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## By the rivers of Babylon: Multiculturalism in vivo in Vojvodina/Vajdaság

This paper contrasts the practices of interpreting and implementing official documents that regulate multilingual policies in Vojvodina (Autonomous Province of Serbia) to the experience of multilingualism in everyday situations. The issues of multilingualism on paper as opposed to everyday life are discussed within the framework of multiculturalism from a methodological perspective of social anthropology. The main topics of the research deal with minority-majority interactions. Without the ambition to systematically investigate multilingual practices, the author's aim is to point out certain ambiguities and shortcomings of regulating official language use in a multicultural setting such as Vojvodina. The general goal of the research is thus to make a link between the empirical cases of multilingual policy-making and the theoretical concept of multiculturalism.

**Key words:** multilingualism; multiculturalism; official language use; minority rights; Vojvodina.



На рекама Вавилонским ... Како ћемо певати песму Господњу на земљу туђој?  
Na rekama Vavilonskim ... Kako ćemo pevati pesmu Gospodnju na zemlji tuđoj?  
... Babilon folyói mellett ... hogyan énekeljük éneket az Úrról az idegenek földjén?  
Na brehu babilonských riek ... Akože môžeme spievať pieseň Pánovu v cudzej krajine?  
Pe malurile riurilor Babilonului ... Cum să cântăm noi cântările Domnului pe un pământ străin?  
Na vodama babilonskim ... Kako da pjevamo pjesmu Gospodnju u zemlji tuđoj?

Psalm 137 (136)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Multiculturalism in Vojvodina: heaven or hell?

Vojvodina, the northern province of Serbia, at least nominally autonomous regarding certain economic and policy-making competences, offers an interesting case study for questions of multiculturalism and discrepancy between what multilingualism is on paper and what it is in reality. A textbook example of multiculturalism in a post-socialist state, Vojvodina used to be a highly heterogeneous area in terms of ethnicities, even when it was part of Hungarian territory until the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, then during the periods of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and of Yugoslavia, and today in Serbia, when officially more than twenty national minorities live alongside Serbs in Vojvodina; the most numerous being Hungarians, Roma, Romanians, Slovaks, Croats and Rusyns<sup>2</sup> (Ilić 2001; Göncz and Vörös 2005; Bozoki 2007). Studies exploring the applicability of multicultural models to the context of Vojvodina exist (see Devic 2002), ones that take a historic viewpoint do also (see Kocsis and Hodosi 1998) or ones that take a legal perspective on the region (see Korhec 2006), alongside those that present evidence of strained ethnically framed cleavages (see Bieber and Winterhagen 2006). It is a fact that Vojvodina has seen much less explicit conflicts between ethnic groups than for instance Kosovo, the (former) Serbian province with the same status of an autonomous province within Serbia, one of the six republics of Yugoslavia. Still interethnic relations is an issue that needs to be paid special attention to and multilingual policies are one of

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 137 (By the rivers of Babylon ... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?) translated into the five official languages of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia: Serbian – Cyrillic script, Serbian – Latin script, Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian and Croatian, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Also called Carpatho-Rusyns, Ruthenians or Ukrainians. This mainly diasporic ethnic group originates from the Zakarpattia region, what is today the Ukraine, and lives in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (and also in the USA and Canada). They speak and write a dialect of the Ukrainian language.



the most important aspects of both influencing and analyzing the relationship between various ethnic groups that live within one state.

There have been very few open conflicts between members of different linguistic/ethnic groups in Vojvodina, and the political and much of the everyday discourse regarding ethnic communication has not been characterized by ethnic hatred and intolerance, on the contrary: in the public narratives, Vojvodina is many times presented as a bastion of democracy and interculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, in this paper I argue that the mechanisms for developing and sustaining multilingualism and multiculturalism are far from what is promoted in these very same discourses and that their aim is often merely to preserve the status quo of interethnic relationships. I believe that multilingualism on an everyday level exists in a much lesser extent than it is expected when reading the documents that deal with multiculturalism, language rights, minority rights etc. Here I will present certain excerpts from legal documents that regulate multilingualism and compare them to data from the ground. This paper does not have the aim of a complete analysis of any of the legal documents; it rather takes them as basis for the analysis of what happens to multilingualism *in vivo*, or how 'lived multilingualism' works. Also, given the constraints of the length of this paper, my method cannot be termed Critical Discourse Analysis in the sense Wodak and Meyer (2009) but it is rather an exploration of the content of the documents in question by contrasting them to the practices they regulate. Yet, I hope that even this limited methodology is capable of capturing the inherent controversies of the regulation and implementation of multilingualism. I chose language regulations and practices that are important for the everyday life of citizens belonging to national minorities in order to point out the ideological pretexts of an inherently multilingual social context. By referring to the banal examples of the everyday experiences of multilingualism, similarly to the manifestations of banal nationalism, i.e. the endemic manifestations of nationalism (Billig 1995), I aim to point out the discrepancies between the letter of the law and its spirit. Yet, my aim is not merely to criticize multilingual policies in particular and identity politics in Serbia in general; my purpose in pointing to the weaknesses of law enforcement is to open a debate on multiculturalism and multilingualism in general, the meaning of multiculturalism with regard to language use, its state of the art and the possible directions the concept of multilingualism can take in the future.

