

Vernacular Variety in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT--- *The aim of this paper is to provide the reader with better insight of vernacular L variety of language in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The paper will try to give some key points on diglossia and how diglossic community functions in different social situations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, paper will try to give some answers on pragmatics, language history, prestige and codification of vernacular variety in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

Keywords--- Diglossia, H and L varieties, vernacular, prestige, pragmatics, codification.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term diglossia is a linguistic situation, by which in a certain society there are two varieties that respectively coexist. In the most of the today's societies such linguistic phenomenon is present and will continue to exist. Likewise in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a long-lasting diglossic situation and diglossic community. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (further on B&H); there is a rather complex linguistic society. In following paragraph I will try to explain best I can historical background of such a complex structure of Bosnian language and varieties.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bosnian language is a one of the three language varieties which are used at the larger territory that encompass Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. All three varieties: Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian variety belong to the same language family tree, the East Slavonic tree of languages. These three varieties are very similar and to a certain degree share same vocabulary, grammar and history. People from these three countries can understand each other without any difficulty. Minor deviations can be observed as you move towards the exit borders of these countries, respectfully; towards Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia and Albania. Major differences among these three varieties could be traced back to the accent, slightly different vocabulary and register and the most obviously in uses. Before the existence of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian there was only one language Illyrian-Bosnian, but through the history and historical conquest (especially Ottoman 1463 -1878 and Austro-Hungarian 1878 - 1914 conquests, and later on German conquest 1941 - 1944) three varieties with different names come to the existence with lots of loan words. It is necessary to say that such defragmentation had political, religious and nationalistic implications which would finally lead to the dissolving of former Yugoslavia Federation and the war for the Independence of B&H. Out of this reconstruction, six new countries and six new languages appeared; B&H, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. Now let us turn to the focus of this paper; Bosnian variety.

3. USAGE AND PRAGMATICS

Bosnian variety is spoken at the part which generally covers whole territory of the northern Bosnia and southern part of country called Herzegovina; it has different dialects and accents but is generally mutually intelligible among the people across the country. There is language diglossia present and Bosnian has H and L varieties of language, which are ascribed to different uses and different social situations. High variety of Bosnian is, just like elsewhere, taught in schools, and if you are stranger and you are taking the lessons of Bosnian you are for sure being taught H variety of the language. This variety is confined to the official and formal situations like; political talk, television and radio talk, at work, at schools, administration, legal and judicial talk and other formal situations. On the other hand there is a low variety which is learned since birth and its uses are confined to the street, in talking to your friends, family and neighbors. Both varieties are acceptable, of course if used in appropriate situations. Low variety is more widespread and used more by the people who feel confident and relaxed when they speak it. If someone talked H variety during the situation where low variety is expected, people would consider such talk posh and pompous, except for the situation of meeting the people for the first time, then H variety is acceptable and somewhat demanding. In other uses people enjoy talking L variety which they consider as their vernacular language.

Even though, if observed from grammatical point of view, very poor and non-expressive L variety is preferred and considered more pragmatic and effective variety than H variety. When I say that L variety is poor, I am referring to the fact that sentences are usually short, very often grammatically incorrect – with missing verbs, and with poor vocabulary – containing numerous abbreviations and loans words. But on contrary, all this add up to the efficiency and pragmatics which is necessary for fast, brief and successful communication. People simply prefer to speak L variety in daily life, shopping, talking to family, friends and neighbors.

4. DIFFERENT USES IN DISCOURSE

As mentioned before H variety of Bosnian language is restricted to the formal occasions, while L variety, considered vernacular, is assigned to numerous social situations, which include relations to the people you know and in most cases if you are not familiar with people, if you choose L variety people consider it as a sign of closeness, warmth and friendly approach. Another situation which personally fazes me out is the fact that people in Bosnia start chit-chat conversation with unfamiliar people very easily. Some people feel confident and enjoy talking L variety to such extent that they even started to modify it. This modification usually considers the change in which people basically take the last two letters or syllable from the back of the word and place it at the beginning of the word. This modification in English is widely known as slang or street talk, jargon, but in Bosnian it is called “Satrovacki” which has prospects to become even lower variety of the Low variety. People use “Satrovacki” out of sheer fun, to entertain themselves and friends, and to make language and communication more interesting and colorful. Below there is a table 1. which gives the examples of the words which have gone through modification of being used through “Satrovacki” manner:

Table1.

