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# 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY STANDARD LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY IN SERBIA AND POLAND

#### Abstract

The present paper examines standard language ideologies in Serbia and Poland. We look closely at the weight that standard language ideology carries in both nation-states by analyzing those languages which are not accorded the highest status: in Serbia – Bunjevac, and in Poland – Kashubian. We demonstrate how – in both Serbia and Poland – standard language ideology appears to be challenged on various grounds, yet it is almost indisputably enforced at the same time. In the end, we conclude that our examination contributes to the latest observations regarding the notion of language standardization, which appears to have been changing before our very eyes.

**Key words**: standard language ideology, Serbia, Poland, Bunjevac, Kashubian, language standardization

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#### **1.** Introduction

In the present paper, our examination of standard language ideology (hereafter, SLI) in general zeroes in on two European nation-states in particular, Serbia and Poland, aiming to scrutinize only certain SLI aspects of the two nation-states.

According to Amon (2004: 273), "[t]he term *standard* with respect to language was only established over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century." It is, however, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that this otherwise "technical term used by linguists" (Auer 2011: 486) has become considerably more prominent in some linguistic (and not only linguistic) accounts of late modernity. Milroy's (2001:530) portrayal of what he refers to as the ideology of the standard language suggests that "[c]ertain languages ... are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms, and this kind of belief affects the way in which speakers think about their own language and about 'language' in general. We may say that speakers of these languages live in *standard language cultures.*"

By looking at two specific standard language cultures, Serbian and Polish, we specifically examine the weight that SLI carries by analyzing the ways in which the cultures behave toward languages, which – in those cultures – are not accorded the highest status: in Serbia – Bunjevac, and in Poland – Kashubian. We demonstrate that, while SLI in both Serbia and Poland appears to be challenged on various grounds, its enforcement in the instances of Bunjevac and Kashubian still paints the picture of an undisputed rationale.

In the section immediately following, we provide an outline of what we suggest can be considered the basis of SLI in Serbia and Poland. Then, in section 3, we detail the two respective case studies of Bunjevac and Kashubian, showing the effects of SLI on them. After the role that SLI plays has been shown, in section 4, based on examples unrelated to Bunjevac and Kashubian, we reveal just how easily this role is undermined, which is why we eventually question the need for SLI. We summarize our findings in the concluding remarks.

# 2. SLI in Serbia and Poland

From what we present in this section, it is clear that both Serbia and Poland champion what Gal (2006:163) recognizes as "a common sense view widely held by European elites that languages are organized systems with centrally defined norms, each language ideally expressing the spirit of a nation and the territory it occupies." In fact, in both nation-states, only the status of the selected languages is regulated by the supreme laws of the two lands – their constitutions.

#### 2.1. SLI in Serbia

Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia reads, in part, that "[i]n the Republic of Serbia, the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet are in official use."<sup>1</sup> Serbian is, thus, the only language with a constitutionally recognized status; while there are other languages also in official use, they are not regulated by the constitution, but by various lower laws, and the status of those languages does not apply to the whole of Serbia; it applies only to specific geopolitical units.

In the Serbian standard language culture, the most compelling explication of SLI is found in the works of the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language (*Odbor za standardizaciju srpskog jezika*), particularly in its foundational principles. The Committee was established on December 12, 1997. On that day, the Agreement Establishing the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language (*Sporazum o osnivanju Odbora za standardizaciju srpskog jezika*), the Operational Plan of the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language (*Program rada Odbora za standardizaciju srpskog jezika*), and the Bylaws (*Poslovnik*) were signed.

According to Article 1 of the Agreement (Brborić et al. 2006: 17), one of the Committee's goals is "to systematically establish the norms of the Serbian language, both ekavian and ijekavian,<sup>2</sup> generally speaking and in detail, as well as to produce the documents and manuals and also to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> All translations into English are ours unless noted otherwise, M. N. and B. B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ekavian and ijekavian are two pronunciations of the so-called Neoštokavian dialect reflecting present-day pronunciations of what is traditionally known as the *jat* sound (hence, 'child' is *dete* in ekavian pronunciation and *dijete* in ijekavian pronunciation).

