

Approaching Difficulties of Teaching Language Complexes by Example of GAS and BCS

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Abstract

In this article a closer look will be taken at the issue of combining three languages into one language complex, i.e. GAS, German German, Austrian German and Swiss German (hereinafter referred to as: GG, AG and SG) and BCS, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. In recent times, the Montenegrin language is also being considered as an addition to the latter language complex. It is common practice throughout Croatia to teach all three varieties of the German language in the German as foreign language departments, much the same as it is common practice to teach BCS in language courses and at universities in Germany or Austria. But is it really possible to combine these languages into one? How important is it to point out differences and similarities between the above mentioned and are teachers really able to do so, seeing as the objective or goal is for teachers to educate and students to accept all three languages? For this purpose, the specifics of teaching at German as foreign language departments in Croatia shall be presented, mainly concerning staff and the organization of studies, as well as the characteristics of students being taught at these departments. Furthermore, certain examples of differences between GG, AG and SG are referred to and explained. In the second part of this article, the relatively artificial language termed BCS that is being taught outside of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, is examined and several issues are pointed out. The providers of such languages courses may or may not be aware of these problems, as they most likely do not take into consideration the political dimension lurking in the background. Basically, assuming that communication and comprehension is the end goal, it may be justified to teach these languages as one language complex. But what happens if one were to consider other factors such as history and politics? Teaching both GAS and BCS seems to challenge language teachers as they are expected to recognize and correctly educate students on the differences and similarities of the three, in the future maybe even four languages, which are not necessarily their native language or the language they were taught during their own education.

Keywords: BCS, GAS, foreign language teaching, German language, language complexes, language courses

1. Introduction

The languages being dealt with in this article are all of the same origin, i.e. the Indo-European language which, as time went by, developed into individual languages being spoken in different countries.

The term *Indo-European* not only denominates the language group but also represents a geographical designation: "Indo" for the most eastern language and "European" for the most western language. Linguist Julius Klaproth conceived the term "Indo-European" in 1823 at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (cf. von Polenz, 2009: 2).

Several groups of languages belong to the Indo-European languages: Celtic, Italic, Indo-Iranian, Germanic but also the Slavic languages, among others. They all were derived from the original Indo-European language and have in common the inflecting, or synthetic syntax:

"Die syntaktischen Beziehungen der Wörter zueinander werden vornehmlich durch Endungen oder Vorsilben ausgedrückt, die wohl dadurch entstanden sind, dass nach- oder vorangestellte Wörter durch Akzentabstufung mit dem Wortstamm zu festen Flexionsformen verschmolzen, ähnlich wie noch im frühmittelalterlichen Deutsch der anlautende Konsonant des nachgestellten Pronomens ‚du‘ zum festen Bestandteil der Konjugationsendung der 2. Person sg. wurde (ahd. gibis, mhd. gibest, gibst)". (von Polenz 2009:3)

Synthetic syntax, according to von Polenz, means that the relations between words are mainly expressed by affixes and prefixes. These evolved from words being put in front or behind the original word and later on merging into a fixed inflection form.

Subsequently, the Indo-European language developed into individual languages such as the Germanic language and the Slavic language, which then developed into smaller languages like German, English, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, etc.

Languages per se are subject to constant changes and development, new words are added, structures are modified, orthography changes etc. As the world and the people develop so do languages. Therefore, one cannot and should not stick to old habits and things as they used to be seeing that the world keeps turning and brings with it constant change. If no one had accepted modifications and developments in the Indo-European language we would today be deprived of diverse languages and would still speak Indo-European. Nowadays, young countries like Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia are also attempting to establish languages of their own. These, of course, are of the same origin but *have* already developed a substantial number of differences and in the future surely will develop even further.

Equally, the German language is being spoken in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Lichtenstein although those languages are of the same origin. They have developed certain modifications in German-speaking countries, sometimes even leading to misunderstandings between native speakers of GG, AG and SG.

2. Teaching language complexes as one language – by example of GAS

First of all, it is necessary to point out that under no circumstances is the intention of this article to judge and/or evaluate the quality of teachers or students at the German as foreign language departments or the quality of study programs, which is in fact on a very high level, nor is it intended to criticize teachers or students of BCS or the providers of such courses. The intention, rather, is to point out peculiarities as well as forthcoming difficulties in teaching three languages combined into one, i.e. into a singular language complex.

