

**Constructing Montenegrin Identities Online through Language Ideology and Semiotic  
Differentiation**

by

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# **Constructing Montenegrin identities online through language ideology and semiotic differentiation**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2024

Research on the intersection of language and identity in the Balkans, especially following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, is a robust field spanning many disciplines and approaches. The current project addresses a gap in the literature on the Montenegrin national language variant in two central ways. First, by using data from popular social media platforms, mainly Reddit and Twitter/X, this project builds on internet discourse as a relatively new data source in an understudied linguistic context. Second, in contrast to other projects that characterize the Montenegrin ideological field as consisting of Serbian versus Montenegrin identities, this project reframes the questions using Montenegrin identity as its cultural base. Thus, the data reflect a more local tension between Montenegro-aligned Montenegrins and Serbia-aligned Montenegrins, with both groups drawing on a shared Montenegrin heritage, developing from close regional contact. This approach highlights the importance of local semiotic fields in constructing language ideologies. It also avoids a conflation of identity categories between "Serbia-aligned Montenegrins" and Serbs from Serbia proper, many of whom do not participate in the language debates in Montenegro.

Utilizing a semiotic approach inspired by Irvine and Gal (2000, 2019), the study analyzes marked graphemes <ś> and <ž>, which are part of the controversial and newly recognized Montenegrin national variant. Alongside these graphemes, patterns of emoji usage and metapragmatic discourse emerge and these signs are thus employed as co-occurring semiotic

resources that circulate and reinforce a Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin identity. By analyzing varieties of expressive communicative behaviors online, through orthography, emojis, memes, and metalinguistic discourse, this dissertation contributes to discourses of language and identity in the Balkans, specifically between Montenegro and Serbia, through a semiotic framework viewing variation in communicative practices as potential signs leading to differentiation in how identity and language use pattern on the internet. Semiotic differentiation is a productive approach for examining discourses that invoke language ideology, competing national standards, and the role of social media in public discourse around language issues.

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### Pronunciation guide for selected graphemes

Latin	Cyrillic	IPA	Approximate English equivalent
Š š	Ш ш	/ʃ/	<u>s</u> ugar
Ž ž	Ж ж	/z/	treas <u>u</u> re
Ђ đ	Ђ ђ	/dʒ/	<u>g</u> inger
Ї ĭ	И и	/tʃ/	<u>ch</u> urch
Ї ĭ	И и	/tʃ/	<u>ch</u> ick
Ц ц	Ц ц	/ts/	<u>it</u> s
С с	С с	/s/	<u>s</u> tep
Ѕ ѕ	Ѕ ѕ	/e/	—
Џ џ	Џ џ	/z/	—

## 1.0 Introduction

Regarding accessibility, convenience, global reach, and lasting power, virtually no other means of communication has matched what the internet has accomplished for its users and communities worldwide and across all divides of language, time, and geography. Social media platforms like Twitter/X, Reddit, and Facebook have been linked to the origination and spread of significant cultural and political movements, for example, the Arab Spring in 2010-2011 (Smidi & Shahin, 2017), the Russian-led information warfare campaign of the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Boyd-Barrett, 2020), and even a so-called "Balkan spring" (see Bieber & Brentin, 2018, on social movements in the Balkans). On the internet individuals usually have control in how they present themselves to others, whether that be through choices in profile picture, username or handle, or writing style, the content itself, or even its orthographic representations (e.g., use of capitalization, non-alphabetic symbols, or other font manipulations). These resources can help individuals reveal, highlight, conceal, or diminish certain aspects of their identity and self-presentation (see Androutsopoulos, 2014, on audience design and context collapse; Baym & boyd, 2012, on socially mediated publicness). The choices available to a user are influenced by the norms and practices of their online communities, and by making certain choices, social practices can be reinforced or abandoned. Thus, making one choice over another can affect the social practices of other communities. On the internet communities often have inherently overlapping or "fuzzy" borders, and part of the reason for this is the difficulty involved in organizing shared practices as one way of delineating groups (see Samoilenko et al., 2016, exploring linguistic neighborhoods on Wikipedia; Rautava & Ristolainen, 2022, on mapping the borders of "cyberterritory").

Without the affordances of physical space, bodily gesturing, and interactive co-presence, the participant roles of addresser and addressee can be unclear in any online communicative interaction. Even in more direct online channels, for example with instant messaging, there are few guarantees of who is on either side of the interaction (see Onanuga & Taiwo, 2020, on discursive features of the “Nigerian prince” scam and Preetha et al., 2022, on developing cyber-awareness of scams on social media). In open social media venues, sites like Twitter/X, Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram, it is in the nature of the product that members of different communities can interact with one another. Groups, pages, spaces, and subreddits are all ways of designing infrastructure on a social platform for "cross-pollination" among users. For these types of platforms there is an additional burden for the speaker/writer/addressor to make their message intentionally meaningful for the correct or intended audience, whomever that might be, while anticipating that an unintended audience may, and likely will, comment on and engage with the original message or some derivation of it. Discourse originating on Twitter/X often circulates on Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other social sites, creating a comparability among and between the platforms. The discursive norms, practices, and assumptions that might be taken to be expected in one context may not hold for message recipients outside of the original. This situation represents what is often called a *collapsed context* (for context collapse on social media in general, see Georgakopoulou, 2017; for context collapse on Twitter specifically, see Marwick & boyd, 2011). This idea draws on previous work in fields like anthropology and the sociology of communication. For example, Goffman (1956) compares human social interaction to a stage performance, such that actors craft their messages, or performances, for a particular imagined recipient (who are theatergoers in the metaphor of the stage). The concept was later applied to electronic media (e.g., radio and television) and the internet as technology advanced. Meyrowitz’s classic book *No sense*

*of place* (1985) and danah boyd's *It's complicated: the social lives of networked teens* (2014) address questions of context and interaction among newer forms of media for their given periods. The issue of context collapse creates situations in online discourse in which social acts that can mark insider/outsider status for a community, online or off (e.g., jokes, stereotypes, nationalist rhetoric), are accessible by both in-group and out-group members. This process can produce various discourse responses, from humor and jocularity to the vitriol and discord that characterize parts of social media.

Identity itself can be created and manipulated semiotically through an individual's linguistic and stylistic choices, using the means available to them for a given sociocultural context. The availability of meaningful choices in such an environment has been conceptualized as an indexical field or a "constellation" of social meaning (see Eckert, 2008, for an overview of the semiotic or indexical field) from which a person can pick, with differing degrees of awareness, from alternatives of a variable to create links between social practices to the social meaning that they want to express. For example, Eckert notes that one feature, /t/ release, can be used to take stances of politeness, effort, exasperation, among others, to create speaker styles, like School Teacher or Gay Diva (2008, p. 469).

As a technology created to facilitate communication and interaction, the internet provides its own kind of multimodal indexical field, presenting a seemingly endless array of variants of socially meaningful variables for its users to take up. The accumulation of these patterns of choices can form recognizable categories of identity to other internet users, and these can undergo further evolution through semiotic mechanisms of ideologizing, style-making, and stancetaking, among others (for example, see Irvine, 2001, on style and linguistic differentiation; Johnstone, 2007, and Kiesling, 2022 for language and identity through stancetaking). The point is that the process of

creating a message, sharing a message, and responding to a message comes with many choices that need to be made by the author/writer/addresser and, regardless of what choices are made, other users will make additional and unpredictable choices in how they react to and recontextualize discourse online. These choices can affect and be affected by a user's identity categories, whether national, political, ethnic, religious, or otherwise.

Since narrowly gaining its independence in 2006, Montenegro, the newest ex-Yugoslav state to become independent, has been asserting its national, ethnic, and linguistic identity distinct from the other Balkan countries. This process is especially evident regarding its relationship with Serbia, as Montenegro works to distance itself from the period in which both countries were united, from just after the First World War until the collapse of the Yugoslav rump state in the early 2000s (see Greenberg, R.D., 2004, which discusses the effect of the disintegration of Yugoslavia on Serbo-Croatian; Morrison, 2018, which recounts recent Montenegrin history post-Yugoslavia). Montenegro has been working towards differentiating itself through several social, cultural, and political processes, but one particularly salient category is language. What was once a common pluricentric language called *Serbo-Croatian* in English (or occasionally, *Croato-Serbian*) and spoken by most of the countries of the western Balkans, split into nationally codified languages Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and most recently, Montenegrin, in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s (see Alexander, 2006, for a clear explanation of regional language variation and pluricentricity; and Čirgić, et al., 2020, for a sociolinguistically-informed dialectology of Montenegrin). Since attaining independence in 2006, there have been many attempts by actors in various state and public organizations to legitimize the Montenegrin language through venues such as education, cultural programming, and national policy; however, public discourse, both online and off, appears to be more successful at reinforcing

language practices and ideologies from the bottom up than the political bureaucracy itself. That is, notions of national identity through language, national standards, and historical narratives have been guided more by public opinion and political fiat than out of necessity (see Glušica, 2009, 2010, and 2011 on the political nature of the Montenegrin language; Morrison, 2018, for a recent history of Montenegro and Montenegrin social policies in general following independence). These cultural movements for the independence and self-determination of Montenegrin nationhood and language converge in spaces both virtual and not, with the internet and social media providing an especially rich context for the study of identity formation and ideology circulation.

This dissertation examines how semiotic and linguistic resources create and differentiate between competing conceptions of Montenegrin national identity in online discourse. Deployment of several co-occurring semiotic resources, both visual and textual, is tracked in this discourse, each providing a potential site for identity construction and circulation through the lens of language ideology. These resources include orthography (e.g., graphemes and script choice), visual material (e.g., emojis), the circulation and recirculation of memes, and metalinguistic and metapragmatic discourse, which can be found in public debates over language use. The data presented in this dissertation are bookended by two case studies illustrating how language ideology affects language users beyond the purely theoretical and how ideology comes to differentiate users. The project opens with a vignette exploring the discourse surrounding a Montenegrin Wikipedia wiki, which has been proposed five times since 2006 but rejected four times, with the fifth attempt stuck in adjudication since 2017. This problem exists for only the Montenegrin wiki project. This is despite the creation of Wikipedia wikis for Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and the Serbo-Croatian languages, the name of the latter now regarded as an obsolete and outdated term (see Djordjevic, 2022, on the post-Yugoslav legal status of Serbo-Croatian; and Krejčí, 2018, on constitutional naming of

Montenegrin). The dissertation closes with a second vignette discussing the public talk around the 2023 national census in Montenegro. The newly incoming government of Montenegro, which is perceived by many Montenegrins as sympathetic to Serbia, conducted a national census as an early major action by the new government. Censuses are often used to gauge demographics among political constituents in terms of economic status, property ownership, and identity categories (e.g., religion, language, and ethnic identity), among other data that a government might find useful (see Alterman, 1969, for more on the history and use of the census; for more on the role of the census in the Balkans, see Labbé, 1997; Visoka & Gjevori, 2013; Hoh, 2015, 2017; Cooley, 2019). The agencies organizing the census in Montenegro during the autumn of 2023 arguably had similar intentions. However, the questions posed primarily addressed issues of linguistic, ethnic, and religious identity, and inconsistencies with the operationalizing of the census caused problems. In short, locals perceived the process as attempting to elicit a Serbian majority in order to support the new pro-Serbia government (as seen in regional journalism, e.g., Kajosevic, 2023a, 2023b).

Work in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology has explored many processes by which language can be contextualized and recontextualized through the accumulation of stances, the patching together of style, and the ideologizing of language beliefs in the pursuit of understanding the relationship between language, culture, and identity (e.g., Eckert, 2018, on so-called ‘third-wave sociolinguistics’; Gal & Irvine, 2019, on semiotic differentiation; Johnstone, 2007, on identity, dialect, and stancetaking; and Kiesling, 2013, on identity). These same processes can be seen in the countries of the Balkans, as each former Yugoslav country establishes its own cultural and linguistic identity through salient and recognizable semiotic acts. As one of the more recent states to undergo this process legally, publicly, and internationally, Montenegro is doing so using the virtual context alongside the physical. This situation offers the unique opportunity to

investigate the creation and performance of national identity while it is actively happening. The current project describes and analyzes the discourse surrounding the Montenegrin language on popular social media platforms, which are important sites of social interaction. Much of the data comes from Twitter/X and Reddit since these platforms are consistently ranked among the topmost visited websites (Semrush, 2023). While both are generally similar in communicative affordances, each offers a slightly different context, eliciting variations in register, genre, and common practices. The resulting project is a semiotically-informed description of language-on-the-internet situated in the context of contemporary Montenegrin public discourse. This project addresses a gap in the literature concerning language ideology, standardization, and meaning making on the internet and in the Montenegrin sphere. While there is scholarship on this issue written in the Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian languages, much of it concerns the polemics of natural or artificial language identity, often between scholars working in local political or educational institutions. Where there is research on this situation in English, it is often quite limited in scope and is either out of date, addressing language identity in a Yugoslav context, or it often does not address internet discourse specifically. This dissertation can serve as both a documentation of a contemporary sociolinguistic issue and context and offer a semiotically-informed analysis of multimodal resources found in social media discourse.

## 1.1 Positionality Statement

My primary concern throughout this dissertation is the ever-present risk of inadvertently perpetuating a legacy of essentialization and orientalization that has affected scholarship on the Balkans for far too long. Bias and essentialism can creep into any narrative, even in the pursuit of a "neutral" position. As a sociolinguist specializing in Balkan and South Slavic languages, I have dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to familiarize myself with the nuances and complexities of the region under study. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that I cannot completely divorce myself from my identity categories. Coming from an Anglo-American background with no historical ties to the Balkans or Southeastern Europe, I acknowledge that I am an outsider in this context.

Nonetheless, my outsider status may offer a unique perspective to observe and interpret the phenomena discussed in this dissertation. Gal and Irvine's assertion that "there is 'no view from nowhere,' no gaze that is not positioned" (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 995) resonates deeply with me and with the scholarship I have strived to undertake. My perspective is inherently situated, however, and every decision I make, as well as my biases and positions, influence the analytical choices I employ. I realize that there is a need for constant vigilance against contributing to the *othering* of the Balkans, thus this statement reflects my commitment to approach this research sensitively, acknowledging and navigating the complexities of identity, bias, and historical narratives. I aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language, ideology, and identity in the Balkans in a specific communicative context while actively avoiding perpetuating detrimental patterns. In this spirit, one editorial choice I have made in writing this dissertation is that I maintain the original spellings of Montenegrin places and names in English as accurately as possible to the Montenegrin, using the appropriate diacritics wherever the meaning remains

relatively unobscured by doing so. For example, the name of one long-time Montenegrin politician is rendered in this dissertation with its native orthography, “Milo Đukanović,” instead of the more common English transcription of “Milo Djukanovic.” While it is a small act, it is meant to respect the names and places in the Montenegrin language which affect this story. A pronunciation chart is included on page xvii for assistance where necessary. I also intend for this project to capture a language situation I see unfolding on the internet at the current time. In no way do I intend for my work to represent the voices of Montenegro or Montenegrins as whole, or really, of any Montenegrins at all. It is only my observations from the outside and my analysis of those observations that I intend to share. Similarly, the claims found in this project focus on internet discourse, which inevitably and unavoidably erases the experiences of those Montenegrins who are not connected to the internet or who do not do much, if any, communication online. Their voices are important too, but they are outside the research scope and methodologies of this project. Much of this dissertation was written while living in Montenegro, over an 8-month period funded by the David L. Boren Fellowship and while on this fellowship, I was affiliated with the Faculty for Montenegrin Language and Literature (*Fakultet za crnogorskog jezik i književnost*, or *FCJK*) in Cetinje, Montenegro. While I have been very fortunate to consult with many Montenegrins throughout this project, any errors, missteps, or misunderstandings occurring along the way remain entirely my own.

## 1.2 Looking Ahead

This dissertation addresses questions of identity formation through language ideology and semiotic differentiation in the Balkans, particularly in Montenegro, a country greatly affected by recent political changes and language standardization efforts. The project aims to demonstrate how seemingly small semiotic choices, such as the use of emoji and selection of graphemes, accumulate and acquire social meaning, creating styles or patterns of meaning-making that are recognizable and relevant to speakers of the Montenegrin language.

As small parts of a larger internet sphere, social media platforms function as a public square, invoking and enforcing linguistic and cultural norms and acting as a semi-authoritative voice on language identity. Looking ahead at the structure of this dissertation, chapter 2 provides a socio-historical background of language and identity in the Balkans, with a focus on Montenegro and its long and singular history. Chapter 3 presents a literature review addressing three themes: Balkan linguistics, the semiotic construction of social meaning, and internet language, through the media of orthography, emojis, and memes. Chapter 4 addresses the challenges of researching social media, a relatively novel arena in sociolinguistics, and discusses the methods, ethical considerations, and analytical choices made in the presentation of the data in the next chapter. Chapter 5 presents the data analysis, examining identity formation using the resources of script choice, grapheme usage, and emojis. Chapter 6 offers the author's synthesis of the role of these data in studying language ideology and proposes an account for how these data participate in the construction of social meaning using semiotic processes of indexicality, enregisterment, and ideology. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the main findings and suggesting implications of the research and possible future directions.

## **2.0 Background**

This section includes background on the Balkans, with a focus on major issues of language and identity. After a broad overview of the region, I provide a history of the Montenegrin language and nationhood, focusing on how Montenegro's history and culture differ from those of its neighbors. This section concludes with the first of two vignettes, which brings it into the 21st century through the lens of language identity and ideology on the Wikipedia talk pages.

### **2.1 Nations, nationalities, and nationalisms**

European nationalism as a political ideology (and the consequent use of national identity as a salient social category) is often described as beginning in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Philosophers like Johann Gottfried Herder are often credited with identifying language as one of the features through which people could unite and find a common bond. Herder's ideas were likely influenced by the earlier French Enlightenment philosopher of mind and psychology, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, who argued for the existence of expressive creativity of language, one in which language could be the force that allows people, and perhaps society, to create action in the real world (see Olender, 1992; Wells, 1987). Thus, even early theories of social behavior saw language as something that could enact social change and create identity, leading to the building of nations and states. From this era onwards, languages have marked social groups using the category of nation in different ways, even as political and socio-cultural contexts have changed. Gellner (1983) argues that developing a national language standard is essential to creating

nationalist states. Since at least the 18th century, scholars have taken notice of the groups occupying the Balkan region and how complexly woven together are the many ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups occupying the area. The tapestry of identity in the Balkans was a boon for those wanting to write about an exotic land within the borders of Europe (and it was often a controversial position to claim the Balkans for Europe). For centuries, this region was politically, culturally, and even physically divided by the rule of the Ottoman Empire, arriving from the "East" with its Islamic and Turkic cultural norms, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire coming from the "West," with its Catholicism, its connection to the classical Roman empire, and its geographic proximity to other significant European empires (Boardman, 1982).

While linguistic theories have evolved since Herder's time, remnants of Western European ideologies, such as *homogenism* (or the idea that a nation consists of one kind of person with one shared language, faith, and history), persist. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) note that scholars of nationalism utilize tropes of "invention...imagination...[and] narration" to understand the nation-state as a basic unit of governance. Unlike Herder's preference for poetry as a nation-uniting force, modern theories presuppose that shared language forms are the foundation for creating discursive genres that shape the nation (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Bakić-Hayden & Hayden, 1992).

As one example of a nationalist cultural invention, standardized language itself can symbolize a nation, but it also disproportionately represents specific groups, based on whether or not those groups use the lionized variety comprising the standard (see Lippi-Green, 2012, on social effects of language standards in the United States; and, Errington, 2000, on language and power in Micronesia). This observation underscores the intricate relationship between the dynamics of language and power, where the imposition of standardized language can marginalize linguistic

diversity within a nation, inadvertently or otherwise. From the early philosophies of Herder to contemporary scholars of nationalism, the recognition of language as a force in the construction of the nation-state remains a constant, regardless in changing conceptions of identity or evolving understanding of language as a psychological and social behavior. The persistence of standardized language as a symbol of the nation, while simultaneously reflecting the interests of specific groups, highlights the ongoing complexity of linguistic dynamics in the context of evolving socio-cultural and political landscapes.

### **2.1.1 A brief history of the Balkans**

The relationship between language and nation is especially complicated for a geopolitical region like the Balkans, a place which has witnessed the rise and fall of empires. Robert Greenberg echoes a point made by Balkan scholar Kenneth Naylor when Naylor writes: "...language in the Balkans has functioned as a 'flag,' with which each people has asserted its independence and sovereignty" (Greenberg, R.D., 2004, p. 8). This property of language is particularly evident in a country like Montenegro, which has been part of the linguistic, social, and cultural milieu of the Balkans since the settlement of the South Slavs in the first millennium C.E., but which has only been intermittently recognized as an independent political state, with its most recent period of independence starting in 2007. In such a complex region, with many periods of migration and settlement, language is one artifact of many that can mark individuals as members of a cultural, national, religious, or otherwise connected group (Dieckhoff, 2004; Jaspal, 2009).

Which Countries Make Up the Balkans?



COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS

Figure 1 Map of the Balkans (McBride, 2023)

The Balkans are famously a land divided by histories of empire, between the Ottomans, who ruled over much of Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the Austro-Hungarian empire, which was generally more westward, in Croatia, Slovenia, and parts of Serbia. Colonization of areas in Montenegro and Albania by groups like the Venetians adds another layer of identity and additionally, beginning in the 19th century, the Russian and Soviet empires were also present in the region. The map in Figure 1 displays the countries that are commonly described

as belonging to the cultural sphere of the Balkans. These are the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro, the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Bulgaria, Greece (the Hellenic Republic), and the Republic of Romania. In some maps, the Republic of Hungary is included, as is the Republic of Türkiye (formerly Turkey), or at least European Istanbul and Turkey-in-Europe (Rumelia). In others, the Republic of Romania is excluded. This variation in assigning geographies to maps suggests that identifying constituents of the Balkans is a fraught and endlessly complex challenge that is highly dependent on which criteria are used (e.g., language, food, religion, history).

The term "Balkan" originates in the Turkish language and refers to a mountain range in present-day Bulgaria. However, it also came to refer to the large peninsula in Southeastern Europe—on which these Balkan Mountains are found. The very definition of Balkan as something set apart from another region, or in contrast to some other notion of geographic identity, is itself laden with ideologies of difference. These are often ideologies of superiority and inferiority. Compared to so-called "Western Europe" (often referring to countries like England, Spain, France, Germany, and occasionally Italy), the Balkan countries are described in orientalizing or essentializing terms, leading the region to be seen as somewhere exotic and unknowable, or underdeveloped and "backward" (likely related to stereotypes arising since the occupation of the Ottoman Empire and remaining prevalent during the region's history of social discord). These discourses are found in every form, including literature, art, and cinema, and are reflected and reinforced in public discourse, including some of the social media posts and memes appearing in this project. Some have suggested that the Balkans take the place of the subaltern or subjugated native in a context in which Western Europeans are seen as colonizers of the other half of Europe (see Bjelić, 2006, on

orientalizing travel writing on Balkans; Fleming, 2000, on Balkan historiography; Said, 1978, a classic work on orientalism; and Guha & Spivak, 1988, on the subaltern in general).

This discourse of Balkan identity, in sharp contrast to other large geographically defined cultural groups, has become a kind of entrenched discourse of humor and language play on social media. For example, Figure 2 presents an image of two starkly different Europes. On this two-panel meme, the top panel is labeled "Western Europe" and it appears to present a diverse and multicultural group of young people presumably waving enthusiastically to the photographer. They are leaning against what seems to be a nice car, and the overall atmosphere of the scene is bright and lush, with verdant green foliage framing the panel. The bottom panel is labeled "Eastern Europe," and the subjects here are dressed shabbily in denim and dark colors and standing awkwardly apart. They lean against a visibly older and less fashionable car, and their body language is much more compact and reserved. The atmosphere of this scene is gray and dismal.



Figure 2 Western Europe vs. Eastern Europe (from Facebook group *Squatting Slavs*, n.d.)