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create bills to allow for approved innovations from everyday language to enter the norm." The Operational Plan states (Brborić et al. 2006: 21), among other things, that "[t]he Committee will follow and support the work on the major projects that have already been accepted (two syntax volumes, a word formation volume, a phonology volume, a one-volume dictionary, a reverse dictionary, bilingual dictionaries, the completion of the orthographic complex). The Committee will also strive to find working groups for major projects that have not yet been considered (a morphology volume, an accentual dictionary, etc.)." It eventually delves into the essence of how the Committee itself understands the concepts of the standard language and standardization (Brborić et al. 2006: 22):

The Committee expects that its members and members of the subcommittees will contribute to the necessary terminological differentiation (language standard/standard language : language of literature/literary language : substandard linguistic expression(s) : dialects) as well as to the understanding of the work on standardization in the manner outlined in the Committee's Decision #1 (final section, right after subsection 3.6),<sup>3</sup> which, in no way, means "giving chase" to anything, "persecution" or "discontinuation" of anything, including the traditional meaning of the term literary language. In a nutshell – the Committee is not tasked with abolishment, but with arrangement of the standard Serbian language, including both its dialects (ekavian and ijekavian) and both its alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin).

Crucially, the view of the standardization process, as outlined here, is overall an affirmative one.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This section, in part, explains that "[s]tandardization prohibits and annuls nothing, let alone 'burns' that which exists in human brains and their linguistic creations, immortalized in books, journals and newspapers, on celluloid, diskettes, and compact discs. Standardization simply establishes a certain order of linguistic units in the public use, particularly that described as official (language use). ... In better social circumstances, those who know and respect linguistic norms could gain a higher social reputation, as well as other conveniences, as is indeed the case elsewhere, particularly in the more developed world.

# 2.2. SLI in Poland

Article 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (1997) declares: "Polish shall be the official language in the Republic of Poland. This provision shall not infringe upon national minority rights resulting from ratified international agreements."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Polish language is the only official language that the Constitution recognizes.

In the past, the Polish standard language culture was developed by experts specializing in the Polish language, particularly individual eminent linguists (cf. Lubaś 2013: 202) and various associations such as the Association of Admirers of the Polish Language (*Towarzystwo Miłośników Języka Polskiego*) based in Cracow and the Association of Culture and Language (*Towarzystwo Kulturyi Języka*) based in Warsaw, all of which have published manuals, dictionaries, and journals focusing on the Polish language. This tradition continues today, with the most important and authoritative organization in this respect being the Council of the Polish Language (*Rada języka polskiego*) which was established in 1996 and started to operate in 2002, according to the Act of the Polish Language (*Ustawa o języku polskim*). The organization's tasks are as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) spreading the knowledge of the Polish language, its varieties, norms and evaluation criteria, and suggesting proper linguistic forms in various situations;
- (2) resolving linguistic doubts with regard to lexicon, grammar, pronunciation, orthography, and punctuation, as well as the appropriateness of stylistic forms of expression;
- (3) searching for solutions in the usage of the Polish language in various fields of sciences and technology, particularly in new scholarly disciplines such as informatics;
- (4) expressing opinions on the linguistic form of texts for public communication, especially in the press, on the radio and TV, and in administration;
- (5) establishing the orthography and punctuation of the Polish language;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/konse.htm>. Web. November 14, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;http://www.rjp.pan.pl/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=212&cati d=36&Itemid=73>. Web. November 14, 2017.

- (6) expressing opinions on the names (and their grammatical and orthographic forms) proposed for new goods and services; and
- (7) nurturing the culture of the Polish language in schools.

