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BELLS INTERVIEW: RANKO BUGARSKI

LINGUISTICS AS A SCIENCE OF MAN

by Katarina Rasulić

BELLS: Your academic career as a linguist is truly impressive, not only in terms of its duration and the number of your influential publications, but also in terms of the range of linguistic and interdisciplinary fields in which you have been active. These include English linguistics, general linguistics, contrastive linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, language policy and planning, language in relation to identity, culture, ethnicity and nationalism, written language and literacy, political manipulations of language, terminology and bibliography, history of linguistics – and the list is not exhaustive. In retrospect, what do you see as the main driving force in the development of your scholarly interests in the study of language?

BUGARSKI: In the endeavours listed I was basically driven by my early acquired and continuing fascination with language in its many and diverse aspects. As a linguist I am naturally committed to my profession, but I often feel – if I may put it this way – that language is even more wonderful than linguistics. It is this sense that has taken me from one facet of language to another, and correspondingly from one of the linguistic subdisciplines to the next. This constant urge, however, has been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, given such a broad range of interests my scholarly contributions, whatever merit they may have, have necessarily remained more restricted in impact than they might have been had I from the start focused on a few selected fields and delved far deeper into them, which

is what most properly trained linguists do. But my linguistic training was anything but proper. I studied English language and literature and German language and literature as one of the first generation of students enrolled in the newly opened Faculty of Philosophy in my hometown, Sarajevo, in l951, and graduated with full marks practically without ever hearing of linguistics. There were courses in the phonetics, grammar and history of these languages, to be sure, but no introductory linguistics course of the kind that would now be taken for granted in most universities. However, towards the end of my studies I found a copy of Sapir's *Language* of 1921 in the poorly equipped departmental library; I still wonder how it ever got there, but it certainly played a part in my later decision to focus on linguistics (my first publications had been in the field of literary studies).

Actually, it was only after I moved to Belgrade as a newly appointed assistant lecturer in the Department of English in 1961, at the not-so-young age of 28, that I properly discovered linguistics, but thereafter I enthusiastically embraced it, greatly aided by a scholarship that soon took me to University College London, with Professor Randolph Quirk and other well-known linguists, and with libraries in which I eagerly went through the main linguistics journals in a ferocious attempt to make up for lost time. This is where I started work on my PhD dissertation – and finally became a linguist in the process. Yet on the other hand, while I might have achieved more had I controlled my interests and narrowed down the scope of my research, I don't regret having spread myself over the whole range you indicated, as it simply gave me satisfaction to take a keen look "here, there and everywhere".

BELLS: In your book *Language and Identity* (Bugarski 2010) you describe how you grew up virtually bilingual, acquiring English as "the second family language". What was that experience like and what role has the English language played in the formation of your identity?

BUGARSKI: It's no exaggeration to say that this experience was a vital one in my formative years. I am convinced that early bilingualism is one of the best things that can happen to anyone, for several very good reasons related to cognitive development, outlook on life, tolerance of differences, range of choices available when considering one's future profession, etc. It is sometimes said that science begins with comparison: if only a single species of tree existed, or only one kind of crystal, there could be no botany

or crystallography as we know them, since science implies generalizations made by comparing different items of a relevant class for similarity and difference, and one can't usefully generalize over a single item. Similarly with language: I believe that monoglot individuals, constrained by their single mother tongue, are hardly equipped to appreciate to any significant degree the wonders and splendours of human language. Correspondingly, the history of linguistics teaches us that, with all the glories of the great individual languages of ancient civilizations and the early landmarks of their separate descriptive and normative studies, no general linguistics was possible before the knowledge of scores of genetically and typologically different languages across the world had accumulated sufficiently in the post-Renaissance period to give rise to nineteenth-century comparative linguistics.

And as to my own identity, I have been most grateful for the circumstances which have allowed me to enrich it with an additional language, an added bonus being that this was English, then on its way to becoming the leading world language. But more generally, it is a mainstay of European cultural history, dating back to late eighteenth century Romanticism and the related rise of nationalism, that the mother tongue of a person or nation is an exclusive sanctity which must be preserved by all means in the face of competing alien tongues. Strong echoes of this long outdated view reverberate even today in educational circles, where it is frequently claimed that learning a second language should be put off until the precious mother tongue as the principal safeguard of identity has been "stabilized" enough to be able to resist the allegedly harmful intrusions of the other language. In sharp contrast to this singular mother-tongue myth, I have always considered my linguistic identity to consist precisely of all the languages and scripts that I have some knowledge of: no doubt a minority view, but one which I hold to be the only reasonable one in this day and age.

