

BUNYEV(S): A LINGUISTIC FRONTIER TO BE?

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Abstract: The arguably blossoming field of borderlands studies has not produced a single theory of borders, offering instead a plethora of terms often denoting overlapping concepts. This is precisely why – first – a theory of frontiers, specifically linguistic frontiers, is only outlined and – second – applied to the concrete area of Serbia's Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Then a close analysis of the Vojvodina's populace of Bunyevs is offered in an attempt to better understand the process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier.

Кључне речи: језик, граница, ((стварање) лингвистичке) међе, потврђивање међе, сегментација међе, језичка политика, социолингвистички режим од врха према дну, рад од дна према врху

Апстракт: Иако су пограничне студије у експанзији, још увек не постоји јединствена теорија граница. Постоје, међутим, бројни термини који се често односе на концепте који се некада и преклапају. Баш из тог разлога, у раду је – као прво – скицирана теорија међа, конкретно лингвистичких међа, а затим је – као друго – она употребљена у разматрању ситуације у Аутономној Покрајини Војводини у Србији. Коначно, у раду је дата анализа конкретног војвођанског етничитета, Буњеваца, у жељи да се што је могуће боље разуме процес стварања лингвистичке међе уопште.

Language remains the one great boundary which, for so many of us, remains difficult to cross, in the absence of a single, global, borderless form of communication.

(Newman, 2006: 147–148)

Boundedness may be created by those in power exercising “elite closure” through use of elite language and through people with no power saying in effect that if they cannot fit in, they will draw linguistic lines explaining who they really are.

(Urciuoli, 1995: 535)

I. Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)'s very first definition of LANGUAGE presents it – in part – as “[t]he system of spoken or written communication” and then COMMUNICATION as “[t]he fact of having something in common with another person or thing; affinity; congruity.” From such a standpoint, ideas offered by the two epigraphs above seem almost oxymoronic. Yet it is precisely those ideas that will be examined in the present paper: What sort of a boundary does a language create and how does such a boundary emerge?

Arguably, both the notion of *language* and the one of *boundary*, and – consequently – *boundedness*, are highly debatable, in that it is not at all easy, if at all possible, for everybody to agree on exactly what they are. The present paper has no intention whatsoever to settle the debate(s): there will be no attempt to offer any definition of *language*, and *boundary* will be accounted for from only one point of view, the one I most recently explicated in (Belić, 2014), based on a theory of borderlands studies. Rather, it is the interplay of the two notions that is the focus here.

Theoretical considerations of the interplay of language and boundary are based on a very concrete example, fairly clearly specified in both time and space: I analyze the example of the populace of Bunyevs in present-day Serbia. I propose that the example of Bunyevs offers insights into what will be termed the process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier, which – as it turns out – is still ongoing in the example analyzed here. This is precisely why looking into what Bunyevs are doing and how they are doing it is useful for a better understanding of frontiers in particular and boundaries in general.

As indicated earlier, attempting to define language in any way is a task beyond the scope of the present paper. The only relevant criterion here is if someone claims to speak a certain language by assigning a name to it, no matter what that language is considered to be. The equally complicated notion of boundary, however, is discussed in some detail in the section immediately following, section II. In section III. an application of a theory of borderlands studies is presented using as an example Serbia's Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Then in section IV., the populace under consideration, Bunyevs, is sketched with only the most germane details. Various aspects of the process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier are scrutinized in section V. In section VI. concluding remarks are

offered regarding the question of whether the Bunyev linguistic frontier will – indeed – be, or it will not.

II. Boundary

In his account of the latest advancements in the study of borders, (Newman, 2006: 145) indicates that “years of joint discussions and deliberations have not necessarily brought us any nearer to the construction of a single theory of borders ... and it is futile to seek a single explanatory framework.” And though Newman suggests that there are common terminologies, not even that turns out to be of much help either. There are various terms in the English language alone – *boundary*, *border*, *barrier*, *frontier*, to name only a few – used in various ways in the study of borders: sometimes they are undoubtedly synonymous, yet at other times they are clearly differentiated. At all times, however, it is crucially important not to neglect the fact that the latest understanding of boundaries, borders, barriers, frontiers... is as much mental as it is physical. In the words of (Newman, 2006: 146), “[t]hey are as much perceived in our mental maps and images as they are visible manifestations of concrete walls and barbed-wire fences.”

