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BOSNIAN, CROATIAN, MONTENEGRIN, AND SERBIAN IN U.S. COLLEGE CLASSROOMS*

1. Introduction

Robert Greenberg (1999: 141) noted that the nominal language death of Serbo-Croatian „has resulted in the birth (or what some might call rebirth) of new ‘successor’ languages.“ „The current post-Yugoslav language situation,“ as accounted for by Ronelle Alexander (2013: 341), is „one of several distinct but closely related languages,“ which is probably why Greenberg (1999: 155) felt compelled to note that „[t]hese new languages are by no means ‘instantly invented’ languages which still need to be taught to their speakers.“ However, much like the Serbo-Croatian language of the past, these new languages still need to be taught to those who are not their (native) speakers. One example where this happens on a (fairly) regular basis is in classrooms at U.S. universities; in all of them, these new languages are all taught over a single class period.

The languages under consideration – listed individually here alphabetically – are most commonly referred to in the United States of America as Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian (respectively, B, C, M, and S). In fact, Goldberg et al. (2015) present *Bosnian*, *Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian*, *Croatian*, *Serbian*, *Serbian/Croatian*, or *Serbo-Croatian* all as one item (thus, supposedly, one language) in their Table 10b, which shows enrollments in fifteen leading European less commonly taught languages in United States institutions of higher education. The table indicates that, while the enrollments

* Results of the research, which constitutes the foundation of the present paper, were presented, first, at the 2017 Annual Conference of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages, and, second, at the April 2017 University of Washington Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures Slavic Graduate Student Colloquium. I am grateful to both audiences for their invaluable feedback. I am also infinitely thankful to the sixteen individuals who participated in the research. Finally, I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments. All of the abovementioned helped make this paper better. I, however, take full responsibility for all of its shortcomings.

in the year 2013 were higher by 6.6% than in the year 1974, they were 32.8% lower in the year 2013 than they were in the year 2009. Debating the languagehood of B, C, M, and S goes beyond the scope of the present paper; rather – for the purposes of the research on which the paper is based – they were all termed languages, notwithstanding objections even by some of the research participants. The aim of the research was to get a sense of exactly to what extent B, C, M, and S are balanced when taught in U.S. university foreign language classrooms, where they are all taught at the same time and are allotted the same number of instruction hours as other languages not faced with the linguopolitical issues surrounding B, C, M, and S.¹ In the section immediately following, Section 2, I will provide a brief description of the research serving as the foundation of the present paper. Then, in the following three sections, I will discuss various aspects of the research: in Section 3, I will present what I refer to as the state of affairs when it comes to teaching B, C, M, and S; in Section 4, I will analyze the presence of B, C, M, and S in both the materials used in courses and in the classrooms themselves; in Section 5, I will examine ways in which both students and teachers of B, C, M, and S deal with the fact that the four are, indeed, all to be taught simultaneously. I will end with the B, C, M, and S teachers' takes on the issues they face in their classrooms and my concluding remarks in Section 6.

2. Research

The research findings scrutinized in this paper have all been collected by means of an online questionnaire during the period between December 19, 2016, and January 16, 2017. The questionnaire, whose content is given at the end of the paper in an appendix,² was in part inspired by similar questionnaires found in Hurtig (2006), Östlund (2005), Tioukalias (2010), and Tran and Moore (2015). The invitation to fill out the questionnaire was sent only to those who were identified³ as U.S. teachers of the language formerly known as Ser-

¹ To be sure, the linguopolitical issues surrounding B, C, M, and S are of a recent origin, stemming from what are sometimes referred to as the Wars of Yugoslav Succession of the final decade of the 20th century. Pedagogically, however, as was pointed out by the anonymous reviewer, the issue of balancing B, C, M, and S is quite a common one. Take, for example, the pedagogical challenges of English language teachers attempting to incorporate the so-called world Englishes in their classes.

² Questions which were marked with 'a', 'b', or 'c' following the numeral are follow-up questions, and were available to participants depending on their answer to the questions marked with the numeral alone. Questions which are underlined required a more elaborate answer.

