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CONTESTING IDENTITY IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF BELGRADE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Abstract
This paper investigates aspects of the Linguistic Landscape of central Belgrade between 2009 and 2017, theorizing its findings at the intersection of sociolinguistics, ethnography, and semiotics, which has gained ground as the platform of choice in "second wave" linguistic landscape (LL) research. It focuses on dynamic indexical relations between space and language in the framework of superdiversity, as a way of making sense of language-in-society. To this end, it problematizes how ideologically laden identitarian concerns (such as digraphia/double literacy but also Christian Orthodoxy and heteronormativity as an index of *srpstvo*) find their way onto Stari Grad walls. Such concerns have considerable – and often lasting – effects on the LL which can only be adequately investigated by systematic ethnographic studies of the semiotic means employed in inscribing it.

Key words: linguistic landscape, identity, indexicality, digraphia, homosexuality, Belgrade

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1. Introduction: Language, space, and ethnographic LL research

In the twenty years since Landry and Bourhis's (1997) seminal paper on the linguistic landscape (henceforth LL), scholarship has investigated this multifaceted phenomenon primarily in urban settings producing an impressive body of work (see, e.g., the contributions in Gorter 2006; Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael and Barni 2010; Pennycook 2009, 2010; Blackwoodet al. 2016 – to name just a few). Indeed, urban space has received the lion's share of LL research to date, although work on non-urban and peri-urban spaces has started gaining ground (Blommaert and Maly 2014: 1). This seems to hold true even as LL research is well into its "second wave", having progressively moved from setting more quantitative to more qualitative goals. And yet, there is precious little work done on the Balkans (e.g. Grbavac 2013; Canakis 2016; Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016), although the Greek financial crisis did precipitate interest in linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of space in the Greek capital and elsewhere (Kitis 2011; Kitis and Milani 2015; Stampoulidis 2016; Zaimakis 2016; Canakis 2012, 2016, 2017a, in press). With few exceptions (Radović 2013; Ivković 2015a, 2015b; Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016), Serbia has become the object of – often field-work based – investigations of public space and semiotic means from a variety of points of view (notably, activist perspectives, e.g., Sombatpoonsiri 2015[1]). And yet, such work often focuses selectively on semiotic production (non-linguistic and linguistic graffiti) which serves as a starting point for discourse analysis (more often of the type connected with non-linguistic work) and emphasizes power struggles over contested space (Johnson 2012). In a way this is how my research started out.[2]

However, I have always felt the lack of a *bona fide* linguistic frame of reference for my work, even as I continued my field work over several long trips, an extended stay of over a month in summer 2011, and frequent returns to Belgrade eversince. And if LL provided this much-needed frame, the work produced on my chosen area of interest (Serbia and

[1] See also Canakis (2017b) on this work.

[2] Visiting Belgrade in November 2009 – for a totally different project – I could not fail to notice the hate graffiti on the city walls in the aftermath of the cancelled September 21 2009 Gay Pride Parade (*Parada ponosa*). I could not fail to notice the sheer ubiquity and high visibility of such written messages, especially since, at the time, I was working intensively on language, gender, and sexuality issues.

the Balkans) was carried out by social scientists, notably historians and anthropologists, whose primary interests lie outside linguistics proper and whose findings require both special handling and a good dose of inter-disciplinary translation before being effectively used by sociolinguists. To this day, there is, to my knowledge, little work on the Serbian LL and it would be preposterous to think that this paper will fill the gap (widened and deepened as it has been by years of intense – and methodologically diverse – approaches to LL internationally).

What it does aspire to do, however, is to offer an ethnographically-based overview of Belgrade's LL, focusing on Stari Grad/Dorćol in the city center, pinpointing identitarian concerns as manifested in the LL – and what is more, concerns which have demonstrably galvanized Serbian society at large and have been operative in shaping contemporary identities (*qua* stances and actions, cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2004) in a post-war society within a globalized world(cf. Bjelić 2000; Blommaert 2013).

This work is situated, both chronologically and methodologically, at the intersection of first and second wave LL investigation, but has always assumed the ethnographic point of view, which has become the trade-mark of second-wave LL research. As I hope to be able to show, this is a more opportune approach (cf. Blommaert 2007) for research aspiring to situate and contextualize its LL findings at a certain point in time, in this case the period from 2009 to date. To this end, in the second section of this paper I will attempt a brief introduction to the LL of Belgrade, focusing on its peculiarities and attempting to anchor my observations on interdisciplinary work on Serbia and the Balkans. In the third and main section, I will concentrate on two aspects of the LL of Belgrade: the interplay of long-standing digraphia (a corollary of *dvoazbučnost* or double literacy in the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets; cf. Bugarski 1997a; 2012) and heteronormativity (the alignment of one's gender and sexuality, given a generalized presupposition of heterosexuality) with national identity (*srpstvo* 'Serbdom') in changing times. Although digraphia and a gendered and sexed sense-of-self may seem strange bed fellows, it will easily become apparent that they are not: for both have been heavily implicated in indexing national identityboth in the LL and in public discourse (cf. Canakis 2013; Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016). In the concluding section, I will show the implications of these findings for an understanding of Stari Grad and Dorćol as lived space in which aspects of social life are inscribed on the city walls.

