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# LANGUAGE CHALLENGES ON NATIONAL TELEVISION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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# CHALLENGES OF LANGUAGE IN NATIONAL TELEVISIONS IN NORTHERN MACEDONIA

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## Abstract

**Abstract Introduction:** This paper will examine the use of spoken language on National Television in North Macedonia, comparing it with the Television of the Republic of Kosovo as two multi-ethnic states emerging from the Balkan region. Additionally, a comparison will be made with television in Belgium, specifically in Brussels, one of the cities with diverse ethnicities and a member state of the European family, which remains an objective for many Balkan states. The aim of this paper is to address the use of active spoken Albanian language and its written form on national television, which has been deteriorating in recent years. The use of language, which remains a key activity of sociological, communicative, and linguistic identity of humans, and embodies anthropological characteristics and values.

**Methodology:** By presenting the level of national television in Macedonia, a comparative method will be employed to assist us in reaching conclusions and resolving the issues addressed, by comparing it with television in the Republic of Kosovo and in Belgium. Both deductive and inductive methods will be utilized in this paper, approaching linguistic norms, sociolinguistic analyses, linguistic discourses, language policies, and the educational level of journalists.

**Conclusions:** Through the comparison of rules and practices of European and Balkan media, as well as the education and training of the public and the concentration of powers, be it legislative or executive, and the interest of organizations, we conclude that there are significant differences and there is a need for a model that will bring innovation and progress to the media in North Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo.

**Keywords:** television, power, media, spoken language, language of speech, communication, language policies, information.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Written language and spoken language as key components of communication in media

Due to the lack of information regarding the exact origins of language, we cannot provide a precise description and timeline on this issue. One thing is certain, however, that the beginning

of language is closely linked to the beginning of humanity and society. Many centuries ago, written language allowed us to create a somewhat more accurate historical sequence of events (Belon, Minjo, 2003).

With the invention of the printing press, which was based on a much older discovery, paper, as an indirect way of preserving statements, a significant impact on the proliferation of information appeared. Before the printing press, communication could not rely solely on writing, but relied on signs and signals as the only means of textual expression. Later, through sounds and images, it gradually took the form of spoken language. With the emergence of the alphabet, as defined by the classical scholar Haverlock, "...the gap between word and language was bridged, separating speech from the speaker and achieving conceptual discourse. This historical turning point was made possible by the nearly three-thousand-year development of oral tradition and non-alphabetic communication, but Greek society achieved what Haverlock calls a 'new spiritual state' or an 'alphabetical mind,' which brought about a qualitative transformation of communication among people" (Castells, 2005). The fact that language remains the fundamental tool of communication leads us to think that humans have not utilized it to its full potential (Gruevski, 2011).

Here we will also mention Drvarov, known as a scholar of the art of language, who states that "Human beings are the most spiritually developed and perfected beings on the planet. Humans should be grateful to language for these deserved epithets. Only humans are capable of processing the received information, selecting it, distinguishing the necessary from the unnecessary, the useful from the futile, interpreting phenomena, and thinking for themselves and the world around them" (Drvarov, 2000). Therefore, communication is a way of expressing thoughts that leads to human development, as the ultimate anthropological form of communication.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

We have assessed that communication as a scientific discipline, is still not sufficiently studied in our country. However, in this paper, we have managed to include local, regional, and internationally recognized authors who have given special emphasis to this issue in their extensive body of work. We have also used online resources and conducted interviews with journalists, editors, media executives, regulatory authorities, as well as members of journalism associations and communication science educators. Our work has involved field research conducted locally, regionally, and throughout Europe. To address the issues related to media and the used language, which are the main topics of this study, we have cross-referenced information with publications from renowned authors in the fields of linguistics and communication science. The interviews we conducted during the period of September to January in 2019-2020, with language professors such as Avzi Mustafa, national television editors like AleksandarÇomovski, and others, as well as in Kosovo with Violeta Hyseni, former Chair of the Independent Media Commission, and university professor MilazimKrasniqi at the University of Prishtina, in

Brussels with LamfalussyCristophe, Robert Esselinkch, Habibe Duraku, and many others, have been important sources to clarify the issues of our research.