³ I am indebted to Mr. Danko Šipka for his help with this.

bo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian, with the goal of eliciting teachers' perceptions of B, C, M, and S in their own classrooms. Ultimately, a total of sixteen teachers took part in the research, hailing from the following thirteen universities (figures in parentheses are used to indicate the number of teachers when more than one per university participated in the research): Arizona State University; Columbia University; Cornell University (2); Indiana University-Bloomington; The Ohio State University; Princeton University; University of California-Berkeley; University of California-Los Angeles; University of Chicago; University Of Kansas (3); University of Michigan-Ann Arbor; University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus; University of Wisconsin-Madison. There are, at the moment of writing, at least two more universities with a related regularly offered language course, whose teachers – for different reasons – did not take part in the research, notably the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Washington-Seattle Campus. Hereafter, they will be referred to as the non-participating universities. Finally, it is impossible to claim with certainty that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers a related language course; some inconclusive evidence points to the fact that the course might have been offered in only a few of the past several academic years.

For the sake of historical comparison – and with the total number of universities presently teaching B, C, M, and S in various capacities standing at sixteen,⁴ all of which are classified by the 2015 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as *Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity* – it is worth pointing out that Šipka and Dunatov (1988: 21) cite a 1983 Modern Language Association Language Survey, according to which „at that time, Serbo-Croatian was taught at 19 universities.“ According to the Linguistic Society of America's 1984 Directory of Programs in Linguistics in the United States and Canada, the authors state that there are „32 institutions of higher education at which, at least periodically, Serbo-Croatian is studied.“

3. State of Affairs

According to reports, the vast majority – ten – of the U.S. universities examined teach B, C, M, and S under the title of *Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian* or *Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian*.⁵ Additionally, when it comes to the two non-parti-

⁴ According to Table 11 in Goldberg et al. (2015), which offers number of institutions reporting language course enrollments by language, *Bosnian* (zero), *Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian* (eleven), *Croatian* (one), *Serbian* (zero), *Serbian/Croatian* (three), or *Serbo-Croatian* (four) are taught at nineteen institutions.

⁵ It is safe to disregard the name of *Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian* here, for it was most likely

participating universities, one uses the former, the other – the latter of the two course names. There are two universities where the course is entitled *Serbo-Croatian*, and one where the name used is *Serbian/Croatian*.⁶ The results are clear in showing that not one of the examined universities includes *Montenegrin* in the course name.⁷

Of the sixteen participating teachers, ten identified as females and six as males. Two teachers were between the ages of 26 and 35, three between 36 and 45, five between 46 and 55, and six were older than 55. Their average teaching career was fourteen years, ranging between one and forty-two (the specific lengths of teaching careers – in full years – being 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 16, 18, 20, 20, 27, 31, 42). A slight majority of the teachers were born in one of the four countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2), Croatia (2), Montenegro (1), and Serbia (4), where figures in parentheses indicate the number of the teachers born in each country. The vast majority of the teachers—thirteen—have visited all four of the countries; two have visited only Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, and one has visited only Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The teachers were asked to report what they perceived as being their native language/mother tongue, specifically with B, C, M, and S in mind. Not one of the teachers considered Montenegrin to be their native language; one considered it to be Bosnian, two – Croatian, and seven – Serbian. The remaining six teachers were then asked to report on their perception of their B, C, M, and S fluency. Four said they were fluent in Croatian, one in Bosnian, one in Serbian, and – again – not one of the teachers said that they were fluent in Montenegrin. Finally, the six teachers were then asked if any one of B, C, M, or S challenged their comprehension, to which five responded in the negative, while one indicated that Croatian challenged their comprehension.

4. BCMS in Language Materials and Classrooms

A set of questions asked the teachers to report on what could be regarded as the balance among B, C, M, and S both in the educational materials used and the actual classroom production, which also included exams. More than two-thirds of the teachers – eleven – indicated that their materials presen-

erroneously reported only once and by a teacher whose fellow teacher from the same university reported *Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian*.

⁶ It appears that on a few of the most recent occasions of its being offered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the course was entitled *Bosnian, Serbian & Croatian*.