From among the not-yet-agreed upon pool of terms, of which Newman spoke in general, the one of *boundary* has been used thus far as an overarching one, the one encompassing all others. Of them, the most relevant term for the present paper is that of *frontier*. The complexity of the notion of *frontier*, adopted here as the basis for all theoretical considerations, I described in (Belić, 2014).

As demonstrated in (Belić, 2014: 18) – by means of quoting (Leerssen, 1993:14) – the notions of *frontiers* and *borders* are often viewed as displaying a certain degree of similitude, on the one hand, yet, on the other, they are still fairly far apart. Frontiers are said to be “hardly ‘borders’ at all [for t]hey do not surround or enclose anything [(like borders do, B. B.); they are] grey areas rather than black lines.” Frontiers, therefore, “meander across the map with far less precision or neatness [as they are] discontinuities, places of transition ... with mixtures and minorities.” At the same time, Leerssen implies that there are different types of frontiers, only one of which is cultural frontiers. One subtype of cultural frontiers is linguistic frontiers, which are the sole focus of the present paper.

Following (Stoddard, 1991: 2), I suggested in (Belić, 2014: 19) that the best way to understand a frontier is to think of it as “a cultural setting, a normative perspective toward others in time and place; frontier lines are then drawn around these ‘culture areas’ designating usage, not ownership.”

There are two important processes characteristic of frontiers, the process of *frontier confirming*, and that of *frontier segmentation*. Frontier confirming is modeled in (Belić, 2014: 20) on (Dimitrova, 2008: 53) and her notion of *border confirming*, which “is about confirming areas of demarcation and division.” While, according to the stance taken in the present paper (and also in Belić, 2014), frontiers are different than borders, in that the former are apparently not as firm as the latter, they still can be, and – indeed are – confirmed. The exact nature of how frontiers are confirmed may and, naturally, will vary. In (Belić, 2014: 22), I modelled frontier segmentation on (Stoddard, 1991: 10) and his notion of *border segmentation*, according to which “various border segments have developed as a result of their varied natural resources.” Again, due to a certain level of similarity, much as borders can and do display different segments, frontiers can and do as well. And, similarly, frontier segmentation can be both temporal and spatial, depending on whether different segments of frontiers develop over time or over space, respectively.

The theory of frontiers – specifically linguistic frontiers – outlined here was developed using the concrete example of Serbia’s Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (henceforth, Vojvodina). The following section demonstrates exactly how the theory operates in multilingual Vojvodina.

III. Vojvodina’s Linguistic Frontiers

Vojvodina lies in the north of Serbia, where it comprises an area of 21,506 square kilometers, approximately one-fifth of one percent of the overall area of Europe, and is inhabited by 1,931,809 people, which constitutes 26.87% of the overall population of Serbia (GOVERNMENT). The province borders Bosnia and Herzegovina (southwest), Croatia (west), Hungary (north), and Romania (east). In fact, Vojvodina’s borders with Croatia and Hungary are Serbia’s sole borders with those two countries. In the south, Vojvodina borders the part of Serbia commonly referred to as Central Serbia.

Serbia, as of this writing, is a candidate country for the European Union (EU) whose “status is conferred by the European Council on the basis of an opinion from the European Commission (EU).” Of the four countries that border Vojvodina, three (Croatia, Hungary, and Romania) are members of the EU, while one country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) is a potential candidate country for the EU. With such a geopolitical set of circumstances, it is not at all surprising that the government of Vojvodina, in its official Internet presentation, describes Vojvodina – inter alia – as “a region in

which multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multiconfessionalism are traditionally fostered (GOVERNMENT).”¹ This is, in part, in line with what (Krzyżanowski, Wodak, 2011: 116) observed about the European Union and its policies, notably that “[t]hroughout the last decade, multilingualism increasingly became one of the key foci of the EU’s policies.”