BELLS: Which (three) linguists have influenced your work the most and in what ways?

BUGARSKI: This is a difficult question for somebody who is to a signficant degree a self-made linguist and has never been a member of any particular school of thought or convinced follower of a leading luminary. However, I have been influenced in my work by a considerable number of linguists

of a variety of shades. My greatest debt I owe to Randolph Quirk, my first mentor, for his guidance in the early stages of work on my dissertation and friendly encouragement later on. As I write I recall how much his support meant to me in connection with my first major article. In 1967, while spending a year at Columbia University in New York, I sent him a draft of a long paper on the interrelatedness of grammar and lexis in the structure of English, asking for his opinion. His anxiously awaited verdict began with these words: "I haven't had the time to read the whole article, but I've seen enough of it to be convinced that it must be printed". What sweet music to my ears! The paper was indeed published the following year in *Lingua*, Amsterdam, an international journal of high repute (Bugarski 1968) – and I have preserved this letter from London to this day...

And having mentioned Columbia, I think it proper to add at least two names from there. One is Uriel Weinreich, a pioneer of contact linguistics and noted lexicographer and semanticist, whose work and personality I admired, but who unfortunately died at the age of forty, in the middle of a course on semantics which I was attending. The other is William Labov, a founder of sociolinguistics, whose ground-breaking studies of the speech of New York City and of Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, had done much to inspire my interest in the links between language and society. There is also Noam Chomsky, whose revolutionary studies of the syntactic structures of natural languages and of the relationship between language and mind opened up new vistas for me, vitally enriching my English syntax courses here as well, though after a while I found the rigid formalism too demanding for me to follow. I even came to challenge one of Chomsky's fundamental claims by arguing that his generative grammar was an offshoot of structural linguistics rather than a replacement for it – and did so long before it became fashionable in some theoretical circles to be anti-Chomsky: at the Copenhagen meeting of the European Linguistic Society in 1981 (Bugarski 1982). Nevertheless, I gained a great deal from Chomsky's powerful ideas even while questioning some of them. I could of course go on in this vein, but I must stop here, having already exceeded my allowance of three names!

BELLS: Your recent book on Serbian lexical blends (Bugarski 2013) opens with a prologue in which you reflect on one sentence from your student essay written long ago – "Over the entrance

to the shop, pink neon spelt BEAUTILITY". What makes this sentence special in your life as a linguist?

BUGARSKI: Ah, yes – that's a nice little story. The sentence you quote is from an essay I wrote on 8 October 1962 for Professor Quirk's class, entitled "An afternoon in Oxford Street: Reflections of a linguistically-minded foreign visitor", where I jotted down various items of what would today be called the linguistic landscape of that street and commented on them. The advertisement caught my physical eye at the time as worthy of attention, but I saw it again in my mind's eye no less than half a century later, while I was finishing the book you referred to. So what is so special about it? Well, I sensed in it an almost uncanny symbolic power, in that it seemed to overarch and condense half a century of my grappling with the mystery of language in some of its widely different manifestations. Namely, by sheer accident (or maybe not quite so?) its very first word is *over*, which was subsequently to become my favourite item in the system of English prepositions covering vertical orientation in space, the subject of my dissertation. While at its very end (once again, how accidentally?) we see the light of a blend, *beautility* – and a few decades later blends would constitute the main topic of my investigations of the contemporary Serbian lexicon. All this is contained in the sentence with maximum economy, and furthermore in the correct chronology of my preoccupations: first English, linguistic theory and prepositions, then Serbian, sociolinguistics and blends. In this way substantial segments of my long career of linguistic research have been symbolically copied into a short and banal English sentence, which simply says that at the entrance to a shop there is a rosy neon advertisement for a certain cosmetic product which combines beauty with utility! Small wonder I got hooked on blending...

BELLS: As Professor of English Linguistics and General Linguistics (and one of the founders of the Department of General Linguistics at the Faculty of Philology, University in Belgrade in 1988), how do you see the relationship between the two today? Is the field of general linguistics Anglo-centered?

BUGARSKI: To begin with, for me English linguistics has always meant 'the linguistics of English', i.e. the application of the concepts and research methods of general linguistics to the study of this particular language, whereas general linguistics implies empirically valid generalizations about

the essential properties of human language, linguistic structure and change, language functions, etc., based on the investigation of many genetically and typologically diverse languages, often – or nowadays perhaps even mostly – including English. So the two are naturally interlinked; that is why, for example, my own courses in the structure of English have from the start been designed as introductions to English linguistics, with a liberal amount of general linguistics being taught through the lens of English.

