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Bilingualism (Multilingualism) in the Balkans: Bulgarian and Macedonian Exemplification

Abstract

The paper attempts to find a broader language and identity context for the output of Grigor Prličev (1830/31–1893), out of an obligation created by the first Polish translation of his poem *Skanderbeg* (1862, Σκενδέρμπεης), by Małgorzata Borowska (*Colloquia Humanistica* 10, 2021). Prličev’s dramatic language and identity choices had their roots in the multilingualism in the Balkans, and a complete change of civilisational and cultural orientation in Balkan cultures during the nineteenth century. The Bulgarian and Macedonian exemplification is preceded by a Serbian illustration with some references to the Greek.

Keywords: Grigor Prličev, identity, multilingualism, Balkan cultures, civilisational change.

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The issue of many languages¹ being used in the Balkans is an obvious one, but it is very much less than obvious – especially to a wider humanities audience – that multiple variants of a native language can be used within a single ethnonational community. This was observed as an especially intensive trend in the nineteenth century, when the national idea split the Ottoman space, which was ethnically rather fluid, into national communities that over time developed into states with clear borders.

In the Serbian linguistic context, the period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a very distinctive one, when different variants of written language were in use. In the eighteenth century the community of writers and scribes known as the School of Rača, who had come from the monastery on the River Rača near the River Drina (Deretić, 2002, pp. 421–432, 443–455, 458–459; Pavić, 1970, pp. 62–71; Rapacka, 1993, pp. 54–55), used the Serbian redaction of Church Slavonic, which started splitting into Church Slavonic used for liturgical purposes and a variant used for copying the medieval legacy, which opened up to popular Serbian out of consideration for a non-elite audience (Kot, 1988, pp. 181–191). This variant of Church Slavonic was replaced with the Ruthenian redaction in the 1740s (Boškov, 1974, pp. 9–79; Sujecka, 2015, pp. 554–580), which was a consequence of schools being set up in Habsburg territories by teachers from Russia, the brothers Maksim and Pëtr Suvorov in 1727, and by Emanuel (Manuil) Kozachinskiĭ from today's Ukraine,² from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, in 1733 (Sujecka, 2015, pp. 560–562).

There were thus three variants of Serbian literacy functioning at the same time: the Serbian redaction of Church Slavonic (known as *slavenoserpski*), the Ruthenian redaction of Church Slavonic (*slavenoruski*), and *narodn srpski* i.e. the vernacular Serbian of the time, which became the foundation of the future standard in the mid-nineteenth century³ and which, like the

¹ In the Balkans the Ottoman elite spoke and wrote Osmanlica, Arabic and Persian, but this practice was underpinned by the unity of the single Arabic script. The Greek alphabet predominated within the Balkans of Orthodoxy. Tension existed vis-a-vis Cyrillic and the rise of the Slavophone Orthodox nation-states of Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro (Bozeva-Abazi, 2003, pp. 33–125; Lindstedt, 2016, pp. 51–67; Nikolova, 2006; Wahlström, 2012).

² Emanuel Kozachinskiĭ brought the Church Slavonic grammar developed by Meletius (Meletii) Smotrytsky (1577–1633) to Sremski Karlovci. On the other hand, in 1726 the Suvorov brothers arrived from Russia bringing a large number of textbooks and grammar books, including the famous *Букваръ* [Manual] by Feofan Prokopovich (1681–1736), the book from which eminent Serbian historiographer Jovan Rajić learned the rudiments of the language as well as the principles of the Orthodox faith newly defined in the spirit of the Enlightenment ideology (Grbić, 2011, pp. 26–42; Kirilović, 1956, pp. 18–20).

³ The Serbian language's standardisation is considered to have begun in 1847, with the publica-

Greek *dimotiki* (Δημοτική – Demotic), was the language of everyday speech for both Habsburg and Turkish Serbs.⁴ Latin was the fourth language, although present only among the Habsburg Serbs, thanks to the *Collegium slaveno-latino carloviciense* in Sremski Karlovci, a bilingual, Latin-Slavic higher secondary school founded by Kozachinskiĭ.⁵

Linguistic stratification was also present in nineteenth-century Greece as it was building its statehood, where alongside the Demotic commonly used in everyday speech, i.e. the vernacular Greek of the time with its many variants, a “scholarly” version of Greek was introduced, namely the “‘Hellenic’ language of official documents, an archaised Greek that is known by the name of Katharevousa” (Borowska, 2021). However, a completely different linguistic image can be observed in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bulgarian as well as Macedonian discourse, as these did not officially note any linguistic stratification or bilingualism, whereas in fact it existed in both cases.