In its highest law of the land – the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (henceforth, SAPV) – the province is defined in various ways; the governmentally proclaimed regard of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multiconfessionalism is explicated in Article 7 (SAPV), aptly entitled *Multilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Freedom of Religion*:

Multilingualism, multiculturalism and freedom of religion represent values of particular importance for AP Vojvodina.

Within the scope of its jurisdictions, AP Vojvodina supports and helps preservation and development of multilingualism and the cultural heritage of national minorities – national communities living in it, and helps mutual acquaintance and regard of languages, cultures, and confessions in AP Vojvodina with special measures and activities.

While Article 7 implicitly argues for the equality of all national minorities in Vojvodina, Article 6 (SAPV), entitled *Equality of Citizens and National Equality*, explicitly argues in favor of “providing the fulfillment of the constitutionally guaranteed comprehensive equality” with Serbs for exactly nine national minorities: Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Montenegrins, Romanians, Roma, Bunyevs, Ruthenians, and Macedonians. Nowhere does SAPV mention exactly how the selection was made and the list of the aforementioned national minorities produced. All other non-mentioned national minorities are referred to in the article as “numerically smaller.”

According to the theory of frontiers assumed here, it is now clear how, inside Vojvodina’s borders, various frontiers lie. This is but one possible interpretation of SAPV’s Article 6 in particular, and – more generally – of Vojvodina’s top-down regime, in the sense of (Krzyżanowski, Wodak 2011: 119), in managing its national minorities. The same top-down regime (Krzyżanowski, Wodak 2011: 118) detect in the EU’s focus on multilingualism, notably that “the EU has gradually become a typical late-modern sociolinguistic regime which, though officially multilingual, perceives its multilingualism in rather limited ways.” This goes against their

¹ All translations into English are author’s unless specified otherwise.

belief “that language (or its more general policy or context-specific regulation) cannot be ‘owned’ by any individuals and groups and should not be subscribed to individual and collective aims and interests.” However, in an attempt to sketch specifically Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers, I initially turn to SAPV and the way it sketches the province’s sociolinguistic regime.

Article 24 (SAPV), *Official Languages and Alphabets*, regulates – in the most general terms – the way Vojvodina’s languages and alphabets operate in the official use:

In addition to the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet, in the bodies of AP Vojvodina Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, and Ruthenian language (sic!) and their alphabets are equally in the official use, in accordance with the law.

Within the scope of its jurisdictions, the bodies of AP Vojvodina take measures to fulfill consistently the legally regulated official use of languages and alphabets of national minorities – national communities.

Again, nowhere does SAPV explicate what specific criteria were taken into consideration for selecting the five languages and alphabets of Vojvodina’s national minorities listed in Article 24. Nevertheless, I assume that the language of this particular article provides an initial idea of what Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers are. They are, however, more numerous than what the article itself indicates.

In their comprehensive account of the fulfillment of the rights of national minorities in Serbia to officially use their languages and alphabets, (Башић, Ђорђевић, 2010: 43) necessarily discuss the well-known fact that these rights are regulated, first, by the Serbian Constitution, then SAPV, and then, finally, various lower laws. It is thus that individual municipalities can introduce the language and alphabet of a national minority in the official use if that national minority comprises at least 15% of the municipality’s overall population based on the latest census. Moreover, in Vojvodina a territorial unit smaller than a municipality (i.e., local community), can introduce the language and alphabet of a national minority in the official use if that national minority comprises at least 25% of the local community’s overall population (again, based on the latest census). Thanks to these two legal provisions, the composition of Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers exhibits a much more complex structure than what SAPV alone might present it to be.

According to the latest report (REPORT) on languages and alphabets in the official use in Vojvodina, that from 2012, there is currently the total of eleven different language-alphabet combinations in the official use. As is

indicated in Article 24 (SAPV), the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet are in the official use in the whole of Vojvodina's territory, every single one of its forty-five municipalities. However, there are fifteen municipalities, in which the Latin alphabet is also in the official use. Hungarian language is in the official use in twenty-eight municipalities, as well as in three additional local communities; Slovak is in the official use in ten municipalities and three additional local communities; Romanian in nine municipalities and one additional local community; Ruthenian in five municipalities and one additional local community; Croatian in one municipality and four additional local communities; Czech in one municipality, Bulgarian in one local community; Macedonian in two local communities; and Montenegrin in one local community. The following table reflects the data presented (numbers in parentheses indicate Vojvodina's local communities).

