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## STUDYING THE MINORITY GROUPS' IDENTITIES IN THE BALKANS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

*„...the Balkans were becoming European by shedding the last residue of an imperial legacy, widely considered as anomaly at the time, and by assuming and emulating homogeneous European nation-state as the normative form of social organization. It may well be that what we are witnessing today, wrongly attributed to some Balkan essence, is the ultimate Europeization of the Balkans. If the Balkans are, as I think they are, tantamount to their Ottoman legacy, this is an advanced stage of the end of the Balkans.*

(M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 1997)

*Abstract:* The study of linguistic ideology, which can be defined as sets of beliefs about language articulated by users and observers as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use, could be a source of valuable information on identity strategies in the Balkans. I will try to determine the relation between linguistic ideologies of „Balkanism“ formed by Western scholars and observers and that one formed by scholars coming from the region, as well as to explore the ways how these ideologies are reflected in the linguistic ideology of the members of small ethnic groups in the Balkans. Such an approach can essentially contribute to understanding of the identity strategies of such groups. It makes a researcher aware of broader ideological frames of interpretation to which the „outside“ expert discourse of small ethnic groups and their language belongs; on the other hand, an „inner“ perspective provided by exploring the linguistic ideology of speakers themselves provides her or him with the first-hand information on the links between macro-processes such as economic and social changes, life of group's members in their micro worlds. Considering the perspective of language ideology would help a researcher to avoid the danger of considering only one side of the story and by that reproducing discourse which is also ideologically loaded.

Due to historical circumstances and geographic position, the Balkans is a region characterized by a great number of various ethnic groups. People

of different ethnic origins and religions, speakers of different languages, live together for centuries on this peninsula managing to survive despite sometimes very unfavorable political and social circumstances.

Most of these groups are too small to be either institutionally organized or to attract the attention of states of their origin. They, however, have attracted a lot of attention of social scientists such as historians, anthropologists, ethnographers, as well as travelers, writers, and journalists both from within the area and outside of it. In the historiography, ethnography, and travel literature from the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, a lot of attention was paid to small ethnic groups in the Balkans. The medley of people, religions, and languages became a „trademark“ of the Balkans, and was at the same time seen as the most salient difference between this region and rest of Europe, ethnically relatively homogenous, where „the ideal political order of one nation, speaking one language, ruled by one state, within one bounded territory“ was the prerequisite for achieving the highest European values of technological progress, economic development, and civilization (Irvine and Gal 1999: 63). Much already has been written about different aspects of this opposition between Europe and the Balkans (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Bakić-Hayden 1995, Bjelić 2003, Todorova 1994, Todorova 2003). What has not been considered extensively is the role of language and language ideologies in mapping the Balkan symbolic geography.<sup>1</sup> In their article which partly concerns the process of standard language formation in the Republic of Macedonia, Irvine and Gal (1999) stress the fact that „nineteenth-century descriptions of the languages and people of Macedonia were crucially affected by the ways in which linguistic ideologies of Western European observers interacted with ideologies and communicative practices of speakers of Macedonia“ (op. cit., 60); this may also be applied to other nations and ethnic groups in the Balkans.

In this article, I argue that the linguistic ideology, which can be defined as „sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use“ (Silvestrein 1979: 193)<sup>2</sup>, could be a source of valuable information on identity strategies in the

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<sup>1</sup> This topic, is however, more and more present in linguistic studies related to the Balkans: Todorova 1990, Fredman 1997, Tsitsipis 1998, 2000, Irvine and Gal 1999, Petrović 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from this, already classical, definition of language ideologies, there are also others; Irvine (1989: 255) stresses socio-cultural dimension of language ideology, defining it as „the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests“; the similar approach is the one of Heath (1989:53), who defines it as „self evident ideas and objectives a

Balkans, since it can serve as a „mediating link between social structures and forms of talk“ (Woolard and Schieffelin 1993: 53). From the epistemological viewpoint, language ideology can be a subject of research due to the twofold nature of human language – language categories are either structured (linear, mandatory), or social (indexical, pragmatic, public) (Lucy 1997: 306; cf. Levinson 1997). „Much of the meaning and hence communicative value that linguistic forms have for their speakers lies in the ‘indexical’ connections between the linguistic signs and the contextual factors of their use – their connection to speakers, settings, topics, institutions, and other aspects of their socio-cultural worlds“ (Kroskrity 2000: 7).

