

**CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE STEREOTYPES
IN THE ATTITUDES OF ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS
ALBANIANS AND THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE -
THE VIEW FROM BEHIND THE MIRROR**

Добро је позната чињеница да су наши ставови према другим етничким групама или народима под утицајем многих фактора, веома често спољних, као што су: политика, масовни медији, историјске и социо-политичке околности (Zastrow, Kirst-Ashman, 2007; McQuali, 1979). У којој мери ће језик и култура одређеног народа или етничке групе бити прихваћени или неприхваћени и да ли ће произвести позитивне или негативне ставове код чланова друштва, у великој мери зависи од тога како је представљена и постављена језичко-културна симбиоза одређеног народа или етничке групе и друштва. Циљ нашег рада је да пружимо преглед елемената који имају велики утицај на онемогућавање повезивања албанског језика и културе са позитивним ставовима међу млађом популацијом, популацијом адолесцената, у Србији. Представићемо резултате анкете спроведене на Филолошком факултету у Београду међу студентима који не студирају албански језик и књижевност.

Кључне речи: културни и језички стереотипи, ставови према другим етничким групама, спољни фактори.

Every culture includes a different web of patterns and meanings, including ways of earning a living, systems of trade and government, social roles, religions, traditions in clothing, food and the arts, behavioral expectations, attitudes towards other cultures, and beliefs and values about all of these activities. To which measure the language and culture of one particular people or ethnic group will be accepted or un-accepted, and will produce positive or negative attitudes within other social subjects, greatly depends on the how the symbiosis of language-culture of that group and its society is presented and placed. The symbiosis of language-culture reflects what we recognize essentially as the main feature or characteristic of an ethnic group or people. We could also say that this symbiosis is iconic.

Languages communicate not only meaning in a neutral sense, but also power. It is very important who speaks a language, which class it is associated with and what image it has in society (Rahman, 2001: 50). The linguist T. Rahman (2001) talks about three different kinds of power, which every language poses. They are: signitive, pragmatic and symbolic. Pragmatic power is based on the communicative dimensions of language, the signitive aspect indicates that the language is a means of propagating ideologies, while the symbolic power refers to the association of a language with attributes that have a value, positive or negative, in the mind of the perceiver (Rahman, 2001). Associating a language with features that have a positive or negative value may refer to the relation of two or more languages in society and, in the opinion of Rahman, the symbolic value of the language is always associated with power. How a language is accepted and treated within a multilingual society is an issue that is closely related to the status which that language has within a particular society or community. This issue is very complex, but at the same time, it is of great importance for every society, since it always implies some kind of comparison between two or more languages or their ranking in importance. This is completely independent of the concept, which refers to *the structure of language* (which is one of the main focuses of linguistics as a science) (see Rahman).

Ulrich Ammon (1991) mentions six main components of *linguistic status*: the numerical power of the language, the social character of the language (which includes economic power), the functions of the language, geographic distribution, legal status and the assessment or value component. In our attempt to determine the status that Albanian language has among adolescents in Serbia and, at the same time, to find out something about their cultural and linguistic stereotypes regarding this language and Albanians in general as a nation, we conducted a survey at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade among students who do not study Albanian as their main language. Our survey included 67 students from various departments, mainly from the first and third years. During the survey, we paid special attention to two out of six linguistic status components mentioned by Ammon: the economic strength component and the assessment or value component of the language. We also tried to point out the influence and significance of external elements, such as the current political situation,

mass media and the influence of the social environment on the formation of attitudes and stereotypes among adolescents in Serbia.

When we look at the linguistic map of Europe, we realize that Albanian does not occupy a very high place, because it has fewer native speakers than over twenty other languages indicated in that list. When it comes to the place that Albanian has among the languages spoken in Serbia, Albanian has the status of national minority language. According to the data published by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Albanians represented the largest minority in Serbia until 1981. They were followed by Hungarians and Bosniaks. Our assumption is that the current situation is unchanged and that Albanians represent the largest national minority in Serbia.