	SERBIAN CYRILLIC	SERBIAN LATIN	HUNGARIAN	SLOVAK	ROMANIAN	RUTHENIAN	CROATIAN	CZECH	BULGARIAN	MACEDONIAN	MONTENEGRIN
2012	45	15	28+(3)	10+(3)	9+(1)	5+(1)	1+(4)	1	(1)	(2)	(1)

Table 1 – Languages and Alphabets in the Official Use in Vojvodina (2012)

This is the complete picture of Vojvodina's linguistic frontiers at the moment. Also, this top-down sociolinguistic regime of managing languages and alphabets in the official use in Vojvodina is a clear example of the process of linguistic frontier confirming: various laws of the land explicitly confirm which languages and alphabets are in the official use in exactly what territories. However, in addition to this top-down regime, I showed in (Belić, 2014: 21) examples of something that could – conversely – be termed a bottom-up regime: “all national minorities in Vojvodina ... are said to be highly concentrated in particular counties, municipalities, or cities;” “members of at least two national minorities, Croatian and Hungarian, most often identify with Vojvodina, as well as their own town or city,” thus regionally; finally, “[t]he youngest members of Vojvodina's population, those age 25 or younger, express the least interest in knowing

languages of national minorities and think that learning a language of a national minority in the immediate surrounding is unnecessary.”

Not only are Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers in the process of being clearly confirmed, they also exhibit characteristics of the process of frontier segmentation. The same report on languages and alphabets in the official use in Vojvodina, mentioned as having been produced in 2012, was produced earlier in 2010, and even earlier in 2009. The data of all three reports are summarized in the following table:

	SERBIAN CYRILLIC	SERBIAN LATIN	HUNGARIAN	SLOVAK	ROMANIAN	RUTHENIAN	CROATIAN	CZECH	BULGARIAN	MACEDONIAN	MONTENEGRIN
2009	45	23	28+(3)	10+(3)	9+(1)	5+(1)	1+(3)	1	(1)	(1)	0
2010	45	22	28+(3)	10+(3)	9+(1)	5+(1)	1+(3)	1	(1)	(2)	0
2012	45	15	28+(3)	10+(3)	9+(1)	5+(1)	1+(4)	1	(1)	(2)	(1)

Table 2 – Languages and Alphabets in the Official Use in Vojvodina (2009, 2010, 2012)

The data indicate that there appear to be some linguistic frontiers in Vojvodina that are stable: there is no change recorded for the Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Ruthenian, Czech, and Bulgarian linguistic frontiers in the period observed. (Naturally, no change could ever be recorded for the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet.) However, the Serbian language and Latin alphabet frontier, as well as the Croatian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin linguistic frontiers, are changing over time (2009–2012) as well as over space (in various municipalities and local communities). In fact, the Montenegrin linguistic frontier seems to have appeared only in 2012. But it did – thus having undergone the process of frontier confirming – and its example is not the one to offer insights necessary for answering the question posed in the title of the present paper regarding the process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier. Rather, it is a different national minority in Vojvodina, that of Bunyevs, whose example is more relevant here.

IV. Bunyevs

Bunyevs refer to themselves as *Bunjevci*. They are a South-Slavic populace. In Vojvodina they inhabit the region of Bačka living mainly in

and around the cities of Subotica and Sombor. They are Roman-Catholics. Their native speech variety is described in dialectology as the so-called New-Štokavian Young Ikavian dialect of what used to be known as the Serbo-Croatian language. This dialect is also spoken in the Dalmatian Hinterland and on some Dalmatian islands in Croatia, in western Herzegovina in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Serbian and Hungarian Bačka, as demonstrated by (Ivić, 2001: 233–244) and (Stepanović, 1994: 101).