I will try to determine the relation between views on language situation among Balkan people formed by Western scholars and observers and those formed by scholars coming from the region, as well as to explore the way in which these ideologies are reflected in the linguistic ideology of the members of small ethnic groups in the Balkans. I will argue that such an approach can essentially contribute to understanding of the identity strategies of such groups. On the one hand, using such an approach, a researcher is aware of broader ideological frames of interpretation to which the „outside“ expert discourse of small ethnic groups and their language belongs; on the other hand, inside perspective provided by exploring the linguistic ideology of speakers themselves, read-out both from the language use and their views on language, provide us with the first-hand information about the way macro-processes such as economic and social changes and the life of group's members in their micro worlds are linked. In the present article, I will predominantly deal with coding of language ideology in discourse produced in the Serbian language, by and about small groups speaking this language, putting it in a broader Balkan context whenever necessary.

#### *Western Views on Language Projected on the Balkans*

The discourse produced by scholars coming from inside the area usually valorizes the multilingualism of Balkan people as genuinely Balkan and „healthy“ and glorifies the ethnic mixture in the Balkan, but is nevertheless historically conditioned and immediately followed by a contradictory stressing of the purity of language spoken by people in such mixed areas. The Slovenian anthropologist Niko Županić, who was a big promoter of the

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group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group“. In all the three definitions, the focus is on speakers' views of language and ways in which various social phenomena are being articulated through these views.

Yugoslav idea on the eve of forming the common state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918), idealistically described the ethnic diversity of Slovenian southern region of Bela Krajina. Despite the fact that Slovenia is, due to its relatively high ethnic homogeneity much closer to Central and Western Europe than to the Balkans, this particular region is characterized by a great scale of diversity of ethnic, linguistic and religious types. It possesses many characteristics by which it could be labeled as Balkan. Besides Slovenes, there are Croats in the region, then German speaking population of Gottsche (*Kočevarji*), Roma population, as well as descendents of *Uskoks*, an Orthodox, Serbian-speaking population living here for about five centuries. In 1912, in the first monograph dedicated to Serbs in Bela Krajina, Županić writes that „an inhabitant of Bela krajina gets in touch with all South-Slavic tribes except Bulgarians already at his home“ (Županić 1912: 16). In this small area, Županić also writes, „there is such a great ethnographic diversity that [a visitor] is surprised everywhere by a multitude of languages, folk psychologies and material cultures“ (*op. cit.*, 6). But simultaneously, he stresses the fact that Serbs in Bela krajina preserved the beauty and strength of their native language: „People from Marindol and Bojanci (...) are the only Carniola Serbs who had preserved their nice old Jekavian language, costumes, customs, as well as Orthodox religion.“ (Županić 1912: 9-10). Women, being non-mobile, have best preserved that language and its genuine features: „Women especially maintain the old customs and keep the language strong, which they speak in a beautiful way. The reason for that is in the fact that women stay at home and keep old cultural heritage, while men as soldiers and businessmen go around the world and hear and learn other languages and dialects“ (*op. cit.*, 13).

At the same time, Western travelers discovering the Balkan medley of people, religions, and languages found this plurality both confusing and disturbing. Irvine and Gal (1999) give several illustrations for such an attitude: a German geographer Karl von Östreich wrote about the Balkans in the beginning of the 20th century: „Instead of racially pure Turks and Albanians we find people who are racially mixed... and whose multilingualism misleads us about their origins, so that they can be counted sometimes as Greeks, sometimes as Bulgarians, sometimes as Wallachians“ (Von Östreich 1905: 270). Another traveler from the same period, Lucy Garnett, describes the Balkan „confusion“ in the following way: in Macedonia, she notes, „a Greek speaking community may prove to be Wallachian, Albanian or even Bulgarian, and the inhabitants of a Slav-speaking village may claim to be of Greek origin... All these various ethnical elements are, in many country districts of Macedonia, as well as in the towns, so helplessly fused and intermingled“ (Garnett 1904: 234-235). Ehrenpreis (1928: 12) describes

