

Created by US-NATO, Linguistic Engineering: New “Boshnjak” Identity and “Bosnian” Language

Twenty Years After The 1995 Dayton Peace Accord:

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This year in November (21st) is going to be the 20th anniversary of the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord – a treaty signed by four Presidents (the USA, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) that led to an end of the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As a result of the Dayton Peace Accord a new “independent and internationally recognized state” emerged: Bosnia-Herzegovina as a confederation of two political entities (the Republic of Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation) but ethnically strictly divided into three segments composed by the Serb, Croat and Muslim (today Boshnjak) controlled territories. In contrast to the Republic of Srpska (49% of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina) the Muslim (Boshnjak)-Croat Federation is cantonized on the ethnic basis.

However, Bosnia-Herzegovina is today just another non-functional western project – a country that is not independent; it is a Western protectorate, a territory, fully dependent on international financial donations and credits. The country is ethnically divided as imposed by US-NATO without any inter-ethnic cooperation between the three leading ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, one of the most important features of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is a creation and existence of a new ethnolinguistic and ethnonational identity – the (Muslim) “Boshnjaks” who speak the “Bosnian” language as a separate and independent language from the family of the South Slavic languages. This is an artificial construct with a view to creating ethnic and linguistic divisions.

The political consequences of the “Boshnjak” project are of international significance: this ethnonational identity is based Islam and Muslim political ideology as all other identity components, including the language which in the 1980s was Serbo-Croatian. Subsequently, the Muslim Boshnjaks accepted all components of political Islam ideology and as a consequence the world is today faced with the fact that the Muslim part (cantons) of Bosnia-Herzegovina is the first European Islamic State (the second one is Muslim Albanian Kosovo) – a country that is a main European recruitment center for the Middle East Jihad fighters.

Nevertheless, the political project of making the “Boshnjak” ethnonation required and the creation of a separate ethnolanguage for such ethnonation in order to prove that the Boshnjaks deserved to be treated as a separate nation with their own independent state.

The object of this article is to present the process of making separate (from Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrin) Boshnjak ethnolinguistic national identity by using the technique of “linguistic engineering/chirurgic” in the process of creation of an independent (from Serbian/Montenegrin and Croatian) Bosnian language as a national language of Bosnian-

Herzegovinian South Slavic Muslims (former speakers of common Serbo-Croat language). We will present as well the ways in which various elements of linguistic diversity within former Serbo-Croat language have been “emblemized” and taken as markers of ethnonational and political identity of Muslim Boshnjaks in multicultural/multiconfessional Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1993, when official Boshnjak ethnonational identity was introduced, up today.

The relationship between language, nation and state is a part of an ideological composition either in Bosnia-Herzegovina or in the rest of the Balkans (similarly to majority of European regions). Bosnia-Herzegovina is a Balkan historical province where the consequences of the clash between national ideologies, which are both domestically rooted and imported from outside with more or less autonomous currents of thinking and behaviour, have been deep and extreme.

Imported ideology of the 19th century German Romanticism of linguistically rooted ethnonational identity and solving the national-state problem (“Eine sprache, ein folk, ein staat”) is fused with more autonomous currents that were heavily imbued with “bloody memories” from WWII and resulted in what is labelled to be “post-Communist nationalism”. Such amalgamation became a basis for the creation of increasingly homogeneous states with rejuvenation of inter-ethnic intolerance.

