

Multilingual Societies And Linguistic Variations

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate interplay of language, identity, and government, employing North Macedonia as a case study. Grounded in structuralist and post-structuralist theories, it examines the relational nature of institutions, emphasizing language's pivotal role in their construction. The study navigates the complex trajectories of language in nation-building, scrutinizing the impact of paradigms like the "one language, one culture, one nation" concept. Focusing on North Macedonia's unique language policy, it unravels the complications arising from its diverse population and delves into historical conflicts, notably the 2001 war. The research underscores the importance of cultural competency in today's globalized society and offers a historical overview of language use in North Macedonia, tracing its evolution from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The conclusion explores the government modality's implications for state unity, drawing parallels with the concept of national cultural autonomy. Emphasizing the significance of language in practicing cultural identity, it highlights the state's commitment to safeguarding national rights, particularly in language use, for maintaining a cohesive and diverse society. Ultimately, this research contributes nuanced insights into the intricate dynamics of language, identity, and government in North Macedonia, sheds light on the challenges and strategies employed in navigating these complex intersections.

Keywords: Linguistic Diversity, Language Standardization, Communication Barriers, Regional Language Education, Economic Implications

1. Introduction

Structuralist and post-structuralist theories suggest that identities are inherently relational, with communication processes constructing and influencing them. Languages play a crucial role in shaping national identities and the construction of states, such as the "one language, one culture, one nation paradigm" in countries like Switzerland, Australia, Germany, Canada, North Macedonia and the United Nations. However, experts argue that language is not the only factor in creating and advancing identities.

Language policies in countries like Turkey and Greece face significant challenges, particularly when it comes to minority languages. Some countries actively restrict and oppress these languages, while others promote them extensively. Modern states were constructed by establishing political hubs and extending their influence to marginal or peripheral areas through cultural and institutional assimilation and integration. Some governments implement assimilation policies by designating a single official language for communication throughout the nation, while others choose integration policies that allow for the coexistence of a few minority or regional languages.

North Macedonia's language policy is exceptional, based on Macedonian nationalism and the goal of establishing a state aligned with the language, nation, and state. The country is characterized as a nation-state comprising both the Macedonian nation and all its inhabitants. The Macedonian language is used by 62% of the population, while 444,026 individuals employ the Albanian language. Ethnic groups in the country include Turkish (3%), 15,509, 28,088, 4,993, and 1,795 people who speak Bosniak.ⁱ

Unresolved conflicts with neighbouring states and internal tensions around minority group rights inside Macedonia's borders are further exacerbated by these issues. After the nation gained independence, there were many manifestations of conflicts between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. The hostility was inherent in the political processes of democracy and state development, ultimately resulting in bloodshed in 2001. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) led to the establishment of a revised constitutional framework aimed at promoting the representation of minority groups. The nation underwent a redefinition, becoming a state home to both ethnic Macedonians, Albanians and other component peoples, enjoying the advantages of different means of representation and safeguarding their rights at both national and local levels.ⁱⁱ

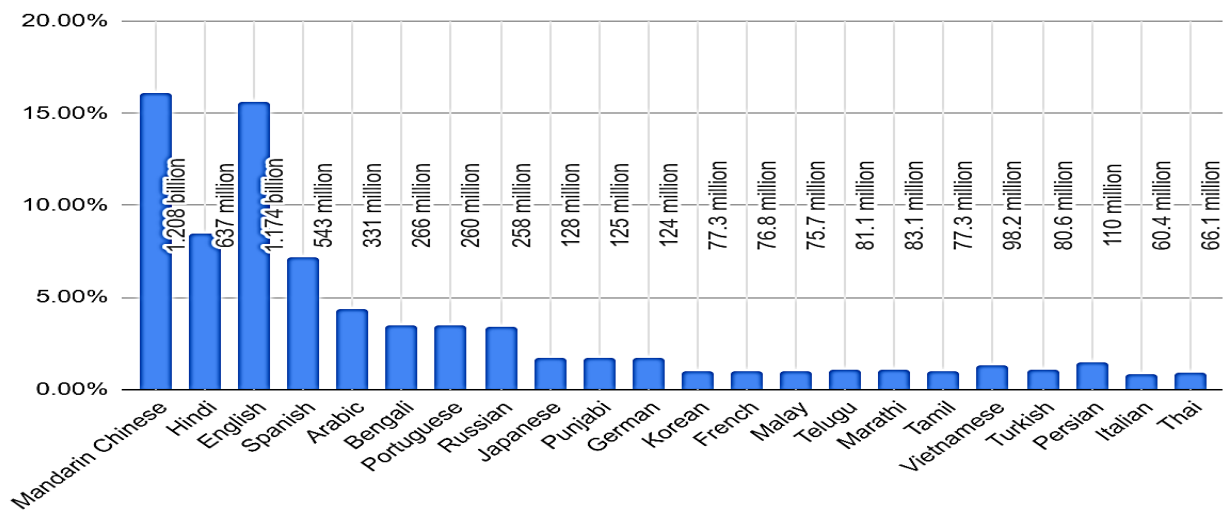
2. Awareness Of Cultural Disparities In Communication

