

Kordić, Snježana. *Jezik i nacionalizam*. Durieux, Zagreb, 2010. 430 pp. Bibliography. Index. €28.00.

THE last two years have seen the publication of two important books on 'language chauvinism' in South-East Europe, as *Metzler Lexikon Sprache* (2000) terms the attempt to divide Serbo-Croatian into four separate languages. In 2009 Bernhard Gröschel published *Das Serbokroatische zwischen Linguistik und Politik* (Munich: Lincom Europea), a broad and thorough overview of all arguments and stances in the 'language quarrel' over the unity of Serbo-Croatian, and found the four-languages claim to be unacceptable from a linguistic point of view. In a similar manner Snježana Kordić's *Jezik i nacionalizam* discusses the arguments used by a group of influential Croatian linguists associated with the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (Dalibor Brozović, Stjepan Babić and Radoslav Katičić, and a few others), who have been in a position to direct language policy in Croatia since 1991 and have put forward the view that Croatian is a separate language. Kordić names this group the 'Croatists' and contrasts their claims not only with contemporary linguistics, but also with claims made by foreign Serbo-Croatian specialists, and — sometimes to very amusing effect — with their own pre-1991 claims. It should be noted, however, that the kinds of arguments Kordić criticizes in this book were put forward not only by this group of Croatian linguists, but can be heard in other parts of the former Yugoslavia as well, as Kordić duly points out where relevant.

With a plethora of quotations from German, French, Polish and English linguistic literature, Kordić demonstrates that international linguistics has declined to accept the claim that Serbian, Croatian, Bosniak and Montenegrin constitute separate languages. Serbo-Croatian is still viewed as a polycentric language, with four standard variants spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These variants do differ slightly, as is the case with other polycentric languages (English, Spanish, German and Portuguese, among others), but not to a degree which would justify considering them as different languages. The differences between the variants do not undermine the integrity of the system as a whole and do not hinder mutual intelligibility. The most obvious difference is the contemporary reflex, i.e. rendition, of the Old Church Slavonic 'jat' vowel, which divides Serbo-Croatian — as well as Bulgarian — into ekavik and ijekavik pronunciations. However, Kordić claims this difference, which never affects mutual intelligibility, is overemphasized by the phonetic orthography used by Serbo-Croatian speakers: if English and German were to register such minor differences of pronunciation in written texts, the differences between the German spoken in Austria and Germany, or English in the UK and the USA would actually appear as more substantial than those between Serbian and Croatian variants. What is more, Kordić points out that many Serbs are also ijekavik speakers. Vuk Karadžić advocated making ijekavik the standard; Ante Starčević, the leading Croatian nineteenth-century nationalist, advocated ekavik. It is one of the paradoxes of the language standardization in the nineteenth century that Zagreb accepted ijekavik, and Belgrade remained ekavik, Kordić reminds us.

Mutual intelligibility between the variants is difficult to contest, so the 'Croatists' have put forward several other arguments. One of them claims that

Serbian and Croatian are different languages because Serbs and Croats have different cultural traditions. Even if this were true — and to disprove this claim Kordić points to the homogenous culture in which Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as significant cultural differences between the Croatian regions of Dalmatia, Slavonia, Istria and historical Croatia proper, the region north of Zagreb — different cultural traditions are irrelevant as regards the existence of polycentric languages, as the case of Argentina and Spain testifies. Moreover, this argument points to past cultural traditions, evident at the time when the kajkavian and čakavian dialects, as well as the Slavenoserbski sociolect were written; these past differences ceased affecting the Serbo-Croatian language from the moment štokavian was accepted as the basis for the standard language in the mid-nineteenth century.

The so-called sociolinguistic argument — the fact that the new post-Yugoslav states in their constitutions have all named the language differently — Kordić finds equally unacceptable. This argument is based on the confusion between official and standard language. If this were a valid linguistic argument, the vast majority of the world's languages would not exist at all, because they neither have official status nor is their name recorded in constitutions. Here Kordić supports Gröschel's call for the defence of the dignity of linguistics as an academic discipline; this argument demands that the community of linguists not cave in before politicians and surrender their own definitions and classifications.