The joke apparent in this meme is that "Eastern Europeans" from some region called "Eastern Europe" are somehow different from "Western Europeans" (even *Eastern Europe* itself is a vaguely defined geographic concept itself; for more discussion on the history of the label, see Ballinger, 2017a, 2017b; Twardzisz, 2018; Walters, 1988). Depending on the viewer's perspective, the differences could be interpreted negatively (Eastern Europeans are less friendly or warm, more socially distant, and less economically successful) or positively (Eastern Europeans are hard-working, strong, with traditional values), but regardless of perspective, the two groups are implied to be very different. The text of the image suggests that geography is the source or main determinant of those differences. Compare Figure 2 to Figure 3 below, in which a popular four-panel meme (sometimes called the "Tuxedo Winnie the Pooh" meme) is used to joke about Europe, as divided by the four cardinal directions. Generally, for this meme format, images and text are situated in a tiered list, depicting the Pooh character dressed in a tuxedo, with a monocle and top hat, at either the top or bottom of the panel. The character is depicted more casually (or more formally, depending on vertical perspective) until Pooh is seen wearing only his classic uniform of a red t-shirt and nothing else.

In some cases, such as the one presented here, the Pooh character is edited to present him in non-canonical or offensive ways. For example, in this version, the final panel shows Pooh drooling, with a significant overbite and half-closed, sleepy eyes, leaving the viewer-interpreter to draw their own potentially problematic conclusions about this Pooh. At the very least, this panel suggests a lack of social class or decorum compared to the others. In this meme, the regions of Europe are ranked in order of sophistication as perceived by the meme creator. Northern Europe occupies the position of tuxedoed, monocled, top-hat-wearing Pooh, appearing as the superlative and most sophisticated character in the group. Eastern Europe is the next panel down, with Pooh

wearing the same tuxedo but missing a few of the accessories, like the top hat and the monocle. Next is Western Europe, which is the closest figure to the canonical Pooh character, in his famous red shirt and his face in an arguably neutral facial expression, thus it seems that Western Europe similarly occupies the ideological neutral position with regard to perceived sophistication. Finally, Southern Europe is the bearer of the least-canonical and, as previously suggested, offensively depicted Pooh.

↑ Posted by u/CrazyPhilHost1898 2 years ago 🔔  
25 How Europe's regions were typically defined based on the cardinal directions (i.e. N, E, W, S)  
↓



🗨️ 10 Comments   ➦ Share   📌 Save   ⋮

**Figure 3 Tuxedo Winnie the Pooh (CrazyPhilHost1898, 2021)**

The geographic labels attached to the various characters seem to reflect the stereotypes held by the author of the meme, and the meme itself illustrates a pattern of humor often found on Reddit and Twitter/X, especially in Slavic, Balkan, and Eastern European online communities. It is unclear exactly where the Balkans would fit in this panel however, and that is part of the issues latent in the orientalizing ideologies of the region. Some would view the Balkans as solidly in Eastern Europe (particularly concerning countries like Romania, Bulgaria, and the former Yugoslavia). However, others would fit it more with Southern Europe (e.g., Croatia, Albania, or Greece). The uncertainty relies on which communally shared ideologies and conceptions of culture, nationhood, and identity, are being invoked by the viewer. These ideologies are then reflected in many of the practices of language choice in other online contexts, though not always through Winnie the Pooh memes.

The Balkans are often described as "the crossroads of Europe" due to the area's rich history of migration and empire (Marinov, 2013; Todorova, 2009). As they migrate and settle, people bring their cultural artifacts with them, including language, literature, and religion, among others. Through these settlements and the consequences of human migration, the Balkans became a region of at least two writing systems, several competing religions, and a rich textual history related to religious and cultural practices. While many scripts have existed in the region over the ages, Cyrillic and Latin have been among the few that have survived and thrived and remain into the 21st century (though see Studemund-Halévy, 2021, for a discussion of scripts used by Judeo-Spanish Bulgarians, among others).

The Cyrillic script was first developed around the 10th century in Bulgaria by disciples of religious missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, replacing the Glagolitic script developed by Saint Cyril (Iliev, 2013). The Cyrillic script was used to write church books and manuscripts

commissioned by the Byzantine Empire to spread Christianity among the Slavic people in the regions of Bulgaria and its surrounding population (Lunt, 2001; Schenker, 1995). This alphabet spread throughout the region by way of Orthodox belief and culture among the early Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians. As empires grew and changed, so did the script itself to adapt to new contexts. The early Russian empire adopted the Cyrillic script to improve its regional power and assimilate other Cyrillic-using Slavic tribes. This process continued as other groups adopted, altered, and occasionally even discontinued the usage of Cyrillic as history progressed and needs changed. In the nineteenth century, Vuk Karadžić, a philologist and folklorist from Tršić, in present-day Serbia, led reforms on the Cyrillic alphabet. His project was to adapt the script to fit better with the local speech forms used in parts of Serbia and its neighboring regions. His work resulted in the first compiled dictionary of the Serbian language (Đorđević, 2018).

While he was born in Serbia, Karadžić had family roots in present-day Montenegro, in the northern city of Nikšić. Thus, he is often seen as an early cultural folk character for both the Serbian and Montenegrin nations (see Greenawalt, 2001; and Pavlović & Atanasovski, 2016, on Karadžić's importance in the region). In his 1818 dictionary, Karadžić modernized the Serbian literary language by removing graphemes from the Cyrillic alphabet that were unnecessary or irrelevant for Serbian and by creating new graphemes for sounds that were not part of the previous alphabet, thus simplifying and streamlining the system for use by Serbian speakers. He based his new script on the speech of the region of Eastern Herzegovina, which was Karadžić's dialect, and which could be found in southern Bosnia, southwestern Serbia, and northern Montenegro. His driving principle was *write as you speak and read as it is written*,<sup>1</sup> which was initially coined by German philologist

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<sup>1</sup> *Piši kao što govoriš, a čitaj kao što je napisano* (Alexander, 2006, p. 382)

Johann Christoph Adelung, who was writing about German grammar and orthography at about the same time as Karadžić. Some of the changes to Serbian orthography included the introduction of new graphemes. In orthographic and phonetic representations, some of these graphemes included: <Љ> (/ʎ/), <Њ> (/ɲ/), <Ѡ> (/d͡z/), <j> <(/j/)>, <ћ> (/tɕ/), and <ѣ> (/dz/), which generally represent palatalizations that are phonemic to Serbian (as well as Bosnian, Croatian, and Montenegrin)<sup>2</sup>. However, these changes set off discord among some communities, particularly those in Novi Sad, the second-largest Serbian city, who resisted Karadžić's reforms, claiming they were akin to imposing a foreign dialect on the community (Alexander, 2006, p. 383).

Karadžić and fellow Serbian philologist Đuro Daničić were co-signers to the 1850 Vienna Literary Agreement, which established the Serbo-Croatian language as a standardized pluricentric language, having multiple cultural centers (see Greenberg, R.D., 2004; though Katičić, 2008, disagrees with some of Greenberg's claims). Per Greenberg, the Vienna Literary Agreement was organized by writers and literary leaders of Croatia, Serbia, and modern-day Slovenia to discuss uniting under a shared banner of South Slavic dialects with shared Slavic cultural heritage (p. 20). In the early 19th century, Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia, was chosen to be the cultural center for the Illyrian language movement, a revival of the cultural memory of Illyria (an old name for the region before the settlement of the Slavs) in the service of South Slav unity, invoked by Croat intellectuals living under Austro-Hungarian rule. This movement was led by Ljudevit Gaj, a Croatian writer and linguist, following the principle of *write for the eye and not for the ear*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For this dissertation, graphemes are marked by angle brackets "<>", allophones (or sounds as they are often pronounced) using square brackets "[ ]", and phonemes using forward slashes "//"

<sup>3</sup> *Piši za oko, a ne za uho* (Alexander, 2006, p. 383)

Through his reforms, Gaj did for the Croatian standard literary language what Karadžić did for Serbian. The Latin alphabet (called *abeceda* in the local languages) came to be known as *latinica*. It was intended to unite the Croatian national regions of Austro-Hungary (the regions of Slavonia, Dalmatia, and the rest of present-day Croatia), in contrast to the Cyrillic alphabet (called *azbuka* in the local languages) or *ćirilica*, intended for use by the Serbs (Alexander, 2006; Greenberg, R.D., 2004). In 1954, in Novi Sad, Serbia, there was a meeting among Serbian and Croatian linguists and writers, who agreed that the Serbian and Croatian languages were one unified language and that the variant spoken in Serbia and Montenegro would be called "Serbo-Croatian," in Croatian "Croato-Serbian" and either name to be used in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This meeting, the Novi Sad Agreement, has been described as a sequel to the Vienna Literary Agreement (Bugarski, 2012, p. 226) in terms of establishing the linguistic identity of speakers of Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian (recently abbreviated to BCMS, which is the first initial of all four varieties in alphabetical order). It is important to mention that all these orthographic and literary events were designed for use by the speakers of the Štokavian dialect of the BCMS languages.

Štokavian is one of three main dialects of BCMS (the others being Kajkavian and Čakavian, both of which are mostly found in Croatia). Štokavian has the most significant number of speakers and has been the variant used by modern nations of Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro, thus all literary standards of the Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian languages are based on this dialect. Within the Štokavian dialect area, an additional dialect division is centered on historical reflexes of the old Slavic letter *yat'*. This letter represented iotation (*jotovanje*) in which the *yat'* vowel (often depicted graphemically as <Ѣ, ѣ> and romanized as <Ě, ě>), initially sounded something like phonetic [æ], but within the South Slavic languages became

pronounced as [i], [e], or [je/ije] (Alexander, 2006, p. 391; Čirgić, 2009). Thus, speakers of the Štokavian dialect were also divided based on additional dialect boundaries, so named based on whether and how the yat' reflex appears, or Ikavian, Ekavian, or Ijekavian respectively. This difference has since become standardized, such that Ekavian is the standard variant of Serbian, Ijekavian is the standard variant for Croatia and Montenegro, and Ikavian is standard in the Dalmatian region of Croatia and parts of Bosnia. As an example, the word for "milk" in the BCMS languages can be standardly written and heard as *mliko*, *mleko*, or *mlijeko* (мЛИКО, МЛЕКО, мЛИЈЕКО) depending on whether the speaker uses Ikavian, Ekavian, or Ijekavian Štokavian BCMS. These differences are reflected in the orthographic standards of the region as well, so whether an individual uses the Latin or Cyrillic alphabets. See figures 4 and 5 for examples of biscriptal grammars used in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Misko Misko**  
@todDM53izjASpRe

10.XII1954. srpski i hrvatski pisci i lingvisti postigli su Novosadski dogovor o srpskohrvatskom književnom jeziku  
Zaključeno da je narodni jezik Srba, Hrvata i Crnogoraca jedan jezik s dva izgovora, da su oba pisma, ćirilica i latinica, ravnopravna i da jezik ima zajednički pravopis



10:56 AM · Dec 10, 2023 · 5,496 Views

6 17 152 1

**Misko Misko**  
@todDM53izjASpRe

Author's Translation

10.XII1954. Serbian and Croatian writers and linguists reached the Novi Sad agreement on the Serbo-Croatian literary language

It was concluded that the national language of Serbs, Croats and Montenegrins is one language with two pronunciations, that both alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin, are equal and that the language has a common spelling



10:56 AM · Dec 10, 2023 · 5,496 Views

6 17 152 1

Figure 4 Post celebrating 69 years of the Novi Sad agreement (Misko Misko, 2023)



Figure 5 Close up of “Grammar of Croato-Serbian”/ “Grammar of Serbo-Croatian” (Misko Misko, 2023)

For this dissertation, the Štokavian variant is the one referred to, with the assumption that Montenegrin primarily uses Ijekavian and Serbian mainly uses Ekavian. Alexander (2006, p. 388) offers an excellent overview of the differences between the various dialects, scripts, and their geographical correlations. Montenegro, being geographically and culturally close to Serbia and Croatia, has been affected by the long history of language discourse between the two countries. Consequently, many of these issues are still prevalent in Montenegrin language ideology today.

### 2.1.2 Montenegro and Montenegrin

The earliest known inhabitants of Montenegro were the Illyrians, about whom little is known and who flourished until the Roman Republic conquered the region around the 1st or 2nd century B.C.E. (Boardman, 1982; Judah, 2009). When the Roman Empire split, the dividing line

ran through Montenegro, causing it to be a kind of cultural bridge connecting Eastern and Western influences (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006). Slavic tribes arrived in the area around the 6th century A.D., settling along the coast and forming the Principality of Duklja (Latin: *Dioclea*), later renamed Zeta, from the Montenegrin coast on the Adriatic Sea to the center of present-day Montenegro. From the 9th to the 12th centuries, Christianity spread through the Slavic lands through Byzantine missionizing efforts. Over the following centuries, Duklja changed hands several times, ruled by Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Byzantine Empire itself (Judah, 2009; Roberts, 2007; Morrison, 2009). During the 15th century, Duklja was ruled by the Crnojević dynasty. However, the Ottoman invasion in the 16th century forced the Crnojevićs to flee inward towards the area of Cetinje, in the mountains of central Montenegro (Roberts, 2007). At the end of the 15th century, the Montenegrin West fell under Ottoman control, while the Republic of Venice dominated the coastlines, with their empire stretching from Dalmatia (present-day Northern Italy and Croatia) down to Montenegro (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006).

Between the Ottomans and the Venetians, nestled in the intensely mountainous regions of Montenegro, existed autonomous indigenous warrior clans who were largely independent, though they paid yearly taxes to the Ottomans (Clissold & Darby, 1966). Historical records suggest that these clans formed around the 15th and 16th centuries; however, some research suggests these clans settled the area long before the establishment of any South Slavic states, meaning that Montenegrins (or, perhaps "proto-Montenegrins") occupied the land before other groups (Vucinich, 1975; Zlatar, 2007). These clans eventually revolted against the Ottomans, and this event became a cornerstone story of Montenegrin national identity, defining Montenegro as a nation of people possessing their own identity and their own right to self-rule. Montenegrins thought of themselves as a people who, despite being vastly outnumbered, could repel the great

Ottoman Empire and hold on to their land. Though there are alternate historical accounts where the Ottomans simply lost interest in fighting to keep such rocky terrain, this narrative undoubtedly entered the Montenegrin national cultural consciousness and left a lasting impact on how Montenegro views itself (Judah, 2009, p. 62).

During the 19th century, Prince-Bishop (title of *vladika* in Montenegrin) Petar II Petrović Njegoš ruled what was at the time called the Principality of Montenegro (*Knjaževina Crna Gora*), a region made independent by successful resistance to the Ottomans and located in the central regions of Montenegro, of which Cetinje was to be the royal capital. Njegoš is credited for uniting Montenegro's tribes through his rule and establishing a centralized state. His reign set the stage for a united Serbia and Montenegro in what would eventually become the state of Yugoslavia (Morrison, 2009). Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire's grip on the Balkans was quite weakened by the middle of the 19th century. Rising discontent fueled rebellions across the region. The Serbian Revolution (1804), sparked by discontent around taxes imposed by the Ottomans, led to an independent Serbia in 1867. Similarly, the Herzegovinian Uprising (1875-1877) saw Orthodox Christian Serbs in Herzegovina, the southern regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Raska, in northeast Montenegro, rise against Ottoman rule.

In 1876, Montenegro and Serbia together declared war on the Ottomans, simultaneously igniting the Serbian-Ottoman War, the Montenegrin-Ottoman War, and the Russo-Ottoman War (also known as the Russo-Turkish War), among others in the region. This period became known as the *Great Eastern Crisis* (Hupchick, 2002). Russia's victory over the Ottomans thus marked the decline of Ottoman power in the Balkans and fostered close ties between the newly independent Serbia and Russia. The Berlin Congress of 1878, helmed by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Germany and consisting of Great Britain and Ireland, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy,

Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, produced the Treaty of Berlin, which gave Montenegro and Serbia formal and internationally recognized independence from the Ottomans (Yavuz & Sluglett, 2011).

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by Bosnian-Serb Gavrilo Princip in 1914 is often said to have sparked World War I, and due to historical ties and geographical proximity to Bosnia and Serbia, Montenegro was quickly drawn into the conflict. Despite its efforts, the small nation suffered multiple invasions and faced significant losses in both lives and infrastructure. By 1916, King Nikola I Petrović-Njegoš, the last monarch of Montenegro, was forced to flee to Italy and then France, where the Montenegrin government continued to operate in exile from Bordeaux. On the 11th of November 1918, as the war was ending, a meeting known as the Podgorica Assembly (*Podgorička Skupstina*) convened, voting to depose King Nikola and annex Montenegro to Serbia. The assembly was gathered with the support of the government of the Kingdom of Serbia to facilitate a total union of Montenegro and Serbia and to consolidate power as the region recovered from World War I. Very shortly after the Podgorica Assembly, territories of the former Austro-Hungarian empire (mainly consisting of the modern states of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia) then gathered to form the South Slavic super state, the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, which was eventually renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Montenegrin opponents of this unification were the *Zelenaši* or "the Greens," and they believed in maintaining freedom and independence for Montenegro and believed that the actions of the Podgorica Assembly were illegitimate and illegal and were masterminded by Serb forces looking to expand the state of Serbia. The *Bjelaši*, or "the Whites," were largely pro-Serbian and pro-Yugoslavian activists supporting unification with Serbia and, after that, creating a larger nation of South Slavs as a federation of Serbia and Montenegro. The names of the factions,

*Zelenaši* and *Bjelaši*, are derived from the color of voting cards and posters used by each of the factions in promoting their cause. The *Zelenaši* party used green paper to print lists of political candidates who either supported complete independence of Montenegro or federation with Yugoslavia, with Montenegro being an equal partner, and the second party, the *Bjelaši*, used white paper to print pro-unionist candidate lists (Banac, 1984).

Montenegrin society at the time was dominated by the interactions between these two ideological factions, divided mainly on the mechanics involved in joining the proposed Yugoslav state and what kind of authority and self-governance Montenegro would retain (Andrijašević & Rastoder, 2006). On January 7th, 1919, Orthodox Christmas, the Greens led an uprising in Cetinje that would be known as the "Christmas Uprising," or *Božićna pobuna* (Kordić, 1986). The rebellion failed, and ultimately, the Whites won with the support of the Serbian army, thus leading to the creation of a Serbia-Montenegro state. This state would eventually merge with its neighbors to form the first iteration of Yugoslavia. While there were Montenegrins at the time who supported the creation of a unified South Slavic state, the majority wanted to do so with Montenegro being an equal partner along with the other member states rather than as part of a Serbian kingdom (Morrison, 2009).

The sociocultural aftermath of the ideologies associated with these two factions remained throughout the federation and persists to this day, even after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the late 20th Century. These ideas still form a cultural background for modern political opinions and ideologies (Morrison, 2018), with the Green Party forming a cultural backbone for pro-independence activists persisting in the present day. This effect can be seen in the circulation of contemporary memes, as in Figure 7 below, which circulated on the internet around 2019-2020. This meme is based on a popular format called "what pride flag is that?" (Know Your Meme,

2023) in which the characters appear to be in a college dormitory and are decorating their room in the first panel. In the second panel one of the characters is seen standing in front of a flag representing an obscure or niche interest or specific identity affiliation. The first use of the meme format used an Italian flag, but the meme quickly spread to include flags from the Star Trek universe, the flag of the United States Marines, and even the flag of the Galactic Empire from the Star Wars franchise, among many others. The use of the green Zelenaši flag in this meme demonstrates the salience of the flag as a recognizable symbol of identity affiliation, which invites commentary on the use of this flag. The caption on the post reads, "The only thing I'm gay for is my country 🇲🇪 [emoji of the flag of Montenegro]." The structure "to be gay for" appears to be a description of an emotional state, like "being in love" or showing strong support for. This phrase is often used in internet discourse to express strong affinity, affiliation, or affection towards some discourse focus, in this case, one's country. This meme shows the connection between the green flag and the subject's love of Montenegro, drawing on the rebellious actions of the Zelenaši in Montenegro's past as activists, who were fighting in support of Montenegrin power, independence, and self-rule. For comparison, Figure 6 shows an image of the Zelenaši flag outside the meme context.



**Figure 6 Zelenaši flag (Wikimedia Commons, n.d.)**

Posted by u/Killymanjaro\_2 Budva 2 years ago



31 The only thing I'm gay for is my country 🇲🇪



11 Comments Share Save ...

Figure 7 "The only thing I'm gay for is my country" (Killiymanjaro\_2, 2022)

During World War II, conflicts arose along the Montenegro coast between supporters of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany on one side and three guerrilla militias on the other side. These were the new Green party, the Četnik Yugoslav Army, composed mainly of Serb-identifying Montenegrins and some former members of the White party, and the Yugoslav Partisans, consisting of members of the Communist party. These three groups were briefly united in their shared desire to resist the Axis powers in the region, but the Četniks eventually lost local support

because of their underlying goal of creating a homogeneous Serbian nation, beyond the shared goal of defending the region from Axis powers. During World War II, Podgorica– Montenegro’s largest city– became temporarily under the protectorate of Fascist Italy. Because of this, Podgorica was heavily bombed by Allied forces until it was liberated by the communist Partisans in 1944. Following WWII, the leader of the Partisans, Josip Broz Tito, established Montenegro as an official independent republic of Yugoslavia. Montenegro joined Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia, and the autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina. This arrangement of states became known as the *Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (SFRY), and it endured from 1945 to 1992, when it underwent intense dissolution into its constituent states (Morrison, 2009; Ramet, 2006).

The post-WWII years were marked by profound social restructuring following the period of war and social discord. In 1946, Podgorica officially became the modern capital of Montenegro, displacing Cetinje, a longstanding cultural capital of the nation, harking back to the days of Ottoman rebellion. In 1948, Podgorica was renamed *Titograd* (later becoming Titograd due to inconsistencies in official records) in tribute to the new leader of Socialist Yugoslavia, the former Partisan leader, Tito. In 1948, Tito orchestrated an ideological split between Yugoslavia and its longtime ally, Russia (then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or U.S.S.R.). This event would come to be known as the Tito-Stalin split and it had a great effect on the future of Yugoslavia and its constituent republics. Despite the U.S.S.R. exerting rule over Yugoslavia's geographical neighbors, this split allowed Yugoslavia to emerge as a freestanding geopolitical power, a unique position for countries in this region. Economically, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia greatly benefitted Montenegro, the smallest and least populated constituent state, as the support

from fellow constituent members enabled Montenegro to thrive, especially compared to the tumultuous century preceding it.

After the death of Marshal Josip Broz Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia, including Montenegro, began to suffer from economic crises—resulting in protests and social movements lasting throughout the mid to late 1980s. Led by Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, protests (known as the *Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution*) occurred between 1988 and 1989. These protests ultimately resulted in the overthrowing of the government of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, as well as the governments of the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina, in northern Serbia, and Kosovo, bordering Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and present-day North Macedonia. Milošević's allies were appointed to government positions, which established a Serbian-dominated voting bloc in the presidency of SFRY. This presidency was a union of representatives from each republic and province in Yugoslavia. While the protests were ostensibly aimed at replacing perceived corrupt governments and politicians with democratic substitutes, they were also viewed as a coup d'état and power grab by Milošević, seeking to fill the power void left by the death of Tito. Slovenia and Croatia resisted Milošević's actions, leading to the dissolution of the ruling Communist Party of Yugoslavia and triggering the overall disintegration of the SFRY. In Montenegro, three young politicians and associates of Milošević—Milo Đukanović, Momir Bulatović, and Svetozar Marović—successfully took control of the country, emerging as the new faces of Montenegrin leadership, prepared to lead Montenegro through the disintegration of Yugoslavia. These three politicians who were, at the time, political newcomers are inextricably linked in this period and are even sometimes collectively referred to as 'the trojka' or the trio (Morrison, 2009, p. 85).

The alliance of these politicians with Serbia during the 1990s, under Milošević's regime, Montenegro's participation in the Yugoslav War, and a violent conflict against Dubrovnik in

Croatia, set the stage for challenging years ahead. In March 1992, Montenegro held a referendum. The majority voted against independence, opting to stay in union with Serbia within the (now) *Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (FRY)—a state comprising only two republics with significant asymmetry in size, economic strength, and political power. Internal challenges eventually surfaced in Montenegro, most notably the division between pro-Milošević and anti-Milošević factions within the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) of Montenegro. Đukanović, the now leader of the anti-Milošević faction, publicly expressed his opposition to Milošević's actions during the Yugoslav wars, which triggered a major party split in 1997. This power struggle within the DPS persisted, with Đukanović ultimately gaining control of the party and eventually steering it toward a pro-independence direction, as a backlash to perceived Serbian aggression and in support of a new Montenegrin self-governance. As a result, the late 1990s witnessed escalating tensions and a repeat of culture wars between Montenegro and Serbia.