An important note has to be made here regarding my own position in the research I conducted. It would be naïve to think that the researcher's own position



does not affect the course and outcome of the study, especially if the kind of study is ‘anthropology at home’. I knew some of my interviewees before the research; I have undoubtedly been familiar with the location of the research and the social context; and I have even included some of my own experience in the paper. Actually the practical examples are taken from the context I am the most familiar with, the Hungarian community in Vojvodina. To a certain extent, I had a preconception about the outcomes of the research and I have been fairly subjective whilst conducting it. All of these are issues that can be very ‘dangerous’ to the research, but there is one thing that endangers its validity even more: not being aware of them. Therefore, I did not intend this paragraph to be a mere disclaimer – I have attempted to reflect on my own position throughout the entire research and analysis, even if not constantly engaging in it on a linguistic level. In addition, I strongly believe that choosing to present random individual examples is valid, not only because they are merely the tips of an iceberg, but also because individual problems give a pretext to a much broader problem of multilingualism and discussion about its possibilities and its applicability – which is also at stake in this paper.

Due to historic border changes and migrations, all countries of the world are multilingual (Annamalai 2004). Yet, even in the most liberal democratic states, there is a tendency to ignore this fact or pretend that the idealized model of one territory – one nation – one language exists (Kymlicka 1995). Conversely, multilingualism is still seen as a danger. The most common argument against multilingualism is that the allowance to use several languages on the territory of one state is a threat to the majority language and thereby the majority nation, and it jeopardizes the territorial integrity of the country. Thus monolingualism, and therefore monoculturalism, are considered an ideal state that is as such, implicitly or explicitly, taken as a norm to be aimed at.

The situation is not much different in Vojvodina, often referred to as a multicultural heaven, than what Kymlicka (1995) describes. On an official level, multiculturalism is valued and nurtured: it is stated as a principle that has traditionally been cherished in the region in the very first Article of the Statute of the Autonomous Province. Article 7 of the Statute defines multiculturalism as one of the key values of Vojvodina. The issue of language rights and official language use was brought into focus by the most recent Statute of Vojvodina and all the laws and bylaws regarding language policy, and also the recently established National Councils of the National Minorities (usually called National Minority Councils, hereafter: NMCs) in Serbia. The Statute gave some new au-



thorities to the Autonomous Province that concern language policy, while the NMCs have explicitly been authorized to deal with four competences, one of which is the regulation of official minority language use (the other three are education in mother tongue, information on native language and minority cultures).

Yet even a superficial reading of the few legal documents dealing with multilingualism brings about the problem of extensively general regulation. Not only is the Constitution general, but laws, bylaws and other regulations also fail to directly describe and regulate the situation of official language of national minorities in Serbia. To put it bluntly, the only real improvement since the times of ethnic tensions in the '90s is that today it is much easier to speak publicly about minority-related issues (Bozoki 2007), but still "Serbia has no active politics towards ethnic minorities"<sup>3</sup> (ibid: 530). Hence, I will concentrate on the following question: if not legal regulation, then what mechanisms regulate inter-ethnic linguistic communication in official settings and in what manner?

## 2. Official language use and language rights

*"The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia ... regulates that in the Republic of Serbia the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script are in official use, while the official use of other languages and scripts is regulated by law"*<sup>4</sup> (Report 2008: 3; also Oros 2007). The Statute of Vojvodina therefore regulates that other than the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script, in certain municipalities of the province the Serbian language written with Latin script is also official, and the Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian, Ruthenian and/or Croatian languages can also be used officially (Article 26). The law states that municipal authorities are obliged to initiate the introduction of a language into official use if and when the percentage of the members of the given ethnic community in its territory reaches 15 percent (Report 2008: 6). If the language of a national minority is not in official use in the territory of the entire municipality it will be introduced to official use in the local government (i.e. village or town) only when at least 25 percent of the inhabitants speak the given language (Report 2008: 7–8). Paragraph 6 of the Statute emphasizes that Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Montenegrins,

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<sup>3</sup> Quotations translated from Serbian by the author.