Due to globalization, interactions with many cultures are becoming commonplace in today's society. To effectively engage with other cultures, it is essential to possess cultural awareness and cultural competency. This enables individuals to empathetically connect with cultures with distinct values, attitudes, rituals, customs, and modes of communication. In the foreign language classroom, the subjects of study include linguistics, conversational aspects, and contemporary culture and civilization, rather than only emphasizing historical eras. It is essential to contextualize all historical traditions and events concerning their current relevance. While traveling, students may find that the old literature they encounter on the cultures related to the languages they are studying may not accurately reflect the current reality. This is due to the fact that we now live in a society that is distinguished by a multitude of cultures.ⁱⁱⁱ

Within the same nation, one might encounter several civilizations. Interactions with other cultures may occur in several contexts throughout our lives, including educational settings where we may be either educators or learners, professional environments with foreign partnerships, and when we travel as tourists. Instances in which it is essential to exercise caution to mitigate or entirely evade culture shock include relocating to live in a distinct culture, pursuing employment opportunities, or enrolling as students. Gaining precise knowledge about other cultures and comprehending their distinctions might facilitate adaptation, whether for a brief or extended duration, contingent upon our sojourn. Language is a crucial component of any culture and is inseparable from the cultural practices and ideas that shape our lives.^{iv}

The link between language and culture is characterized by language being a crucial tool for accessing a society's cultural history and comprehending its social dynamics. Language is a tool for reflecting and shaping a culture and its mentality. The linguistic structure of a language plays a crucial role in shaping the perspective of its speakers on the world. Alternatively, although it may not entirely dictate their worldview, it nonetheless significantly influences and predisposes them towards adopting a particular worldview.

Figure 1



Source: "21,500 endangered languages could disappear by the end of the century." (2023, February 28). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/>

Cultures undergo evolution throughout time since they are dynamic entities that constantly engage in interaction and competition with one another. Culture experiences continuous transformation in accordance with the needs and expectations of its constituents, leading to modifications in its customs, principles, and outlooks. An evident change in cultural dynamics may be seen in the phenomena of variety, which is now held in high regard. Diversity refers to a collection of beliefs and behaviours that recognize and value the presence of different groups within an organization or community. The organization or society acknowledges and appreciates the socio-cultural differences of individuals and encourages their continued involvement in a diverse cultural setting that empowers everyone.

Multilingualism may be considered an integral aspect of multiculturalism since language is an inherent component of every given culture. According to Cutler, diversity encompasses different ways of acting and thinking and diverse learning and communication styles. Multilingualism may be conceptualized as a mode of communication and a factor that shapes cognitive frameworks and ethical principles.^v

By embracing multilingualism, we may enhance our understanding of cultural distinctions and develop empathy towards these distinctions, both in terms of language (particularly pragmatics) and values and perspectives. Individuals who possess the ability to speak many languages are aware of diverse methods of communication and the need to consider cultural contexts outside of their own. Students who already have a knowledge of the subtleties that may be present might acquire additional foreign languages much more easily if they are multilingual since multilingualism may improve their cultural awareness. In the classroom of a foreign language, the instructor may use references to widely recognized languages in order to deepen the student's grasp of the material and speed up their progression as learners.

3. Historical Overview Of Language Use And Its Protection In North Macedonia

The Socialist Republic of Macedonia was a separate federal unit from 1944 until 1991, when it declared independence from the Yugoslavian Federation. On August 2, 1944, the first assembly of ASNOM (Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia) was held at St. Prohor Pinjski Monastery, where the state of Macedonia was officially recognized and the Macedonian language was recognized as the country's official language. The Macedonian language was officially recognized as the state language of Macedonia in 1946.