Following the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime in 2000, Đukanović faced pressure from opposition groups and supporters of the previous regime. In response, he signed the Belgrade Agreement in October of that year, establishing a shaky union with Serbia. While intended as a temporary arrangement, the agreement ultimately led to a more fundamental shift in Montenegrin society: Montenegro's move towards independence. The Belgrade Agreement in 2002, which formally dissolved Yugoslavia, opened the door for an independence referendum in 2006, which was facilitated by the European Union. To pass, the referendum required a 55% threshold for success, which was eventually achieved, if narrowly with 55.5% voting in favor of Montenegrin independence. However, after independence, concerns started to arise about Đukanović's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) potentially controlling the state, which was intended to be a parliamentary democracy. These concerns created resentment among non-DPS party members,

culminating in protests, the most significant of which began in 2015. Following the protests, there were allegations of a Russian-backed assassination attempt on Đukanović in 2016, which further intensified political tensions among supporters of the new independence and those who wanted to remain aligned with Serbia (and Russia, its longtime political ally and friend). These events shifted much of the political focus toward identity politics in the Montenegrin public sphere. The atmosphere was further complicated in December of 2019 when Đukanović's government enacted the 'Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief' (*Zakon o slobodi vjeroispovijesti*), which transferred ownership of religious property built before 1918 to the Montenegrin state. This law effectively meant that the Serbian Orthodox Church would no longer own many of its properties, which were essential sites for Serbian Orthodoxy in Montenegro. This law angered the church leadership, of course, but it also angered Montenegrins who viewed themselves as closely aligned with their own Serbian heritage and Orthodox identities. These events sparked large protests (prayer protests called *litija* or "lity" in English referring to Orthodox Christian religious processions) organized and encouraged by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) throughout 2020. These protests were generally civil, but they were also large and often passionate displays of competing national, ethnic, and religious identities. The *litija* took place even despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, actively ravaging the world at the time. Thus, the Law on Religious Freedom and the ensuing protests marked a sharp turning point for the Montenegrin government, who was facing national elections in the summer of 2020, and which ultimately signaled the end of Đukanović's era, who was voted out of office by one seat.

Đukanović was a complex character in Montenegrin politics. He led the country out of Milošević's rule and into independence. However, he was also effectively in power for thirty years, gaining him the nickname of "stabilitocrat," a politician prioritizing national stability over full-

fledged democracy (Primatarova & Deimel, 2012). The litija movements, Đukanović's one-seat loss in the August 2020 elections, and the subsequent change of government marked a historic moment for Montenegro. It was the first change of government through democratic elections since 1990, even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID crisis. In his 30 years of rule, Đukanović's role during the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution in 1988-1989 and his resilience during the UN sanctions in the 1990s created a substantial support base. He navigated internal party struggles and led Montenegro to NATO accession in 2017, but Đukanović's final political moves were to bring attention to the existential threat on Montenegrin statehood from both Serbia and Russia (Morrison, 2018).

After the parliamentary elections in Montenegro in 2020, Montenegrins were once more divided by whether they supported the outgoing long-term pro-Montenegrin (or, Montenegro-aligned) government or the incoming pro-Serbian (or, Serbia-aligned government). The litija protests saw the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) emerge as a powerful force, challenging the government in ways traditional opposition parties had not done since the days of the Podgorica Assembly and the Christmas Uprising. Fears of Montenegro becoming a second Serbian state, fueled by close ties between the *Democratic Front* party (*Demokratski Front*, or DF) and the *Coalition for the Future of Montenegro* (*Za Budućnost Crne Gore*, or ZBCG) with Belgrade and Moscow, further heightened tensions. The new Montenegrin government is now led by the populist *Europe Now Movement* (*Pokret Evropa sad!* or PES!), consisting of politicians from other conservative and centrist coalitions in Montenegro. These party relationships would set the stage for the 2023 census to become another cultural battleground, which would see the Serbian Orthodox Church try to increase the number of Montenegrins who declare themselves as Serbs by

putting up billboards (see Figure 8) and engaging in a fervent public campaign of emphasizing Serbian historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity in Montenegro.



**Figure 8 Montenegrin billboard "Proud of their Serbia" (Vučinić, Ž., Lajović, V., & Jovovic, M, 2023)**

This split between the Serbia-aligning and Montenegro-aligning groups in Montenegro has been present in some sense since the period following World War I and the creation of Yugoslavia. However, following the 2020 elections and the litija protests, a new level of tension between the groups was reached. Figure 9 presents a meme shared on Reddit, in the Montenegro subreddit in early 2023. The image depicts a group of Serbian Orthodox priests with hunting equipment, photographing the spoils of their latest hunt– a Montenegrin flag stretched between two wooden poles as if it were animal skin. While this image is undoubtedly gruesome, it highlights the palpable tension between the competing factions in Montenegro and the metaphorical depiction of the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church as preying on Montenegrin identities and independence.

r/montenegro · Posted by u/dhoukl Слава Україні! 🇺🇦 11 months ago  
state of affairs  
Meme



18 Comments Share ...

Figure 9 "State of affairs" (dhoukl, 2023)

Returning to the history and categorization of language identity in the region, from before the Vienna Literary Agreement to the Novi Sad Agreement and beyond, it is perhaps not surprising that language would remain a central issue in Montenegro as it grows into its new post-independence phase. In the new constitution, the Montenegrin language was recognized as an official state language, and since then, Montenegrin has undergone a long and complex process of standardization. While there has long been an undercurrent of academics and writers who supported Montenegrin language rights and who supported the general right to the self-determination of a people to name their own language since the twentieth century, it emerged in the new Montenegro as a significant part of nation-building efforts.

Literacy as a practice of reading and writing is found in Montenegro dating back to the 9th century, particularly in the Principality of Duklja, around the Monastery of Prečista Krajinska, on the border of Montenegro and Albania. There also exists evidence of the use of Cyrillic in the form of Old Church Slavic texts dating back to the time of Zeta, and Latin and Italian both appear in texts from the Montenegrin coast, dating to the 15th to 18th centuries (Šekularac, 2014). The period following World War II saw the formation of several organizations and social groups that supported Montenegrin language and literacy in Montenegro, including the Montenegrin PEN center in 1990 (*Crnogorski PEN Centar*) and Matica Crnogorska in Cetinje to promote Montenegrin language and culture. In 1993, the PEN center wrote the “Declaration of the Montenegrin PEN Centre on the Constitutional Position of the Montenegrin language” (*Deklaracija crnogorskog PEN centra o ustavnom položaju crnogorskog jezika*), defining the national language of Montenegro as "Montenegrin." This document would play an essential role in the official process of standardizing Montenegrin in the years following the independence referendum.

Most contemporary work supporting the existence of a separate Montenegrin language began with the work of Montenegrin linguist Vojislav Nikčević in the 1970s. Nikčević was a Yugoslav intellectual dissident who supported the notion of Montenegrin national identity, including linguistic identity, during the period of SFRY, when national movements were often quashed in support of greater Yugoslav harmony. In the 1990s and very early 2000s, Nikčević wrote some of the first grammars of the Montenegrin language, along with Špiro Kulašić, founded on the idea that the Montenegrin and Serbian languages were significantly different (Dulović, 2009). He also advocated using the Latin alphabet graphemes <ś> and <ź> to replace the Ijekavian digraphs <sj> and <zj>, though his ideas were generally neglected at the time (Nakazawa, 2015,

p. 130). In 2007, the new Montenegrin government tasked local linguists and literary scholars to create new graphemes, in both Latin and Cyrillic script, to represent marked variants of Montenegrin speech, which were historically found in primarily rural and non-standard dialects (Čirgić, et al., 2020; Greenberg, R.D., 2019). In 2008, the Committee for Standardization of the Montenegrin language was formed (*Savjet za standardizaciju crnogorskog jezika*) headed by Branko Banjević, to produce a grammar and dictionary of the Montenegrin language, along with other intellectuals, including Dr. Rajka Glušica and Dr. Adnan Čirgić, among many others (Nakazawa, 2015, p. 131). The new orthography was released in 2009 with four new graphemes, <ś> and <ź> in Latin and their matching Cyrillic graphemes <ć> and <3> respectively; however, the reaction was rather tepid, and both the new graphemes and their predecessor graphemes were allowed to coexist in the official language standard (Perović et al., 2009, p. 225). Čirgić emerged as one of the more visible proponents of the Montenegrin language standard and he wrote some of the first textbooks of the Montenegrin language, along with several monographs on dialectology in Montenegro (Čirgić, 2017; Čirgić, et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Glušica became one of the more prolific critics of Čirgić's work (e.g. see Bigović-Glušica, 2020; Glušica, 2009, 2010, 2011).



**Figure 10 Montenegrin language (Andrea, 2020)**

Figure 10 shows one example of how users define the Montenegrin language in comparison to Serbian. According to this user, "Andrea," Montenegrin is defined by its Ijekavian dialect forms and its use of the special graphemes <ś> and <ź>, compared to Serbian, which uses Ekavian and, by implication, does not use the graphemes. This user has an awareness of language differences based on the new standard and appears to have a positive relationship with these forms, judging by emoji use and general tone of the post. Because of the interaction between the Ijekavian dialect and potential places for use of the marked grapheme, some words seem to exhibit greater variation than others. Table 1 displays two words that are typical carriers of variation connected to identity

in the Serbian-Montenegrin language context. The word for "president" and its derivations (i.e., presidential, presidency) and the question word "where," are common sources of differentiation, with the former particularly prevalent in the data presented in this dissertation. The forms "пресједник/presjednik" indicate Ijekavian speech norms found in Croatia, Montenegro, and parts of Bosnia, and notably not Serbia.

**Table 1 Spelling variation among BCMS languages<sup>4</sup>**

Variant	PRESIDENT	WHERE
Standard Serbian Ekavian (in Cyrillic, Latin, and Cyrillic Italics)	председник [predsednik, <i>predsednik</i> ]	где [gde, <i>zde</i> ]
Standard Ijekavian (Croatia, Montenegro, parts of Bosnia)	predsjednik	gdje
Standard Montenegrin Ijekavian	predšednik	dje, đe

In 2008, supporters of Montenegrin language independence requested an ISO code for Montenegrin to replace the former code for Serbo-Croatian as a step towards gaining international recognition of their language status. The International Organization for Standardization (or ISO, intended to summon up the Greek word “ἴσος” or *isos*, meaning "equal") develops international standards in many arenas globally, including language codes for use in text categorization and

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<sup>4</sup> Individuals commonly write председник/predsednik/predsjednik/predšednik [president] as преседник/presednik/presjednik/prešednik, without the first <d>. This is generally treated as a typo or misspelling. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will maintain that convention and assume that a missing <d> is a common typo specific to this word. However, there is likely dialect-driven variation occurring here, though that is beyond the scope of the current project.

metadata creation. The request was finally approved in 2017, after some bureaucratic issues, and Montenegrin received the code ISO 639-2 and the abbreviation [cnr].

The standardization process of Montenegrin, from using the official name of "Montenegrin" in the constitution to enshrining unique graphemes in textbooks and finally having international recognition through ISO codes, all become topics for public language debates, as can be seen in the talk pages of Wikipedia.

## **2.2 Vignette: the Wikipedia 'talk' pages**

Public commentary about language practices and communicative norms can reflect how individuals and communities think of language at a given time (see Philips, 2004 and Kroskrity, 2004, for examples of public language debates in Tongan and Arizona Tewa communities, respectively). Wikipedia is a collaborative online encyclopedia, and its article writers and editors may consist of anyone who creates an account on the platform, regardless of intellectual or professional qualifications. The encyclopedia is divided into sections, based on language, which are often called "wikis." While not necessarily a prominent social media platform, Wikipedia has a section called the "talk pages," which are behind-the-scenes sites for administrators and editors of Wikipedia articles to discuss issues in editing content or improvements to an article or editorial process. In doing so, these users converse with other writers and editors about how to best enact Wikipedia's policies and mission statement to be a "widely accessible and free encyclopedia" (Wikimedia, 2024). As individual wikis on the platform are also collaborative and constantly being updated, the talk pages can provide a public record of commentary and debate which addresses issues relating to language use on the site, that is, issues of style, content, and article

appropriateness. Every component of Wikipedia (articles, the front page, administrative sections) has a corresponding talk page. This vignette examines the Wikipedia talk pages and the five attempts to create a Montenegrin-language Wikipedia between 2006 and 2017. By highlighting users' comments on why such a Wikipedia should or should not exist, common claims of the existence or non-existence of the Montenegrin language, and the language standardization process, these debates show that issues of language difference and ideology are socially salient to users of Wikipedia aware of the cultural and political history of the region. Wikipedia was founded in 2001 and was initially only available in English, though multilingual wikis were shortly added based on user demand and the availability of willing moderators and content writers.

The Serbo-Croatian wiki was the first of the BCMS languages to be created in January 2002. In December of 2002, a Bosnian version was formed and in February 2003, two separate Serbian and Croatian wikis were created. Including the Serbo-Croatian wiki, this brought the total number of wikis to four representing the languages of Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro.



Figure 11 Front page of the Serbo-Croatian wiki with converter (Wikipedia, 2024)

The initial Serbo-Croatian wiki is written in Latin script. Wikimedia eventually addressed the issue of biscriptality by including a built-in converter, which would allow articles written in Latin to be converted into Cyrillic. The first group of users hoped that the Serbo-Croatian wiki

would be "...absolutely NPOV [neutral point of view], liberal and antinationalist" (Rogers, 2015, p. 172); thus, it was named "Serbo-Croatian," which was the most common way of referring to the BCMS languages at the time. The hope was that this Serbo-Croatian Wikipedia would be a solution, in the context of Wikipedia, to the Yugoslav discord of the 1990s, which showed up in all social spaces, including spaces on the nascent internet. In practice, the overwhelming preference of the newly-independent countries at the time was for them to carve out their own national spaces, including their own Wikipedia site, as part of a process of differentiation from one another.

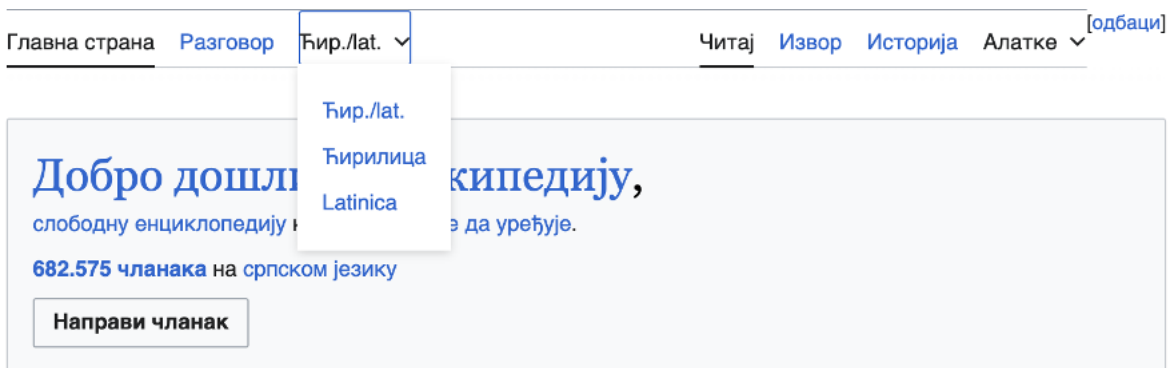
The Bosnian wiki was created at the end of 2002. Despite the presence of both Latin and Cyrillic scripts in the Bosnian language, this wiki still remains only available in the Latin script, without the Latin-to-Cyrillic converter, as shown in Figure 12:



**Figure 12 Front page of Bosnian wiki (Wikipedia, 2024)**

In February 2003, individual Serbian and Croatian wikis were formed. The Serbian wiki uses the same character mapping application as the Serbo-Croatian wiki to switch between Cyrillic

and Latin alphabets. The Serbian wiki is currently the largest one of the South Slavic languages and the 21st largest overall in terms of article count and number of registered users.



**Figure 13 Front page of Serbian wiki (Wikipedia, 2024)**

Like the Bosnian wiki, the Croatian wiki (Figure 14 below) does not have the converter; it only offers content in the Latin script. Interestingly, the Croatian Wikipedia is regularly claimed to be rife with biases and disinformation,<sup>5</sup> with an ideological slant towards Croatian nationalism. The wiki has even been accused of historical revisionism in its articles when compared to articles in the wiki of Bosnian, Serbian, and Serbo-Croatian. While certainly problematic, this issue highlights a key feature of having separate wikis for each language. Each wiki has its own content, subject to the ideological whims of its authors and editors. Despite being highly similar languages, the wikis for Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Serbo-Croatian contain content that is not only different from one another but also conveys different ideological and positioned viewpoints. It is not the case that the material from one wiki is translated to produce the material for the other. That is, an article addressing some topic on the Serbian Wikipedia is not merely a Cyrillic version of an

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<sup>5</sup> [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Croatian\\_Wikipedia\\_Disinformation\\_Assessment-2021](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Croatian_Wikipedia_Disinformation_Assessment-2021)

article made for the Croatian or Bosnian wikis and written in the Latin script. The differences are measurable enough that one wiki can be accused of expressing bias or non-neutrality more than the others.



Figure 14 Front page of Croatian wiki (Wikipedia, 2024)

In the context of four separate wikis existing for Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Serbo-Croatian and of the potential for disinformation and ideological bias on all wikis, Montenegrins wanted to form their own wiki, with content produced by themselves, rather than use the content created by other language groups. In 2006, while Montenegrin national identity was new and still finding its place in society and online, local Montenegrin language activists decided to move forward with the process. While this process was being adjudicated, these activists created an internet encyclopedia named *Montenegrowiki* (eventually changing its name to *Crnogorska Enciklopedija*, or "Montenegrin Encyclopedia") on a different platform in anticipation of eventually creating a wiki on Wikipedia itself. This encyclopedia only lasted from 2006 to 2008 and, despite having over one thousand articles, was shut down, possibly due to hacking from

Serbian language nationalists.<sup>6</sup> The first proposal for an official Montenegrin language Wikipedia was submitted in November 2006 but rejected in the same month for the following reason: "Wikis should not be split along political lines, and we encourage Montenegrin editors to collaborate with Serbian editors in a single wiki, or at the very least, to have Montenegrin pages alongside Serbian pages." The default position that Montenegrin editors should be working with Serbian editors (and not Croatian, Bosnian, or Serbo-Croatian ones) struck a discordant note with the supporters of the Montenegrin Wikipedia, who were actively involved in a genuine and intense struggle for the independence of their country from Serbia and who felt erased from the Wikipedia platform.

Table 2 highlights several comments which were taken from the talk pages of the first attempt at creating a Montenegrin wiki, which was proposed and then rejected in the same month, thus all comments were written in November 2006 while the request was pending. Bolding has been added to interesting segments addressing issues of language standardization and the "realness" of the Montenegrin language. Otherwise, the text is presented as the original authors posted it. Thus, there are many typos and misspellings, likely due to the role of English as a non-maternal language for many of these users. By convention, administrative discussion on Wikipedia is conducted in English, even though the content concerns Montenegrin, so the content is not presented in translation, as it is in English already.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crnogorska\\_Enciklopedija](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crnogorska_Enciklopedija)

<sup>7</sup> All users are referred to here by the gender-neutral pronoun set 'they/their/theirs' for consistency, as user gender is not easily perceivable based on display names. I will do so for the rest of this dissertation whenever necessary.

Table 2 Comments from Montenegrin wiki request 1

#	User	Text
1	George D. Bozovic	<p><b>(Perhaps I would vote 'support' if Montenegrin language was officially proclaimed and standardized in a form.</b> Right now, the language is not neither officially proclaimed by the Government of Montenegro, <b>nor it has a standard literary form.</b> I think that, at the moment, we should just wait to see what is going to happen in Montenegro about this matter, and <b>if Montenegrin Government proclaims Montenegrin language and if Montenegrin Academy standardizes it, then this voting will have sense.)</b></p>
2	YUGO	<p><b>this language simply does not exist.</b> its an invention of anti-serbia-attituted peoples. <b>i do not know any montenegrin words or linguistic differences to serbian, than only minor dialectical ones.</b></p>
3	Carl Dien	<p>How stupid... <b>Creating a Wikipedia in a language that doesn't exist.</b> Why don't we just create a Moon-language Wikipedia, while we're at it..</p>
4	George D. Bozovic	<p>Beside, what would you do with a Wikipedia? <b>The language is not standardized yet;</b> when you just try write a single sentence in it, you can't be sure is it actually correct!</p>
5	deleted user 1	<p><b>You could borrow from the Serbian articles letter for letter and nobody would notice.</b> What's next, Australian? Texan? Female?-</p>

Users like George D. Bozovic (1, 4) explicitly mention in their comments that the standardization process is vital in determining whether to accept the existence of the Montenegrin language and, thus, the creation of the Montenegrin wiki. This user “would vote ‘support’ if Montenegrin language was officially proclaimed and standardized” or if it had “...a standard literary form...” supported by the Montenegrin government and Montenegrin language academies. YUGO and Carl Dien (2, 3) directly claim that the language does not even exist, with YUGO and a since-deleted user (2, 5) arguing that there are no differences besides "minor dialectical [sic] ones" between Serbian and Montenegrin. Other comments in this discussion, and in future discussions, echo similar points— the language is not standardized, there are no accepted grammars (as of 2006), and there are no governing bodies or language authorities who would support the creation of this wiki, so the idea cannot succeed. This wiki was ultimately rejected because “Wikis should not be split along political lines,” thus enforcing the social perception that the only difference between the Serbian and Montenegrin languages is political rather than linguistic.

The second proposal for the creation of a Montenegrin wiki was submitted at the beginning of January 2007, just a few months after the rejection of the first proposal. This attempt was apparently rejected for the same reason: “This request has been rejected for the same reasons as the November 2006 request; the discussion below has not provided new information that would change this decision.” This decision again relied on the claim that the only differences between Serbian and Montenegrin are political and not linguistic. Table 3 displays some selected comments from users discussing this new attempt. They follow similar lines in terms of issues to those from the first attempt in Table 2.

Table 3 Comments from Montenegrin wiki request 2

#	User	Text
1	Kseferovic	but if Anglosaxon and <b>languages long extinct can have wikis</b> , then there is no reason why Montenegrin shouldn't be able to have one.
2	Stop_The_Lies	Since I consider the Serbian and Montenegrin language(s) <b>practically identical</b> , yet it takes me half an hour to read a paragraph in cyrillic, <b>I wouldn't mind having 2 Serbian Wikipedias</b> (which is what this would create) at all (one I can read fast and the other... not so fast hehe)!
3	Dzordzm	say let the Montenegrin state, now unopressed from the alleged authoritirianism from Belgrade, <b>develop a "new" language for its population, codify it and obtain an ISO classification and then come back to ask for an opinion.</b>
4	deleted user 2	Cyrillic is an element of Greater Serbdom. Montenegrins should completely abandon it, just like the Croats. <b>Cyrillic is only a leftover of Greater Serb aggression on Montenegro.</b>
5	Sideshow Bob	<b>Letters Š, Ž and 3, used exclusively in Montenegrin language.</b> Š is frequently used, while the other two are somewhat marginalized, but still used in certain words and expressions.