2.1. German as foreign language departments in Croatia

There are only four German as foreign language departments in Croatia, namely in Rijeka, Osijek, Zadar and Zagreb. The departments are organized in three teaching fields: literary studies, linguistic studies and language practice. The latter aims to improve language competencies of students as they register for the bachelor programme on B1 level pursuant to the CEFR¹ which requires them to be on a C1 level when graduating pursuant to three years. Upon being awarded the master's degree their language proficiency should be on a C2 level in accordance with the CEFR.

The language education field is regarded as being most responsible for language instruction, i.e. grammar practice, listening and reading comprehension, writing and communication skills as well as vocabulary expansion. This is precisely the segment of education at the German as foreign language department that this article is based on.

Students at the German as foreign language departments are decidedly heterogeneous, as they originate from different parts of Croatia, as well as Bosnia, and bear certain distinct characteristics.

First off, there are groups of students who have previously lived in German-speaking countries for a period of time as their parents fled from the civil war, thus they attended school abroad. Some of the students were native speakers of German as they were born and raised in Germany, Austria or Switzerland. Nonetheless, this group is becoming smaller as many of these generations have by now finished their university education and there are less returnees in total considering that Croatia, at the moment, is facing a wave of emigration rather than a wave of immigration. However, there still exist students who have returned from any of the above mentioned German-speaking countries.

Next, there is the second group of students who were taught German at school. At present, German is predominantly being taught as a second or third foreign language with less lessons (usually two per week), because it is common for English to be the first foreign language in schools.

¹ CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)

Finally, there is also quite a large group of students who learned German simply by watching cartoons and children's programmes on German TV. They have an impressively broad vocabulary and practically no accent when speaking German, but most of them lack grammar knowledge.

The German as foreign language departments in Croatia are very lucky to have a successful cooperation with the DAAD¹ and the ÖAD² in that there are always one or more language assistants or lecturers from Germany and/or Austria present at the departments. Often there are also trainees from Germany, Austria or Switzerland resulting in a high number of native speakers at the departments, as is the case with some of the regular teachers.

All this results in profoundly heterogeneous groups of students from different backgrounds at various levels of proficiency and an equally heterogeneous teaching staff. This offers a wide range of language varieties and opportunities to teach and learn an abundance about culture and civilizations of the three different German speaking countries. On the other hand, heterogeneity also leads to distinct problems and oftentimes confusion among students concerning the language being used and that which is most desired by teachers.

2.2. Standard German language

It is difficult to deal with the complex language *German*, seeing as it is a pluricentric or polycentric language meaning that it is a language with several interacting codified standard versions being used in different countries. Furthermore, there are many varying dialects within Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Concerning standard or written German language, Reiffenstein points out the following:

"Die in Österreich verwendete Schriftsprache weicht in keinen wesentlichen Bereichen von der sonstigen deutschen Hochsprache ab [...]. Normabweichungen gibt es lediglich in bestimmten Sektoren des Lexikons: zum Beispiel in der Medien- und Amtssprache für die Bereiche der öffentlichen Verwaltung und Institutionen, zum Beispiel in der Sprache der Speisekarte [...], und natürlich in einigen weiteren Bereichen" (Reiffenstein 1983:20).

He considers that there are no major differences between GG and AG in standard or written German language except for deviations in media and administrative language in the fields of public administration and institutions, foods and beverages and certain other fields not specified by him distinctively.

Considering the backgrounds of staff and students at the German as foreign language departments, the three countries, or rather the standard languages of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, were chosen to be compared in this article.

Henceforth, merely a few examples are stated and a brief insight into the concrete issue is presented:

2.2.1. Usage of German/Austrian/Swiss terms

In order to illustrate the differences one could not only list plenty of varying terms but also different usage of prepositions, gender of nouns etc. However, this would go beyond the scope of this article, therefore some common examples of terms concerning foods and beverages shall be discussed at this point.