In 1963, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution that confirmed Macedonia's full membership in the Yugoslav federation. Article 2 of the Constitution states that laws and general acts of federal bodies must be published in authentic texts in the languages spoken by the people of Yugoslavia, which are Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian, Slovenian, and Macedonian.

The Macedonian language maintained its position as an official language within Yugoslavia, with Article 61 stating that it shall be used in all governmental institutions, social self-government bodies, and organizations carrying out activities in the public interest. Paragraph 3 ensures that one's native tongue may be spoken in court, before other government bodies, and by organizations with public duties.

Albanians and Turks were both recognized as citizens under the Socialist Republic of Macedonia's constitution in 1974, emphasizing the socialist self-governing democratic community of working people and citizens, popular sovereignty, government power, and worker self-management. The Constitution of 2002, which established the Macedonian language as the designated official language, is still in effect and governs the usage of the official language. In accordance with the Law on the Use of Languages, the Language Implementation Agency was formed. Its objective is to protect the use of the official language and alphabet of the nation, which at least 20% of the population speaks. According to the Law on the Usage of Languages' Article 1, Paragraph 3, Article 2, Paragraph 3, and Article 18, Paragraph 8, the agency is in charge of standardizing and enforcing

uniform usage of the language. The Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia conducts a public selection procedure to designate the agency director, who then serves a 4-year term and may be re-elected. The Agency's mandate under the Language Utilization Act (2019) is to provide translation and editing services to help institutions comply with the law's provisions, as well as to review all acts before they are published in the Official Gazette. The agency also promotes the language that at least 20% of the population speaks by advocating for and enacting efforts to do so. It also supplies the government with professional analytical materials and writes reports detailing how its duties are being carried out.

The Agency provides expert opinions on matters related to the achievement of the objectives set out in this Law (Art. 19), including the use of materials in the process of implementing and promoting the use of the language spoken by at least 20% of the population. The Inspectorate for the Use of Languages is a government agency set up to monitor the correct application of linguistic regulations. The Law on the Use of Languages Inspectorate (2019) was passed to provide for this purpose. The director's appointment, tenure in office, duties, operational processes, and other structural and procedural needs for the institution's smooth operation are all spelled out in this statute. To guarantee that the linguistic requirements of this law are carried out in a comprehensive and consistent manner, the Ministry of Justice establishes an Inspectorate for the use of languages. A distinct statute that outlines the Inspectorate on Language Use's guiding principles, areas of expertise, organizational structure, and inspection procedures controls it. As the highest governing entity, the government has a responsibility to promote Macedonian and Albanian, the country's two official languages.

4. State unity and the preservation of communities'

There is no mention of a federal system in the Constitution of North Macedonia. Since its independence, the country has been governed as a unified whole, with one central authority responsible for all matters. The policies, regulations, and methods used to ensure equal rights, human rights, and the promotion and preservation of cultural identities bear some resemblance to a "national cultural autonomy" (NCA) model of governance, also called non-territorial autonomy (NTA) in contemporary literacies, if we accept that this unitary state contains multiple nationalities within its borders and is structured to maintain its unity and identity as a multinational state. The NCA has its origins in the Habsburg Empire, when Austrian socialists worked to make the Dual Monarchy less of a patchwork of competing cultures and more of a democratic federation of people. The major goal of this idea was to keep the Empire together while enabling different cultural groups to operate as autonomous entities within a multinational state. The resultant recommendation is the formation of collective organizations called autonomous firms under a management system in which all participating communities are given legal authority. Personality is fundamental to NCA because it establishes the basis for the legal relationship between an individual and a certain public autonomous entity. This bond is built on the basis of shared traits rather than shared geography. Communities in North Macedonia are unable to participate collectively since there are no independent firms accessible. Instead, there are procedures in place for dividing up the authority. Communities everywhere throughout the region have become more integrated. Some cultural rights, such as the right to speak one's native language, remain contingent upon geographical location and population size.^{vi}

According to Lytra (2016), there are two different perspectives on language and nationality. According to the essentialist view, persons and communities are assigned fixed and distinct categories based on their language and ethnicity via their interactions with others. On the other hand, the constructionist view sees both language and ethnic identity as results of historical, contextual, social, and discursive processes in communication established via connections and agreements. By strictly following the liberal ideals of nation-building, Albanians in North Macedonia and other ethnic minorities may protect their culture and language.^{vii}