Now as regards "Anglo-centered", in the sense of being largely occupied by scholars from English-speaking countries, I would say yes, to some extent, but less so than in the second half of the twentieth century, when Chomskian linguistic theory ruled the scene. Thereafter we witness more diversity and variation, owing especially to the Internet and related technologies which make it much easier for voices from any corner of the earth to be readily heard; in other words, general linguistics has become more international. But I would add that it is definitely and increasingly English-centered, referring to the language of linguistic publications across the world, as it has already become imperative for authors seeking an international audience to publish in English, even as against such formerly leading languages of science as German, French or Russian – to say nothing of the multitude of smaller national languages, in this respect mainly reduced to domestic consumption. Many linguists outside the English-speaking orbit find this state of affairs regrettable, and with good reason. Yet one positive aspect of the worldwide dominance of English is that it forces previously reluctant nationally-minded scholars into more than a nodding acquaintance with this language if they wish to make their research known to the world beyond the confines of their nations.

BELLS: What is your stance with regard to the general distinction between formal and functional approaches to language study (cf. e.g. Newmeyer 1998, *Language Form and Language Function*)? Is the distinction appropriate, can the two approaches be reconciled, which perspective do you advocate and why?

BUGARSKI: Briefly, the formalist approach rests on the claim that linguistic form can and should be characterized independently of meaning and function, as against the functionalist approach, which takes the position that considerations of meaning and function can be influential in shaping

linguistic form. But both these approaches come in several different versions, so that they are highly general orientations rather than specific tightly knit theories. In the book you cite, Newmeyer, himself a convinced generativist and formalist, points out that their proponents have tended to cluster in mutually antagonistic camps and mainly work in disregard of each other. After a thorough analysis he concludes that their respective arguments are not necessarily in contradiction, so that a unification of the two basic positions is both possible and desirable. As for me, I have – as already noted – given up following the intricacies of generative grammatical theory and thus cannot be the judge of the respective virtues or vices of the two positions: this simply isn't my cup of tea. All I can say is that, speaking quite generally, as a non-formalist I find the opposed view more to my taste, especially as in my own work I have always relied heavily on both the meaning and function of linguistic items and structures.

BELLS: Over the past three decades, one of the most rapidly expanding linguistic paradigms has been Cognitive Linguistics. Your work on English prepositions from the late 1960s (Bugarski 1968, 1969, 1973) was in many ways a visionary anticipation of the subsequent cognitive-linguistic turn, highlighting the general principle of gradience in language and the interrelatedness of grammar, lexis and semantics. How so and how do you see this aspect of your work today?

BUGARSKI: First off, I seem to be by temperament a "gradient" kind of person: in linguistics as in life, I have as a rule tended to reject "either/or" options in favour of "both/and" ones, preferring expressions like *some*, *more or less* to *all or none* and recognizing continuities, shades and fuzziness where many theoreticians would posit sharp divisions and rigid boundaries. This inclination informed the work you refer to, at a time well before such considerations were built into the foundations of cognitive linguistics. Which, as you imply, and as several other observers have noted, would make me a cognitivist *avant la lettre*. While such a status may fill me with a moderate amount of pride, the feeling is somewhat overshadowed by the unfortunate fact that some of my relevant research, including the dissertation itself, was published in Serbo-Croatian, therefore reaching only a highly limited audience. I had in fact contacted Longman on Professor Quirk's suggestion, but they found the text too technical for a commercial

publisher. Later on I had another opportunity to publish an English version of the book: in 1972, at the Bologna International Congress of Linguists, I talked to the editor of a reputable North-Holland book series, who made me such an offer right away. I said I would consider it, but this consideration took much longer than expected, as I was busy finishing my book *Language and Linguistics* (Bugarski 1972), which was to win the highly regarded Nolit prize for that year. The publicity surrounding that event, coupled with the publication of my selection of Chomsky's writings that same year, kept me away from other projects for quite a while – long enough for me to quietly forget about the possibility. In subsequent years my interests went in other directions, and I never came back to my beloved prepositions. So that was it, and I have only myself to blame for missing a good chance. But how was I to know at the time that my work would be relevant to a new and influential paradigm that took shape a dozen or so years later? And in response to the last part of your question, all I can say is that I now regard this aspect of my work with not a little nostalgia...

