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Ethnographic accounts of linguistic issues in the Yugoslav successor states



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*Ethnographic accounts of linguistic issues
in the Yugoslav successor states*

Guest editor
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Ethnographic accounts of linguistic issues in the Yugoslav successor states: An introduction

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Doing ethnographic linguistics (or linguistic ethnography) in the area of what used to be Yugoslavia is both a challenging and a promising undertaking. Challenging, in that there are so many ideological traps to take into consideration. Promising, in that there are so many complex matters to take a closer look at. These matters, even when exclusively realized in linguistic means, may have great influence on people's everyday political, cultural, and social meaning-making. Especially so, as indexical relations and the ideological premises and effects of choosing to use one linguistic realization over the other, has played an important role for all speech communities in the region.

As is well known from many accounts, doing linguistics can be a highly political undertaking. It bears manifold potential traps even when not adhering to a specific ideological stance –ideological stance being the commonest problem. This is true especially, but not only, for the language debates over the successor standards and semi-standards of former Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian (Kordić 2010; Gröschel 2009; Bugarski 2012 to name just a few). Linguistic encounters on Southeastern Europe both within and outside the former Yugoslav lands have been able to study and contribute to a wide range of language planning activities in the region over the past decades (Friedman 1998; many of the contributions in Schaller 1997; Toporišič 1997; Kamusella 2016). This possibility of linguistics being used as a political tool is exponentially increased in times of ideological debates based on nationality, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity-making. Such debates have been plentiful in ex-Yugoslavia and they add up to an “extremely interesting and complex language situation” as Milorad Radovanović and Randall A. Major (2001: 2) rightly put it.

In this sense, looking at the research outcomes of language studies from the last couple of decades on a meta-level, we realize how linguistics itself is an interesting object of ethnographic accounts in former Yugoslavia and its successor states. Both side-taking as well as deliberately impartial accounts assuming different stances on the relationship of language and nationality, for example, are necessarily embedded in their political and historical context. The decision to adhere or not to the claim of different varieties of former Serbo-Croatian being categorized as national languages of the newly founded states, makes a difference both on research impacts and the careers of individual scholars.

What used to be called Serbo-Croatian has always been a matter of regional variation rather than a monocentric linguistic reality. Still, the falling apart of one language into four both continues and mirrors the wider political claims and discussions on geopolitical hegemonies and liberation struggles again and again. With every new discussion, the different forces crossing both national and ideological boundaries are clearly displayed. And these boundaries are, of course, far from identical with current state borders but can rather be located within as well as between successor states of Yugoslavia.

A fascinating and current aspect of the ongoing debate is the *Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku* (Declaration on the common language),¹ released in March 2017 by numerous high-profile academics from the four countries where Serbo-Croatian is a mother tongue (i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia). This declaration is a frequent reference point in conversations on language use in the countries that used to share a language until the official nationalization and standardization of four separate languages –Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian– took place, at different stages, after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The harsh critique from linguists opposing the declaration shows how the topic still evokes animosity.²

Language and linguistics, as the discipline offering expert opinion and guidelines on how to use it, has arguably played a significant role in the violent wars in former Yugoslavia (Bugarski 2001; Hodges 2016). Clearly, Croatia has been in the focus of many different accounts of showing the involvement of linguists in nationalist meaning-making. This is consistent with Croatia's open and energetic efforts to quickly establish its own standard language (Kapović 2010; Bertoša & Skelin Horvat 2012). Yet, neither Serbia (Ivić 2001), nor Macedonia (Friedman 1998; Topolinjska 1998), Montenegro (Glušica 2011; Nakasawa 2015), Slovenia (Toporišič 1997), Kosov@ (Kamusella 2016) nor Bosnia (Tolimir-Hölzl 2011; Mønnesland 2004) have been inactive when it comes to the macro-level of nationalist language policies.

As the contributions in this special issue of *Aegean Working Papers in Ethnographic Linguistics* show, both the macro and the micro-level of *linguaging* (Shohamy 2006: 14) confirm the deep political influences of the recent past. The interaction and mutual influence of the linguistic macro- and micro-level³ are a central issue of ethnographic accounts in linguistics (Shaw, Copland & Snell 2015: 8), as they both form part of one and the same context. No matter how local or regional the specifics might seem, the holistic and comprehensive view of ethnographically informed linguistics (or linguistically informed ethnography) can hardly neglect the sociopolitical context. The meaning of the broader political (i.e., the macro-linguistic) framework of a given language policy, for example, is hardly fully comprehensible

¹ Available at: <http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/> (last accessed: November 2018).

