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### ***Small area languages in global academic settings***

#### **1. Introduction**

This paper provides a closer look at the Serbian academic setting, viewed as paradigmatic for small area languages<sup>1</sup> in academia. Publication locations (academic journals in particular) accepted as relevant to one's academic CV at Serbian universities, are investigated in correlation with the 'publish in English or perish' paradigm, which we view as the case in which "the language barrier has become a more general and scholarly barrier..." (van Dijk, 1997: 292). Lack of visibility of scientific findings related to regional, national or endemic topics in Serbian science, accompanied by an almost non-existing scientific terminology management in small area languages, such as Serbian, are the most common consequences of such academic policies.

As many European and other international institutions point out, English as a lingua franca is not enough! The European Commission and the Council of Europe have long time ago declared plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as their primary goals for each and every citizen of the continent, in which everybody should be able to use in all communicative domains their own L1, a lingua franca and at least another foreign/second language. This goal is to be achieved in different communities of practice, and the academic ones should of course be among them. We propose a rationale for a new academic policy based on a new plurilingual academic discourse recognized in an international/global academic setting which might help researchers writing in small area languages receive credit for their achievements both at home and abroad. *Open Access Journal System* in synergy with new translation tools, such as the one developed in Europe (*itranslate4eu*), might present an excellent initial solution which would assure visibility to researchers writing in small area languages.

#### **2. English as a global academic lingua franca vs. small area languages in academic discourse**

If we view language as means to create, produce and reproduce social functions, roles and relationships, i.e., overall social practices, academic discourse should be understood not only as an objective reflex of 'pure' and impartial scientific knowledge, but rather as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles" (Gee, 1996, cit. in Hyland, 2009: 1). Consequently, as in all other instances of human communication, ideological, epistemological and strategic orientations of the speakers are very closely related to language choices in academic discourse as well.

In the continuation of this paper, a critical view of the role of small area languages is outlined and commented on in relation to the dominance of English as an international academic lingua franca, in order to investigate power relations which are derived from linguistic choices on either personal or institutionalized levels. The basic question we address is whether the overarching presence of academic English, both on international, but also often on national/regional scale (in non-Anglophone countries), should be defined in terms of linguistic imperialism which prevents scientific knowledge presented in other languages to reach a larger academic audience, as proposed by e.g., Phillipson (2006), and, if so, what is the future of smaller languages in this particular place in times of globalized communication which puts high demands on the members of academic communities all over the world. Nowadays, specific (often quantitative) demands are placed in terms of individual production and international recognition which are necessary for university professors and/or researchers' promotion or tenure, that is, for their simple survival in the academic world<sup>2</sup>. It is argued that the world of international science (in which English is the language of communication) is, as any global system, permeable only to top research results and accomplishments. Such results are born out of long term efforts, investments and academic interaction on a global scale, supported and carried out by networks of educational, scientific, industrial and financial potentials which, quite predictably, have interests above and beyond 'pure science'. We fully recognize the fact that endemic, regional or national topics have always received attention from interested scholars, who learn smaller languages and conduct extremely valuable research in geographic areas where they are spoken, but their results are also most commonly published in English. For instance, some very well known literary and anthropological research on Serbian oral poetry was carried out by international scholars and their results published in English internationally recognized academic journals.

However, in times when social contexts become more and more hostile when faced with challenges of integration of poorer immigrant population into richer societies (e.g., see recent comments made by the British and the German Prime ministers on the doom of the concept of interculturalism), these richer societies (which invest much higher percentages of their GDP into scientific research) also assign themselves a role of leaders in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Small area languages are standard languages with relatively small numbers of native speakers, in comparison with, for example English or Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> Herein, we will not focus on the role of English as the language of education (i.e., English in the teaching process) which has been recognized by many researchers: "With half the world's population predicted to be speaking the language [English] by 2050, English is becoming less a language than a basic academic skill for many users around the world. This clearly has implications for Higher Education" (Wilson, 2002, cit. in Hyland, 2009: 5). Consequently, we will not engage in researching the discourses of teaching processes, even though they certainly present an extremely interesting research area.

epistemological orientations, research topics and preferred locations (i.e., academic journals, textbooks, conferences and networks) in which the scientific results are being published (even a superficial look at the Journal Citation Indexes of some of the most commonly cited lists, such as Thomson Reuters List, reveals in a painfully obvious manner that most of the journals found there are those that publish almost exclusively in English).