Bunyevs are one of the nine different national minorities explicitly listed in Article 6 of Vojvodina’s statute (SAPV). In fact, of those listed, Bunyevs are the seventh most numerous, with 16,469 according to the 2011 Census (CENSUS1), of which 13,553 in the territory of the city of Subotica and 2,058 in the territory of the city of Sombor. These facts alone satisfy the criterion set in the assumed theory of frontiers, in that the Bunyev frontier in Vojvodina appears to be confirmed in the afore-described top-down regime in managing national minorities. However, the situation is quite different when it comes to something that will here be termed the Bunyev linguistic frontier.

A quick comparison of Article 6’s (SAPV) list of national minorities, Article 24’s (SAPV) list of languages in the official use in Vojvodina, and the full list of languages in the official use in Vojvodina from Table 2, given below (following the order from Table 2), reveals, on the one hand, full parallelisms (as seen, for example, in: Hungarians | Hungarian | Hungarian), and on the other, various divergences from it. Crucially, Bunyevs are an example of the latter.

ARTICLE 6 (SAPV)	ARTICLE 24 (SAPV)	TABLE 2
		Serbian, Cyrillic
		Serbian, Latin
Hungarians	Hungarian	Hungarian
Slovaks	Slovak	Slovak
Romanians	Romanian	Romanian
Ruthenians	Ruthenian	Ruthenian
Croats	Croatian	Croatian
		Czech
		Bulgarian
Macedonians		Macedonian
Montenegrins		Montenegrin

Roma		
Bunyevs		

Clearly, Bunyevs figure in Article 6 (SAPV) alone; their language is not mentioned in Article 24 (SAPV), and is not among the full list of languages in the official use in Vojvodina (cf. Table 2). Results of the 2011 Census (CENSUS2: 13), however, reveal the category of the Bunyev language as one of additional “three modalities” in the “classification of mother tongue” compared to the previous census, that of 2002. According to the 2011 results, there are 6,821 speakers of the Bunyev language in Vojvodina. This makes Bunyev more numerous than Macedonian, Montenegrin, Bulgarian, and Czech, all in the official use in Vojvodina (cf. Table 2), of which the last – Czech – is not even listed as a separate modality in the 2011 final results. This fact suggests that the top-down sociolinguistic regime does not recognize the Bunyev linguistic frontier in Vojvodina. (Башић, Ђорђевић, 2010: 39) refer to this as “the language policy problems regarding the Bunyev national minority,” concluding that “[e]ven though the “Bunyev” (sic!) language is heard on the radio and television, and also found in a specialized newspaper, it is not in the official use in any one of local self-governing units.” A piece of information found in their footnote 37 states that “Bunyevs represent more than 25% of the overall population of four local communities in Vojvodina, with which they satisfy the requirement for introducing their language in the official use, however, that has not happened yet.”

It thus comes as no surprise that the Bunyev ethnic group, as (Ilić and Belić, 2012 and 2014) have demonstrated, finds itself in a precarious situation: the Bunyev elite and political activists are most immediately concerned with developing the Bunyev national identity, which – in their view – should be founded upon the tenets of language and education. In the words of the president of the oldest Bunyev national institution, the Bunyev Matica, Mr. Ivan Sedlak, if the Bunyevs are “to be equal to all other national minorities,” they “have also to resolve those two very important issues, meaning, the issue of standardization and the issue of the continuing development of education in [their] mother, that is, [their] Bunyev tongue (Ilić, Belić, 2012).” Despite the lack of support from the top-down sociolinguistic regime, Bunyevs are still working in a bottom-up fashion on what is seen as the process of the emergence of the Bunyev linguistic frontier.

V. How To Make A Linguistic Frontier?

What seems to be one (if not – indeed – the) major obstacle in allowing the Bunyev linguistic frontier to fully emerge is the lack of willingness to refer to the Bunyev speech variety as the Bunyev language. It appears that the concept of standardization, whatever it may mean to the various parties involved, occupies a central position, or – actually – the central position in the Bunyev language debate, for it looks as though it is only thanks to standardization that a speech variety may gain the label of language.