For instance, there are three different terms for referring to *rolls*: Germans would say *Brötchen*, Austrians would say *Semmeln* and the Swiss, *Weggli*. The same fact applies to *chicken*, where Germans use *Hähnchen*, Austrians *Hendl* and Swiss, *Güggeli*, *Poulet*. In turn, Germans refer to *whipped cream* as *Schlagsahne*, Austrians as *Schlagobers* and Swiss as *Rahm* as well as *mirabelles* being *Mirabellen* in Germany, *Kriecherl* in Austria and *Pfläumchen* in Switzerland. Many other terms could be added to this list, such as *girolles* being *Pfifferlinge* in German, *Eierschwammerl* in Austria and *Eierschwämmli* in Switzerland.

Even though this is a very small selection of examples, the major difficulties can still be singled out by these few references. Consequently, if there are Swiss teachers or students having lived in Switzerland, they will for instance use the word *Nüsslisalat*, meaning *lamb's lettuce*. Teachers with German or Austrian background do not necessarily understand this and

¹ DAAD = Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)

² ÖAD = Österreichischer Austauschdienst (Austrian Exchange Service)

would certainly correct it to *Feldsalat* (GG) or *Vogersalat* (AG), although teachers at the departments are instructed to accept words and expressions from all three languages.

This begs the question, how and if it is possible to demand from teachers to accept all three languages considering the fact that a teacher, for instance, is a GG native speaker and not necessarily familiar with AG and SG or has learned GG, AG or SG during his/her education and is not familiar with the other two varieties. The other question raised is, to what extent does this lead to confusion among students if one teacher offers three different terms for the same thing?

We know from experience that it is very confusing for students as they have to learn three new words/terms/expressions and subsequently are not entirely sure which to use in a given context. On the other hand, it is also demanding of teachers as they would have to get acquainted with all the different words/terms/expressions from GG, AG and SG in all teaching fields. Therefore, most of the teachers prefer to stick to their native language or, if not native speakers, the German language they have been taught during their own education, not paying much attention to the other two German components. This can lead to situations where students complain: "But Mrs/Mr XY uses this expression all the time, why don't you accept it?" or "In Switzerland/Austria/Germany we have always used this expression". Sometimes this even generates dissatisfaction when written essays or seminar papers are being corrected.

Generally, regardless of whether GG, AG or SG is used, it is possible to make oneself understandable, as most of the words are used in the same way in all three varieties of the German language. There are, of course, certain specific expressions, namely differences in pronunciation and grammar to some extent, which could be compared to British English and American English (Canadian and Australian English should probably be included here as well). Therefore, critics may interject that, in general, it is not important or necessary to make a distinction between GG, AG and SG, as the main goal is comprehension. But, is it really possible to understand one another accurately without proper knowledge of all three languages?

At this point allow me to insert a small anecdote from my own experience in Austria a few years ago: As native GG speaker I came to a coffee house in Austria and wanted to drink a *Milchkaffee*, so I ordered a *Milchkaffee*. The waitress looked at me puzzled and asked me what exactly I meant by *Milchkaffee*. Although I was a little confused, I explained to her that I wanted coffee with milk in it and off she went. After a few minutes she returned with a small cup of filter coffee and a little pot of milk next to it. Now I was the one puzzled. I told her that this was not what I had ordered, that I wanted a *Milchkaffee* and explaining to her that I meant a big mug or glass with little coffee, a lot of hot milk and milk foam on top. Finally, she seemed to understand what I wanted, smiled at me and said happily: "Oh, you mean a latte macchiato?" This made me laugh and I replied: "Well, it's good that we finally understand each other in Italian".

The point I am attempting to make by mentioning this anecdote is that even two native speakers of German, GG and AG, do not necessarily have to understand each other due to their different backgrounds, but communication and comprehension is obtained by other means; at least the same basic language markers make it possible to describe what is meant by a certain expression that is not comparable in GG and AG.

In conclusion, one might claim that it is difficult to demand the usage or acceptance of all three varieties of the German language as very few teachers and students are and could be familiar with all of them.

Pronunciation must also be mentioned in this context as well. It is not difficult to recognize whether the speaker originates from Germany, Austria or Switzerland, as the stressing of words and pronunciation differ from country to country and not only the expressions. Primarily, the pronunciation of words give us a clue as to whether GG, AG and SG is in question but also the different usage of prepositions and varying gender of nouns.