2. Locating Belgrade in urban LL research

Part and parcel of the move from quantitative to qualitative LL research is an emphasis on the so-called "semiotic landscape" of which language is an integral part. To quote Jaworski and Thurlow (2010: 1)

> […] we are concerned here with the interplay between language, visual discourse, and the spatial practices and dimensions of culture, especially the textual mediation or discourse construction of place and the use of space as a semiotic resource in its own right. The broader context which we are interested in is the extent to which these mutual processes are in turn shaped by the economic and political reorderings of post-industrial or advanced capitalism, intense patterns of human mobility, the mediatization of social life […], and transnational flows of information, ideas and ideologies […].

To the extent that LL research is a reflex of the *spatial turn* in sociolinguistics, we are required to recognize "that space is not only physically but also socially constructed, which necessarily shifts absolutist notions of space towards more communicative or discursive conceptualizations […]" (Ibid.: 6).This is directly manifested in the gradual shift of scholarly interest in "*spatialization,* [i.e.] the different processes by which space comes to be represented, organized and experienced" (Ibid.: 7). This point of view is elaborated further in Blommaert (2013: 1-4), who argues that LLs bring great descriptive and analytical potential to sociolinguistics, urging sociolinguistics to pay more attention to literacy and historicize its analyses, given an understanding of space "as inhabited and invested by people" (Ibid.: 2).

Such a perspective favors a more holistic approach to the LL and underscores its dynamic character. Looking at space not only as physically bounded but also socially constructed allows for a better understanding of the role of the stativity, mobility, or/and evanescence of LL signs as well as of layers of human agency on the LL (cf., e.g., intertextuality). Observing space as dynamic and historical presupposes focusing on LLs as "indexing social, cultural and political patterns" (Ibid.: 3). Viewed in this way, the LL becomes an advantageous arena for the negotiation and contestation of identities (cf. Blackwood et al. 2016; Rojo 2016; Stroud 2016).

Keeping this in mind, researching the LL of Belgrade means researching the LL of a superdiverse metropolis in late modernity (cf. Blommaert and Rampton 2011), in which the tensions of the local and the global are manifested at rapid pace which is characteristic of large urban centers. Even a cursory look at the LL of Belgrade will reveal dense signage of all kinds, notably, public/administrative and private/commercial. Internationally known 'BCNs' (big commercial names; Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael 2016: 201-202) coexist with well-known local brand names in a variety of written messages in the form of printed posters, flyers or stickers and stenciled or free-style graffiti. What is more, these signs are predominantly written in two alphabets. And whereas this is the case in many large urban centers internationally, where a local alphabet coexists with the Latin alphabet, often as the carrier of a *lingua franca*, in Serbia both the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets are local (Bugarski 1997a). Digraphia is thus one of the most marked characteristics of the Serbian LL (cf. Ivković 2015a, 2015b) and an issue which has often caused conflicts (both within ex-Yugoslavia and Serbia proper) since the 1850 Literary Agreement (Greenberg 2004: 41), especially when reductive alignments have been sought between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets on the basis of ethnicity and religion as justification for exclusivist policies and practices (cf. the "Cyrillic only" movement) regarding the use of the alphabets (Greenberg 2000, 2004; Bugarski 1997b: 107 quoted in Greenberg 2004: 61-62).

Digraphia, as a particularity of the Serbian LL – indeed as a dominant characteristic of Serbian sociolinguistic reality – rife as it is with (long-standing but also changing) indexical relations to religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, etc., permeates linguistic ideologies in Serbia while also emerging as a theme in other aspects of sociopolitical life. It is not accidental, for instance, that the Cyrillic alphabet seems to be the favorite carrier of signs relating to religious life or nationalist mottos. As I will try to show in the remainder of this paper, the indexical relations of the Cyrillic alphabet to Serbian national identity, to *srpstvo*, seem to license a number of symbolic extensions which may be more "perceived" than "real", but are still "out there". It is in this way that the Cyrillic may end up, for instance, as a symbol for (religious) anti-abortion groups (who advocate pronatalism in the interest of *srpstvo*; cf. Picture 17).