Although the Council does not explicitly address the standardization of the Polish language, it is clear that the activities of the Council are closely related to the standardization of the Polish language and its implementation.

# 3. Bunjevac in Serbia and Kashubian in Poland

We now turn to the two case studies, where we examine Bunjevac in Serbia and Kashubian in Poland, and particularly highlight the weight that SLI carries in both nation-states.

#### 3.1. Bunjevac

According to the latest census, the 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, one of the languages spoken in the country – and listed in the census results – is Bunjevac. In fact, compared to the previous census, Bunjevac is one of three so-called new modalities (including also Armenian and Montenegrin) found in the classification of mother tongue (Census: 13). This fact alone implies that the status of Bunjevac is not a particularly high one.

The 2011 Census results indicate that there are 6,835 speakers of Bunjevac in Serbia, of whom almost all -6,821 – reside in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The vast majority of them are concentrated in Vojvodina's municipalities of Subotica (6,313) and Sombor (387). While the Bunjevac language as such is documented in the 2011 Census, it is not documented in any of the major Serbian laws focusing on the official use of languages and alphabets.

In their study on national minorities exercising their rights to have their languages and alphabets in official use in Serbia, Bašić and Đorđević (2010: 83-85) examined 43 different Serbian legal documents in various capacities. Only five major ones were consulted for the present examination of the status of Bunjevac: the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia; the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina; the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets; the Law on the Ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; and the Provincial Parliamentary Decision on the Closer Arrangement of Various Issues of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities on the Territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Not one of them documents the Bunjevac language in any capacity even though some do, indeed, document languages other than Serbian.

One of the lower laws examined signals that Serbia is one of the countries which have ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Even though Article 3 of the Law on the Ratification explicitly states – in part – that "articles of the Charter apply to the Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Romani, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, and Ukrainian language", Bunjevac is one of the languages subjected to the Committee of Experts' monitoring cycles on the application of the Charter in Serbia. In their report issued in 2013, after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monitoring Cycle, the Committee of Experts additionally noted the following:<sup>6</sup>

10. A particular problem exists regarding Bunjevac. However, the Serbian authorities have informed the Committee of Experts that Bunjevac [is] not officially used in any unit of local self-government because [it has] not yet been standardised. The Committee of Experts notes that the concept of "official use" in Serbia covers not just written, but also oral communication with citizens for which standardisation is not necessary.

Clearly, the status of Bunjevac in Serbia depended solely on the fact that the language was considered not to be standardized. The report also provided guidelines for "clarify[ing] the status of Bunjevac ... in consultation with representatives of all speakers [and] in cooperation with the speakers."

Exercising their right to respond to the Committee of Experts' report, the Serbian authorities only confirmed the weight that SLI carries in Serbia by stating that "the non-existence of standardised Bunjevac [language is] a realistic obstacle to [its] introduction into official use," declaring that it is "incontestable that the existence of standardised language is a prerequisite for the implementation of this provision."

Not only is Bunjevac facing the issue of not being introduced into official use anywhere in Serbia; Bunjevac's languagehood – despite its being mentioned in the 2011 Census and discussed in the Committee of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/16806dba31>. Web. September 22, 2017.

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Experts' reports – is also outright denied. In their ethnodialectological study of Bunjevacs in Serbia, Bošnjaković and Sikimić (2013: 190), in the chapter authored by Žarko Bošnjaković, address the issue of classifying Bunjevac, concluding that "considering the fact that the Bačka Bunjevacs do not have a standardized language, the idiom that they use can only be called speech/lect (*govor*)." Clearly, yet again, the decisive factor in what exactly constitutes language was the role played by SLI.

#### 3.2. Kashubian

According to the 2011 Polish Census of Population and Housing,<sup>7</sup> 108,140 people declared Kashubian as their language of everyday contact,<sup>8</sup> the vast majority of whom – 107,742 (99.3%) – dwell in the Pomeranian Voivodeship.

