

Магдалена Абаджиева

(България, Институт за български език „Проф. Любомир Андрейчин“, БАН)

Банатските българи, банатският говор и палкенския език

Резюме: Статията си спира на понятията „палкенски език“ и „банатски говор“ в контекста на стремежите на банатските българи за съхраняване на тяхната културна идентичност. Изследването дава примери от съвременни автори, банатски българи, за начините, по които те възприемат езиковите характеристики на своето творчество. Използвани са данни от проведена през месеците май и юни 2023 г. онлайн анкета сред банатските българи, които онагледяват разбиранията на тази общност за нейния език. Анкетата е попълнена от 40 души на възраст от 42 до 73 години. На въпроса на какъв език говорят със своето семейство, 50% отговарят „на палкенски“; 15%: „на палкенски и румънски (влашки)“; 10%: „на румънски (влашки) и български“; 5%: „на банатски български и румънски“; 5%: „на банатски“; 5%: на румънски; 10% не посочват нищо. Преразгледана е установената терминология в научните среди и са дадени препоръки към бъдещите изследователи. Защитена е тезата, че при самоопределяне банатските българи могат да назовават своя език „палкенски език“, а в научните изследвания трябва да се използва термина „банатски книжовен вариант на българския език“.

Ключови думи: банатски българи, банатски език, палкенски език, български католици

Magdalena Abadzhieva

(Bulgaria, Institute for Bulgarian Language, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Banat Bulgarians, the Banat Bulgarian Dialect and the Bulgarian Palken Language

The „Cultural Identity of the Banat Bulgarians and Bulgarian Catholic Literatur“ project of the Institute for Bulgarian Language, supported by the „Scientific Research“ Fund, started its work in the middle of December 2022. Among the outcomes is the planned publication of an anthology with texts from the literature of Bulgarian Catholics and Banat literature, as well as a primer for teaching the so-called „Palken“ language to children in Romanian Banat. One of the main objectives of the project is to summarize and reconsider the current terminology regarding the Banat Bulgarian literary standard by proposing a unified terminological framework. The current article is an attempt in this direction, examining the Banat Bulgarians placed in the complex cultural-linguistic situation between the Banat speech and the Palken language.

The Banat Bulgarians (Palkens) are part of the Bulgarian Catholic community, and establishing the linguistic and cultural connections between these two groups is necessary to help affirm the identity of the Banat Bulgarians and their recognition as a full-fledged part of Bulgarian society – with its specifics, but also with its common features.

In recent years, research on Bulgarian Catholics (on their literature in particular) has increased with new and detailed studies (Петков/Petkov 2022, Илиева/Ilieva 2020, Абаджиева/Abadzhieva 2020). The relevance of the topic also grew with the visit of Pope Francis to Bulgaria in 2019. In 2017, Prof. Liliya Ilieva discovered in Modena, Italy, the thought-to-be-lost „History of Petar Bogdan Bakshich“ („On the Antiquity of the Fatherland

and Bulgarian Affairs“), which further popularized the contribution of Bulgarian Catholics to the spiritual and cultural growth of the Bulgarian people (Василев/Vasilev 2020). In 2019, the Section for History of the Bulgarian Language at the Institute of Bulgarian Language, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, received eight unexplored manuscripts, examples of Bulgarian Catholic literature, and research on this academic segment is becoming increasingly relevant.

The significance of the „Cultural Identity of the Banat Bulgarians and Bulgarian Catholic Literature“ project is also measured by the interest it will stimulate in the study of the so-called „Palken“ language and its preservation as a spoken and written language, a mark of the cultural identity of the Banat Bulgarians. Since the majority of Bulgarian Catholics are former Paulicians, the Banat Bulgarians retain this designation, calling themselves „Palkens“ and their language „Palken.“ In schools in the Banat region, where there is a Bulgarian population, children have the option to study literary Bulgarian language. However, at home, as well as in catechism classes in the church, which are mandatory for children from the Catholic community, the youngsters use the „Palken“ language, which is hard for them to associate with the Bulgarian language due to the differences accumulated over a long period of emigration. The differences are further deepened by the Latin script used by the Bulgarian Catholics in Banat. This alphabet was adopted as early as the middle of the 19th century, when Jozu Rill wrote his „Orthography“, establishing a spelling standard for the Banat Bulgarians (Rill 1866). Efforts are needed to outline the connections between the Bulgarian literary language and the so-called „Palken“, which will facilitate both the study of the literary Bulgarian language by children in Banat and the preservation of the „Palken“, especially in its lexical richness.

