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Review paper

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EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA - A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This article gives a brief historical overview of foreign language education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with special emphasis on primary education. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long history of teaching foreign languages. Geopolitical changes influenced foreign language policy and, thus, different languages have been taught throughout the history of formal education: Turkish, Arabic, German, French, Russian, English. After the World War 2 Russian was obligatory in primary and secondary schools, and even at the university level. Pupils attending grammar schools learned English, German or French as their second foreign language. However, from the 1980ies this policy changed and pupils had the chance to choose between English and German. Majority of pupils (about 95%) opted for English. Again extra-linguistic factors proved to be decisive for foreign language teaching policy and global status of English resulted in its becoming the first obligatory foreign language in Bosnian formal education in the mid-1990ies. It was first taught from the fifth grade and in secondary schools for all four years followed by German or French as second foreign language. With the introduction of nine-years-long primary school in the 2000s, English is taught from the first grade. Pupils now have the chance to choose between German, French or Turkish in the fifth grade. English and one more language are also taught in secondary schools. English for specific purposes is introduced at tertiary level of education. The state organization additionally complicates the situation with foreign language policy. The lack of ministry of education at the state level resulted in the fact that two entities and ten cantons regulate foreign language education policy.

Key words: Foreign language policy, primary education, English, curriculum, education system, Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long history of teaching foreign languages. Geopolitical changes influenced foreign language policy and, thus, different languages have been taught throughout the various historical periods. This will be shown in the following chapters.

2. THE PRE-OTTOMAN PERIOD

There are very few records on the organization of education before the arrival of the Ottomans to the region¹. Education was exclusively the right of churches. In this way churches held their followers in the subordinate position. There were no system or curriculum, but, rather, prayers and religious ceremonies were taught and learned by heart due to the lack of books and materials. Therefore, all education was mainly of religious character. There are some records of education at medieval feudal or ruler's castles and self-education. Bosančica (Bosnian medieval alphabet) was used in the medieval Bosnia.

3. THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

After conquering territories, the Ottoman introduced their system of administration including the system of education². The first forms of primary schools in the territory of present state of Bosnia and Herzegovina were introduced with the arrival of the Ottomans. Those were the so-called sibijan maktabs, religious schools for Muslim children, where they were taught basics of Arabic alphabet in order to learn to read Quran, the holy book. The Ottomans accepted and used Bosančica together with Arabic alphabet. The two alphabets and languages, Arabic and Bosnian, mixed and resulted in Arebica (Bosnian language written with Arabic alphabet). This alphabet was used in many Bosnian Muslim literary works, the so called alhamijado literature, which present a valuable asset of the Bosnian language and culture in general.

However, this period of development of school system must be observed from three perspectives:

¹ For more details on development of education in this period see: Bijedić, E. (ed.) (2014). *115. godina Gimnazije "Meša Selimović" u Tuzli*. Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga.

² Ibid.

a view of the development of Muslim education and training,
a view of the development of Catholic education and training, and
a view of the development of Orthodox education and training (Kasumović, 1999:
22).

In 1869, Topal Osman Pasha introduced the Law on Schools which proposed that Ottoman Turkish language be a means of instruction for all subjects except for Writing and Calculus for non-Muslim pupils. They were to be taught those two subjects in Serbo-Croatian. The primary school lasted for four years where pupils were taught basics of reading and writing and mathematics. In secondary schools foreign languages were introduced, i.e. in 1865 in Roman-Catholic schools pupils learned Latin, German and French. In madrassas (Muslim secondary schools) pupils learned Arabic, Turkish, and in Orthodox seminary pupils learned Old Slavic and Greek.

In Muslim primary schools (maktabs) pupils learned Ottoman Turkish language and Arabic alphabet, but since pupils learned by heart and without understanding they could not read and comprehend texts in Arabic or in Turkish. In secondary schools – madrassas pupils learned Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Persian. Both instructions and textbooks were in these three languages and pupils had the chance to master them. Beside these religious schools, there also existed secular secondary schools at the time – ruždija, where pupils also learned Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish in addition to history, geography, calculus and geometry.

The organized education of Bosnian Orthodox population started in the 19th century, i.e. in 1820 in Livno, and later on such schools opened in other towns and cities throughout Bosnia. There are no data on subjects and curricula taught in those schools. In 1855 the first secondary school for Bosnian Orthodox was established in Sarajevo as a need for good merchants to trade with Vienna and Trieste. The emphasis was on learning German and Italian and basics of trade with the aim to become well-equipped future merchants.

