

Language and Cultural Identity of Croats

This contribution discusses the multilayered character of linguistic identity in relation to language system, norm and culture. It focuses on written and spoken Croatian in three periods of its recent history: the immediate pre-war period, the 1960s and the 1990s. The first two periods date from the Yugoslav times and the third period from the first decennium of the new Croatian state. The survey shows that there was a clear continuity of the Croatian linguistic identity based on indigenous strategies of integration of innovations in the past as well as indigenous stratification of linguistic profiles in the present. Moreover, spoken Croatian was characterized by a continuity linguistic characteristics at all levels, from phonetics and phonology to discourse, making it a recognizable bearer of identity throughout the so-called Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian period. The presumed diasystemic or pluricentric Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian language existed only at the level of the official norm, not of the actual language as an expression means of the cultural heritage. In this sense it is possible to understand that the contemporary census data of 2002 in Croatia and Serbia make the impression that millions of former Yugoslavs speaking Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian have died out within a decennium. It is the common diasystemic norm of Croatian and Serbian which has died out since the disentanglement of these states and thereby ceased being a target of identification. What has survived are the indigenous linguistic norms based on the living cultural heritage and regulated by ideological considerations based on the same heritage. The contribution ends with a model of multilayered constitutive elements of identity.

Key words: identity, diglossia, diasystem