At this point let us move on to the dilemma, or rather confusion, occurring in regards to teaching BCS (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian) at language schools and universities abroad, which will be examined closer in the next chapter.

3. Slavic languages - Common origin of BCS

Modern Slavic languages are characterized by their partial mutual understandability, i.e. at least on conversational level. When considering South Slavic language speakers, Bulgarian and Macedonian citizens are able to communicate with each other, as well as Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian people amongst each other. East Slavic language speakers are also able to communicate with one another, as can the West Slavic language speakers, in particular the Czechs, Slovaks, Polish and Sorbs (cf. Sussex 2006:3). Difficulties arise when considering the written language, as some of the South Slavic languages

use the Cyrillic script, namely Macedonian, Serbian and Bulgarian, while Croatian, Bosnian and Slovenian use the Latin script. Although they are categorized into groups termed South, West and East Slavic languages, all of the mentioned languages within these categories are distinct, i.e. individual languages.

From a linguistic point of view, the South Slavic languages of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian are very closely related, especially when considering that they were once unified into a singular language, namely Serbo-Croatian. But, from the socio-linguistic point of view, there are at least two standard languages, Croatian and the Serbian (the status of the Bosnian [standard] language still continues to be unclear to some extent although efforts are being made to create a standard Bosnian language by writing individual grammar books etc.).

In regards to language type, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian belong to the fusional or synthetic languages meaning that, in order to denote multiple grammatical, syntactic, or semantic features, they use only a single inflectional morpheme (cf. Roeske 2009:25).

3.1. Teaching language complexes as one language – by example of BCS

As in GG, AG and SG, there are also different terms for naming foods and beverages in the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages. For instance, Bosnians use the term *kahva* for coffee, Croatians *kava* and Serbs, *kafa*; *butter* is called *puter* in Bosnia, *maslac* in Croatia and *mlačenica* in Serbia, or *garlic* being referred to as *bijeli luk* in Bosnia, *česnjak* in Croatia and *beli luk* in Serbia. There are many terms for which Bosnians use either the Croatian or the Serbian expression as for example *beetroot* being *cvekla* in Bosnian and Serb, but *cikla* in Croatian, or *carrots* being *mrkva* in Bosnian and Croatian, but *šargarepa* in the Serbian language.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter regarding GG, AG and SG, it would be necessary for teachers to point out the differences between the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages, provided that they are familiar with all three terms, or rather both terms, as the Bosnian language to a great extent uses either the Croatian or the Serbian term and/or both are possible. Although in the above mentioned examples for food the Bosnian language does not really have many individual terms, other fields exist in which various expressions appear and are the result of derivations of words loaned from the Turkish language.

Variations in terms are not the main concern when combining BCS into one language complex, the major difficulty lies in the above mentioned socio-linguistic factor and what has occurred in the past 20+ years since the civil war in former Yugoslavia ended. The languages have always been slightly different and following the end of war they have changed even more drastically. Nowadays, there is no common language as the Serbo-Croatian language does not exist anymore.

There are different grammar books for the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language, but even linguists cannot agree on whether three individual languages really DO exist. In 2003 Dževad Jahić, Senahid Halilović and Ismail Palić published the book *Gramatika bosanskog jezika (Grammar book of Bosnian language)* which was not very well accepted by the famous Bosnian linguist, Midhat Riđanović, for instance, who declared it the worst grammar book ever written and a complete failure. Furthermore, he is of the opinion that Bosnians, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs are one people, speaking **one** language which is perfectly understandable to all of them. (cf. Patria 2015)

Regardless of his opinion, all three countries have made major efforts to define their own culture and language as well as to differentiate their languages from the other two. To some extent, the languages have even been modified on purpose to clearly distinguish one from the other. Lest we forget, the Serbian language does not only differ in regards to expressions and pronunciation, but especially concerning writing as they primarily correspond in the Cyrillic alphabet which is not used in the Croatian or Bosnian language.

Lectors and assistants from Germany and Austria, who come to work at the German as foreign language departments, usually have completed one or more BCS courses so that they are better equipped to communicate in this “fabricated” language. This language is neither pure Croatian, nor Serbian or Bosnian, sometimes even ending up in a wild mixture of the three making it hard for native speakers to understand any of the mentioned languages.