In this case, reasons for and against the wiki again include appeals to the existence of the language. For example, user Kseferovic claims that if extinct languages, like Anglo-Saxon, can have wikis, then Montenegrin should also be permitted. While this statement might be dismissive of the Montenegrin language, frivolously equating it to dead or no longer spoken languages, this user is correct in pointing out that many of the current wikis do not represent contemporary or surviving language communities. For example, there is a wiki for Old English and one for Interlingua, a constructed language based on the Romance languages. User Stop\_The\_Lies claims that Montenegrin is identical to Serbian, but they are still supportive because of the potential option of reading articles in Latin. This comment was likely posted before the script converter was applied to the page and, like the previous statement, has a dismissive tone towards the Montenegrin wiki, reducing Montenegrin to the status of Latin Serbian. However, the user still supports the project for functional reasons. Similarly, a deleted user commented that Cyrillic is a remnant of Serbian aggression in Montenegro. Thus, the Montenegrin wiki should be permitted just for access to Latin, rather than for its own merits. User Dzordzm suggests that they would be satisfied if an ISO code were created, appealing to outside authorities, like the ISO granters, for the authentication of the Montenegrin language. Finally, User Sideshow Bob supports the proposal because of the marked Montenegrin graphemes. This comment is one of the earliest mentions of the marked graphemes <ś>, <ź>, and <ǰ> on the Wikipedia talk pages as linguistic features intimately tied to Montenegrin identity. This topic reappears in future discussions around proposals.

The third proposal was suggested and rejected in 2010 for the same reason as the first and second proposals: “This request has been rejected for the same reasons as the November 2006 request and April 2007 request; the discussion below has not provided new information that would change this decision. There is no ISO-639 language code for Montenegrin, which is a strict

requirement for eligibility.” This comment again highlights the issue that Serbian and Montenegrin are the same language; thus, the creation of a Montenegrin wiki is politically motivated and not linguistically. However, there is another caveat this time: There is no ISO number yet to support the Montenegrin language standard. At this point, there were already public debates on the standardization of Montenegrin, and a request for an ISO code was submitted in 2008. As of 2010, no decision was made by the ISO committee, so that was considered a point against the Montenegrin wiki project. What was not known at the time was that the Montenegrin ISO application had stalled due to issues with paperwork and bureaucracy, not because of any ISO-internal rejection of the request. However, it still formed the body of evidence against the wiki project.

Table 4 Comments from Montenegrin wiki request 3

#	User	Text
1	Maduixa	If political reasons prevailed in two previous cases, then <b>why would we now pretend that linguistics is so important?</b>
2	Geologicharka	Oppose <b>Language is created for political reasons...</b>
3	ЈованВБ	Oppose <b>This language don`t exist. They don`t have ISO code also.</b>
4	Лечени	oppose <b>False language.</b>
5	RichardArnolde	it has been stated that <b>the purpose of this Wikipedia is to revive, maintain and strengthen Montenegrin nationalism</b> and the Montenegrin national identity, in the wake of a much stronger, affirmed one, Serbian.

This third attempt centers on the role of politics in language existence. The independence referendum is in the recent past. However, there were still heated public debates among the committees for language standardization, especially between Dr. Adnan Čirgić and his supporters and those of experts like Dr. Rajka Glušica and others who disagreed with Čirgić's proposals. User RichardArnolde even directly acknowledges the Wikipedia project's role in enhancing and strengthening Montenegrin nationalism against the more powerful (and already affirmed) Serbian national identity.

In 2011, a fourth attempt was undertaken and rejected. This attempt was short-lived, and the conversation on the talk pages was brief. The reasoning this time was directly addressing the


issue of the ISO code, but the code was only the necessary, not sufficient condition. As the moderator writes: "Montenegrin does not have its own ISO 639 code. If and when it gets one, the language committee will consider the creation of a Montenegrin Wikipedia; otherwise, there is no point in continuing to ask for one." While it was not part of the official reasoning previously, the lack of ISO code is very much an explicit challenge for the admins now.

**Table 5 Comments from Montenegrin wiki request 4**

#	User	Text
1	Antony D. Green	<b>Montenegrin does not have its own ISO 639 code. If and when it gets one, the language committee will consider the creation of a Montenegrin Wikipedia;</b> otherwise there is no point in continuing to ask for one.
2	deleted user 3	<b>Serbian language is imposed upon the Montenegrins, by the Serb occupiers</b> in year 1918...and even before that, by the serbizated dynasty Petrović/Njegoš - who ruled the Montenegro for 200 years... <b>Stop serbisation, stop assimilation, we have our rights!</b>
3	CRVENAHRVATSKA	Due to Greater Serbianist imperialism and pro-Chetnik agenda, <b>the Montenegrin language was crushed, repressed and pushed to near extinction. It represents one of the few surviving languages of Europe in geopardy.</b>
4	Mir Harven	The "distance" on which level ? <b>They are the most "distant" standard language of all, re. their phonemes inventory (š, ž et.c.) As for, say, morphology, word-formation (not the same in Slavic languages), syntax, semantics, stylistics, lexicology, discourse,...- it is irrational to require they should satisfy some non-existent test of "differentiality"</b> . Especiallyly the finances "argument" reminds me of the pretence used in Yugoslavia to promote Serbian language in practice ("we don't have enough money to print all the laws & federal injunctions in all four languages); incidentally, aped by Bosnian unitarian language planners who use the same "excuse" to oust Croatian and Serbian languages whenever & wherever possible.
5	Markus cgl	<b>Montenegrin official letter from the alphabet š (which he does not have any other language with area former Serbo-Croatian) is used in schools and government documents.</b> Here's an example from the official site of the Assembly of Montenegro

Users like CRVENAHRVATSKA and a deleted user describe the Montenegrin language as something that has been repressed or imposed upon by Serbian occupiers and see the Wikipedia project to push off the metaphoric yoke and support Montenegrin independence. Users Markus cgl and Mir Harven join the chorus on the role of the marked letters, with the former focusing on the <ś> specifically, which is perceived to be (and likely by any quantitative measure is) much more common than the other marked graphemes. User Mir Harven appeals to linguistic jargon, e.g., phonology, morphology, stylistics, and lexicology, in their support of the Montenegrin language and, in doing so, conveys a position of authoritativeness on language issues by appealing to technical language and linguistic knowledge.

The fifth and most recent proposal was submitted in 2017, following the approval of an ISO code for Montenegrin. While the debate has yet to be resolved, much of the discourse centered on whether the wiki is even eligible for creation despite the establishment of an ISO code. The mods' refusal to approve the project once more gives users the impression of "changing the goal post" and postponing the project indefinitely, assigning the status of "on hold" to the project.

submitted	verification	final decision
 <p>Discuss the creation of this language project on this page. <b>Votes will be ignored when judging the proposal. Please provide arguments or reasons and be prepared to defend them</b> (see the <a href="#">Language proposal policy</a>).</p> <p>The <a href="#">language committee</a> needs to verify the language is eligible to be approved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Check that the project does not already exist (see <a href="#">list</a>).</li> <li>▪ Obtain an ISO 639 code</li> <li>▪ Ensure the requested language is sufficiently unique that it could not exist on a more general wiki.</li> <li>▪ Ensure that there are a sufficient number of native editors of that language to merit an edition in that language.</li> </ul> <p><b>This proposal is on hold:</b></p> <p><i>On hold. Code is now valid, but LangCom is still discussing eligibility of the project (see <a href="#">#Second discussion below</a>). That said, a sufficiently active and robust test project must be built in Incubator before any test in Montenegrin would approved for creation as an independent wiki. So please contribute to that test at <a href="#">incubator:Wp/cnr</a>. StevenJ81 (talk) 17:55, 5 January 2018 (UTC)</i></p>		

**Figure 15 Summary of project status for Montenegrin wiki request 5 (Wikipedia, 2024)**

**Table 6 Comments from Montenegrin wiki request 5**

#	User	Text
1	GregorB	<b>Montenegrin alphabet is distinct from Serbian: "The most notable distinction, say Montenegrin linguists, is in two letters, "s" and "z" ["Ś" and "Ž", actually], each bearing what resembles a French acute accent, neither of which exist in Serbian.</b> They were always present in the spoken language in Montenegro, but were only formally added to the Montenegrin alphabet last July [i.e. July 2010]
2	Bojan	Note that some Serbs (both those who live in Montenegro and those who do not) also use hyperiotated forms (đe, đevojka, đed, deca, nedelja, poćerati, meded) in colloquial speech. <b>In fact, in past many more Serbs spoke like that</b>
3	Freemanmne	As such, it has three layers: <b>1. first part are general Shtokavian language features (common in Bosnian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Serbian languages); 2. second part are the features from general Montenegrin language layer (macro-structure); and 3. third layer comprises features of local speech patterns pertaining to Montenegrin dialects (micro-structures).</b> Basic structural difference between these languages, among others, is their phonemic composition. "Surplus" Montenegrin phonemes are ś and ž
4	ApcehCraft	Those "hundreds of differences" between standard variants are <b>simply found by nationalist tricks and are fueled by politics.</b>
5	Lujki	With all due respect I do not understand why these two letters cause such problems, they haven't been invented by anyone out of the blue, <b>they have been in oral Montenegrin tradition for hunderds of years, surviving huge repression in 20th century,</b> they just couldn't be written at that time. First use of Ś in example is almost a thousand years ago, when first Slavic tribes came to these areas
6	Ego and his own	So I when was a kid, I have studied "Serbo-Croatian" for 8 years then because of war in Yugoslavia[2] and separation of Croatia suddenly started studying "Serbian" in 1992 or so. Nothing changed with language except name. <b>Montenegrin language was suppressed to degree of utter discrimination and called "villager" talk, "street" talk etc. Motives for such suppression was to assimilate Montenegrins to be Serbs.</b>
7	Ivan VA	And is <b>entirely based on analysing the relationship between the language name (and nothing other than that) and national identity and the (contemporary, Montenegrin) political context</b> this relationship arises out of.

Discourse on the fifth attempt's talk pages has been active even as of 2023. The comments presented in Table 6 show the same issues arising, as they were unsettled in previous attempts.

Arguments over whether Montenegrin has been satisfactorily standardized appeal to the usefulness of the Montenegrin graphemes/sounds for distinguishing a separate Montenegrin language and the match between language and political/national identity. The same arguments are repeated– on the anti-Wikipedia side, that differences in the Montenegrin language consist of "nationalist tricks and are fueled by politics" (ApcehCraft, 4) and that Montenegrin "is entirely based on...the relationship between the language name...and national identity...and the political context" (Ivan VA, 7). As well as on the supporting side in which there are the marked letters, "neither of which exist in Serbian" (GregorB, 1), and which have been in "...oral Montenegrin tradition" for hundreds of years (Lujki, 5). The support side views the Serbian language and Serbian language standards as suppressive, to "...assimilate Montenegrins to be Serbs" (Ego and his own, 6).



Figure 16 Front page of Montenegrin wiki incubator(Wikimedia Foundation, 2024)

One of the requirements to successfully propose and create a new language wiki is for supporters to assemble an incubator with a substantial number of articles already prepared. While the project was rejected, Montenegrin linguists and literature critics have been building an incubator project ready to launch. Figure 16 shows the front page of the Montenegrin Wikipedia in incubation. While it is not easily accessible due to its incubator status, it boasts many articles - 2166 to be exact - written entirely in the Montenegrin language and addressing concepts and topics relevant to a Montenegrin user base. This impressive level of content creation demonstrates the fervent desire of Montenegrins to have a Wiki of their own.

The rejection of the first four proposals for a Montenegrin Wikipedia (in 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2011) paralleled public debates in Montenegro over language and national identity. The fifth and current proposal was submitted in 2017, co-occurring with Montenegro's entry into NATO and the coup attempt, which antagonized Serbian and Montenegrin relationships (through the alleged actions of Serbs and Russians). The final comment on the state of the project is: "On hold. Code is now valid, but LangCom is still discussing eligibility of the project...That said, a sufficiently active and robust test project must be built in Incubator before any test in Montenegrin would be approved for creation as an independent wiki."

Since first submitting a proposal for the project, Montenegrin has been officially standardized by the university and national language academies, obtained an ISO code, and created a thorough incubator page. However, it still has not been approved. Supporters of a Montenegrin language Wikipedia have only to wait for the next requirement and the next goal post in the seemingly endless process of having their own Wikipedia. Social platforms like Wikipedia are essential as public forums to discuss social issues, including language usage. An oft-quoted line

attributed to Max Weinreich is that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy. In the 21st century, a language may just be a dialect with a Wikipedia.

### **3.0 Literature review**

This dissertation explores how different forms of communication, including script, grapheme, and emojis, shape and distinguish competing notions of Montenegrin national identity online between Montenegrins aligned with Serbia and those aligned with Montenegro. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation, this literature review will focus on the three themes of sociolinguistic identity, language ideology, and internet language, with a particular emphasis on the use of orthography, emojis, and memes. These issues are complex and intertwined within the rich context of the Balkans and its diverse linguistic environments. As this project contributes to the growing field of internet linguistics and discourse analysis of social media by analyzing the impact of orthography and emojis, this literature review also provides a comprehensive overview of the major themes of language and identity in the Balkans, the study of sociolinguistic meaning and ideology, and the role of language and the internet.

#### **3.1 Language and identity in the Balkans**

In this section, I highlight relevant scholarship in Balkan linguistics. This builds upon chapter 2, which covers the historical and social context of Montenegro, including a brief introduction to relevant work on dialectology and standardization.

The Balkans, a region often described as comprising the countries of former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and North Macedonia), Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and European Turkey, have long been recognized as a region

sharing features of culture, language, religion, and history. Much of the following overview on the Balkans is taken from Friedman (2011) and (2022), which provide comprehensive reviews of scholarship on issues of language contact and historical linguistics of the Balkans. Many of the Balkan languages are described as comprising a sprachbund, given their shared linguistic features because of geographic proximity and social contact (Joseph, 2020). The linguistic complexity of the Balkan region that forms such an entity is deeply rooted in the historical and ideological remnants of empire and settlement, including the Ottomans, the Austro-Hungarians, the Slavs, and in some cases, smaller empires like the Venetians and Illyrians. The qualities delineating the Balkan sprachbund consist of phonetic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features and are often referred to as Balkanisms, or linguistic traits shared by Balkan languages. This observation dates to Kopitar's (1829) assertion that Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, and Albanian share enough features to constitute "one grammar with three lexicons." Other 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars like Schleicher (1850) and Miklosich (1861) lay the groundwork for explicitly identifying the features differentiating the lexicons through these Balkanisms, marking the beginnings of Balkan linguistics as a formal discipline of study (Kopitar, 1829; Schleicher, 1850; and Miklosich, (1861), referenced in Friedman, 2022).

Schaller (1975) reviews work on the sprachbund, the primary focus of Balkan linguistics for much of the 20th century and brings the work of the early part of the century in line with the later part and reintroduces the idea of the Balkan sprachbund. Joseph (1987) contributes a comprehensive overview of Schaller (1975), critically reviewing Schaller's contributions and exploring both collective and individual aspects of Balkan language study. An insight from Joseph (1987) is the acknowledgment that language contact in the Balkans is complex and that it does not adhere to national boundaries. This is especially prescient given the dissolution of Yugoslavia in

the early 1990s, which would thus lead to a dramatic change in national boundaries as the super-state broke up into its many constituent parts. Bugarski and Hawkesworth (1992) address the ongoing state of language standardization and national identity while Yugoslavia was actively in the process of breaking up. They update this project ten years later (Bugarski & Hawkesworth, 2004), on the eve of Montenegro's independence, but they find uncertainty around the future prospect of the Montenegrin language.

Greenberg (2000) addresses Montenegrin language issues in connection with Macedonian by homing in on linguistic parallels between South Slavic languages Macedonian and southern Montenegrin, emphasizing shared features in phonology, morphology, and syntax which could be found across Northern Albania and supporting the claim that parts of the Montenegrin dialect participate in the sprachbund. Alexander (2006) is both an instructional textbook and a sociolinguistic grammar, offering the first comprehensive coverage of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian from educational and sociolinguistic perspectives. The missing Montenegrin variant in the book's title is one indication that the process of standardizing the language is ongoing, but not yet complete. Greenberg (2004) focuses on the standardization of the former Serbo-Croatian language following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the recent independence of Montenegro and what this new geopolitical make-up meant for the region. Much of the scholarship on Balkan languages, both addressed in this review and excluded, concerns either dialectological perspectives, often through phonology, or language policy effects with a close attention to the mechanisms of policy and state apparatuses. While sociolinguistic identity is very much a part of both of those tracks, the second decade of the 21st century would see research shifting to internet contexts, thus re-centering the question of individual community and identity. This period marks an especially computational and quantitative turn for the study of Balkan languages and linguistics.

As social media use grew following a steep rise in global internet-capable technology, one of the most popular platforms globally was Twitter, which was also an excellent early source for data on online variation and dialectological studies. Ljubešić, Miličević Petrović, & Samardžić (2018) explore the geographical distribution of dialectological and sprachbund features by using geo-encoded Twitter data to map occurrences of these features among the BCMS dialects on Twitter. Their work concludes with dialect maps of regional isoglosses based on differences like use of the infinitive, synthetic or analytic future tense, or preferences for certain intensifying adverbs, all features often described as bound by geopolitical borders in the BCMS regions (Bieber, 2015; Brozović, 1992). The authors find that in many cases, dialect features are found where one expects them to be found, especially in terms of Serbia and Croatia, but that Bosnia and Montenegro are much more gradient and inclusive of features, potentially suggesting some flux as they are newer language standards which are developing in real-time. Fišer, Ljubešić, and Popič (2021) provide tools for annotating and classifying South Slavic languages to build an infrastructure for analyzing user-generated content in Slovene, Croatian, and Serbian to track language attitudes by users from former Yugoslav communities. These studies were inspired by the work of dialectologists, who sought to track, measure, and quantify the differences between various dialects in the region. By utilizing the internet as a tool for analysis, these computational studies were able to provide valuable insights into the differences between dialects in both the virtual and real-world contexts. Complementing these computational and quantitative trends in Balkan and South Slavic linguistics research are many qualitative studies which explore how social media creates social meaning, shapes, and improves the use of identity categories, and affects language ideologies.

Qualitative research on the BCMS languages addresses issues of ideology formation and circulation on both print and social media. George (2020) examines linguistic simultaneity among Serbian youths in the capital city of Belgrade, using a Bakhtinian approach to understanding translingual and code-switching practices and their relationship to identity (Woolard, 1998). In her analysis of Facebook posts, George observes that students take advantage of the ability to use different languages and writing systems online to conform to or defy the dominant ideologies behind language use and identity. She proposes a framework for analyzing social media data that considers ambivalence and discomfort with available categories and choices in Serbia and the stigma that young Serbians experience due to the country's political history and public image in the eyes of the international community. George's work shows how orthographic choices and script use can be affected by ideologies, which themselves are tied to larger political and historical challenges. Bogetić (2021) explores the role of hegemonic masculinity and other gender ideologies in the online dating profiles of Serbian gay men. Bogetić observes that these ideologies create stances of defiance and distance from specific queer identities as the men try to assimilate into normative and hegemonic masculine identities. Bogetić's work shows one way in which virtual discourse can offer alternative or novel contexts for users to express complex and ideologically rich stances in an online community of practice. Lastly, Tyran (2023) demonstrates the emerging role of orthography and grapheme use in differentiating Montenegrin from Serbian language identities in contemporary Montenegro. Tyran's paper analyzes newspaper headlines and not internet language explicitly, but she finds that orthography reforms due to changing national standards are connected to language ideological disputes in the BCMS language region. Tyran (2023) is among the first to apply a semiotically-structured framework of ideology analysis to the Montenegrin orthographic space. It is inconclusive though; thus, this dissertation supports Tyran's

preliminary findings by applying them to a virtual discourse context, drawing on similar approaches to ideology, which influences some of the insights I discuss in later chapters of this dissertation.

### **3.2 Sociolinguistic approaches to meaning and ideology**

This section reviews important literature addressing the semiotic processes of indexicality, enregisterment, style and persona, and the circulation of linguistic ideology. Language can create meaning that creates, alters, and shares conceptions of the world between its producers and its recipients. This dissertation draws on insights from what has been called “third wave sociolinguistics,” where language is seen as a social practice that creates identity through stylistic acts, compared to previous eras of scholarship in which identity is understood as a social structure intimately bound to social categories and community definitions (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class).

Early studies in variationist sociolinguistics focus on the social meaning of dialect differences, primarily to explain quantitative findings rather than to understand the mechanics of variation and its underlying causes. Social meaning refers to a speaker's role in producing language, their relationship with the social context, and the impact of identity labels and social categories, such as class, ethnicity, and religion, on discursive practices. Social meaning is a dynamic process that varies with every change in the environment, and new speakers in new contexts create new meanings (see Coupland & Jaworski, 1997, on the role of social and pragmatic processes in communication). The modern study of language variation originates with the work of linguists such as Labov (e.g., 2006), Wolfram (e.g., 1969), and Trudgill (e.g., 1974), who explore

the relationship between language use and these social categories. These early studies employ phonetic variation as a primary source of data. This period is often referred to as the 'first wave' of variationist studies (Eckert, 2012, 2016). The 'second wave' focused on smaller-scale and community-bound variation, exploring meaning as transmitted through local networks and based on locally-relevant categories. The concept of style is especially significant when reflecting on the research occurring at this time, as is the construction of personae and characterological figures constructed through language, through non-linguistic cultural practices and artifacts, like clothing and music (Eckert, 1989, 2000; Milroy, 1980). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) propose that the practices of a community of speakers, whose constituency is defined broadly, determine social meaning, highlighting the role of shared and recognizable linguistic practices in the production of identity.

The third wave of sociolinguistic variation, and the approach on which the current study is primarily drawn, views variables of any kind (for example, variation in language use, the wearing of clothing and other forms of adornment, and the use of script and emojis online) as signs that can communicate meaning to the interpreter of the sign. Thus, this perspective decenters the role of major social categories and even community-bound meanings to instead focus on constructing meaning through semiotic means. No longer strictly about variables of lexicon, phonetics, or syntax practices reflecting identity categories, the locus of third-wave variation research is on the individual acts involved in creating social meaning itself. In contemporary sociolinguistic research, social categories are still considered relevant and valuable. However, in contrast to earlier views that emphasized the essentializing quality of categories, Eckert (2019) argues that their relevance lies in the ways in which they intersect with each other to shape the conditions and everyday experiences of life. These conditions and experiences are what allow variables of human behavior

to take on social meaning and to be invoked in social practices. These social practices emerge in response to these conditions and that is where variation takes on meaning. The intersections of broad social categories like age, class, and ethnicity, with the conditions and experiences of life is where social practices and meanings become especially complex and nuanced (Eckert, 2019, p. 1).

### **3.2.1 Processes of meaning-making**

Much of the underlying theory supporting projects of social meaning in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics draws on the work of semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce provides insight into the ways in which the application of signs can influence our thoughts, communication, and understanding in various arenas of human experience and he identifies three primary sign forms determined by their relation to form and meaning. These three basic sign forms are icon, index, and symbol (De Waal, 2013). For Peirce, an icon is a sign formed by the relation of resemblance between form and meaning. For example, a photograph of a telephone resembling the actual telephone it depicts is an icon. An index is a sign formed by a connection with some real-world phenomena. For example, smoke is an index of fire. Finally, a symbol is a purely arbitrary relationship between a sign and its meaning. For example, the exclamation mark “!” represents an elevated tone of speech and can reproduce the action of shouting in writing. Much of language falls into this latter category of symbolism, where words are often arbitrary pairings of sound/gesture and meaning.

These Peircean building blocks have found significant use in the third wave of linguistic variation, particularly through the concepts of *indexicality* and *enregisterment*. Indexicality refers to the process by which a sign becomes a signifier of some meaning in each context, or an *indexical*. For instance, the first-person singular English pronoun 'I' refers indexically to the subject

or whoever is speaking, signing, or gesturing in a particular discourse event. Similarly, the time adverb 'yesterday' indexically refers to the day before the current speech event in which the word was used. By highlighting and creating a linkage between one instance and another, deictics such as these can become connected to new meanings through their use in different contexts and times, such that 'I' means someone different, depending on who is using it. Indexicality plays a crucial role in meaning-making by taking an abstract meaning, linking it to some context of use, and employing it for use in new contexts and with new meanings. Michael Silverstein, a prominent linguistic anthropologist, introduces this concept in his studies on language and culture by observing the semiotic relations between pronouns and demonstratives and their references (1976).

