

## Slavic 597: The Politics of Language in Southeast Europe

### GEC Rationale, Learning Goals, and Course Assessment Plan

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A sample syllabus is included as a separate file.

#### 1. Rationale

Language is a key issue in the articulation of identity and the struggle for power. This course presents a case study of the social and political import of language on the Balkan Peninsula (and in a few neighboring countries). It will explore how linguistic histories and structures have been foundational to the formation of modern Balkan ethnic and religious identities, and how language has been and continues to be used to manipulate nationalist sentiment and to shape political and social structures. This course is intended primarily as a general education course rather than as a course for majors and minors, although it will count as an elective for the Slavic and East European Studies minor. Approval for the Issues in the Contemporary World GEC is being sought.

The Herderian belief that each nation should have its own language arrived in the Balkans in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of the Illyrian Movement, which sought, among other things, a single standard language for Serbs (Eastern Orthodox Christians), Croats (Catholics) and Slavic-speaking Muslims (now usually referred to as Bosniaks) in the western Balkans. These populations were spread across the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, and the push for a unified language (which culminated in the Vienna Literary Agreement of 1850) was a declaration of ethnic unity despite religious and cultural differences. It was also a tool in the fight for political sovereignty. Language in the Balkans has thus been tied from the beginning to modern forms of nationalism.

At the same time, at least two distinct senses of the term *nationalism* are relevant here, based on the concepts of *nation* as a political-geographic entity, and *nation* as a sociocultural entity. In the Balkans, political-geographic boundaries have not often coincided with sociocultural ones. In recent history this has had well-known and serious consequences, most famously the Yugoslav wars, which were characterized by bitter ethnic fighting in Bosnia and Croatia. And while the wars began in 1991 (in Croatia and briefly in Slovenia, 1992 in Bosnia), "... it is no exaggeration to say that the final break-up of Yugoslavia had been presaged in language issues a good quarter-century before it actually occurred" (Bugarski 2004: 3). As a single example, in 1967 as part of the Croatian Spring, an article titled *Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language* was anonymously published by a group of Croatian scholars in a national newspaper. The article declared that not only was there no single language (Serbo-Croatian) shared by Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, but in fact such a language had

never existed. Just as the Illyrian Movement used language to symbolically declare the social and ethnic unity of these groups, the Declaration denied such unity. While this swelling of nationalism was suppressed by the Yugoslav state, the Declaration, and other language issues, foreshadowed events that would later occur in the violent break-up of Yugoslavia.

The issue is not whether Serbo-Croatian is (or even was) a unified language -- from a linguistic perspective both a yes and a no answer is possible. The issue is that there is a symbolic function to language; it can be used to shape imagined communities (in the sense of Anderson (1983)). And in Southeast Europe, the mismatch between sociocultural entities and the geographical-political ones has made language ripe for exploitation, and the history of the region is one in which language has long been a tool of nationalist agendas, in both senses of the term. Studying the languages of the region -- how they have been standardized, engineered, 'purified', manipulated, supported, denied, etc. -- thus offers a window into historical/political/religious/social issues.

The relationship between the individual's sense of personal identity and his/her ethnically- and/or religiously-based social identity is also an important dimension. For instance, Serbs in the Yugoslav successor state of Croatia, who speak a language variety that is virtually indistinguishable from that of their Croat neighbors (with the exception of some religious terminology), responded to Croatian language engineering by demanding that school textbooks be translated from Croatian into Serbian, i.e. into a variety that is farther from their own speech, but which is a symbolic match to their ethnic/religious identity. This is significant because it is a foregrounding of ethnicity at the expense of a locally-rooted identity. This interplay between different levels of identity is key to understanding why ethnic nationalist agendas are successful, and how they are promoted. We must therefore also take in a social psychological perspective.