² Comparing the respective Wikipedia articles on the Deklaracija is really interesting in this respect. These are available in *Bosanski, Hrvatski, Српску / srpski* and *Srpskohrvatski / српскохрватску* and show significantly different evaluations of the document, with especially the Croatian Wikipedia entry being highly critical, mirroring majoritarian official reactions in Croatia.

³ While the *linguistic macro-level* is displayed in official, often state-level, approaches to linguistic meaning-making, language politics, and/or authoritative language management, the *micro-level* is what can be observed in individual, local, everyday and sometimes non-obliging language usage to authoritative language regulations.

without taking into consideration its impact on the individual language user (and, hence, on the linguistic micro-level). It is the main endeavor of ethnographic linguistics to look at language and communication by considering contextual relations at all possible levels. Therefore, the understanding of linguistic meaning-making as a highly hybrid and fluent human activity does not end at this integration of relevant aspects of the contemporary macro and micro-level. Rather, it also needs to consider historical realities and interpretations, social features of all kinds and, last but not least, geographically and socio-politically constituted space.

With these general theoretical characteristics of ethnographic accounts in mind, we can see an amplitude of research possibilities when looking at the area of what used to be Yugoslavia in different state structures for over 100 years. Many different ontological and epistemological perspectives allow to spot manifold sets of empirical material, research questions and possibilities to develop and test theories for anyone interested in researching the interaction of social, cultural and political questions with language usage. For ongoing border shifts in the region have left indelible traces; and so has voluntary or forced relocation of populations from one part of the region to another. Such traces are reflected in the linguistic reality of individuals in the region.

Just as in many other national movements throughout Europe in the 19th century, language rights and the struggle against linguistic aspects of colonialization have been pivotal in national movements in Southeastern Europe. Despite the wide range of linguistic varieties, these national movements also provided fertile ground for spreading the claim of ‘one people-one language’ which dominated language policies in Southeastern Europe as it did elsewhere, for example in Gottfried Herder’s widely studied German-based accounts of the linguistic basis of cultures and nations. This discourse on the necessity of linguistic unity existed both at the official political macro-level and in the many movements that over the years were striving to further develop and spread the usage as well as the reputation of one or the other language to become part of a given local reality. And really, linguistic unity did, in fact, precede political unity. The *Vienna Literary Agreement* –dating back to 1850– determined that the dialectal base of the common language was to be Štokavian, which Vuk Karadžić, among others, had used in his collections of folk tales and songs (*Narodne P(j)esme*). This document was a means of support for South Slavic struggles to gain sovereignty from the then great powers, the Habsburg monarchy and the Ottoman empire, and their political and linguistic dominance (Peti-Stantić & Langston 2016: 319).

This significance of language for national movements has never lost meaning ever since. Even more, the interaction of nationalism and language use is of special importance for the linguistic discussion in and about former Yugoslavia and its successor states. When it comes to the differences as well as the commonalities of the linguistic entities of present-day BCMS (Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian), what is most relevant is a careful distinction of communicative space from symbolic space (Peti-Stantić & Langston 2016: 323; Škiljan 2002: 274). Despite a high degree of mutual intelligibility, the symbolic function of distinct national/standard languages is not to be underestimated.

Many scholars have provided broad-scale (Greenberg 2008, Voss & Jusufi 2013), nation-specific (Langston & Peti-Stantić 2014), and cross-border (Bugarski 2001, 2012; Balažev 2016) accounts of the influence of nationalism (mostly to be understood as *ethnonationalism*) in the area. The latest nationalist outbursts in the late 20th century

are, of course, the main focus of current research. The situation in the former Yugoslav lands is clearly complicated because of a rather recent (yet enduring) trend to use chauvinist nationalism as a major political instrument. Nationalist and sovereignty struggles led to sweeping changes at the macro-level in that a range of new nation states have been founded. And with them came new national languages.