In a seemingly different vein, homophobic attitudes and explicit hate-speech in public discourse and LL signs, often signed by extremist nationalist groups such as *Obraz* or *1389*, have been routinely associated

with *srpstvo* (regardless of whether they are written in the Cyrillic or the Latin alphabet). By the same token, local and foreign voices advocating LGBT[3] rights have been routinely cast as serving foreign interests and as undermining both *srpstvo* and Serbian sovereignty (Canakis 2013; Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016). It is interesting that the very same "foreign-mercenary" rhetoric has been noted in the literature in relation to linguistic and political facts in Serbia (Bugarski 1997a) – and it is by no means a Serbian novelty (cf. Canakis 2017a). Still, what this tells us so far is that, at a certain point in time, non-homonormative behavior came to be associated with anti-national behavior, whereas there was scarcely any mention of such an idea before. And, to be sure, if the LL in Belgrade after 2009[4] testifies to this, this is not the case anymore, as I will show in the next section. This conjunction of sexuality and *srpstvo* can only be appreciated in the light of linguistic and social science research on contemporary Serbia in the aftermath of the fall of Yugoslavia – and the same is true of any other issue that one may choose to focus on (e.g. the booming tourist industry in Belgrade, marked by extensive gentrification and development (cf. e.g. *Beograd na vodi*) as well as by the recent placement of signposts marking landmarks in several alphabets, and bearing maps of the surrounding area; see Pictures1 and 2).

This brings us to the relevance of ethnographic investigation of the LL of Belgrade. Despite the undeniable diagnostic merits of a quantitative analysis, a qualitative approach based on ethnographic study of the LL of Belgrade is more likely to provide thicker descriptions of language in lived space. Moreover, it is more likely to foreshadow the concerns of *Beograđani* and *Beograđanke*, as actual and potential LL actors, at a time of increasing globalization but also increasing tensions between the local and the global (cf. Blommaert 2010, 2013), given the competing views of national identity. An investigation of Belgrade's LL will necessarily have to refer to this (as it would in the case of other world cities) – but it will also have to refer to much more: the specifics of what we call "the local".

Belgrade is the biggest city and capital of a country that has changed names three times since the 1990s. It is still the biggest city where a version of (erstwhile) Serbo-Croatian (currently BCMS) is spoken as a native language. The sociopolitical adventures of conflict during (and after)

[3] LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people.

[4] In September 2009, there was an attempt to organize a Gay Pride Parade in the city for the second time and it failed.

the fall of ex-Yugoslavia have not only been inscribed in the LL, but often provide the necessary context to an understanding of what goes on in the LL today. Such background information will unavoidably have to inform LL research in Belgrade. In fact, some aspects of the LL may make little sense otherwise. It is against this background (and not in Belgrade as "a-chronic" physical space) that digraphia and homophobia may be seen as aspects of national identity at all. And it is highly unlikely that this will remain so, despite the strong indexical relations still holding among them.

The ethnographic approach applied in this work warrants a broader explanation of the themes focused upon and the specific material used. As previously mentioned, I began investigating the LL of Belgrade systematically in late 2009. Although, at the time, my interest lay primarily in hate speech and homophobia, it quickly became apparent to me that it was often co-articulated with a number of other concerns. By 2010 I was already investigating the LL of central Belgrade in a comprehensive way, looking for strands and connections in data which included quite literally everything: from public and commercial signage and football fan graffiti, to political signs and ads for private tutors, painters, and live-in care takers for the elderly. Although my work was never quantitative, I paid particular attention to repeated tokens of the same sign. Among these signs, the ones relating to identity politics in the realms of political life, football, religion, and sexuality were ubiquitous and allowed for interconnections which are best examined *in situ*. These are issues for which research in the LL and the social sciences provides suitable analytic tools and which, given the sheer number of collected data over the years, I feel confident, matter to LL actors in Belgrade.

3. Case studies

3.1. Digraphia: Cyrillic vs. Latin in the LL

To be in the Serbian capital is to witness "a unique case of active digraphia" (Ivković 2013: 335). It is also a rather safe assumption that this is one aspect of Belgrade's LL which is relatively stable. Although one could embark on a quantitative study in order to determine the percentages of use of the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets in specific domains, one could also focus on the irrelative distribution and visibility, based on the order in which they appear on certain types of signs, the font, size, color, and other material

aspects of their production (cf. e.g. Backhaus 2007; Grbavac 2013), as potential indexes of both official and unofficial stances towards them. Their long-standing coexistence as functionally equivalent, native vehicles of written language in Serbia is as easily ascertained in the LL as it is in people's private practices (e.g. handwritten shopping lists and reminders on one's fridge; PhD theses submitted in Cyrillic but PhD defense power points in Latin, etc.). And yet, their use suggests the prevalence of one over the other in specific contexts and may be understood as making a political statement, given the history of ideologically driven conflicts around them (Bugarski 1997a, 2001, 2012).

