

LOCAL VOICE IN A GLOBAL WORLD

TRANSLATING FOR A SMALL NEW ZEALAND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The Serbian community in New Zealand is very small and relatively new, almost all having arrived in New Zealand in the 1990s, following the break-up of former Yugoslavia. As newcomers and educated professionals, Serbians mostly request translation of official documents and certificates, and this does not generate enough work for a full time professional.

With only 12 million speakers, Serbian is a language of limited diffusion. There is a lack of dictionaries and tools available in New Zealand. There are also issues surrounding the separation of the Serbo-Croatian language into several languages. Different educational systems and changes in names for government agencies used over the years of political turmoil add to the usual problems with correspondences of words and terms.

This all makes the work of a translator challenging. Translators cannot rely on translation as a main source of income. Are there other benefits which could be an incentive for spending free time on translating? Is there enough work to gain the necessary experience and expertise in a particular area? In this context, is globalisation another challenge, or an opportunity?

The paper will discuss the challenges the translator meets and the opportunities offered by the Internet.

Introduction

Most Serbians arrived in New Zealand in the 1990s. The uncertain situation caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, disastrous economic crises, vicious ethnic conflicts and civil war pushed many people to emigrate. Most went to the United States, Canada, and Australia, but a small number came to New Zealand. They were predominantly young families with children. In the years that followed, more children were born in New Zealand and many people brought out their parents. However, the community has not grown as many Serbians emigrated to Australia, or went back to Serbia.

As newcomers and educated professionals, Serbians mostly request translation of official documents and certificates, and this does not generate enough work for a full time professional. At the same time, the range of issues that a translator deals with is varied and complex. Extra-linguistic factors such as politics and culture have a big influence, and have to be taken into account.

Translating is not only a matter of relationships between texts. As Ribeiro pointed out, translation as an object of analysis can no longer be dealt with from a disciplinary point of view but clearly requires a multidisciplinary approach (Ribeiro, 2004). This paper describes how various aspects outside of text have affected my work as a translator for the Serbian community in New Zealand. It also discusses the opportunities that are offered by globalisation, and the Internet.

Death of a language

One of the most prominent factors in the history of the Serbian language has been politics.

Serbian has been used for more than nine hundred years in the Serbian Orthodox Church, in literature, and in administration. During that period, the language standard was changed several times. From the middle of the nineteenth century until the last decade of the twentieth century, Serbian was part of the Serbo-Croatian language.

Serbo-Croatian, or Croato-Serbian, was the biggest of the official languages of the former Yugoslavia (1918-1991). It had over twenty one million speakers and was spoken in four of the six Yugoslav Republics: Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. (The distribution of nationalities in former Yugoslavia is shown in Figure 1.)

The idea of creating a standardized language for Serbs and Croats was proposed in the mid-nineteenth century by several Croatian writers and linguists in the Illyrian movement led by Ljudevit Gaj, and two Serbian scholars, Vuk Karadžić and Đura Daničić. As a basis for standardisation they chose the Shtokavian dialect, the most widespread dialect used by both Serbs and Croats. In the 1850 Vienna Agreement, leading Serbian and Croatian literary figures and intellectuals declared their intention to create a common language.

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the language also separated, initially into Serbian and Croatian. Later Bosnian became a separate standard and currently, there is a move to create a Montenegrin language. According to data in Wikipedia, Serbian has around twelve million speakers, Croatian six million, Bosnian three million and Montenegrin a hundred and fifty thousand speakers.

There is much controversy around Serbo-Croatian and its daughter languages (Robin, 2004) and some issues are of importance to translators.

For the ordinary customer the situation with these languages can be very confusing, and it can seem unnecessary for people to pay for three translations. For lack of a more succinct alternative, the name Serbo-Croatian is still used to denote the "daughter" languages as a collectivity. An alternative name has emerged in official use abroad - Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BHS). There is even an on-line dictionary of this language.¹



Figure 1 - Nationalities of Yugoslavia in 1991, before the war

Currently Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian languages are mutually intelligible; however, divergent development and standardization will lead to their further differentiation. A translator who is a native speaker of any of them can translate from any of the three, but few translators would nowadays accept a job translating into any of the languages except their native one.

The new countries differ in their choice of official languages. In Croatia, the official language is Croatian. Bosnia-Herzegovina has three official languages - Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. Serbia has Serbian as its official, and Croatian as a regional

¹ <http://www.datoteka.com/rjecnik/>

language along with Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Rusyn, and Albanian. Montenegro has Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian as official languages. Therefore, it is advisable for clients to specify the target language(s) in advance.

The NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters)² approach is that Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian are three separate languages and translators have to obtain separate accreditation for each of them. For the translator, this makes an already small market even smaller, and for customers makes it even harder to find a translator.

Some specifics of the Serbian language

The Serbian language belongs to the Slavonic group of languages, one of the three largest groups in the Indo-European family (along with Romance and Germanic). Present-day Serbian uses two alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin. Both were used as official scripts for Serbo-Croatian in the former Yugoslavia. The modern Serbian Cyrillic alphabet was developed from mediaeval Serbian Cyrillic at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Serbian linguist Vuk Karadžić and adopted officially in 1868. The Latin alphabet was devised by Ljudevit Gaj, a Croatian scholar in 1830.

А а	Б б	В в	Г г	Д д	Ђ ђ	Е е	Ж ж	З з	И и
A	B	V	G	D	Đ	E	Ž	Z	I
/a/	/b/	/v/	/g/	/d/	/dʒ/	/e/	/ʒ/	/z/	/i/
Ј ј	К к	Л л	Љ љ	М м	Н н	Њ њ	О о	П п	Р р
J	K	L	Lj	M	N	Nj	O	P	R
/j/	/k/	/l/	/lʲ/	/m/	/n/	/nj/	/o/	/p/	/r/
С с	Т т	Ћ ћ	У у	Ф ф	Х х	Ц ц	Ч ч	Џ џ	Ш ш
S	T	Ć	U	F	H	C	Č	Dž	Š
/s/	/t/	/t͡ɕ/	/u/	/f/	/x/	/t͡s/	/t͡ʃ/	/d͡ʒ/	/ʃ/

Figure 2 – Serbian Cyrillic and Latin alphabets

As can be seen from Figure 2, the alphabets do not entirely correspond. The consonants /ɲ/, /ʎ/, and /d͡ʒ/ have been represented by a single letter in the Cyrillic alphabet (Њ, Љ and џ) while in the Latin alphabet they are digraphs (nj, lj and dž).

Automatic transliteration of Cyrillic text to Latin is straightforward, but transliteration of Latin text to Cyrillic requires additional care and human intervention, because there are words in which Latin diphthongs do not translate to Cyrillic single letters. For example, Latin *njegov* (*his*) is **ЊЕГОВ** in Cyrillic, while *injekcija* (*injection*) is written **ИНЈЕКЦИЈА**.

² <http://www.naati.com.au>

Serbian has two main pronunciations, Ekavian and Iyekavian, reflecting the divergent development of the old Slavic phoneme *jat*. The Ekavian pronunciation is characteristic of eastern areas and Iyekavian of the western. Because Serbian orthography follows the principle of "one letter per sound", there is a difference in spelling as well (*млеко*, *млијеко*). Generally, Serbian native speakers are comfortable with both pronunciation and alphabet. However, exceptions can be found with regard to official language use (Serbia uses the Ekavian, and the Republika Srpska and Montenegro the Iyekavian variant), and areas such as marketing and advertising. As Miroslav Starovlah pointed out, (Starovlah, 2007) it is important that agencies who order a translation should be aware of these differences and specify their requirements in advance.

Translating official documents and cultural issues

The majority of Serbians come to New Zealand on a points system which selects for education and employment skills. To establish themselves in New Zealand, they have to provide a range of documents and certificates, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, diplomas, and letters of reference. Sometimes they also need to send legal letters back to Serbia.

When translating official documents, the translator has a moral and legal obligation to produce a faithful and precise translation (Mayoral Asensio, 2003). There is very little margin for improvisation. This can be a difficult requirement when translating documents. In the process of translating, not only two languages are put in context, but two cultures too (Ribeiro, 2004) and differences between cultures cause more complications than differences in language structure (Nida, 2004). Translating can never simply be communication between equals because it is fundamentally ethnocentric (Venuti, 1998). More than other texts, official documents include concepts that exist in one society but not in the other.