However, as competition among scientists, researchers and university professors becomes more and more dependent on their publication records, speakers of smaller languages become exposed to a new type of academic segregation whose main consequences are the following:

1. Research areas related to topics specific to geographically and linguistically limited, regional, national or endemic phenomena are non-transparent or only partially transparent to a larger scientific community. Due to the fact that they are most often published in regional or national languages, they are lost to the global academic market.
2. As researchers who have in the past published in languages other than English recognize the need to be visible on the global scene, they gradually shift to English and take less care of scientific terminology management in their own languages which often results in a very non-selective and confusing application of a number of terms for the same concept in non-English academic discourse. (This latter issue related to scientific terminology management of small area languages lies beyond the scope of this research and will not be dealt with in the continuation of this paper.)

All the above flies in the face of the proclaimed goals of European institutions arguing for importance of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism of the continent. If plurilingualism is *the* goal to be reach at an individual level, then it must also become a norm within different communities of practice, the academic ones being among them.

### 3. English vs. Serbian in Serbian academia

The Serbian academic setting is viewed herein as paradigmatic for small area languages in academia. Requirements for promotion at state universities in this country are defined in terms of numerical scales which stand in direct correlation with one's academic publication records. These are specified in line with the internationally recognized journal and citation indexes and impact factors assigned to them by international associations, the most prominent one being the *ISI<sup>3</sup> Web of knowledge*, provided by the Thomson Reuters Business Corporation. Thus, Serbian academia follow what some researchers have named 'revealed preference' criterion, rather than the 'stated preference' or 'peer review' criterion for journal ranking when determining a person's achievement rate and merit for academic promotion and tenure (Tahai & Meyer, 1999). The stated preference criterion (based on expert judgment of members of a given academic community) had been a long honored tradition of Serbian, just as many other European universities, before academic globalization was recognized by Serbian scholars as a prerequisite for both national and international recognition of Serbian research in all fields of academia (Filipi Matutinović, 2011: 58).

This particular shift from stated to revealed, quantitative, evaluation of location and (supposedly objective) value of publications has brought into focus an issue of the use of English as an international language of academic communication among Serbian scholars. It has been established by many that "academics all over the world are increasingly publishing their research in English and finding these papers cited more often.", and that "[...] English makes up over 95% of all publication in the *Science Citation Index*" (Hyland, 2009: 179). In addition to this, over the last several decades voices have been heard that researchers who write in English as L2 have been systematically excluded from publications in English (Gibbs, 1995; Hyland, 2009). And even though we recognize the fact that the frustration caused by this state of affairs is shared by English journals editors on one hand, and researchers and academic writers who speak/write in English as L2 on the other hand, we feel that the overall state of discomfort is much more overwhelming among 'the periphery writers' of the English speaking world (Canagarajah, 1996). Namely, as difficult as it may be for academic journal editors to deal with manuscripts prepared in accordance with discursive patterns and text organization alien to native-English speakers, we strongly believe that "Non-Native English speaking researchers may feel particularly intimidated by the demands that publishing in English makes on them" (Hyland, 2009: 181).

This is most certainly the case of Serbian academic writers which have been quite threatened by the requirements set up by a small number of their peers who sit on academic committees and decide on their future. The fact that the criteria have been set up by members of the academic community coming from engineering and natural sciences whose placement in the English-dominant publication sphere seems to be more established has been viewed as especially jeopardizing to researchers and university professors from social sciences and humanities who are more often than not dedicated to research in endemic, locally or regionally relevant topics which have for the longest time been published in Serbian or regional academic journals and other types of publications (Filipi Matutinović, 2011: 40)<sup>4</sup>. Within this context, it is noteworthy mentioning that in 2009, there were only 15 Serbian journals (from all areas of scientific research, and none of them from humanities and social sciences) listed in the *Web of Science* (Filipi Matutinović et al., 2009). According to our research, this number has