BELLS: Your work unites theoretical and applied linguistics in many different ways, whereby you interpret "applied linguistics" as "linguistics applied". What is the essence of the shift of perspective in the conception of "linguistics applied"?

BUGARSKI: Up until the mid-twentieth century, the phrase "applied linguistics", especially in English and French usage, was normally understood to refer to foreign language teaching, and in some versions also to machine translation. But the decades that followed gradually brought with them the realization that this was far too narrow, that linguistics had much to offer (in terms of insights, basic concepts, terminology and methodology) to a wide variety of areas beyond these two. So there occurred a major shift of focus, or paradigm change if you like, from seeing applied linguistics as a restricted branch of linguistics to regarding it as an approach to linguistics as a whole, spreading itself outward to meet a whole range of language-related problems in human societies; this is what I attempted to capture with my reversal of the two words in the discipline's name (see esp. Bugarski 1987). While certain theoretical and methodological problems remain, it is safe to say that this broader and more productive interpretation of applied linguistics, to which numerous scholars and practitioners across the world have contributed, has become widely accepted.

BELLS: In the 1970s and 1980s you were especially dedicated to defining and organizing applied linguistics as an academic discipline in Yugoslavia and internationally. What was that experience like and how do you see the regional and global development in that field today?

BUGARSKI: That experience was challenging but also highly rewarding. I remember those years as a time of fervent activity – organising the first congress of applied linguistics in Yugoslavia, coordinating the work of the scientific commissions of AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics), preparing and attending AILA's world congresses, editing national and international publications in the field, etc. I had a strong sense of participating in a truly worthwhile endeavour which united dedicated individuals and groups from many countries. My AILA engagements ended in 1990, and a year later, with the breakup of Yugoslavia, my role in domestic developments followed suit, to be revived in Serbia only occasionally and briefly. There are now regional associations in several of the post-Yugoslav states, but I have only scant information on their activities. AILA, on the other hand, seems to be flourishing, and applied linguistics as a field of research and action on a global scale has more than achieved its long-sought universal affirmation.

BELLS: An important aspect of your work concerns mediating knowledge between the international and Yugoslav linguistic communities. Specifically, as translator and editor, in the 1970s and 1980s, you acquainted the Yugoslav public with the works of Noam Chomsky, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, and with the basic tenets of some important linguistic disciplines, such as transformational-generative grammar, sociolinguistics or psycholinguistics. What was this experience like? Given the global spread of the English language and the availability of information through the Internet, how important is this kind of mediating work today? Is enough attention paid to the development of linguistic terminology in Serbian?

BUGARSKI: This too was an experience I cherished. I just felt it was up to me, given the knowledge of linguistics that I had acquired and a missionary fervour of sorts, to help in acquainting the Yugoslav public with some major

modern figures, ideas and developments out there, on the great linguistic scene. It wasn't an easy task, though, especially in the case of Chomsky and TG grammar, because of the novelty and unfamiliarity of the field, the technical apparatus employed, and the utter lack of corresponding Serbo-Croatian terminology. But I never for a moment regretted the effort it all took; on the contrary, I was satisfied that I was doing something of value to many scholars, students and other interested readers in my country. Now about the global spread of English and the Internet, of course you are right in suggesting that mediating work – of this and perhaps any other kind – has in this day and age lost much of its former significance. Much, but not all, I would say: we still need translations, explanations and interpretations of academic works, not only in order to advance what is usually called the national culture but also in the service of disseminating reliable expert knowledge, which is not always easily found by taking Internet shortcuts. And lastly, as just intimated, Serbian linguistic terminology is still underdeveloped, particularly in the more technical areas of modern language study, so that such mediation remains useful.

BELLS: Your role as mediator between the international and Yugoslav communities goes in the other direction as well. Specifically, you have kept the international linguistic community informed about the changing language situation in the former Yugoslavia and its successor states, with a special focus on the politically-determined dissolution of the Serbo-Croatian language, as evident in the two volumes you co-edited with Celia Hawkesworth (Bugarski and Hawkesworth 1992, 2004), published by the leading American publisher devoted to Slavic studies. Thereby, you advocate a conception of Serbo-Croatian as a polycentric standard language, linguistically one but politically dissolved into different national languages. What are the main arguments for this conception?