<sup>4</sup> From the "Report on the exercise of rights on the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina" made in 2008, hereafter: Report.



Romanians, Roma, the Bunjevac community,<sup>5</sup> Rusyns or Macedonians, as well as other smaller national communities, are equal in the exercise of their rights, thus in Češko Selo in the municipality of Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă/ Fehértemplom) the Czech language is also in official use, while in the village of Jabuka (Јабука) in the municipality of Pančevo and Dužine (Дужине) in the municipality of Bela Crkva the Macedonian language can also be used as the number of Czechs and Macedonians respectively in these three villages exceeds 25 percent.

Consequently,<sup>6</sup> with regard to the number of languages that are in official use, the most multicultural municipalities in Vojvodina are Novi Sad (Újvidék/Nový Sad/Нови Сад), Zrenjanin (Nagybecskerek/Zreňanin/Zrenianin), Kovačica (Antalfalva/Covăcița), Bačka Topola (Topolya/Bácska Topola/Бачка Тополя), Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă/Fehértemplom) and Plandište (Zichyfalva/Plandište) with the Serbian, Hungarian, Slovakian and Romanian or Rusyn languages officially used. On the other hand, in the municipalities of Inđija, Irig, Opovo, Pećinci, Ruma and Sremski Karlovci only Serbian is the official language, and in all of these except Sremski Karlovci only the Cyrillic script is officially used.

Does this mean that the inhabitants of the municipalities of Novi Sad, Zrenjanin, Kovačica, Bačka Topola, Bela Crkva and Plandište are polyglots? Hardly so. For someone who is not from this Babylonian province, it may be difficult to imagine how multilingualism works in practice. It is sometimes difficult to imagine how it does even if one lives in this, one of the most multicultural region of the world. By showing a few examples of how members of ethnicities other than Serbian experience difficulties in exercising their language rights, my aim is to show weaknesses in the concept and mechanisms of multilingualism in Vojvodina. The following paragraphs will deal with such situations.

***“The official use of the languages of national minorities is understood as the use of the languages of national minorities in legal and court cases and in***

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<sup>5</sup> *Bunjevci* are a national minority in Vojvodina, living mostly in and around the town of Subotica (Szabadka), having settled there in the 16th century from Dalmatia, Herzegovina and Lika. Even though their roots are Croatian, they often differentiate themselves from Croatians, claiming to be *Bunjevci* (similarly to the other Croatian-speaking ethnic group, *Šokci*, who arrived to Vojvodina later than *Bunjevci*). The reason for the differentiation from Croats is more often than not political, given the ethnic tensions of the post-Yugoslav era.

<sup>6</sup> In brackets I have given the name of the village or town in the languages of the national minority/minorities that are in official use (if it is different from the Serbian name).





*administrative proceedings in the languages of national minorities” (Report 2006: 9).*

Several years ago, during the parliamentary debate on official language use in Serbia, the Member of Parliament from the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians presented an interesting example to the National Assembly. Namely, an inhabitant of the town Senta (Zenta), where both Serbian (Latin and Cyrillic script) and Hungarian languages are in official use, received a court order in Hungarian, in full accordance with the law on official language use and language rights. However, the order was written in Cyrillic script, so it basically made no sense. The issue was solved by the judge who signed the court order being laid off after the presentation of the MP.<sup>7</sup> Most probably, this case was not unique, and one cannot help wonder how many similarly absurd cases have taken place without the public being informed of them.

On the other hand, one of the officially most multilingual towns presents the following case: on the door of a public institution, its name was written in all languages that are in official use in the town, except Serbian. The reason, as an employee of the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the Secretariat for Administration, Governance and National Minorities, argued,<sup>8</sup> is that while controlling the exercise of language rights of national minorities, the person in charge noticed the name of the institution written in Serbian only, and by threatening with a fine he ordered the name to be written in all languages that are in official use in the town. The institution was quick enough to take the necessary steps, and in the rush to obey the order within the given deadline, so as to avoid paying a fine, they forgot to write the name in Serbian language.

