PERSISTENCE AND CHANGE
Current features of Serbo-Croatian
and how they affect the training
of interpreters.

By
Ljiljana Avirovic
SSLM Trieste, University of Trieste

IS CROATIAN CHANGING ITS FACE?

"New politicians have brought a new language
onto the new political scene", says Zagreb
linguist Dubravko Skiljan. At the same time he
claims that the structure of the language has
remained very similar to what it was before, and
that the changes introduced, in the language used
in newspapers for example, basically involve
lexical changes, especially the re-emergence of
earlier meanings of words which had been used
with a different acceptation (1).

What is going on? Yet again, the Croatian
language is caught up in the turmoil caused by
changes in the political system. It is difficult to
say what the consequences will be in the
immediate future, but it is in any case necessary
to recognize just how much Croatian is affected
by political language. Much is currently being
written on the future of Croatian and several
books have already been published on the topic,
one of which deals exclusively with the language
they all link what is occurring to the language to
historical changes (2).

In order to have a clearer idea of what is
happening at present, it is worthwhile describing
the situation as it was before. The postwar period
in Yugoslavia was characterized by political
intervention in specific areas of the language. The
process of territorial and political unification
called for the creation of a new, purely
ideological language to reflect the new cultural
and social homogeneity achieved by the Federal
Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The political
language was quickly followed by technical terms
for the different social and administrative
structure of the new state. The Croatian
language, and its close relationship with Serbian,
has long been a major obstacle. The country's
official language was given the name Serbo-
Croatian, creating a new combined form and
assimilating two languages which are in fact very
similar. Croatian words describing situations that
were either controversial or not accepted by the
new system of government were eliminated from
common usage. In this way, the original meaning
of these words, which had previously denoted
referents that were not directly political, was
also lost (e.g. kusalic = test tube; svratiste =
inn; zacetnik = promoter; zbogom = farewell;
slovored = alphabet). The reutilization of these
terms has often led to censorship and self-
censorship. The situation is in some ways similar
to that which occurred with the revisionism
among the left-wing intelligentsia in Western
Europe in the 1980s.

Let us, however, go back to Croatian. Eminent
linguists like Stjepan Babic were not only unable
to find sufficient space to express their ideas on
the nature of and changes in the language, but
they were also considered a danger because of
their destabilizing effect on the socio-political
unity that the state was trying to stress (3). It is
now realized that they were not attempting to
upset the linguistic system, but merely wished to
study the historical development of the two
languages. They noted that Croatian and Serbian
were very alike, but that each language had its
own particular characteristics which had to be
studied to prevent artificial barriers to the use
and development of the language and to contribute
to its wealth.

Babic underlined how official intervention in
language matters in the Socialist Republic of
Croatia was always carried out by politicians,
without the help of specialists in the field. This
type of approach naturally had nothing to do with
linguistic research - it was merely a
discriminatory factor as regards political
orthodoxy, i.e. in clearly fixing the boundaries of
cultural and ideological membership (4).

Let us take a quick look at the politico-
economic terminology employed in the 1980s in
Yugoslavia, with particular regard to the changes that occurred, which interpreters must take into consideration.

A frequently recurring word, for example, is 'ministar' (minister). The initials standing for the Autonomous Work Unit SIZ (Samoupravna Interesa Zajednica) and the Republican Autonomous Work Unit RSIZ (Republicka Samoupravna Interesa Zajednica) will be less widely used as it is intended to reorganize these organizations and perhaps change their names. The Associated Work Organizations (OUR) and their myriad of Local Associated Work Organizations (OOUR and SOUR) also look likely to disappear fairly soon. The interpreting of this type of terminology was a major difficulty and now one must await the appearance of another type of expression.

