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# Balancing act between national ideological language policy, linguistic findings and minority rights: an analysis of language and content teaching strategies in Bosnian school books in the Serbian Sandžak region

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## Résumé

In the course of the language disintegration of the former "Serbo-Croatian" into the different national variants of the BCMS (Bosnian / Croatian / Montenegrin / Serbian), an official bi- or trilingualism has emerged in the multi-ethnic areas of former Yugoslavia, which is, however, almost exclusively of a political and sociolinguistic nature. In the south-west Serbian "Sandžak" resp. Novi Pazar region, for example, a considerable number of Slavic Muslims or Bosniaks live alongside the Serbs, and in some places they make up the majority of the population. From a purely linguistic perspective, the Serbs and Bosniaks in the Sandžak not only speak the same language (BCMS), but also belong to the same local dialect groups. However, regional ethno-political actors of the Bosniaks are endeavouring to imply and enforce a Bosniak / Bosnian-Serbian bilingualism in the public space of Sandžak as part of their identity politics. As early as 2004, they successfully obtained the introduction of textbooks entitled "Bosnian language with elements of national folk culture" for a compulsory elective subject of the same name from year 1 to 7 at schools with a majority Bosniak population.

Here, in contrast to the Serbian standard of the Belgrade version of the BCMS, which Serbian and Bosniak children have to learn in the compulsory school subject of Serbian language (as the state-declared mother tongue), the textbooks for the compulsory elective subject are based on the Bosnian standard of the Sarajevo version of the BCMS, which was only codified in the 1990s.

Although the programme of the minority textbook refers to the Bosnian language as a mother tongue, the contents of the book are structured according to foreign language teaching methods, as the local dialects in the Sandžak are in practice somewhat closer to the Serbian standard than to Bosnian. To counteract this, the textbooks list, for example, a series of vocabulary that are old linguistic "Orientalisms" or Turzisms, which found their way into the South Slavic dialects (especially among the islamised population) under Turkish-Ottoman linguistic mediation and have largely disappeared from language use in the course of language change, modernisation and assimilation processes since the first half of the 20th century. But, these Turkizms resp. linguistic "Orientalisms" are declared to be a special linguistic criterion of the Bosnian language by Bosniac linguists, although the Serbian language

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also has numerous lexemes with Turkish, Arabic and Persian origins. In this context, reading texts of the Bosnian school books in Serbia are also constructed in which these "vocabulary words" are integrated as frequently as possible. In addition, the children are often asked to create their own dialogues and texts with as many old Turzisms as possible and to talk to people from the oldest generation about this lost lexis.

Another important language policy point is the insistence on the use of the standard Bosnian variant for the reflexes of the Old Slavic phoneme /ě/, which is based on the so-called Ijekavian-Jekavian variant, while standard Serbian falls back on Ekavian (e.g. mlijeko versus mleko for "milk"), which is also more common in the local dialects. Here too, countless Ijekavian-Jekavian words are enumerated in a similar way to vocabulary lists and have to be memorised through constant writing and speaking exercises.

Of particular interest is the use of the Latin script, which is explicitly presented here as the standard Bosnian script in contrast to Cyrillic in Serbian. As the children in the first class of Serbian lessons learn Cyrillic first and Latin only in the second class, the Bosnian textbook for the first class is in Cyrillic as well, which also, however, is considered as a linguistic differentiator from the Serbian language according to the Bosniak national ideological point of view.

Overall, these special features and differences between the Serbian and Bosnian codified standard language and the corresponding dialects are not just linguistic "minor details", but characteristics that were and are used both by Bosniaks and Serbs in their entirety in the space of former Yugoslavia depending on the historical, regional and social context.

This results in a discrepancy between democratic rights in favour of minority protection versus linguistic scientific findings that falsify the concept of bilingualism in the Sandžak region. It also shows how the decades of discrimination and suppression of the language, identity and cultural characteristics of the "Yugoslav Muslims" resp. Bosniaks outside Bosnia by Serbian nationalism has led to a very specific local Bosniak counter-nationalism. Nevertheless, the nationalistic language policy and politics paradigms and strategies of the majority of the Sandžak-Bosniac and Muslim Bosnian nationalistic politicians and intellectuals are even critically discussed and partially avoided among parts of the left-wing, liberal and moderate nationalist intellectual and political scene of the Bosniaks in the Sandžak, Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere.

Apart from the linguistic and pedagogical aspects, the books also convey specific national ideological contents of "Bosniakism" and, from a gender perspective, strong patriarchal patterns of thought and behaviour can be identified in the textbooks.

Building on these facts, the presentation will use the example of the content and concepts of the textbooks from a nationalism-critical perspective to show in brief how linguistic nationalist paradigms and language development strategies are implemented in pedagogical textbooks and which linguistic and sociological contradictions arise in the process. This clearly illustrates how language policy can be instrumentalised as a means of identity politics in the education sector.

**Mots-Clés:** Policy for and by minorities, Native versus foreign language teaching methods, language nationalism, language politics as identity politics, politicisation of dialects, linguistic pedagogical concepts in minority textbooks