

SEMIOSIS OF THE SCRIPT

Cyrillic and Latin

writing in the Serbian and Croatian national discourse on the Slavic background

Summary

Marshall McLuhan introduced a very valuable methodological remark to the theory of media, which is known as: The medium is the message. This means that the choice of a communication means itself affects the transferred content and the recipients' perception. This is how I approached writing. A collection of letters of Slavic alphabets in certain social and political situations is no longer just a tool that makes it possible to convey thoughts and verbal language in a graphical way into permanent material such as paper or computer screen. The writing type selected by leaders (writing system, orthography) is becoming an element of the national culture canon and through education, members of a specific community are socialised, while expanding the scope of their perception with identity functions. Ethnic and/or national self-identification, despite the undergoing changes, requires a collection of symbols in each case that are recognised as one's own. The most frequently-listed elements of belonging include country and language but places of memories, personalities, history, statues, literature, confessions are also associated with them. In my monograph, writing will be added to the above list. Its history, creation and development are not found in the school curriculum. A user, not being aware of it, learns a given writing system during the first stage of education, specifically becoming sensitive to the form of letters that characterise a given mother tongue, while making them used to immediately recognising text that is written in their native language. The acquired writing customs remain in the muscle memory, which makes any changes of handwriting or learning new writing varieties very difficult. To make radical decisions regarding changing the writing system (similarly to orthography), a special period in a community's life is required. Political and cultural decisions cover many social strategies and symbols that are imposed within the scope of reforms or revolutionary transitions. The reasons for defining symbolic values or their replacement may be internal and may be associated with processes of developing societies, but they may also be caused by an actual or presumed external risk. Defending the nation and its canon in such a case is the main objective of a country. Breakthrough moments activate aspects of the life which are not noticeable at times of stable functioning of a society. As a result, neutral elements are subjected to semantisation, becoming characters. Hence, writing that is an integral part of the relation between culture and language is no longer a string of single graphic

symbols and instead, it adopts the function of a character. Such high rank of writing results from processes that have been taking place from the point of its appearance, from the memory-related function and mystical attempts of explaining reality, to the integrative role in bureaucratic countries that required lists, documents and chronicles. The writing system is a guardian of memory not only of particular units. It ensures contact with the past that is constantly updated and subjected to assessment due to the needs of contemporary recipients.

The critical analysis of discourse I have applied, specifically according to T. van Dijk, enabled me to disclose mechanisms of ideological occurrences. It is worth noting that discourse standards are common and their beginnings date back to the 19th century texts dedicated to developing European nations of the modern era. Models of national discourses turned out to be so effective that they are referred to today, when national community and elements of its cultural canon are discussed, also in the processes of forming new ethnic self-identifications and attempts of empowerment. The key stages and elements of this type of ideology include creation of a formal and non-formal pressure group that will be able to articulate its convictions on behalf of the entire society, while retaining that it is supported by the authority of science, law and religion/confession. The above group indicates clear oppositions between itself and the opponents that may be composed of external “enemies”, usually the closest neighbouring countries, but also the government that acts against social will and representatives of official science, which is clearly evidenced in the material being the subject of my analysis. This specific sensitivity regarding the aspect of research social and human sciences, and most of all linguistics, is an immanent characteristic recognised in national or nationalistic agitation. According to this rhetoric, historians and linguists are responsible for hiding facts, absence of their appropriate interpretation, collaboration with governments that retain a “false” image of the history and geopolitical systems. Their organised manipulation of data that is finally put in handbooks and dictionaries leaves the nation in cognitive inertia. Hence, the purpose of the group of activists is to spot such activities, learn the actual version of history and emphasising the positive aspects of all attributes of the cultural canon. Due to the character of the discussed material, I will not analyse verbal communication and non-verbal communication means such as voice tone, timbre, accenting, gestures. Nevertheless, the graphical form itself provides a broad insight into the used propaganda measures. In the Serbian case, if publications or websites are strictly in favour of the Right wing and refer to Orthodox values, texts are published only using the Cyrillic alphabet and there is no possibility to choose a Latin version. This is a very common practice on the Serbian Internet. Titles emphasised with appropriate font use lexicalised forms, usually referring to the semantic aspect of war, such as: hazard, occupation, rape, imposition, attack, defence. Texts exhibit a propaedeutic character. This pedagogisation, as A. Gramsci would define it, forces to construct a distance between the agitators and the society. In terms of the linguistic form, this shall be understood as creating clear and unambiguous statements but with explicit characteristics of the scientific and publicist style. The syntax of complex sentences underlines the importance of the issue but also the professional and objective approach. Indexing data and graphical listing of text content, important from the point of view of the agitators are to be used for the same purpose.