The land of Bosnia-Herzegovina is probably the best Balkan example of a crucial interface between language and nationalism. For the purpose that they are separate nations all three major ethnoconfessional players in Bosnia-Herzegovina legally proclaimed their own national languages to be disconnected with Serbo-Croatian. That was of especial importance to the Muslims/Boshnjaks as without “evidence” that their native language is different from Serbian and Croatian they will hardly convince the international community that they are not originally Serbs or Croats, which was a crucial justification of their claims to live in internationally independent “national” state organization.[\[1\]](#)

The *Bosnian* language (de facto of only Muslim Boshnjaks), as a separate (South) Slavic one, was officially inaugurated in 1996 by publishing the book: S. Halilović, *Pravopis bosanskog jezika (Orthography of Bosnian Language)* in the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina – Sarajevo. According to the *Orthography...* (and other similar publications), Bosnian language is different in comparison with “relative” Serbian and Croatian because of the following main reasons:

- The use of phoneme “h” in certain words differently from Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrin. For instance, the word “coffee” is written and pronounced in these languages as: in Bosnian: *kahva*; Serbian/Montenegrin: *кафа/kafa*; Croatian: *kava*; in Bosnian *hudovica* (widow), in Serbian/Croatian *udovica*, etc.
- Greater use of “Turkish” words (i.e. of Oriental origin) like *ahbab* (friend); *amidža* (uncle); *adet* (custom/habit), *akšam* (twilight), etc. (all of these words are known in Serbian, Montenegrin and Croatian languages but not used regularly as they are replaced by the Slavic words).[\[2\]](#)
- Using of only one form of the Future tense: “ja ću kupiti/kupit ću” (I will buy) that is used in standard Croatian as well, but no use of forms “купићу/ja ћу да купим” as in standard Serbian/Montenegrin.[\[3\]](#)
- The use of Ijekavian sub-dialect of the Shtokavian dialect but not the Ekavian one of the same dialect.[\[4\]](#) However, Ijekavian sub-dialect is used in spoken and standard language by all Serbs, Croats and Boshnjaks westward from Drina River

(historically and politically separating Serbia from Bosnia-Herzegovina) and by Serbs in Western Serbia and by all Slavs in Montenegro.

Nominally, the Bosnian language is written in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. However, in practice it is only in Latin (like Croatian) for the purpose to break any link with the Serbs for whom the Cyrillic script is (by language law) the first, while Latin is the second national alphabet.[\[5\]](#)

It has to be emphasised that Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian Latin script is identical. In a historical context, the native language of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina (claimed to be *Bosnian* one) was written by three alphabets: "latinica" (Latin), "bosančica/bosanica" (Cyrillic) and "arabica" (Arabic). However, with regard to "bosančica", the fact that this script came to mediaeval Bosnia-Herzegovina from Serbia and during the Ottoman rule is not recognized. It was known within the Bosnian Muslim feudal circles as "Old Serbia" up to the mid-19th century. At the same time Croatian philology claims that "bosančica" is Croatian national Cyrillic script. By "arabica", undoubtedly, it was written in one of the most beautiful profane lyric, religious and fine literature - "književnost adžamijska".[\[6\]](#)

Regardless of official domestic and international recognition of a separate Bosnian language, linguistically speaking, grammar and spelling of Serbian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Bosnian languages are broadly the same. [\[7\]](#) It shows that all four of them have the same origin, process of development and linguistic essence. Even the fact that there are 8% of lexical differences between them does not imply practical obstacles for understanding and communication in everyday life.

The common link that is connecting in practice and even in literature Bosnian with neighbouring Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian and Montenegrin languages are about 3000 Oriental words ("turcizmi"). For many of them there is no domestic Slavic alternative.[\[8\]](#)

One of the main problematic issues concerning ethno-linguistic-statehood reality of Boshnjaks is the fact that their ethnic, language and state names do not have the same terminology as in the majority of European nations (ex. Polish nation; Polish state; Polish language, etc.). In the other words, their ethnonational name - "Boshnjaks" does not correspond to the name of their national state - "Bosnia-Herzegovina" and both do not correspond to their national language name - "Bosnian". In this context, why do Boshnjaks not speak the Boshnjak language but rather speak Bosnian? In this regard, it has to be said that originally from 1991 up to 1996 Boshnjaks pretended to officially speak the Boshnjak language (but never tried to rename Bosnia-Herzegovina into "Boshnjakia"). Such practice was even internationally sanctioned by the Dayton Peace Treaty in November 1995 when the text of the agreement was signed in four languages: English, Croatian, Serbian and Boshnjak (not Bosnian!).