There is no doubt that both the Cyrillic and the Latin versions of the alphabet used in Serbia are highly visible. However, a quick look at official, administrative public signage in various domains indicates a specific alphabetic order. For example, in Pictures (1) and (2) Cyrillic comes first and it is in a larger font. The Latin version of the name of the street appears directly under it, not only in a smaller font, but with *Street* following it. On the other hand, *Knez Mihailova Street* is typographically aligned with Chinese and Russian versions following it in this order. This official sign sets the Cyrillic clearly apart from the Latin script which, given the addition of *Street*, relegates the Latin version to the realm of the foreign. Even if we concede that this choice reflects considerations of economy or/and redundancy in public signage, the absence of a Latin equivalent for *Trg Republike* and the choice of *Republic Square* instead (Picture 3) is semiotically significant. But one should be careful, for *Kosančićev venac* (in Picture 2) is indeed the Serbian Latin version of the place name which appears first in (boldface) Cyrillic and not an equivalent in English. A closer examination of several of these signs points to a state of affairs where Cyrillic always precedes Latin, sometimes clearly meant as an equivalent of Cyrillic and sometimes as a translation in English as the lingua franca *par excellence*. The Latin alphabet is a vehicle for both local and foreign languages, which, in turn, seems to be the driving force behind the choice of Cyrillic as first, i.e. as local. However, although there is a Serbian version of Latin just as there is a Serbian version of Cyrillic, Russian Cyrillic stands apart in all cases. This choice has a double effect: it presents Serbian Cyrillic as the local alphabet of choice, while allowing second place for the Latin alphabet as either local or foreign and global. The particulars of the Serbian version of Latin (such as *ć* and *č*) do not disqualify a place name from the position reserved for English, but Serbian and Russian Cyrillic are systematically set apart.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4

These newly erected columns, meant to help tourists find their whereabouts in Belgrade, present Cyrillic as the local, native Serbian, script. Seen in a different way, Cyrillic is considered to suffice for addressing locals. At the same time, this state of affairs tells us something about local administrative perceptions regarding the intended recipients of these signs. If the linguistic realm of the local is represented by the Cyrillic alphabet, the realm of the global features English, Chinese, and Russian in this order – and the choice and order of appearance are not accidental. The presence

of Chinese has increased commensurately with China's economic power and influence on the world economy. As for Russian, the reasons may be more complex: a perceived affinity with Russia as another Slavic and Orthodox nation since the fall of Yugoslavia has replaced the rather cool relations during Yugoslav times,[5] and evidence of this is available in the LL. In 2011, when the NATO meeting in Belgrade caused vociferous protests, the city was infested with posters and stickers (Picture 4) urging people to say "no" to the EU and proposing a political alliance between Serbia and Russia. Another indication of this perceived affinity is that, at the same time, there was a large graffitied sign in Studentski Trg on how Serbs are the ones paying for Russia's weakness. In Belgrade, as elsewhere, the LL provides dialogic and intertextual evidence of administrative choices as well as stances (cf. section 3.2) to issues attracting public attention. This is an instance of "the city as a text" (cf. Radović 2013).

The primary or exclusive use of the Cyrillic alphabet for administrative uses in the LL is documented by regular street signs (Pictures 5 and 6), official notices on postal boxes (Picture 7), and signs and billboards at the National Theater (Picture 8), to give just a few examples. Street signs, in particular, because of their sheer number in urban LLs, offer a good source of evidence for the principles guiding administrative signage. In central Belgrade, road signs typically feature both alphabets in the same font size with Cyrillic fist, in the upper part of the sign (Picture 5). This order is never reversed, in my experience. Cyrillic only road signs (Picture 6) are rarer in the city center, but more common as we move away from the center. Moreover, they are relatively older and likely to reflect policies which are no longer followed. However, it must be noted that Cyrillic only signs are also to be found on the very same main streets where other signs appear in both scripts.

[5] Yugoslavia was not a member of the Warsaw Pact.



Picture 5



Picture 6

Moving to the domain of public services, the vividness of the print on stickers bearing information on collection times on mailboxes (Picture 7) suggests they are a relatively recent addition. Moreover, billboards addressing the public of the National Theater and advertising its program are in Cyrillic only (Picture 8), in contrast to the billboards for the *Jugoslovensko Dramsko Pozorište* which may appear in Cyrillic or Latin (Picture 9). A similar poster bearing relevant information for the National Theater in English (Picture 10) suggests, once more, that an increasing realization of Belgrade's international position and appeal has cast the Latin alphabet as a preferential vehicle for foreign languages, notably English. Last, the Library of the City of Belgrade (Picture 11) is another institution which opts for Cyrillic only, as does Belgrade Public Transport Authority (Picture 12).



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12

While all of this is probably known to locals and foreigners who take an interest in linguistic matters in contemporary Serbia, my experience from researching the LL at home (the Metropolitan area of Athens, Greece and Mytilene on Lesbos) and abroad has made it clear that this kind of micro-documentation of mundane, banal signs (cf. Milani 2014) brings into focus what we, as locals, usually fail to notice, despite its ubiquity. And to be sure, the state of affairs presented here has to be examined in conjunction with wider discourses and stances regarding the use of the two alphabets in Serbia, to which I turn next.