According to Silverstein, indexicality can be viewed as a cycle, beginning with the initial pairing of a variable linking to some kind of social meaning. After repeated use by members of a social group or category it can become a recognizable social type, which lends it the possibility of becoming a commodification of social meaning or a caricature of social identity (2003). Johnstone and Kiesling (2008) explore this notion in the context of Pittsburgh and the local language variant of Pittsburghese. They find that some linguistic features found in the region, for example /aw/ monophthongization, began as a first-order indexical that indexed a particular kind of speaker (Silverstein, 2003, p. 205; Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008, p. 8). It is a variable that sits below the level of social awareness and does not initially mark any social information. It is merely used by some group of people in some spatio-temporal context of discourse.

This form picks up implications of class, gender, and age, based on evaluations by hearers of the form and of the kind of people who use this form. At this second level, or second order indexicality, a first-order feature is given an "ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 212). This level shows some local variation and begins to

acquire social meaning. Once this cycle occurs enough, the type is considered enregistered and can be the topic of overt social commentary or caricaturing.

Eventually this feature became linked to a social group (Pittsburghers, maybe) and was eventually recognizable enough to be available for commodification, such that now local souvenir shops sell shirts, mugs, keychains, and other products, mocking /aw/ monophthongization (for example, in words like ‘dahntahn’ [downtown]) to perform various stances of humor, affiliation, support, and sometimes mockery. In other words, the third level is the most advanced stage where individuals of a specific persona are stereotyped and become a type to either align oneself with or distance oneself from. Zhang's (2008) study of rhoticization in the Beijing variety of Chinese provides a good example of the process, in which the pronunciation of a rhotic becomes associated with the region of Beijing, and eventually linked to the speech practices of businessmen. Finally, it reaches a third order of indexicality when it becomes a caricature of a group of people, such as the perception that Beijing users of the rhotic are “oily” smooth operators who cannot curl their tongues (Zhang, 2008, p. 211). Silverstein's work helped develop a detailed system of 'ordering' social life through semiotics, showing that the process of linking a meaning can be traceable in its effect on social practices and is also an iterative process. These orders of indexicality can then begin again, with the third-order indexicality thus becoming its own sign eligible for recontextualization in a new semiotic environment (see Bauman & Briggs, 1990, for more on recontextualization as a discursive process).

Once a sign has been used as an indexical representation of a certain meaning, it can become *enregistered* and be used to perform style. Enregisterment is the process by which a set of linguistic forms becomes recognizable within a context of other language practices (Agha, 2003). In other words, it is a way of linking and re-linking ways of speaking with social figures throughout

time and space, in what Agha terms a *speech chain* (2007). Enregistered signs as a collection of features can be drawn together to produce style, which individuals use to project identifiable social types (Irvine, 2001; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Podesva, 2007, 2011). These social types can represent any “kind” of person, for example social archetypes like jocks, nerds, and valley girls to gay divas, schoolteachers, and more. These social types or *personae* can be seen as ideological types that are linked with specific ways of speaking and behaving (D'Onofrio, 2020, p. 4).

The term *persona* or *personae* are sometimes used interchangeably with character type, social type, or characterological figure, though they may have slightly different meanings and contexts of use. The concept of *persona* draws on previous research on characterological figures, and its importance lies in the fact that *personae* or social types are visible marks of the distinctions that make up the social fabric (Agha 2003, 2007; Silverstein 1976, 2003). They are holistic representations of the social roles and identities that people occupy and enact in different contexts, for example, Eckert's *Jocks* and *Burnouts* are social types relevant to a particular social context, a suburban Detroit high school in the 1980s (1989, 2000). *Personae* can be re-circulated and taken up in different contexts, making them a dynamic and evolving part of social life. The process of enregisterment plays a significant role in this process, as it links ways of speaking with social figures and creates recognizable and locally recognizable elements of social meaning.

The creation of social meaning through indexicality is a continuous process that involves the accumulation of layers of evaluation and interpretation. These cycles of indexicality give rise to constellations of meaning that move "from demographic categories to associations with those categories" (Eckert 2008, 2019 p 13), thus shaping the way we perceive and interpret signs drawn from an indexical field of variants available to the language user. As communicators engage with these signs, they work and rework them, enlisting newly enregistered types and *personae* to further

enrich the meaning-making process. The process of indexicality, therefore, involves a continuous back-and-forth between the communicator and the social world, resulting in the creation and re-creation of social meanings that are shaped by the context in which they are embedded. As a new and continuously changing environment, social media and the internet represent a novel indexical field needing more research. It is through this ongoing process that we make sense of the world around us and form social relationships that are based on shared meanings and interpretations.

### **3.2.2 Unpacking ideology**

In attempting to understand the connection between human life and social meaning, anthropological linguists have long studied the relationship between power and ideology. To achieve this goal, they have frequently sought inspiration from semiotics, which, as mentioned in the previous section, is the study of signs and how signs engage with processes of meaning-making and dissemination of social and cultural knowledge. Instead of taking a perspective driven by language variation and its mechanics, anthropological linguistics has often been more interested in studying the ways in which language is used to convey ideology. The term *ideology* refers to a set of beliefs, values, and principles that underpin a particular worldview and was first coined by French philosopher Destutt de Tracy in the late 18th century. At the time, many intellectuals and political leaders, including Napoleon himself, were critical of the traditional field of metaphysics, which dealt with abstract concepts beyond the realm of empirical observation. In this context, ideology was seen as a more scientific replacement for metaphysics, as it sought to provide a more concrete understanding of the world and how people make sense of it.

By the time of Marx and Engels, ideology had already become laden with negative connotations. As Marxist thought spread, ideology became intertwined with the post-Marxist idea

of "false consciousness," or how social, cultural, institutional, and other processes maintain social class structures and conceal the subordination of the lower classes (see Kołakowski, 2005). Silverstein (1976) then helped to refocus the lens of ideology onto questions of language, grammar, and cultural practice, by showing that, as tools of communicating time and place, shifters (or deictics) can index speakers to cultural and social frameworks and in doing so, invoke ideologies behind power dynamics, social relationships, and social roles. According to Silverstein's perspective, the cultural assumptions embedded in linguistic frameworks are not separate from the grammar of a language, but rather an integral part of it (1976). This can be observed through the study of various grammatical manifestations such as formality and politeness practices that are encoded into the grammar of a language. For instance, certain pronouns like "tu" and "vous" in French carry significant social information and provide researchers such as anthropologists and linguists with insights into the organization of a society and the construction of relationships between language users, based on social ideologies of politeness and formality. By studying the grammar of a language, one can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural values, norms, and beliefs, and thus the ideologies, that shape the language and the society that uses it.

Gal's (1989) review of ideology research offers an in-depth analysis of the interplay between language structure, language use, and political economy from a Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspective. According to Marxist perspectives, ideology is essentially a set of ideas and beliefs that serve to maintain the existing social order and to favor one social class, possessing power and resources, over others (Hall, 1997). This perspective is still highly relevant in Critical Discourse Analysis, which considers ideology a form of "false consciousness" (Blommaert et al., 2001; Gal & Irvine, 2019; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Critical Discourse Analysis is a multidisciplinary approach that examines language and discourse to uncover the underlying power relations and

ideological assumptions that shape social reality. This approach is rooted in the belief that language is not neutral but instead reflects and reinforces existing power relations and social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1989, 1992). Ideology in this view is a false consciousness because it obscures the true nature of social reality, reinforces dominant power relations, and is a tool for maintaining the status quo and perpetuating social inequalities (Blommaert et al., 2001; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Irvine & Gal, 2019). Gal's (1989) comprehensive review underscores the crucial role of ideology in the study of structural inequalities and social differences. In line with this perspective, Irvine (1989) posits that words function as indexes for economic transactions and political interests that extend beyond their linguistic value. She emphasizes the sociocultural impacts of language ideology and its multifaceted functions by citing the example of the exchange of cash and goods among Wolof praise singers. Through such an example, Irvine illuminates the complex ways in which language ideology intersects with economic, political, and social factors to shape everyday practices and experiences.

Rumsey (1990) looks at the ideologizing relationship between words and actions in the Australian Aboriginal language, Ungarinyin, and demonstrates that for speakers of Ungarinyin, the distinction between words and actions is not always clear. Rumsey's work suggests that the separation of words and actions is a choice driven by language ideologies rather than an innate or biological predisposition for language users. He defines language ideologies as "shared bodies of common-sense notions about the nature of language in the world" (p. 346), emphasizing that the separation of words from actions is an ideological choice, not an innate or biological one for language users. He demonstrates that language ideology plays a significant role in how we understand, use, and interpret language and that it is a dynamic and constantly evolving phenomenon. Rumsey's work, along with other studies, highlights the intricate relationship

between language structure and language ideology. They underscore that language structure and ideology are intimately interwoven notions and cannot be understood independently. They provide valuable insights into how language ideologies shape our perceptions and understanding of language and how they impact our interactions with others in the social and cultural context.

Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) provides an insightful reflection on the study of language and ideology up to the early 1990s. The authors note that there is no single core literature regarding research on language ideology, indicating the complexity of the subject matter (p. 54). Since then, bodies of literature have arisen centered around particular methods or approaches, often bounded by disciplinary practices, with few unifying themes. Taking an approach that centers language, Woolard (1998) describes ideologies as representations that “construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (p. 3). In other words, the study of language and ideology should include an awareness of how social contexts shape our use of language. According to Woolard and Schieffelin, ideologies are not the false consciousness or hegemonic bogeyman that hides in the shadows and waits for a careless victim. Instead, they are present in all linguistic practices, and there is no neutral position (a claim repeated in Gal & Irvine, 2019, among other works).

Kroskrity (2004) offers a definition of ideologies as "beliefs or feelings about languages as used in their social worlds" (p. 498). This definition underscores the crucial role of language in shaping and influencing people's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions towards society. Considering these frameworks and definitions of ideology, the current project adopts a different approach to the study of ideology, as conceptualized by Irvine and Gal's extensive work. Their perspective views ideology as more akin to Foucault's notions of *Discourse* (Gal & Irvine, 2019; Foucault, 1970). This approach posits that there are no neutral positions, and so every position is an

ideologizing one. No speaker, hearer, interpreter, signer, or communicator comes from a neutral or blank background—there is always context to what we say and what we understand others to be saying. Therefore, there is no 'false consciousness' to speak of. Ideologies are not logical statements that can be true or false, but rather, they are social positions that individuals take as they move through the world and through social space. This viewpoint emphasizes the significant role of language in shaping people's perceptions of the world and their place in it and it suggests that people's ideologies are shaped by the language they use and the social contexts in which they use it. Ideologies play a crucial role in shaping all people's beliefs and attitudes towards society and its constituent parts.

Irvine and Gal's model of linguistic differentiation demonstrates the process by which ideologies impact the perception of language differences, which, in turn, construct social identities. The authors argue that the common view of ideology is often linked with the suggestion that it is something that other people possess (Irvine, 2018, p. 26). This inherent differentiation between “self” and “other people” highlights how ideology performs the work of *ideologizing* using language or other semiotic arenas, like clothing and visual media. The term “ideologizing” is used as an active verb following Gal and Irvine (2019) because an ideology is not a passive, latent, subliminal thing but a process that is constantly occurring and actively takes up signs from the local context to reconstruct itself. In their earlier work, the authors introduced three semiotic processes that enable this ideologizing, which are iconization (rhematization), fractal recursivity, and erasure, with axes of differentiation eventually added as a fourth semiotic process (Irvine & Gal, 1995, 2000).

Iconization, according to Irvine and Gal (2000), is a 'transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked' (p. 37).

In other words, an indexical relationship between some practice of language and some social type is interpreted as a direct link. This ties to the Peircean notion of ‘icon’ as a sign type. Hence, the linguistic form captures the essential qualities of the social type. In an iconic relationship, the social type and the linguistic form are bound together. Gal and Irvine (2019) propose an update to the concept of iconization, which they call *rhematization*. According to their view, rhematization refers to a process in which the original indexical connection between a sign and its referent can be diminished or even eliminated, while a new iconic relationship is established between the sign and its referent.

Fractal recursivity is a complex process that involves projecting an opposition from one level of relationship to another, resulting in the creation of dichotomies. This means that larger dichotomies are broken down into smaller ones through this process, which is why it is described using the geometric metaphor of fractals. The third semiotic process is erasure, which involves rendering certain persons, activities, or linguistic phenomena invisible. This process often occurs when prevailing language ideologies simplify the sociolinguistic field and fail to recognize language features or patterns that do not fit within their established norms. This can result in the erasure of cultures or groups of people, which can have negative social and political consequences.

Finally, Gal and Irvine introduced the concept of an axis of differentiation, which is a set of binary, contrasting notions organized around a single feature or *qualia* (which are sensory properties of existence that can become linked to a sign, e.g., the redness of an apple or the wetness of a puddle; see, Gal 2013, 2017). This axis then organizes how other semiotic relations are construed. For example, the authors use the axes of east/west and north/south to describe language ideology in the framework of United States geography. In an axis of differentiation centered on north/south, invoking contrasts familiar to many American English speakers, the south is often

perceived as speaking slowly compared to the fast talkers of the north, especially in the context of cities and urban speech. This North/South distinction is an axis that can be fractally reproduced. For example, if a city within the American South is perceived as having a dialect in which its users speak faster than its other southern neighbors, users of that dialect can be thought of as taking on qualities of the 'North', but in a Southern context. Thus fractally reproducing the North/South ideological divide along an axis, populated by ideologically-driven distinctions in the kinds of people who speak a certain way. In essence, the authors propose that ideologies lead to differences in the perception of language differences, which can affect the sign variants that language users employ to construct social identities. By understanding these processes, we can gain a deeper insight into how language, culture, and identity shape our social identities and accompany our social acts.

This section explored the relationship between language and ideology, highlighting how they are interconnected, emphasizing that language structure and ideology are not separate from each other but intertwined concepts. Therefore, understanding the structure of language is crucial when analyzing language ideology.

### **3.3 Language and the internet**

The internet, especially in the current age of social media, is an ideal laboratory for understanding how identity is formed and circulated through language. In an oft-referenced cartoon from an issue of *The New Yorker*, a dog sitting at a computer proudly proclaims: “On the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog” (Fleishman, 2000). This mundane caption on what would

be an otherwise unremarkable cartoon proved to be quite prescient in its anticipation of the power of the internet to structure and represent one's identity to an unseen audience of users.



**Figure 17 "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (Journal of Art in Society, 2023)**

The internet has become so ubiquitous since the cartoon's publication that style guides even recommend that the word 'internet' itself no longer be capitalized. This simple transformation

from proper noun to common noun demonstrates the pervasiveness of the internet in our daily lives. No longer is ‘cyberspace’ something we access separate from the other activities we do in our lives, like reading a book, watching a movie, or talking with friends. Many of us (though certainly not all) are always connected through technology and our devices, including everything from cellphones to ‘wearable’ fitness monitors—and even the refrigerator.



**Figure 18** APA recommendation to not capitalize "internet" (APA Style, 2019)

Internet linguistics of the 1990s, often referred to as 'computer-mediated communication' or CMC (Crystal, 2011; McCulloch, 2020), examined data in the semi-closed social groups available at the time, for example, forums, listservs, and Usenet groups. To access these social spaces, a user first needed to know how to access the internet (and needed to have the resources to do so in the first place), and then one needed to know how to find a location online, especially before search engines. The arrival of early social networking sites, like LiveJournal, MySpace,

Tumblr, and Facebook, opened the field of study to examine more cross-sectional and interacting social groups that were networked with one another on a global scale not possible before. Mass participation in a globally connected internet and the resources for individual users to produce content are some cornerstones marking the beginning of Web 2.0 and the shift into the age of social media (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, B., 2008; Toledano, 2013).

In Web 2.0, internet users became consumers and media producers through the many social media platforms that were beginning to populate the space. The advent of Web 2.0 marked a turning point in online interaction, characterized by its dynamic and user-driven nature. Websites evolved into platforms that enabled active engagement among users, allowing them to share and comment on content. This engagement with content creation led to a constant cycle of contextualizations and recontextualizations, where messages evolved and took on new meanings through user interactions. In addition to sharing content, Web 2.0 platforms opened new channels for users to express themselves beyond traditional text. Creative uses of orthography and punctuation emerged, allowing efficient and playful communication (Gunraj et al., 2016; Houghton et al., 2018; McCulloch, 2020). Platforms also adopted a more informal language style, allowing users to express themselves with slang, emojis, and non-standard grammar (Herring & Dainas, 2017; Logi & Zappavigna, 2023). Capitalization and punctuation became tools for emphasis, with users using all caps to signify shouting or excessive punctuation to convey strong emotions (Heath, 2018, 2021).

To enrich online communication even further, text-based emoticons (like ":)") which represents a smile) evolved into emojis, thus creating a more diverse and expressive online world. These digital icons gained widespread popularity with the rise of smartphones and social media, offering a visual language to express emotions, ideas, and actions (Danesi, 2016). Web 2.0 also

saw the emergence of memes, which became central to the era's online culture. These shareable images, videos, or phrases facilitated the rapid spread of cultural ideas and humor in the ever-evolving digital landscape (Soh, 2020; Neog, 2024; Zenović, 2022). By creatively combining the elements of language, emojis, and memes, Web 2.0 platforms fostered a unique and dynamic online communication style, empowering users to express themselves in nuanced and creative ways that exceeded traditional text-based communication's limitations. It is in the use of these new elements that this new digital landscape affects how users perform identity across categories of language and nation. This is a space which is constantly updated as communicative affordances online change; thus, this dissertation helps to address a one part of that changing space through the study of Montenegrin online discourse.

### **3.3.1 Orthography**

Orthography, or the study of spelling and writing, has been a central area of research in internet language since the early days of Usenet newsgroups, web forums, and Internet relay chat (IRC) on the World Wide Web. Orthography refers to the standardized way of writing a language, which includes punctuation, spelling, and grammar. It emphasizes the correct usage and arrangement of letters, characters, and words to ensure clarity, accuracy, and consistency in written communication. Authoritative entities such as educational institutions or language academies establish these conventions. On the other hand, the related term typography refers to the art and technique of arranging type, including letters, symbols, and numbers, to ensure legibility, readability, and visual appeal in printed or displayed text. Typography considers factors such as font selection, size, line spacing, and overall design to ensure the text is aesthetically pleasing and easy to read. Typography can enhance the impact of written communication, making it more

engaging and accessible to the reader. Typographic manipulations can also be found in other significant places, for example, the use of calligraphy can represent spiritual and cultural relationships between writers and their communities (Studemund-Halévy, 2021). Orthography and typography are interconnected and can influence each other in several ways. For example, using diacritics in graphemes is often a typographic choice, but it can also affect the orthography of a language as it reflects spelling variation and creates potential distance between a wordform and an established language standard. Similarly, the choice of font and size can impact the readability and clarity of a text, making orthography and typography both highly relevant in an online context where text is the primary channel of communication. This section reviews how orthography and writing have been treated in sociolinguistics and how they can convey social meaning in various contexts, especially online. Additionally, this review explores how writing contributes to the construction of personal identity both online and off.

Orthography is a central concern of internet writing and text-based internet communication. Manipulations of font style and size, and punctuation, can create significant pragmatic effects on the viewer/reader of the content (Lin, 2016). For example, non-standard capitalization is commonly interpreted to be a stand-in for shouting or yelling on the internet and is a way in which users express their voice and identity. In this vein, Linden's (2020) working paper looks at non-standard capitalization in internet English and argues that this type of capitalization can be used to signal contrastive focus, a linguistic phenomenon in which speakers use language to draw attention to something, whether a particular part of a sentence or utterance or something physically co-present. Generally, written data has different constraints on what can be considered meaningful and how meaning can be expressed and so, it has not often been the subject of sociolinguistic analysis. However, writing on the internet is often a proxy for speech

(and signing), which are more canonical sources of linguistic study, and through manipulations of orthography and typography, and affordances of social media, users find ways to communicate on the internet.

According to Blommaert (2013), writing should be viewed as a complex set of specific resources subject to distribution patterns, availability, and accessibility. In their study of non-standard orthography, Sebba (2007) emphasizes how non-standard spellings can carry social meaning and reflect aspects of social identity, national identity, and cultural politics. Sebba proposes a “sociolinguistics of orthography” (p. 5) based on observations that orthography “touches on matters of social identity, national identity, cultural politics, representation and voice” (p. 7). Choices of spelling, script, and punctuation are ways in which users express notions of stance and alignment in a virtual community. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) argue that writing systems are not just tools for transcribing speech, but they also carry significant historical, cultural, and political meanings. They point out the ideologically driven debates that can take place in systems of writing and emphasize the importance of examining the social and cultural context in which writing systems are used (p. 65).

Writing on the internet can provide a public arena for multilingual and variably literate communities to interact with one another and engage with differing moral and cultural backgrounds. Androutsopoulos (2020) focuses on the sociolinguistics of writing and spelling, particularly the choice and alternation of scripts in digitally mediated communication in a Hellenized English context. The study introduces the concept of “trans-scripting,” where users employ non-canonical scripts or orthographies to represent a language in ways that deviate from both social expectations and technological limitations. Transcribing choices can lead to sociopolitical and moral judgments by other users who are consuming the content. Building on the

study of mixed scripts, Meletis (2023) explores the social functions of typographic mimicry and its impact on how readers perceive texts. The study examines how variations in typography can influence readers' interpretations and how users leverage these variations to position themselves socially. Additionally, the study examines how typographic practices are utilized by users to position themselves socially with respect to other groups of people. The author employs a metapragmatic analysis to study how texts are negotiated discursively, which highlights that the use of typographic mimicry can be a controversial issue, especially when it comes to cultural appropriation and racism. Typographic mimicry will be evident in the data (see Figure 29 in the data chapter for an example of typographic mimicry) in which a user of Cyrillic script uses Latin in limited ways to suggest the foreignness of the Montenegrin language and to take a stance of distance from Montenegro and Montenegrin identity.

Jaffe, et al., (2012) focus on the complex relationship between scriptural practices and the construction of social hierarchies, identities, and relationships. The authors argue that these practices can become the subject of public ideological debates, and that they both reflect and contribute to the formation of social meaning and to the construction of power relationships in many societies. Sebba (2012), a chapter in the Jaffe collection, introduces the concept of the "zone of social meaning," which suggests that a written form can only be socially meaningful within a given orthographic system if it is different enough from the standard form to be recognized as an alternative, yet similar enough to be considered a viable derivative of the original. For instance, in English, the word "dog" could be spelled as "dawg" or "dogg," which would still be perceived as a recognizable variant of the original word "dog", even if these variants carry additional connotations of identity. However, if the word "dog" were written as "<Dd@gG>," it would be unrecognizable as a derivative of the original word and therefore meaningless in terms of social

meaning as it relates to the source word. In other words, the social meaning of a written form is dependent on its ability to be recognized as a valid alternative to the standard form within a given orthographic system and there is variation in these orthographic practices that a user might take up online.

Orthography has been shown to be closely bound with ideas and ideologies of national, religious, and ethnic identity, both online and off. Ahmad's (2008) study of the Devanagari script in 19th century India provides a critical perspective on how language use shapes and reflects social realities. The study highlights the importance of examining language as a social practice to understand its role in constructing social identities and realities, including ethnic or religious identity. Ahmad observes how speakers of Urdu and Hindi are active agents in constructing their identity and they use discourse to participate in the construction of social realities, especially tied to national and religious identity. Ahmad's work emphasizes the importance of examining language use as a social practice to understand how it shapes and reflects social realities in richly complex, multilingual, and multicultural societies. Riha's (2008) dissertation similarly explores variation in writing practices, in this case, the use of roman letters (what I call the Latin script) due to influence from English, in Chinese writing, which has traditionally been written with Chinese characters. Despite the two language systems (Chinese and English) being quite different in how they represent morphemes and syllables, Riha finds that communities can merge the scripts quite successfully to accomplish both typographic ease in multilingual societies and to reflect social and political differences of language users.

Similarly, the languages of the Western Balkans are not immune to the multi-dimensionality of orthographic practices. In his study of Serbian digraphia online, Ivković (2013) observes, "...alphabet choice in Internet Serbian is both technology-driven and politically and

ideologically charged” (p. 353). Cyrillic or Latin script use is influenced by both user ideologies of script (e.g., what kind of person uses Cyrillic versus Latin) and the limits of the technology itself that they are using. While many devices and platforms in 2024 allow for a relatively easy way to switch between scripts, this cannot be said to be universal. Because devices are imported and exported worldwide and the internet can be accessed practically anywhere, it is not easy to gauge which communities have access to which technology. Regardless of how well technology like smartphones, tablets, computers, and social media platforms become at converting between scripts and languages, it is irrelevant if users do not know how to access this technology or the tools to do the script conversions. Ivković addresses these issues in the Serbian language context and provides a framework that includes orthographic variation from both socially motivated and technologically limited perspectives.