However, very soon the ideologists of the Boshnjak ethnonational identity understood that international science of Slavonic philology is very suspicious upon the use of *Boshnjak* language as it is not at all rooted in the historical sources in which from the year 1300 up to 1918 is mentioned only the *Bosnian* language (in fact as a provincial language spoken by the Orthodox, Catholic and from 1463 Muslim communities).[\[9\]](#) The Bosnian language, as a mother tongue of all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina was especially promoted at the time of Austro-Hungarian administration in this province from 1878 to 1918.[\[10\]](#) However, such

solution was decisively rejected by the Serbs and Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina who called their languages after their ethnic names. Thus, the idea of the Bosnian language at that time (as today as well) was accepted only by local Muslim inhabitants.[\[11\]](#)

Nevertheless, the Austro-Hungarian policy of the Bosnian language as a native one of all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina is accepted today by those who advocated the Bosnian language as a mothertongue of Serbs, Croats and Boshnjaks from Bosnia-Herzegovina and of the Boshnjaks from Sandžak area (*Paška* in Serbian language and historiography). The last one was divided after 1913 between Serbia and Montenegro but before 1878/1908 being a part of the Ottoman province (pashaluk in Serbo-Croat) of *Bosnia* (not of Bosnia-Herzegovina!) which existed from 1580 to 1878/1908.[\[12\]](#)

The truth is that in the 15th and the 16th centuries “Bosnian” (or “Serbo-Croat” or “Serbian” or “Croat”) language was the second diplomatic and official language at the court in Istanbul (after the Turkish one) due to the fact that at that time there were many high Ottoman officials and the Janissaries[\[13\]](#) in Istanbul (including and Grand Vizirs) originating from Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, this fact became the basis for the claims that the *Bosnian* language was at that time some kind of Balkan *lingua franca* and a diplomatic language in Europe. Nevertheless, the sources are telling us that in the most cases the local South Slavic population of ex-Serbo-Croat language (especially those from Dubrovnik) have been calling their language as “our language”, “Slavic language”, “Illyrian language”, etc., but only in very rare cases by ethnic names.[\[14\]](#)

The creators and promoters of a separate Bosnian language, in order to prove their standpoint, have applied the technique of “linguistic engineering”, similar to their Croatian colleagues concerning the Croatian language.[\[15\]](#) In both cases, it was and is done for the very purpose to prove that their ethnic groups are linguistically independent which enables them to call themselves separate *nations* internationally recognized as independent nation states according with the right to self-determination. However, in contrast to Croatian case, Bosnian “linguistic engineering” is not based on the introduction of neologisms[\[16\]](#) but rather on the re-introduction of Oriental words which had been brought to the Balkans by the Ottoman authorities (those words are of Turkish, Arab and Persian origin).

In conclusion, we can say that the problem of official recognition of a separate Bosnian language of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Boshnjaks can be solved taking into consideration two standpoints:

w Linguistic standpoint

w Socio/polito-linguistic standpoint.

De facto (linguistically), Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin languages are part of one standard-linguistic system. They express unity in orthography, grammar, morphology, syntax, phonology and semantics. For instance, all of them have 30 phonemes (25 consonants and 5 vocals). Between them there are only app. 8% lexical differences (including and “neologisms”). However, there is a tendency to create lexical differences with a view to creating barriers, in order to firmly justify ethno-linguistic and state-political differentiation. The obvious fact is that the level of understanding is almost 100% (excluding the most newest neologisms).

De Jure (in socio/polito-linguistic point of view) these four languages are separate ones and

internationally recognised. While Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin are considered separate languages in essence they are the same language.