Critics at this point may again interject that the main goal of learning a foreign language should be the ability to communicate and comprehend the target language, no matter if it is grammatically and lexically entirely correct. But, when taking into account the sordid past of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, people still react very strongly to Serbian being spoken in Croatia

or Bosnia, Croatian being spoken in Serbia or Bosnia and Bosnian being spoken in Serbia or Croatia. Unfortunately, even after such a long period of time has passed there is still a lot of grief, anger and even hatred left over from the civil war.

3.2. BCS language courses

At this point, allow me to introduce a short excerpt from an advertisement for BCS language courses on a website in Vienna, Austria:

„Hier lernt man auch etwas über die Kultur und Bräuche der Region. So hält Klara heute ein Referat über Lepa Brena. Das ist eine „pevačica“ oder auch „glazbenica“, wie man in Kroatien sagen würde.“ (Bužić 2014)

Basically, this quote states that you can learn something about the culture and customs of a region and that Klara is preparing a presentation about Lepa Brena. This is a “pevačica” (*singer*), or “glazbenica” (*musician*), as the Croatians would say.

Firstly, the author does not refer to a specific country, i.e. Bosnia, Croatia or Serbia as individual states, but to the “region”, which came to be a common expression for referring to the above-mentioned former Yugoslav states.

Secondly, the problem with presenting versions of all three languages is very clear at this point: Serbians say *pevačica*, referring to a person who is a singer. In Croatian this would be *pjevačica*. This tiny letter “j” exactly defines which of the two languages one is speaking and from which culture the speaker originates as the Serbs speak *ekavica* (Ekavian) and the Croatians speak *ijekavica* (Ijekavian). But *glazbenica* (*musician*) being presented here as the proper Croatian translation of *pevačica* is not quite correct as it covers a wider scope and is not isolated to the sole meaning of *singer*, as the Serbian word *pevačica* suggests. And what about Bosnian? It is not mentioned in this context at all. If you point out differences between two of the three languages, why omit the third one? This is because there is no additional word in the Bosnian language: the Bosnians use either “pevačica” or “pjevačica”, depending on which part of Bosnia they reside, but should this not be mentioned as well? Therefore, the effort is made to, at least, present two of the three languages, Croatian and Serbian, but not in the correct way.

Concerning the paper that is being presented by a student in this BCS language course, one should perhaps say that Lepa Brena is a singer who was born in Bosnia and has been living in Belgrade, Serbia since her youth. She was very popular in the 1980s, i.e. in the former Yugoslavia, but is still active and produces songs in Serbia. Interestingly, she published the song “Jugoslovenka” (*Yugoslav woman*) in 1989, continues to mourn “the good old days” and is a Yugo-nostalgic (cf. V.N. 2017).

Unfortunately, this leads to the assumption that providers of BCS language courses are not dealing sufficiently enough with the 20+ year development in the former Yugoslav states of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia as well as with the changes that occurred there, especially concerning languages.

Moreover, in the short article mentioned above, it is stated that the teacher of BCS is a woman from Bosnia who attempts to convey all three language standards. Her last name indicates that she is of Serbian origin although she was born in Bosnia, as is mentioned in the article (cf. Bužić 2014). Hence, it is to be assumed that her native language is Serbian, not Croatian nor Bosnian. Bosnia is very specific for it is divided into three autonomous parts: Croatian, Serbian and Muslim, having strict delimitations concerning language, culture and scripture, resulting in labels and signs within the country in three different languages and two different scriptures (Cyrillic and Latin). What’s more, children in Bosnia learn their native language according to the part of Bosnia they are born in and where they go to school, therefore this can be either Croatian, Serbian or Bosnian.

Presumably, the mentioned individual is a pleasant and proficient language teacher and tries her best, but it is almost inconceivable to convey all of the three different language standards, as shown by the example of *pevačica* and *glazbenica*. This would require extensive work on vocabulary and clarification of all differences as well as requiring students to learn the Cyrillic scripture. In doing so, students would be required to gain knowledge of three languages instead of one, no matter how similar they might seem. By gathering all of the above into one language complex termed BCS it encompasses a bit of everything, yet nothing specific or tangible.