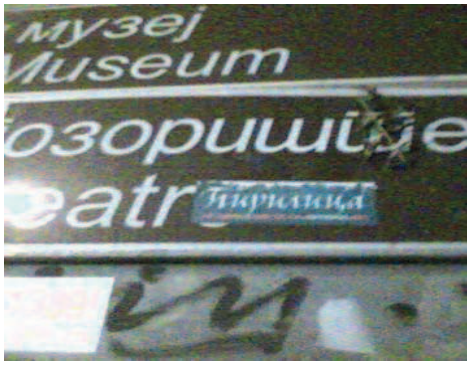
Although use of the Cyrillic or Latin alphabet in the former Serbo-Croatian area was conditioned by religion, the coexistence of Cyrillic and Latin in Serbia dates back to the early 20th century (Bugarski 2012: 224; Greenberg 2004: 41) and, if anything, their officially recognized equivalence by the Novi Sad Agreement in 1954 accorded high status to both. However, after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the intensification of regional nationalisms (cf. Bugarski 2001), while Serbia did not lead in linguistic innovation, it clung to the Cyrillic, which, being "highly valued as a crucial symbol and safeguard of Serb identity, was given priority over the 'Croatian' Latin" (Ibid.: 231; see also Bugarski 1997a). Greenberg (2004: 63) mentions that "[s]ome Serbs have felt strongly that only Cyrillic should be protected and promoted, and they have responded to real or perceived threats to the status of this script". The 2015 campaign organized by the newspapers *Politika* and *Večernje Novosti* for a law which would eliminate

taxes for printed material in Cyrillic may not have succeeded, but it is indicative of the continued concern for its protection.[6]

Signs relating to the Cyrillic-only campaign have punctuated the LL of central Belgrade over the last decade (Pictures 13 and 14). Given what we know from the relevant literature, public discourse, and LL research, such LL signs speak for the anxiety over the present and future of the Cyrillic in a LL where its prevalence can hardly be denied.



Picture 13



Picture 14

However, as repeatedly stated here, this prevalence is in the administrative sphere, whereas a charitable interpretation of the signs in Pictures 13 and 14 is that they target the commercial, and, most importantly, the private sphere. It is in the private sphere, and especially in computer mediated communication (Ivković 2013), where the Latin is perceived as prevalent and as threatening the Cyrillic (cf. Greenberg 2004: 41). In public space, the prevalence of the Latin script seems to be largely a result of its being chosen more often for commercial purposes. Ivković (2015b: 99) aptly describes the situation in the Serbian LL as "genre digraphia", a situation "defined as a tendency of use of one or the other alphabet in a particular domain/subdomain of language use, or genre: context, content, agency, activity, as well as within a particular spatial and temporal frame." Given its prominence in administrative LL signs, there are good grounds for assuming that exhortations for using the Cyrillic script make sense primarily if understood as enhancing its use in commercial signage and in private practices. This is a move that would restrict the use of Latin, and,

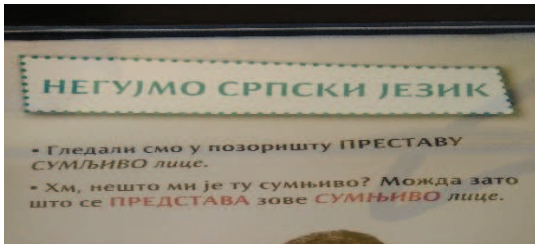
[6] See http://serbianmonitor.com/en/society/34998/serbia-an-offensive-to-preserve-cyrillic-alphabet/#.Wiq7K99l_IV

by the same token, enhance a sense of the Cyrillic as the national Serbian script in terms of everyday practice. Put differently, it aims at eliminating what Ivković currently describes as "genre digraphia".

Such a view seems justified in view of the animosity against the Latin Serbian script, manifested, for instance, in cases where the Latin version of a street-name is purposefully erased (Picture 15).[7] Although it is more than likely that such defacing of signs reflects the attitudes of political extremist minorities, it is nonetheless significant that such groups invest the Cyrillic and Latin script with strong identitarian meanings. Indirect, secondary evidence for such concerns also comes from the more recent *Negujmo srpski jezik* campaign, whose posters in Cyrillic are found in bookstores around the city (Picture 16). Although those signs are puristic directives aimed at regulating language usage in the context of advertising prescriptive manuals, the Cyrillic appears as a self-evident choice of script, since it complements the alphabetic purism documented in other LL signs.



Picture 15



Picture 16

Whereas the examples used so far are straightforward, some uses of the two scripts in the LL point to ideological and identitarian alignments which may need to be unpacked. For instance, preference for the Cyrillic in anti-abortion rallies relies on the privileged links of such groups with the Orthodox Church and the clergy (Picture 17) as pillars of national identity. In a similar vein, the preferential script for graffiti signed by *SNP 1389* and promoting the view of General Ratko Mladić as a hero (Picture 18) is, characteristically, the Cyrillic. The signs in Pictures (17) and (18) condense

[7] The sheer number of such cases in Stari Gradi/Dorćol and beyond justifies my treating this as a run-of-the-mill token.

aspects of identity and ideological claims with reference to the nation. That is why I will argue that the Cyrillic and Latin scripts in Belgrade are crucially implicated in the construction of complex orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003) with local significance.