The secessions from former Yugoslavia that entailed violent wars contributed to a “culture of conflict” (Dimitrijević & Kovács 2004: XXII) which is still to be fully overcome. A crucial reason for this endurance of the past in the official discourse is an ongoing influence of nationalist and hostile ideologies in political leadership. Yet, such general picture of official and state-level discourses bears the danger of concealing the documented linguistic diversity in this area (what Blommaert & Rampton (2011) and Blommaert (2013) call *superdiversity*) of people’s everyday reality. Both these political realities are eye-catching for everyone involved in linguistic analysis and – even more so– in everyday *linguaging* in the region: people’s language use goes far beyond such monolingualistic claims, showing standard language ideology (Milroy 2001) to be of negligible relevance for everyday language-making in the region. This, of course, does not curb the insistence of political and linguistic authorities on the importance of national languages for the purposes of nation-building. And it is this insistence which strengthens the authoritative meaning of prescriptivism in linguistic accounts in the region (Kapović, Starčević & Sarić 2016).

Superdiversity –mostly a function of multilingualism or multidialectalism– has been historically important for many people after almost five decades of (maybe superficial but nonetheless enduring) efforts to dissolve ethnic boundaries during socialism in Yugoslavia. What is more, nationalist language planning has, ironically, even led to more diversity. In Croatia, for example, the new standard is often used in parallel with the older standard variant. Frequently, the new standard is used mostly by the younger generation within family, while elders are much more likely to speak the language they have learned during their own years of language acquisition at home and linguistic refinement at school during the ‘Croato-Serbian period’.

This discrepancy between efforts at the macro-level of language politics and linguistic prescriptivism to normalize a language use that proves to be often negligible for everyday linguaging, might not be a unique feature of this region. What seems to be rather specific, though, is the frequency of such top-down initiatives and the publicity some of them achieve. An interesting field of research in that respect is the interplay of gender and language. The many accounts of discussions and prescriptivism in the field of professional titles and function names for women can shed some light on the relevance of linguistic meaning-making in the region. Even more, even in the field of gender and language use, which seems to be more than distinct from the non-stoppable attempts of distancing one national language from the other, the intersection of one (i.e. gendered) with the other (nationalized) identity-making process plays an important role. This is why the following examples from Croatia and Serbia, show us some interesting accounts of the interrelation of political discourses with language use, language regulation and authoritative language management:

1) In Serbia, the Committee for the standardization of the Serbian language published a “long expected”⁴ decision in May 2018 stating that there is no need to use feminine forms for women professionals, as masculine forms do not exclude women. The main argument of the paper is that linguistic theory has determined this and, furthermore, grammars maintain that masculine word forms should be understood as generics, applicable to all genders. This is a well-known stance in more traditional Serbian linguistics (see also example 2). Now, what is problematic about it is its neglect of different linguistic and scientific accounts. First, it overlooks a whole branch and tradition of linguistics (i.e., feminist, queer, and/or gender linguistics) that has worked on the documentation of an ongoing and widespread ignorance of non-male realities by this linguistic practice (i.e., the so-called *generic masculine*). It also fails to admit that feminine word forms are commonly used in less valued professional contexts as well as in most private instances of referring to women. Just as in so many discussions of this sort in other languages and national contexts, the problem arises when feminine word forms reach more prestigious professions.⁵ Less prestigious professions in Serbian are also regularly realized in feminine word forms and are used for gender specification for all manner of linguistic sense-making. Interestingly, the document does acknowledge that in actual language use feminine word forms for denoting professional women are increasing (Odbor za standardizaciju srpskog jezika 2018: paragraph 2). Furthermore, it claims to go against the political mainstream, as it must obey linguistic theories (ibid.: paragraph 5). The example shows how both more recent linguistic studies⁶ and actual language use are to be neglected when language policy-making is at stake, a point linguists have come to appreciate through bitter experience.

2) The claim that the importance of the feminine grammatical gender for linguistic indexing of women is to be neglected when it comes to (certain) professions and public functions in standard Serbian has been regularly articulated in newspaper releases and public announcements in the last years (see also the contributions in Pavlidou 2006). As it happens, such discussions typically appear following publication of relevant books by Svenka Savić and her colleagues at Novi Sad University. As Simone Rajilić shows (2014; 2015), a central argument of Serbian linguists countering feminist linguists’ attempts to discuss problematic issues of traditional language use with regard to gender identity, is pointing to the fact that feminine word forms are widely used in the new Croatian standard language. Therefore, the argument goes, this would

⁴ Original: “дуго очекиван[а] Одлук[а]” in the press release on <http://hronograf.net/2017/10/12/sanuborkinja-psiholoskinja-vojnkinja-sekretarka-gramaticki-nepravilne/> (last accessed: November 2018).

