*) answers. These statements have been created on the basis of the literature previously listed, as well as on the attitudes to the relation between language and national identity which can be found on the websites of the far-right wing organizations in Serbia, i.e. on the website of the *Otačastveni pokret Obraz* organization (www.obraz.rs) and the *Srpski narodni pokret 1389* movement (www.snp1389.rs)³. Some of these positions are as follows: *The native language of every nation contains the entire soul, history, everything spiritual and the creative ideas of a nation, A nation without its own language and state is doomed*, and the like.

We were careful in formulating these attitudes in such a way that the respondents who “tend towards” either a “nationalist” or “cosmopolitan” standpoint constantly have to alternate between *yes* and *no* answers, rather than constantly (automatically) offer only one of the two answers.

The survey was conducted in March 2012 on a sample that consisted of a total of 665 students, 146 of whom were students of the English Department, 96 of the Sociology Department and 88 of the History Department, from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, 140 students of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, 121 students from the Faculty of Law and 74 students from the Faculty of Medicine in Niš.

All the responses from the questionnaires were then entered into the SPSS program for statistical analysis. The preliminary analysis of the data revealed that with the interviewed students an almost general (non)compliance (80% or more) for a total of 7 standpoints, and that they therefore cannot serve as proper indicators of “linguistic nationalism” or “linguistic cosmopolitanism”, which is why they were not taken into account in the quantitative data processing. The responses of the participants to the remaining 12 standpoints were recoded so that a “nationalist” response to the proposed attitude scored 1, and the “cosmopolitan” scored 0. That was the basis for calculating “the index of linguistic nationalism” (hereinafter referred to as ILN), a term that has three related meanings: 1) at the level of every individual participant, it represents the

3 These websites were accessed in September 2011.

total value of the recoded “nationalistically” directed responses of a participant to the views presented to him / her; and 2) at the faculty/department level, it represents an average value that is obtained by adding all the recoded values of the “nationalistically” directed answers of all the participants from a specific faculty/department and by dividing it by the number of participants from the faculty/department; 3) at the level of the entire survey sample, it represents the mean value calculated by dividing the recoded values of the “nationalistically” directed responses of all the participants from the sample by the total number of participants (hereinafter we shall always state which of the three meanings we have in mind).

Clearly, the value of the ILN in each of the three listed meanings ranged from 0 to 12, where a value closer to zero indicated that the participants tend towards “cosmopolitanism”, and a value closer to 12 indicated “nationalistically” oriented attitudes.

Thus the established ILN was then cross-tabulated with the following demographic variables: educational and professional profiles, sex, age, nationality, place of birth and residence, parents’ place of birth and education, the confessional affiliation of the participants and their attitude toward religion.

This paper in no way lends support to the thesis that the values obtained by the described methods of calculation represent any “absolute values”. On the contrary - they may simply indicate certain tendencies among the participants belonging to different departments and faculties.

The attitudes which for the purpose of the quantitative analysis were previously qualified as not discriminative enough, were, however, taken into account for the qualitative analysis of the data.

Analysis and Discussion

ILN mean value of the whole sample is 5.92, which would mean that the interviewed students hover between the “nationalist” and “cosmopolitan” pattern in their understanding of the relationship between language and identity. The participants from the English Department scored the lowest ILN mean values, and the participants from the History Department had the highest scores. The standard deviations of the mean values are relatively high. The data are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: The mean values of the ILN for the faculties/departments

Faculty / Department	Mean value ILN	n	Standard deviation	min	max
Mechanical Engineering	6,61	129	2,27	1	11
Law	6,25	117	2,32	1	11
Medicine	6,44	70	2,00	2	11
English	4,43	138	2,46	0	12
Sociology	4,98	87	2,36	0	10
History	7,42	84	2,50	0	12
Total	5,92	625	2,55	0	12

When it comes to cross tabulating the ILN with the socio-demographic variables, the connection of the ILN and the attitudes referring to religion has proved to be significant, whereas the connection to the participants' gender, age, place of birth and residence, ethnicity and denominational affiliation, their parents' education and place of birth was less obvious. When comparing the ILN mean value for each faculty in relation to the gender of the participants, the results reveal higher “nationalism” among the male students, except for the Faculty of Philosophy, where the ILN mean value at all three departments is higher among the female students. The most consistent results, with an almost negligible difference, were obtained from the future lawyers, whereas the largest differences were determined between the male and female students of sociology and English. On the basis of the existing data, we cannot offer a more substantiated explanation of these findings. Only the following supposition might be offered for the lower level of “language nationalism” of the male students from the English Department, Sociology Department and History Department as compared to the female students: since a significantly greater number of female students study at the Faculty of Philosophy (which offers mostly “female” professions such as, for example, the teaching profession), it is possible that the young men who enroll in these studies do not belong to the “typical” group of men, as found at other faculties where we conducted the research: hence their more pronounced “language cosmopolitanism”.