The Kashubian language has been recognized as a regional language since 2005 by the Bill on Ethnic and National Minorities and Regional Languages (Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o *języku regionalnym*), its status and use being observed in the Pomeranian Voivodeship only (for instance, there are bilingual place-name signs). In spite of the fact that Kashubian does not have an established standard variety, judgments regarding its languagehood (as well as, of course, its status) – unlike the case of Bunjevac in Serbia – turned out to be affirmative. Indeed, the standardization of Kashubian, or to put it differently, efforts invested in forming a codified written variety have been ongoing since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with some intervals. Today the Kashubian standard is often described as in statu nascendi, that is, it is still being formed (cf. Obracht-Prondzyński 2007: 19). According to Tréder (2014: 183), "the norm in Kashubian is not quite clear yet, while it is also very vague, depending quite a bit on the language spoken or written in each individual home."

In 2006, tasked with standardizing Kashubian, the Council of the Kashubian Language (*Radzëzna Kaszëbsczégò Jãzëka*) was formed as an organization attached to the Kashubian Pomeranian Association (*Zrzeszenie Kaszubsko-Pomorskie*). The members of the Council discuss

<sup>7 &</sup>lt;http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD\_ludnosc\_stan\_str\_dem\_spo\_NSP2011. pdf>. Web. November 14, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Of them, 3,802 people indicated that Kashubian is the only language they use.

concrete problems related to specific language forms and, based on their discussions, the Council then issues its suggestions. These suggestions are regarded as the norm of the standard variety of Kashubian.

In this context it is worth noting that there are two recent publications aimed at standardizing the language: the 2005 Kashubian Normative Dictionary (*Kaszëbsczi słowôrz normatiwny*) by Eugeniusz Gołąbek and the 2016 Grammar of the Kashubian language (*Gramatika kaszebsczégò jãzeka*) by Hanna Makurat. Gołąbek was a former member of the Council, and Makurat is an active Council member. However, neither publication represents the Council's suggestions; they are, rather, the authors' personal ideas on the lexicon and grammar of Kashubian.

# 4. Challenging SLI

In this section, we show how the apparently forceful, and monolithic, SLI in both Serbia and Poland is rather easily challenged. The examples chosen are exactly that – examples; they are to be taken as a way of showing that the essence of SLI – the speakers' belief that their language exists in a standardized form – is not unshakeable after all.

#### 4.1. Example from Serbia

One of the tasks of the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language, as was illustrated in 2.1 above, is arranging the standard Serbian language, the language with the highest status in Serbia. This, from the Committee's point of view, includes arranging both the ekavian and ijekavian dialects, as well as the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. In fact, of the two alphabets, one is accorded a higher status than the other: the Cyrillic alphabet is constitutionally recognized as the one in official use. However, the implication that what made Cyrillic available for such a high – in fact, the highest – status was its being standardized was recently called into question.

In early 2015 at least two media reports explained how certain levels of Serbian society, all of them in close connection with the education system, asked for the Cyrillic alphabet in Serbia to be standardized. It all began with a request from the Association of Teachers of Vojvodina: On January 8, International Literacy Day [*sic!*], the Association of Teachers of Vojvodina submitted to the Ministry of Education and to the Matica Srpska a request for the final standardization of the Serbian language alphabet in school primers. /.../ It is both inexcusable and utterly irresponsible that we still do not have an officially standardized school-primer alphabet.<sup>9</sup>

At least according to this association, Cyrillic is not yet officially standardized. Moreover, the association also informed the public that it has been pointing to this particular problem since 2003, additionally contacting the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language as well as various textbook publication houses. Four days after the request was made public, Serbia's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development reacted to it:

Yesterday [January 12, 2015, M. N. and B. B.] the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development forwarded an initiative to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language in which it asked them to raise the question of standardization of the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that the Ministry concurred with the Association's stand toward the Cyrillic alphabet and its standardization. What is even more striking is the headline, under which the Ministry's concurrence appeared: *Verbić*<sup>11</sup> *in favor of the standardization of the Cyrillic alphabet*.