⁵ The very telling examples of professions that do not need female word form are: ‘борац’ (engl. fighter+MASC), ‘пилот’ (pilot+MASC), and ‘академик’ (academician+MASC) (Odbor za standardizaciju srpskog jezika 2018).

⁶ More than theoretical enquiries, empirical evidence from many languages has shown the factual non-comprehensiveness of masculines used generically (i.a. Khosroshahi 1989; Braun, Sczesny & Stahlberg 2002; 2005; Liben, Bigler & Kogh 2002; Valdrová 2008; Gyga, Gabriel & Sarrasin et al. 2008; Kusterle 2011; Steiger-Loerbroks & von Stockhausen 2014; Alvanoudi 2015; Vervecken & Hannover 2015). See also Kersten-Pejanić (2018) for a perception study in Croatian and a short overview of existing studies on the perception of generically intended masculines. See Kersten-Pejanić (2017: 92-114) for a more comprehensive overview of the long tradition of testing ‘masculine generics’ with regard to their supposed gender neutrality and more detailed results of the above-mentioned perception study of Croatian person appellatives.

render them non-acceptable for usage in Serbian. Now, not using a specific shared grammatical structure (such as feminine word forms for women in prestigious professional and public positions) while absolutely using equal grammatical realizations in so many other contexts, is an interesting argument here. And it is worth researching in the wider context of language use in society. If one thinks about the given equivalence of morpho-syntactic features and realizations (also) in nowadays Serbian and Croatian, such explanations hardly seem linguistically based but simply attempt to curb the ongoing language due to a significant change in gender relations over the last century.

3) On the other side of this game, ‘selling’ feminine word forms for female professionals as a unique Croatian instance of language usage has proven to be very practical for Croatian activists striving for gender-sensitive language use (although, here too, attention has to be paid as some suffixes are perceived as ‘Serbian’). As leading Croatian linguists have educated the Croatian public ever since Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in 1991 that their language needs to be distinguished from Serbo-Croatian and, especially, from Serbian, showing that feminine forms for occupational titles effectively realize such distinctiveness, is a very useful argument when promoting gender-specific language use in the public sphere in Croatia. And really, Croatian feminists have not only had the backup of traditional Croatian linguists (Barić 1988; Babić 2006) on this matter, but they also had a much easier go through institutions and into general and public language use. This is, of course, also due to the recent EU integration process which clearly allowed for a convincing argument with regard to gender equality policies of all kinds (Kersten-Pejanić 2010; 2014a; 2015a). Furthermore, even the usage of graphic signaging (such as the ‘slash-variant’ as in *student/ica*) for deconstructing the use of masculine forms as generic has spread into institutional settings (Kersten-Pejanić 2014b; 2015b; 2017). Job advertising, for example, is to be realized in a way that refers to ‘both’ genders by law (see the by now third amendment of the Gender equality act: Hrvatski Sabor 2017: paragraph 13.2). In this, the legal provision in Croatia goes against the stance of the well-known prescriptivist linguist Stjepan Babić, who claims neutrality for masculine word forms when referring to people in general, while supporting the use of feminine word forms for specific women (Babić 2006).

Those ethnographic encounters on language use and its relevance for gender equality policing in two states that have been central parts of Yugoslavia (and the two name-giving entities of the Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian language) display different levels and approaches to linguistic management in the area. Despite the authority and importance official institutions are still entitled to, linguistic normalization can take different routes. Furthermore, alliances for linguistic norm-making and breaking show interesting and sometimes surprising activities (Kersten-Pejanic forthcoming).

Another promising new path in exploring linguistic realities in ex-Yugoslavia is to be found in the evolving number of recent accounts of the linguistic landscape in the Yugoslav successor states (Canakis 2016, 2018; Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016; Ivković 2015a, 2015b; Kramer, Friedman & Ivković 2014; Vuković 2012; Grbavac 2013; Bilkić 2018). Linguistic Landscape Studies (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Pennycook 2009; Kasanga 2014; Blommaert & Maly 2014; Blackwood, Lanza & Woldemariam 2016 to name just a few) aim to engage sociolinguistics with other disciplinary accounts (such

as human geography and different branches of political, sociocultural, and historical studies) and, hence, at exploring a given space by focusing on its linguistic features. Therefore, Linguistic Landscape Studies allow for a convincing ethnographic gaze at the value and the meaning of language in (public) space. Furthermore, they permit linguistic analysis to be part of broader scientific accounts of a certain region.

