

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "BEST PRACTICES OF TEACHING LESS WIDELY-USED LANGUAGES IN MULTICULTURAL AND MULTINATIONAL EUROPE"

Vilnius, Lithuania

2004

The globalization and the Bulgarian Language

Borislav Kuzov

Integra Association

Sofia, Bulgaria

boris@integra.bg

One of the most discussed topics in the Bulgarian forum during the internet conference, held in July 2004, in the frame of the project "European Language Net" financed by the European community, was the globalization in less widely-used European languages.

Lecturers from different scientific fields and Bulgarian language learning foreigners discussed actual linguistic problems, shared their opinions, which outlined their well-founded points of view and disclosed the problems of the globalization and Bulgarian language.

1. Globalization and languages

1.1. "Globalization and Identity Study" / Teaching identities/ teaching through /by identities/

One of the interesting interpretations of globalization, the role of the English language and the origin of the phenomenon we can find in *Globalization and Studying in Identity* by Borislav Georgiev.

He says, "Dictionaries connect the term "globalization" to industry. For example, The Collins Cobiuld English Dictionary—which helps us to learn original English, and the word "original" is underlined in the dictionary—in its typical natural style writes that when industry is globalizing or has already globalized, companies from one country joins companies from other countries to do business together. It seems the globalization of industry is the first steady combination of words in which the basic word is the term "globalization", there is one more phrase that contains the same root – global warming which sounds somewhat ominous. Probably because of the global warming or for another reason words like global and globalization sound apocalyptically and even spectacularly apocalyptically.

At the same time when we talk about globalization from the point of view of the anthropology, there is no way to miss the global village by Marshal MacLouhan.. 'In the century of the electricity', he says, 'the world is no bigger than a village. That's why I connect the term globalization not only with

industrialization, which probably is an old-fashioned strategy, but first of all with the free movement of the global current in the world. The desire and even the passion to learn something more, to know something more than the others is the basic movement force of the globalization process in its cultural measurement.”

1.2. Globalization – A Cultural and Social Conglomerate

For Stefan Parvanov globalization is a cultural and social conglomerate of identities and their obscuration.

“The obvious disregard of linguistic rules in Bulgaria undoubtedly is a serious contemporary problem. It is a marker not only for omissions in our educational system but also for an alarming signal for value change. The practice of Internet communication doesn’t observe even basic linguistic rules and institutionalizes the lack of norms. You can even see some steady changes in spelling under the influence of the requirements, enforced by computer communication. The carelessness towards the language could find a number of banal explanations and justifications – from a form of protest among the youths or desire to simplify the language to frank illiteracy. But in all cases it is a shame not to speak and write in your own language correctly. And if Internet users are a peculiar representative sample of the young generation in Bulgaria then the conclusions of it are not very joyful.

One of the most serious disasters for our speech is an uncontrolled massive invasion of loan words in Bulgarian speech. It gives an impression that Bulgarian language is poor or powerless to interpret the reality around us. The traditional borrowings don’t sound so alarming but the invasion of more and more English words in Bulgarian is turning into a fashion of dangerous scale, especially among the young people. You can even see a peculiar language pose – one new syndrome of misunderstood sophistication. It is forgotten that borrowings are necessary only in that case when one language cannot find a suitable equivalent.

At the same time Bulgarian lawmakers don’t think it is necessary to enact a special legislation to protect Bulgarian language. And something else – this idea, even it has just started developing, faces a fierce resistance with that banal reason that the language is self-developed system and it is too dynamic to be controlled by law. But practice shows that similar laws could be very efficient in some EU countries, like France for example. For ungrounded change of the French words with English borrowings the French law made provision for paying high fines. And that applies to the phraseology of every day computer communication.