⁷ According to the most recent reports, the University of Washington is in the process of renaming its course as *Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian*.

ted Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian; four reported that all four were presented by the materials; one suggested that their materials presented only Croatian. The numbers were slightly different when teachers reported which languages they in fact taught in their classrooms. Of the sixteen teachers, nine said they taught Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian; five – that they taught all four; two reported that they taught Croatian and Serbian.

The questionnaire then presented the teachers with a hypothetical scenario. They were asked to imagine a situation in which they would be facing a linguistic phenomenon whose realization was different for each B, C, M, and S. Under the circumstances in which B, C, M, and S are taught simultaneously over a single class period, the teachers were instructed to indicate the order in which they would introduce the phenomenon. While there was a total of six different orders in the findings, two of them were given by seventy-five percent: seven teachers gave the SCBM order, and five gave the CSBM one. The orders of BCSM, BSCM, CSMB, and SBCM were given by one teacher each. What appears to be most significant here is that not one teacher decided to go in the alphabetical order, BCMS, which is usually how B, C, M, and S are often referred to.

The question regarding the use of B, C, M, and S on exams yielded results not all that different from the question regarding their use in the educational materials and in the classrooms. A slight majority of the teachers – nine – reported that they used Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian on their exams and four indicated that they used all four. One teacher said they used Croatian and Serbian, one reported they used only Croatian, and one indicated they used only Serbian on their exams.

5. Students, Teachers, and BCMS

The teachers were asked to report on different questions with respect to their students and the environment in which B, C, M, and S are taught over a single class period.

Answers to the question of whether students registered for the course with the goal of studying one specific language of the four yielded nine answers in the affirmative and six – in the negative; one teacher did not know the answer to this question. In order to better understand these results, however, students' own answers should be taken into consideration, something which was lacking in the research discussed here, for it was aimed solely at the teachers. Thus, it would be interesting to find out, first, if the teachers' reports were accurate, and, second, if the reports were fairly accurate, how it is that students themselves in fact view B, C, M, and S.

The teachers reported on their students' language production as follows: eight indicated that their students produced Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian; four – listed all four; three teachers indicated that their students produced Croatian and Serbian; one teacher reported that their students produced only Croatian. Considering such diverse classroom environments, the teachers were also asked if their students mixed B, C, M, and S, to which the vast majority of teachers answered in the affirmative (twelve out of sixteen); only four out of sixteen teachers indicated that their students did not mix languages which they produced in the classroom. Specifically, according to the teachers' reports, two teachers said that their students were able to produce Croatian without mixing others with it and two teachers said their students were able to use Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian without mixing them.

All of the remaining questions required that the teachers elaborate in more detail on what was originally asked of them.

The overwhelming majority of the teachers – fifteen out of sixteen – reported that they thought it was important for their students to know about the differences among B, C, M, and S. The sole teacher who did not think that this was important deemed teaching the differences among B, C, M, and S – unnecessary. Rather, this teacher thought that students would be able to learn the differences on their own as that became imperative. The reported reasons of those who thought that the differences should be made apparent ranged from fairly abstract – concerning sociolinguistic issues of the area where B, C, M, and S are spoken – to absolutely pragmatic – taking into consideration students' reasons for signing up for the course, as well as their eventual ability to physically move through the area in which B, C, M, and S are spoken.

When asked if they devoted any classroom time to specifically studying the differences, eleven teachers answered in the affirmative and five in the negative. The latter were then asked if their students were at all aware of the differences, which all of them confirmed. This was reportedly achieved in part thanks to students' being exposed to their textbooks; native B, C, M, and S speakers; or – in fact – hearing the differences in the classroom. On the other hand, those teachers who spent part of their classroom time on studying the differences were asked to elaborate on exactly what they did. They reported that, when necessary, they would point out the differences – including using their textbooks, all of which would mostly happen by the teachers' selecting examples which showed the differences themselves; one teacher reported that they “look at the intonation; supra-segmental features; lexical differences and structural differences; [and] analyze pragmatics and socio-linguistic aspects.”