Although interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences on former Yugoslavia is well-developed and reputable, linguistic accounts are frequently missing in the discussions evolving from what may be called *Southeastern European Area Studies*. Yet, given the relevance of linguistics when tackling ethnicity, aspects of post-conflict societies, nationalism, etc. –all of which are essential in producing cogent accounts of the region– linguists should certainly (re)claim their place in broader discussions, reaching well beyond grammatical forms. While these possibilities of engagement with current and politically challenging questions have been deployed compellingly in historical, social, political, and literary studies, linguistics still needs to find ways of engaging with these research strands. Linguistic Landscape Studies are a convincing possibility for using linguistically informed methodologies while studying politically and socially relevant issues. For example, concepts of ethnic (and other) identity-making, national belonging, citizenship, and activism and their potential to influence people's everyday-life, clearly is a pivotal aspect of linguistic landscape research. The wars of the 1990s and the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia left deep traces in the Yugoslav successor states that can hardly stay unnoticed up until today, twenty years after the last armed conflicts took place in the region (Canakis 2016; Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016). Public discourses show ongoing political irritation and uncertainties. With that come considerable tendencies of radicalization, especially given a devastating economic reality and a changing ('transforming') –and, for some, alienating– everyday life (Tomić 2016; Blagojević Hughson 2012 among many others).

Glaring signs of increasingly manifested ideological conflicts, and ethnicity-based hostilities between the different national groups of former Yugoslavia (Bieber 2011) can be perceived in the physical landscape. Yet, those discourses of ethnic hatred (Bilkić 2018) are also clearly visible in people's 'writings on the wall', and so are other discourses of hatred, such as homophobia (Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016). Furthermore, the coexistence of different national entities in former Yugoslavia have shown to significantly shape the linguistic landscapes in terms of multiculturalism and superdiversity (Grbavac 2013; Vuković 2012). In addition to visible legacies of the violent war in the landscape –such as wrecked buildings, signs warning citizens of unremoved land mines, war-related monuments, etc.– it is the linguistic landscape of these former war zones that shows the boundaries the war has left in this previously diverse and heterogeneous society.

National homogenization appears to be an ongoing process that was certainly not completed with the end of the wars. Instead of a 'corporate sense' of Yugoslavia, manifested –or at least officially proclaimed– in the maxim of 'bratstvo i jedinstvo' (Cvetković-Sander 2012), there are obvious trends of enduring (ethno)nationalism (Bieber 2011) and a "renewed traditionalist discourse" (Ramet 2015: 357). Those trends do not only impact the societies in question but, of course, permeate space, as occupied and turned into place by human agency (Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016): by people in these societies. My own ongoing research on the linguistic landscape in

two designated fields at Croatian borderlands⁷ shows how nationalist and revisionist politics of memory (Radonić 2010; Kuljić 2010) are significant for the linguistic landscape in post-conflict rural areas. These political stances (Đurašković 2016) have very clearly and outspokenly made their way into the linguistic landscape of former Croatian war zones. More than the mere existence of nationalist and hostile signs in the form of unofficial graffiti at outer house walls, e.g., it is their apparent normalcy and a striking lack of disapproval or perceivable dismissal that make them appear as signs of a dominant discourse instead of a supposed “heretical discourse” (Bourdieu 1991: 129) of an imaginable minority of radical nationalists.

Such observations in studying the linguistic landscape allow us to trace the meaning of language use far beyond its mere linguistic features. Using the ‘right language’ has been a political issue in the region for a long time, and official language politics has rightly been characterized as a matter of violence by Ranko Bugarski, already in the early 1990s (Bugarski 1994: 117). Moreover, language is used to display and spread political messages while simultaneously addressing (certain) readers by performing (certain) political attitudes and claiming identity politics: in more cases than not, such identity politics focus on politics of ethnic belonging. In this way, not only is a given space and the physical landscape influenced by people, but residents of a given space are also affected by it. And it is linguistic performance in this space which allows for direct and explicit spread of meaning among the people addressed.