It is true that the high speed of changes bumps us up against many phenomena new for our reality and we are inevitably forced to use borrowings. And it is absurd to claim that it is necessary to have

a detailed cleansing process of the modern language (Balan). But it is necessary to understand the importance of this problem. It is necessary to have a law to partly restrict the usage of Latin letters on the signs in our cities, on magazine covers, in our every day computer communication. One of the threats to the linguistic wealth of modern Bulgarian is the triumphant invasion of English words and Latin letters in our everyday life. English is no longer the language spoken in particular nations. Today it is *the* international language and together with modern information technologies has become a universal tool of communication. But it can hardly justify the fact that despite the municipal orders to replace all Latin alphabet advertisements with Cyrillic ones, it is still very difficult to find signs or advertisements written in Bulgarian. Trademarks in Bulgaria are largely of foreign origin, and some of them are even registered with Latin letters. It turns out that we are so used to using the Latin alphabet that we stop paying attention, even if we find it out written on our own roll of toilet paper. Bulgarian even doesn't think how absurd is the fact that goods made in Bulgaria have only Latin symbols, even though they are not for export.

It is true that bilingual symbols are something ordinary for countries like ours but lately there is a tendency to gradually replace the Cyrillic with Latin at representative places and official events. As if our mother tongue rises shame or it does not deserve to be used. It is worth thinking about this popular physiological defect—non-Bulgarian symbols are a symbol of finesse and high social rank.

There is even a suggestion of changing our Cyrillic alphabet with Latin because it can be adapted to administrative European language and it is a barrier between us and the rest of the world. It turns out that the Cyrillic reminded to our communist past. Paying attention to such judgments shows the arrival of the information society will put national languages like ours to a serious test. In fact the communication on the Internet has already forced us to use Latin symbols for Bulgarian sounds. The Cyrillic is in danger to become just a souvenir font of museum value. Invasion of the Latin letters is a regular phenomenon dictated by the process of cultural globalization. It is an alarming fact that many people can find in it an excuse for their systematic neglect of national values.

While borders are becoming more and more formal lines on the map and items as national identity are losing their previous strength, for many people the care of the language is not a question on their daily agenda day and probably sounds like an anachronism. Actually, of all elements contained in the notion of *nation*, it is language that is the best symbol of nationality. Protecting language is a permanent necessity. It is a necessity especially nowadays – not only as an end in itself or in a burst of pathetic patriotism but it as a particular instinct of self-preservation. It is a natural aspiration for preserving identity and spiritual intellect under conditions of a large cultural exchange and value equivalence among nations. The linguistic xenomania seems to be a resistant feature of the Bulgarian

popular mindset and the situation nowadays has proven it one more time. The problems our language and languages in general face in conditions of globalization are really serious and require special attention and responsibility at all levels.

2. National Alphabets and The Latin Alphabet

2.1. Around the world

One of the most interesting facts in view of globalization is replacement of the national alphabets of less widely used language with the Latin alphabet and the adaptation of the national language that follows. In general, this cultural phenomenon was observed at the beginning of the 20th century – in the first quarter of the 20-th century when Kemal Ataturk replaced the Ottoman alphabet with the Latin alphabet specially adapted for this purpose. Turkish linguists, however, are still arguing about the introduction of Latin graphemes and whether they correctly reflect, in the first place, the phonemes and syntaxemes from syntax and punctuation point of view.

Some less widely used languages, from the group of the Middle-Asian languages in the former USSR, replaced the Cyrillic alphabet with local alphabets. In other former USSR republics both, the national and the Cyrillic alphabets are in use.

In third countries as the case is with Serbo-Croatian, Serbs use the Cyrillic and Croats use the Latin alphabet.

2.2. In Bulgaria

In the recent years in Bulgaria, discussions about replacing the Cyrillic with the Latin alphabet were fanned up by the media and rejected by the Bulgarian society. The question of Bulgarian Internet users typing Latin letters, however, is completely different.

The famous Bulgarian linguist prof. Vladko Muradov in his article “The mirror of the Cyrillic” writes,

“There was one benefit from the arguing about the replacement of the Cyrillic alphabet with a Latin one. It made us realize that there are still cases, like our proper names in particular, when it is necessary to use the Latin to make them understood by more people. But in some funny texts that appeared lately in the newspapers, the authors played with the Latin alphabet, and proved that is it necessary to implement a unified system of rules to turn the Cyrillic into Latin.