We can see that NCA may have some bearing on the situation in North Macedonia if we look at how other scholars, such as Porter (2003), have portrayed NCA. These factors are related to the case of preserving state cohesion above protecting ethnic groups' unique cultures and traditions. Porter (2003) goes above and beyond the existing body of research by proposing five principles that, with some tweaks, provide a workable answer to the problems connected with protecting minority rights. This is especially important when thinking about ethnic groups, which are statistically small relative to the overall population. This analysis focuses on Porter's (2003) first three points of clarification. In accordance with the first tenet, the minority must guarantee the majority that it will not secede.

Second, the nation-state must acknowledge the national minority's right to maintain its own cultural identity.

Thirdly, a state must openly recognize the minority's right to practice its own culture without interference and pledge to protect the minority from prejudice. Guaranteeing the state's unity and calming fears of secession, the OFA (Articles 1.2 and 3 of the OFA) and later legislative provisions included mechanisms that restrict geographical separation.

The North Macedonian Constitution guarantees citizens the freedom to form associations and maintain their unique cultural identities, including the right to establish groups and political parties. Article 48 ensures that each group's unique ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious characteristics remain intact. The law in North Macedonia protects the right of specific ethnic groups to speak their native tongue, as language plays a crucial role in forming individual and communal identities. Porter's third principle addresses anti-discrimination tools found in other legal documents, such as freedom of association, access to education, and employment.^{viii} However, there is not enough detail in Porter's plan for making a public pledge of allegiance, as these assertions are implicitly made through the process of attaining citizenship. The idea of a social compact, which emerged during the Age of Enlightenment, suggests that citizens knowingly or unknowingly cede some liberties to the state in return for the security of their remaining liberties.

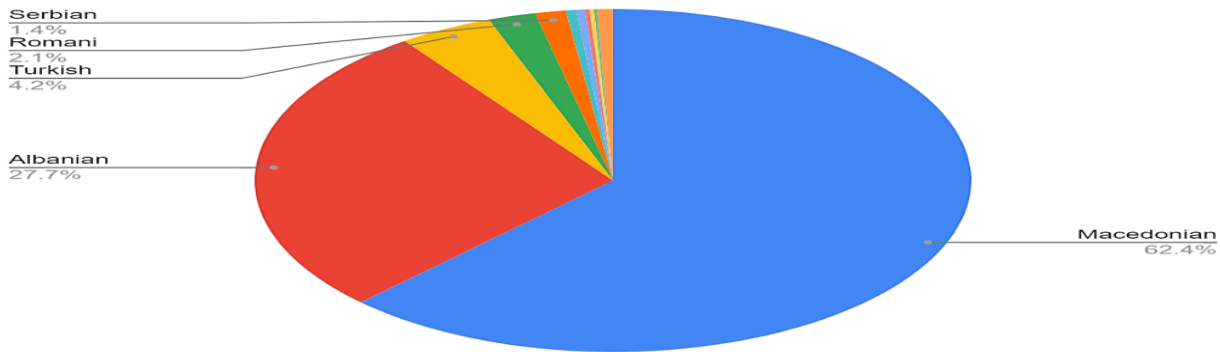


Figure 2

Source: 2021 Census of North Macedonia. The census was conducted by the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia and it surveyed a total of 1,836,713 people.

The majority language, Macedonian, spoken by 56.7% of the population, and the second most spoken language, Albanian, at 25.3%, exemplify the linguistic diversity addressed in the study. The significant presence of these languages underscores the relevance of language in shaping identities and reflects the intricate interplay of cultures within the nation.

The challenges outlined in the legal and historical context of North Macedonia find resonance in the disparities among languages presented in the data. The need for language protection, reflected in the establishment of language agencies and inspectorates, is justified by the diverse linguistic landscape evident in our data. The percentages of speakers for each language represent not just numerical figures but voices seeking recognition and protection within the state framework.^{ix}

Moreover, the discussion on state unity and the preservation of communities aligns with the data. The percentages attributed to various languages highlight the presence of distinct ethnic communities, each contributing to the cultural tapestry of North Macedonia. The absence of a federal system, as mentioned in the research, adds a layer of complexity to managing linguistic and cultural diversity within a unified state, a challenge mirrored in the distribution of languages.