The situation of potentially mixing B, C, M, and S was further examined by asking the teachers to report on exactly how they addressed the mixing both

in the classroom and on exams. According to the reports, teachers' activities ranged from non-action to very specific interventions: at least four teachers (one of whom discriminated based on students' level opting for potentially addressing the mixing beyond intermediate proficiency) indicated that they do not do much, if anything, about the mixing; two more said that they addressed the mixing only occasionally. One teacher resorted to explaining to students that they were mixing B, C, M, and S. At least two teachers reported that they either encouraged students to produce only one of B, C, M, and S, or else explicitly request the choice to be made with respect to pronunciation and the use of alphabets. All the teachers, who indicated that they provided certain interventions, also suggested that they did not penalize their students for the mixing.

6. Conclusion

At the end of the questionnaire, the teachers were given the freedom to explain particular issues in teaching B, C, M, and S. Three teachers spoke about the need for the most up-to-date educational materials. Two of them discussed the fact that at least some students who take B, C, M, and S are heritage speakers, their presence being seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage. Two other teachers were concerned with very specific linguistic issues, notably, verb aspect and alphabets. One teacher reported that there are „too many“ issues to be able to list them all; another indicated that there are „many“ issues, though not necessarily regarding the fact that B, C, M, and S are taught simultaneously over a single class period; rather, the issues were of a general foreign language teaching nature. One teacher actually saw a challenge in having to teach Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian „in one class [which] requires more time;“ another saw the mixing as an issue. One teacher noted the fact that „Montenegrin is generally less represented“, which the teacher thought was because of the lack of „textbooks for it.“ Still, this teacher made an effort to overcome this particular problem by using „Montenegrin ... videos or news articles“. Two teachers reported that they did not face any noteworthy issues.

Finally, the diversity of the teachers' responses concerning any particular issues in the present-day teaching of the course that students take to learn the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian presented the complexity of the endeavor of teaching B, C, M, and S simultaneously over a single class period with many more details than almost any other questionnaire task, the majority of which was of a forced-choice format. Specifically, the teachers brought up a variety of at least eight major issues, including the fact that one teacher noted that there were „too many“ while another repor-

ted that there were „many“ issues. It is up to anyone's imagination, of course, to speculate as to exactly how many issues the two teachers actually had in mind. A somewhat clearer picture, however, emerged based on the teachers' responses to all but the final task.

It is significant that none of the teachers reported Montenegrin as being their mother tongue or a language in which they considered themselves to be fluent. What is more, eight indicated that Serbian was their mother tongue (seven) or that they considered themselves to be fluent in it (one); the corresponding figure for Croatian was six (respectively, two and four), and for Bosnian – two (one and one, respectively). Such teachers' perceptions show the clear dominance of Serbian and Croatian over Bosnian and Montenegrin, which was further solidified by other reported perceptions.

When faced with a hypothetical situation of presenting different B, C, M, and S realizations of a linguistic phenomenon, twelve teachers reported that they would begin either with Serbian and following it with Croatian (seven), or do it the other way around (five); in both instances, Bosnian would follow and Montenegrin would come last. Indeed, Montenegrin would come last in all but one reported order (when it would be second to last, followed by Bosnian). Finally, it was explicitly noted by one teacher that Montenegrin was less represented than the other three, which again spoke to an apparent imbalance among the four.

Nevertheless, it seems that at least some teachers are making conscious efforts to balance B, C, M, and S in both their educational materials (four out of sixteen), as well as their classrooms (five out of sixteen). Still, Croatian and Serbian dominate again (Croatian was present in sixteen and Serbian in fifteen of the educational materials used, and both were present in all sixteen classrooms), with Bosnian reportedly included in the educational materials of fifteen and in the classrooms of fourteen teachers. Croatian and Serbian also dominate on exams (both reported by fifteen teachers); Bosnian was reported to be used on exams of thirteen teachers, and Montenegrin of four teachers.

Even when it came to the name of the course, the labels *Serbian* and *Croatian*, in their various shapes, were found in all sixteen U.S. universities examined. The label *Bosnian* was found in thirteen of the universities. And while it was reported that one university might be on the path toward calling the course *Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian*, at the moment of writing, the label *Montenegrin* was not a part of any course name.