*“... the issuing of public documents and of official record keeping...”* (Report 2006: 9): As a definitely positive step toward ensuring language rights to all, regardless of ethnicity, I would like to cite my own experience. To my great surprise, in 2009, upon requesting a new ID card, the employee of the Zrenjanin (Nagybecskerek/Zreňanin/Zrenianin) office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs asked me whether I would like to have my ID in two languages, Serbian and Hungarian. I had filled out the request, as I have always done, entering my name in both Serbian and Hungarian, as it is officially written in the birth register, but without any hope that I would receive an answer to my request, because it had always been ignored - until this occasion. Finally, I did receive the document

<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation with the author.

<sup>8</sup> Personal conversation with the author.



with my name written in two languages – although Hungarian in brackets and the diacritic from the Hungarian letter ‘á’ missing. As the official explained to me, they still had not received Hungarian letters for their keyboards. It was hard to believe, and it indeed turned out to not be true. A few months later I was renewing my passport. Fully confident and aware of my rights, I filled in the form with my name in Hungarian only. I wasn’t even astonished when I received it with the data exactly as I had filled them out. When upon collecting my passport I showed my ID to identify myself, the official asked me why the diacritic from the ‘á’ was missing. I said to her what I had been told, that the office did not have Hungarian characters on their computer keyboards. “They lied to you,” she said.

The Report states that even if individuals requiring a new ID card attach a copy of their birth register, on which their name is written in a language other than Serbian, these same ID cards, until recently, were regularly issued only in the Serbian language, often in Cyrillic script (the languages of all ethnic minorities in Serbia other than Rusyns use Latin script). Officials were often arguing that this was the only legal way of issuing personal documents, that writing names in the languages of ethnic communities would be illegal, or that the installed computer systems would not make it possible and/or that they would not have the required letters on their printing machines (Report 2006: Annex).

*“The biggest under-representation of members belonging to ethnic minorities, and the lack of knowledge of languages that are spoken in the area of duty of the authorities in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is recorded at the secretariats of the Ministry of Internal Affairs”* (Report 2006: 11). The above-mentioned examples seem to prove what the Report claims. The language policy of the secretariats of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as their employment policy, does not always reflect the ethnic composition of the area in question, even though it is guaranteed in Article 77 of the Constitution. Yet these problems, especially the one regarding the under-representation of minorities in the institutions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (but basically at any workplace), are almost impossible to prove and remain at the level of suspicions and anecdotes only. One of the stories is that until recently, young people from ethnic communities other than Serbian, who wanted to devote their lives to maintaining the law and order of their country, were eventually rejected, even if they passed the psychological and physical exams for the admittance to the police forces, because they had flat feet. The Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina nominally aims at legally regulating an ethnically proportional





employment policy (Article 24). However, it remains a question both in theory and in practice whether positive discrimination based on ethnic membership is indeed in the best interest of all citizens of Vojvodina, or does it evoke the negative associations of the times when institutions were operating according to national keys and ethnic quotas. Also, given the general suspicion of non-Serbs in any government authorities, these policies have to be accompanied by a genuine political will to include minorities in the public institutions and to raise their motivation to participate in the society in this manner.

An ambiguous piece of news illustrating the above-mentioned is that twenty members of the Serbian police force have started learning basic Hungarian to communicate more effectively with the local citizenship in regions where Hungarians are in majority.<sup>9</sup> Most citizens would agree that it would be more efficient, simpler and cheaper to employ Hungarian policemen and policewomen; however, even though the head of the Novi Sad Police Department also agrees, he claims that there is unfortunately little interest in the Hungarian community to join the police, whereby he publicly calls all minorities to apply in a greater number. Whether it is a good excuse for not hiring minorities to the police, for fear that more minorities will disintegrate the force, or a valid argument, is impossible to know.

***“In the translation service, translation and interpretation are provided from Serbian to Hungarian, Croatian, Slovak, Romanian and Rusyn languages and vice versa”*** (Report 2006:9). However, “in practice it happens that during the entire procedure the minority language is used, yet, records and other acts are kept in Serbian language” (ibid.). This practice may lead to situations when in the lack of available interpreters during a court procedure the attorney himself translates the testimony of the defendant,<sup>10</sup> a practice that can hardly be assessed as objective, or one like the following: in a room there is the judge, who is of Hungarian nationality; the person fined for riding a motorcycle under the influence of alcohol, who is a schoolmate of the judge’s son, also of Hungarian nationality; and the typist who is of Serbian nationality and speaks no Hungarian. The interrogation takes place as follows: Judge to the offender: *Hány sört ittál?* (‘How many beers did you drink?’) – Offender to the judge: *Négyet.* (‘Four.’) – Judge to the typist: I dictate: “Under the influence of two beers...”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.magjarszo.com/fex.page:2011-04-13\\_Magyarul\\_tanulnak\\_a\\_szerb\\_rendorok.xhtml](http://www.magjarszo.com/fex.page:2011-04-13_Magyarul_tanulnak_a_szerb_rendorok.xhtml).