Table 2: The mean values of the ILN at faculties/departments in relation to gender

Faculty / Department	Gender	Mean value ILN	n	Standard deviation
Mechanical Engineering	Male	6,70	100	2,15
	Female	6,31	29	2,65
Law	Male	6,21	24	2,13
	Female	6,28	92	2,37
Medicine	Male	6,60	25	2,25
	Female	6,36	45	1,86
English	Male	3,83	30	2,65
	Female	4,59	108	2,39
Sociology	Male	4,08	26	2,33
	Female	5,36	61	2,29
History	Male	7,31	54	2,64
	Female	7,60	30	2,25
Total	Male	6,18	259	2,62
	Female	5,75	365	2,48

When considering the ILN mean value concerning the students' age, only those students between the ages of 20 and 23 were taken into consideration for the analysis.⁴ The data reveal different trends at the faculties/departments. While we find a constant decline in "nationalism" with the students of sociology with an increase in age (at the more advanced levels of study)⁵, with the law students the opposite was evident. The Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, the History Department, and, especially, the Faculty of Medicine, bring out the largest number of variations, and we cannot speak about any clear tendency towards one direction or another. The ILN mean value remains the most constant with the students of English, which is somewhat surprising, since the expected findings

4 This makes up 82.10% of the total sample, and 87.36% of those who expressed their agreement/disagreement with the 12 statements on the basis of which the ILN is constructed. We must note here that a very small number of students aged 20 and 23 from the Faculty of Medicine made up this group - only 3 - and a small number of mechanical engineering students aged 22 (n = 9) and 23 (n = 6). In all the other cases, the whole sample consists of students aged 19-50, where the average age was 21.82, with a standard deviation of 2.26.

5 However, we cannot speak about a stronger correlation, given the low value of Spearman's correlation coefficient ($\rho = -0.285$).

are that as the studies progress, the level of students’ awareness regarding the relationship between language and nation increases.

Regarding the *ethnicity* of the students, 96.4% of the sample consists of students who declared themselves Serbs, where the ILN has the same value as for the entire sample. The percentage of other nationalities⁶ is negligible (each less than 1%). Here we must mention that the highest ILN average score was obtained from the participants who did not give data on their ethnicity, and that this finding is repeated in all the analyzed variables, with the exception of *religion* and *attitude toward religion*, and we can ascertain some greater distrust to the conducted research among participants who displayed the strongest “*language nationalism*”.

When analyzing the relation between the *place of birth* and the ILN, no major differences in the average achieved score were determined (with a minimal deviation from the average for an entire sample) for the students born in towns, cities and large towns, which make up 94% of the participants. The percentage of the others is negligible, and no valid conclusions may be drawn regarding the effect of the birth place on the “nationalism” of the respondents.

When it comes to the *place of residence*, it was expected that with the increasing size of the community where the students reside, a decrease in “nationalism” would be found. However, these expectations were not met. Although the students who live in the country scored the highest ILN value (6.06), it is only slightly larger than that of the others, which make up a more significant percentage of the sample (e.g., in the case of a large city it is larger by only 0.14); therefore we cannot ascertain any regularity.⁷

The analysis demonstrated that the *place of mother’s and father’s birth* does not present any noticeable effect on the ILN value, whereas when it comes to *parents’ education* a surprising finding is that the average ILN value records a slight increase with an increase in the level of the education of the father, and in the case of the education level of the mother the ILN decreases when we go from elementary school, over to high school and university, recording a slighter increase in cases when the mother has a university degree. The findings are contrary to the assumption that the level of “nationalism” will record a decline among participants with highly educated parents.

Most of the students from the sample (67.8%) cited Orthodox Christian as their *religion* (n = 451), and their average ILN score was 6.26. Orthodox Christians from among the students of English and sociology have lower scores (4.88, and 5.56 respectively), whereas the Orthodox Christians from other faculties/ departments have higher scores.

6 Those include: Bulgarian, Montenegrin, Yugoslav, Roma, Croatian and Greek.

7 Thus the only respondent who cited Belgrade as the place of residence achieves a relatively high score of 8 on the ILN.

Christians made up a significant percentage of the sample (n = 87, 13.1%) with an average ILN score of 5.87 and atheists (n = 25, 3.8%), who also had a lower average ILN value of 3.08 (the ILN value with both the “Christians” and the “atheist” varied in the same way as with the “Orthodox Christians”⁸ at faculties/departments). The incidence of other religions⁹ is negligible (less than 1% each). Students who did not state their religion (n = 67, 10.08%) had an average ILN score of 5.22.

The clearest relation was observed between the ILN and *the attitude toward religion* – the “stronger” the religiousness, the higher the ILN score. However, the standard deviation values are relatively high, and the low value of Spearman’s correlation coefficient ($\rho = -0.28$) indicates that there is no significant dependence between these two variables.