There is now a tendency to use in place of the word 'opozicija', which had strong political connotations, the word 'oporba' (from 'opratel' se = to resist, contrast), in which the traditional idea of opposition, i.e. of facing and therefore deviation, is replaced by that of a dialectical contrast. The word 'rukovodstvo' (from 'rakovoditi' = to lead by the hand, guide), used to denote top-level politicians, is currently being replaced by the word 'vodstvo', even though its semantic value has nothing to do with a governing party.

Many words will reacquire their real semantic role. Some people still use the term 'predsjednik' (president) to denote the newly-elected president of the Croatian Parliament, but others now use the term 'celnik' (from 'celo' = forehead and therefore to be at the head of), which is reappearing after being rejected because it had been used to denote the nationalist leaders with the ordinary meaning of boss. This is not the place to discuss whether this meaning is ambiguous - what is of greatest interest here is that the word does not appear in either the Croatian or Serbian-Italian dictionary (5) currently in use and can therefore present certain translation difficulties for the translator or interpreter whose mother-tongue is not Croatian.

While reasons of a mainly political nature were behind the attack on certain words, the refusal to use others had and has its roots in the desire for a national identity, which is committed to protecting itself from an excessive use of foreign words. This desire has also clashed with the abundance of words of Latin and German origin, and the influence of Turkish. These borrowings are so deeply entrenched in the spoken and literary language that it sometimes appears a mosaic rich in colour. The systematic Croatization of words of foreign origin, carried out without reference to their specific context or historical roots, has not brought about any major alterations to the language. It has, however, frequently involved a drop in the amount of information intrinsic in the source language from which the words were changed or translated, generating hybrids that are practically unusable in similar contexts. They are, therefore, a hindrance rather than efficient tools of linguistic purification.

Croatian has often assumed the more frequently used words of foreign origin through phonetic transcription, using them alongside existing words of Croatian origin with the same meaning. There was recently a heated debate as to the legitimacy of this process between purists and those in favour of encouraging linguistic innovation at any cost. On this problem, which involves and often ends up by imposing a standardized use of language, here is a quote from the more elastic observations of Stjepan Babić, who proposes a "concertinaed" use of the lexical wealth: "In language not everything can be solved using scientific processes... there is a certain arbitrariness to spelling after all, as in language. Sometimes there are reasons for one solution or another and it is very difficult from a linguistic viewpoint to eliminate what is wrong. People expect linguists to say that just one thing is right and that everything else is wrong. They will now have to get used to dualism and the possibility of choice" (6).

Which solution is being sought? The general insecurity over the use of one word rather than another and correct spelling is often due to the lack of reference works. To be able to study continuity in the use of words, it is first of all necessary to remove, as far as is possible, the ideological filters that have formed when it comes to matters of language. For this to happen, however, one needs reference books that provide the necessary guidance and assistance.

WORKING AIDS

It remains to be seen how the above-mentioned problems will be solved in the Croatian spelling guide by Stjepan Babić, Bozidar Fink and Milan Mogus, the publication of which is planned for the autumn of 1990. This guide, which has had quite a troubled past, reappears after nineteen years suppression.

The "Pravopis hrvatskospjektnog knjizevne zvuka" (spelling guide to literary Croatian-Serbian) by Jonke and Stevanovic (7) had been in use since 1960, but was considered unsatisfactory as regards both its spelling rules and the accompanying dictionary. A new spelling guide...
was therefore required. The Zagreb committee responsible for language and spelling rules, comprising the specialists Stjepan Babic, Dalibor Brozovic, Zeljko Bujas, Bozidar Finka, Ivo Franges, Ljudevit Jonke, Radoslav Katicic, Tomislav Ladan, Milan Mogus, Stjepan Pavesic and Josip Silic, commissioned Babic, Finka and Mogus to write a new guide. At a routine meeting of the committee in May 1971, the authors outlined their general approach, asking that the spelling guide be allowed, as far as was possible, to incorporate Croatian tradition and its linguistic and spelling practice so that readers would not encounter serious problems or unnecessary difficulty in using it. The committee approved the general rules outlined by the authors; the Association of Croatian Writers, the Department of Literary Croatian of the Faculty of Philosophy, and the Language Institute of the Yugoslavian Academy of the Sciences and Arts in Zagreb all followed the committee in giving their go-ahead for the writing and publication of this work (8).