„the Levantine type in the areas between the Balkans and Mediterranean“ as „psychologically and socially, truly a ‘wavering form’, a composite of Easterner and Westerner, multilingual... superficial and unreliable“. Todorova (1999: 142) quotes words of a Western traveler, who did not like religious ceremonies of Catholics along the Dalmatian coast and the prayers they sung „in their half-Latin, half-Slavic language“. This mixed, incomplete nature of language corresponds with the way people in the Balkans were seen by most travelers and writers from the West: as „semideveloped, semicivilized, semioriental“, as being always in-between, unpredictable and unstable. The explicit linking of multilingualism and consequences of language contact with characteristics such as unreliability and incompleteness established in these two descriptions represent an expression typical for Western language ideology, in which multiple languages imply multiple loyalties. In that ideology, categories of ethnicity, language and nation tend to be equalized, and consequently communities in which it is not the case are perceived as unnatural, confusing and incomprehensible.

Confused by such a mixture of languages and identities, which so radically differed from one-to-one relationship established as an ideal model for Western societies, Western observers failed to recognize the *functions* of Balkan multilingualism and the fact that it was often a survival strategy and a precondition for successful trading and economic prosperity, and „an attempt to extend social networks in uncertain times“ (Irvine and Gal 1999: 64; see also Goffman 2002: 15-16); within the ideology of Western European *order*, multilingualism rather is seen as an obstacle for prosperity.

#### *Ideologies of Purism: Pure and Spoiled Language Varieties*

Linguistic purism is one of the central ideological constructs, originally generated by elites. It is inseparable from language contact and language change.<sup>3</sup> Linguistic practice of members of small ethnic communities is inevitably connected with their multilingualism resulting in language contact and change. Native dialectology, being the most developed linguistic sub-discipline for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South-Slavic linguistics, predominates in the linguistic research of isolated Serbian speaking groups as well.<sup>4</sup> In this field, *pastoral tradition* prevails, with a „rhetorical convention which

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion of this issue, refer to Aitchison 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Here I mention just a few of dialectological studies dealing with isolated Serbian language varieties: Ivić (1957) for dialect of Serbs from Galipolje (Turkey) who moved to Macedonia, Tomić 1984 and 1987 for dialects of Serbs in Romania, Ivić 1966, 1994, 1994a, 1997, Stepanović 2000, Rakić 1997, 1998 for dialects of Serbs (and Croats) in Hungary, Vukićević 1984–85 for dialects of Serbs in Macedonia, etc.

continually looks back, often nostalgically and for moral guidance, to a lost, but supposedly more pristine, rural, homogeneous, and authentic past“ (Williams 1973). Within this tradition, researchers would look for „*best speakers*, who will provide evidence of the most ‘unadulterated’ form of the language“ (Dorian 1981: 3), while the processes of innovation and results of language contact, would only rarely be noticed, and usually seen as a degeneration of an authentic language. In such context, both multilingualism of speakers and interference of varieties in contact were simply ignored by researchers<sup>5</sup> and identified as a „spoiling of language“ (*kvarenje jezika*). In the case of Serbian, the ideological notion of spoiled idioms was probably first introduced by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. Speaking about dialects Vojvodina, which was a center of urban life in the 19th century Serbia, he wrote that „among all our peoples, those from Srem, Banat and Bačka speak the most ugly and spoiled Serbian language; the more upper-class members and educated persons are in the settlement, the worse language is spoken there“ (Karadžić 1845: 85). Such evaluation was in accordance with Karadžić’s efforts to establish the Serbian standard language on a purely vernacular basis. However, the categorization of language varieties as „spoiled“ or „pure“ is nowadays also met both in scientific discourse and in the folk language ideologies. Serbian dialectologists, searching for the „pure and genuine form“ of a language variety spoken by a certain group, label idiolects or vernaculars as spoiled if they are influenced by the standard language or other languages in contact. In the folk ideology among speakers of Serbian, on the other hand, there is a deeply rooted belief that dialects closer to those chosen by Vuk Karadžić for the basis of the Serbian standard language are more pure, so that one can frequently hear that in Valjevo or Užice people speak more purely than those in Kruševac, while in Pirot language is highly spoiled, etc.