The beginnings of education of Bosnian Catholics are connected to monasteries in Fojnica, Kreševo and Kraljeva Sutjeska. Primary schools were mostly of religious character where Franciscans held the positions of teachers. There were some forms of secondary schools attended by boys who were prepared for priests and monks. Those secondary schools in time transformed into grammar schools where, in addition to their mother tongue, they were taught Italian and German.

There are very modest data about them but should be mentioned here because they add a special value to Bosnian colorfulness – the Jewish schools. The language of instruction was Spanish that Jews brought with them in the 15th century when they

were persecuted from Spain and in those schools they taught religious ceremonies and prepared future religious leaders.

4. THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PERIOD

However, with the arrival of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the education system on the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina changed and the contemporary schools and trainings are based on the foundations laid by the Austro-Hungarian administration³. The Austro-Hungarian curricula and classes were constituted in 1879. The Austro-Hungarian governance insisted on the existence of both religious and secular schools⁴.

The first private schools were introduced with the Austro-Hungarians (Papić, 1972: 41) where either German or Hungarian was used as a means of instruction. In 1880/81 they introduced the first civic schools which were attended by pupils of all religions: Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox and Jews. They had unique schedule of subjects and it did not include foreign language at the primary level of education. From 1881 German was elective subject. Foreign languages were taught at the secondary level of education and mainly German and Hungarian in teacher training colleges and Arabic in madrassas. German, Hungarian, Arabic and Turkish were taught together with Latin and Greek in grammar schools. Bosnian was means of instruction for all subjects. Pupils had the right to choose between German and Hungarian, and between Greek and Arabic.

In Sunday schools pupils learned Arabic, Church Slavic, Greek and Spanish together with religious ceremonies.

5. THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA PERIOD

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia inherited and mostly retained the Austro-Hungarian model of education⁵. Pupils age six to twelve attended primary schools where they learned to read, write and basics of mathematics, and afterwards either continued

³ For more details on development of education in this period see: Bogičević, V. (1965). *Istorijat razvitka osnovnih škola u BiH u doba turske i austrougarske uprave (1463-1918)*. Sarajevo: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika BiH.

⁴ For more details on development of education in this period see: Ćurić, H. (1965). *Školske prilike muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini 1800-1878*. Beograd: Naučno delo.

⁵ For more details on development of education in this period see: Bijedić, E. (ed.) (2014). *115. godina Gimnazije "Meša Selimović" u Tuzli*. Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga.

with vocational or grammar schools. The same curricula was instructed for all four religions in public schools and religious schools, maktabs and Sunday schools, taught religious ceremonies.

The new governance insisted on deletion of all Austro-Hungarian influence in the education system – books on the Habsburg Monarchy were evicted from libraries, and ministries insisted that secular subjects such as history and geography prevail in the teaching process. Grammar schools also developed in this period and there were three types of grammar schools: secondary schools, ordinary secondary schools and classical grammar school. The curricula in those three were different, e.g. classical languages were not taught in ordinary secondary schools, and in other two in addition to Serbo-Croatian as a mother tongue, German, French and Latin were taught as foreign languages.

6. THE SFR YUGOSLAVIA PERIOD

The primary schools in that period worked according to the curricula that were valid for a whole Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they were renovated in 1945, 1947, 1948, 1959, 1964, 1972 and 1980. Then were mostly adopted new laws on primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike at the beginning of this periods⁶.

Foreign languages were for the first time instructed at the primary level of education. Russian, German and English were instructed from the forth grade until 1959. Due to political circumstances, Russian became the first and only foreign language taught at primary and secondary level. The situation changed at the beginning of the 1980ies. Again, after the end of Cold War, geopolitical situation influenced the changes in curricula and English and somewhat less often German was again introduced to the primary level of education. In some grammar schools French was also taught.

However, the situation completely changed and Russian was taught only sporadically in rural schools. English prevailed.

⁶ Ibid.

7. THE INDEPENDENT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA PERIOD

The pre-war period of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted for a few months and during this period the complete education system was copied from the period of SFR Yugoslavia⁷.

English, and in some schools German, was taught from the fourth or fifth grade depending on a school. Russian was almost completely neglected and often teachers ended up working in libraries.

8. THE INDEPENDENT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA PERIOD POST-WAR

The education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina faced several significant changes after the Dayton agreement was signed in 1995 and war ended⁸. Very often these changes were illogical and retrograde. In order to satisfy national demands and usually enticed by national demands the curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina was deteriorated.