The argument which is based on speakers' 'self-estimation' is equally flawed: linguists are not obliged to accept the lay understanding of phenomena under study. No biologist would agree to consider eels to be snakes, simply because this is how some non-specialists view them, says Kordić quoting Ammon. Many peoples believe that their language was a gift from a golden bird, but linguists do not accept that. Moreover, language policy can easily manipulate speakers, and then quote this allegedly deep-rooted belief as proof.

Since 1991, the 'Croatists' have promoted the view that the separate status of Croatian is a question of the utmost importance, affecting the survival of the state and nation, maintains Kordić. In the early 1990s language policy in Croatia was influenced by the extreme language ideology of the fascist Ustasha regime of the 1940s, when an artificially produced difference from 'Serbian' was top of the agenda. Purism and prescriptivism were its main features: a ban on certain words perceived as 'Serbian' (which were for the most part merely international) and the idea that a word is more 'Croatian' if fewer Croats understood it, resulted in the widespread impression that no one but a handful of linguists in Croatia knew the standard language. Nevertheless, the decision as to which word was Croatian, and which was not, could only be arbitrary. Instead of describing the actual language norm, that which is widespread in use, neutral and non-regional, the 'Croatists' tried to prescribe and impose a new norm. Units for language censorship were instituted in the media and they functioned as political filters. Despite these attempts, the language reform imposed on the media and education has left few traces, and the spoken language in Croatia remains unaffected. Contrary to everything they maintained before 1991, in this year the 'Croatists' put

forward the axiom that Croatian and Serbian are different languages, and if they are not — they should be. Kordić also quotes two of Stjepan Babić's important autobiographical testimonies: that the subtext of all his activities has been to increase differences between the variants, and that he 'always took good care to follow the party line' (p. 286) — even when the party in power changed.

Kordić also demystifies the most important myths created by the revisionist history thought up by the 'Croatists', one of these being language unitarism in the former Yugoslavia. She reminds the reader that both Serbian and Croatian variants were represented in grammar books, dictionaries, school textbooks and in books known as *pravopis* (which detail spelling rules). Yugoslav language policy was an exemplary one: although three-quarters of Yugoslavs spoke one language, no single language was official on a federal level. Official languages were declared only at the level of constituent republics and provinces, and very generously: Vojvodina had five (among them Slovak and Romanian, spoken by 0.5 per cent of the population), and Kosovo four (Albanian, Turkish, Romany and Serbo-Croatian). Newspapers, radio and television studios used sixteen languages, fourteen were used as languages of tuition in schools, and nine at universities. Only the Yugoslav Army used Serbo-Croatian as the sole language of command, with all other languages represented in the army's other activities — however, Kordić reminds us that this is not different to other armies of multilingual states, or in other specific institutions, such as international air traffic control where English is used worldwide. All variants were used in state administration and republican and federal institutions, in striking contrast to post-Yugoslav states. However, legal equality could not dampen the prestige Serbo-Croatian had: since it was the language of three quarters of the population, it functioned as an unofficial *lingua franca*. And within Serbo-Croatian, the Serbian variant, with twice as many speakers as the Croatian, enjoyed greater prestige, reinforced by the fact that Slovene and Macedonian speakers preferred it to the Croatian variant because their languages are also *ekavik*.