The crucial technique of “linguistic engineering” pertaining to the Bosnian language is its lexical Orientalization with the three sociolinguistic and ethnonational tasks to be achieved:

1. Inner homogenization of *Boshnjak* nation
2. Denationalization of Croats and Serbs within Bosnia-Herzegovina (by suggestion that all inhabitants of this state speak the Bosnian language)[17]
3. External heterogenization of ethnoconfessional Boshnjak nation in relation to the neighbouring Serbs and Croats.[18]

The politics of “linguistic engineering” in the case of the Bosnian and Croatian languages was implied for the final aim to create firstly independently standardized national languages within officially common Serbo-Croatian one (during ex-Yugoslav (con)federation) and later (after collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991) internationally recognized separate languages by deepening and using as much as the dialectical/regional differences of the same spoken Serbo-Croatian language. The ultimate result was that minor speaking differences were proclaimed for the national characteristics and as such have been used to be lay the foundations of the newly declared autonomous *national* languages. Consequently, the common Serbo-Croatian language has ceased to exist together with a common Serbo-Croatian nationality.

Finally, the Muslim community in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 20th century is no longer a *religious community*. It has been categorized and internationally recognized as a national identity with its own *national* language. However, Boshnjaks, Croats and Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina (likewise from Montenegro, Sandžak or ex-Republic of Serbian Krayina) all speak the same language which in the 20th century came to existence as *Serbo-Croatian* with a shared historical past.

If one were to apply a German Romanticist criteria upon ethnonational identity Serbs, Montenegrins, Boshnjaks and majority of the Croats would be considered as a single ethnolinguistic nation with the right to live in a unified nation state organization with a common identity.

Notes:

[1] An extra ordinary feature of Bosnia-Herzegovina is that it covers the fault lines between three major confessions: Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam. From this point of view, local nationalism(s) are not only ethnic; they are even more confessional ones.

[2] Lexical differences have been a primary criterion for the establishment of a separate Bosnian language.

[3] However, both Serbs from Eastern Herzegovina (regularly) and Western Serbia (in many cases) are using future tense construction “ja ću kupiti/kupit ću” like in standard Bosnian and Croatian.

[4] Former Serbo-Croat language was composed by (officially) three dialects: Chakavian, Kajkavian

and Shtokavian. The last one became standardized literary language for Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins and Muslims/Bosnjaks. Shtokavian dialect was/is subdivided into three sub-dialects: Ijekavian (*mlijeko* = milk), Ikavian (*mliko*) and Ekavian (*mleko*). Ikavian is not standardized.

[5] Similar policy of using alphabet in *Bosnian* language was pursued by Austro-Hungarian authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1878-1918.

[6] Besides these mentioned, historically, on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina have been used and Glagolitic and Greek scripts.

[7] According to the Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina official languages are: Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian. Such constitutional-linguistic situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is quite similar to the Swiss one – Italian, French and German (plus Romansh, spoken by very small community).

[8] During the Bosnian-Herzegovinian civil war of 1992-1995 Bosnian-Herzegovinian Serbs tried unsuccessfully to purify their language by elimination of the “Turkish” words. However, in many cases it was impossible without creation of new neologisms (ex: *čarape*=socks, *šećer*=sugar, *pamuk*=cotton, etc.). It is interesting that common nickname for Bosnian Muslims given by the local Christians, but also and as a group name used by Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims to identify themselves, was *Turci* (the Turks). The Bosnian-Herzegovinian Christians used the term *poturice* (those who became the Turks, i.e. convertors). The Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, on the other hand, called the real ethnolinguistic Turks (Turkish language speakers) from Anatolia as *Turkuše* or *Turjaši*.

[9] In historical sources the name *Bosanski jezik* (Bosnian language) is mentioned for the first time in the year of 1300. It is true that the earliest Slavonic philologists like P. J. Šafařík, J. Dobrovský and J. Kopitar used the term *Bosnian* language but only as provincial speech of all inhabitants of the Ottoman *Pashaluk of Bosnia* but not as a language of *Bosnians* in ethnic term.