Miličević and Ljubešić (2016) discuss challenges in the normalization process of data analysis of Serbian and Croatian language corpora on Twitter. They identify several issues relating to spelling variation based on differences of transcription choices in Serbian and Croatia, for example, the use of *tviterasi*, *tviteraši*, or *twitteraši*, to mean 'Twitterers' or users of Twitter. They find that spelling variation between Serbian and Croatian is sometimes related to linguistic differences between the varieties (for example, Serbian's preference for phonetically transcribing foreign names for easier pronunciation compared to Croatian's preference<sup>8</sup> for maintaining the original spelling of foreign names and brands, like Twitter). Building on the study of variation on

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<sup>8</sup> I am using the terms like ‘Serbian’ and ‘Croatian’ in this anthropomorphized manner as a convenient way of referring to the preferred acts of *speakers* of these languages, and the use of these terms should not be taken to imply any inherent features of the language itself.

Twitter, Miličević, Ljubešić, and Fišer (2017), expand on the previous study and compare spelling variation on Twitter in Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian using statistical means. The authors also find that in their data set, Serbian language Twitter users were more likely to produce non-standard spelling and engage in language play, possibly related to different social norms on representing foreign data in typed format.

The works discussed in the previous chapter illustrate that choices in orthography and typography affect how language users relate to and connect with a particular social context and these choices influence the formation and expression of dimensions of identity, including ethnic and religious identity. Pragmatically-motivated choices in the use and alternation of scripts in digitally mediated written discourse can be used to perform the discursive work of stancetaking and differentiation, or can be a reflection of technological affordances and knowledge of (and access to) appropriate tools of internet writing. Even though orthography has not always been a preferred domain of analysis for sociolinguists, on the internet it is an essential medium to analyze in order to comprehend the complexity of language use in social practice.

### **3.3.2 Emojis**

Graphicons (graphical icons) are a type of graphical feature found on social media platforms and which are classified into various subcategories by researchers, with the most common types including emoticons, stickers, GIFs, images, and videos (Herring & Dainas, 2017; Logi & Zappavigna, 2023). One subcategory of graphicons that has gained immense popularity over the years is the emoji. The term 'emoji' is derived from the Japanese meaning 'picture-character'. It was initially created in 1998 by Shigetaka Kurita, a manga enthusiast and Japanese telecommunications employee. The 'e' in emoji stands for 'picture,' while *moji* represents 'letter' or

'character,' though in English inevitably the 'e' also evokes the folk meaning of 'electronic,' as in *e-mail*. An emoji is a visual representation of a word or phrase, making it a "picture-word". In English, *emoji* can be a singular or plural noun, with 'emojis' being a commonly used variant of the plural (Danesi, 2016, p. 2).

Emojis are pictorial representations of emotions and ideas that have become ubiquitous in digital communications. They are an evolution of emoticons, which were originally made up of keyboard characters to depict facial expressions (Crystal, 2011, p. 36). Emojis are an effective way of expressing affective states and emotions in non-virtual settings, offering nonverbal cues through visual indicators (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Maíz-Arévalo, 2015). Like many affordances of internet language and social media, emojis are a constantly evolving tool and communicative form, but in recent years, emojis have been extensively studied . They have been shown to be effective in enhancing emotional expression and managing social interaction in various digital contexts, such as online conversations, social media, and other forms of mobile messaging (Thompson & Filik, 2016). Emojis have become an integral part of our digital language, providing an efficient and engaging way to convey emotions and ideas in a concise and recognizable manner.

One of the central motivators for emoji use is to compensate for the lack of tone of voice, facial expression, or body language in written communication (Danesi, 2016; McCulloch, 2020). Emojis help bridge the gap between face-to-face conversations and written messages, allowing the author to convey their intended meaning through visual cues. By displaying pictures of facial expressions, emojis give the reader an idea of what the author is trying to convey, making written communication more effective and expressive. They are modern-day forms of communication that can have cultural and historical meaning. Different cultures use emojis with specific meanings and attitudes, allowing them to evaluate the world based on their own cultural and social frameworks.

Thus, an emoji may not have the same meaning when comparing uses across linguistic, social, and cultural contexts (Danesi, 2016, p. 120).

Emojis and emoticons can clarify message intentions, compensating for the absence of nonverbal cues in written communication, for example, in communicating and decoding sarcasm (Thompson & Filik, 2016). Recent work suggests that emoticons have both phatic and pragmatic functions. These tiny symbols have various functions, including tone-enhancing and clarifying message intention (Danesi, 2016). They can convey emotions, attitudes, and moods that might be difficult to express in text. Some of the pragmatic functions emojis can serve include expressing emotions, reinforcing or contradicting verbal messages, acknowledging social relationships, and conveying nonverbal discursive cues like humor or sarcasm. The context in which an emoji is used can significantly impact its meaning, making it crucial to consider the broader communicative context when analyzing emoji use.

Collister (2015) suggests that emojis and emoticons can act as discourse particles that eliminate misunderstandings or threats and weaken conflict. By using these symbols, people can convey their emotions and attitudes more effectively, thus reducing the chances of misunderstanding. They can be used to establish social relationships and convey particular social meanings, through pragmatic processes of meaning-making. Pragmatic functions of emojis have included markers of illocutionary force (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Li & Yang, 2018), politeness strategy (Darics, 2010; Kavanagh, 2017), and face-saving strategies (Maíz-Arévalo, 2015), among many others, with new uses created all the time.

Several classifications of these functions have been proposed. Kavanagh's (2010) classification of English and Japanese emoticons is quite detailed and includes functions of modesty, hedging devices, positive politeness strategies, humor, and more. Dresner and Herring

(2014) classify emoticons into three categories: emotion indicator, non-emotion indicator, and illocutionary force indicator, with each category addressing the question of whether emoticons are able to map directly or conventionally onto facial expressions and finding that sometimes they do, though there are pragmatic motivations to how emoticons are used. Herring and Dainas (2017) identify six primary functions of graphicon use in Facebook comments, including to create reactions, tone modification, and to build narrative sequence. Dürscheid, et al., (2019) suggest that researchers look at the context-specific interpretations of emojis as a combination of text and image together in a framework they call "grapholinguistics." They argue that the interpretation of an emoji is "...variable and determined by the context or the reader's interpretation" in whatever context it is produced (p. 174).

The use of gestures as forms of communication, and emojis as a kind of gesture, has been studied in terms of paralinguistic functions. Many emoji symbols are indexical of bodily gestures, and some even iconically mimic body parts and expressions, for example, emojis of waving hands, people running, and crossed fingers. In a classic study of nonverbal communication conducted by Ekman and Friesen (1969), types of gesture were identified and catalogued, one type of which they called "emblems." According to the authors, emblems are nonverbal gestural acts that can have a direct and precise translation or description, usually one consisting of a word or two or a simple phrase. These gestures are well-known by members of a group, class, or culture and they have culturally fixed meanings with specific constraints of use (p. 63). For example, the use of the 'middle finger' gesture as an insult for some cultures (common to many segments of American culture) or the thumbs up as a congratulations gesture have specific cultural meanings that can be summed up in a recognizable way (e.g., the thumbs up gesture as 'the OK sign'). This concept of emblems has been extended to include emojis in contemporary digital communication (Gawne &

McCulloch, 2019; McCulloch, 2020). Emblems have precise and stable meanings, even though they require some cultural knowledge to interpret them correctly. However, the category of emblems has been extended to also include uses of non-gestural symbols, such as the eggplant and peach emojis, which are often found in humorous or suggestive discourse, invoking their contemporary meanings by way of anatomical iconization (see Weissman, 2019, for more on the role of context in interpreting these specific emojis). Thus, emojis have different interpretations depending on the culture and context in which they arise. As with any communicative system, what may be a commonly understood gesture in one culture or group may not have the same meaning or interpretation in another culture or group.

Abercrombie (1968) and McNeill (1992) expand on their typology and note that gestures, or emojis in the context of this project, can also be classified as belonging to the co-speech type (sometimes also called *illustrative*). Co-speech gestures are those that cannot be easily described in a few words, unlike emblems, but which instead provide additional pragmatic and paralinguistic information to the listener by accompanying the spoken or written message. For example, pointing a finger to direct the attention of an interlocutor to a particular object in the physical discourse or to draw their attention to a specific message in a textual environment. Gawne and McCulloch (2019) find that gestures and co-speech emojis are closely intertwined with the accompanying speech or text, so they play a crucial role in conveying meaning in communication (p. 13). Gestures are commonly used in everyday speech and it is not surprising that they have found their way into internet discourse as well. The use of new digital communicative tools like emojis underscores the importance of nonverbal cues in communication and how these cues can enrich and expand the meaning of a message beyond what is conveyed through words alone.

Language is an embodied phenomenon- the body itself is "central to the production, perception, and social interpretation of language" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016; p. 173). Speakers and signers are typically dependent on the properties and actions of the body, e.g., gaze, speech, sign, and movement—communicative actions which are signals processed by the ears, eyes, mouth, and so on—to interpret linguistic meaning. These qualities contrast the idea that meaning, and language are separate from the body and occupy some purely figurative or metaphorical realm located solely in the mind. Through these embodied properties and actions discourse is negotiated and managed among interlocutors, and social meaning is conveyed to other members within a speech community. Though embodied language necessarily carries the metaphor that communication is inherently physical, by extending the metaphor of the body-as-a-speech-channel to that of the internet-as-a-speech-channel, internet discourse can reflect the same semiotic processes of embodiment and meaning making. Emojis have been shown to reflect these additional pragmatic and paralinguistic meaning through these embodied paths (Dainas & Herring, 2021).

As embodied gestures, emojis representing the body can fulfill many pragmatic and paralinguistic roles, and because they are potential variables in digital communication, they can be used to accomplish discursive goals, such as performing identity through interaction. Emojis-as-gestures can be iconic in the sense of depicting what they represent and they are situated in the "bodily hexis" itself (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016; p. 178). Emojis can also behave as indexes or symbols though, making them important semiotic resources in digital communication and internet language.

### 3.3.3 Memes

The term "meme" has been defined in many ways over the years, but in digital discourse studies, it generally refers to a type of digital product that is formed when a user adds new content to a pre-existing template (whether that template is an image, or a video, or something else) and which is spread from person to person via the internet. Shifman (2014) provides a more specific definition of memes as a group of digital items that share common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance. Memes have an underlying structure, usually an image, and are recirculated in slightly new forms with different text. These versions are created with an awareness of one another and circulated, imitated, and/or transformed by many users via the internet, placing memes of a shared type into a similar body of discourse (p. 41). Memes are known for this ability to spread rapidly through social media platforms and other online communities. However, not all memes are equally popular or widely shared and determining what makes a meme popular or 'go viral' is not always clear (Blommaert & Varis, 2015, p. 7). Memes are an integral part of the online communicative ecosystem though and they can take many forms, including GIFs (Graphics Interchange Formate), YouTube clips, and image macros. Image macros are images overlaid with text, which can often be humorous, satirical, or political in nature (Ross & Rivers, 2017). Some researchers have viewed memes as a tool and a reflection of a digital participatory culture that has emerged in recent years (Ross & Rivers, 2017; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015), following Jenkins' (2009) framework of a participatory culture as a culture characterized by low barriers to expression and engagement (p.3).

The ease and speed with which memes can be created and shared makes them an effective tool for sharing political or social ideologies and for engaging in public debate around some salient issues (Milner, 2013, p. 65). Memes can also be viewed as a form of political rhetoric, depending

on the particular text and image pairing found in the meme (Huntington, 2016; Ross & Rivers, 2017, p. 3). A meme can be used to express political views, promote a social cause, or criticize a particular politician or policy. Additionally, memes offer insights into how people collectively view identity, culture, and society from the lens of their own identities and subjectivities and those of the social groups to which they belong. Memes are often used as a means of communication by groups that are or feel excluded from other forums or discussions (Lambrecht, 2023; Huntington, 2016; Ross & Rivers, 2017; Gal et al., 2016). They can allow marginalized communities to express their views and ideas in a creative and engaging way and in so doing, obtain a kind of communicative currency in broader or more mainstream discourses. As such, memes have become an important element of online culture and a powerful tool for social and political change.

Ross and Rivers (2017) define memes as creative devices used to communicate political beliefs, attitudes, and orientations, which are often shared among groups of people who share similar or opposing ideological beliefs (p. 1). Their perspective highlights the often explicitly political nature of internet memes as a form of counter-culture discourse and of protest culture (see Lambrecht, 2023, on meme addressing the 2020 U.S. presidential elections in the context of voters in Nevada, an important swing state for the elections). Soh (2020) analyzes how memes are used in Singaporean elections to resist authoritative government policies, which traditionally restrict and censor the content of public political speech. As the creators of memes are often anonymous and authorship is difficult to ascertain, memes can be a powerful way for individuals to share controversial or forbidden perspectives without fear of retribution from powerful institutions and their shareability allows the internet public the opportunity to quickly endorse and propel these views across a wide swath of society.

Memes circulate by being posted to some online discussion space-- a forum, a thread, a subreddit, a timeline, and so on. Sometimes, the posters are the creators of the meme, and sometimes, they are just the consumers, which creates what has been called an economy of production and consumption of digital content (Jenkins, 2007; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015, p. 1888; Soh, 2020, p. 1121). Memes as digital content and cultural products must be 'imitated, remixed, and rapidly diffused' (Shifman, 2012, 2013; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015, p. 1893) within a *public*, a concept drawing on Habermas (1999), which delineates a space that "designates its own 'norms of membership' by virtue of its circulation and uptake." (Warner, 2010, p. 78). Milner (2012) claims that memes are "a quintessential participatory artifact: open, collaborative, and adaptable" (p.12), thus they are made to encourage online public discourse and encourage users to reappropriate text, images, and sometimes even sound in the production of memes. Milner (2012, 2013) suggests that memes can be used in "polyvocal discourse," a subversive method of presenting various ideological positions in a discourse. Paz, et al, (2021) look at internet discourse around COVID-19 safety measures in Spain and the powerful ability of memes to polarize online speech, fragment the digital public, and share and magnify controversial and offensive ideological positions. In Paz, et al. they observed the ability of memes to spread misogyny through the lens of COVID-19, especially towards female politicians in the debates around large social shut-downs and business restrictions.

Much research on memes also addresses questions of political discourse. Shifman (2014) notes that politics has been "deeply intertwined with the construction and consumption' of memes (p. 119). Shifman captures three general and intertwining intentions for the use of memes. First, they are 'forms of political advocacy,' second, they are 'grassroots actions,' and third, they are 'modes of expression and public discussion' (p. 136). In describing memes as a component of

public participation in the *Occupy Wall Street* movement of 2011, Milner observes how memes can incorporate satirical humor in the political discourse in which they participate (Milner, 2013, p. 2360; Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021) and can serve to disparage political candidates and their platforms (Halversen & Weeks, 2023; Paz et al., 2021; Ross & Rivers, 2017). Huntington (2016) looks at the circulation of the "pepper spray cop" meme (Know Your Meme, 2023), which is a meme based on a photograph of a police officer apparently casually pepper-spraying protestors at a university, as an example of the intertextual nature of protest memes that spread rapidly through activist communities as counter-culture resistance. Ross and Rivers look at the context of the 2016 United States elections and analyze the use of memes to engage in the delegitimization of political candidates (drawing on the concept of *delegitimation* in Van Leeuwen, 2007) and the ability of memes to engage in the negative characterization of "the other." In analyzing the role of memes during a Singapore election, Soh (2020) notes that memes "differ from so-called 'traditional media' forms such as journalistic photographs, whose authority often rely on a locatable authorial source" (p. 1118). Memes are not journalistic media and their origins are not often traceable or able to be confirmed, so they occupy a nebulous space as a form of political discourse that is also not always trustworthy. For Soh, memes have an ambivalent status as both political and humorous objects (p. 1119). In this vein, memes have even been shown to 'promote polarization and partisanship' (see Halversen & Weeks, 2023, who look at the 2020 U.S. elections and memes among politically moderate users), partially because of the bias inherent in how people interpret memes, which are often based on pre-existing beliefs and stereotypes held by a community (Huntington, 2020).

From a semiotic standpoint, memes can play a role in indexing images, text, discourse, and historical events in a speech chain (Agha, 2007), such that to fully understand a meme involves understanding the historical occurrence it was based on, as well as the path of former images,

discourses, and memes that led to a meme's existence in its current state (Soh, 2020, p. 1121). Internet memes are enregistered combinations of signs (Agha, 2007), meaning they "...indicate the types of communicative events in which they are utilized, and the stereotypical characteristics of the 'speakers' involved in those events" (Soh, 2020, p. 1127). Therefore, memes can reflect and influence public discourse in ways that overlap and differ from orthography and emojis by providing a richer historical, social, and cultural context. As Shifman (2012) explains, memes are "...a prism for illuminating aspects of modern digital culture" (p. 190), and they will continue to be a significant component of online conversation. Every public occurrence can now be transformed into memes that allude to cultural moments and criticize those in power within a society (Shifman, 2013). As the data in this dissertation will show, for a Montenegrin context, the use of script and marked graphemes and the debates, both recent and historical, become rich semiotic material that can be used to produce memes, especially to take strong stances of either support or to undermine Montenegrin language and independence.

### **3.4 Wrapping up**

The rise of the internet and social media has revolutionized the way we communicate and connect with one another. Virtual communities and their digital overlaps on social media allow individuals from all corners of the world to interact in innovative ways, utilizing a variety of tools, including orthography, emojis, and memes, to enhance their discourse. These advancements have presented new challenges and opportunities for research into language ideologies and linguistic variation online. As such, there is an increasing need for research that can adapt traditional frameworks to the online context.

Studies in computer-mediated communication and digitally situated sociolinguistics seek to explore how the internet impacts our identity formation and language usage. While the Balkans have long been a focal point in dialectology, further research is warranted to apply this knowledge to digital platforms. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate linguistic landscape of the region, it is essential to examine how Balkan dialects, such as Montenegrin, are employed in online spaces to produce styles and alignments of recognizable social types.

#### 4.0 Methods of research on the internet

This dissertation adopts a qualitative, ethnography-inspired methodology inspired by a grounded theory approach (Birks & Mills, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to explore the interplay between language identity and ideology on the internet in the context of Montenegrin language. These data, taken from Reddit and Twitter/X, are analyzed for script use, graphemic variation, and use of emojis. The following section elaborates on the reasons for selecting the data collection methods, ethical considerations, and the procedures followed for data analysis and collection.

The use of social media to study social and cultural issues has, naturally, increased as the role of social media in our daily lives has also increased in personal and professional arenas. At the beginning of 2024, the internet-connected global public is generally still considered to be within the parameters of Web 2.0, defining internet users as both participants in the production of digital content and as the ultimate consumers of it (Calude, 2024, p. 17). Social platforms like Reddit, Facebook, Twitter/X, and even Wikipedia (as demonstrated in the first vignette of this dissertation) are designed to maximize user consumption and content creation and, in doing so, to attain high levels of user engagement (which satisfies their business goals and likely the goals of their shareholders, too). In discussing the pervasiveness of social media in our contemporary lives, boyd (2015) writes that "...social media has gone from being a dream of Silicon Valley technologists to a central part of contemporary digital life around the world" (p. 2). Given the relative newness of data collected online and from social media, many disciplines, including sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, are still developing field-wide best practices for gathering, analyzing, and presenting social media data. This dissertation presents just one set of decisions out of the many possible.

Social media platforms have been used for data analysis since they were first created (for example, see Marwick, 2005, on identity presentation, authenticity, and power on Myspace and Friendster). Going hand in hand with the use of social media data, the issue of data privacy and the rights of users to consent to research has existed just as long. Crano, Brewer, & Lac (2023) note the publicness of data online and that the "...prevailing philosophy is that preexisting content on the Internet constitutes public domain and therefore can be observed and recorded without obtaining consent" (p. 423). They discuss the importance of anonymizing data collected by users online as standards of social research; normative practices are yet to be crystallized in the social sciences.

In the section that follows, I will first describe the data I will present in chapter 5. I will identify the most important components of the social media platforms and the posts that are relevant to my data. I will also address concerns around anonymity and present the choices I made for this project. I will then explain how I collected these data and the methodologies that support my data collection process. Finally, I will present analytical decisions made in the interpretation of the semiotic resources of script, grapheme, and emoji usage in the data I include in this dissertation.

#### **4.1 Describing the data**

The data in the following sections are taken mainly from Reddit and Twitter/X. Figures 19 and 20 below are examples of social media content which was produced on these platforms. Figure 19 is an example of a Reddit post taken from the subreddit r/montenegro. A subreddit is a community of users gathered around a shared interest or topic, but is generally viewable by anyone,

regardless of whether they have an account with Reddit or not, thus Reddit is an open platform. A subreddit is organized vertically using a scrolling function and depending on user settings, posts can be ordered ascending or descending by categories representing a post's newness, controversiality, or popularity, measured by user engagement. A Reddit post consists of a question or an issue a user raises, on which users can comment or vote. An 'upvote' causes the post to become more prominent in the subreddit, and a downvote causes a post to appear lower in the subreddit thread and be less likely to be viewed by other members. By upvoting or downvoting a comment in a thread, users can affect the 'karma' of the poster by increasing or lowering it, respectively. Karma can be thought of as the number of social points a user has— if the user has low, no, or negative karma, it can prevent that user from posting or commenting in the subreddit in the future. Users also get karma by creating their own posts or by leaving comments on others' posts. The moderators of a subreddit (the 'mods') determine the acceptable karma levels for posting in their subreddits. Because of the potential 'karmic' consequences of upvoting and downvoting and the effect on user capabilities, these voting actions often act as a proxy for 'liking' or 'disliking' content, like engagement processes on other platforms, for example, Twitter/X with its 'heart' button (see Kiesling, Pavalanathan, et al., 2018, for a stance analysis of discourse on Reddit).



Figure 19 Example of a Reddit post (Skips\_PassportForger, 2021)<sup>9</sup>

In Figure 19, the user, or Redditor, has the display name 'Skips\_PassportForger.' Their avatar, or profile picture, appears to be the default picture for the platform, a silhouette of Snoo, a genderless alien and the Reddit mascot. The u/tag in front of the name distinguishes the content as the name of a Redditor. Beside the name is the timestamp of when the content was posted, often represented in hours, months, or years depending on when the viewer is accessing the material and the time that has passed since the creation of the material. The post title is often a question or statement posed to a subreddit community, and it serves as a preview or comment on whatever is to be represented or shared in the post. In this case, the post title is 'Mods are asleep

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<sup>9</sup>[https://www.reddit.com/r/montenegro/comments/jabwsy/mods\\_are\\_asleep\\_upvote\\_njegoš/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web3x&utm\\_name=web3xcss&utm\\_term=1&utm\\_content=share\\_button](https://www.reddit.com/r/montenegro/comments/jabwsy/mods_are_asleep_upvote_njegoš/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web3x&utm_name=web3xcss&utm_term=1&utm_content=share_button)

Njegoš', and the content is a picture of an important cultural and national hero for Montenegro, poet-king Petar II Petrović-Njegoš. Besides the title is a content tag. While these tags are not always mandatory, subreddit norms often expect posts to be tagged for cataloging purposes. The tag for this post is 'shitpost' which alerts Redditors that the content is meant to be humorous or taken as a joke. Other content tags often identify memes, or serious or potentially offensive content. At the bottom of the post, below the picture, are up and down arrows, which are the mechanics for upvoting and downvoting a post or a comment. The speech box icon links the viewer to the post's comments and the number in the box represents how many comments the post has received. The last icon to the right is a button to allow the post to be shared to another subreddit or another social media platform altogether. For posts which I have analyzed as data in this dissertation, I include a direct link to the source material in a footnote whenever possible.