Žarko Bošnjaković (in Bošnjaković, Sikimić, 2013) dedicates a brief excursus to the issue of the name of the Bunyev speech variety, explaining that two distinct labels have been used for it, *language (jezik)* and *speech/lect (govor)*, and interchangeably so, without any apparent method involved. Moreover, he notes that there were also attempts to avoid language-or-speech/lect labeling altogether by referring to the idiom as simply *Bunyev (bunjevački)*, or *Croatian Štokavian-Ikavian Bunyev (hrvatska štokavsko-ikavska bunjevština)*, or *Croatian (“Bunyev”) (hrvatski („bunjevački“))*, the last one allowing for “the term Bunyev to be belittled in three different ways: by its position (following the term Croatian), by the use of parentheses, and by the use of quotation marks (Bošnjaković, Sikimić, 2013: 189).” While it is not quite clear exactly how Bošnjaković’s conclusion follows from the various dialectological textbook descriptions of Bunyev mentioned, which have always described Bunyev as a part of a dialect, he proposes that “considering the fact that the Bačka Bunyevs do not have a standardized language, the idiom that they use can only be called *speech/lect*.”

It is exactly in conclusions such as Bošnjaković’s that the top-down sociolinguistic regime finds its full support for not recognizing the Bunyev language and, consequently, not allowing it to be introduced in the official use alongside eleven different language-alphabet combinations in official use in Vojvodina. However, as (Urciuoli, 1995: 531) points out, “the sense of a compendious language emerges when people perform it. Social actors bring into being a sense of boundedness, which may also map onto a border. This point can be obscured in conventional sociolinguistics.” She also reminds that “a linguist’s classification of code and the judgments native speakers might assign have different goals (Urciuoli, 1995: 529).” Native speakers of the Bunyev speech variety, it seems at the moment, have every intention of continuing to work on various bottom-up aspects of the process of frontier confirming of the Bunyev linguistic frontier until the top-down sociolinguistic regime in Vojvodina confirms it as well.

One of the most significant achievements of the Bunyev national movement in Serbia took place in 2007. This is the year when Vojvodina's Secretariat for Education and Culture adopted the Handbook for the Educational Curriculum *Bunyev Speech/Lect with Elements of the National Culture* for the first, second, third, and fourth elementary school grades (elective school subject) (cf. OFFICIAL BULLETIN, 2007). From that moment on, it was possible and legal to organize classes in elementary schools, which – indeed – happened in the 2007/2008 academic year. According to the Bunyev National Council data, classes have been organized in two out of Vojvodina's forty-five municipalities, Subotica and Sombor. While the enrollments have been on the constant rise, the number of elementary schools in which classes are held has varied from year to year, fourteen being the highest number. In eight elementary schools, classes have been offered continually since the 2007/2008 academic year.

What is crucially important is the name of the elective school subject, *Bunyev Speech/Lect with Elements of the National Culture*. In the current Serbian elementary school curriculum, there are sixteen different elective subjects, one of which is the subject of *Native Language with Elements of the National Culture*. Within this subject, there is a total of ten different ones for ten different national minorities. Of them, nine are called *languages*, while only Bunyev is called *speech/lect* (cf. HANDBOOK, 2012).

For some time now, Bunyevs have been working on producing teaching materials for the aforementioned subject. The Bunyev grammar for grades 1 through 4 (*Clew: My First Bunyev Grammar with Elements of National Culture for the Elementary School, grades 1–4* (*Klupče: Moja prva bunjevačka gramatika s elementima nacionalne kulture za niže razrede osnovne škole, 1–4 razreda*)) and the school reader for grades 1 and 2 (*Bunyev School Reader and Instruction Book for Teachers, grades 1–2* (*Bunjevačka čitanka i priručnik za učitelje 1–2. razred*)) have recently been published. In the two textbooks the language issue is resolved in the following way: the Bunyev speech variety is referred to as *speech/lect*, not as *language*, which corresponds to the name of the subject. A Bunyev orthographic manual still does not exist. There is, however, one big dictionary entitled *Dictionary of the Bačka Bunyevs* (*Rečnik bačkih Bunjevaca*) published in 1990, whose extended and revised edition is a work in progress. Thus, the unwritten list of publications, whose existence is often required in the process of the standardization of a speech variety, in the Bunyev situation does not seem to be complete. Yet the Committee of

Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages pointed out – to no avail, admittedly – that “the lack of standardisation is not by itself an obstacle to the application of Part II to a regional or minority language,” adding that “Bunjevac appears to be standardised to some extent (cf. CER, 2009).”