In case of isolated Serbian speaking groups, such as Serbs in Bela Krajina, their commonly shared attitude towards the native idiom can be formulated in the following way: *We speak that language, although it is not the real Serbian language, it is rather a mixture of Serbian and a dialect spoken in Kordun (Croatia), in addition there are many Slovene words in our language...* The Slovenian standard language is, on the other hand, the ideal

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<sup>5</sup> Present lack of interest in the processes caused by language contacts is strongly opposed to the fact that the first researches of these phenomena were conducted exactly in this area: Schuchardt (1884:30, quoted in Winford 2003:6) mentions G. Lucio’s discussion in 1666 of the mixture of Croatian and Romance dialects in Dalmatia, based on Dalmatian records from 14th century. Schuchardt, the first great creolist and pioneer in the study of contact languages, provided numerous examples of structural mixture and contact-induced change in the Balkan area.

that could hardly be reached: a Serbian interviewee consequently explains: *My granddaughter says: 'Children from Preloka and Zilje [Slovene villages of Bela Krajina] speak the dialect of Bela Krajina, and those coming from Croatia speak Croatian, but I speak Slovene in the correct way.' But I said to her that it is not easy at all to speak real Slovene.* Speaking „pure“, „correct“ standard Slovene is therefore by all generations perceived as one of the highest cultural values, and the correct use of this language variety (i.e. the Slovene standard language) is placed above all local language varieties. The rapid shift towards the national language and putting it at the top of the value scale and above the mother tongue can be seen as the way the inhabitants of Bela Krajina adjust their own model of identity to the Western model, in which linguistic boundaries should correspond to social and ethnic ones. With such an adjustment, the attitude towards key-values and structural characteristics of their once patriarchal society has changed. It also concerns the common attitude towards Slovenian brides: Dražumerić (1988: 313) quotes a teacher from Adlešiči – the neighboring Slovenian village where children from Marindol, Milići and Paunovići attend primary school – who mentioned that „pupils of Non-Slovenian mothers have difficulties with the Slovenian language, especially with respect to grammar“. Accordingly, a woman from Paunovići told me: *When my [Slovenian] daughter-in-law checks the homework of her children written in Slovene, she always finds mistakes and says 'this is from the Paunovići way of speaking'.* In the current situation, therefore, having a Slovenian daughter-in-law is perceived as an advantage, while some decades ago a son's intention to take a Slovenian for wife would have been met with his parents' strong opposition.

Friedman (1987: 8) points out to the following equation typical of Balkan language ideologies: contact = impure = bad = illegitimate, stressing that „if a language is portrayed as not having a distinct lexicon owing to being hopelessly mixed as the result of prolonged contact and subordination, then it can be treated as not being a 'real' language and thus unworthy as the characteristic of a nation, which in turn has no right to territory or a state.“ Applied to idioms of small ethnic groups, we find this equation relevant from certain aspect: today, when the national languages became an exclusive means of public communication also in the Balkans, idioms native to the small ethnic groups that function only locally, are also perceived as a local means of communication and named accordingly: inhabitants of the Orthodox villages in Bela Krajina call their native vernaculars simply „our way of speaking“ (*po naše*), or after the village where it is spoken: „Bojanci way of speaking“, „Milići way of speaking“, etc. (*po bojansko*, *po milički*, etc.). In the same manner, Meglen Vlachs in Turkey from village Nânti designate their language as *nântine<sup>9</sup>ti*, and those still living in Meglen (Greece) also call their