Figure 20 Example of a Twitter/X post (X, 2023)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://x.com/X/status/1723161754723647526?s=20>

Figure 20 shows a standard post on Twitter/X. In this post, the viewer can access the account's display name (here it is the 'X' with the checkmark icon beside it), the handle (beginning with the 'at' sign [ @ ] and followed by the name itself, X in this case), and the profile picture. which in this case is the brand for the company X, which depicts the grapheme <X>. Posts can be up to 280 characters, including text, emojis, and punctuation. Below the content is the time and date the post was published. The post also shows how many 'likes' it received, any options to reply to or share the post, and finally, the number of replies it received. Similarly to Reddit, posts are viewable on a vertically scrolling timeline, often called a 'thread,' which may present posts chronologically (newest first) or based on algorithmic activity, depending on user settings.

Elon Musk took over the original platform Twitter in July 2023 and as of early 2024 is still rolling out changes for the new platform, X. However, some of the data presented in this dissertation come from Twitter before the Musk takeover, so they occasionally look different when compared side by side with posts from X. While the official name of the platform is now 'X' and not 'Twitter,' the current manifestation of the platform is often referred to as 'Twitter/X' because some features and links still use Twitter's branding and name. In this dissertation, I have tried to consistently refer to the platform as 'Twitter/X' unless reference is specifically made to one incarnation of the platform and not the other. However, the changes between the platforms are not so dramatically different to be difficult for users of one version to acclimate to the other, but they deserve some mention. For example, 'retweets' in which one user reposts material from another user to their own thread are sometimes called 'shares.' Also, 'quote tweets,' in which a user reposts material and adds commentary to it, are often also called 'comments.' Finally, 'likes,' which are actions often used to support or acknowledge a post's content, are now 'hearts' and are depicted visually by a classic heart symbol. As the internet is an ever-changing medium, all presented data

have been checked for accuracy as of the end of January 2024. However, since posts can often be edited, recontextualized through sharing, or even completely deleted, it is fair to assume that content can and will change, as can the number of likes/hearts, quote tweets/comments, and retweets/shares.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I carefully deliberated on whether and how to anonymize the posts I reproduce in this dissertation. However, the two platforms I primarily drew data from, Reddit and Twitter/X, are open platforms (or were as of the writing of this dissertation), meaning that content can typically be accessed without creating an account or gaining some kind of clearance prior. Besides relatively uncommon instances in which posts are made private by the user or set to "followers only," most of the included content is easily searchable by and accessible to popular search engines. Ultimately, I decided not to anonymize the data in most cases. Though many alternatives for anonymization were thoroughly workshopped, each decision in the process relied on the researcher (the current author) deciding what components of a post should be anonymized or not (i.e., profile pictures, display names, usernames, post content, number of likes or shares) and how far to take the anonymization. For example, one question I asked is whether it is enough to translate a post's content into English, thus rendering it more challenging to find the original, or do I paraphrase content, in addition to translation? Following that, what degree of paraphrasing is "good enough" for anonymizing purposes without losing the sensitive and highly context-dependent nature of the original post? I was unsatisfied with any attempt to creatively translate or paraphrase posts or to describe the visual media without actually presenting it. Each attempt to anonymize data in these ways felt unnatural and dishonest in terms of representing the views of the original poster. Because all the platforms that I used offer the ability to delete posts, and in many cases, posts can be edited, I decided to present data in their

original form and leave it up to the users to determine what is important to them based on their own relationship with the social media platforms and their audiences. This allows me to avoid imbuing paraphrases or creative descriptions with my own ideological perspective as an outsider.

Because of my focus on reproducing precisely what a user posts, I have included a direct link to accompany every item of data in this dissertation. However, it is important to note again that users may edit or delete content, so it is very possible that some of these data will either appear differently in the future or will no longer be available. For a researcher of internet discourse, this is a good thing, if occasionally frustrating. The potential ephemerality of some internet discourse (at least at a very superficial level) in some ways parallels the nature of speech and gesture in offline communication. While there is still an unsolved disciplinary question on the reproducibility of social media data, the ability to delete and edit content empowers the user to have the final say over their own posts and content. Relatedly, these data represent the user interface of the social media platforms as of January 2024, particularly based on my own user settings. Generally, I used a Google Chrome web browser on an Apple MacBook to access and record content. In cases where I present data that was collected from groups on closed platforms like Facebook, which do require an account and sometimes group membership to access content, I present those instances anonymized, that is, without any identifying data of the poster (e.g., Figure 23, which is a meme about the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets and is taken from a Facebook group). Though these cases are intentionally minimal. All data and translations presented in this dissertation were my own, but were reviewed by several native-language speakers and teachers of Montenegrin to ensure accurate interpretations and to confirm tone and tenor of social media content. However, any remaining mistakes are entirely my own.

## 4.2 Collecting the data

The data presented here are a representative selection of approximately 20 items drawn from a more extensive corpus of around 200 posts collected from Twitter/X and Reddit between 2020 and 2024. Thus, these data represent around 10 percent of a larger corpus I built. However, no claims are made on how representative these data are of the internet or social media posts in general, or even of the presence of these features outside of my own corpus. The temporal bounds of data collection were the events surrounding the December 2019 passing of the Law on Religious Freedom in Montenegro and the discussion surrounding the national Montenegrin census, which is ongoing as of the time of writing, but which for this project is considered to end in January 2024. These are two very polarizing social issues which especially targeted and antagonized Serbian and Montenegrin relations in Montenegro. Data were initially observed using an approach inspired by Grounded Theory (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967, who are often credited as the first developers of the theory, or Birks & Mills, 2015, for contemporary applications of the theory). Grounded Theory is an inductive approach to the formulation of research questions and hypotheses, in which data are systematically collected, observed, and compared, and from these processes, a researcher forms the relevant question addressing issues discovered in the data. As a researcher, I began with an interest in internet discourse in a Montenegrin language context, which was initially inspired by experiences I had as a student of Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian and by an initial short-term study abroad in Montenegro in 2019. My research questions arose after observing Montenegrin-language posts on Twitter/X and Reddit and taking note of interesting or unexpected uses of graphemes and emojis, which seemed to be connected to issues of identity between Montenegrins and Serbs in Montenegro.

While exploring social media in a Montenegrin language context, I viewed my participation as part of a digital ethnographic approach (e.g., for earlier examples of digital ethnography on the internet, see Boellstorff, 2008 on the interactive virtual platform *Second Life*; or Miller & Slater, 2000, which is an early ethnography of the internet as of the late 1990s and early 2000s). This approach of observing data was inspired by Ivković (2013) who observed script and orthographic variation related to ideology and technological limitations in users' comments found on two Serbian online newspapers. Similarly, George (2019) observed use of orthography and script in meme usage in a Serbian language context. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a high school in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia, but focused her work on the communicative practices of a subset of her students in a Facebook group. Similar to George, I was physically based in Montenegro for an 8-month period on a David L. Boren research fellowship and affiliated with the *Fakultet za crnogorski jezik i književnost (Faculty for Montenegrin language and literature, or FCJK)* in Cetinje, Montenegro, but drawing my dissertation data from the digital contexts of Twitter/X and Reddit. Similarly to both Ivković and George, my digitally observed and collected data are supported by 'real-world' observations while conducting fieldwork in the site of interest. Much of my understanding of the data I present here was checked and confirmed by conversations, some quite casual, with Montenegrins in Montenegro.

Data collection itself began with the seeding of a word, phrase, or description of an event in the search box of each social media platform, in English, as well as in Montenegrin and Serbian, in both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts. I used these targeted searches to find discourse contexts in which I expected to find variation in usage of script, graphemes, and emojis based on my earlier observations of the Montenegrin internet context. Searches on Reddit and Twitter/X were seeded by terms like *crnogorski* [Montenegrin], *Crna Gora* [Montenegro], *pravopis* [grammar], *jezik*

[language], *srpski* [Serbian], *popis* [census], *zakon* [law], *pravoslav* [Orthodox], among others. My previous observations suggested that discourse around topics of politics, religion, and explicit discussion of language, would offer the clearest examples of the style that I am arguing exists. Inevitably, the results are subjective to my own experience as an internet user and I cannot make claims that these searches captured all relevant discourse events or that they reflect the experiences of all Montenegrin language users. However, for a subset of Montenegrin speakers who are connected to the internet and who use social media, these searches were successful in eliciting enough data to present the style I will discuss in chapter 6. Future work can make use of computational or automated means to better understand the language practices of a larger population of Montenegrin users on the internet.

From the initial set of results from these seeded searches, I followed up on users who commented or re-shared relevant content, or who otherwise visibly responded to the initial post. I continued this process until I collected a large enough corpus of social media posts, from which a representative selection is presented in this dissertation. While a quantitative or computational approach might have garnered more data and offered different insights into language use on the internet, there were insurmountable challenges to such an approach. First, one of the most significant changes occurring during the Musk changeover of Twitter to X was the temporary loss of personal developer accounts, which were previously relatively easy to obtain, and which allowed any user to run software (i.e., an Application Programming Interface or API) on Twitter to automate the collection, sorting, and analysis of large amounts of Tweets. After losing my own developer account during the change, I needed to pivot. I committed to collecting and analyzing the data qualitatively. A similar process happened with Reddit in April 2023, in which APIs were made unusable due to new policies of monetization affecting use of external programs on Reddit's

platform. Second, as user of social media and a consumer of Montenegrin social media content, as well as a temporary inhabitant of Montenegro, in some ways I was also subject to the effect of the ‘algorithm’ in the media that I was presented on these platforms. Subjectivity is an inherent part of this project and is a useful tool in forming the insights I take away from these data. However, these data only represent a subset of Montenegrin language users who are connected to the internet and who use social media and these data do not represent any quantitative insights on language use in this context. By allowing the data to be revealed to me in a more naturalistic way, the data collection process potentially resembles how a user might naturally encounter these data in the ‘wild.’ This decision to conduct qualitative research is not necessarily a limitation of this dissertation; however, there is room for developing this project to include more computational and quantitative methods in the future to make broader characterizations of Montenegrin language users on the internet.

### **4.3 Analyzing the data**

The data presented in the following sections represents posts collected from Twitter/X and Reddit. For each post, several analytical categories are used (illustrated in Table 7) to highlight features and qualities of the discourse. The rows represent a single analysis item related to the analytic categories in the columns. The columns for 'Fig' (Figure) and 'User' identify the specific data item referenced (e.g., post from Reddit or Twitter/X) and the user from which the data comes. All usernames, including their spelling and typographical qualities, are presented as they are in their native digital environment, as best as possible (though emojis can sometimes render oddly on different user interfaces). The variable column refers to the item of interest. Thus, this includes

the grapheme or emoji used. The 'Type' column offers additional categorization of the data represented. For example, orthographic data can appear in several forms, such as 'standard' (found in the standard language), marked (differing from the standard in some way), or 'digraphic.' Digraphs are two graphemes combined into one and are generally treated as one grapheme in the orthography and phonology (e.g., <lj>, <nj>, <dž>). In the Montenegrin language, digraphs often occur in lexical environments with potential variation, as the data will show. In terms of emojis, these can be further divided into 'emblems' or 'co-speech' based on emoji studies (as in McCulloch, 2020, who uses gesture studies as a model for emojis). A few emojis can be interpreted as either type, depending on cultural background. As in the 'thumbs up' gesture, if you are part of a cultural or social background in which this gesture means something like 'okay' or 'good job' it would be an emblem. If otherwise, for example if one were to use it to point in a direction, then it would be co-speech. The 'Form' column refers to the 'shape' of the data, whether it is Latin or Cyrillic for orthographic data or as a textual description of the image of an emoji (e.g., flag, gesture, symbol). The column for cultural reference describes the topic of the post. For example, a post about a political candidate could have 'the Montenegrin census' as its cultural reference. The column for 'Alignment' is a product of stancetaking (Du Bois, 2007; Kiesling, 2022) and is a way of capturing the positionality of the post, whether it is Serbia aligned or disaligned or Montenegro aligned or disaligned. See Table 8 for descriptions of the alignments I considered with these data. Finally, the column for 'Affective Stance' captures the emotional content of the data based on either explicit lexical choice or how other users appear to react to the data. This metric is necessarily subjective, and affect has been conceptualized in several ways (see Wetherell, 2012, for a review of research on affect and emotion in fields like neuroscience, social psychology, sociology, and political science). Here, I am considering affect to be a category of emotional content that relates a user's

stance to the post's reference (see Kiesling, 2018, for an exploration of affective stance as it relates to masculinity). All features have been checked for appropriateness and tone and confirmed by several native speaker informants.

**Table 7 Example of a data table**

Fig	User	Variable	Script	Emoji Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
0	@xuser, u/reddituser	s, sj, š, z, zj, ž, č, 3 / emojis	Latin, Cyrillic	Emblem, Co-Speech	Topic	Montenegro or Serbia aligned or disaligned	emotional content (e.g., pride, anger, joy)

For each presentation of data, the table will identify all relevant variables of interest, even if not necessarily applicable to that section of the dissertation. For example, in the section addressing graphemes, the table will also represent any emoji appearing in that post and reference will be made to script choice in the surrounding text. While this may be slightly confusing at first, it highlights the interconnectedness of these semiotic resources on social media. Variation in script, graphemes, and emojis often co-occur and they are all interpreted by the viewer simultaneously. For reasons of clarity and simplicity, in the first section on script choice (5.1.1.), I will not include tables since the salient variable is just whether Latin or Cyrillic script is used. That is evident from the displayed post itself and the surrounding text contextualizing those data.

As mentioned previously, the alignment category of my data tables represents whether the data item can be interpreted as Serbia-aligned or Montenegro-aligned or whether it is disaligned with one of those stances. Serbia or Montenegro alignment was chosen instead of the prefix 'pro-' (e.g., pro-Serbian, pro-Montenegrin) to avoid the explicitly political connotation of the prefix, which comes loaded with its own ideological baggage. Alignments can be made along political,

national, ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences between Serbian and Montenegrin cultural norms. However, these acts of alignment should not be understood as on/off switches between Serbian and Montenegrin stances, nor should they be seen as a zero-sum characterization where all positions total to one hundred percent Montenegro or Serbia aligned. Again, these alignments represent my characterization of data collected from a small subset of Montenegrin language users who engage with content on Twitter/X and Reddit.

**Table 8 Descriptions of alignments**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Montenegro aligned</b></p>	<p>Data explicitly aligned with the cultural values of a modernized, independent Montenegro possessing the right to have its own language and political self-determination</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Serbia aligned</b></p>	<p>Data explicitly aligned with the cultural values of Vučić’s Serbia, which tend to preserve traditional orthodox values and maintain belief in Serbia as a regional leader (possibly with the support of Russia, which shares Slavic and Orthodox heritage)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Montenegro disaligned</b></p>	<p>Data are commenting on something in the Montenegrin cultural sphere and might be critical of Montenegrin language, culture, or policy, but also is not clearly aligned with Serbia either</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Serbia disaligned</b></p>	<p>Data are commenting on something in the Serbian cultural sphere and might be critical of Serbian language, culture, or policy, but also is not clearly aligned with Montenegro either</p>

In the process of qualitatively analyzing the complex discursive practices presented in these data, it was necessary to make subjective choices regarding the categorization and interpretation of many of the variables. The qualitative and ethnographically-inspired approach acknowledges that there are multiple ways of presenting and analyzing data, and the current method was chosen based on a careful consideration of the various factors at play. Despite the subjective nature of the analysis, the results are hopefully presented in a clear and comprehensive manner, providing valuable insights into the discursive practices being studied of this subset of language users.

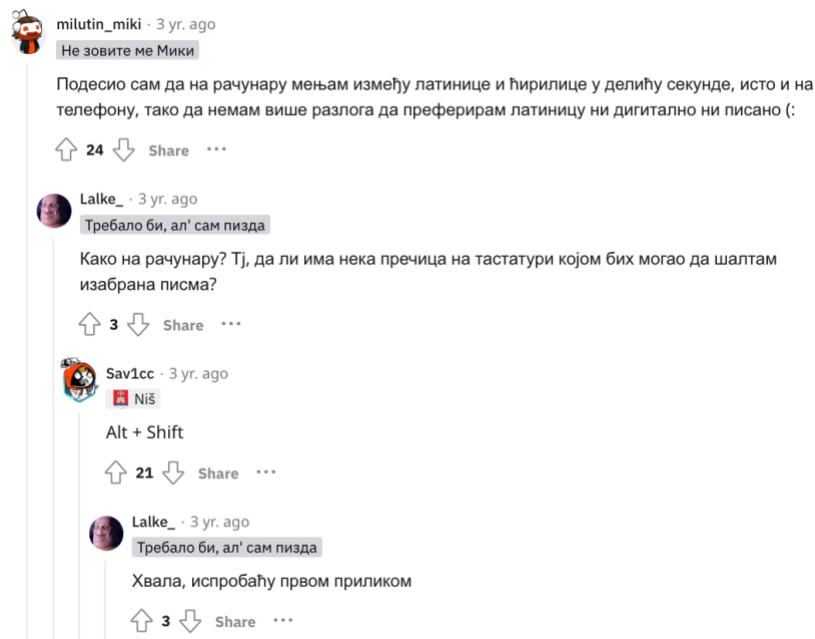
## 5.0 Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, the data for this dissertation draw on both orthographic and visual resources used on Reddit and Twitter/X. Thus, this section briefly contextualizes possible orthographical and typographical choices before presenting data demonstrating ideologically driven script choices between Cyrillic and Latin for users of social media platforms. This section will explore the use of the marked Montenegrin graphemes developed for writing and, eventually, typing the Montenegrin national standard. Afterward, emojis are shown to be additional semiotic resources capable of intensifying the aligning force of the graphemes and script along a continuum of identity-related alignments, reflecting Serbia-aligned and Montenegro-aligned positions. These resources are combined in creating and circulating memes as bundles of semiotic resources, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. This section will show how script, graphemes, and emojis are employed to achieve the work of identity and ideology systemically through a representation of data taken from a larger corpus.

### 5.1 Orthography as a semiotic resource

As discussed previously, script choice is occasionally a consequence of technological limitations but is also often an ideologically driven choice. The issue at the intersection of technology and ideology is salient enough to be a subject of metalinguistic discourse around script use. The exchange in Figure 21 is from Reddit (April 2021), in which commenters respond to a poll posted in the subreddit r/serbia asking how often users write in Cyrillic. As the exchange

shows, some users write in Latin because it is the default option on many technologies and the only option they know how to use. Thus, given technological limitations, it becomes a communal practice for one user to teach others how to write in Cyrillic. Figure 21 is an excerpt taken from a more extended conversation comparing different methods to access Cyrillic depending on what operating system one uses (e.g., whether Windows or something else):



Author's Translation

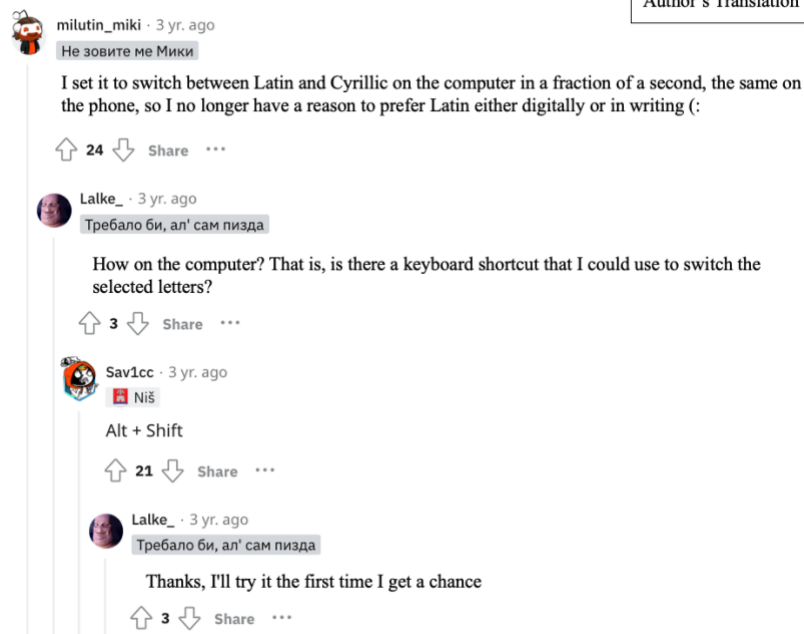


Figure 21 Latin or Cyrillic (milutin\_miki, 2021)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>[https://www.reddit.com/r/serbia/comments/mpxz7i/comment/gucmzeb/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web2x&context=3](https://www.reddit.com/r/serbia/comments/mpxz7i/comment/gucmzeb/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3)

Figure 22 comes from the same general Reddit thread as Figure 21. In it, the user describes how they prefer to use Latin on their mobile phones and computers but Cyrillic when writing by hand. Contrary to previous explanations of technological difficulties, this user claims that Cyrillic is a better fit for the Serbian language, highlighting graphemes that are monographemic in Cyrillic but digraphemic in Latin: <њ> (Latin <nj>), <љ> (Latin <lj>), <џ> (Latin <dž>). Thus, there appears to be an ideology in which fewer graphemes per sound produce an efficiency that makes Cyrillic a better fit for Serbian.

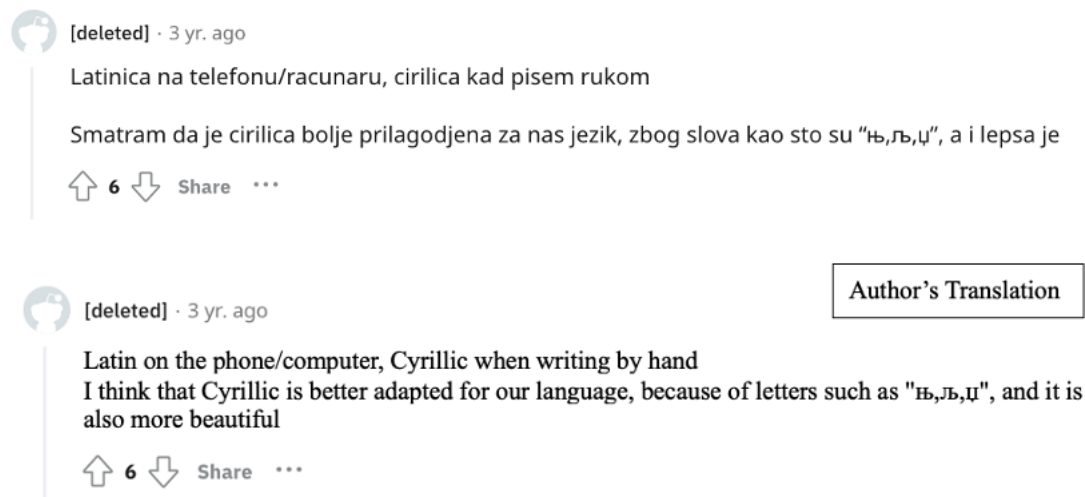


Figure 22 Latin on the phone, Cyrillic by hand (milutin\_miki, 2021)<sup>12</sup>

Cyrillic is often thought of in monolithic terms as if there is just one variety of Cyrillic and one way of portraying Cyrillic graphemes. Of course, this is not entirely accurate. Cyrillic-using languages, like Serbian, Ukrainian, or Bulgarian, have great diversity regarding available graphemes and diacritics. While there are similarities between the Cyrillic scripts, one is not easily

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<sup>12</sup>[https://www.reddit.com/r/serbia/comments/mpxz7i/comment/gucntel/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web2x&context=3](https://www.reddit.com/r/serbia/comments/mpxz7i/comment/gucntel/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3)

substituted for another. However, orthographic and typographic standards and how the technologies use them are often developed for language systems with a greater number of users, which has a more significant effect on the demand for more accessible methods of typing. That said, technology is only a part of the context. Users still have clear choices in how and when they use a particular script and often can speak meta-linguistically about when and where they use one or another script.