Coupled with their work on what they see as the process of the standardization of the Bunyev language, one recognizes also Bunyevs’ activities directed toward getting the fullest possible attention of those who will ultimately be able to change the current state of the top-down sociolinguistic regime, Serbian politicians, more specifically, the president of Serbia. Within a period of only three months in 2013 and 2014, the president of Serbia, Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, has attended to the issue of Bunyevs in general and their speech variety in particular.

On February 26, 2014, the president (cf. PRESIDENT, 2014) met with the president of the Temporary Executive Office of the Bunyev National Council, Ms. Suzana Kujundžić Ostojić. The Serbian president confirmed, among other things, “his readiness to contribute personally to educating the future generations of Bunyevs, adding that, if it were so necessary, the Nikolić family itself will finance publishing books in the minority languages.”

Three months earlier, on November 25, 2013, the president (PRESIDENT, 2013) took part in the Bunyevs’ celebration of one of their national holidays, the day when, in 1918, Bačka, Banat, and Baranja, which constitute present-day Vojvodina, decided to join Serbia, with a significant participation of Bunyevs. Mr. Nikolić spoke of Bunyevs as an autochthonous South Slavic people, asserting that they “are neither Serbs, nor Croats, but an authentic Slavic nationality with attributes of specificity and uniqueness, with its cultural identity, its folklore, and its historical heritage.” The president stopped short of adding language to the list of the Bunyev attributes. He did, however, stress that “the standardization of the Bunyev Ikavian dialect should have concluded long ago, just as more should have been done in the area of allowing more Ikavian classes in schools, as Ikavian is the everyday Bunyev speech/lect.”

Curiously enough, despite the fact that language was not mentioned in the president’s speech, one of the leading Bunyev representatives, Ms. Nevenka Bašić Palković, Librarian Advisor at the City Museum of Subotica, reacted (personal communication) by saying that the president was the most important guest at the celebration, adding that “Serbia will defend Bunyevs from any assimilation.” More than anything, her words

demonstrate the hope of the Bunyev people not to be pushed aside as they were in the period between 1945 and 1991. (Ilić, Belić, 2012) provide echoes of similar sentiments from a member of the Bunyev Language Committee, Mr. Mirko Bajić:

For the Bunyev language, which is a living language, used here from time immemorial, at one time, unfortunately, neglected, disputed by claims that it is a part of another language and consequently considered to be a dialect, we are trying, with all this what we are doing now, we are hoping to demonstrate, to prove (and succeed in that) that Bunyev is a language to us, that belongs to us, and is our mother tongue.

VI. Conclusion

We live in the age of the Ethnic Renaissance, which (Huss, Lindgren, 2011: 9) view as an “ethnic awakening [which] began with the minorities starting to develop further the ideal of democracy: a minority should have the right to its own culture and to its identity without stigmatization or discrimination. From this point of view, true democracy requires pluralism, multilingualism, and also positive discrimination.” In this age, the languages of those minorities are but one important aspect of human life that undergoes regulatory practices explicated in a language policy. Thus, at no time should one forget the often nonverbalized complexity of the deceptive simplicity of the humans-languages-policies interface, of which (Urciuoli, 1995: 525) speaks, explaining that “[p]eople act in ways that are taken as “having” a language, which is equated to “belonging” to an origin group. Borders emerge in specific contexts as a metonymy of person, language, and origin category. This metonymy can be fleeting or quite rigid and in varying degrees politicized.”

Thus, from one point of view, linguistic frontiers, including the Bunyev linguistic frontier, are simply there as long as those who “own” and “have” them are there. Still, from another point of view, linguistic frontiers, including the Bunyev linguistic frontier, must undergo the process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier, which will – eventually – inevitably take them through the processes of frontier confirming and frontier segmentation. The process of the emergence of a linguistic frontier consists of both bottom-up and top-down efforts on behalf of all the necessarily involved social actors. It is only at the time of the meeting point of the two directions of efforts that a linguistic frontier emerges fully.

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