

Polyphonic yat reflexes in Central South Slavic

Đorđe Božović
(University of Belgrade)

Keywords: dialect-to-standard advergence, Central South Slavic, yat-reflexes

Introduction. Central South Slavic diasystem is traditionally classified according to the reflexes of the Proto-Slavic vowel *yat* (*ě) into Ijekavian (*ě > *ije/je*), mostly spoken in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and parts of Croatia, Ekavian (*ě > *e*), mostly spoken in Serbia and parts of Croatia, and Ikavian (*ě > *i*) dialects, mostly spoken in parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Brozović & Ivić 1988). While Ikavian is not standardized in its modern form, the Ijekavian (in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) and Ekavian-based standards (in Serbia) have been in use since the 18th and 19th centuries, occasionally however overlapping in border zones, where state borders do not fully coincide with dialect boundaries. One such zone is south-western Serbia (with the city of Užice, formerly Titovo Užice, as the regional urban centre), where the Ijekavian base dialect is in a century-and-a-half-long, albeit still largely undescribed, advergence with the official Ekavian standard (Božović 2020).

Research questions, methods and data. Following Petrović's (2016) 'dialect as performance' approach, this paper looks more thoroughly into the Ijekavian base dialect of south-western Serbia in contact with the Ekavian-based standard as a case study, in order to point out both structural and sociolinguistics factors in the process of language shift vs. base dialect retention in this area of Central South Slavic. In particular, we focus on the *yat* reflexes, as perceptually most salient markers, and trace their distribution in dialogues situated in different socio-pragmatic contexts. In addition to field data, we have also transcribed and analysed the corpus of spontaneous dialogues produced by *Zlatiborski Podcast* (2023–), an online podcast run by members of the local community, featuring interlocutors of various age, education and social status.

Discussion and conclusions. By examining the use and distribution of *yat* reflexes and other dialect features with different degrees of structural salience in the corpus, the paper points out how speakers' meta-linguistic awareness as well as identity negotiation strategies play a role in the processes of base dialect features retention or change in contact with the standard. This, in turn, creates polyphony-like effects, in which speakers may use different accommodation strategies with different in-group and out-group interlocutors in different situational contexts, by making various choices from the inventory of traditional dialectal and more standard-like features, thus posing both methodological and theoretical challenges for describing the actual dynamics of dialect-to-standard advergence, which are further addressed in this paper.

References

Božović, Đorđe (2020). Lingvistički markeri regionalnog identiteta: pogled iz štokavskog. In: V. Polovina & B. Kovačević (eds.), *Primenjena lingvistika danas: Jezik, književnost i interdisciplinarnost / Applied Linguistics Today: Language, Literature and Interdisciplinarity*. Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 47–76.

Brozović, Dalibor & Pavle Ivić (1988). *Jezik, srpskohrvatski-hrvatskosrpski, hrvatski ili srpski*. Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža".

Petrović, Tanja (2016). Dijalekat kao performans. In: R. Žugić (ed.), *Dijalekti srpskoga jezika: istraživanja, nastava, književnost*, vol. 1. Leskovac: Leskovački kulturni centar / Vranje: Pedagoški fakultet, 531–538.