While the examples above focus on the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian complex (former Serbo-Croatian), several other languages exist side-by-side in Southeast Europe, most notably, Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Greek, Romanian, Romani and Turkish. When we look at these languages and the cultural groups that speak them some common themes emerge, for instance a mythologized language history that seeks to establish ancestral roots on the Balkan Peninsula and thereby the primacy of the modern group. (The fact that most of the hypothesized ancestral connections are demonstrably false is irrelevant -- the point lies exactly in the efficacy of language mythology as a tool for the shaping of modern identities.) At the same time, the relevant languages, cultures and states have their own unique histories and circumstances, which have in turn shaped language policy and people's attitudes towards their language in different ways. And the situation is constantly evolving, with new languages being 'added' across the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries -- Macedonian was codified only in 1945; the breakup of Serbo-Croatian into Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian can be dated to the 1990's; and an ongoing question is whether Montenegro will develop a fourth standard language variety (Montenegrin) from the remnants of Serbo-Croatian. This offers the opportunity to observe developments almost in real time.

Taken collectively as a series of related case studies, the Balkan languages thus demonstrate the enormous complexity of the relationship between language, identity, and social and political structures. Moreover, this course has relevance well beyond the Balkans, in that a major goal is for students to evaluate their own preconceived notions about the relationship between language and social/political structures -- in their own lives, and in the contemporary world more generally.

## 2. GEC Learning Goals and Expected Outcomes

The GEC Program Learning Goals and Objectives for the Issues of the Contemporary World GEC category are:

*Goals:* Students attain an understanding of the increasingly global nature of the contemporary world by drawing upon multiple disciplines in an enriching capstone experience.

*Expected Learning Outcomes:*

1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse disciplines to contemporary issues.
2. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting with students from different majors.
3. Students write about or conduct research on the contemporary world.

### 1. How do the course objectives address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

The course objectives are closely aligned with the goals and expected learning outcomes of this GEC category. The following are the course objectives:

1. Students will develop a better understanding of the linguistic, social, religious and political histories of the Balkans, and the importance of these histories to modern global relations.
2. Students will critically examine their own preconceptions and those of others regarding the relationship between language and social and political structures in the contemporary world.
3. Students will conduct hands-on investigation of the social importance of language (in SE Europe) through data collection and analysis.
4. Students will learn about some of the goals and methods of (social science) research.
5. Students will synthesize and evaluate information from diverse sources, representing different disciplinary perspectives.
6. Students will be able to apply knowledge from this course to new domains.

### 2. How do the readings assigned address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

The assigned readings will achieve the expected learning outcomes by exploring (identity in) the Balkan region from several perspectives: linguistic, ethnic, religious, historical, political, and social psychological. Some of the readings are themselves explicitly interdisciplinary in nature, for instance, Friedman's (1006) article "Observing the observers: Language, ethnicity, and power in the 1994 Macedonian census and beyond". In other instances, articles stemming from different disciplinary traditions are read together, sometimes alongside primary texts, as a way to highlight the various facets of an issue.

For instance, in week 5 a central question is how ethnic nationalist agendas are promoted, and why they are supported by the general population. Students will read the original text of the *Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language* (in English translation, published as Spalatin (1975)), alongside Greenberg's (2004) historical analysis of the political significance of the *Declaration* (among other events) for the eventual dissolution of Yugoslavia, and Katičić's (2001) more social psychological argument about how linguistic events of this period changed the salience of ethnic identity at the level of the individual (i.e. changed the imagined community with which the individual identified most strongly), and thereby affected individuals' political loyalties. By integrating these different types

of information, students will explore of the social importance of language, especially as it relates to the relationship between the individual and larger societal structures.

### 3. How do the topics address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

The topics in this course are designed to emphasize the complexity of the relationship between language, identity, and social and political structures in the Balkans. The first three class sessions (weeks 1 and 2) introduce the Balkan region from different perspectives – geographic, historical, ethnic/religious, and linguistic – taking each largely on its own terms. The next three sessions (weeks 2 and 3) then consider the relationship between these structures, with particular attention to ‘mismatches’ between language, ethnicity/religion, and geographical-political boundaries, and the fluidity of ethnic identity over time. These three classes also provide a theoretical foundation for the rest of the course. The remaining seven weeks of the course then consist of more detailed case studies of four languages of Southeast Europe: the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian complex (formerly known as Serbo-Croatian), Macedonian, Albanian, and Romani. These languages, and the cultures they represent, demonstrate different ways in which language has been manipulated to shape ethnicity and political structures.