### **2.1. The status of language evaluation, as the primary means of communication in the media**

The status of language evaluation as the primary means of communication in the media in the Republic of North Macedonia and the region, in general, is concerning. Journalists face serious problems with functional reading and writing skills, as observed within the media community. Ludmil Spasov, a university professor of linguistics in Skopje, expressed his concern about the linguistic knowledge of journalism students (source: <https://24.mk/details/povekje-od-50-procenti-od-mladite-vo-makedonija-se-nepismeni>”, 2019) He emphasizes that "Students enrolled in journalism programs are not sufficiently familiar with the alphabet. We have a problem with accurately writing a sentence, word, or even a letter. They do not know how to write less frequently used letters, such as 's' and 'u' in the Cyrillic alphabet. A similar situation, according to Avzi Mustafa, a professor of Albanian language and literature, is encountered with Albanian students. They do not accurately know where to use the letters 'ë', confuse 'ç' with 'q', 'gj' with 'xh', 'y' with 'i', resulting in errors in writing and understanding words. Instead of saying 'çaj' (tea, a grammatical category noun), they say 'qaj,' which means 'cry' (verb in the present tense, first person). Instead of 'shtypi' (press, a masculine noun), they say 'shtipi,' which alludes to the city of Shtip (toponym). This also raises questions about the number of letters in the alphabet and the meaning of words. The results of the PISA tests (<https://365.com.mk/244402/objaveni-rezultatite-od-megunarodnoto-pisa-testirane-makedonija-i-kosovo-na-dnoto>, 2016) and later data (<https://iportal.mk/makedonija/oecd-gi-objavi-rezultatite-od-testiranjeto-pisa-samo-kosovo-poslabo-od-severna-makedonija/>, 2019) shows that only 24% of students in North Macedonia have achieved positive results, meaning they are able to understand what they read. The "Achievements of students remain significantly below the average of OECD countries" is concerning. These reports indicate low performance of students in reading and education in general (<https://civilmedia.mk/unitsef-ohrabruvachkite-rezultati-od-pisa-treba-da-n-motiviraat-da-gi-zabrzame-reformite-za-obrazovanieto/>, 2019). These difficulties in writing and reading will reflect on the quality of information transmitted in the media. Language errors and misunderstandings can hinder accurate content and the credibility of news. In everyday life, we send and write messages through phones, the internet (social networks, email), as well as in restaurants, and this communication represents a medium. The word "medium," which originates from Latin, is related to establishing relationships at a distance, something that mediates (Maigret, 2010), and what we write through this intermediary should have regulations (Pajaziti, 2009). The word "medium" indicates the mediator, the bridge through which the action we will be informed about is transmitted. Meanwhile, one of the characteristics of language is that it stands out as a system of rules for connecting voice, through which we convey thought and meaning (Ibid, Gruevski).

It has been said by many journalism experts that "The primary function of journalists is to communicate with human beings and express true thoughts and feelings towards them, therefore, intelligence, knowledge, higher experience, talent, and the ability to observe and judge are required from people working in this profession, specifically journalists" (Maliqi, 2006), and not only that, because "Journalism is of vital importance due to the influence it has on government policies for objectivity in information, accountability, and freedom of speech in democratic societies" (<https://www.nezavisen.mk/mk/vesti/2019/02/124934>). So then, how will we be able to distinguish censorship from freedom of speech if we are not capable of writing, reading, and understanding?

In a similar situation, we find Kosovo, where the seriousness of the problem includes reading and writing, for which initiatives have been undertaken to include the Albanian language as a subject in every academic year. Let's view this movement as a positive initiative from one perspective. Experts say that in Kosovo, there is a professional crisis, and 30-40% of students have a demonstrated interest in knowledge, while the rest have a serious problem, a "new type of illiteracy, not only in terms of struggling with letters but also in terms of lack of awareness of reality" - expresses Milazim Krasniqi. Political, social, economic, and media systems vary from country to country in terms of development level and journalistic culture, but one thing is certain: good education is a prerequisite for improving society and healthy citizenship" (Baçovska, Rajčinovska, 2016).

The professional staff and the state of the media or journalism, in general, are worse in Kosovo than ten years ago. After the war in Kosovo, Kosovar journalists went through numerous international trainings, which was quite positive in terms of media development. The media in Kosovo were noticeably better than the media in the region, where the previous system was shattered. Then, the trained teams from prestigious global television networks such as the BBC, CNN, etc., took higher positions in the hierarchy, while the operatives remained less prepared and lacking sufficient practical experience. This raises questions about the duration of training programs and the need to find a solution to this issue.