Yet the guide was never published. In the wake of Croatian nationalist disturbances that same year, in which Matica Hrvatska in Zagreb - the organization sponsoring the project - was involved, the 40,000 copies of the guide were destroyed. Just a few hundred copies of the entire edition were saved and these copies, which did not contain any index, preface, introduction or abbreviations, were not circulated. The guide was then published on the basis of these incomplete copies in London in 1972 by "Nova Hrvatska" (New Croatia), the most important newspaper for Croatian emigrants. The guide will now be published in its 1971 version, without any changes, in order to provide a complete picture of the linguistic situation starting from the point at which the authors had arrived. This will make it possible to judge the theoretical and functional worth of the text.

*Pravopisni prirucnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* (spelling guide for Croatian or Serbian), by Vladimir Anic and Josip Silic, was published back in 1986, but it has not been adopted by the Novi Sad committee (9) and many people consider it unsatisfactory. It has, however, made an important contribution towards the transcription and transliteration of names. If foreign names come from Neo-Latin languages, they are written in the same way as in the original language (e.g. Nicola Abbagnano, Francesco Appendini, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Charles Baudelaire). If the names come from a language that uses the Cyrillic alphabet or another alphabet, the rules are given for their transcription and transliteration (e.g. Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, Fjodor Mihailovic Dostojevski, Pjotr Illic Cajkovski, etc.).

The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Croatian or Serbian, conceived by Duro Danicic and first published by the Yugoslavian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb in 1880-1882, is still the most complete reference work. Recently revised and prepared for publication, it is an indispensable tool for obtaining a good knowledge of the language. It is, however, difficult for an interpreter or translator to make everyday use of it.

An etymological dictionary of the Croatian or Serbian language was also compiled by Petar Skok and edited by Mirko Deanovic and Ljudevit Jonke (10) in several volumes, the first of which dates back to 1971. This too is a specialist reference work.

Of indispensable assistance for interpreters and translators is the "Rjecnik stranih rijeci" (dictionary of foreign words) by Brdaljub Klaic (11), which is a work in progress, i.e. it can be up-dated and is a valid starting-point for the creation of other specialized dictionaries. The work is also of interest for its extuming of words of foreign origin used in the past (up until the 18th century). This results from the author's special knowledge of the history of Croatian literature, a subject he has carefully explored in his well-known series of volumes that make up "Pet stoljeca hrvatske knjizevnosti" (five centuries of Croatian literature) (12).

An easy work to consult is the "Frazeologski recnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika" (phraseological dictionary of Serbian or Croatian) by Josip Mateic (13). It is the first phraseological dictionary that makes an attempt to analyze phraseological constructions in Serbian or Croatian, explaining the meaning of each expression with first-hand quotations from well-known authors and bibliographical references. The "Skolski recnik" (school dictionary) of standard Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian by Mirjana Jocic and Vera Vasic was published recently (14). It is expected to be used in elementary and middle schools, but, given its characteristics and the intentions of its authors, it ought to have a wider use. For a whole list of technical reasons it is too early to go into now, it is difficult to judge this work and whether or not it can be used outside of schools.

A monolingual dictionary (in one volume) by Moskovljevic recently came out in Belgrade after being suppressed for around twenty years and its usage has yet to be officially sanctioned. There is still the serious problem, therefore, of the lack of a monolingual dictionary for Croatian. It goes without saying how difficult this makes things for translators and interpreters.