In the Bulgarian context, the situation is further complicated by the fact that the Bulgarian redaction of Old Church Slavonic is officially called Old Bulgarian. The written medieval language has indeed been given various names in all the Slavic languages.⁶ To some extent, the blame for this appropriation of the Slavs’ common heritage by the Bulgarian discourse is due to the national work of history that concluded the national middle ages and marked the beginning of the national revival, namely *История*

tion of a translation of the New Testament by the author of the language’s reform, Vuk Karadžić, as well as *Рат за српски језик и правопис* [The War over the Serbian Language and Orthography] by Đuro Daničić and, finally, Branko Radičević’s volume *Песме* [Poetry]. The language reform proposed by Karadžić was incorporated into education in 1868, when the last ban on Karadžić’s vernacular Serbian standard was lifted in Serbia (Đorđević, 2018, pp. 164–173). This did not translate into the immediate replacement of Slaveno-Serbian until the emergence of the Belgrade urban standard around 1900.

⁴ The terms Habsburg Serbs and Turkish Serbs originated from the Serbian migrations, *seobe* (migrations) in Serbian, also known as the Great Exoduses of the Serbs. When the countries forming the Holy League (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Habsburg Empire, Venetian Republic, Tsardom of Russia) gave up their plans for a war against the Ottoman Empire, a group about 70,000 of Serbian exiles under the leadership of Patriarch of Peć Arsenije III Crnojević (1674–1690) left Serbian territories and, having crossed the Danube, settled in the Hungarian Habsburg lands (Felczak & Wasilewski, 1985, pp. 210–215; Ivić, 1907; Krestić, 2010, pp. 317–318).

⁵ About the bilingualism within Serbian culture of the eighteenth century see: Deretić, 1989, pp. 194–199; Gil, 2005, p. 112; Palavestra, 1989.

⁶ The binding term in the Polish academic discourse is Old Church Slavonic, in the Russian discourse it is Church Slavonic or Old Slavonic, and in the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian discourse it is Old Slavonic. However, Church Slavonic is also claimed as Old Slovenian, Old Serbian, Old Macedonian, Old Croatian or Old Slovak..., but the generally predominant term is Old Slavonic in all of former Yugoslavia. The situation is currently different in Ukrainian as well as Belarusian discourse.

славяно-болгарская [Slaveno-Bulgarian History] written in 1762 by the monk Paisii Khilendarski (1722–1773), in which the identity of Saints Cyril and Methodius is presented in an ambiguous light:

[...] Они приишли въ Охридъ при архіепископа Климента, он былъ родомъ Болгаринъ, но по Гречески четаль, и ту ся собрали петъ философы отъ Болгарски родъ [...]: Климентъ, Сава, Наумъ, Еразмъ, Ангеларія, то су вси святи мужи пять отъ языка Болгарскаго [...]. (Paisii Khilendarski, 1885, p. 63)⁷

According to Paisii, the disciples of Methodius: Kliment, Sava, Naum, Erazm and Angelarii, were from Bulgarian families and spoke Bulgarian. Such an interpretation originates from the Russian redaction of Orbini's work *Il regno degli Slavi* [The Realm of the Slavs], which Paisii most likely came upon in Sremski Karlovci:

[...] Моравія воспріяла вѣру христіанскую [...] руками Кірілла Філософа Апостола болгарскаго [...].⁸ (Mavroubin, 1722, p. 36)

The Russian redaction of Orbini's work depicts Cyril as a Bulgarian apostle, because he is of Bulgarian origin, or as an apostle to the Bulgarians; the cited passage permits both these interpretations. Paisii's work continued this ambiguity: "[...] Св. Методія сталъ войвода Словенски или Болгарски [...]" (Paisii Khilendarski, 1885, p. 63).⁹ In this case, Slavicness is identified with Bulgarianness, the consequence being the Bulgarisation of Cyril and Methodius' disciples as well (Sujecka, 2015, pp. 554–580). True to the convention of the text written at the turn of the long medieval period¹⁰ and the new era, in Paisii's work the main way of describing the disciples of Cyril and Methodius is through their *pod* (*rod* 'kin') and language, although the ambiguous term *narod* (*narod*) also appears sporadically in *History*. However, in the version of his *History* intended for broad education, the term *pod* (*rod*) was replaced in many cases with the ambiguous *narod* (*narod*), meaning a people and a nation at the same time (Sujecka, 2013,

⁷ "[...] They came to Ohrid in the times of Archbishop Kliment, he was of Bulgarian family/kin but read Greek, and here five philosophers of Bulgarian family/kin gathered [...]: Kliment, Sava, Naum, Angelarii, these are all holy men of the Bulgarian language [...]" [All quotations are given in the original notation; the English philological translations are based on my own Polish translations – Jolanta Sujecka & Joanna Dutkiewicz: JS & JD.]