What came out of all of this is unclear and also irrelevant for the present paper. This example simply shows that what might be expected to be – the pun is, of course, intended – a standard for how the standardization of the Serbian language (and its alphabet) works, conversely proves that the apparent monolithic weight that SLI carries in Serbia is ever so slightly wavering.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Politika, 8 January 2015: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/315602/Drustvo/Uciteljitraze-standardizaciju-bukvarskog-pisma> Web. September 23, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Politika, 13 January 2015: <a href="http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/315984/Verbic-za-standardizaciju-cirilicnog-pisma">http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/315984/Verbic-za-standardizaciju-cirilicnog-pisma</a> Web. September 23, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Mr. Srdan Verbić was the Minister of Education, Science, and Technological Development at the time.

Along the same lines of questioning the standardization of Cyrillic in Serbia, on two occasions in 2015 (April 22-May 6, and November 16-December 14), a questionnaire on the topic of what the standard Serbian language is was administered among 70 faculty members and students at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Philology. One of the questions specifically asked whether the Cyrillic alphabet was standardized or not. While 87.1% answered in the affirmative, 2.9% said that Cyrillic was not standardized, and 10.0% said that they did not know the answer to the question. Again, although the Cyrillic alphabet is the one with the highest status in the Serbian standard language culture, its users are not unequivocal with respect to the issue of its standardization.

#### 4.2. Example from Poland

Contemporary Polish shows a relatively high degree of uniformity (Buttler, Kurkowska and Satkiewicz 1971). According to Gajda (2001: 209), after WWII, thanks to the changes in social structures inaugurated by the then communist Poland, the literary variety (język literacki) – which in the present paper is referred to as the standard variety – that had been used particularly by Polish elites expanded into the other social classes very quickly. According to Lubas (2013: 203), between 70% and 85% of Polish citizens were capable of using the literary variety after WWII. However, Poles, particularly linguists, are aware that the standardization is still an ongoing process. For instance, Lubas (2009: 443) opines that "[t]he changes that took place in the history of literacy over a period of several centuries caused a myriad of inconsistencies and practical troubles in everyday usage, with which codification could not deal to this day." Indeed, standardizers of the Polish language are typically influential linguists often working in teams, but representative specialists in "correctness" when it comes to language usage such as Jerzy Bralczyk, Jan Miodek, and Andrzej Markowski often do not agree with each other in many respects (cf. Bralczyk, Miodek, Markowski: 2014). Another specialist, Bugajski (1993: 110), when speaking about the role of mass media in the integration of individual linguistic varieties, admits that the process "is related to ... issues of language integration and the normalization of a language, unification - eliminating differences among variants, the establishment of general norm on correctness, the liquidation of whatever kind of fluctuation. It is

often said that the standardization of a language or a standard or median language can be handled by an entire multimillion society."

#### 5. Whence the need for SLI?

Now that examples have been presented of just what weight SLI carries in both Serbia and Poland, we ask the question of where this necessity for SLI comes from.

The answer is found in the fact that both Serbia and Poland are part of what Gal (2006: 164) names "the European linguistic mosaic [which is] the product of language standardisation, a sociocultural process that accompanied and often legitimated the making of European nation states." It then makes sense that both the nation-states that are the focus of our interest insist on enforcing SLI, thus legitimizing not only their languages, but even more so their very states. One way of demonstrating the weight that SLI carries – as we have outlined above – is by pointing out the shortcomings of the standardization of languages other than the selected few. The standard language cultures in question will continue to be dominated by this particular view until the latest scholarly views of the concepts of standardization and standard language are introduced and given sufficient power to change the existing state of affairs.