Binary comparison of “we” with positive added value, and “others”, foreigners, enemies always portrayed as worse involve specific mental structures expressed with language. The order applicable in Serbian discourse, i.e. Serbian – Orthodox – Slavic – Eastern – Cyrillic alphabet, is compared with negative listing: Croatian – Catholic – Western – Latin alphabet. Croatian discourse, which is understandable, uses the same scheme but with different values. Both series may be pragmatically and rhetorically modified and enriched to generate a stronger emotional effect. In Serbian texts, the sequence is willingly supplemented with objectively pejorative expressions that are to discredit the enemy, such as: fascism, fascist and communist. Croats in their propaganda on the other hand, retain a mythologised image of a regressive Balkan neighbour and barbarian, dreaming of creating the Great Serbia, referring to anachronic concept of a (Southern) Slavic community. In both cases, the

methods of self-presentation are identical since they originate from one romantic historical and philosophical source. Presentation of ancestors of the contemporary nations announce future decisions and fate of the ethnic group. Original culture (in the Serbian version it is associated with a broader Slavic context), which was generated as a result of intellectual work of the most recognised members of the community, must be respected and protected. In this regard, the pressure group applies verified discourse methods. Pedagogisation does not consist only of sharing knowledge but also of using enforcement and demanding forms, hence texts usually feature declarations that acting on behalf of the entire nation, group members will: make requests and petitions, follow/observe the government's actions and actions of scholars, etc.

Writing selected as one of attributes in an identity-related approach unifies the nation but also allows to recognise an alien that uses their own graphical system. Conscious choice of the writing style is a declaration of belonging to a specific civilisation community. Its imposing is an act of religious, economic and military domination. Isolated writing systems (Chinese, Japanese, Georgian, etc.) evidence historical or ideological separation. Using a certain writing system is a proof of being a member of an ethnic, national and supranational community. My intention was to show how the issue of a writing system is thematised, which when acquiring an integrative sense, enters into a relation with the national language and the entire spectrum of the national canon. Having an individual writing system or original orthography is treated as a constructive ethnic value itself. Their symbolism is compared with national symbols, which is to ensure recognisably for the community itself, and beyond it. Emotional approach to writing is created by lexicalisation that helps collective recipients to retain its advantages. All discussed examples may be reduced to several linguistic measures. National writing is the most beautiful, suited best to the spoken variety of the standard language, easiest to acquire, it is best for handwriting and typing, it is easier to read – these are expressions that refer to the practical and aesthetic values. At the cultural and emotional level, writing system and orthography unite the contemporary nation with the past, which is presented as a success streak. They also determine geopolitical and confession choices of the existing community members. Failures are not mentioned on purpose.

I have chosen the Slavic region for analysing the matter of semantics of writing, however I have evidenced to what extent it is an imaginary creation. Countries resided by ethnic groups and nations that confess to being Slavs do not constitute a specific of exceptional territory. Models and processes that take place here are common for all writing societies. The characteristic feature of the Slavic region is the fact that writing discourses and orthographic choices have taken an important place when modern nations were forming. They resulted from two opposite tendencies: on the one hand, it was attempted to create a supra-ethnic community, while on the other, a homogeneous nation was the ideal. Often, the same activists followed both of the above trends at the same time. The impossibility to accommodate extreme tendencies in the 19th century was not the reason for ceasing the search for the golden mean. Development of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia is the evidence that the myth about communication and ideology-related mutuality of Slavs is still alive. The fall of socialist countries, geopolitical transitions as well as changes in global economy have restored the necessity for redefining canons, sourcing one's own independent identity and its symbols as well as creating a unique brand of country. Within the scope of new community-related notions, the issues of language and writing have been thematised and semanticised once again.