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THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES, IN THE FIRST PLACE INTERNET, ON "SMALL" LANGUAGES

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Abstract: In spite of the fact that they, among other things, propagate multiculturalism and multilingualism, hiding the real reasons for their existence, globalization and other prevailing contemporary tendencies, find ideal grounds in informational technologies. The development of informational technologies in a simple way and deceptively has been offering the image of all people equality. On the one hand, English language used to be the basis of all informational technology, as well as internet itself, penetrating each and every other world language, while, on the other hand, many further steps have been made, in the sense that a great deal of sites has been translated into local languages, or has started to offer a certain number of options in local languages. The paper deals with concrete cases of internet sites which have been localized, trying to estimate to what an extent they really and truly contain local languages, not anglicisms.

Keywords: informational technologies, internet, web site, localization.

With the appearance of home computers (Commodore, Atari, Spectrum) during the 70-ies of the last century, the final stage of the informational development began, known as the informational era. The development of personal computers, mobile phones, satellite communication and, finally, the Internet has brought us to the nowadays frequently used term "global

village". Such an expression should point to the fact that the insurmountable boundaries have been overcome, that we are all the same, that we all have all pieces of information and the whole knowledge available, i.e. that all people on the planet are equal.

Unfortunately, these statements are far from the truth and the factual state, material grounds being the main obstacle for the idea to come true, and it will remain so for a long time before the term "global village" becomes our reality. However, even if we neglected the real state of things, we would find ourselves before various barriers, as language, culture, religion, way of life etc. Language being listed in the first place, as the basic prerequisite for any communication, we come to the situation in which "small" languages start gradually to lose their identity.

The first and basic versions of operational systems used since the II world war to the middle of the 80-ies of the 20th century relied almost exclusively on the usage of English language. Rare attempts to use some other language were condemned to failure due to vary narrow range of users, who were in the same time trained and educated to use operational systems in English language. Small markets, high price of translation of operational system almost completely discouraged any participation is such projects.

The first personal computers being construed, the success in the application of small computers designed in such a way and the appearance of Microsoft operational system called DOS (Disc Operating System) has led to the changed informational image of the world. Computers with their relatively low prices have become available to a great number of users. Applicative programs in the first place purposed for home usage – typing, home finances, simple mathematical operations

and finally games, represent a new market of informational industry, which is only at its outset. Almost as a prophet, Bill Gates at the head of Microsoft (in the 80ies of the 20th century) realised that computers and informational technology would spread as a disease all around the world. What was neglected in any other industry, i.e. the influence of the buyer on the look and functionality of the product, was something like a direction for the development of Microsoft. Carefully listening to a buyer, i.e. a user, and in a way awarding his or her critics and pieces of advice, this firm has been accordingly designing its products. As an initially poor and lacking operational system, MS DOS has gone through more versions developing mostly through adding new user programs and recognizing new devices, which have been changing, i.e. appearing even faster. However, within the mentioned operating system very soon a basis for "localization" has been developed, i.e. the adjustment of operating system to the characteristics of a given country. At the very beginning it was possible to set date and time, according to particular geographic area, but very soon (although viewed from aside, even maybe too late for some relatively small groups of users), a possibility appeared to show and use letters characteristic for numerous alphabets, i.e. languages. In Serbian language, for example, it was possible to display characteristic Latin letters like ČĆŠĐŽ, but, on the other hand, MS DOS has never, in its initial version, i.e. versions made it possible to use Cyrillic letters on computer. Furthermore, the users have often not been able to do these adjustments, due to inefficient informational literacy and the lack of needed staff who would deal with the issue more seriously.

The fact that "localization" has not been carried out because of the above mentioned reasons has

influenced the appearance of writing of a whole set of words in a completely new way. On the one hand, the letter Š was written as S or Č as C, while the letter Ć was also written as C, leading to disappearance of the difference between the letters, i.e. the phonemes (in the case of Serbian language there are 30 graphemes and 30 phonemes), Č and Ć. In the same time, there is a large number of words which written in this way have completely different, but meaningful meaning. Consequently this can very often lead to confusions. There is another interesting phenomenon – the letter Š is written SS, Ž – ZZ, and Č and Ć as CC. This procedure of doubling letters reminds of the way it is written in Anglo-Saxon and German languages. Such a way of writing has even today remained in the usage of mobile phones in which Serbian language has lost itself in the process of "localization", but here the reasons should be searched for in a way in which mobile phones found their way to our market (most often – illegally).

TABLE

On the other hand, the situation in which there are not precisely defined standards has led to the appearance of the whole variety of ways to use the characters which are rarely or not at all used in a language as a replacement for local characters. The most well known code pages which in certain ways (most often those regarding software, rarely hardware) have overcome the insufficiencies of operational systems are Yuscii, UniChair, as well as the code pages of the magazine *Računari* and *Moj mikro* etc. The characters { }~ @ etc were used by the means of software to give on the screen or printer the suitable display of local signs, i.e. letters.