From this overview of the main linguistic aids
that have been published in Yugoslavia in the last few decades, it is clear that there are numerous gaps which need to be filled, first and foremost that of a monolingual dictionary. The work of the interpreter and translator suffers as a result of the uncertainties - a problem felt by both Yugoslavians and others wishing to study Serbo-Croatian.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE INTERPRETER

Why is Serbo-Croatian a language, but not just one language? On what scientific facts and social interests is our linguistic unit based? Do the differences and variations impoverish or enrich the literature, and divide or unite the four peoples for whom Serbo-Croatian is their mother tongue? Would it not be better if the experts made less rules and projects, and provided more studies and explanations? What does the future hold for the ikavka pronunciation in the Socialistic Republic of Serbia? Is the double alphabet a source of chaos or supremacy? Why do studio guests on television speak more correctly than the professionals working for the television?

These questions asked by Asim Peco (15) sum up part of our problems. Even if they have all the necessary requirements, interpreters working with Serbo-Croatian will have to bring their linguistic knowledge up to date once more. The fact that until 1989 interpreting booths were designated as Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian was due among other things to the uniformity in the politico-economic, scientific and literary languages. Now that words that were once banned (e.g. casnik, vjezbenik, prievunski casnik) are being used again in Croatian, the booth that was previously designated Serbo-Croatian must be specified as either Serbian or Croatian. Naturally, it is not a question of there being two languages, but simply that certain differences do exist between the two languages. The majority of words and the syntax will remain the same, and for a foreigner the result will be identical. It is part of the normal cultural training to get students used to the Cyrillic alphabet and the variations in Serbian and Croatian, without exclusion; and the two alphabets should be used equally.

Interpretation in Yugoslavia is based on practice as theoretical training is not very well organized. The fact that interpreting theory is linked to that of translation, upon which it leans heavily, is not accidental. Only a fraction of the theoretical studies have been carried out on interpretation and the book "Novi Original" by Miodrag Sibinovic (16) is no exception. The book does, however, make an important contribution and it opens the way for more detailed studies, in addition to assisting in the learning of a job which is considered one of the most difficult thinking professions.

A great many good interpreters working in Europe are Yugoslavian as regards their origins, tradition or culture. It is often said the Slav people have an innate ability for the study, learning and also application and interpreting of foreign languages. This is firstly explained by the fact that the country comprises several different nations and therefore languages, each of which is spoken by only a relatively small number of people. This predisposition towards the study of foreign languages results, therefore, from the need to be able to communicate and to adapt to different foreign languages. The presence of various linguistic components and lexical borrowings in interpreters whose mother tongue is a Slavic language is perhaps one of the keys to explaining their successful interpreting and ability to decodify automatically. If the young interpreters working in Yugoslavia today had the necessary aids (particularly reference works) and if they had - which they do not - a specific course of study for consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, it is normal in other European countries, their work would be made a great deal easier.

They do, however, have something in their favour. While Yugoslavian interpreters working in Yugoslavia and other European countries do not have a suitable training in the techniques of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation (unless they have acquired it abroad), they do usually have a degree and doctorate in linguistic science and a very good command of the language into which they have to interpret. So in Yugoslavia interpreters will interpret from the foreign language into their mother tongue and vice versa, even changing languages. Indeed, Yugoslavian interpreters very often translate from more than two languages into their mother tongue. This leads to the strange situation whereby, in certain cases, interpreters prefer to translate into their first, second or third language (if this is how knowledge of the languages has been classified) rather than into their mother tongue. This is not something to be underestimated as the culture and general knowledge of a language are often decisive factors in the booth. The intention is not, of course, to underestimate the importance of delivery techniques, but to highlight the need for the interpreter to possess all the various characteristics, first and foremost of which is an excellent linguistic knowledge, but which must also be accompanied by a good general education.