Picture 17



Picture 18

In his pioneering work on the Serbian LL, using quantitative and qualitative methods, Ivković (2015a, 2015b) also concludes that "an alphabet becomes an index of religion, identity and nationhood, commodification, press tabloidization, and internetization, to name a few" (2015b: 99).[8] The waves of nationalism in the former Serbo-Croatian area have reinforced historical indexical relations between script and ethnicity, typically mediated by religion, and have opened a new chapter for the Serbian Cyrillic script as a symbol of national identity and Serbian citizenship and, therefore, as an eminent index of *srpstvo*. This is in keeping with research from a variety of perspectives (cf. Lampe 1996; Ramet 1996; Štiks 2006; Shaw and Štiks 2013). What is more interesting are the extensions of this symbolic currency to other domains (Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016), which justifies Ivković's (2015a: 109) observation that the choice of alphabet in Serbia is anything but arbitrary, for its consequences go well beyond alphabetic preference.

[8] See also Ivković (2013), who suggests that alphabet use on the internet shows both the dominance of the Latin alphabet as well as the stabilization of its non-standard orthographic variants.

3.2. Sexuality as an index of national identity in the LL

Urban centers in LL research have emerged as arenas of contestation between different groups as LL actors (cf. Shohamy and Waksman 2009; Blackwood et al. 2016). Anything from rivalry between football team fans (cf. Siebetcheu 2016), protests against gentrification and urban development (cf. Papen 2012), social protests and political unrest (e.g., Kasanga 2014; Kitis and Milani 2015; Stampoulidis 2016; Waksman and Shohamy 2016), language conflicts (e.g., Pavlenko 2009, 2010), and the rights of vulnerable social groups (e.g., Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016; Canakis 2017a) may be read off the LL of urban centers around the world. Situating the relevant LL signs in lived space and investigating them in the context of wider local and global discourses has been the hallmark of ethnographic LL research. It is in this intellectual climate that it makes sense to talk of Belgrade's LL as a locus for contestation of the legitimacy of the Latin alphabet as a Serbian script, document the administrative protection of the Cyrillic, and argue for the latter as an index of national identity. It is also in this tradition that it becomes possible to investigate how the inscription of seemingly irrelevant aspects of social life in the LL is ultimately linked to overarching concerns, such as national sovereignty and identity, which have dominated Serbian public opinion and motivated LL actors since the breakup of Yugoslavia. In this section I will attempt to show how public expression of homosexuality in Serbia became the target of extreme nationalist rhetoric and was portrayed as anti-Serb behavior after 2009.

LGBT advocacy groups and an awareness of LGBT rights as human rights gained visibility in Serbia after 2001, when the first Gay Parade in Belgrade was cancelled due to violent protests and, especially, after 2009, when the parade was cancelled yet again for security reasons (cf. Canakis 2013). These events coincided with nascent sociolinguistic interest in language and sexuality (Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Bucholtz and Hall 2004), and breakthroughs in LL research (cf. Barni and Bagna 2015, Shohamy 2015; Shohamy and Ben-Rafael 2015). Moreover, discourses around these events, both in and out of Serbia, developed in the context of intensified investigation of the interplay of sexuality and citizenship in Central and Eastern European societies (cf. e.g. Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011, especially the contribution by Blagojević). Much of this research was inspired by work on the interplay of nationalism, sexuality,

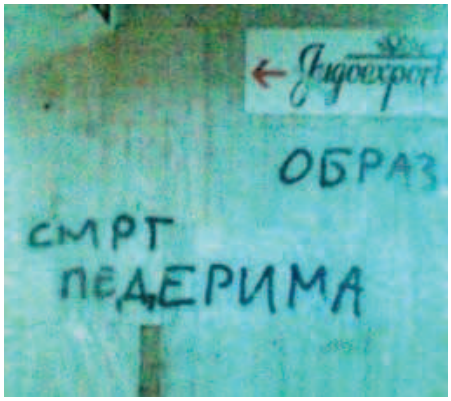
and masculinity (notably, Mosse 1982, 1985a, 1985b, 1996; Nagel 1998; and Pryke 1998) and advocated its relevance in new contexts. Although a thorough discussion of this theoretical background is beyond the goals of this paper,[9] it is important to stress the commonality of such ideological constructs in the Western world, before tracing aspects of the specific polemic in Belgrade.

From November 2009,[10] freestyle or stencil graffitied signs exclaiming *Smrt pederima* 'death to faggots' (Picture 19), *Čekamo vas!* 'we are waiting for you!' (Picture 20), *Neće proći 20.9* '20.9 won't pass', and a variety of other messages (Pictures 21, 22) became ubiquitous in the LL of Belgrade. They were mostly but not exclusively in Cyrillic, they were often signed by the extremist nationalist organizations *Obraz* and *SNP 1389*, and they were meant as intimidating messages to Serbian LGBT people who sought to enhance their visibility through organizing and taking part in Gay Pride Parades in Belgrade. These extremist groups, along with football fans and often connected with them, and maintaining close ties to political elites, were instrumental in spreading these LL signs.[11] Although they were often white-washed, they kept resurfacing. Moreover, they attracted attention in and out of Serbia because of their intensity and, presumably, because they were unprecedented at this scale. Be that as it may, before long, they became emblematic of Serbian intolerance of LGBT rights (cf. the 2009 documentary by Matthew Charles) and were instrumental in creating tension between local and foreign conceptualizations of sexuality vis-à-vis citizenship (cf. Blagojević 2011; Canakis 2013) and even dividing local LGBT advocacy groups. Specifically, given the explicit nationalist ideology of groups such as *Obraz* and *1389*, who orchestrated anti-gay protests and were major LL actors in spreading hate graffiti, homosexuality was pitted not only against traditional family values, but also against *srpstvo*.

