National identity and language: students' usage of English terminology within the Croatian language

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Abstract

This article explores the issue of whether the strength of a country's national identity can determine extensive use of English instead of Croatian equivalents among Croatian students of kinesiology, both in their professional (i.e. expressions related to sport) and everyday language usage. The study addresses the following issues: a) what does having stronger national identity mean; b) is there correlation between strength of national identity and gender differences in knowledge and preferences in using Croatian equivalents over English terms; c) in which context (everyday or sports) do students use more Croatian terms than English ones? A questionnaire was given to a sample of 100 students from the Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split, Croatia. The Spearman Rank Order Correlations were used in establishing a correlation between national identity and the usage of Croatian equivalents, while the Mann-Whitney U Test was used in testing gender differences. To conclude, the results show a negative correlation between strength of national identity and knowledge of Croatian equivalents (in 51% of cases, in sports terminology, students do not know the Croatian word, and 78% prefer using English sport terms). Furthermore, gender differences were only found on the scale regarding English grades in high school (women had better grades than men).

Key words: Croatian language; English; national identity; gender; sport

Introduction into the context of Croatian national identity and English words in the Croatian language

There are many perceptions, approaches (Cinnirella, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), standpoints, and interpretations of what national identity represents, how it is acquired and what its constituent elements are. A common definition may be drawn. Since national identity, as a form of social identity, represents a person's sense of belonging to a certain nation, it means that he/she and that group share the same language, cultural beliefs and values, tradition, religion, customs and attitudes and/or geographical place, as well as many other elements (Čorkalo &

Kamenov, 2003; Matera, Giannini, Blanco, & Smith, 2005; Penjak, 2012; Gregory & Urry, 1985; Rembold & Carrier, 2011).

Language, on the other hand, stands not only as our basic medium of communication, personal and collective expression of thoughts, exchanging ideas; it does not only generate the concept of belonging to one nation, but it represents that nation's cultural identity index (Gvozdanović, 2010, p. 40). Generally speaking, language embodies cultural history and the memory of a community and as such gets passed on to new generations and new members of the society. This makes language a very complex concept of the human experience that constantly resists changes, challenges and influences from other languages, which, via various forms of media communication, interfere with its norms and values on daily basis .By addressing the issue of national identity and language, this article turns to Croatian national identity context and its language – Croatian.

Croatia, a state that was once a Socialist federal unit of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), gained its independence in June 1991. The official language in former Yugoslavia was 'Serbo-Croatian', characterized by two scripts (Roman and Cyrillic), two orthographies (Croatian orthography and Serbian orthography), and two grammatically distinctive features (Serbian and Croatian phonology, morphology, word formation) (Franolij, 2001). Accordingly, the Serbo-Croatian language was a symbol of national identity that, as Bellamy puts it, was 'an important political tool throughout former Yugoslavia in the 1990s' (Bellamy, 2003). Once Croatia became independent, the Croatian language split from Serbo-Croatian and became one of Croatia's 'inherent and essential features of national identity' (Milošević-Đorđević, 2003, p. 133; Nigbur & Cinirella, 2007; Gvozdanović, 2010; Langston & Peti-Stantić, 2003; Turk & Opašić, 2008). In the last 60 years, the Croatian language has been facing great linguistic challenges due to the constant usage of English words instead of their Croatian equivalents. Based on historical data, we can document influences from other languages on Croatian throughout history, such as: Classical languages (mostly Latin), Italian, German, Hungarian, Turkish, Russian, Czech, French, Serbian and, lately, English (Turk & Opašić, 2008). Within the very strong and serious introduction of modern technology, globalization and Westernization, English has had a strong influence on Croatian. Although the 'ever present English', as Borges refers to it, indicating its widespread and universal status (Penjak, 2012, pp. 982; McLuhan, 1962), has always been present within the Croatian national context, it has never had such a strong presence, influence, and usage, in particular, among the Croatian population as it does today (Drljača-Margić, 2009, pp. 54). More precisely, 40% of new words in Croatian are English borrowings, writes Raos (Raos, 2006, p. 406). The presence of English words among the Croatian general public as well as within the political, scientific, commercial, cultural, and media contexts is constantly growing in size,

reports Brdar (2010). Langston and Peti-Stantić (2014, p. 169) report on the Council of Croatian Standard Language's request from the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports that 'unnecessary foreign words were to be avoided, and that many newly created Croatian terms should be in accordance with the recommendations of the Council'. Apart from language instruction in education, such as the teaching of a foreign language or English as a language of communication in an international programme, the use of Croatian as a native language is obligatory throughout all levels of education in Croatia (Langston & Peti-Stantić, 2014).