language according to the same model: *o'ine'oti* (O'añ/Archángelos), *umine'oti* (Uma/Huma), *cupine'oti* (Kupa/Cúpa), etc. (Kahl 2002: 33). With respect to the Slovene speaking communities in northern Italian Val canale /Kanalaska dolina, which is situated close to the borders of Slovenia and Austria, the social anthropologist Robert Gary Minnich notes that „elderly residents of Ukve/Ugovizza [one of the Slovene speaking villages] consistently claim that the language they have learned at home is neither Slovenian, Austrian nor Italian, but „our language“ (*naše narečje*) (Minnich 1988: 126). These examples allow us to conclude that the locally and relatively grounded language variety nominations characteristic of small ethnic groups indicate that these varieties function within the local frames only and are valorized accordingly; the language of the national state, which is simultaneously a means of public communication, is the only that „deserves“ to be designated more universally, and only using this language the equation nation = language = territory = state can be established (cf. Friedman 1987: 6).

As given examples clearly show, linguistic purism as an ideological construct has become relevant only when the process of establishing national states and according national languages began. Although this construct was initially characteristic of elites, today it is present in its various manifestations also among speakers of Balkan languages.

### *Ideologies of Nostalgia*

With liberation from the Ottoman rule and emergence of the national states in the Balkans, Western-like expectations to closely interconnect the categories of language and ethnicity appear also among the scholars and public figures within the area. Such expectations are frequently articulated by the *discourse of nostalgia*<sup>6</sup> and regret because members of small ethnic groups „forget“ their origin and loose ties with the country of origin.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Slovenian linguist Ivan Navratil writes about *Uskoks*, the Serbian speaking population who settled in areas of Žumberak and Bela Krajina (today border area between Croatia and Slovenia) within the Military Border protecting the Habsburg monarchy from Turkish invasions. He was very disappointed by the fact those people do not identify ethnically or linguistically with their brothers but use local name for the self-ascription: „When I asked them how they call themselves, they answered - *Žumberčani* (people from Žumberak); and how you call your language?

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<sup>6</sup> For more on nostalgia in sociolinguistics, anthropology and related disciplines, see: M. Bucholtz (2003).

- *Žumberški, a nekoji kažejo hrvatski* (the Žumberak way of speaking; some also would say Croatian). I was very sad hearing these words. That is what happens when people separated from their nation forget their name and start calling themselves and the language they speak after the region where they presently live“ (Navratil 1866: 14). In this particular case that Navratil laments the Uskoks' lack of national awareness, despite the fact that in the moment he writes these lines, the issue of national identification was still undiscovered for Uskoks in Žumberak and other minorities elsewhere in the Balkans. They will seriously face this issue much later, with the increase of national awareness in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. Navratil's nostalgic discourse on something yet to be discovered is, however, understandable in context of the historical moment when he writes these lines. In the middle of 19th century, South Slavs started they battle for liberation from rulership of Habsburg and Ottoman empires, followed by the formation nation-states, standard languages on the vernacular basis, and the awakening of national awareness of South Slavs; „the political history of the region was concerned with the creation of sovereign (nation-)states, and language has served, among other things, as a vehicle of state-forming ideology“ (Friedman 1997: 4). In such political climate, Navratil considered it very important that Uskoks identify themselves and the language they speak nationally and not locally.

Niko Županić's nostalgia has a different nature. In his opinion, Serbs in Bela Krajina were the last healthy Balkan nucleus in the region that is not spoiled by the European influence. The traditional folk dance *kolo* as well as the white traditional costume typical of Bela Krajina are disappearing together with the old patriarchal morals and values; the only who preserve them are Serbs in Bela Krajina. The increasing influence of „of Bavarians and Slovenians from the North“ of Bela Krajina, on the other hand, brings higher material culture and widespread European individualism (Županić 1925: 148–149). Idealism and nostalgia towards „Yugoslav patriarchal culture“ expressed by Županić should be read again in the historical context in which he wrote his works, as well as with regard to his political role in the newly formed state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1918. In his discourse, therefore, the dominating opposition is between these two cultural patterns – Balkan and European – which encounter and struggle with each other in the small region of Bela Krajina.