[9] For a more extensive discussion, see Canakis (2013) and Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić (2016).

[10] This date refers to the beginning of my own research and is not meant to reflect the first appearance of such signs.

[11] Moreover, as suggested by an anonymous reviewer, political elites and football fans were also instrumental in the disappearance of these signs from the streets of Belgrade in recent years (cf. also Canakis 2013).



Picture 19



Picture 20

Declarations by representatives of *Obraz* and *1389* (see Canakis 2013: 312ff and Charles 2009 for footage), explicitly stated that they oppose not homosexuality as such, but its visibility in "Serbian streets", as it goes against religion and "Serbian spiritual identity" (lit. *duhovni identitet*). Not only was there mention that this display was indicative of imported mores, but, as the argument went, "this is just one of many indicators why Serbia should not join such a monstrous project as the European Union." Last, tolerance for Gay Pride Parades was squarely cast as curtailing the "freedom" of the Serbs. Note that this information was not spelled out as such in the LL. And yet, publicized as it was both in and outside the country, it facilitated the intended reception of the relevant LL signs as nationalist mottos rather than (only as) hate-speech. By the same token, LGBT people were not only stigmatized for their sexual practices, but also for their perceived lack of allegiance to the nation and its values. In this process, which subsided only many years later, LL signs served as shorthand for the wider rhetoric.

One did not have to look far to see the signs, for they were everywhere (see also Pictures 21 and 22 for different versions), just as one did not have to specifically search for the positions of extremist groups, since their members often took to the streets and chanted them while holding banners featuring national symbols. These groups claimed high visibility for themselves, as upholding national values, while casting Serbian LGBT people as anti-national subjects; indeed, a sexualized version of the "foreign mercenary". Thus, sexuality and national identity became the links of an indexical order with local currency at a historical moment. Given the

widespread dissatisfaction in Serbia with the positions adopted by the EU and the international community in negotiations regarding sensitive political matters, such as the independence of Kosovo, extremist voices may have found it easier to appeal to the public. Similar phenomena have occurred elsewhere. For instance, the rapid rise of the Golden Dawn in the context of the financial crisis in Greece after 2010, combined with a widespread distrust of both immigrants and the West *qua* oppressive lenders threatening national sovereignty, led to a deterioration of the status of LGBT citizens as early as 2011 (Canakis 2017a: 169).



Picture 21



Picture 22



Picture 23



Picture 24

It is worth examining the combination of linguistic and wider semiotic means which ended up portraying homosexuality (non-heteronormativity) as anti-Serb behavior. Linguistically speaking, the main mottos issue directive (*Smrt pederima* 'death to faggots') and declarative (*Čekamo vas!* 'we are waiting for you!', *Neće proći 20.9* '20.9 won't pass') speech acts which presuppose an identifiable enemy. The symbolic analogy of *Smrt pederima* to the Partisan motto *Smrt fašizmu* ('death to fascism') is hardly lost on the intended recipients. Therefore, the linguistic content of these messages portrays LGBT people as the enemy. On the wider semiotic plain, the very name of *SNP 1389* and *Obraz* 'honor', along with the latter's symbols (Picture 21), are fraught with national significance for the Serbs and are iconic of national identity. Regardless of whether *1389* and *Obraz* usurp such symbols, the combined effect of the linguistic and semiotic means in the LL is that people who uphold national (and religious) values are ready to engage in physical battle with a foreign enemy force. The sticker in Picture (23), where *Čekamo vas!* is written in Cyrillic under the schematic representation of a rally where a crowd is waving *Obraz* flags, featuring an identifiable symbol of Christian Orthodox iconography, aptly employs verbal and pictorial means to condense this view. However, the *Mene čekate?* 'are you waiting for me?' handwritten in Latin script next to it[12] is also significant.

One of the more interesting aspects of LL is its dialogic construction. Messages invite counter-messages exhibiting various degrees of intertextuality. Johnson's (2012) critical analysis of anti-LGBT graffiti in Belgrade can be fruitfully incorporated in investigating the place of these signs in contesting public space (cf. Pennycook 2009). Specifically, in Pictures 20, 23 and 24, original anti-LGBT graffitied signs are answered. What is more, they are answered in a tongue-in-check manner, making light of the threats. The stenciled graffitied signs featuring Batman and Robin (Picture 23) or a comic-book *femme fatale* (Picture 24) asking *Are you waiting for us/me?* are highly intertextual, as they directly address a declarative with a question featuring the same verb, and are indicative of the intentions of the people using them as situated responses to threats. Such counter-graffiti, replicated all over the city, is indicative of the type of resistance opted for by LBGT Serbs. By juxtaposing good-natured comic book heroes responding to threats at face-value, they assumed a (potentially unnerving) humorous stance while "inscribing non-normative, alternative human experiences, in

[12] Both appear on the marble pedestal of the statue of Mihailo Obrenović in Trg Republike.

a process of claiming visibility by symbolically appropriating public space" (Canakis and Kersten-Pejanić 2016: 136). More importantly, by choosing not to oppose the nation and its values directly, they have made clear their intentions to claim a position as national subjects within *srpstvo*.[13] But it is still noteworthy, and relevant to the discussion in the first section, that these responses are in the Latin script, a choice which contributes to their function as a rebuke.