<sup>10</sup> Personal conversation with the author.

<sup>11</sup> Personal conversation with the author.



### 3. Is multilingualism worth it?

All legal acts that concern the use of languages in official settings in Vojvodina aim at ensuring collective minority rights as part of human rights. Given that preventing members of certain ethnic communities from using their mother tongue in official settings, as well as limiting their participation in social life, is an infringement of human rights, more particularly linguisticism, i.e. “ideologies, structures and practices, which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of ... language (linguistically argued racism)” (Skutnabb-Kangas 1996: 178), it is evident that the pressure to comply with international standards is great.

The incentive of joining the EU is strong enough in most post-socialist countries to avoid explicit infringement of minority rights. Most new democracies, including Serbia, have already arrived to the conclusion that providing minorities with access to participate in public life only reduces the chances of interethnic conflict (Kymlicka 2007). Minority national communities in Serbia expect that other national communities (other minorities and the majority) respect their rights – whether they are defined as human rights, minority rights or linguistic rights. It is not only a moral duty; it is worded in the Constitution: “The State guarantees special protection of national minorities with the aim of achieving complete equality and preserving their identity” (Article 14).

Thus, the obvious conclusion would be that there are no problems whatsoever with exercising language rights of minorities. Yet claims for a better legal regulation of language rights and a stricter implementation of existing laws arrive from members of minority groups day after day in various forums. As some of the examples above have shown, the letter and the spirit of the law are sometimes deeply divided, or they correspond only on paper.

The problem that all multilingual municipalities rightfully emphasize, and which the controlling authorities are also aware of, is that even if the Constitution provides for all citizens’ participation in public processes under equal conditions, regardless of nationality, there are no finances specifically allocated to translating documents, forms, or providing translation and interpretation services, etc. There can be no serious multilingualism policy without considerable financial support. From the state budget, municipalities with one official language are allocated the same amount of resources for public administration as



those that have five, not counting the salaries of translators and interpreters, printing cost for documents and forms in several languages or bilingual street names and signs – to mention only a few examples of the enjoyment of multilingualism. Until now, the Provincial Secretariat for Administration, Governance and National Minorities has distributed finances on the basis of yearly calls for proposals to the authorities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina which have official languages other than Serbian, and there has been hope with the Executive Council and with the beneficiaries of these proposals that further regulation will provide for regular finances concerning the enjoyment of language rights of citizens belonging to ethnic communities other than Serbian.

Other than the lack of financing, what I see as the main problem in language right implementation is the lack of preparation of authorities that deal with these issues – technical routines and probably even more being ready to offer ‘services’ that have not been provided before. As it is peculiar to nearly all former socialist states, sometimes informal mechanisms seem to operate better than formal systems. Even though the willingness and positive attitude of the staff of the various institutions that deal with language issues may be visibly present, one cannot rely on the good will of the employees or the informal regulations of the authorities when expecting proper law enforcement. Naturally, this positive attitude is not enough, but it means a lot if one measures the public assessment of the necessity to provide equal opportunities for all to participate in society, regardless of ethnic membership. In this respect, Vojvodina can be seen as being on the right track.

In general, the role of multilingual policies would be to eradicate the otherness between speakers of different mother tongues and to promote instead policies in which ethnic groups are not essentialized, but contextualized (McLaren 1995), as well as to endorse the fact that they are ‘different’ from each other, as opposed to ‘other’. Only then can multilingualism be understood as a resource, not as a burden that needs to be regulated. Only then will members of different ethnic groups, including the majority, see that multilingualism is worth the ‘extra work’: the translation of legal acts, the issuing of multilingual documents, of street names or the promotion of proportional employment.

There are three most important general problems that come out of my exploration of multilingualism as part of multiculturalism in Vojvodina. Firstly, most of the existing literature on multiculturalism (see Goldberg 1994; Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1995; Kymlicka 2007) discusses it in relation to Western societies.