In order to underline the communicative
importance of interpretation, the implications of this apparently simple situation must be considered. It must first of all be stated that the physical world is not identical for everyone and that a people's language, i.e. their culture, also depends on their historical and geographical situation. From a linguistic viewpoint, Yugoslavians are destined to be translators as the Slavic languages of the south are of scarce importance in international communications. The problems arise when interpreters have to transmit the cultural components of another country. They then find themselves with the difficult task of conveying aspects of this culture to those who are listening, using linguistic tools that did not develop as an expression of the culture itself and are not, therefore, one could say, qualified to describe it adequately. This task is often fulfilled only partially, which is most apparent when one wants to describe characteristics of the everyday life of a people, i.e. their food, history, religion, economy and socio-political relationships.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE

Some linguists from Belgrade have studied the problem of the theory of translation and consequent and simultaneous interpretation. They have always linked the history of translation theory and translation theory itself to the problem of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. In Miodrag Sibinovic's recent book "Novi original", there are several pages devoted to consecutive interpretation, which is considered one of the most difficult forms of oral translation and is divided into consecutive interpretation without notes and consecutive interpretation with notes. There is another very common form of interpretation which the author calls "ping-pong interpretation", i.e. in both directions - from the foreign language into the mother tongue and vice versa. The detailed description of these different types of interpretation and a careful study of the psychological and linguistic problems led the author to the conclusion that each of the different stages of interpretation, i.e. listening, memorizing and delivery, are of equal importance for the understanding of what the speaker is saying. Every language has its own rules of intonation, most of which are known and are of help in the training of consecutive interpreters. An interpreter whose mother tongue is Italian, for example, should not use the same intonation when translating into Serbo-Croatian. The problem is less marked in Western Europe, where interpreters tend only to interpret into their mother tongues. The importance of intonation is underlined by the Polish psychologist Schefcuk, who is quoted by Sibinovic. After considerable experimental research, Schefcuk noted, "the learning of a sentence decreases in relation to changes in stress and intonation; when the reading is neutral, i.e. without any stress, the results drop by 35-55%, and when the stress is wrong by 72-87%. The reason for this is that word stress helps to divide the segments of meaning and makes it easier for us to remember them" (17).

With regard to the decodification from Italian into Serbo-Croatian, the result is directly proportional to the topic of the original text. The scanty knowledge of a foreign culture very often leads to a wrong consecutive interpretation, not through the subjective inability of a student to manipulate the language, but because of a lack of objective knowledge of the context to which the words belong. An interesting example recorded by Sibinovic is that of the eminent Russian theoretist Fjurik Mignar-Belorucev (18), regarding the results of an experiment carried out on final-year students at the Faculty of Translation. During simultaneous interpretation, twenty-two students heard through their headphones three groups of words in French - numbers, expressions commonly used by speakers (such as 'from this lofty tribune', 'to support', etc.) and a selection of words from the socio-political language. After 5-6 exercises, lasting twenty minutes, during which each group of words was worked on separately (the numbers read first in Russian then in French, followed by the commonly-used expressions and lastly the socio-political vocabulary), the students had few problems, all of them translating 90-100% of the words they heard. The mistakes (words not translated) were made by students with slower reactions and usually at the end of the exercises. During the interpretation of the socio-political vocabulary (the last group of words), the students were suddenly given numbers. This surprise introduction of words from another semantic system was also repeated during the interpretation of the commonly-used expressions. The inclusion of a number in French resulted on every occasion in it being either wrongly translated or left out altogether. Either the word from the 'extraneous' system or the word immediately after it in the known system was omitted. The introduction of the number in Russian caused less problems. Subsequent exercises with the surprise inclusion of words from a different semantic system and different topic caused fewer and fewer mistakes, although certain signs of difficulty (mistakes, omissions and slowing up) persisted for quite some time.
This example clearly shows that the problem is a general one; in the case of less well-known cultures, the problem often becomes very acute. This can result in the complete paralysis of interpreters who are able to translate even very difficult sentences when they know the topic well enough. Let us leave aside the problem of the correct, or rather almost always incorrect, interpretation of surnames, which can often, as in the case of numbers, provide absurd results. The normal teaching of a language must, therefore, include different semantic contexts, using different types of exercises: the written translation of a text that is read or listened to on tape; the translation of a dictated text; specialist word exercises; transformation exercises; micro-speech exercises; visual comprehension of a text and counting aloud exercises; complex listening exercises (counting aloud and memorizing the text one listens to at the same time); and rapid delivery exercises.