Concluding this section, we should repeat that the LL data examined here are not ahistorical or achronic. They may have spanned a long period but they were not always there, and neither will they persevere forever. Both graffitied threats and tongue-in-cheek responses have become much less visible. And yet, in the aftermath of this public conflict, those earlier signs provide the context for new, intertextual signs further justifying the view of LLs as dynamic. These new signs (Pictures 25 and 26, shot in 2016), constitute rebukes in a different vein. The stenciled sign in Picture 25 announces, in Latin script, that it is capitalism rather than gay people who "screw you-all". It is intertextual in that it issues an aphorism which makes sense in the context of Belgrade's LL, but is not a response to another sign in its immediate vicinity. In contrast, Picture 26 features a co-constructed, intertextual sign, where a garden-variety token of *Smrt pederima* 'death to faggots' is edited to read *Smrt hejterima* 'death to haters'. Both the original and the edited part are in the Cyrillic alphabet (with the exception of *t* in *hejterima*).



Picture 25



Picture 26

[13] In contrast, given different local histories, Greek LGBT people often opt to explicitly state their distance from the nation with graffitied signs claiming they are the "shame/dishonor of the nation" and rebuking self-styled patriots as "disgraceful".

Regardless of who the LL actors are in this case, it is still important that the superimposed text identifies the original message as hate-speech – and that it does so in Cyrillic. Despite their differences, both of these signs challenge the exclusion of LGBT people from the national body.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I examined aspects of the LL of central Belgrade as contested space, focusing on conflicting views of national identity as manifested in the choice of script in administrative signage and in graffiti and counter-graffiti on the public expression of homosexuality. Despite extensive digraphia in commercial and private signs, Cyrillic is the alphabet of choice in administrative signage vis-à-vis the key aspects of public life (road signs, public transport, postal service, libraries and other cultural institutions, etc.). Moreover, it is the alphabet indexically linked with religious life and traditional national values. In contrast, the Latin script, depending on the context, may function as local or foreign and may also be used as a way of reaching out to non-local others.

On the other hand, the symbolic power of the Cyrillic as the national script may license its use in cases which are less obvious: as the preferred script for hate speech against homosexuals, at a certain historical moment, precisely due to discourses forwarded by local extremist groups, which cast homosexuality as anti-Serb behavior. This testifies to the dynamic character of indexical relations in general and the existence of complex local orders of indexicality in particular. Indexical relations are dynamic precisely in that they are not achronic, a point which has been underscored in analyzing more recent LL signs dealing with homosexuality in Belgrade.

Linguistic landscapes provide cues for the symbolic construction of public space (cf. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006) by focusing on the dynamic indexical relations between space and language, as a way of making sense of language-in-society. The two examples examined in this paper, situated as they are in the center of a contemporary superdiverse metropolis, bespeak the intentions of competing LL actors to inscribe, contest – and, in doing so, symbolically claim – Belgrade's bustling historical center. Whether representing officialdom (cf. Section 3.1) or driven by individual ideological concerns (cf. Section 3.2), LL actors are motivated by a tacit understanding that claiming and dominating over the LL of Stari Grad

effectively links their LL signs to coveted public space, forging indexical links between language and space.

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ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ ИДЕНТИТЕТА У ЈЕЗИЧКОМ КРАЈОЛИКУ БЕОГРАДА: ЕТНОГРАФСКИ ПРИСТУП

Сажетак

Рад истражује аспекте језичког крајолика централног Београда у периоду између 2009. и 2017. године, уз теоријско разматрање налаза у пресеку социолингвистике, етнографије и семиотике као преовлађујуће платформе у „другом таласу" истраживања језичког крајолика. Фокус рада је на динамичним индексним везама између простора и језика у оквиру супердиверзитета, као начина разумевања језика у друштву. У том циљу проблематизује се начин на који идеолошки оптерећена питања идентитета (као што су диграфија/двоазбучност, али и хришћанско православље и хетеронормативност као показатељи српства) проналазе своја места на зидовима Старог града. Таква идентитетска питања имају знатан – и често трајан – утицај на језички крајолик, који се може адекватно истражити једино систематичним етнографским студијама семиотичких средстава која се користе за његово уписивање.

Кључне речи: језички крајолик, идентитет, индексикалност, диграфија, хомосексуалност, Београд