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# ETHNO-CENTRIC OR MARKET-CENTRIC SOCIETIES? BILINGUALISM VS ETHNOCENTRISM IN THE BALKANS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the interaction that language and economy have in society versus an ethnocentric approach that sees other languages as challenges instead of an opportunity. The paper analyses the role that bilingualism has in the economy and how economy can impact the promotion of flexible language policies in order to open new markets. Throughout the discourse a strong focus is placed on the dilemma: can language impact and make economy beneficial? The study aims to explore how multicultural societies which often have one dominant language can benefit by opening language diversity to the business habitat with a specific focus on particular linguistic and economic developments in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia. In the second part this global issues are analyzed in the local context. The study brings examples from Macedonia on how the private sector is much more advanced and innovative compared to the state institution. During this discourse few corporations active in Macedonia are analyzed in order to size the positive impact that flexible usage of language has on the economy and how state institutions can replicate this positive model. Other factors such as culture and the neurolinguistics studies have been considered as well.

**Key words:** Language and economy, neurolinguistics, linguistic benefits, unequal distribution of language, Macedonia.

## **WHAT IS ETHNOCENTRISM FROM THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE?**

In order to develop deeper understanding of the subject matter it is important to explain at the beginning the basic concepts and definitions of the terms ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. There have been few interpretations regarding the first usage of this term in academic literature and it is believed that the first appearance of the term was used in few books of the sociologist Ludwig Gumpolwitz published in the nineteenth century. Bizumic(2005) states that Gumplovitz saw ethnocentrism as a similar concept to geocentrism (a belief that the Earth is the center of the universe) and anthropocentrism (a belief that humans are the center of the Earth)...but focused on one's own ethnic group, with the assumption that it is better than any other (Gumplowicz 1881). In this regard today's Oxford dictionary defines ethnocentrism as the evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture. These concepts clearly brought to development of many negative phenomena's in linguistics and sociology and one of the possible elucidation to this concepts in education was the promotion of cultural relativism in the Garcias (1999)“teaching in pluralistic society” views in pedagogy. We will discuss these phenomena at a different occasions but it is important to mention at this stage that ethnocentrism is considered a negative phenomenon in the world of education however it is often used by the Balkan political elites as populism tool to attract attention and gain support from masses.

## **HOW ETHNOCENTRISM AFFECTS SOCIAL ORDER?**

In societies in the Balkan Peninsula, the social order has often been disputed as unjust or in certain cases also as a source of unhappiness and poverty. This explains also the trend of the changes of the regimes in almost every 50 years in most of the Western Balkans countries. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the regimes were aiming to sustain a monarchial system, which later switched to communism and socialism and finally switch to capitalism during the end of the previous century. In this regard the term social order refers to two different sets of systems. The first one is social structural through customs, system of values and practices and institutions. Here you can find a number of examples on how social order functioned in the Balkans from the feudal period. On the other hand, the other set of system in regard to social order is contrasted to chaos and disorder with the need for a system that will be maintained from its members and it is essential the organization of a firm state.

## **THE STUDY**

This study aimed to explore not only theoretically but also practically, how aware are the public and private institution in regards to the power of language and the opportunities it create in open new markets. It is widely known today that linguistics itself has become an industry and this is particularly factual with English language. In 2014 the British the government has collected an estimate sum of US \$ 3.48 billion only from student spending

and tuition, accommodation and other living expenses the ELT sector. In a study named “Supporting the British economy through teaching English as Foreign language” a team named “Capital Economics for UK” has reported that the sector supports approximately 26.650 jobs throughout England only and it results to a net tax return of US \$281 million to government coffers(cited in Poshka,2014). It is stated in the study that this industry earns more than Coca Cola or Vodafone company and is competing to some extent to the trade of BP(British Petroleum)in regard to its 18.000 UK employees.

This is a clear sign that language does not only have cultural value but also economical and using it for political purposes without a fair distribution of the capital nor equal distribution of human rights through language right is unacceptable for the reality of the 21 century.