8.1. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The first and main reason of deterioration is the lack of ministry of education at the state level. Planning, organization and implementation of education has been lowered to the levels of entities, or cantons and even municipalities. Thus, it all resulted at uneven and scattered system of education at the state level. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for education sector but its role is more formal because the Ministry can give recommendations, suggestions, organize seminars, workshops, supervise local and international projects, but cannot impose decisions, rules and rulebooks on any level of education: pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for education in one entity but cannot force cantonal ministries of education to implement any of its rules. Their role is rather advisory. Ten cantonal

⁷ For more details on development of education in this period see: Tufekčić, A. (2003). *Školstvo na području Srebrenika*. Srebrenik: BZK "Preporod".

⁸ Ibid.

ministries of education can develop and adopt and apply their own laws on education on all four levels of education. For example, although there is the Framework Law on Higher Education at the state level, it very often is in collision with cantonal laws on higher education and even more often cantonal laws on higher education are applied rather than the State Law. The Ministry of Education of Republic of Srpska has its own law on education that is legal on the territory of Republic of Srpska. Laws on education on all these levels are very different, and thus, prevent horizontal harmonization of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, in the Republic of Srpska elementary school lasts for eight years and in some cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. the Middle Bosnian Canton. In other cantons (Sarajevo, Tuzla, etc.) elementary school lasts for nine years. Therefore, the curriculum significantly differs. Children age 6 or 7, depending on the length of primary school, enroll and must attend it because it is compulsory. Secondary schools e.g. grammar, technical and art schools last for four years and vocational schools last for three years and are not obligatory. Upon completion of secondary schools students may enroll universities that last from four to six years depending on the study program.

8.2 CURRICULUM

Curriculum, time-table, study programs and courses are not stipulated on the national level but are rather haphazardly on all levels of governance: cantonal, entity and state. For example, in the Federation of B&H textbooks are stipulated by the Pedagogical Institutes or Ministries of Education and it also varies from canton to canton and in the Republic of Srpska they are stipulated by their Ministry of Education. The same situation is applied to the issuance of certificates at both primary and secondary level of education. The form and content of certificates differ from canton to canton, from entity to entity. At the end of secondary school students take the final exams in their mother tongue, Mathematics and English. This exam is also not certified at national level but at cantonal or entity levels. Students usually receive the highest score in English at this exam.

At the university level situation is harmonized due to the Bologna Declaration and obligatory forms of Diploma and Diploma Supplement are respected.

8.3 THE TEACHING STAFF

Generally speaking, teachers of foreign language must get a university degree. In all cantons except the Canton of Sarajevo, they finish the four-year study program with obligatory language, literature, language teaching methodology, pedagogy and psychology courses and it equips them to work in primary and secondary schools. In the Canton of Sarajevo this study program lasts for five years upon which students receive their master's degree and can work in primary and secondary schools. In the Tuzla Canton K/1-4 teachers⁹ teach all subjects but English. However, in the Canton of Sarajevo K/1-4 teachers teach all subjects including English.

Teacher education programs are mostly financed by British Council or American Embassy programs or European Union funds, and very rarely by the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology. Very often the Pedagogical Institutes organize seminars and courses together with different associations of English teachers (e.g. TETA in Tuzla). Sporadically, language teachers attend courses and seminars abroad.

The Ministries of Education organize a trainee exam after a nine-month of probation work in schools which teachers must pass in order to receive a license for work. A novice has a mentor, an experienced teacher who guides them to learn profession and laws related to education sector. After this period a novice takes an exam which consists of two parts, practical part and laws and rulebooks on education and passes it in front of a three-member committee. Further, teachers who achieve significant results during their work can be promoted into mentors and advisors.

8.4 LANGUAGE LEARNING SYSTEM

There is no unique system at the national level according to which foreign language learning is introduced to children. It depends from canton to canton, entity to entity when children will start learning foreign language institutionally.

From 2000 English is taught as the first foreign language in the Tuzla Canton from the first grade (It was elective subject in the first grade until 2003 but all pupils attended it.), which was not the case in the Canton of Sarajevo until this academic 2016/17 year. However, the policy also changed in the Tuzla Canton in 2016/17 when parents of first graders were offered to choose between English and German as their

⁹ K1-4 teachers teach pupils from the first to the fourth grade.

children's first foreign language. The problem is that the issue of foreign language policy is not approached in an academic manner and it is not resolved after conducting a study analysis but rather in an elemental and amateur way. Also, children in the City of Tuzla are taught English in kindergarten and preschools since the age of three which is also elective but 99% of children attend these classes. Furthermore, German is introduced as a second foreign language at the fifth grade in the Tuzla Canton. Also, students learn both languages in all secondary schools and English at the University of Tuzla. In grammar schools students choose between French, German and Turkish and in madrassas Arabic and Turkish are obligatory for all four years. In the private school sector, courses are offered in various foreign languages, Turkish predominantly, for all age groups.