A prerequisite for simultaneous interpretation is the ability on the part of the interpreter to speak and listen at the same time, an ability which can be improved by practice. There is nothing to stop a student who speaks another language, say Italian, from interpreting well into Croatian or Serbian. One comes across cases in teaching where the powers of expression and communication of students are rather modest in relation to their grammatical knowledge. They can overcome this shortcoming by using the "rapid translation" method. Rapid translation is nothing more than the logical result of the automatic application of existing predisposed abilities. The ability to decodify and recodify a sentence is a prerequisite for an interpreter to be able to reach virtual bilingualism. Yet this can only be achieved through a constant, dogged use of both languages.

SIGNS AND SYSTEMS

It is well known that all interpreters create their own way of note-taking for consecutive interpretation or, more frequently, adapt an existing system to suit their own needs and capabilities. The choice between taking notes in the source or target language depends on the interpreter's preference for one language or the other. Here, too, the systems vary from interpreter to interpreter, but very often a sort of "interlingua" is created from which the message is then decodified. Note-taking in consecutive interpretation is based on the vertical system, the system of abbreviations using letters and the system using symbols, but it is elastic enough for it to be able to be adapted to suit the individual characteristics of each interpreter.

After examining the various forms of note-taking for interpretation in Serbo-Croatian, Sibinovic arrived at a system which Serbo-Croatian, which is rather complex in the way it establishes the relationship of cause and effect, could generally apply in a compound sentence, as well as between two syntactically independent sentences. The relationship of cause and effect is indicated by a line - everything above the line is cause, below the line effect. Oblique direction lines identify the sense of the message, which is often quite long. In this way it is possible to quickly note down a sentence that is not very long, but complicated and full of figures and particular references(19). The sentence examined is as follows: "U protekla dva meseca vrednost jugoslovenskog izvoza je oko 339 miliona dolara, a vrednost jugoslovenskog uvoza oko 396 miliona dolara". One note-taking solution could be as follows:

Translated into English, the sentence is: "In the last two months the value of Yugoslavian exports was around $339 million, while the value of Yugoslavian imports was around $396 million". Here now is the same sentence, using the system most commonly adopted by our students of Serbo-Croatian:
As can be seen, it is quite a bit simpler. The student has used three signs (✉ for exports, ✐ for imports, and ‒ for around) and jotted down the sentence in a very short time. The automatic use of the oblique line system guarantees two results of primary importance: a) as a result of the very nature of note-taking based on the principle of contraction (the reducing of a message to its essential parts) and with the aid of general symbols, the speed of note taking is greatly increased, i.e. the completeness of the information is ensured; b) presented in this symbolic fashion, the message taken from the source language becomes a neutral text which, when reproduced in the target language, is expressed more spontaneously, i.e. without being affected by the source language. Interference between the two languages is reduced as the mind of the interpreter is quickly able to reconstruct the sentence using the structures of the target language on the basis of concise, but meaningful signs and the intonation of the speaker.

The two aspects of the training of an interpreter analysed above, i.e. the creation of an efficient system of signs and the quest for non-interference and the relative procedures to try and achieve that, are mentioned to underline the need to create a profitable relationship between language theory and interpretation theory, and also between specific interpreting techniques and the general education of the interpreter.

Recent events concerning Serbo-Croatian have in some ways accentuated the age-old controversy as to the existence of one or two languages, the relationship between them and their autonomy. Yet they are also giving rise as is demonstrated by the recent flurry of books of a linguistic nature - to indispensable research, providing new, more flexible methodologies or critically reviewing work carried out in the past.

NOTES
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