In this study we analyzed the flexible usage of languages in 16 different banks active in the Republic of Macedonia. The database in regards to the basic information for the bank, founders and their boards’ member were provided by the National Bank of Macedonia. From the gathered information it was concluded that there were two types of banks: local banks, meaning banks which sre founded and use local capital and foreign banks which firstly operated with foreign capital. In order to compare and contrast public and private capital we also included the National Bank of Macedonia in the sample as the only operator of the monetary policy, also the main institution that is expected to regulate, license, and supervise banks, savings houses, e-money issuers and other financial institutions as further specified in this Law or any other law and act as fiscal agent to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

The study analyzed the different language accessibility of all active banks firstly through their website. The second stage was through analyses of different language availabilities in the ATM services (automated teller machines) which serve for cash withdrawal. In the last stage, we conveyed interviews with customers in regards to customer satisfaction in regards to the language availability, so if they would have available clerks that would provide information in non-dominant language (Albanian, Turkish etc).

The information for the first two stages in the banks with the local capital is reflected in the following table:

Banks with local capital: Name of the bank	Languages:		
	Macedonian	English	Albanian
Komercijalna Banka	√	√	√
Makendonska Banka za Podrska na Razvojot	√	√	√
Stopanska Banka AD Bitola	√	√	√
Narodna Banka na Makedonija	√	√	√
TTK Banka Ad Skopje	√	√	√
Univerzalna Investiciona Banka(UNI Banka)	√	√	
Centralna Kooperativna Banka(CK Banka)	√		

From the table we can conclude that most of the local banks have recognized the multicultural reality in Macedonia, and this is reflected in the language offering of their website. Of course there are certain discrepancy and UNI Banka and CK Banka who seemed to have forgotten or might not being interested for the Albanian language and Albanian customers. Unfortunately, we cannot say that the situation is as positive with the ATM machines and in most of the cases there are only two languages: Macedonian and English.

When it comes to Banks with foreign capital it seems that they are more consistent with language offerings and there is also one bank that offers website and ATM services in 4 different languages. The details are in the following table:

Banks with foreign capital	Registered Country	Languages			
		Macedonian	English	Albanian	Turkish
Euro Standard Banka	Switzerland	√	√	√	
Halk Bank	Turkey	√	√	√	√
Capital Bank	Bulgaria	√	√	√	
NLB Banka	Slovenia	√	√	√	
Ohridska Banka	France	√	√	√	
Sparkasse Bank Macedonia	Austria	√	√		
Procredit Bank	Germany	√	√	√	
Stopanska Banka AD Skopje	Greece	√	√		
Silk Road Bank	Switzerland	√	√		

From the tables above, it is clear that private foreign corporations have understood the economic value of language although surprisingly Stopanska Banka AD which is the largest bank in the country has only a bilingual website, but on the other side most of its ATM services are three lingual. The key dilemma in this regard would be to understand if equal distribution of languages results to equal distribution of economic goods. The German sociolinguist Florian Coulmas(1992) in his book Language and Economy raised these dilemma's:

1. How linguistic conditions facilitate or obstruct the economic process;
2. How multilingualism and social affluence are interrelated;
3. How and why language and money fulfill similar functions in modern societies;
4. Why the availability of a standard language is an economic advantage;
5. How the unequal distribution of languages in multilingual societies makes for economic inequality etc.

Often a set of questions also provide the answers inside their syntax structure and most of these issues have one common nominator, the tendency to dominate and sustain power. This power is not only political but it goes in line with the social dominance theory. In this regards

Bourdieu(1979) believes that in certain sense symbolic power is often more powerful than the physical violence since it is rooted in the methods of actions and structures of reasoning of the individuals that later imposes legitimacy of the social order.

Unfortunately, we cannot see this fair distribution in Macedonia. Recent tendencies of the newly elected government to formalize the status of the Albanian language with a law that will expand its usage ran into a serious barrier dictated by the president of the country Mr. Gjorge Ivanov. The president lost the opportunity to prove that the Macedonian political system aims to promote an egalitarian society in which rights and benefits are equally distributed. Failure to adapt to the internal needs of the society does not help in social cohesion nor promotes the economic value of another language in the society. The political system in this regards fails to understand the multicultural reality in which we live in and its need to be reflected in everyday life of its citizens.