BUGARSKI: As is well known in sociolinguistics, a polycentric standard language is one that is standardised in two or more centres, so as to fill the specific needs of the different nations using it. The resulting forms of the language, usually called its standard variants, necessarily exhibit certain peculiarities but these are not sufficient to make them distinct languages. The phenomenon is quite common, as all the widespread languages tend

to develop variants (such as British, American, Australian etc. English, European and Canadian French, European and Brazilian Portuguese, German in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and so on). The main argument proving that these variants are not different languages from a linguistic point of view is easy communication among their speakers. In the case of standard Serbo-Croatian there was full mutual understanding among its variants, and this remains true even after its recent dissolution, for political reasons and by administrative means, into its officially recognized national heirs: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin – despite all the linguistic engineering with the aim of making them as different as possible. I have therefore advocated the view that Serbo-Croatian is linguistically still one language (though with several variants), even if it is politically a group of separately named languages.

BELLS: In your sociolinguistic considerations of English as a global language, you drew some comparisons to Serbo-Croatian, in terms of the centripetal and centrifugal forces regulating unity and diversity. How does English compare to Serbo-Croatian in this respect?

BUGARSKI: As just observed, both English and Serbo-Croatian belong to the class of polycentric standard languages. However, as your question correctly implies, there are differences between them in the way their polycentricity is manifested, caused by various historical, political and social psychological factors. In both cases we may envisage an overarching entity covering a range of subentities, but the relations among them are different. To take English first, the existence of national variants is regarded as normal and unproblematic, since "no English-speaking nation feels threatened or even uneasy about sharing both the language itself and its name with other nations". Accordingly, there is no political or psychological need to blow up the differences and give the variants of English separate names, like the British, American or Australian language; when necessary, corresponding attributes can be used (British English, American English, etc.). Hence it is normal to regard a speaker of, say, Australian English as a speaker of English. In contrast, "the dissolution of Serbo-Croatian as the principal linguistic symbol of a recently destroyed federation of several nations stirs up collective emotions in a way unthinkable in the English-speaking world" (quotations from Bugarski 2004). So the umbrella term itself has been officially eradicated, with the former or newly recognised

variants elevated to the status of distinct national languages. Consequently, there are claims that the officially non-existent Serbo-Croatian cannot be spoken or written, and that therefore a speaker of Serbian, Croatian etc. is not simultaneously a speaker of Serbo-Croatian.

This, then, is the basic difference: in the first case the hyperonym comfortably subsumes its hyponyms, whereas in the second instance it has been deleted, leaving its offspring as orphans, so to speak. The latter picture, of course, represents the official position, contrary to my own view as sketched out in answer to your previous question. I'd also like to stress that the use of four language names (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin) by no means implies that what we have in fact are four languages; obliterating this distinction opens the way to all kinds of manipulation. Lastly, I wouldn't speculate about the stability or otherwise of the current situations. How far Serbo-Croatian can in the long run resist the concentrated pressures on its fundamental unity remains to be seen; and there are indications that the centrifugal machine which has dealt with Serbo-Croatian has been at work on English too, as shown by the well-known English vs Englishes debate.

BELLS: You have also been concerned with the notion of *linguistic nationalism*. How do you define linguistic nationalism?

BUGARSKI: Briefly, this is nationalism expressed through a dedicated and often fiery concern with language, seen as the principal, vital and irreplaceable symbol of the respective nation, and the safeguard of its special values or even of its very existence. It typically seeks to achieve its goals by manipulating that same language, extolled as older, purer and more authentic than other competing languages, which represent a constant threat to it; this national sanctuary must therefore at any cost be guarded against alien influences. Its roots are in the already mentioned European Romantic and nationalist cultural tradition, which upheld the "Holy Trinity" of language, nation and state as the natural and ideal entity of human social organisation (although it never in fact existed in anything like its desired pure form). Linking language with nation stirs up emotions and leads to the politicising of linguistic differences, as we have seen in the destruction of Yugoslavia, a process to which the several aggressive linguistic nationalisms on its territory made a substantial contribution. It seems appropriate to notice with a touch of melancholy that Serbo-Croatian, manipulated in fanning hate speech on all sides in the conflict, itself fell

victim to these forces, so that the four national languages established in its place can be justifiably regarded as the children of linguistic nationalism.

BELLS: In addition to your academic work, you have also been actively engaged in the public sphere, critically reflecting on current political and social issues. Especially during the 1990s, which saw the rise of militant nationalisms and the tragic break-up of the former Yugoslavia, you raised your voice against war and nationalism, in opposition to the current political regime. This sort of public intellectual engagement is not uncommon for prominent linguists, with notable examples including Noam Chomsky and George Lakoff. What do linguistics and politics have in common? What have you gained and what have you lost due to your public engagement?