A good example of a term from the Serbian language that does not have a corresponding term in English is *Јединствени матични број грађана*. Every person born in Serbia has a unique identification number. In Serbian, that number is called *јединствени матични број грађана*. The number was introduced in 1976 in Yugoslavia, and applied to all citizens. It is still used in all six countries of former Yugoslavia. As there is no equivalent number in New Zealand and other English-speaking countries, translators try to come up with a term that best describes this concept. This naturally leads to a huge number of variant terms. A quick search on the Internet reveals more than twenty different terms used by translators. Here are just some of them:

*Personal Identity Number*³
Citizen Identification Number
Individual Registration Number
*Unique Citizen Registration Number*⁴

³ The author prefers the first listed term, *Personal Identity Number*.

⁴ The term *Unique Citizen Registration Number* is used on Wikipedia.

*National Identification Number*⁵
Personal Registration Number
Unique Master Citizen Number.

It is an interesting question whether Personal Identity Numbers have any relevance for potential New Zealand employers and whether any of these variants would aid their understanding. However, uniformity would be desirable, so officials looking at documents from two different translators do not get confused.

A similar problem exists in translating the English expression *To whom it may concern* into Serbian. In Serbian letters of reference, the author of a letter addresses the person who is reading the document, and so the usual greeting is: *ПОШТОВАНИ/ПОШТОВАНА* (*Honorable Sir/Madam*). If the letter is more official, or intended for an institution rather than a person, the term *Надлежној особи* (*To authorised person*), or *Надлежном органу* (*To authorised body*) is used. Following the English idiom, translators have been using terms such as *СВИМ ЗАИНТЕРЕСОВАНИМА* (*To all those interested in*), and even *Кога се тиче*, and *Онима којих се тиче*. The later two sound rather unnatural in Serbian language, or even vaguely rude, because they are very similar to the common phrases *Шта те се тиче* (*That's none of your business*), or *Кога се то тиче* (*That's nobody's business*).

The Yugoslav educational system, and later, the Serbian, has undergone a number of reforms. The major ones are the reform of high schools in the 1970s when the school programme was changed from four years to two plus two, and the recent implementation of the Bologna declaration principles in the universities, which cut the basic degree from four years to three. Also, the names of government agencies changed several times over the years of political turmoil. There are so many variations that translators must bear in mind how these differences will be understood by New Zealand officials when they compare the originals and translations.

An additional problem is that translators have not been able to restrict their work to translating into their mother tongue. In the 1990s, when people from former Yugoslavia started coming to New Zealand, the New Zealand translating scene was similar to that in Australia, as described by Stuart Campbell, where the first round of immigrants has to supply their own translators (Campbell, 1998). Due to the lack of people with English as a mother tongue who also speak Serbian, and a demand for translations, it was inevitable that translators would end up translating from Serbian into English, their second language. The situation remains the same for all nationalities from former Yugoslavia, with the exception of Croatians, significant numbers of whom have been in New Zealand for over a hundred years. Translating into a second language is more complicated than translating into a native tongue. No matter how good their knowledge of foreign language, translators always lack linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target

⁵ The term *National Identification Number* in Wikipedia describes any number that governments use as a means of tracking their citizens, and permanent and temporary residents for the purposes of work, taxation, government benefits, health care, etc.

language, and need to employ additional strategies to increase their translating competence.

Is translating a rewarding career?

According to the Population Census of 2006⁶, there are 1149 persons born in Serbia living in New Zealand. Figure 3 shows the number of New Zealand residents born in Serbia and in other countries of the former Yugoslavia.

New Zealand Census 2006 - Birth Place				
Serbia	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia	Slovenia
1149	1968	462	780	150

Figure 3 - New Zealand residents born in countries of former Yugoslavia according to the Census 2006

The small Serbian community does not produce a large amount of work for a translator, and this influences many business decisions. In the New Zealand context, translators of minority languages may not think of translating as a business at all. They usually need another source of income and they lack the motive to invest in translating tools, marketing, and continuing education to increase their skills. They do not want to spend time building their own dictionaries of terms. Unfortunately, these factors also directly influence the quality and speed of translation.

Translating for such a small community might not be a rewarding career in terms of money, but it can provide satisfaction in terms of intellectual curiosity and creativity.

To do their work well, translators must have a wide general knowledge and keep building it up. In the situation where the target language is their second language, translators must work at improving their language and cultural knowledge to achieve near-native linguistic competence. Keeping up with technological developments and investing in the construction of personal corpora of translation equivalencies, makes translating assignments infinitely easier and quicker.

Translators also meet members of the community and help them adapt to their new lives, and this brings a social dimension into translating work. As translators play a critical role in facilitating successful communication for immigrant families, they are often regarded as a source of advice in a more general sense.