However, from what we have seen above, the private sector has understood this essential moment much better and majority of large companies promote bilingual and three lingual services. This is evident in the Banking system in which most of the promotional campaigns are bi-lingual. Also almost all ATM machines are three lingual, and in one case with “Halk Bank” the language options for their cash-withdraw services and the website are in four languages (Macedonian, Albanian, English and Turkish). The private sector has understood that the multicultural reality should be reflected in the services that they are providing. This is expected to lead to better customer satisfaction, better profits and more sympathy in the competitive market. It seems that our Banking system is slowly understanding what Coulmas (1992) identified that if languages are seen as an asset and not a challenge and through a more liberal approach many trade barriers can be minimized.

## **WHO RUNS THE “SYMBOLIC POWER”?**

In the both abovementioned setups social orders is important and the question on who runs the “symbolic power” is a continuous dilemma. This concept itself was introduced for the first time in the book “La Distinction” of Pierre Bourdieu(1979). I cite the book since it is considered as one the ten most influential books in the field of Sociology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the International Sociological Association. According to Bourdieu the cultural roles are often more important than the economic ones and knowing that language is one of the most important elements in every culture it conveys to us to the assumption that the presence of language in a society gives us the hierarchy in social order and symbolic power. Bourdieu(1979) believed that in France status and economic capital are essential to preserve dominance in a society and not just ownership.

However, sometimes the companies themselves are more cautious in order to not be stereotyped and prejudices from the local communities. A typical case in Macedonia was the opening of the “Skopje City Mall” shopping center. Although a very big investment was undertaken and the major investor was an Albanian business man from Albania, all labeling inside the shopping center were in Macedonian and English only. The business venture was consciously or unconsciously following the Bourdieu claims’ of the concept of “symbolic power” bias by labeling everything in the language of the major ethnic group and excluding Albanian language in any mode of communication. Throughout the ongoing promotional

campaign you would see hundreds of cultural events in Macedonian but none in Albanian, Turkish although the owner was Albanian. What might be the reasons for this kind of “self-censorship” decision? Arguably, the business concept will be considered as an Albanian project which is not a very popular image if you build in a Macedonian neighborhood in which there might be ethnic prejudices. Of course this last paragraph is based on an assumption, but the fact that every activity after the shopping was opened was mainly focused on Macedonian customers including marketing promotional material, radio and Tv ads and other commercial initiatives bring us to the conclusion that there are spaces in the business habitat in which liberal approach towards the usage of languages is not always welcomed, even from large business corporations. In Macedonia there are few multinational corporations that have this marketing paleness as well. Few of these corporations “forget” to provide bilingual promotional campaigns which later reflect in their income from the non-majority communities. It would be wise to conclude that language can be expression of symbolic power, but languages are also an economic power which can provide goods but also potential social cohesion.