To move closer to the subject at hand, this article explores several issues. Firstly, the issue of any correlation between Croatian national identity and the Croatian language. In other words, the assumption is that the strength of Croatian national identity might determine preferences and knowledge of Croatian in contrast to English equivalents among students of kinesiology. Secondly, the article addresses the presence of a correlation between strength of national identity and gender differences in knowing and using Croatian over English. The assumption is that grades will determine a gender's usage and preference regarding language usage (English or Croatian). Lastly, the authors address the question of the contexts (everyday or sports) in which students use more Croatian or English terms and which are more preferable.

For this purpose the authors explore the issue of the kinesiology student population and their usage of Croatian/English, in some specific domains, i.e. in everyday usage and in their professional language (expressions relating to sport). We selected students of kinesiology for the following reasons: firstly, studies on the topic show that English in sport terminology in various languages (Russian, Serbian, Slovene, German, Swiss, French) is strongly present (Benson, 1958; McClintock, 1933; Konya, 1966; Bon, 1948; Milić, 2013; Stramljič Breznik & Voršič, 2011); secondly, this is the first study to explore the use of the English and Croatian languages in sport terminology and their relation to the feeling of national identity within the Croatian national context.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Our sample consisted of a total of 100 first and second-year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split, Croatia. All students (age - median 19; range 18/23) reported to be Croats. Participants of both genders were equally present in the research (50% male and 50% female). All of the participants have also studied English throughout their education.

Testing was done in December 2015, at the Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split, Croatia, during an English class. All of the students were given a questionnaire written in Croatian and were asked to fill it in. They were informed

that the questionnaire was anonymous and subject to their own will. All 100 students took the questionnaire and filled it in. There were no time constraints.

Measuring instruments

The questionnaire consisted of 10 variables divided into 2 sets. The first set of variables referred to the use of English in the domain of sport and in everyday language. They were as following: 1. Years of learning English (Years learning); 2. Average grade in English in secondary school (Grade); and 3. Strength of national identity (Nat. identity). The second set of variables estimated knowledge of the Croatian equivalents for the given English terms as well as the students' personal preference in using English or. They were as follows: 1. Number of correct answers - sport terminology (Correct sport); 2. Number of correct answers - terms present in everyday language (Correct e.l.); 3. Number of correct answers in sport and everyday language (Correct total); 4. I use Croatian terms in sport more often (Croatian sport); 5. I use Croatian terms in everyday language more often (Croatian e. c.); 6. I use Croatian terms in sport and everyday language more often (Croatian total); 7. Number of correct answers & usage of Croatian terms (Correct & Croatian).

In the first set, we measured the students' dimension of national identity using Cinnirella's Scale of National Identity (Cinnirella, 1997) with a 5-point Likert scale format (from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). For the purpose of this research, the questionnaire was translated into Croatian. The students had to circle one particle from 1 to 5 for each of the 7 scales depending on how close or distant they felt to the statement (1 meaning 'I feel very close to this statement' and 5 meaning 'I don't feel close to the statement, at all'). The answers were collected so that the higher the result on the scale, the stronger their sense of national identity is. A reliability analysis of the questionnaire regarding strength of national identity showed the following data: Cronbach's alpha results in 0.85, while Average Inter-Item Correlation results in 0.47. The Cinnirella questionnaire fulfilled the reliability criterion.

The second set consisted of 40 English words (20 general words – *Sms*, *fail*, *link*, *shopping*, *event*, *make up*, *cool*, *sound*, *stage*, *party*, *chilling*, *title*, *remake*, *weekend*, *trailer*, *business*, *surf the Internet*, *mailati*, *sharati*, *sherati* - and 20 sports-related words – *simuliranje*, *menadžer*, *transfer*, *fitness*, *tim*, *meč*, *ferplej*, *performans*, *plejmejker*, *respektirati*, *precizan*, *brend*, *lider*, *driblati*, *nokaut*, *blokirati*, *aut*, *skor*, *rolati*, *trening*). The words were not presented in context but as single, separate, listed words. As part of this set of variables, the students were asked to: a) write down the Croatian equivalent for the English pair; b) circle for each word pair which of the two variants they prefer using (English or Croatian). The general words were selected from the research Irena Brdar presented in her article on the presence of English words within Croatian (Brdar, 2010). Since the participants of