⁶ Census data is published on the New Zealand Statistics web site at <http://www.stats.govt.nz/default.htm>. It is also available on the University of Auckland Library database New Zealand Statistical Sources, <http://nzstats.auckland.ac.nz/>.

Globalisation – friend or enemy?

The unprecedented development of technology in the last decade, particularly the Internet, has had a huge influence on the translation profession. Globalisation is both praised and criticised, but one thing is sure - the impact of globalisation on the theory and practice of translation is unavoidable. Two main characteristics of globalisation are the overcoming spatial barriers and the centrality of knowledge and information. (Bielsa, 2005). The concept of globalisation scares many people, but the ability to exchange vast streams of information instantaneously offers exciting possibilities. Translators are no longer restricted to a local market; suddenly a whole global market is open for them. Also, globalisation itself brings more jobs for translators, as translation is essential for effective global operations. On the Internet it is possible to find advice on how to develop a translation business, and how to obtain different translation software, dictionaries and other translating tools.

The last is crucial for translators who work in a language such as Serbian. With only 12 million speakers Serbian is a language of limited diffusion. Serbian print dictionaries and thesauri are not available in New Zealand bookshops, but several Serbian dictionaries can be found on the Internet. Some are general-type dictionaries, like *Krstarica*,⁷ and some are subject-focused, like the *Dictionary of Library terms*.⁸ A comprehensive list of Serbian dictionaries has been compiled by Ljiljana Kovacevic. (Kovacevic, 2000).

Sometimes, just googling a term and checking on the number of times the term has been used on the Internet is a good indication of acceptability. The frequency with which a word or phrase appears on the Internet in comparison with other variations is a good signal of its currency.

For a translator who works in a small market, many commercial computer-assisted translation (CAT) systems are too expensive. A community of only a thousand members does not produce enough work to justify buying tools like Trados, or Déjà Vu. Luckily, there are also freeware tools, such as OmegaT. This translation memory application is written in Java and intended for professional translators. Among other features, OmegaT has Unicode (UTF-8) support, and it can be used with Serbian Cyrillic or Latin alphabet.

Translation memory systems bring many benefits and are very good for repetitive texts (Lagadouki, 2006) but are not particularly useful in translating official documents. Microsoft Word templates produce better results (Lambert-Tierrafria, 2007). In documents like birth and marriage certificates, much of the text does not vary from document to document. A template with this data pre-populated is time-saving and very efficient.

There are many small, specialized, and free applications designed to do simple tasks, like Google Gadgets, Microsoft Gadgets, Apple Widgets, and Mozilla Add-ons. Many of

⁷ <http://www.krstarica.com/recnik/srpsko-engleski/index.php?u=>,

⁸ <http://btr.nbs.bg.ac.yu/default.htm>.

them can be very useful for translator. FoxClock⁹ helps a translator keep track time zones around the world, while Split Browser¹⁰ can split the content area of the browser in different ways (up, down, left, right) and in multiple windows. Microsoft Transliteration Utility¹¹ is a tool that can be used to transliterate Serbian Cyrillic to Latin as well as Serbian Latin to Cyrillic. It can be downloaded free of charge from the Microsoft site.

Final remarks

Translating for the Serbian community in New Zealand provides only a small number of assignments, but at the same time, a complex range of issues. The multidisciplinary nature of translating is highlighted and the act of translation emerges from a powerful integration of linguistic, political, cultural, social, and historical thinking. As this article shows, a whole range of elements outside the source and target texts influence translators' work and every decision they have to make.

This, in the case of Serbian language, includes political issues surrounding the separation of the Serbo-Croatian language into several daughter languages. In the New Zealand context, the lack of work for a full time professional poses a range of business-related questions. The socio-cultural environment adds to the usual problems with correspondences of words and terms.

Although translating for a small community may not be a financially rewarding career, it brings some additional benefits. It provides real satisfaction in terms of intellectual curiosity and creativity, and has a strong social dimension as well. However, the difficulty of obtaining sufficient number of jobs means a lack of opportunity to work and further develop skills and expertise.

Globalisation has many positive effects as it offers to a translator the chance to exploit new knowledge, new technologies, and new markets. Many translating tools are available on the Internet - dictionaries, thesauri, and translation memory systems. Some are commercial products and have to be paid for, but many are free. Also, translators are no longer restricted to the market in the country they live in, but can obtain work from anywhere in the world. This opens prospects to people in remote parts of the world who would like to pursue translating as a profession.

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