<sup>3</sup> ISI: Institute for Scientific Information.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, this is not the case just in Serbia. Even languages with much larger numbers of native and non-native speakers, such as German, have found themselves in the same position when it comes to their representation in academic writings in different research fields: according to Genc & Bada (2010: 147), between 98% and 72% of German scholars in natural sciences claimed their working language was English, while that percentage was much lower in humanities in social sciences, ranging from 35% in linguistics to 8% in law!

not changes till the present day. The fact that numerical evaluation based on international scientific citation indexes have been imposed rather indiscriminately and without taking into consideration other just as relevant factors in academic research, especially in humanities and social sciences, has been pointed out on numerous occasions in public, political and academic debates in Serbia (e.g., see "Evaluation, financing and development of science in Serbia, held on October 15, 2009, where the Minister of Science of the Republic of Serbia and a number of distinguished members of the academia took place, see at [http://www.politickiforum.org/index.php?vrsta=tribina&kategorija=&tekst=31&naredba=prikaz&br\\_stranice=#689](http://www.politickiforum.org/index.php?vrsta=tribina&kategorija=&tekst=31&naredba=prikaz&br_stranice=#689)). "For a small academic community such as the Serbian one, it represents a great success to publish articles in journals included in the Web of Science, and to be cited in those same journals, but an absolute number of those citation should not be overemphasized and should not be used as a science metric indicator [...]. Other sources of data about citations and publications should be used as well in science metric research, especially in scientific disciplines such as history, geography, etc., which are regionally specific [...]" (Filipi Matutinović, 2011 48).

From all the above, it is very clear that a new non-English centered, pluricentered, pluricultural and plurilingual academic policy in academic publications is needed. A rationale for a this new policy based on plurilingual academic discourse recognized in an international/global academic setting might help researchers writing in smaller languages receive credit for their efforts both at home and abroad.

#### 4. Plurilingual academic publication policy

In light of all the above facts, we propose a search for a rationale for a new approach to academic research and publications which would lead to a more widespread recognition of scientific results published in languages other than English, or, what we have labeled small area languages. It is our strong belief that a new policy should be defined by members of academic communities using small area languages which would make their journals and other academic publications more easily available to the international public.

First of all, digitalization of relevant publications in Serbian and other small area languages is a prerequisite for enhanced visibility of research results of relevant academic communities<sup>5</sup>.

Second, in order to offer the contents of digitalized publications in small area languages to the widest interested international audience, an attempt should be made to publish them online through open access journal systems, such as DOAJ (*Directory of Open Access Journals*, see <http://www.doaj.org> for further information).

Third, machine translation tools are needed in order to make those journal contents in small area languages visible to the speakers of other languages. One such tool was recently developed and is in use in Europe, entitled *itranslate4 eu* (for further information visit <http://itranslate4.eu/project/>), designed by the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with a number of academic and commercial machine translation agencies from France, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Finland and Latvia. As stated on their web page, this tool provides " [...] translation for the following languages (in every language pair): Afrikaans, Albanian, Arabic, Basque, Belarusian, Breton, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dari, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, German, Greek, Haitian, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Kazakh, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Malay, Maltese, Norwegian Nynorsk, Norwegian Bokmål, Occitan, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Tajik, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Welsh, Yiddish. The translation will be available from any to any language, in many cases directly or if needed through English." In other words, it is possible to check contents of an academic article written in a language one is not familiar with using the support of this and other similar machine translation tools which makes the above cited language barrier far less visible, dominant or decisive in academic research.

Consequently, if all the above actions are carried out, a context is created in which a researcher's competence in English as a global academic lingua franca bears far less impact on the visibility of their publications and makes them more readily and easily available to their interested academic peers on the international scene. Small area languages around the world are then again in the position to regain the place they rightfully deserve on both national and international/global academic scene.

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade has recently undertaken a comprehensive task of digitalizing its complete database of publications: journals, monographs, manuscripts, etc.

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