Likewise, in the case of multilingualism Western examples are usually those that are cited. The examples of multicultural/multilingual societies, whether they affirm the concept or criticize it, are Canada, the USA, New Zealand, Sweden, Belgium, etc. The question is whether these models can be tried and tested in a historically and socially very different context. The case of Serbia, a post-socialist country with a long tradition of both ethnic tolerance and ethnic hatred, raises the question whether there is any analytical use of comparing one social context to another. Instead, I argue in this paper that an independent model of multilingualism and multiculturalism should be developed and applied with regard to the specificities of the environment. I believe that for a successful multilingual policy, instead of striving to live up to Western standards of multilingualism in drafting documents, the actual experience and need of local citizens should be taken into account.

Secondly, a novel way of promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism should be put into practice. What should be aimed at is a genuine understanding between various ethnic communities. As a tendency, it can be said that centuries of various ethnic groups living in Vojvodina have led to peaceful cohabitation of peoples, with recognition and tolerance, but at the same time “hierarchies of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minority and majority groups have appeared as a result of the politics of various elites, and various forms of discrimination disfavoring minorities have emerged” (Göncz and Vörös 2005: 188). It is a fact that Vojvodina has seen much less explicit conflicts between ethnic groups than neighboring regions. However, conflicts alongside ethnic cleavages, latent or explicit, are present despite their underreporting and sweeping under the carpet by various ethno-national elites (not only majority but also minority) with the aim of maintaining the status quo, i.e. while ideologically propagating multicultural policies and practices what is nurtured is multiculturalism understood merely descriptively: as ethnic pluralism. As few advocates of Vojvodinian multilingualism and multiculturalism see, there is much more to this concept than a situation of cultural heterogeneity, where several cultures coexist in a same geographical space; it also means an ideal of political programs that strive to achieve a better position of autochthonous or immigrant populations, and a theoretical critical category related to cultural pluralism and interculturalism when speaking about the quality of the relationship between various ethnicities living in the same location (Goldberg 1994; Feischmidt 1997; Lukšić-Hacin 1999). To put it bluntly, what I argue is that different ethnic groups live (at best) peacefully ‘next to each other’, but far from ‘with each other’, as life in Vojvodina is often described. As Bieber and Winterhagen (2006) argue, “a pattern of separate lives



has become a feature of majority-minority relations in Vojvodina” (2006: 1), which is also reflected in language use, leading to interethnic tolerance at best, but not to interethnic understanding.

Thirdly, one shall not fail to see that most of the definitions, categorizations and explorations of multilingualism and multiculturalism in different societies, still construct ethnicities to be majorities versus minorities, dominant versus subordinate. One of the main critiques of conservative multiculturalism is that it pays only lip service to equality (McLaren 1995): even if in its policies it strives for heterogeneity, this heterogeneity presupposes tolerating the different (Goldberg 1994). Tolerance presupposed paternalism, i.e. a group accepting another group, but not perceiving it as equal to itself. The existing work on multiculturalism, including both conservative and liberal conceptions of it, does not manage to, or does not aim to, deconstruct the binary oppositions between different ethnicities. In this sense, multiculturalism remains a discourse that constructs the power relations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Kymlicka 2007), and fails to achieve its most basic goal: “commitment to principles of individual freedom and equality” (ibid.). Without pointing to the inherent hierarchies in the discourses of multiculturalism and analyzing them from a critical standpoint, acknowledging “diversity in approaching diversity” (Kymlicka 1995), there will be no successful model of multilingualism in Vojvodina, or anywhere for that matter.

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### NA RIJEKAMA BABILONSKIM: MULTIKULTURALNOST *IN VIVO* U VOJVODINI

U radu se uspoređuje praksa tumačenja i provedbe službenih dokumenata koji reguliraju višejezične politike u Vojvodini (srpskoj Autonomnoj pokrajini), i iskustva s višejezičnošću u svakodnevnim situacijama. Pitanja višejezičnosti “na papiru” u usporedbi sa stvarnom praksom raspravljaju se u okviru multikulturalnosti i iz metodološke perspektive socijalne antropologije. Glavne teme istraživanja bave se odnosom manjine i većine. Bez ambicija da se sustavno istraže višejezične prakse, autorica želi naglasiti neke višeznačnosti i nedostatke vezane uz reguliranje upotrebe službenog jezika u multikulturalnoj sredini poput Vojvodine. Glavni cilj istraživanja je dovesti u vezu empirijske primjere razvoja višejezične politike i teorijski koncept multikulturalnosti.

**Ključne riječi:** višejezičnost; multikulturalnost; upotreba službenog jezika; prava manjina; Vojvodina.