BUGARSKI: I don't see any immediate or necessary link between linguistics and politics as areas of human activity, but it may be possible to relate specific kinds of one and the other. Thus the leading American scholars whom you mention do seem to show that avant-garde concern with linguistic creativity (Chomsky) and theoretically informed investigation of linguistic manipulation (Lakoff) tend to go with broadly leftist political activism, as against more traditional approaches to language study, usually associated with more conservative views. Also, owing to their specialist knowledge linguists are better equipped than other professionals to identify, analyse and counteract various manipulatory misuses of language. As to me, while I am naturally flattered by being placed in the same context with these two high priests of theoretical linguistics, I must say that I never thought of myself as a lower-case local chomsky or lakoff. However, my own public engagement as an outspoken critic of the regime from expressly anti-nationalist and anti-war positions may perhaps be related to my broad cosmopolitan and liberal mindset, in which my training in languages and linguistics certainly had a share.

Now what did I gain from this engagement? Well, in effect not much, especially when I see how essentially futile it all was in view of later developments. But at the time there was a satisfying feeling that I was on the right side of history during those turbulent years. I stood up and was counted, which nurtured my self-respect as a man who acted in accordance with his convictions; also, if nothing else, I felt that my family and friends would have no cause to be ashamed of my behaviour in a time of crisis. And

what did I lose? Two things readily come to mind. First, although nominated, I wasn't elected to membership in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts: I was written off as nationally suspect before my professional qualifications were even considered. Given the circumstances this didn't bother me much, but I suffered a far more serious blow when I was fired from the Faculty of Philology, along with several distinguished colleagues, in a scandalous "cleansing" campaign launched by a dean newly appointed by the Milošević-Šešelj government. (I was reinstated a year later, after winning my case in court and the downfall of that regime, including the notorious dean). So my balance sheet registered some gains and some losses; let's leave it at that, without calculating their relative weight.

BELLS: Dating from the 1990s are your books *Language from Peace to War* (Bugarski 1994) and *Language in a Social Crisis* (Bugarski 1997), in which you provide a comprehensive and cautioning account of hate speech and political manipulations of language. How do these books resonate with the current global development, when we are living in what has been termed "the age of post-truth politics"?

BUGARSKI: In those two books and other writings of the period I provided a detailed exemplification, analysis and classification of techniques of manipulating language for political purposes. In that capacity I'm amused to see the current upsurge, in the best tradition of Orwell's doublethink, of phrases like *alternative facts*, *post-fact* or *post-truth politics*: all of them, I suppose, "politically correct" euphemisms for misconceptions, delusions or – probably most often – downright lies. (And when I say amused, I mean it: at a protest against this usage in America a dog was seen wearing the label "Alternative cat"). There is certainly resonance here with the misuses of language that I studied twenty years ago, the difference being that previously facts were deliberately distorted whereas they are now simply ignored and replaced with populist appeals to emotions and stereotypical personal beliefs; Brexit and the US presidential election campaign are notorious examples. This is frequently accompanied by wholesale Trumped-up charges against political opponents, journalists and other dissenters – in the US but also elsewhere, notably including Serbia. This country is apparently developing into a post-truth society where it is quite normal to routinely and consistently falsify facts and figures, and practice wholly groundless but vicious slander against any challengers in the public

arena (including, as we have seen, even their innocent families), with the slanderers being actively encouraged rather than told off by the regime. And taking a global perspective, one wonders what is next, what new types of discourse we are yet to be exposed to in an increasingly fake world behind the looking-glass.

BELLS: As a pioneer of sociolinguistics in Yugoslavia and a decade-long national correspondent of the *Soziolinguistische Bibliographie Europäischer Länder* in the yearbook Sociolinguistica (Tübingen/Berlin), how do you see the current global trends in sociolinguistics compared to the early development of this field?

BUGARSKI: Sociolinguistics as an academic discipline originates from about the mid-1960s. In its formative years it was mostly seen as a part of linguistics dealing with the social basis of language, and contrasted with the sociology of language as a part of sociology concerned with the linguistic markers of society. This distinction, necessarily rather loose from the start, was further weakened with the growth and maturation of sociolinguistics, so that nowadays this field is generally regarded as dealing with all aspects of the relations between language and society. Indeed, in the view of Labov already in the 1970s, the very segment socio- in its name is superfluous, since it is clear that the primary task of linguistics itself is to study the normal, everyday use of language in social communication ("linguistics as sociolinguistics"). Today sociolinguistics is a broad, differentiated and vital area of language study, duly institutionalised through its own specialists, university chairs, serial publications, conferences, etc. A good example is the European bibliography you refer to, for which I have served as a national correspondent from its first issue in 1987 until today – that is to say, for thirty years without interruption. Leafing through these volumes gives a good impression of the rich present coverage of the field. An important change in comparison with its beginnings is that it is no longer a mere collection of individual empirical studies with little reference to any underlying theoretical framework ("a mile wide and an inch deep"), but a fully-fledged scholarly discipline with its own practitioners, theory and methodology. As such it has definitely come of age and is recognised all over the world.