## **2.2. The spoken language in national television in North Macedonia - a comparison with the media in Kosovo and Belgium**

The differences that have emerged during the comparison of language use in the media of North Macedonia with those of the media in Kosovo - two states emerging from the Balkan cauldron with ethnic, religious, racial, and linguistic diversity - have also been evident during comparative research on Belgian media. Belgium, a part of the European family of states that both of the aforementioned countries aspire to be in, is also a country with diverse cultures and more than 150 nationalities. Meanwhile, at a professional level, the media in Kosovo do not have significant differences compared to North Macedonia, as is the case with Belgium. RTK (Radio Television of Kosovo), both legally and in its statute, is the only Albanian television in the region that has made a declared and public commitment to using the standard language in all RTK programs, but it cannot be said that it has been fully implemented. There have been

violations that have not been punished(<https://www.rtklive.com/pages/files/standardet%20profesionale.pdf>).

Meanwhile, this statute has undergone changes with the removal of norms for the standard Albanian language (<https://www.rtklive.com/sq/docs/archive/495.pdf>, 2022). Despite the high workload, RTK has three language editors for three channels in the Albanian language. When it comes to private television stations in Kosovo, not only the Geg dialect but also regional dialects are spoken, and especially in the titles of shows, we notice the Prishtina slang. The number of editors presents a problem as well, where, MTV 2, has only one editor, Radio Shkupi in the Albanian language has one editor, while the program in the Macedonian language has three editors. Special importance, according to the editor-in-chief and producer of BRUZZ TV, Robert Esselinkch, as well as for all other Flemish national television stations, is related to the linguistic and grammatical aspect. No program or information was allowed to be broadcast without the necessary corrections. For the newspaper "La Libre Belgique," respect for the language is a very important element, and the newspaper is known for its good writing in French. Despite having an electronic system, according to the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, LamfalussyCristophe, two or three levels of verification are practiced for the written media, and only one for the website, and this is still being improved in terms of the professional language framework. Unlike the Albanian media in the country and Kosovo, Flemish television has a proofreader every day, which means that Flemish media and the Flemish community in general attach great importance to language. According to the producer of the Francophone National Television - RTBF, Alexander Plexter, the Flemish have a standardized language that is respected and regulated by law, while for the Francophone part, did not create a possible space for the use of standardized French. For him, the most important element remains the objectivity of information, while language regulations are not a priority. The language rules followed by spoken language regulations are important factors for proper and fair communication. "Language is not just a neutral tool for mass communication, for the flow of information. Language can express information; it can be used as a tool to manipulate social knowledge, as a means to create order and rules of any kind in society" (Bačovska, 2000). Below, we will provide an example with some sentences in the imperative form:

Example 1: Learn from your father, don't be a fool! Learn, don't be a fool like your father!

Example 2: Hit it, don't let go! Don't hit it, let go!

Example 3: Will we eat, people? Will we eat people?

Example 4: Right, not left!

The mass cannot be said to be very familiar with this "media illness" and cannot distinguish these abuses or misinformation. But "Language is that irreplaceable instrument in media abuse; words are one of the most powerful weapons. They can be distorted, divorced from the meaning they aim to express, tend to achieve unclear meaning, and often taken out of context" (Bačovska, 2007). Meanwhile, "communication is done through the use of language as the most important characteristic of humans, which sets them apart from the rest of the animal world. A language has a vocabulary and a grammar and norms of language standards. Vocabulary is not a collection

of random vocalizations, but it is highly organized. It contains pronouns, forms of expression at different grammatical tenses (present, past, future, etc.), numbers, spatial lexicon, and many others that are used to present truth and falsehood" (Gruevski, 2011). The unsatisfactory quality of language expression has led to incorrect or completely wrong interpretations of certain terms and phenomena. In some media outlets, such as in North Macedonia and Kosovo, the terms "metrology" (the scientific discipline that deals with measurements) and "meteorology" (the discipline that deals with weather phenomena and changes) have been confused. "The airport is closed, car traffic has come to a complete halt, and there are only a few pedestrians on the streets. Metrologists announced that the new cyclone will bring..." (<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk>, 2019). In the media of both countries, many journalists confuse the term "composition/compound." The first refers to the composition of musical notes, creating a new song, while the second term, "komponim," refers to a chemical composition. "The theory of precise journalism is considered radical, futuristic, and utopian, advocating for maximum objectivity in journalistic reporting on social issues, adapting scientific methods, scientific objectivity, and scientific ideas throughout the communication process. But this theory of accurate journalism also plays a significant role in raising awareness of the need not only for an engaged journalist but also for an educated journalist" (Bačovska, 2016). Manuel Castells, who is considered one of the world's best communication and sociologists and continues to promote new ideas in many major universities worldwide, divides communication into written and audiovisual forms (based on symbols and perceptions), which reach the pinnacle of mass communication. This pinnacle is precisely the "cultural power," a standpoint that he still shares today and is the main tool of media culture in modern society (Castells, 2005). Media and language culture and education in Belgium, specifically in Brussels, are integrated into the educational system and are also regulated by the Regional Audiovisual Council, which sets the priorities. In the educational program, this topic is included as a sub-branch of Telecommunications and Audiovisuals, and students have separate classes to better understand the audiovisual program. According to Habibe Duraku, educated at all levels in Belgium, in primary school, communication or media education is included in all science teaching directions. It is similar to secondary and higher education, where almost all faculties, from medicine, economics to criminology, include this subject. According to research in a report prepared by the European Policy Initiative of the Open Society Institute... Sophia (<https://ssnm.org.mk/vesti>, 2019), North Macedonia remains towards the bottom of the media literacy index, always ahead of Kosovo. The fact that language policies for Albanians in North Macedonia have been strict, the media in NM, compared to the media in Kosovo, remain more dedicated to the standard Albanian language. As a result, "during the communist period (1945-1991), Albanians were represented in all parliaments, governments, labor organizations, public enterprises, etc. However, their representation was not adequate in accordance with the actual situation of the Albanian population in Macedonia" (Demiri, 2015). Supposedly, "in the former SFRY, minority rights were relatively well respected, especially in the media aspect, and supposedly ethnic groups had the opportunity to preserve their language and promote their