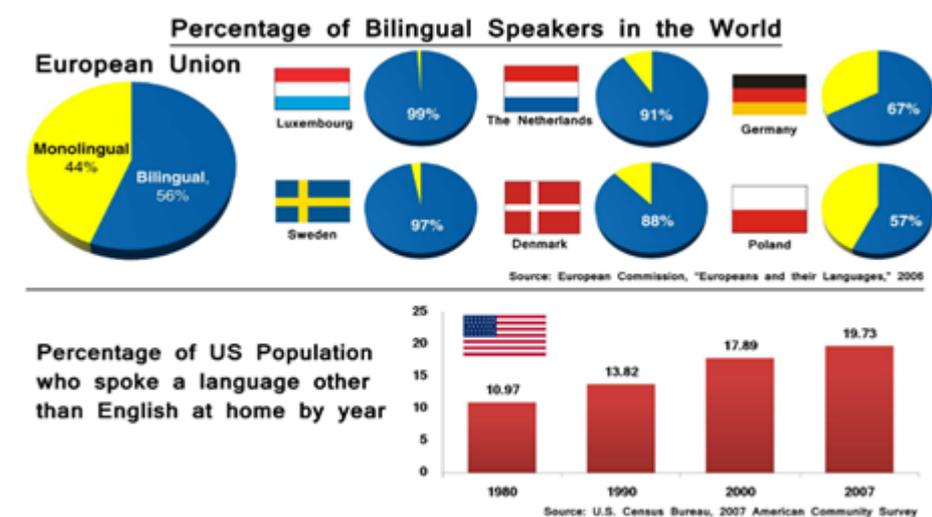
## **WHAT NEUROLINGUISTICS SAY ABOUT BILINGUALISM?**

Neurolinguistics is a branch of linguistics dealing with the relationship between language and the structure and functioning of the brain. It is a fairly new discipline but with the recent advancements in brain imaging technology has given an impressive input to the process. As it is known from the cognitive science the left hemisphere is dominantly analytical and logical and the right hemisphere has the centers for emotional adjustment, creativity and social skills. In this regard, different imaging evidence is seen in the brains of monolingual and bilingual speakers. The way bilingual brain is wired is different and they are divided in three subcategories:

1. Compound bilinguals- language speakers that learn both language at the same time. Mainly these are children of emigrants who are born in a foreign country.
2. Coordinate bilingual – language speakers who working parallel with two language systems.
3. Subordinate bilingual – language speakers that filtering the second language(L2) through the primary language (L1).

Why is all this important? Besides the economic and cultural values that variety of languages brings to each community and society, there is also a medical advantage to bilingualists. Research shows that the workout with that bilingualism gives to the brain postpone diseases such as Alzheimer and dementia for 5 years. In other words bilingual brains are less likely to be affected by these brain diseases.

Here is graphical representation of Bilingualism in EU and USA:



It is clear that even countries which dominate the world markets such as USA and Germany are fully aware of the bilingual presence and many support-instruments are designed in the Europe through the European Commission to celebrate the diversity and the values that come from multilingual environment and use it for economic advancement. As a product of the flexible usage of languages, the European Union has 24 official languages and the DG Translation department which is the department that operates the language policy affairs translates 1 million pages yearly. Clearly this is a costly process but is also profitable for the EU trade market of 500 million citizens.

## CONCLUSION

Is this language policy unjust in Macedonia? Based on what we mentioned above the current language policy is unjust not only to Albanian community but to Macedonian and other communities as well. The society is not keen to progress if it is ethnocentric and not open to changes and new ideas. The advantages are multidimensional.

One argument elaborated above is the power of language and the cultural and heritage values that each language promotes. Creating space or a natural habitat for these languages to flourish helps the cultural and linguistic aspects of the community.

Also, language and economy accomplish analogous functions in current modern societies. As mentioned above, Coulmas(1992) identified that if languages are seen as an asset and not a challenge many barriers of trade can be minimized. Based on the abovementioned studies language justice is possible in Macedonia and it can bridge

differences. Languages can also promote unique economic developments since languages should not be the challenge but the chance.

Secondly, language creates opportunities for new markets. A product that is labeled in Macedonian, English and Albanian language stimulate the Albanian consumer to perceive this product better. Also, a product branded in two or three languages has a better chance to compete in the neighboring trade markets, such as Kosovo and Albania in comparison to monolingual products. This type of bilingual or three lingual labeling makes the product popular for the internal market as well since the majority of the consumers in Western Macedonia are of Albanian origin. The same logic should be reflected also for the products that try to penetrate the markets of ex-Yugoslavia and more liberal language approach should be considered.

Third argument to support the language and the bilingual context is that research shows that the workout that bilingualism gives to the brain postpones diseases such as Alzheimer and Dementia for five years. In other words bilingual brains are less likely to be affected by these brain diseases.

Failure to adapt to the internal needs of the society does not help in social cohesion nor promotes to the economic value of another language in the society. The political system in this regards fails to understand the multicultural reality in which we live in and it needs to be reflected in everyday life of its citizens. Certainly, the private sector has understood this essential moment much better than the state institution of Macedonia and majority of the large companies have started to promote bilingual services. Languages are a powerful potential and this potential should be seen as an asset and should be used to achieve economic and social growth in most of the post-communist countries in the region.

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