⁸ "Moravia adopted the Christian faith [...] from the hands of Cyril the Bulgarian [ethnically Bulgarian or "to the Bulgarians" – JS & JD] Philosopher Apostle [...]."

⁹ "St Methodius became a Slavic or Bulgarian voivode."

¹⁰ The 1762 work by the monk Paisii Khilendarski, *Исторія славено-болгарская* [Slaveno-Bulgarian History], ended the long medieval period and began the National Revival in Bulgarian history of literature. The new era actually started at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, although Paisii's *History* did in fact give a new impulse for the whole period.

pp. 166–167). The version of Paisii's *History* translated into the language on which the subsequent standard was founded became part of the education circuit in free Bulgaria, in the twentieth century, and influenced the new approach teaching Bulgarian children that it was the Bulgarians who had created the Old Bulgarian language and given it not only to the Bulgarians but also the whole of Slavdom, which – naturally – can become cause for national pride.

In this context, a 1913 letter from Bulgarian avant-garde poet Geo Milev (1895–1925) to his father Miliu Kasabov becomes significant; in it we read: “Вожди сме били някога на славянството, на това тъпо славянство, книги и просвета сме му дали, и сега съдбата пък нас – най-малките – предопределя да бъдем неговите възродители” (Markov, 1964, p. 223).¹¹ Geo Milev held left-wing views, he was a universalist and the official representative of two German expressionist periodicals in Bulgaria, *Der Sturm* [Storm] and *Die Aktion* [Action]; his fierce patriotism was awakened by the Balkan Wars and World War I (Sujecka, 2001, pp. 48–84). The letter he wrote to his father testifies to the educational success of the reborn Bulgarian school, but above all it shows the powerful influence of the Bulgarians' national bible, i.e. Paisii's *History*.

A minor action by the adapter of Mavro Orbini's *Il regno degli Slavi* in the Russian redaction resulted in generations of Bulgarian students accepting (after Paisii Khilendarski) that Saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples had been Bulgarians, hence the language into which they had translated the Bible was the Bulgarian language. The situation did not change until after the fall of communism in Bulgaria, when Orbini's work was translated from the original Italian into Bulgarian.¹² However, let us return to the nineteenth-century linguistic and cultural context, whose roots grew from the work of Paisii the monk. The truth of the matter is that, following Paisii, the developing Bulgarian discourse accepted not only the Bulgarian appropriation of Slavdom's common heritage, namely the work of the brothers Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, but also the name Old Bulgarian for the Bulgarian redaction of Church Slavonic, and consequently included no awareness of the language's internal diversity. And although the Bulgarians in the early nineteenth century, like the other people-nations in the Balkans (Kamusella, 2019), moved away from Church

¹¹ “We were once the leaders of Slavdom, of that stupid Slavdom, we gave it books and enlightenment, and now destiny has designated us – the smallest – to revive it.”

¹² The whole of Mavro Orbini's work was translated into Bulgarian by Simeon Todorov and Elitsa Popova, and published in 2012 under the title *Царството на славяните: История от Дон Мавро Орбини от Рагуза Абат от Млетския орден* [The Realm of the Slavs: A History by Don Mavro Orbini from Ragusa, Venetian Abbot] (Mavro Orbini, 2012).

Slavonic and began introducing “vernacular speech” into the written language, they called it “simple Bulgarian”, thus upholding a continuation of the term “Bulgarian language”.

An interesting example of identity and language complications in the nineteenth century can be found in the biography and output of Georgi Sava Rakovski (1821–1867), a subject of the sultan and then, from 1841, a Greek citizen (Crampton, 1997), and at the same time a revolutionary calling on the Bulgarians to reject Hellenisation.¹³ Rakovski held very conservative views regarding the developing standard language, which is especially noticeable in his poetry, in which he uses a grandiose, archaising style (as if modelled on Katharevousa).¹⁴ His excellent knowledge of Greek is confirmed by his letters to Greek friends, written in Greek; he collaborated with Greeks, as he did with Serbs, in many areas. However, Rakovski’s press articles published in the multilingual periodical *Дунавский лебедь* [Danube Swan],¹⁵ founded in the Serbian capital of Belgrade in 1860, were actually written in language that was closer to the colloquial speech of his times. The situation of linguistic stratification that we see in the output of the author of *Горскы пѣтникъ* [Forest Wanderer] (1857) reflects the diversity of views regarding the future standard of the Bulgarian language in the period before its final normalisation,¹⁶ while also illustrating the continuity of the name.