Nostalgia is also observable in the discourse of the oldest inhabitants of Bela Krajina, but they do not contrast two synchronically present cultural patterns, but rather the value systems existing once in the past and those existing today. It is important to note that the nostalgic discourse is characteristic of elder males who were authorities in the old patriarchal social structures. Women, seen by Županić as keepers of language and culture, usually do

not express nostalgia about the earlier state of affairs and often stress their bilingualism and the fact they speak Slovene too. A dialogue between a man and his wife illustrates a symbolic struggle for women's emancipation: when I asked if there is anybody in the villages who speaks only the native vernacular and no Slovenian language, the following dialogue started:

Husband: – *Jelena, Smilja... then aunt Marija, they do not speak Slovene. Also Milka...* // Wife (Milka): – *Oh no, I speak...* // Husband: – *But not real Slovene, it is rather a mixture...*

Neglecting the fact the elder women speak Slovene, a code associated with progress and social prestige, elder men try to keep the previous, patriarchal state of affairs, while elder women, being so eager to stress the fact they are able to communicate in Slovene as well, want to expand their social space at least on a symbolic level, although in reality, they remain living in the old system, limited to the household and village, and with no access to broader communication networks in Slovene.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

The approach that takes into account language ideology can essentially contribute to the understanding of identity strategies of small ethnic groups in the Balkans. On the one hand, it makes a researcher aware of broader ideological frames of interpretation construed by „outside“ experts and other interested groups on small ethnic groups and their language; on the other hand, an „inner“ perspective provided by exploring the linguistic ideology of speakers themselves provides her or him with first-hand information on the links between macro-processes (such as economic and social changes) and their micro worlds. Such an approach helps a researcher to avoid the danger of considering only one side of the story and subsequently reproducing discourse which is also ideologically loaded.

This dual perspective, which takes into account ideological constructs in scientific discourse both in Western linguistics and ethnography and those in the Balkan states, clearly shows that the same explanatory patterns occur in both of them. Gal (1989: 315-316) notes that „announcing the extinction of cultures, languages and dialects at the moment they are first described by outsiders has been a rhetorical construct central to Western ethnography“; the same constructs are met in the writings of ethnographers and dialectologists in the Balkans, where any kind of language change is seen as a positive sign of extinction and corruption of a genuine language form. It seems that the moving impulse for most of the researchers dealing with small ethnic groups in the Balkans was the search for exotic, genuine characteristics, patterns of traditional culture and language forms that are not preserved among the majority. Ideological constructs, such as linguistic purism and putting

standard and national language above all language varieties, initiated by Balkan elites who were influenced by Western scholars, are today also part of folk language ideologies. All this allows us to conclude that Todorova's (1999) thesis on westernization of the Balkans is well supported by data obtained from the discourse-oriented study of language ideologies of small ethnic groups in the Balkans and outsiders studying these groups (cf. also Goffman 2002).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The fact the ethnic and linguistic plurality of the Balkans is something incoprehensible and completely alien to the Western world is an ideological construct is also being proven nowadays, in the context of the European Union, where ideas of multiculturality and intercultural communication are widely present and highly

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ПРОУЧАВАЊЕ ИДЕНТИТЕТА МАЛИХ ЕТНИЧКИХ ГРУПА НА  
БАЛКАНУ ИЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ ЈЕЗИЧКЕ ИДЕОЛОГИЈЕ

Резиме

Лингвистичка идеологија, која се може одредити као скуп веровања о језику артикулисаних од стране корисника тог језика и „спољних“ посматрача, може да послужи као драгоцен извор података о процесима формирања идентитета на Балкану. У прилогу покушавам да одредим однос између лингвистичких представа о Балкану које долазе од посматрача (етнографа, новинара, путописаца, итд.) са Запада и представа етнографа и лингвиста из региона и говорника самих. Овакав приступ омогућава истраживачу да сагледа како шире интерпретацијске оквире реконструкције етничких и језичких идентитета на Балкану, тако и „унутрашњу“ перспективу говорника, чиме добија информације о везама између општијих историјских, политичких и друштвених процеса и микроструктура у којима чланови малих етничких заједница живе.