We began our survey by asking about general concepts related to the Albanian language. For example; “*Do you know to which group of languages Albanian belongs?*” and “*Does Albanian have an alphabet?*”. We thought that students would certainly be able to answer to these questions, because they study philology. Only 15 students knew the answer to the first question; while 48 did not know and others said that it belongs to the Illyrian group or Albanian group, or that it is an isolated language related to Romanian and Romance languages and even that it is not an Indo-European language. It is interesting that more than 10% of the respondents answered that Albanian has no alphabet.

We were interested in the opinion of our students about Albanian culture in general. We thought that representatives of culture and art, or maybe some important historical figures, would be our best connection with Albanian culture. Sixty four students responded that they had never heard of an Albanian writer or poet. The only correct answer came from a student that probably studies Italian, because he mentioned the name of an Italian writer, who has Arbëresh, i.e. Albanian, origin. When we asked “*Have you heard of any Albanian artist (actor, singer, director, painter, etc.)?*” (specifying that he/she should not necessarily have to be from Albania), only 23 respondents answered correctly. They mentioned the names of singers and actors, such as: Muharem Ahmeti, Era Istrefi, Bekim Fehmiu, Zana Nimani, Rita Ora, Eliza Dushku, Jim Belushi, Anjeza Shahini, Olta Boka, Jameson (JMSN), Anna Oxa, Al Bano , Dafina Zeqiri, Silva Gunbardhi.

When we asked “*Can you tell us the name of a famous Albanian man or woman?*”, we got different answers. Only 16 respondents were able to

answer this question. They mentioned some prominent figures such as: Mother Teresa, Scanderbeg, Anna Oxa, Bekim Fehmiu, and two scientists, Musa Ahmeti and Idriz Ajeti. As famous Albanians, they also mentioned some politicians and officials, such as Hashim Thaci, Edi Rama, Ramush Haradinaj and Ibrahim Rugova, as well as some athletes, mostly football players, but also a football player manager and a basketball player: Valmir Berisha, Shkodran Mustafi, Valon Bedrami, Gjerdan Shaqiri (not born in Albania), Fali Ramadani and Ermal Kurtoglu. Also Enver Hoxha was mentioned as a famous Albanian. Some years ago, he would have been the first association, when someone mentioned Albania.

- *Have you ever heard of an Albanian writer that wrote a novel, which was subsequently translated into Serbian?* Out of the 67 respondents, only one knew the correct answer, indicating that it is the famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. One of his first books, “The General of the Dead Army”, was translated into Serbian and published in the former Yugoslavia. Four more of his novels were published in the nineties.

When it comes to the position or vision regarding the Albanian language, respondents were offered the opportunity to circle more than one answer. Most of the respondents answered that Albanian sounds: 1. Interesting; 2. Not better and not worse than any other language and 3. Not melodic at all. The following answer was interesting:

“It is a young, baby language, unknown, harsh and beautiful, like the Romany language.” Fourteen respondents said that they never had the chance to hear that language, while a large number said they had heard Albanian in college, on television and radio, from a friend that studies the language, from former neighbors, through music, in Kosovo, during student exchanges abroad etc.

However, when it comes to their first association when someone mentions the Albanian language, most of the respondents consider that it is an unmusical, archaic, exotic, ugly and rough language. Of course, the subjective evaluation of the native language was proved universal by our survey. Most of the respondents considered that their native language, i.e. Serbian, is very melodic and beautiful.

Economic importance is a very important component of the value of a language. This component implies that the motivation for learning a

language can be related to economic factors, as well as professionally conditioned. People may wish to work with a certain linguistic community, in the sense that they wish to work in the country, whose language they learn (Ammon 1991). However, we would like to add the situation when people are employed in their own country, thanks to the knowledge of a foreign language. We asked whether our respondents would learn Albanian, if that increased their chances of employment.

A large number of respondents answered positively, while 15 said “No” and three were even more explicit “No way!”. From the languages spoken in the immediate vicinity of our country, most respondents (37) said that they would like to learn Greek, followed by Romanian (17) and Slovenian (14).