Table 3: The mean ILN values and the attitude regarding religion

Attitude regarding religion	Mean value ILN	n	Standard deviation
I am a firm believer and I accept anything that my religion teaches	6,89	180	2,24
I am religious, but I do not accept everything that my religion teaches	6,16	211	2,22
I think about it, but I am not sure whether I believe or not	5,17	77	2,36
I am indifferent to religion	5,06	31	3,02
I am not religious, but I do not have anything against it	4,33	73	2,77
I am not religious and I am against it	2,91	11	2,63
No data	6,17	42	2,55

We shall also present here a possible qualitative analysis of students’ answers to two specific attitudes. Such an analysis may by itself further contribute to the achievement of the goal that was set at the beginning, and at the same time it provides us with the opportunity to pay attention to the attitudes which in the quantitative analysis did not prove to be discriminatory enough.

The percentage of positive responses to attitude № 1 of the questionnaire (*It is natural that every nation has its own national language and a national state*) at all the included departments/faculties is extremely large, and ranges from 85.4% at the Department of Sociology, to 95.9% at the Faculty of Medicine.

8 It is very interesting that “atheists” from the History Department (n = 2) scored an average ILN value of 9.5.

9 There were cases of “Muslims”, “Catholics”, “Rastafarians”, “Deists”, “Manicheans”, “Maradonists”, “Agnostics”, and those who cited “patriotism” or “Serbian” as their religion (the last on the list are from the Faculty of Law and the History Department, Faculty of Philosophy).

These data may reflect the (average) extreme “linguistic nationalism” of the participants when it comes to this attitude, i.e. the idea of the tight relation among the nation, the language and the country, especially in view of well-known empirical facts (briefly referred to above) that often deny such a strong relation in practice. In addition, if such a strong “nationalist” attitude could possibly be expected from students belonging to non-philological departments, such an attitude may be considered surprising when it comes to students of English, who study in detail, among other materials, American, Canadian and Australian literature and culture, and are certainly aware of the fact that none of these three nations has its own national language.

The following attitude “*Ijekavian pronunciation (as in the words mlijeko, vrijeme, dijete) should be excluded from the Serbian language as it is used by Croats and Bosnians (for example, in the following words odvjetnik, ispovijed)*” was included in the questionnaire under the influence of an actual event when ijekavian pronunciation became banned for public use in the Republic of Srpska, during the last war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and shortly after the bill was withdrawn because people - native ijekavian speakers could by no means adjust to the new change). Moreover, it is worth reminding that the Eastern Herzegovinian ijekavian dialect together with the ekavian dialect of Šumadija and Vojvodina, constitute *the basis* of the Serbian literary (standard) language, thus every insistence on its expulsion from use could be considered a paradox. In that sense, it could be said that the positive responses regarding the abovementioned attitude, given by more than half of the Faculty of Medicine (66.2%), Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (55.7%) and the Faculty of Law (52.1%) students were quite surprising; at three departments of the Faculty of Philosophy this attitude got only minor support (42% at the History Department, 38% at the Sociology Department and the lowest was for the English Department - 32.3%).

Conclusion

The starting hypothesis proved to be meaningful: *English Language students, as students of philology, regarding the issues concerning the relation between language and national identity, usually hold a more “cosmopolitan” attitude when compared to their colleagues from other departments and faculties (especially the students of history and mechanical engineering, and somewhat less students of sociology).*

Female students at all the departments of the Faculty of Philosophy showed greater “language nationalism”, whereas male students from other faculties were more inclined toward “nationalism”. The age of the participants at the faculties/ departments where the survey was conducted correlates conversely with the ILN, and only with the sociology and law students can we see a clear trend that

over the years they become less or more “nationalist” oriented. In contrast to our expectation, the students who were born or live in large Serbian cities do not have a significantly lower ILN score compared to those living in smaller towns and villages. As far as the parents’ education is concerned, it was found that the value of the ILN does not decrease among participants whose parents have a higher education.

Obviously lower ILN scores were recorded with non-religious participants, and with the variables concerning the attitudes toward religion a “regular” link was noted in direct proportion with the ILN, although no significant correlation coefficient was determined.

When it comes to the conclusions related to the above (very briefly) presented qualitative analysis of students’ answers to individual attitudes, we may say that the participants gave very interesting and sometimes extremely “nationalist”, but “cosmopolitan” responses as well, which, in addition, proved once again that students at the English Department, on average, have slightly more “cosmopolitan” attitudes towards the issues discussed in this paper.

At the end of this analysis, we would like to add that it provides us with the opportunities for further work, in terms of performing a similar study which would include older high schools pupils in Niš, the border areas of Serbia, etc. Such further studies would give more accurate results, which again might be of importance both at the theoretical level - in terms of further development of the theoretical and methodological approach to these issue, and in a more empirical sense, since we might discover some statistically more significant differences and correlations on a larger sample groups of participants, which have not been revealed in this relatively limited study. Finally, this type of research might have some practical effects, in terms of, for example, the introduction/filling in of the relevant teaching materials at the primary and secondary education levels so as to develop student awareness of the complexity of the relationship between the national and language identity.¹⁰

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