The terminology regarding the language of the Bulgarian minority in Banat needs to be reconsidered and standardized because this creates inconveniences, first and foremost, for the community itself. Here, I will quote the names used by Gabriel Kochuba from the village of Vinga to name his language (Groškva 2022):

- Za ko piša u balgarsćja-banátsći jézić?;
- Sam haznuval hurti u banátsćija-balgarsći diálekt;
- Bišnovsćja diálekt;
- Palćensći;
- Balgarsći jézić;
- Banatsćja diálékt;
- Banatska balgarska pisménust.

I'd like to note that all these designations have been taken from the first seven pages of the book, indicating how confused of the terminology the Banat Bulgarians themselves are and how they are at a loss about how to name their language. This impression of mine was also confirmed in personal conversations with Bulgarians from the Stari Bešenov village, Romania.

In scientific studies, different formulations are also found. The first researcher who dealt with the literature of the Banat Bulgarians is L. Miletich, who defines it as Banat-Bulgarian literature (Милетич/Miletich 1987: 484), the alphabet as Banat-Bulgarian script (Miletich 1987: 496), and the language as Banat-Bulgarian literary language (Милетич/ Miletich 1987: 518). There are cases, however, where he calls this literature Bulgarian (Милетич/Miletich 1987: 502). St. Stoykov talks about a Bulgarian dialect on which there have been attempts to create literature, i.e., to elevate it to a separate, independent literary language (Стойков/Stoykov 2002: 195). T. Boyadzhiev provides the following explanation:

created based on the dialect (i.e., the Banat speech - my note) a regional written Banat literary variant of the literary Bulgarian language (Бояджиев/Boyadzhiev 2012: 188).

The most exceptionally detailed study belongs to M. Mladenova, who examines A. Dulichenko's theory of micro-languages, the first to define Banat Bulgarian as a micro-language. M. Mladenova adopts the term „Banat Bulgarian literary language“ (Младенова/ Mladenova 2021).

The Banat Bulgarians from Star Bešenov live in a foreign language environment. In the past, they were within the borders of Austro-Hungary, proficient in German and Hungarian. Today, the language of their country is Romanian. They define their language in opposition of „me“ and „the others“, where languages are divided into „mine“ and „other“ (foreign). In this oppositional line, Bulgarians in Banat find it difficult to separate language from speech (dialect), although they try to do so. Their cultural identification is connected to the past they have carried with themselves after migrating to Banat at the beginning of the 18th century. Therefore, they call themselves „Palkens“, as before adopting Catholicism, many of them were Paulicians. The „Palken“ ethnonym is important for their identity because, in Bulgarian lands, it distinguished them from the Orthodox, and in Banat – from the other foreign nationalities. I am certain that in the consciousness of the Banat Bulgarians, „Palken“ means „Bulgarian Catholic“, and „Palken language“ means „Bulgarian language“. This is their distinctive feature, which has preserved them over the years and saved them from assimilation. Therefore, it seems entirely acceptable for science to admit and agree that the Banat Bulgarians speak the „Palken language“ when they themselves have to define it.

In search of evidence for this thesis, I conducted a survey with Banat Bulgarians from the villages of Star Bešenov and Vinga (in Romanian Banat) during May and June 2023. The survey posed the following questions, which concern the way Banat Bulgarians refer to their language:

Moite roditeli hurtuvat /

sa hurtuvali na...;

U doma s mojata familija hurtuvam na...;

Kakvi jezici sti učili u školata? U školata sam učil...;

U čarkvata hurtuvam na...;

Kakvi drugje jazikj ištiti da učiti? Išta da uča...

The survey was completed by 40 people between 42 and 73 years of age. To the question of what language they speak with their family, 50% answered „in Palken“; 15%: „in Palken and Romanian (Vlach)“; 10%: „in Romanian (Vlach) and Bulgarian“; 5%: „in Banat Bulgarian and Romanian“; 5%: „in Banat“; 5%: „in Romanian“; 10% did not specify anything.