It is considered that Lippmann (Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010) was the first scientist to introduce the term “stereotype” in scientific terminology. In the opinion of Lippmann, the term “stereotype” refers to a typical image that comes to mind when you think of a particular social group (Dovidio et al., 2010: 7). Although this term was defined, at the beginning of the last century, as an inflexible and flawed thought process, in recent times, the discussion is focused more and more on the functional and dynamic aspects of the stereotype, which are mainly applied to simplify complex realities. A specific characteristic of stereotypes is that they provoke an emotional reaction in community members and reflect the belief in a certain feature or features allegedly typical for the members of a certain community. Stereotypes can be positive and negative and it is safe to say that there is no community or group that is not associated with some kind of stereotype.

According to *The Stereotype Content Model* (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick et al. 2002), there are two dimensions of stereotypes: *warmth* and *competence*. The former favors “cooperative” groups and disfavors “rival” groups, while the latter is related to groups that have a higher social status, disfavoring groups with lower social status. Groups that are defined as *cold* and *incompetent*, based on this model, cause disgust, anger and rejection (Dovidio et al. 2010). In our survey, we made several questions that gave us a picture of the kind of stereotypes that adolescents have regarding the Albanians.

What do you think that the typical Albanian looks like? The largest number of respondents gave the following reply: dark-skinned, black

hair, black eyes, short, with characteristic facial features (large nose, thin spread lips), black beard, mustache, white cap on the head, like in the movie “Parade” (short, black hair and with a large number of children). A few responders said that Albanians are blond (at least the ones they know) and that typical Albanians are tall, thin and with rosy cheeks, that in fact they do not differ in any way from Serbs, Croats or English people, i.e. they look like normal people...

In order to complete somehow the picture that adolescents have about Albanians, we asked “*Is there any trait (characteristic) that allows you to identify an Albanian*” and “*How would you describe an Albanian?*”. Although many respondents said that such characteristic does not exist at all or that they do not know (over 40), there were some, who said that Albanians can be recognized by the characteristic facial traits, clothing (at least for those that live in Kosovo and Metohija), language and pronunciation (some respondents perceive their speech as an indistinct babble, no matter whether they are speaking Albanian or even Serbian) and a black beard (characteristic of Muslims).

Respondents offered neutral, positive or negative answers to the second question. Neutral answers: I do not know them; I do not know any Albanians and I have no way to judge; Like everyone else; Without any difference from any other nation; Normal; A nation that is not on good terms with us and for that reason my opinion may be biased; I do not want to generalize, I have a friend from Albania and he is a nice person, always ready to help; I cannot describe people, whom I do not know; Everywhere there are good and bad people, including Serbia and Albania; I have no prejudices; I do not think that they are worse than Serbs; I do not know them well enough; I am not informed enough, but I might say that they are rather problematic, because we do not agree at the political level.

Positive answers: Friendly, funny and nice; The best people I know; Kind; I have heard from other people that they are hospitable and friendly and that they support their compatriots, etc.

Negative: Stubborn and boring; Dangerous; Primitive, not very social; Mostly ugly and uneducated; Violent, unfriendly, full of hatred; People that have hard lives, closed-minded, traditionalists; Uneducated, insolent, soulless, arrogant and with no trace of shame and tolerance; Ag-

gressive and impulsive; Dirty; Judging by what I know from TV and newspapers, I would say that they are very dull and narrow-minded; They are not oriented to the modern world, but instead of that they cultivate hatred towards their neighbors and are very violent.

Given that most of the answers are neutral or negative, we gained the impression that the stereotypes that adolescents have towards Albanians lack those dimensions that would classify them as positive. In fact, the situation is the opposite.

Mass media are very diverse in terms of contents and organizational form. They include a wide range of activities, which may have and very often do have an impact on society (McQuail, 1979). Modern people are surrounded by mass media, which constantly publish information. Each piece of information is at the same time a message.

Specialists in this field point out that the repetition of some information may have a great impact on the effect that the message has on the audience, i.e. on those that receive the information. Such impact may be related to the formation of thinking at different levels, individual, collective, institutional or at level of the entire society. Experts in mass media consider that it is much easier to create opinions or attitudes about the unknown, rather than about known matters, as well as about events abroad, rather than about events that take place in the country where the receptor lives (McQuail, 1979). While processing the survey data, we confirmed our assumption that mass media may have a great effect on the formation of attitudes in any control group living in modern society. Respondents were asked about the way they formed their attitude to Albanians. Most of the respondents said that their attitude was formed on the basis of the information received through the internet, mass media, press etc., as well as based on what they have heard from their families and in the environment, where they live. A small number of them selected the answer that their attitude was formed on the basis of personal experience (11 responses). Fifty three respondents said that they have never been to Kosovo. We also asked them whether that information affected their attitude to Albanians and whether they think that the information regarding the current political situation in the region is insufficient, too much or just as much as necessary. More than half of the respondents said that there is too much information of that kind and that it influenced their attitude to some extent.