### 4. How do the written assignments address the GEC category expected learning outcomes above?

There are four types of written assignments for this course: discussion questions, quizzes, a blog analysis, and a perceptual dialectology project.

The discussion questions will be used to jump start discussion in class. They are also designed to foster interactions among students by showing various ways that students with different personal perspectives and from different majors (and thus with different disciplinary training) might approach the material. This supports the GEC goal of having students “demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting with students from different majors”.

The quizzes primarily serve as a check on students’ comprehension of the readings, lecture material, and discussion topics. Since this content emphasizes an interdisciplinary perspective, the quizzes will likewise require students to “synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse disciplines”.

The blog analysis project is about re-evaluating preconceived ideas about the relationship between language and society. People from Southeast European countries (or even Americans with heritage in some Southeast European ethnicity) often have strong feelings about ‘the Balkan language question’ – what a given language should be called, what its origins are, what the ‘right’ way to say something is, or even whether the language exists in the first place. But when it is boiled down, these arguments are almost never really about language, but are instead ways for the writer to articulate some aspect of their identity, or comment on societal structure. Students will analyze arguments of everyday people, found on the internet, regarding the language question in the Balkans. In order to determine what the ‘real issue’ is, students will have to critically evaluate different types of evidence that are put forth in the source material.

The perceptual dialectology project gives students hands-on experience in conducting research on the contemporary world. The class will collectively design and administer a survey that investigates native Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian speakers’ beliefs about the distance between regional dialects in the B/C/S area, and their evaluation of those dialects along social dimensions. The goal will be to determine whether and to what extent native speakers’ perceptions of the distance between dialects of B/C/S is shaped by political and/or social boundaries, rather than by observable linguistic reality. In

addition to being a research component of the GEC goals, this supports the GEC goal of interdisciplinarity because perceptual dialectology blends the fields of social psychology and linguistics.

### **3. Course Assessment Plan**

Assessment of student learning in Slavic 597 will occur in multiple ways. Following standard practice in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures (DSEELL), each instance of this course will be reviewed via the following mechanisms:

1. Quantitative SEI forms
2. Discursive evaluation of the course by enrolled students, both as part of the SEI process (now administered as a web form), and through paper forms handed out in class near the end of the quarter. An example of an in-class evaluation form is given in Appendix A.
3. Review of student work by the instructor. In their written work and in class discussions students will be expected to synthesize and evaluate research related to the social import of language in the Balkans, and in the contemporary world more generally. For the final project, they will also have to conduct original research in this area. Students will thus have ample opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, and informal assessment of the extent to which students have succeeded in grasping, synthesizing, and articulating major issues is a metric by which to evaluate the course. Student work will be assessed relative to the stated learning outcomes above.

Additionally, in the first quarter that the course is taught, and at least biennially thereafter, it will be reviewed via the following mechanism:

4. Class observation conducted by a senior member of the DSEELL faculty, including a written report to be submitted both to the instructor and to the department chair.

The goal of all four types of evaluation is to assess how well the learning objectives for this course are being met, including goals related to the Issues in the Contemporary World GEC category. The resulting feedback from quantitative SEI forms, discursive evaluations and class observations will be maintained on file in the DSEELL so that the progress of the course can be monitored and evaluated across time as the course evolves and to enable the department to address any major concerns or drift from the established goals and standards. If the results suggest that the GEC learning objectives are not being clearly communicated through course content, the instructor(s) will undertake revision of the course structure as needed. Even when the feedback is positive, the instructor(s) will make minor changes to the material to keep the information up to date.

Periodically, the DSEELL's Undergraduate Studies Committee also reviews the department's undergraduate courses, based upon a representative portfolio of student work, course syllabi and a survey of enrolled students. The purpose of such a review is to assess whether the GEC and program goals for the course are being met. Future reviews will presumably include Slavic 597. As with the other forms of evaluation, if the results indicate that the course is not living up to its intellectual promise, then a revision of the course content will be undertaken.