Institutional foreign language acquisition should generally be differentiated from foreign language acquisition in society. Some authors, e.g. David Crystal (1987: 368) emphasize two terms "language acquisition" and "language learning". He explains that these two terms are sometimes interchangeable but the first one is accentuated as a natural assimilation of language that happens at the unconscious level. However, he also adds that sometimes a line is drawn between the two with the distinction that acquisition is a natural process of learning, and learning is organized process supervised by a teacher.

Despite all the obstacles Bosnian students do speak English fluently. The reason should be sought outside the school system. The first reason is that parents are aware of the advantages that the knowledge of foreign languages provide and, thus, invest energy and resources in their children's mastering of foreign language, English predominantly, via private lessons, courses, and even summer language camps abroad. The second reason is the favorable atmosphere towards the USA and awareness of their dominance in all the aspects: political, economic and cultural. Both students and their parents recognize English as a *lingua franca*. However, together with geopolitical changes foreign language policy changes. Thus, nowadays there has been recorded an increase of interest in learning German.

9. CONCLUSION

Due to all obstacles in the organization of education system, students learn and are successful in foreign languages, English in the first place followed by German and Turkish. Despite all the inconsistencies in the curricula, the teaching process, the number of years of learning, the wish and the need to communicate with the rest of

the world prevail. The second reason is the turbulent history of the country and its people who contacted with different cultures and languages and have a long tradition of learning foreign languages. Furthermore, foreign language learning policy is promoted through media and labor market. Employers both from private and state sector encourage future employees to learn foreign languages regardless of their primary profession and level of education.

The representation of language learning in education systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past in some stages was determined by the domination of cultural and civilization circles, representation of certain languages in the official, everyday, educational and religious use. However, sometimes the ideological reasons were dominant. Thus, the predominance of some languages (e.g. Russian) in different periods was purely ideologically specified, as is its absence today.

This article is a small contribution to such an important topic as early foreign language education is and the author only hopes that it will contribute to upgrading the topic to the national level.

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RANO UČENJE STRANIH JEZIKA U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI – HISTORIJSKI PREGLED

Sažetak:

Ovaj rad je kratak historijski pregled učenja i podučavanja stranih jezika u Bosni i Hercegovini sa posebnim osvrtom na osnovno-školsko obrazovanje. Bosna i Hercegovina ima dugu historiju podučavanja stranih jezika. Geopolitičke promjene su utjecale na politiku učenja stranih jezika, i s tim u vezi različiti jezici su se podučavali tokom godina u formalnom obrazovanju: turski, arapski, njemački, francuski, ruski, engleski. Poslije Drugog svjetskog rata ruski je bio obavezan u osnovnim i srednjim školama, kao i na univerzitetima. U gimnazijama se engleski, njemački ili francuski podučavao kao drugi strani jezik. Međutim, jezična politika se mijenja početkom 1980-ih i učenici su imali mogućnost izbora između engleskog i njemačkog jezika. Većina učenika (čak 95%) se odlučivalo za engleski jezik. Ponovo su izvanlingvistički faktori se pokazali kao odlučujući za politiku učenja stranih jezika, te je globalni status engleskog jezika doveo do toga da postane prvi obavezni strani jezik u bosansko-hercegovačkim školama sredinom 1990-ih. Najprije se podučavao od petog razreda osnovne škole, a u srednjim školama zajedno sa njemačkim ili francuskim kao drugim stranim jezicima. Prelaskom na devetogodišnje osnovno obrazovanje 2000-ih godina engleski se podučava od prvog razreda. Učenici sada biraju između njemačkog, francuskog i turskog u petom razredu. Engleski je i prvi obavezan strani jezik u srednjim školama uz još jedan strani jezik. Također je uveden i engleski za specijalne namjene kao obavezan ili izborni predmet na univerzitetima u Bosni i Hercegovini. Organizacija države dodatno usložnjava ionako komplikovanu jezičnu politiku. Nedostatak ministarstva obrazovanja na državnom nivou je rezultirao činjenicom da dva entiteta i deset kantona reguliraju jezičnu politiku svaki na svoj način.

Ključne riječi: jezična politika, osnovno obrazovanje, engleski jezik, nastavni plan i program, obrazovni sistem, Bosna i Hercegovina

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