[10] For instance, according to the decree of 1880 for Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina existed only *Bosnjaks* who are by confession divided into those of Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox denominations. In general, Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina very much favored local Roman Catholic and Muslim inhabitants at the expense of the Orthodox.

[11] It has to be emphasized that even before Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina the local population used the terms *Bosnian* (“bosanski”) for the language and *Bosnians* (“Bosanci”) for themselves as inhabitants of this province alongside with more pure ethnic names *Serbian/Serbs* and *Croatian/Croats*.

[12] Ottoman *Pashaluk of Bosnia* before 1683 encompasses and parts of historical territories of Croatia and Dalmatia.

[13] Vinko Pribojević, a Dominican friar from the island of Hvar in Dalmatia in his *De origine successibusque Slavorum* (Venice, 1532) pointed out that Ottoman sultans appointed many South Slavs as the commanders of his army and that 20.000 of his guard (the Janissaries) are recruited

among the Thracians, Macedonians and Illyrians (for Pribojević all of them have been South Slavs – aboriginal Balkan people, speaking one language that was later on called “Serbo-Croat”). With the help of them the Ottomans subjugated many states and peoples in Europe.

[14] Mavro Orbini, a Benedictine abbot from Dubrovnik, in his famous pan-Slavic book (“the Bible of pan-Slavism”) *De regno Sclavorum* (in Italian version *Il regno degli Slavi*), printed in Pesaro in 1601, was very clear telling that all South Slavs are speaking the same language and composing one nation within a wider network of united ethnolinguistic Slavdom. More precisely, he inclined to call all speakers of ex-Serbo-Croat language of Shtokavian dialect as the *Serbs*. However, a Croatian nobleman of German origin from Senj, Pavao Ritter Vitezović (1652–1713) in his political-ideological-programmatic book *Croatia rediviva: Regnante Leopoldo Magno Caesare*, Zagreb, 1700 claimed that all Slavs, including and those in the Balkans, originated from the *Croats* and speaking in the essence Croatian language with regional dialects. The essence of both Orbini’s and Ritter’s (likewise Pribojević’s) writings is that all South Slavs (especially the Shtokavians) are composing one ethnolinguistic group (in modern sense – *nation*).

[15] “Linguistic engineering” of Croatian language can be followed even from 1967 when a majority of the most important Croatian scientific, literal and cultural institutions signed a *Declaration upon the name and position of Croatian literal language* (“Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika”) requiring to be officially separated from Serbian one and purified from the so-called “srbizmi” (the words of a Serbian origin).

[16] Croatian neologisms in fact have to replace both the international words (not translated in Serbian) and common Croato-Serbian words in order to make a deeper distance between Croatian and Serbian languages for the sake of lesser understanding as a crucial proof that these two languages and ethnic groups are separated. For instance: *korjenoslovstvo* (etymology), *narječoslovstvo* (dialectology), *točnozor* (sniper), *vrhoskuplje* (summit), *odmoridbenik* (tourist), *veleprevrat* (revolution), etc. There were and such proposals for neologisms which hardly took roots like: *okolotrbušni hlačodržač* (belt for trousers), *uljudba* (civilization), *vrtolet* (helicopter), *prosudba* (mark), etc.

[17] The first President of post-Yugoslav independent Bosnia and Herzegovina and a leader of ruling Muslim political *Party of Democratic Action* (SDA), Alija Izetbegović, was known as an author of nationalistic *Islamic Declaration* from 1970 according to which any form of multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism was not possible for the Muslims who have to establish pure Islamic society firstly by Islamization of the whole Muslim community.

[18] The most problematic and unproved in the sources hypothesis upon the ethnic origins of the Boshnjaks (supported by, for instance, Bosnian linguist Dževad Jahić) is that they are posteriors of the mediaeval Bosnian *Bogumils* who allegedly have been a separate ethnic group, i.e. not Serbs or Croats.

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