this study were students of kinesiology and sport, the authors chose 20 English sport terms, not grouped according to type of sport but based on their currency in media (television and sports newspapers). As with the general terms, students had to write the Croatian equivalent, as well as to circle which of the two terms they prefer using. In order to determine the correctness of the students' Croatian equivalents, we consulted Bujas, an *English-Croatian Dictionary* (2005). The results of this test referred to the number of correct Croatian equivalents (min result 0, max 40 for both of the word sets). We counted and calculated students' preferences in using certain words (min result 0, max 40 for both of the sets). The part of questionnaire regarding the correct translation and frequency of use of the Croatian words showed the following data: Cronbach's alpha results in 0.84, and Average Inter-Item Correlation results in 0.59. The questionnaire fulfilled the reliability criterion.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Statistics 12 (Statsoft, USA, 2013). All variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, median, mode and frequency mode). The Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine differences between males and females. Spearman Rank Order Correlations were used to establish any correlation between the variables. P-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

The results in Table 1 show a statistically significant difference in the Grade variable in English between males and females ($Z=-2.5$; $p=0.01$).

The results in Table 1 show that students who had been learning English for a longer time reported having higher average grades in English. In other words, female students with a longer history of education in English gave more correct answers and used more Croatian terms. Furthermore, there is a statistically significant correlation between the students' strength of national identity and the other three variables referring to their preferences towards English or Croatian words (the results showed a negative association, since the national identity variable was the opposite). A statistically significant correlation was noted between the students' average grade in English and their preferences in the use of Croatian words in their everyday vocabulary. A statistically significant correlation was also present in male students between their strength of national identity and their preferences towards the use of Croatian words in general. No statistically significant correlation was noted among female students for the strength of national identity variable. The variables estimating knowledge are in correlation with the variables of preference in using Croatian terms for males, females and all groups together.

All groups N=100 *statistically significant difference at p < 0.05*	Mean ± SD	%	Median	Mode	Frequency Mode
Years learning	11.1 ± 2.1		12.0	12.0	41.0
Grade	3.6 ± 0.9		4.0	4.0	39.0
Nat. identity	20.4 ± 4.0		19.0	16.0	14.0
Correct everyday usage	14.9 ± 3.4	74%	16.0	16.0	15.0
Correct sport terms	9.8 ± 5.4	49%	10.0	11.0	9.0
Correct total	24.6 ± 8.0	61%	26.0	29.0	10.0
Croatian everyday usage	8.8 ± 3.7	44%	9.0	11.0	13.0
Croatian sport terms	4.4.0 ± 3	22%	4.0	3.0	21.0
Croatian total	13.2 ± 5.9	33%	13.0	15.0	9.0
Correct & Croatian	37.7 ± 5.9	47%	39.5	Multiple	5.0
Male N=50	**Mean ± SD**	**%**	**Median**	**Mode**	**Frequency Mode**
Years learning	11.0 ± 2.4		12.0	12.0	16.0
Grade	3.4 ± 0.9*		3.0	3.0	20.0
Nat. identity	20.0 ± 5.4		19.0	16.0	8.0
Correct everyday usage	14.3 ± 4.0	72%	15.0	15.0	8.0
Correct sport terms	10.3 ± 5.7	52%	10.5	Multiple	5.0
Correct total	24.5 ± 9.2	61%	25.5	27.0	5.0
Croatian everyday usage	9.1 ± 3.8	45%	10.0	11.0	8.0
Croatian sport terms	4.8 ± 3.4	24%	4.0	Multiple	7.0
Croatian total	13.9 ± 6.4	35%	14.0	11.0	6.0
Correct & Croatian	38.4 ± 13.0	48%	39.0	35.0	5.0
Female N=50	**Mean ± SD**	**%**	**Median**	**Mode**	**Frequency Mode**
Years learning	11.1 ± 1.8		12.0	12.0	25.0
Grade	3.8 ± 0.9*		4.0	4.0	23.0
Nat. identity	20.8 ± 5.2		20.0	18.0	7.0
Correct everyday usage	15.4 ± 2.7	77%	16.0	16.0	10.0
Correct sport terms	9.3 ± 5.0	46%	10.0	13.0	7.0
Correct total	24.6 ± 6.8	62%	26.5	29.0	8.0
Croatian everyday usage	8.5 ± 3.7	43%	9.0	12.0	8.0
Croatian sport terms	3.9 ± 2.5	20%	3.0	3.0	14.0
Croatian total	12.4 ± 5.3	31%	12.0	Multiple	5.0
Correct & Croatian	37.0 ± 10.2	45%	39.5	Multiple	4.0