Actually, if you open the Academic Dictionary of Spelling, you can see that a List of Latin Equivalents has existed for a long time and it was observed by the post offices, on the road signs and maps of tourist sites. The particularity about this way of spelling was that it paid

attention the traditions in most Slavic languages that use the Latin alphabet. Thus we adopted special superscripts in order to represent the specifics of our phonemic system.

Most scientists think that this way of transliteration should be kept in the future, but only for specific scientific texts, where it is necessary sometimes to transform into another alphabet not only proper names but whole texts.

In reality, however, the situation is different. After a prolonged usage of the French way of writing the proper names now we switch to English that is said to be much easier to remember and clearer in representing Bulgarian words.

According to the new system of transliteration, if we put aside the easy letters, the following in Latin following equivalences are adopted:

This way of writing is already put into the newest spelling reference books. It will be enclosed in the New Academic Spelling Dictionary.

I would like to pay special attention to this question as we witness nowadays a widespread practice, especially in e-mail, of representing letters like „ч” and ”ш” with the numbers 4 and 6, and the letter “Б” with q.

I address this question for one more reason. When one files application for the new identification documents, one also receives the opportunity define how one’s name will be transliterated using the Latin alphabet. Undoubtedly, freedom of choice is a good thing, but in this particulate case, mostly for ignorance, it often leads to violation of the newly adopted rules. And then we couldn’t talk about the unified system in interpreting the letters from Cyrillic to Latin.

2.3. For and Against the Cyrillic

Probably the most interesting discussion in Bulgarian society on the item “Pros” and “cons” of the Cyrillic can be found by Borislav Georgiev. This topic was raised in 2001 by the former Bulgarian president Petar Stoyanov. In his speech on 24th May – the day of the Cyrillic Alphabet, he said that discussing pros and cons of the Cyrillic has just begun and his statement divided the society.

“The Cyrillic as a graphic system has very little in common with the work of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius because St. Cyril created the Glagolitsa. Secondly, problem with Internet (and computers in general) seem unserious, no matter how one approaches it. To say the least, there is an official adopted system of transliteration from Bulgarian Cyrillic to Latin letters, and today’s software products accept both Cyrillic and Latin. So if we can’t or don’t dare to write in Cyrillic in Internet we can freely use that system of transliteration in

Bulgarian Cyrillic, which you can find in the spelling dictionary. The demand to write in Latin the names of streets or boulevards, and signs on public buildings is reasonable. And it should be done immediately because tourism is an important sector of Bulgarian economy. The day before yesterday I watched the following scene – two foreigners were standing in front of the map of Sofia and looking to find where they were. It was a very nice map, but everything on it was written in Cyrillic, which is completely useless for most foreigners as they cannot read it. In Greece, for example, there is no question about changing the graphic system but all names of the streets are written in both, Greek and Latin Alphabets”.

3. The influence of globalization over the less widely-used languages

In conclusion we can say that although globalization is taking an ever more threatening scale, it will not influence the less widely-used languages for the following reasons:

1. Culture, literature and politics are serviced by a given language or two languages (take for example neighboring Macedonia, where according to recently adopted changes, some administrative regions have 2 official languages—Macedonian and Albanian.
2. The literary form does not undergo frequent changes in codification.
3. The natural conservativeness of the speakers of a given less widely used language, with the only exception for young people under 30.
4. The *ours* vs. *theirs* opposition is a natural protector against the invasion of ‘fashionable languages’.
5. The conservativeness of the contemporary literary language, although, as Bulgarian sociolinguists, stylists, and syntax experts like the professors Mikhail Videnov, Stefan Brezinski, Venche Popova, etc. claim, one fifth of the lexical pool is replaced.

If globalization influences less widely-used languages, such as ours, it will be mainly in lexicology—most often through professional terminology that has no equivalence in Bulgarian; in colloquial language and the various sociolects and slang, and much less often in morphology, syntax and phonetics. The invasion of ‘fashionable languages’ will affect the least the dialects, the traditionally most conservative language system. On the other hand, globalization will make many, for a number of reasons but mostly socio-economic ones study less widely used languages.