In summary, the data provided becomes a tangible manifestation of the intricate dynamics explored in the research. It illustrates the real-world implications of linguistic policies, cultural awareness, and the endeavour to balance unity with the preservation of diverse identities in North Macedonia.

5. A Tapestry Of Multicultural Expression

Approximately 40% of the population of North Macedonia speaks Albanian, which is recognized as the country's second official language. The most significant ethnic group in North Macedonia is the Albanians, who speak Albanian as their primary language. The Albanian language has an extensive and culturally significant history, spanning more than 2,500 years.^x This language belongs to the Indo-European language family and has linguistic connections with the Greek, Armenian, and Indo-Aryan languages. Albanian is a very heterogeneous language, characterized by a multitude of dialects. The primary variants of the Albanian language are Gheg, Tosk, and Lab. Gheg is the predominant language spoken in the northern regions of Albania and Kosovo, whereas Tosk is the primary language spoken in the southern parts of Albania and North Macedonia. Additionally, Lab is

the language spoken in the eastern areas of Albania. The Albanian language has significant significance in the cultural identity of the Albanians residing in North Macedonia. It finds application in the fields of education, media, and governance. Albanian is also used at several religious and cultural establishments. Additional ethnic groups and a wide range of language variations North Macedonia is home to other ethnic groups, such as Turks, Bosnians, and Roma, in addition to Albanians. The presence of several ethnic groups in North Macedonia is characterized by their own languages and cultures, hence enriching the linguistic variety of the region. Turks are the second-largest ethnic minority in North Macedonia, with around 7% of the total population. Turkish is a member of the Turkic language family and has linguistic similarities with Azerbaijani, Kazakh, and Uzbek. Bosnians constitute around 3% of the population of North Macedonia, making them the third-largest ethnic minority. Bosnian is a member of the Slavic language family and has linguistic similarities with Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin.

The Roma community in North Macedonia is around 2% of the total population, making them the fourth-largest ethnic minority group. Romani is an Indo-Aryan language that has linguistic connections with Hindi, Sanskrit, and Punjabi. The presence of a variety of languages in a society that is composed of many linguistic groups North Macedonia is a linguistically diverse community, with its population speaking more than 20 languages. The linguistic variety of North Macedonia is a manifestation of its rich and intricate past. Throughout the years, North Macedonia has harboured a multitude of diverse peoples and civilizations, which is seen in the array of languages spoken in the region.^{xi}

The North Macedonian government acknowledges the significance of linguistic variety and has implemented measures to preserve and advance the languages spoken within the nation. As an example, the Constitution of North Macedonia explicitly ensures that all people have the freedom to express themselves and acquire knowledge in their native language. The government furthermore provides backing for the creation of educational resources in diverse languages, and it allocates cash towards initiatives aimed at encouraging the utilization of minority languages in both media and government settings. The abundant linguistic variety in North Macedonia is a valuable advantage. It serves as a wellspring of cultural abundance and energy, and it plays a role in shaping the country's distinct character.^{xii}

6. Conclusion

Ultimately, this thorough investigation of language, identity, and government in North Macedonia sheds light on the complex factors influencing the nation's sociopolitical environment. The study highlights the inherent interconnectedness of identities, stressing the crucial role that language plays in shaping them. An analysis of language laws, historical conflicts, and the specific situation in North Macedonia demonstrates the need for careful management when dealing with multiple linguistic and cultural environments within a single country.

The research highlights the significance of cultural competence in our interconnected world, underscoring the need for nuanced comprehension in many environments, ranging from educational institutions to international diplomacy. The historical overview chronicles the development of language policy from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the present, offering significant insights into the nation's linguistic progression.

The study highlights the unique language policy of North Macedonia, which is dedicated to promoting a state that reflects the various linguistic, national, and ethnic makeups of its inhabitants. The instance of North Macedonia demonstrates a governance model that, while not officially federal, has aspects similar to national cultural autonomy. This model emphasizes the unity of the state while still protecting the rights and identities of different people.

The state's dedication to defending minority rights, especially in the context of language usage, demonstrates its desire to maintain a cohesive and diverse society. The research confirms that North Macedonia's approach offers a sophisticated framework for managing the complex connections between language, identity, and government in a multicultural setting, recognizing the importance of language in preserving culture.

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