Table 1: Descriptive statistics parameters: mean and standard deviation (Mean ± SD), percent, median, mode and frequency of mode for all variables, with differences between males and females (Mann-Whitney U Test).

Table 2: Spearman Rank Order Correlations

All groups	Grade	Nat. identity	Correct everyday language	Correct sport terms	Correct total	Croatian everyday language	Croatian sport terms	Croatian total	Correct & Croatian
Years learning	**0.22***	0.01	-0.13	-0.07	-0.09	-0.18	-0.07	-0.16	-0.15
Grade		0.13	0.16	0.07	0.14	**-0.20***	-0.15	-0.18	0.01
Nat. identity			-0.08	-0.08	-0.10	**-0.20***	**-0.20***	**-0.24***	-0.17
Correct everyday usage				**0.63***	**0.84***	**0.29***	**0.34***	**0.35***	**0.77***
Correct sport					**0.94***	0.14	**0.52***	**0.35***	**0.83***
Correct total						**0.21***	**0.50***	**0.38***	**0.89***
Croatian everyday usage							**0.59***	**0.91***	**0.58***
Croatian sport								**0.86***	**0.77***
Croatian total									**0.75***
Male	Grade	Nat. identity	Correct everyday language	Correct sport terms	Correct total	Croatian everyday language	Croatian sport terms	Croatian total	Correct & Croatian
Years learning	**0.31***	-0.03	-0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.24	-0.02	-0.16	-0.05
Grade		0.07	0.21	0.21	0.24	-0.20	-0.13	-0.14	0.13
Nat. identity			-0.16	0.02	-0.06	-0.27	-0.23	**-0.28***	-0.17
Correct everyday usage				**0.73***	**0.89***	**0.33***	**0.40***	**0.40***	**0.84***
Correct sport					**0.95***	0.12	**0.48***	**0.31***	**0.83***
Correct total						0.19	**0.48***	**0.36***	**0.89***
Croatian everyday usage							**0.63***	**0.91***	**0.54***
Croatian sport								**0.89***	**0.75***
Croatian total									**0.71***

Female									
Years learning	0.16	0.01	-0.26	-0.21	-0.25	-0.11	-0.13	-0.17	**-0.30***
Grade		0.13	0.08	-0.03	0.02	-0.15	-0.10	-0.14	-0.09
Nat. identity			0.04	-0.19	-0.14	-0.08	-0.15	-0.12	-0.12
Correct everyday usage				**0.51***	**0.76***	**0.28***	0.27	**0.35***	**0.67***
Correct sport					**0.94***	0.18	**0.56***	**0.41***	**0.81***
Correct total						0.23	**0.52***	**0.43***	**0.85***
Croatian everyday usage							**0.53***	**0.91***	**0.62***
Croatian sport								**0.82***	**0.77***
Croatian total									**0.81***

Discussion

According to Rembold and Carrier (2011), the mid-90s marked the end of the nation-state, which led to a change in notion of national identity and its construction and maintenance. It seems that at that point globalization began to take its place on the global map by going beyond national borders, at the same time challenging and changing the concept of nation and nationhood. By focusing on the question of what having strong national identity means, the study demonstrated that strength of national identity did not correlate with the students' knowledge of the Croatian equivalents, or with their preference in using them. Furthermore, there was a negative correlation between strength of national identity and frequency of use of the Croatian equivalents (from -0.20 to -0.24). At the same time, results regarding the strength of national identity, according to this study, were low (20.4 ± 5.3). This might be explained by the fact that during the post-war period a sense of national identity grows. As that phase passes, the sense of strong national identity weakens slightly.