3.3. Brief review of BCS socio-linguistic and political context

As mentioned previously, it is very difficult to examine the topic of BCS without taking a look at the historical and political context of the region in question. This is not merely a matter of language but also many emotions and political issues linked to it.

As Mappes-Niedieck stated, in earlier times a Croat was a Croat, but back then it didn't necessarily mean much until the collapse of the state. Only at that point did fine tuning of identity started to make more sense. Suddenly it was necessary to prove basic and substantial contrasts to neighbours which had existed up until that point – from origin to culture:

„Ein Kroat war ein Kroat; es bedeutete nicht viel. Erst mit dem Zerfall des Staates und dem bisherigen Verteilungssystem bekam der Feinschliff an der Identität einen Sinn. Jetzt erst mussten Beweise her, dass man sich von seinen Nachbarn »grundsätzlich«, »tiefgehend« und vor allem »schon immer« unterschied – von der Abstammung und besonders durch die »Kultur«, ein Begriff mit dem man so gut wie alles machen kann.“ (Mappes-Niedieck 2005: 65)

From the point of view of providers of BCS courses, it is understandable as to why they combine the three languages: the three states are small and there are not many people who speak and/or want to speak these languages. Also, it once was merely *one* language, the Serbo-Croatian language, so why not fuse them into one as surely there are not that many differences?

In 2010, the Croatian linguist Snježana Kordić published her book *Jezik i nacionalizam (Language and Nationalism)*, in which she i.a. deals with the topic of the former Serbo-Croatian language and presents the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language by placing them in a political context.

She, however, received many negative reviews as she claims that the attempt at purifying a language is outdated and openly criticizes the purists by saying that, by attempting this, it is a form of nationalism and xenophobia. She goes as far as to compare language purification to National Socialism in Germany.

Furthermore, she considers the most important factor in learning languages to be comprehension. She states the following:

„Ja se osobno kod tog pitanja držim jedne vrlo mudre definicije 'hrvatskog odnosno srpskog' jezika, koju je svojedobno dao hrvatski književnik Miroslav Krleža: 'Hrvatski i srpski su jedan te isti jezik, koji Hrvati nazivaju hrvatski, a Srbi srpski.'“ (Kordić 2010: 39)

She adheres to the (for her) “wise” words of Miroslav Krleža that Croatian and Serbian are the same language but the Croats refer to it as Croatian and the Serbs call it the Serbian language. This would clearly be a key argument for teaching BCS as a one language complex. With that said, should we not keep in mind that Miroslav Krleža, one of the most famous Croatian writers, lived from 1893 to 1981? The question at hand is this: can one legitimately refer to an author from this period of time and exclude everything that happened between his death in 1981 and now? Furthermore, it is always difficult to pull such quotes out of context as one will never know for certain what his motivation was for making this statement. It would undoubtedly be of use to investigate the political circumstances of his time and to include Krleža's biography.

Everyone has a right to make up their own mind and Kordić, as well as the earlier stated Bosnian linguist Midhat Ridanović, surely have carefully considered all of the factors leading to their conclusions, yet in my opinion there is a big discrepancy between theory and common practice. It is very easy and legitimate to theorize and investigate what other linguists and/or authors claim and argue regarding this topic but in practise the situation may be slightly different.

In Germany and Austria, BCS language courses in language schools and universities are not the only courses offered. Native language lessons for children with a migrant background are also provided and are conceived as BCS classes. It is certainly praiseworthy that children with a migrant background have the opportunity to learn or improve their mother tongue, but is it really their mother tongue they are learning or again a mixture of the three languages, depending on where the teacher originates from?

4. Excursus to other formerly unified languages by example of Czech and Slovak

There are other languages that are similar and once were a sole language as for example the Czech and the Slovak languages. They are still not taught as one language due to specific differences in pronunciation, phonology and vocabulary. Separate languages courses exist for each of the two languages, as the individual development of those two languages seems to be more advanced:

„Die jungen Tschechen verstehen heute immer weniger die slowakische Sprache. Das behauptet zumindest Marek Blahus vom Sprachzentrum der Masaryk-Universität in Brünn:

„Auf der tschechischen Seite wird die Lage immer schlechter, während die Slowaken immer noch Tschechisch verstehen. In der Slowakei kann man noch tschechische Filme sehen und tschechische Bücher kaufen. Umgekehrt gilt das nicht mehr. [...] Die Kinder verstehen es nicht mehr, für sie ist Slowakisch eine Fremdsprache wie zum Beispiel Deutsch oder Polnisch.“ (Kachlikova 2013)

Marek Blahus from the language centre of the Masaryk University in Brno claims that fewer young Czechs speak and understand the Slovak language. On the Czech side the situation is getting worse, Czech children do not understand Slovakian anymore. To them it is a foreign language just like German or Polish while the Slovaks still understand Czech. In the meantime, even Slovak movies are being subtitled so that Czech viewers are able to understand them. (cf. *ibid*)

Presumably, the differences between Czech and Slovak language are and always have been substantial, even in times when it was called Czechoslovak language. Yet as time went on the differences have got even greater, leading to the present situation where younger generations of Czechs and Slovaks simply do not understand each other anymore

This is also most likely to be expected with the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages, as autonomy and equality is not only a matter of independence but also a matter of individual languages and culture(s).

This development clearly contradicts Kordić's statement in which she i.a. also argues that there is no difference between GG and AG or American and British English, although Germany, Austria, Great Britain and the United States are democratic autonomous states. She disagrees with philologists who consider that having an individual language is a sign of democracy and equality. She even states that the ones who suggest that Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Montenegrins speak four different languages are being dishonest:

„Pozivaju se i na ravnopravnost naroda tvrdeći da je znak demokracije i znak ravnopravnosti reći da svaka nacija ima zaseban jezik. Zaboravljaju da lagati nije znak demokracije i ravnopravnosti, a upravo to čine oni koji tvrde da Hrvati, Srbi, Bošnjaci i Crnogorci govore četiri jezika. Osim toga, Njemačka i Austrija su demokratske, ravnopravne zemlje i različite nacije, a nemaju zasebne jezike, Amerika i Engleska su demokratske, ravnopravne zemlje i različite nacije, a ni one nemaju zasebne jezike itd. To znači da se demokracija i ravnopravnost ne postižu zasebnim jezikom.“ (Kordić 2010: 120)

In the interim it still is possible to combine Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian into one language complex, even though it might not be completely correct from the socio-linguistic and political point of view. There is also a chance that, by further development of languages and states, the differences may become too big to overcome and it will be necessary to teach the three languages separately, that is, as individual languages.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that teaching languages itself is a difficult profession as it requires a high level of language proficiency, methodological skills and intercultural competence. The latter is of extremely high importance when speaking in terms of teaching language complexes such as GAS and BCS as it is not easy to convey the linguistic and cultural aspects of three different states.

This presents a particular challenge for the teachers. Either they have to make major efforts to get acquainted with unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural peculiarities, or they may simply transfer their own background knowledge of the country, in terms of language and culture, and teach GG, AG, SG, Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian. In the latter case, the demand to accept and to teach all three languages lapses. Another possibility is to teach in teams, whereby teachers from all three backgrounds or with knowledge of all three languages and cultures are present. This would, of course, be very costly and time-consuming.

As presented in this article, issues are raised from various factors when combining several languages. Even if the languages are of the same origin, they have developed over the years, thus they have certain specific characteristics and are spoken in different countries with contrasting cultural backgrounds.

Teaching GAS and BSC is not identical, as Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia have been independent states for a short period of time, still making major efforts to establish as many differences as possible. There surely are more aspects to consider

when teaching BSC than GAS, due to the mentioned historical events and political issues, but generally some of the difficulties are the same, as for example the challenge for teachers to convey and to accept different language standards and cultural backgrounds. Time will show how the development of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language and culture will proceed - will they remain similar and comprehensible to all the three nations like GG, AG and SG, or will they take the path of Czech and Slovak and become incomprehensible among each other due to the socio-linguistic and political dimensions lurking in the background of BCS language development.

In this article, which is based on individual experience and personal thoughts, only a brief insight was given into some of the difficulties detected in everyday work. This topic should and will be pursued in order to arrive at a broader conclusion on how and/or whether to proceed with teaching language complexes such as the two mentioned in this article. Clearly, language development and influences from other languages cannot be denied and should be accepted. This has always presented and will continue to present a major challenge for language teachers.

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