It is, therefore, worth remembering the words of James Milroy, who indicated that "standardization [is] a process that is continuously in progress in those languages that undergo the process (Milroy 2001:534)." It now seems that it should come as no surprise that we were able to show examples of just how shaky the role that SLI plays in both Serbia and Poland is. In fact, standardization should not be used as the decisive factor in linguistic examinations, for it itself is an ever-so-changing notion. In the words of Milroy (2001: 539), again, "[s]tandardization of language is not a universal."

The notion of a standard language is equally hard to define. It was explained above that the term is a technical one used by linguists. Smakman (2012: 26) indicated that "[t]he standard language ... is subject to a wide array of descriptions, making this language more elusive," with which Coupland and Kristiansen (2011: 11) also agreed, suggesting that "[s]tandard language is itself a slippery concept, and it is in need of further critical consideration." Hence, standard language cannot serve as the

foundation of the role that SLI plays – as we have demonstrated it does in Serbia and Poland – as if it were a notion of unchanging assumptions. The mere fact that its establishment closely follows the establishment of nation-states of approximately two centuries ago suggests that standard language as a concept came into being with a clear purpose.

# 6. Conclusion

By using two European nation-states as the focus of our attention, we attempted to add our own contribution to an ever-emerging image of the weight that SLI carries. We have demonstrated that both of the standard language cultures examined are characterized by the fact that - as was to be expected - the processes of standardization of the languages with the highest status are still ongoing, no matter how the languages are actually regarded (and - for that matter - politically verified). In fact, even agencies concerned with standardization often admit to that. This, of course, is not so because of the standard language cultures examined. It is rather the result of the way in which the process of standardization itself is evolving. Thus, Kristiansen and Coupland (2011: 28), in their own account of various European standard languages, speak of the phenomena of destandardization ("a possible development whereby the established standard language loses its position as the one and only 'best language'") and demotization ("the possibility that the 'standard ideology' as such stays intact while the valorisation of ways of speaking changes"). On the other hand, or - in fact - additionally, Matras (2015: 306, 307, 308) - when addressing issues surrounding the Romani language - reminds us of just how crucially the notion of standardization appears to have been changing before our very eyes:

[T]he Committee of Experts' view on the issues of standardisation underwent a significant paradigm shift. ... [W]e witness the emergence of a different kind of language policy discourse that departs from conventional language planning strategies and views pluralism of form as enabling domain expansion. This position seeks to override the view put forward by some states, which see the absence of a standard as hindering the promotion of Romani. ... Altogether, then, we see the gradual emergence of a language policy that may be characterised as nonterritorial in its outreach, transnational in its strategic approach, and pluralistic in its practical implementation.

The two standard language cultures examined were, however, also different to a certain extent. While the weight that SLI carries is undeniable, it is exercised differently in the two instances examined here, that of Bunjevac and Kashubian. With the former, the role that SLI plays was used – in part – to deny Bunjevac its languagehood; with the latter this was not the case: not only was Kashubian's languagehood affirmed, but its status was also granted at the level of regional language, the only language with such a status in Poland.

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#### ИДЕОЛОГИЈА СТАНДАРДНОГ ЈЕЗИКА У XXI ВЕКУ У СРБИЈИ И ПОЉСКОЈ

#### Сажетак

У раду се испитује идеологија стандардног језика у Србији и Пољској. Конкретно, посматра се моћ коју идеологија стандардног језика поседује у обе државе тако што се у њима детаљно анализирају они језици који не поседују највиши статус: у Србији – буњевачки, а у Пољској – кашупски. Показује се да и у Србији и у Пољској постоје изазови за идеологију стандардног језика обеју земаља. У исто време, међутим, та идеологија је готово беспоговорно примењена у обе државе. На крају, закључује се да је испитивање представљено у раду још један допринос најновијим размишљањима у вези са концептом стандардизације језика – концептом који делује као да се мења пред нашим очима.

**Кључне речи**: идеологија стандардног језика, Србија, Пољска, буњевачки, кашупски, стандардизација језика