Modified word - replacing word	Original word Replaced word	Meaning
Fuka, fuza	“Kafa” - coffee	Coffee which is drank slowly, drop by drop, like infusion
Tebra	“Brat” - brother	Addressing to a brother
Ganci	“Cigan” - gypsy	Derogatory meaning for gypsy
Repa	“Pare” - money	Money, cash
Tipla	“Platiti” – pay	To pay
Mojne	“Nemoj” – don’t	Don’t do it
Lapo	“Pola” – half	Half of something

Many other swearwords, insulting and derogatory words, which native speakers understand and use among themselves, but disguise them in order so that people or strangers who do not belong to that society may not understand. The variety of “Satrovacki” is used to a certain extent all over the country, but especially in capital Sarajevo where it is widely used, and also in some other smaller cities like Zenica.

When it comes to the younger generations, influenced by the new technology like internet, Facebook, Twitter and other multimedia channels, they have their own abbreviations and loan words to communicate, which are most certainly to become a part of Bosnian language one day. When observed through socio-linguistic point of view there is enormous gap between older generations and younger generations, to such extent that there is no mutual intelligibility among them. Table 2 below will provide us with examples of words which young generations use daily but older generations cannot understand.

Table 2.

Newly introduced word	Meaning
“Zaguglati”	To search something using Google
“Lajkovati”	To like something or sign “thumb up”
“Zipovati”	To zip a file or folder
“Čilati”	To chill out, have a rest
“Čatovati”	To chat via internet, cell phone, web page, messenger
“Šerovati”	To share something, file or program etc
“Kruzati”	To drive car slowly through city, cruise with car

Many, many more loan words related to new technology or connected with modern life style which younger generations understand, use and introduce to the standard language.

5. PRESTIGE

When it comes to the aspect of the prestige, the H variety of Bosnian language is more prestigious and its existence is out of any doubt, since all written heritage is in form and style of the H variety. While the L variety, considered vernacular, is more widespread and preferred by large masses of people is not as prestigious as the H variety. It is out of doubt that vernacular L variety will continue to exist as long as there are people who are speaking it, but which changes it may go through is matter of time and influences yet to come. As we can see from following quote language change is irrevocably connected to the changes through which society undergoes:

“Language change is a historical process rooted in synchronic social dynamics. In countless communicative interactions between individuals, novel linguistic variants can emerge, diffuse widely, become integrated into the grammar of the speech community and be transmitted to future generations.” Escobar (2010).

6. CODIFICATION AND ELABORATION

According to our course book by Hudson, in order for a language to become standard, it needs to go through four phases; selection, codification, elaboration of function and acceptance. Standard Bosnian language, H variety has gone through all four phases successfully, unlike the L variety, L variety has gone only through the phase of acceptance, and it was accepted by the people and therefore; what is considered vernacular language in B&H is in fact substandard and low variety of the language.

7. CONCLUSION

The vernacular variety of Bosnian language is widely spread and used in Bosnian homes, streets, market places and all other social situation where there is no need for being formal and official. People of B&H do not exactly like to speak standard Bosnian language which is used in formal situations. If they do not have to, Bosnian people enjoy relaxing and non stressful vernacular street talk or jargon, especially when talking to their family members, friends and neighbors. By talking vernacular language Bosnian people express warmth; friendly intentions, generosity, free spirit, humorous nature, and especially sense of national belonging. Bosnian vernacular variety is however going through certain changes which are imposed by the introduction and use of new technology and internet. New loan words are finding their way through popular and modern life styles, which younger generations lead.

8. REFERENCES

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