Altogether, ethnographic accounts have been central to debates on language questions during and after the fall of Yugoslavia and the official disavowal of Croato-Serbian –and they certainly still are. The gradual dissolution of the pluricentric Serbo-Croatian standard has been accompanied by active language policies in most of the new nation-states emerging after the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, using linguistic features and public discussions about language use as a means of nation-building and delimitation from the new neighboring sovereign countries. However, these specific post-conflict incidents of the lingua franca of the region are not the only areas of research afforded by everyday reality in the region adopting an ethnographic perspective on language. A rich history, as well as a multilayered political, cultural and, undeniably, linguistic everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosov@, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, make these countries good case studies for theoretical and empirical questions on the role of language in people’s everyday life.

The papers in this special issue are indicative of such possibilities. Christian Voß’s contribution is a comparative work on language politics in Macedonia and Montenegro. As he shows in his paper, this comparison is worth our while even though the two countries had their high-time of nationalist language-making in different periods of time. His ethnographic approach to the study of language policies, dictionaries, grammars, and other prescriptive linguistic material vividly points to the close relation of efforts of nation-building and the implementation of standard languages. Starting with a recent act of linguistic meaning-making in the region, namely the “Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku”, Christian Voß develops his argument

⁷ The research project “Linguistic Landscapes at the margins: Performativity of ethnic belonging and memory politics in Croatian post-conflict border regions” is made possible by the much-appreciated financial support of the German Research Foundation (DFG) under project number 401363951.

leading to the conclusion that the omnipresence of Serbian as a high variety has been a constant challenge to standardization processes both in Macedonia and Montenegro.

Branimir Stanković and Marija Stefanović allow the reader to trace some of the specificities of language politics in Serbia and its effect on speakers of the Southern Serbian dialect, Torlak. Their analysis of the interaction and mutual influence of the macro- and the micro-level of language attitudes shows a convincing example of why and how standard ideology can be harmful for the very people it is supposed to benefit. Basing their argument on sociological and sociolinguistic theories, the authors trace the implications of language use and standard ideology for people's lives. Furthermore, assuming a holistic approach to the enormous importance of the broader context and the dominant discourse on language use in Serbia, Branimir Stanković and Marija Stefanović allow for insights into the linguistic realities in a specific regional setting, i.e. Southern Serbia.

In her contribution to this special issue, Lumnije Jusufi combines the study of language attitudes with the analysis of the influence of a state border in the Dibra-region at the Albanian-Macedonian border. Based on the author's extensive fieldwork in this region, this paper is a neatly delimited case study but with the pronounced aim of reevaluating the importance of border regions for understanding linguistic meaning-making. Hence, the comparison of Albanian speakers' attitudes towards other languages on both sides of the state border reveals the importance of the political and historical context and its influence on language attitudes. Lumnije Jusufi's research shows why the micro-level needs to be given great attention and how the focus on a border-region can show the very impact of the political border on the language user.

Snežana Stanković takes us to the area of linguistic meaning-making in the post-conflict society of former Yugoslavia. Her work shows, again, how there is hardly any possibility of separating the micro- from the macro-level, especially not when it comes to the aftermath of violent conflicts following in the secession of the constituent parts of Socialist Yugoslavia. Snežana Stanković's careful observation of the language produced in the needle-work of female Srebrenica survivors in Berlin, who use handcrafted handkerchiefs as a means of commemorative grief-work, is based on both linguistic and ethnographic theories. The paper also points to another important aspect of linguistic meaning-making for the area, namely that neither its causes nor its effects can be limited to the area itself anymore. Rather, due to large-scale migration before, during, and after the violent secession wars, the discussion is now rightly spread all over the planet.

As guest editor of this special issue of a promising new journal on ethnographic linguistics, it has been a true gift for me to be able to collaborate with all the above-mentioned scholars. Moreover, those not mentioned here, for the sake of anonymity as required by the process of academic peer-reviewing, have made this issue much more valuable. I sincerely thank the scholars who spent precious time in order to guarantee the quality of this special issue as anonymous reviewers.

I sincerely hope that future collaboration will enable further development of ethnographic accounts on language issues, in ex-Yugoslavia as well as in all other fascinating parts of the world. It is my firm belief that linguistically informed

ethnographic explorations will allow us to observe the complexity in both linguistic and other social matters around us in a much more comprehensive way.

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