Additionally, the study reported on the absence of any correlation between the aforementioned among the female students, while among the male students it was present in just one out of three variables. Similarly, the study showed that having a strong national identity did not guarantee a proficient knowledge of Croatian, at least considering this sample. Strength of national identity expressed commitment

or even affiliation to a group or nation, but, in fact, it did not necessarily reflect literacy in their mother tongue.

This study also addressed the issue of whether there is a correlation between genders in learning and the usage of Croatian/English and whether it reflects on students' grades in English. We hypothesized that male students would know more Croatian equivalents for English sport terms than female students, due to the fact that they tend to follow sports more than women (Apostolou, 2015). Consequently, no differences were established among genders when considering this question. A possible explanation for this finding might be that the female students partaking in the study are a population of women who have chosen to study sport based on their own interest in it. Or we might even explain it through the idea of gendered motivation to learn the English language. Generally speaking, many studies in non-English speaking countries have been carried out on the topic of the difference between genders in their motivation to learn English (Penjak & Karninčić, 2015; Kobayashi, 2002; Karahan, 2007; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Aldosari, 2014). These studies showed gender differences in motivation to learn English, as well as those regarding the understanding of an English text (Martinez, 2014; Al-Shumaimeri, 2005).

Although studies point at gender differences in language learning (Penjak & Karninčić, 2015; Kobayashi, 2002; Karahan, 2007; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Aldosari, 2014), the only difference this study established was the average grade in English among students during their high school education (male 34±09 vs. female 38±09). Although female students had better grades in English, they did not have better knowledge of the Croatian equivalents of English terms. We noticed a negative correlation between the number of years spent learning English and the total of the Correct & Croatian variable ($r = -30$). Accordingly, the authors of the study state that those who were more proficient in English had more self-confidence communicating in English (whether in oral or written form) and, consequently, did not avoid using English terms more often than their Croatian equivalents.

Seen from the angle of the relation between sport and national identity, the study established that it did not result from the students' preference in using the Croatian sport equivalents instead of English ones. In other words, students used more English sport terms (78%) than their Croatian equivalents (22%), i.e. they used twice as many Croatian words in their everyday communication (44%) than in a sports context (22%). Generally speaking, the sport – national identity relation was clear; athletes, who represented their country at international competitions, symbolized national pride and benefitted the strengthening of their national identity (Topic & Coakley, 2010). Although the study showed that students used Croatian equivalents more often in their daily communication than when talking

about sports, less than 50% of them knew the correct Croatian terminology. The impact of media as a medium through which students come across English sport terms on daily basis (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2012), as well as the currency of sport terms they used or, as Ilona Julianna Konya states, prestige and the need for filling in the native word equivalent (1966, pp. 23), might be one of the key reasons for the aforementioned. In addition, over 50% of the students of kinesiology stated that they prefer using English sport terms over their Croatian equivalents. According to Stramljič Breznik and Voršić, who investigated the same issue in the Slovene language, this occurs as a 'consequence of modern communication requirements' (2011). In other words, Mira Milič (2013) believes that today's extended usage of English sports terminology might be due to the fact that English is the official language of sports, as well as the fact that the same set of rules, which use unique sports terminology, govern and oversee all international sports and sports events. As such, the terminology itself gets transmitted into another language without any change of semantic content, but rather on the level of form (change of grammatical class, morphology, translations, affixation, compounding, etc.) (Milič, 2011). Still, we find these findings alarming, because after graduation some of the students of kinesiology will find jobs at schools, where they will have to work, teach, and educate children. Although frequent usage of English sport terms could stand as an additional stimulus in learning the English language (Pearson Crissey & Riegle-Crumb, 2009), we claim that it is important for students to know and use Croatian words and avoid their English equivalents so that children can learn, master, and enrich their native language.

Conclusion

The authors' focus in this article was the language – national identity association. Although it was a pilot research that included rather a small sample, the obtained results showed the following: a) a negative correlation between strength of national identity and knowledge of Croatian equivalents (in 51% of the case, in sports terminology, students do not know the Croatian word and 78% of them prefer using English sport terms); b) the strength of one's national identity does not influence better knowledge of the Croatian terms or their frequency of use; c) gender differences were found only in the scale regarding grades in English in high school (women had better grades than men).

To conclude, this study offers new insight into the national identity-language usage issue; furthermore, the study opens the door not only to further research on the topic, but also to reconsidering the importance and the way of preserving national interests through language, yet staying open for the new global changes and challenges that every language encounters.

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