The deep effect of other external factors (historical and social-political circumstances) on adolescents in Serbia and their attitudes can be seen in the answer that we got, when we asked “What is your first association when we mention Albania?”

Most answers referred to: Kosovo (11 answers); The occupation of Kosovo; Lazarat; Violence; War and hatred towards other nations and Serbs; Perpetual conflict with Serbia; Terrorists, KLA; Kosovo and Metohija; First World War, mountains, intolerance; Terrorism; Koran; Albanian extremists; Mafia; White cap; Taboo subject (one of the answers was: Honestly, Albania scares me). It is interesting that most of the answers referred to Kosovo, although that territory is not part of Albania. Such an answer can certainly serve as an indicator of the ideas that adolescents have in Serbia, i.e. that there is no ethnic difference between Albanians from Kosovo and Albanians from Albania and that Kosovo is somehow related to Albania, although it does not belong to Albania and is not part of its territory.

The large gap and disconnection between the two cultures is well-illustrated by the following fact. When we asked whether they know a street in Belgrade, which bears the name of a famous historical figure, an Albanian who was a prince and fought against the Turks, 57 respondents said that they did not know, although we are talking about Scanderbeg street, which is located downtown and has not changed its name for several decades. Over fifty percent of the respondents could not answer the question “*Is there a building in Belgrade, whose name is related to Albania?*”. That is very interesting because the “Albania Building” (*Palata Albanija*) stands in the very center of the city. It owes its name to the former coffee-shop “Albania”, which was demolished in 1938, in order to build the first high-rise building in Belgrade.

In conclusion, we would like to point out the following: Perceptions about the Albanian language and Albanians, as recorded in the survey carried out among students of the Faculty of Philology of Belgrade, are mainly based on information from mass media and their environment. Among the respondents there were very few who had formed their opinions on the basis of personal experience and direct contact with this ethnic group and this Indo-European language.

The Albanian language is perceived by adolescents in Serbia as an interesting, archaic and rough language, while the typical Albanian is supposed to have dark skin, black hair, black eyes and a black beard. Judg-

ing by the answers of the respondents, there are no typical characteristics which belong to the national group. When asked about the features by which they can be identified, the respondents mainly offered neutral or very negative answers, while positive answers were scarce.

We believe that more frequent and more direct contacts between adolescents of these two nations would certainly contribute to the formation of a new attitude to Albanians and the Albanian language, very different from the current one. Stereotypical images are something that accompany every ethnic group or nation. However, it is important to emphasize that such a picture is subject to change, and that it may change at different levels. In our opinion, the most important changes can be seen at individual and group level. If we talk about our reflection in a mirror, we should not forget that there are, in fact, three different reflections: the way we see ourselves, the reflection produced by the mirror and the way others see us. We believe that the results would have been completely different, in a positive sense, if we had performed this survey among adolescents in Albania, but that the results would have been almost identical, if we had performed the research in Kosovo.

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Abstract

It is a well known fact that our attitudes towards other ethnic groups and ethnicities are influenced by many factors, very often by *external* factors, such as: politics, mass media, historical and socio-political circumstances (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2007; McQuali, 1979). In which measure the language and the culture of one particular people or ethnic group will be accepted or rejected and will produce positive or negative attitudes within other social subjects, in great part depends on how the *symbiosis* language-culture of particular people or ethnic group and its society is presented and placed. The goal of our paper is to give an outline of elements which have a great influence on disabling the connection of Albanian language and culture with positive attitudes in the environment of the younger population, the population of adolescents, in Serbia. We present the results of a poll conducted at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade among students who do not study Albanian language and literature as their major.

Keywords: culture and language stereotypes, attitudes towards other ethnic groups, external factors

Biographical statement

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