BELLS: Over the past decade, in your capacity as Council of Europe Expert on Regional or Minority Languages, you have been concerned with the European language policy, with a special emphasis on multilingualism, multiculturalism, the relation of language to ethnicity and nationality, and the protection of minority languages. The title of your latest book – *Languages in the Attic* (Bugarski 2016) – symbolically indicates that minority languages are crammed in the attic of the common European house. How so and what should be done in this regard?

BUGARSKI: Practically all European countries have minority languages within their borders, which are treated differently in line with the general policies of the respective states (ignored, tolerated, or actively supported). European institutions have for several decades insisted on the need to safeguard these languages, many of which are threatened with extinction, as valuable segments of Europe's linguistic and cultural heritage. In 1992 the Council of Europe issued a comprehensive major document called The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, inviting all its member states to accede to it. It entered into force in 1998, after the first five states had ratified it, thus undertaking to support all such languages on their territories by applying a set of specified measures. (By now all the post-Yugoslav states except Macedonia have joined the Charter). This process has been monitored by a special committee of independent experts on the Charter, of which I have been a member for over a decade. In the course of our work we have evaluated the measures taken by each individual state during a reporting period of three years and suggested improvements. The general idea, reflected in the title of my book, is that the numerous but often neglected small languages, seeking protection under a common European roof, should be given more space and visibility than they have been granted in the past. In the two decades of the Charter's operation much has been achieved in most of the member states, but a lot still remains to be done in this unbounded process of securing the continued existence and advancing the use of these languages.

BELLS: One of your notable contributions to the study of language concerns your notion of *graphic relativity* (Bugarski 1970, 1993). How does it extend the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of

linguistic relativity, and what is your stance regarding the universalist vs. relativist perspective in language study?

BUGARSKI: The intriguing and controversial Sapir-Whorf hypothesis posits that the structures of particular languages influence or even condition the way their speakers experience reality, so that speakers of, say, English, Arabic and Chinese do not see quite the same world. While preparing for a course in the history of linguistics which I taught in Chicago in 1969/70 I came upon the idea of applying this kind of thinking to written languages, and later on developed the notion of graphic relativity, suggesting in roughly parallel fashion that the typologically different systems conventionally used for writing the various languages may direct their users' perception of the linguistic units (or "building blocks") of the languages themselves, thus channelling the course of native traditions of linguistic thought. This idea didn't attract worldwide attention, but it has been cited and seriously considered by several scholars investigating the cognitive effects of writing. As to universalism vs. relativism, a topic I was interested in at the time but haven't followed closely later on, I can say that it hasn't been a hot one since then. The study of language universals saw its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, prompted in a theoretical way by Chomsky's concept of universal grammar, and in empirical terms by the cross-linguistic typological research of Joseph Greenberg; the debate about linguistic relativity is likewise not very high on the current agenda. But this of course does not mean that these issues are dead, far from it: they may well surface again at any time, depending on the direction that future research in general linguistics and the philosophy of language takes. As to me personally, I believe that universalism and relativism alike remain relevant and stimulating concepts.

BELLS: In your book on Serbian slang (Bugarski 2003) you state that "experimenting with words is one of the more pleasurable ways to know the world". Anyone who has had the pleasure of communicating with you is well aware of your special gift for experimenting with words in thought-provoking and often humorous ways. Could you share some illustrative examples with us?

BUGARSKI: How nice of you to quote that statement! You may not believe it, but this must be one of my most cited sentences. And I do believe what

I say there! For me *Homo loquens* is at the same time *Homo ludens*. From my earliest years on I have been fascinated by words, their forms and meanings, and have experimented by playing with them, breaking them up and recombining their parts – the first inkling, I suppose, that I had in me the makings of a future linguist. Later on came idioms, translations, metaphors, verbal humour, puns, limericks, funny blends ... There is room here for only a few examples from this rich array. In December 1969 in San Francisco, after the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, I spent a few hours chatting and joking over wine with the newly elected President, Archibald A. Hill, a lover of limericks like myself. So we exchanged a few increasingly bawdy ones, whereupon he recited the beginning of one started by Thackeray (about *The Young Countess of Wycherley*) but left unfinished, apparently because of the difficulty of finding good rhymes for the second and last lines. Later that night I found a solution involving the words *itchily* and *twitchily* (or was it *bitchily*?), but unfortunately I no longer remember the whole text, as I foolishly never wrote it down. Professor Hill evidently liked it, for when I arrived at the University of Texas at Austin some months later to give a lecture on his invitation, he introduced me as "the man who after 150 years completed a limerick by William Makepeace Thackeray"!