The second myth is that of the 1954 Novi Sad agreement, when leading Croatian and Serbian linguists agreed on ten points which were to guide language policy. The agreement insisted on the equality of Cyrillic and Latin scripts, and of *ekavik* and *ijekavik* pronunciations. It also specified that 'Serbo-Croatian' should be the name of the language in official contexts, while in unofficial use the traditional 'Serbian' and 'Croatian' were to be retained. *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* were to work together on a dictionary, and a committee of Serbian and Croatian linguists was asked to prepare a *pravopis*. During the sixties both books were published simultaneously in *ijekavik* and Latin in Zagreb and *ekavik* and Cyrillic in Belgrade. Yet the 'Croatists' claim that it was an act of unitarism. The evidence supporting this claim is patchy: Stjepan Babić complained that the television transmission from Belgrade always used the Latin alphabet — which was true, but was not proof of unequal rights, but of frequency of use and prestige. Babić further complained that the dictionary (1967) listed side by side words from both the Croatian and Serbian variants wherever they differed, which Kordić views as proof of careful respect for both variants, and not of unitarism. Moreover,

Kordić claims the ‘Croatists’ criticized the parts of this dictionary for which Croatian linguists were responsible, and ignored the fact that the material for the dictionary came from the Croatian Philological Society. Although Babić today fashions himself as an opponent of the alleged unitarism, in 1964 he himself published a nine-point programme for abolishing the differences between the variants and for creating a unified language. The only positive reactions to this programme came from Brozović and Katičić, the two other ‘Croatists’, and none from Serbian linguists. Not only does this prove the lack of unitaristic pretensions on the part of Serbian linguists, claims Kordić, but it also shows how the very same people in Croatia could take, almost simultaneously, both the unitaristic and the secessionist stances.

Kordić also has something to say about the Vuk Karadžić myth, which in the last two decades can be followed migrating from one English book to another without a single reference to his article ‘Srbi svi i svuda’ (which he himself translated into German as ‘Von den Serben überhaupt’, ‘On Serbs in General’, not ‘Serbs All and Everywhere’). He did not equate štokavian with Serbdom following some secret imperialist plan, but following local tradition (documents in fifteenth-century Dubrovnik routinely termed every štokavian text as Serbian) and Central European philology (Dobrovský and Kopitar considered štokavian as Serbian, and kajkavian as Croatian). However, the creators and disseminators of the Karadžić myth never bother to mention that he, upon encountering opposition from his Croatian colleagues, immediately and placatingly withdrew his proposition. The atmosphere in which this event occurred is significant: it was not conflictive, but a benevolent academic discussion, led under conditions of a striking lack of linguistic information. Karadžić was later honoured by becoming an honorary citizen of Zagreb, which has not been revoked.

As regards the name of the language, Kordić rejects four separate names (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian and Montenegrin), because they suggest differences while denoting the same language. One name referring to the whole region is more correct, and it should be the one with the longest tradition in linguistics: srpskohrvatski, Serbo-Croatian. It was first used by Jacob Grimm in 1824, popularized by Jernej Kopitar in the following decades, and accepted by Zagrebian grammarians in 1854. Kordić points out that one of the ‘Croatists’, Dalibor Brozović, also advocated this name as late as 1988, claiming that in an analogy with Indo-European, Serbo-Croatian does not only name the two components of the same language, but simply charts the limits of the region in which it is spoken and includes everything between the limits (‘Bosnian’ and ‘Montenegrin’). Other options for the language’s name Kordić finds less acceptable. For example, if we were to use ‘Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian/Montenegrin’, we would always need a footnote explaining that it does not refer to four languages, but to one. Moreover, ponders Kordić, what does ‘/’ stand for? Is it ‘and’, or ‘either/or’, or ‘and/or’? The other option, BCS, is indeed curious: an acronym instead of a name. It must be noted that Kordić discusses only the name to be used in linguistics, leaving the public the right to name the language any way it prefers.

*Jeziik i nacionalizam* is a thorough, well-argued and passionately written critique of linguistic nationalism, rooted in the fear that the nation will disappear unless it has a language of its own, and of its main features: the celebration of purism, the obsession with etymologies, the equation of nation with language, the falsification of history, revisionism, and political disqualification of one's opponents. Having been for years politically disqualified and professionally defamed herself, with this book Kordić offers an exemplary gesture of how linguistics can maintain its independence, dignity and high academic standards against political manipulation.

*UCL SSEES*

ZORAN MILUTINOVIĆ