cultural heritage through the media" (Popoviç, 2003). However, there was a certain level of control even over the limited freedom provided by the former system. This is testified by Macedonian journalist and editor of RTVM, Aleksandar Chomovski, who emphasizes that there was discrimination against Albanians and they were deprived of the opportunity for self-realization and education. The political tendencies in the 1980s also aimed to reduce the use of the Albanian language in North Macedonia and promote teaching in the Macedonian language in primary and secondary schools, regardless of the ethnic affiliation of students and teachers (E-br. 174, Object "Jelak," State Archive of the Republic of North Macedonia, 1983). This goal was not fully realized, and as a result, the obstacles continued. Albanian students did not have the same study opportunities, except in pedagogical directions (E-br. 457, Object "Jelak," State Archive of the Republic of North Macedonia, 1983).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In conducting this research, we have used a mixed methodology. The applied methodology for studying texts of visual media includes a wide range of techniques used in textual analysis, ranging from traditional systematic and content analysis to stylistic, discursive, linguistic, pragmatic, ideological, and sociolinguistic analysis. In this study, we have utilized primary and secondary sources, as well as archival materials related to the methodology of linguistic analysis in mass media that transmit television programs in more than two languages. Comparative methods and content analysis have been used for the achievements, findings, and conclusions of this research.

### **4. DISCUSSION**

During this research, we analyze, express our personal opinions, provide our assessments, and present the findings and judgments of notable scientific perspectives. We determine the importance of language and speech as key components and functions in communication with the public. We emphasize the importance of the normative written language, which remains as a regulatory framework for all media, compared to the use of a dialectal language in the media. By reasoning about the past within the context of policies implemented by the former authorities, we criticize and propose solutions for the future of this social issue, which is important for the media, as they remain a significant and influential factor with the public.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The objectivity of journalists and journalism remains crucial until the transmission of the original version. However, to achieve objectivity, this entire process is accomplished through language. Therefore, language plays an important role in communication. Language and speech, as key components of communication, have grammatical and orthographic rules that are highly significant in shaping the image of communication as a community of values, criteria, and norms. Language is the art and the first element of communication. By employing a comparative method in this work, we have concluded that in addition to comprehensive education, which

should be included in educational programs, higher importance should be given to language, especially in Kosovo. The initiative to incorporate the mother tongue into the academic level is commendable. Meanwhile, in North Macedonia, it has not yet been achieved due to the existing legislative problems regarding the use of the Albanian language as an official language. I considered RTK as one of the best motives in the region because its statute had foreseen the respect for the standard of the Albanian language, serving as a model for other media. However, in 2022, when progress is needed in this regard, this paragraph was removed from the statute. In Belgium, this is regulated by law, and it is indisputable that communication as a subject or media education should be included from primary to academic level if we aim to have professional media and professional journalists, as well as an audience capable of distinguishing accurate information. Media literacy or practical communication should be compulsory subjects. This opinion is also shared by all experts in the field, in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Belgium. Journalism creates various stereotypes of expressions and terminology in order to bring about change in society, both in schools and at home. In general, we need to have a responsible attitude towards language and communication, and this is achieved through education and media literacy.

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