Unlike the questionnaire's presupposition with regard to the simultaneous teaching of B, C, M, and S in U.S. university foreign language classrooms over a single class period, notably, that their teaching is balanced, the reality, as perceived and reported by the teachers themselves, is very much

imbalanced. Specifically, Croatian and Serbian are almost omnipresent compared to Bosnian and Montenegrin, of which the former, in certain respects only, appears to be catching up with the dominant two. Montenegrin's representation is not up to par with the other three, the notable individual attempt at including it notwithstanding. This may not be too surprising after all. In the late 1980s, Šipka and Dunatov (1988: 21) reported that, aside from those who indicated their Yugoslav, Croatian, or Serbian heritage, „[f]igures for other nations using the Serbo-Croatian language were not known.“ At that time, the authors of the study still spoke about Serbo-Croatian exclusively, which was a language name with a relatively long tradition. With this in mind, the reported dominance of Croatian and Serbian appears to be but a result of this tradition, much like the imbalanced representation of Bosnian and Montenegrin reflects Greenberg's (1999) initially mentioned account of the birth (or rebirth) of new languages (and pedagogical activities associated with them, which are a development of – roughly – the last three decades).

The research discussed in the present paper is but an initial step in an effort to understand exactly how B, C, M, and S are taught in foreign language classrooms at U.S. universities. In order to understand this phenomenon even better, much more detailed research should be devised; for example, involving not just teachers but also students. This initial effort is offered precisely so that, based on trying to rectify its shortcomings, future research will inevitably be more successful and, necessarily, more informative.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. How do you identify yourself?
2. What is your age?
3. In which one of the four countries listed were you born? 3.a. Have you ever visited any of the four countries listed (select all that apply; if you were born in one of the countries, then select it, as well)?
4. What is the name of your university?
5. At your university, what is the name of the course that students take to learn the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian?
6. For how long – in full years – have you been teaching this subject?
7. Which of the following do you consider to be your native language/mother tongue? 7.a. In which one of these languages do you consider yourself to be fluent? 7.b. Do you have any challenges in comprehending Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian? 7.c. Check all languages that challenge your comprehension.
8. Check all languages presented by the textbook (or, if you do not use a textbook, by the materials) that you use in your teaching.
9. Check all languages that you in fact teach in your classroom.
10. If there is a linguistic phenomenon to be presented, such that it is different in all four languages, which one would you choose to present 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th (select 1, 2, 3, or 4, respectively, in drop-down menus following language names)?

11. Do your students generally register for your class with the goal of studying one specific language of the four?
12. Check all languages that your students produce in your classroom.
13. Do you think that it is important for your students to know about the differences among the four languages? 13.a. Why so?
14. Do you devote any classroom time to specifically studying the differences among the four languages? 14.a. What exactly do you do? 14.b. Are your students at all aware of the differences (and, if so, how)?
15. Do your students mix the four languages? 15.a. How do you address your students' mixing of the four languages? 15.b. Check all languages which your students are able to use without mixing them.
16. Check all languages that you use on your exams.
17. Please, explain how do you address your students' mixing the languages on your exams.
18. Please, address any particular issues in the present-day teaching of the course that students take to learn the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian.

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**BOSNIAN, CROATIAN, MONTENEGRIN,
AND SERBIAN IN U.S. COLLEGE CLASSROOMS**

The present paper discusses research conducted between December 19, 2016, and January 16, 2017, among U.S. teachers of the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian, with the goal of eliciting teachers' perceptions of the presence of Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian in their own classrooms. The teachers reported a variety of at least eight major issues in the present-day teaching of Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian simultaneously over a single class period, which presented the complexity of the endeavour of their teaching. The reality, as perceived and reported by the teachers themselves, is very much an imbalanced one. Specifically, Croatian and Serbian are almost omnipresent compared to Bosnian and Montenegrin, of which the former, in certain respects only, appears to be catching up with the dominant two. Montenegrin's representation is not up to par with the other three.

Keywords: *Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian, U.S. college classrooms, teaching.*