Even from these responses, it's evident that Bulgarians in Banat define their language in various ways – „Palken“, „Banat“, „Banat Bulgarian“, and „Bulgarian“. In the majority of cases, within their families they speak in their dialect which they refer to as a language. This is confirmed by the question about what languages they studied in school. Here, 55% of the respondents say „Bulgarian“, which means that for the majority of Banat Bulgarians, the Bulgarian literary language is foreign, and they need additional help to learn it. 70% of the respondents indicate that they speak „Palken“ in church, confirming the historical fact it was the church that helped preserve the Banat speech over the years and continues to be a guardian of the Banat Bulgarians' linguistic identity today.

In my research, I adopt the term „Banat literary variant of the Bulgarian language“ and I agree to some extent with the formulation by T. Boyadzhiev (Бояджиев/Boyadzhiev 2012: 188). I believe it is important to remove the word „regional“ from the definition because today there are Banat Bulgarians who continue to write in their so-called „Palken language“ outside the geographical area of Banat. The word „variant“ is important in the formulation, as it emphasizes that this is not a separate language. I think we should not move towards turning the

dialect into a language, and in this sense, the definition „Banat-Bulgarian literary language“ seems misleading and incorrect to me. Written texts among the Banat Bulgarians arise as a necessity for religious texts in Bulgarian, in opposition to foreign linguistic influence and as a means of national identification. Their aim is not so much to elevate the Banat speech to the level of another, independent language, as it is to strengthen the national consciousness among their bearers, emphasizing their Bulgarian identity. Thus, in my opinion, when the author of the first printed book for the Banat Bulgarians, Imre Berecs, uses the address „dear Palkens“ (Berecs 1851), he specifically invests Bulgarian identity to his readers. I'd like to note the fact that when Jozu Rill published the orthographic rules on which the future Banat literature would be built, he titled his book „Bulgarian Orthography“ (Rill 1866), emphasizing its Bulgarian identity.

Studying the Banat literary variant of the Bulgarian language by children in Bulgarian Catholic settlements in Banat will help preserve their identity and bring them closer to the literary Bulgarian language as a bridge that will outline the common and the different in the relationship between language and dialect. The Institute for Bulgarian Language at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has already successfully implemented the „Digital Dialectal Interactive Dictionary for Children“ project, funded by the National Culture Fund during 2021 – 2022 (<https://dialektizadeca.com/>), aiming to help children explore the Bulgarian dialectal wealth in an interactive and modern way. The primer for children in Banat, which will be developed over the next two years, will build on already successfully established practices. Its main goal will be to reveal the Bulgarian identity of the Banat speech. Special attention will be given to the Latin script, which is the traditional writing system of Banat literature. Through the primer, children will connect their present with their past, helping them discover and understand rare and obsolete words from the spheres of daily life, family, animal and plant world, nature, abstract concepts, etc. By highlighting words that are found not only in the Banat speech but also in other Bulgarian dialects, children will better understand the belonging of their speech to the Bulgarian linguistic territory.

Bulgarian is a mandatory subject for all children in Bulgarian schools, yet Bulgarian dialects are poorly represented in the educational process – both domestically and among Bulgarians abroad. Furthermore, the crucial element of explaining to children why it is necessary to study rare, obsolete, or dialect words, especially those characteristic of their place of origin, or the dialectal geographical area to which their speech belongs, is missing. Bulgarian language is used not only within the modern state borders. There are extensive areas abroad – for example, the Republic of North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Northern Greece, Turkey, Ukraine, Hungary, Germany, the United Kingdom, the USA, and others, where Bulgarian is spoken but is not studied or is studied in an extremely limited program at school. This is also the case in Romanian Banat among the Banat Bulgarians. There, children are predominantly familiar with the Bulgarian language in its regional variant and at the everyday level. For them, the primer that the Institute for Bulgarian Language will develop as part of the „Cultural Identity of the Banat Bulgarians and Bulgarian Catholic Literature“ project will be a means to see the place of their native speech within the dialectal system of the Bulgarian language and to realize that they are part of the Bulgarian national community. This will encourage their interest in studying not only the Banat literary variant of the Bulgarian language but also the Bulgarian literary language, which is an important prerequisite for their successful integration into Bulgarian society should they decide to continue their education in Bulgarian educational institutions.

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