#### **4. Relationship to Other Courses and Curricula**

The Linguistics Department teaches a variety of courses about the relationship between language and identity, most relevantly:

- Linguistics 303: Language, Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.
- Linguistics 367: Language, Sex and Gender in American Culture
- Linguistics 372: Language and Social Identity in the U.S.
- Linguistics 375: Languages across Cultures
- Linguistics 661.01: Introduction to Sociolinguistics

As the titles indicate, the first three courses above emphasize issues in U.S. society. They have some overlap with the proposed course in a broad thematic sense, but not in the details of the content. Additionally, the proposed course is geared toward the historical and political dimension, whereas Linguistics 303, 367 and 372 focus on cultural aspects of identity formation. Linguistics 375 also touches on issues of language and identity, but with an emphasis on cross-cultural similarities and differences (e.g. in politeness and gender norms). It does not include content about 'sociology of language' issues, such as language standardization and linguistic engineering. Linguistics 661.01 provides a theoretical overview of different areas of sociolinguistics, of which sociology of language issues are only one component. It is also oriented towards graduate students specializing in linguistics, whereas the present course is designed for students with little or no linguistics background.

A few departments teach courses related to the culture, history and politics of the Balkans, either entirely or in part:

- History 516: Modern Greece
- History 519.03: The Balkans from the Ottoman Conquest to World War II
- History 540.03: The Ottoman Empire 1300-1800
- International Studies 231: Introduction to Eastern Europe since World War II
- International Studies 501: The Balkans Since 1989
- Political Science 727.04: Government and Politics of Central and Eastern Europe

All of these courses focus on the historical and/or political dimension, and language issues are presumably considered only briefly, if at all.

- International Studies H501: Nationalism, Past, Present and Future

International Studies H501 has some overlap with the proposed course in a broad thematic sense, but if the Balkans are considered at all, it is presumably only one component of the course. Linguistic issues are presumably considered only briefly, if at all.

## Appendix A

### Slavic 597: The Politics of Language in Southeast Europe Sample Course Evaluation

This course evaluation is designed to help the instructor determine whether the learning goals for the course have been met, and to provide information that can be used to improve this course in the future. This form has two parts -- please answer both parts. Please do NOT put your name on this sheet.

**PART 1: General Course Assessment.** Please answer the following questions. If you need more space, you may write on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Did you work more or less in this course, than in other GEC offerings?
2. What were the strengths of this course? What were the strengths of the instructor?
3. What were the weaknesses of this course? What were the weaknesses of the instructor?
4. If you had the opportunity, would you eliminate any of the assigned readings? Which ones, and why?
5. If you had the opportunity, would you change or eliminate any of the written assignments? Which ones, and why? What kinds of assignments would be more conducive to learning?
6. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

**PART 2: Specific Learning Outcomes.** For each of the following statements, please circle the appropriate number to indicate whether you agree with the statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

1. Because of this course, I now have a better understanding of the political and social structure of the Balkans, and the various forces (historical, linguistic, religious, etc.) that have shaped modern Balkan identities.

1      2      3      4      5

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2. Because of this course, I now have a better understanding of the importance of the Balkan region to global relations in the contemporary world.

1      2      3      4      5

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3. The perceptual mapping project taught me about some of the goals and methods of (social science) research, and allowed me to put my knowledge into practice.

1      2      3      4      5

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4. The perceptual mapping project improved my understanding of the relationship between language, identity, and political structures in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian areas of former Yugoslavia.

1      2      3      4      5

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5. This course taught me to critically examine my own preconceptions, and those of other people, about language and its relationship to social and political structures.

1      2      3      4      5

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6. This course required me to synthesize and evaluate diverse sources of information and different disciplinary perspectives.

1      2      3      4      5

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7. This course helped prepare me to be a global citizen.

1      2      3      4      5

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Please add any comments about these learning goals, and whether/how they have been achieved in this course:

Thank you!