¹³ In the Ottoman Empire, Hellenisation was quite a widespread identity path for many Slavs from the region as well as Aromanians (especially the urban group, i.e. the Cincari) and Albanians. Being a Greek meant a higher position in the hierarchy of the Rum (“Roman”) Millet of Orthodox Christians. The suggestion of resisting Hellenisation had already appeared in Paisii’s *History*, and in the first half of the nineteenth century it became part of the programme of the fight for an independent Bulgarian state after the Ottoman Sultan founded the Bulgarian Exarchate.

¹⁴ Proof of Rakovski’s conservative views on language is found in *Показалец или ръководство как да се изискват и издирят най-стари черти нашего бытия, языка, народопоклоения, старого ни правления, славнаго ни пришедствия и проч* [An Index or Guide on How to Extract and Study the Oldest Features of Our Existence, Language, National Origin, Our Old Rule, Our Glorious Coming, etc.], published in Odessa in 1859, whose archaic title contains case forms. A paper by Nikolai Aretov (2021) from the Institute of Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is an interesting attempt at demythologising Rakovski’s biography and oeuvre.

¹⁵ Founded by Georgi Sava Rakovski, *Дунавский лебедь* contained articles published in the local languages as well as French and Greek. French served to popularise the fight against the Greek-speaking elite of the Rum Millet for a Bulgarian autocephalous church among the European reading public. Greek was meant to popularise the idea among the (sizable) Greek-speaking audience in the Balkans outside the Kingdom of Greece; the local languages used by the editors promoted the pro-Russian and anti-Habsburg pan-Slavic idea, among other things.

¹⁶ According to Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa (Dąbek-Wirgowa, 1980, pp. 79–80), the first attempts at standardising orthography and grammar appeared in the 1830s. The orthography reform proposed by Marin Drinov (1838–1906) came into general use after 1878. Essentially, however, it was only *Речник на българския език* [Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language] (1895–1904) by Naïden Gerov (1823–1900) that consolidated the language’s foundation on *rayas’* speech.

A no less complicated identity and language situation was present among the Macedonians, an excellent nineteenth-century illustration of this being the biography and language choices of Grigor Prličev (1830–1893).¹⁷ And the point here is not that the two national discourses (Bulgarian and Macedonian) have a noticeable tradition of incorporating the author of *Skanderbeg* (1862, Σκενδέρμπεης) into Bulgarianness or Macedonianness, but an in-depth analysis of his linguistic and aesthetic functioning in Greekness, his ideological choice of Slavicness/Bulgarianness and, finally, his being rooted in the Ohrid localness (Detrez, 2012, pp. 259–268).

To some Bulgarian linguists, the fact that the Macedonian and Bulgarian languages belong to the eastern branch of the South Slavic languages is equivalent to the invalidation of the Macedonian language's distinctness. In the nineteenth century, however, when the standard for Bulgarian was developing, and in the second half of the nineteenth century, when attempts were made to create a Macedonian-Bulgarian language (Fridman, 2011, pp. 139–170), anything seemed possible. For Prličev, the “educated” Greekness that was also supported by aesthetic criteria was no longer viable in the face of political events (the death of the brothers Dimitrije and Konstantin Miladinov in Istanbul), while Slavicness/Bulgarianness had brought humiliation in connection with the failure caused by a translation of the *Iliad* that met with great criticism (Detrez, 2012, pp. 264–265).

The Macedonian illustration brings the realisation that the language discussions in the Balkans in the nineteenth century were often not just intellectual disputes or emotional debates between supporters of different options, but genuine human tragedies with no chance of a happy ending.

¹⁷ Grigor Prličev himself gives two dates of birth, 18 January 1830 and 1831, in his *Autobiography* (1893). Most researchers accept 1830 as his year of birth (Prličev, 1988, p. 11).

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Problem bilingwizmu (wielojęzyczności) na Bałkanach. Egzemplifikacja bułgarska i macedońska

Niniejszy artykuł jest w istocie próbą znalezienia szerszego językowo-tożsamościowego kontekstu dla twórczości Grigora Prličeva (1830/31–1893), do czego zobowiązuje pierwszy polski przekład jego drugiego poematu *Rzecz o Skanderbegu* (1862, Σκενδέρμπεης), którego autorką jest Małgorzata Borowska („Colloquia Humanistica” 10, 2021). Dramatyczne wybory językowo-tożsamościowe Prličeva zakorzenione w wielojęzyczności Bałkanów w XIX wieku, były pochodną całkowitej zmiany orientacji cywilizacyjno-kulturowej w kulturach bałkańskich. Egzemplifikacja bułgarska i macedońska została poprzedzona ilustracją serbską z pewnymi odniesieniami do greckiego kontekstu.

Słowa kluczowe: Grigor Prličev, tożsamość, wielojęzyczność, kultury bałkańskie, zmiana cywilizacyjna.

Note

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