Microsoft and manufacturers of computer equipment were in a way forced to "set" standards and

form code pages (Serbian language and those similar to it use the code page marked by the number 852). The code pages have soon become accepted by certain groups of users, while a great number of users has kept to their freely defined way of display of local characters (in Serbia concretely, i.e. Yugoslavia, the code pages Yuscii, UniChair, as well as the code pages of the magazine *Računari* and *Moj mikro* etc).

Finally, with the appearance of graphical operating system Windows, more precisely the version Windows 98SE, Microsoft faced far more favourable situation and internationally defined standards (Serbian and similar languages use code page 1250). This situation has pushed aside all the remaining standards and has become dominant and final.

Having introduced some kind of order in the display of letters, Microsoft has turned to words, i.e. sentences and texts. The recent version of operating system Windows marked XP has been almost completely translated into Serbian, and there is a Cyrillic version, as well. Program package Office XP has also been translated and adjusted to Serbian language and in the same time the tools for grammar and spelling have also been built in. This very move, which was to be a step towards legalisation of software in Serbia and which was assessed as a gesture of good will by Microsoft, has failed to fulfil the expectations, mostly because the state has not introduced legislations regarding the protection of authorship rights. However, we did not have the expected success to a much greater extent due to the fact that the users have already become used to the original (English) versions.

The procedure of translation of operating systems and applicative programs has demanded the use of the existing vocabulary, but it also implied its

supplementation, which has come down to borrowing. More precisely, we are talking about a process which was long ago over, due to the lack of Serbian adequate words. Very often inadequate use of Serbian words has let to borrowing of foreign words as those much more appropriate for intercommunication man to man, man to computer and computer to man. English language, which has already been marked as a dominant at the ousted of informational technology development, once again appears as the best answer for all the above mentioned dilemmas. But here we come to a significant difference between the two periods – while in the beginning of informational era it involved very few people, today the use of computers is broadly spread, leading to much greater and more aggressive influence of English language. "Small" languages have consequently become and remained neglected.

The outstanding growth and development of informational technologies has caught many social spheres off guard and unable to adjust and accept the changes inevitably taking place in the end of the previous and the beginning of the new, 21st century. The Internet, whose history goes "far back" in informational sense, is realistically viewed, a completely new social and phenomenological phenomenon. In the basis of the Internet development lies fast technical growth, while, on the other hand, the basic idea on the exchange and availability of knowledge, which is in the basis of the world web, relies almost completely on the need for universal way of communication and understanding. If we waited for the contents which almost instantly appear on the Internet pages to be translated into another language, whey would lose their topical interest. Therefore they almost always appear in English language, which became dominant on the "net". More

constant contents which have been translated are connected by hyper links and point to similar or more detailed information, which again very often are not translated, but require English language command.

Like in a vicious circle, many owners of the most famous browsers (Google, Yahoo) always at first pages of their sites offer a large number of "localized" options, but each next step in surfing simply brings us back at the beginning – the user should have a sound English language command. Numerous commercial sites also at their first pages offer the choice of a country, i.e. a language, but after first screens, which might contain most basic information on the subject, the local language is lost by going deeply in more detailed contents.

The mentioned phenomena lead to increasingly greater need for learning English language in schooling process (throughout primary and secondary school, a sometimes even at pre-school age). This, of course is not negative. However, on the other side, we often face disinterestedness and lack of motivation for other foreign languages (German, Russian, and French) which used to be equally learnt in our schools. Furthermore, the excessive presence of English language in some parts of our country may cause aversion towards all that is English, or, to be more precise, American.

Finally, the missing segment is a fact that during informational revolution it might have been possible to make programs – translators, which would smoothly and quickly do the job of translation for us. It is a fact that there were many such attempts, but there were no results – the language versatility, its wealth and impossibility to introduce strict rules and patterns in any language, while we all know that informational technology is based on strict and precise patterns, have let to the failure of such projects. It might be that this very fact was and will be

decisive in the preservation of "small" languages, as a way and means to preserve all the features and marks of local languages, as well as the spirit of "small" nations, not allowing it to become a pattern which is to be "installed" on a computer in an automated process.

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NOTES:

[i] in order to emphasise the common grounds in the study of 'mood' and 'modality' in English and Romanian, very difficult to acknowledge in the traditional grammar of the Romanian language, this study considered the chapters on *Personal Moods* (I, pp. 358-394), *Non-personal Verbal Forms* (I, pp. 453-543) but also the chapter on *Modalization* (II, pp. 673-697) of the *Gramatica Limbii Române* (Ed. Academiei Române, Bucuresti, 2005.)
[ii] for example in F.R. Palmer, *Mood and Modality,* Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, 2001, pp. 7-11.
[iii] see *GLR I,* p. 483.
[iv] *Ibid.,* p. 359.
[v] F.R. Palmer, *op. cit.,* p. 21.
[vi] *GLR II,* p. 673.