In 1992, at a conference of the European Linguistic Society in Galway, the participants in the plenary sessions were seated in somewhat uneasy chairs which threatened to collapse unless handled with care. At one point in the middle of somebody's paper, Werner Winter, then secretary of the Society, came crashing down, whereupon I exclaimed "Professor Winter is practicing for a question from the floor!" – and had the hall roaring with laughter. In cognitive linguistic terms, the humorous effect here is due to a reversal of the usual order from a concrete source domain to an abstract goal domain, thereby literalizing conventional metaphorical usage. And quite recently, my obsession with blends carried over into my dreams, so I literally dreamt up items like *splicijaliteti* ('Split specialties' – after my return from Split, where I had sampled some of the local cuisine) or *Slika Dorijana Geja* ('the picture of Dorian Gay' – upon recalling Wilde's life and work). A veritable *pundemonium* in my mind, you might say!

BELLS: Many generations of students have learnt many important things from you, in linguistics and in life. What is the most important thing that you have learnt from your students?

BUGARSKI: This question doesn't really apply to my big undergraduate classes, where it was difficult to establish individual contact, so I will limit myself to my experience with postgraduate students only. In the course of my academic career I supervised 12 PhD dissertations and 46 'old-style', pre-Bologna MA theses, a track record I'm quite proud of. Working with all these students, and especially the dozen or so best ones, has taught me that any effort invested in their training tends to pay off handsomely. And in the process, their keen interest and clever questions and comments have often sharpened my own thinking about various linguistic issues. Given the right circumstances, teaching is a two-way avenue.

BELLS: You have authored over 20 books. Which of them was the most difficult to write and why?

BUGARSKI: The first, and for two reasons. Firstly, precisely because it was the first: I had no experience of that kind, and as we say, every beginning is difficult. But more importantly, my dissertation was the result of several years of meticulous research and hard thinking in a complex area of language structure, with no ready guide to follow; I had to work out a multi-dimensional analytical system all my own, consistently integrating the grammatical, lexical and semantic levels of analysis. So as far as I'm concerned, it really was a ground-breaking effort. It may not seem so to a present-day observer, comfortably taking for granted the facilities undreamt of at the time (computers, electronic corpora, the Internet, etc.), but half a century ago research of this kind was considerably more difficult and time-consuming, to say the least.

BELLS: One of your books is entitled *Linguistics on Man* (Bugarski 1975) – a formulation that reflects your understanding of linguistics as a science of man in psychological, sociological, pragmatic and cultural contexts. From today's perspective, what would you point out as the three most important things that linguistics reveals about the human being?

BUGARSKI: There you are again – you do seem to like the number three! Well, let me have a go. Linguistics reveals that the human being is (1) unique, in possessing language as a wonderfully rich and intricate system capable of performing a range of functions vital to human societies, far beyond that of communication which man shares with other species; (2)

creative, in the non-trivial sense of producing infinite combinations of finite means, as a true *Homo syntacticus*; and (3) imaginative, as unfettered by the chains of the here-and-now and thus able to conceive and interpret not only what is but also what was or will be, or is not, or cannot be – in a word, to experience different possible worlds. Insights like these are of course not the exclusive privilege of linguistics, but the science of language has, especially in the modern era and along the lines suggested, made an important contribution to a broadly conceived and comprehensive science of man, as yet largely nonexistent but perhaps ultimately possible. At any rate, this vision engendered an article of mine first published in 1973 on "Linguistics as a science of man", and reprinted in the book you cite as its first, tone-setting chapter.

BELLS: What is your message to prospective linguistics scholars?

BUGARSKI: Quite briefly and simply: don't allow yourselves to be put off by traditional and usually uninspiring teaching methods associated with school grammar; find your own angle; learn to enjoy language as you study it and you will see that linguistics, in addition to providing a precious window on the world, can be fun.

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And thank you, Katarina, for this artfully designed interview, which so elegantly summed up me and my work!

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