Though many users may need to acquire the additional knowledge or technical skill to use technology and social media platforms in their preferred script, the option at least exists for languages with larger populations of users. Serbian Latin and Serbian Cyrillic keyboards are widely available and relatively accessible to many. In contrast, however, the Montenegrin standard lacks any technological support for its new graphemes <ś>, <ź> and their Cyrillic counterparts, <ć>, <џ>. The Latin <ś> and <ź> are present in the Polish keyboard, which means that for a user to access these graphemes easily, they must switch between multiple keyboards to access all the necessary graphemes. The Cyrillic versions <ć> and <џ> do not exist outside the Montenegrin standard. They are not pre-programmed in Unicode to be accessible beyond using a combination of keystrokes to add diacritics to the base letter, making it much more challenging to use the Montenegrin alphabet (especially in Cyrillic script). This makes the use of Montenegrin graphemes a much more intentional process if users are still employing them despite technological barriers.

### **5.1.1 Script choice: Latin, Cyrillic, or other?**

As discussed in previous sections, script choice is an example of a semiotic resource that has acquired metapragmatic awareness in the region and thus carries ideological value regardless of the chosen variant. For this section, I want to show how using Cyrillic or Latin script affects the

message conveyed by content regarding identity and ideology. From a broad research perspective, this is a path that is relatively well-trodden in studies of Slavic and Balkan orthography (for example, see Banjevlav, 2021 on language rights in Croatia related to script use; Ivković, 2013, 2015 on pragmatic uses of orthography in Serbian online spaces; Jovanović, 2018 on Serbian nationalist discourse around Cyrillic; Magner, 2001 on digraphia in Croatia and Serbia; and Selvelli, 2021, on the history of ideologizing the act of writing in the Balkans). However, it is critical to demonstrate that the distinction in script is still relevant, particularly in the context of Montenegrin social media data and that script choice itself takes on new relevance in the shifting Montenegrin context.

Unique to the countries of former Yugoslavia, both Latin and Cyrillic scripts are co-present. Both scripts are the official standard in Montenegro, according to the Montenegrin constitution. This is compared to the Serbian constitution, which lists Cyrillic as the ‘official script’ of Serbia, but Latin is ‘in official use.’ This means that officially speaking, Cyrillic is the default script, though Latin can accompany it in transcription whenever relevant or necessary. Because of this variation, there is great flexibility in whether and how a user can switch between scripts in their communication in order to perform identity, take ideological stances, or even just because they want to, for aesthetic reasons. However, each choice made in a discourse context has an ideological effect, especially on those who respond to and interact with the original choice. This has often been thought of as *uptake*, or a hearer’s recognition of a speaker’s communicative intent (McDonald, 2020). Due to consequences of history, the two scripts carry immense social baggage in that perceptions and stereotypes accompany users of either script type. Memes like the one in Figure 23 show this ideological disparity in stark visual terms, where the so-called ‘Latin alphabet Slavs’ are contrasted with the ‘Cyrillic Slavs.’

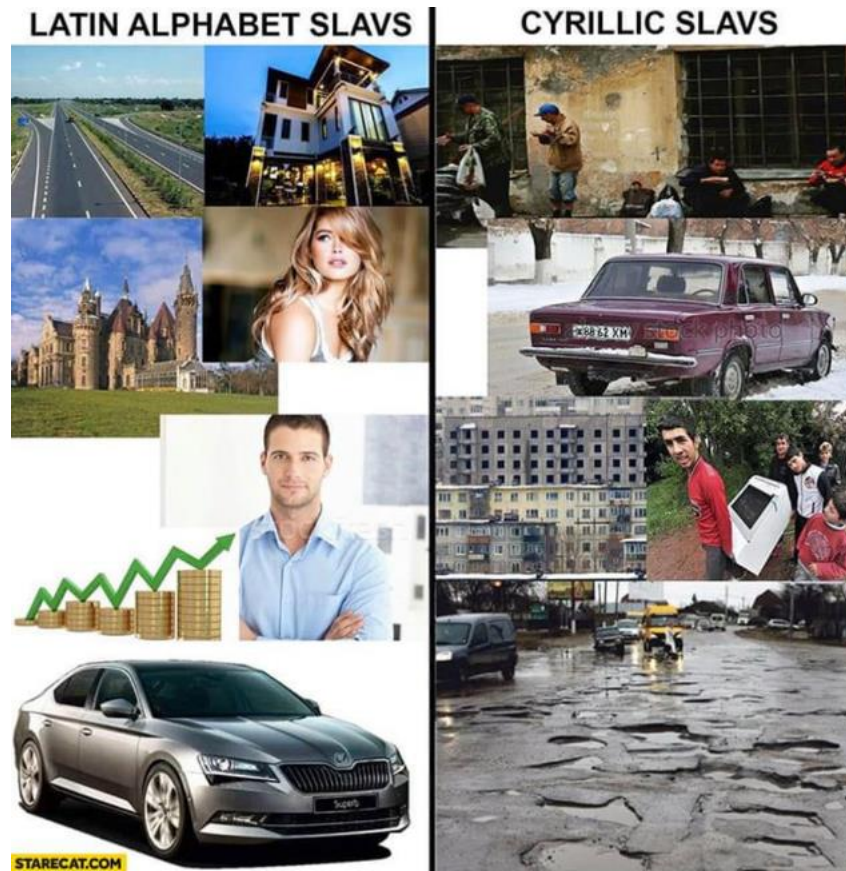


Figure 23 Latin Alphabet Slavs vs. Cyrillic Slavs meme (iFunny, n.d.)<sup>13</sup>

Figure 23 portrays a world divided by its use of script, whether Latin or Cyrillic. Figure 23 is part of a discourse found online and often shared through memes in which Eastern Europe is a disadvantaged, more dangerous, and less successful foil to Western Europe. In these memes, the so-called 'Latin alphabet Slavs' (presumably including countries like Poland, Croatia, Czechia, Slovakia, and Slovenia, which use the Latin alphabet and are largely populated by Slavic groups) are populated with beautiful people, luxury cars, financial security, and high-quality infrastructure

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<sup>13</sup> Originally taken from archived Facebook group *Eastern Europistan 2.0*, date unknown; current image found at meme-generating website 'iFunny.'

in the form of excellent roads, buildings, and even a beautifully maintained castle. On the right side of the panel are the so-called 'Cyrillic Slavs,' whose presence evokes often stereotyped images of Eastern Europe as a forlorn and miserable place. The image shows old cars in disrepair and severe issues with infrastructure (e.g., poorly kept roads), and the human subjects tend to have shabby clothes, and the memes suggest that they may be engaging in some criminal activity, potentially theft. These images are likely meant to represent some of the harmful stereotypes of the Roma people, who occupy much of Europe, but especially the Balkans and Eastern Europe (see Buturoiu & Corbu, 2020, and Rosenhaft & Sierra, 2022, for discussions on stereotypes of Roma, both online and off). These memes present the other side of Europe— the Cyrillic side (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, who are also largely populated by Slavic groups but which exist on the other side of the European cultural divide). This panel seems to suggest that Cyrillic-ness is a quality that supersedes alphabet use and instead defines a nation and is something that permeates a particular kind of person in manners of behavior, activities, and possibly values, suggesting that there is something dangerous in the use of Cyrillic (see Šarić & Radanović Felberg, 2017, on relationship between Cyrillic use in Croatia and painful memories of recent war).

In the Montenegrin and Serbian cultural context, the Serbian Orthodox Church (*Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva* / *Српска Православна Црква*, or SPC/СПЦ) is a significant cultural and social authority. The SPC exclusively uses the Serbian Cyrillic script, demonstrated by Figure 24, which is a screenshot taken from the front page of the church's official website. Without having been educated on how to read Serbian Cyrillic, one would not be able to understand the text on the page. There are also no easily accessible ways to convert the script to Latin or read the page in any other language if desired. While it is not necessarily surprising that the page is not available in

other languages (not every page needs to be translated into every language, after all), it is noticeable that there are no options for BCMS speakers who use the Latin script. According to Salamurović (2019), the Serbian Orthodox Church must use the Cyrillic script, per official church policy. This limitation in script use is a legal reaction to the historical role of communism in the region and the communist state's stance on religion as generally forbidden or disapproved. Thus, SPC leans into Cyrillic as part of its Orthodox heritage and strongly enforces use of the script. The website of the Serbian church presented in Figure 24 shows how the potential erasure of the population of Serbian Orthodox believers who might prefer Latin, is performed, by way of the history and traditions of the church. By focusing on only one script, the church is restrictive in whom it sees as its adherents. In contrast, recall the Serbian Wikipedia from the vignette at the beginning of this dissertation, which offered a converter to switch between scripts to draw other users (e.g., Bosnians, Croatians, and Montenegrins) to its wiki. Both the Serbian wiki and the Serbian Orthodox Church's website have the effect of erasing BCMS-speaking groups who use the Latin script, either by exclusion (as in the church website) or by assimilation (as in Wikipedia).

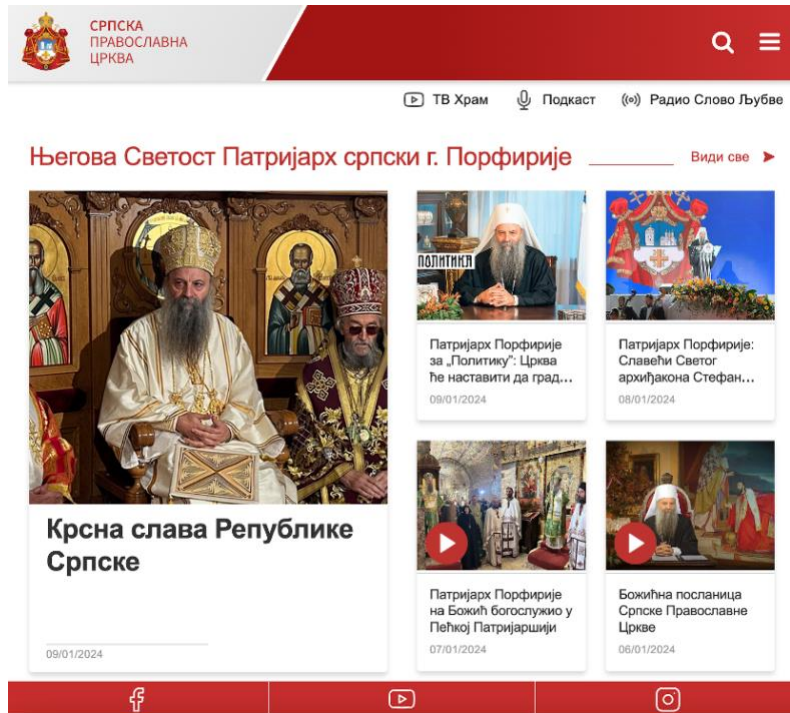


Figure 24 Front page of the website for the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC, January 9, 2024)<sup>14</sup>

Contrasting the website of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the front page of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (*Crnogorska Pravoslavna Crkva*, or MOC/CPC) in Figure 25 uses a different approach. As an Orthodox church, it is still connected with the culture of the Orthodox faith and, as a religious institution, has some of the same relationships with its communist past. Thus, the default script is Cyrillic, as required by Orthodox law. However, visible at the top of the front page are options for users to read the content in the Latin script (*Latinica*) or to translate it into English. The content itself is also created using both scripts, as seen in the scrolling news feed at the bottom of the image, which presents a news story in Latin script. The option to transcribe or translate the Cyrillic text inherently makes the material on the website more accessible to a broader audience.

<sup>14</sup> <https://spc.rs/>

It is more inclusive of users with different literacy backgrounds and preferences. This choice also suggests some institutional impetus to create this accessibility. Someone had to create the website, including the script-converting tool and the content in both scripts, and someone must continue to manage and maintain the website itself. While not overtly stated, this suggests that the Montenegrin Orthodox Church has a more open and cosmopolitan relationship with its users and their potential backgrounds, including potential international visitors to the website.



Figure 25 Front page of the website for the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (CPC, January 9, 2024)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cpc.org.me/>

Despite existing at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, and likely earlier depending on one's choice of historical narrative, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church has existed in its present institutional form since 1993 and it has been an essential voice in campaigning for a Montenegro independent of Serbia (Morrison, 2009). Because of its recency, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is often accused of being a modern invention and political symbol connected to several competing ideologies formed in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and in the movement for Montenegrin independence. For example, the MOC can be seen as part of a newly-globalizing and modern Montenegro, supporting the goal of developing a more robust relationship with the U.S. and Western Europe, or alternatively, as part of a pandering and weakened Montenegro abandoning its regional allies. The latter ideology is particularly salient for Serbia-aligned populations, many of whom subscribe to what has been called the 'Greater Serbia' ideology and related movements of pan-Slavic unity, which characterize Serbia as a regional power over much of the Western Balkans, for example, Kosovo (see Melichárek, 2015 for more on this ideological movement). At the same time, it is impossible to know precisely what the intentions and goals are of the human designers of either website. However, where only one script is offered, only a limited readership can be reached and some populations will be excluded or included as a consequence of this choice. Institutional preference for script promotes ideologies of identity and group belonging in physical and virtual spaces just by their use. Where multiple accessibility options are available, the material is more likely to be accessed by a larger audience and potentially by one that is more international or linguistically diverse.

While this dissertation aims to highlight divergent conceptions of Montenegrin language ideology in contemporary Montenegro, because of the critical role of Serbia and the Serbian cultural sphere, it is helpful to see an example of canonical *Serbianness* in a post. Figure 26 is a

screenshot taken from the official Twitter/X account of the current president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. His display name is written in the Serbian Cyrillic script, in contrast to the handle name (@avucic), which is written in the Latin script. Official usernames are governed by the standard policy of Twitter/X, which is provided in English and has a Latin script base. However, the short biography below the display name is editable by users and can contain any language the platform can render. Vučić's account profile is written using both English and Serbian Cyrillic. As the designated official script of Serbian, Cyrillic would naturally be the script used by the Serbian president. However, there is no Latin variant accompanying the Cyrillic. Despite its legal classification as 'in official use' (compared to Cyrillic's 'official script') and its use by speakers in the same BCMS language system, Latin BCMS is not present. This choice is generally acceptable for reaching literate Serbian audiences educated in the Cyrillic script. However, like the example of the Serbian Orthodox Church, it explicitly excludes and erases groups who only know the Latin alphabet. While countries like Montenegro and Bosnia generally educate their students in both scripts, Croatia tends only to use Latin in its public education (though this can be dependent on the school, region, and age of the student learning to read and write; see Šarić & Radanović Felberg, 2017, p. 55). Thus, it has the effect of alienating users who neither speak English nor can read Serbian Cyrillic. Not every Twitter/X profile needs to offer content in every imaginable language; however, the countries of former Yugoslavia represent a unique situation in that the countries have a long and recent history of union and their spoken language is very similar to one another, despite new political borders. It is rare to find a context in which populations from these now-independent nations do not interact with one another in some way, if only in memory and cultural narratives. Since literacy and orthography need to be explicitly taught and reinforced through society, these

choices reflect the relationship between this user, the Serbian president, and the perceived or imagined audiences receiving his posts.



Figure 26 Twitter/X of President of Serbia (Александар Вучић, 2024)<sup>16</sup>

One word worth noting in the profile in Figure 26 is the word for ‘president’ - *председник*<sup>17</sup> [predsednik], which is inflected in the genitive case as *председника*. This word is highly variable in its spelling and thus provides a consistent test case for orthographic variation. As it is the account profile of the Serbian president, it is written using the Serbian standard, thus the use of Cyrillic and the Ekavian dialect, which uses a single Latin <s> or Cyrillic <c> in the spelling.

Compare Figure 26 to Figure 27, the Twitter/X profile of the former Montenegrin president, Milo Đukanović (@djukanovicCG). As discussed earlier, Đukanović had a pivotal role

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<sup>16</sup> <https://twitter.com/avucic>

<sup>17</sup> Note for readers unfamiliar with Cyrillic: letters writtin in Cyrillic italic look different from Cyrillic print letters

in the independence movement in Montenegro and has outwardly expressed views supporting NATO and E.U. accession and strong relationships with the U.S. and Western Europe. His profile uses English and the Ijekavian Latin variant, generally found in Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia. Note the spelling of *predsjednik* – ‘president’– using the Latin <sj> digraph rather than the <s> grapheme, which appeared in Cyrillic in Figure 26. This spelling is a Serbia-disaligned variant of the word since it is not preferred according to the Serbian language standard, which uses the Ekavian variant. However, it is likely to be found in Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin language contexts. The Montenegrin text is presented first, followed by the English, ending with an emoji of the Montenegrin flag.

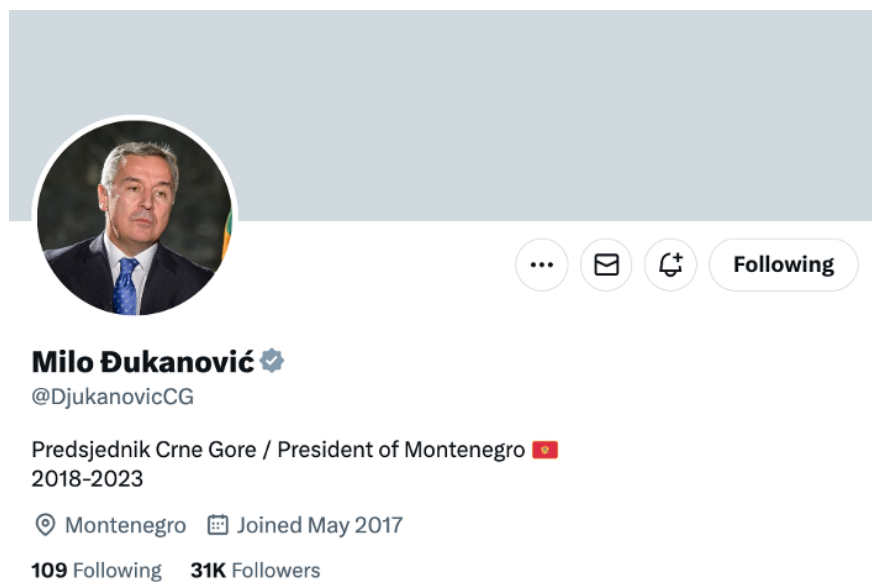


Figure 27 Twitter/X of former President of Montenegro (Milo Đukanović, 2024)<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it is unsurprising that Vučić and Đukanović (or whoever manages their social media) have used the most neutral, standard variant for their respective countries, Cyrillic Ekavian

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<sup>18</sup> <https://twitter.com/DjukanovicCG>

for Serbian and Latin Ijekavian for Montenegrin. However, their use of these forms demonstrates the presence of a standard that is manifested in any language context, even social media profiles, which are often more informal than official channels of communication.

Figures 26 and 27 displayed the use of the semiotic resource of script choice in Serbia-aligning contexts and Montenegro-aligning contexts, and I discussed how these alignments are bound with ideologies inherent in these forms (that is, the ideology of a cosmopolitan and open Montenegro or the ideology of a traditional and conservative Serbia). While it might be satisfying to claim that all profiles of BCMS-speaking politicians on Twitter/X profiles of regional politicians show the same strongly-delineated patterns, that is not quite the case. See Figure 28, which is the profile of Jakov Milatović, who has been the president of Montenegro since May 2023.



Figure 28 Twitter/X of President of Montenegro (Jakov Milatovic, 2024)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://twitter.com/JakovMilatovic>

Until February 2024, Milatović was a member of the centrist political party *Pokret Evropa Sad* ('Movement for Europe Now'), which was founded in 2022 in the aftermath of the dissolution of the first post-Đukanović government and which claims to be pro-Western Europe, pro-NATO, and pro-E.U. accession (Movement Europe now!, 2022). His Twitter/X profile consists of his political title written in English and Ijekavian Latin Montenegrin, like Đukanović. Milatović even uses emojis representing the flags of Montenegro and the European Union, further supporting his stance on the ideology of a modern, westward-looking Montenegro. However, Milatović also has his title transliterated into Ijekavian Cyrillic. This choice is typically used for Serbs in Montenegro who are culturally aligned with Serbia (through the use of Cyrillic) but who are part of the Ijekavian dialect space (found in Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro). Thus, this transliteration can be seen as a gesture towards Serbia-aligned Montenegrins who would also be part of Milatović's constituency as president. In presenting a combination of resources, in terms of script and emojis, Milatović can address the demands of a divided public through discursive moves that are both Montenegro and Serbia aligning and which, taken together, have the effect of softening any hardline stances supporting either perspective.

The Latin/Cyrillic distinction is also attended to by others, beyond politicians, as a marker of identity and alignment. In Figure 29, user 'ШОМИ' [shomi] chooses Cyrillic to spell their display name. This user is commenting on a thread in which the first post explains the difference between Montenegrin and Serbian, focusing on the Ijekavian/Ekavian divide and the use of marked graphemes (see Figure 10). Here, the user writes, 'We are waiting for you to write something in Montenegrin I see all the tweets in Serbian.' Because the user writes their name in Cyrillic and most of their post is in Cyrillic, it is reasonable to assume that they typically use Cyrillic as their script. The Serbian flag emoji also suggests an affective stance of national pride towards Serbia,

and further exploration of this user's post history seems to confirm these assumptions. However, the user performs a stance of mocking the initial post by writing the name of the Montenegrin language (inflected by the instrumental case) in Latin script. Thus, there appear to be no technological limitations on this user's script choice and what could have been written “МОНТЕНЕГРИЈСКОМ” is instead written as “montenegrijskom.” This sudden switch of script sets the text off stylistically— as if imitating air quotes in spoken English— thus conveying the tone of mocking and derision.



Figure 29 Montenegrijskom (Ш О М И , 2020)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <https://twitter.com/ssshomiii/status/1309527948672802818>

Meletis (2023) calls this phenomenon 'typographical mimicry' in which the format of text "emulates visual features of a different script...with the intent of evoking associations with a corresponding 'foreign' culture" (p. 1047). For this user, Montenegrin language and the Latin script in particular represents some degree of foreignness compared to the Cyrillic script. The use of the term 'Montenegrin' itself can also be interpreted as an insult. The word 'Montenegrin' is English, deriving from the Venetian translation of the local term *Crna Gora*, or 'Black Mountain' and referring to the mountains around the old royal capital, Cetinje. In the Montenegrin language, 'Montenegrin' is *crnogorac* (demonym) or *crnogorski* (adjective, e.g. Montenegrin language or music) or in this context, it would be inflected as *crnogorskom*. Thus, when the term 'Montenegrin' appears in an otherwise non-English (or other language) context, it is often used to highlight the outsider status of the referent— often to accuse them of pandering to the West and its liberal ideologies. Whether in religious, cultural, or political contexts or discourse events where one person wants to alienate another, script choice becomes an easily accessible, highly visible, and recognizable semiotic resource to perform this ideological work. Users can present text in entirely one script (the Serbian Orthodox Church's website), or include options to translate or convert script (the Montenegrin Orthodox Church's website). Users can also alternate scripts between sentences (the Twitter/X profiles of local politicians), or even mid-utterance, as in Figure 29. The intense awareness of script choice as ideologically driven allows this resource to be easily accommodated and utilized for the communicative needs of a discourse.


### 5.1.2 Marked graphemes: Š, Ž, Č, Ć

As discussed previously, the grapheme pairs <Š, Ž | Č, Ć> in Latin and Cyrillic, respectively, represent forms used in the Montenegrin language standard. Orthographically, the grapheme <š>, or <ć> in Cyrillic, is often found in the same lexical and phonological environments in which the standard digraph <sj> is found. Likewise, the grapheme <ž>, or <ć> in Cyrillic, can be found in the same lexical and phonological environment as the standard digraph <zj>. These digraphs are common in Croatian and Bosnian as Ijekavian reflexes, distinguishing these varieties from Serbian, which is Ekavian. However, the use of the marked grapheme in writing, as opposed to the digraph form, is restricted to Montenegrin orthography, and its appearance as a dialect variant in speech occurs in more environments in spoken Montenegrin than it does in Croatian or Bosnian (see Čirgić, 2010 & Čirgić, et al., 2020, for more on iotations [*jotacija*] in Montenegrin). Figure 30 shows the grapheme in use to refer to Andrija Mandić, the short-term Montenegrin president and strong supporter of Vučić's party in Serbia. Mandić is the current president of the Montenegrin parliament and one of the conspirators behind the alleged coup in 2016 and alleged assassination attempt on Đukanović (Montenegrin Court Confirms Charges, 2017). The user 'Kafa FCJK' is criticizing Mandić as a shameful politician, despite being voted in by the Montenegrin public. In this example, the post content is addressing Montenegrin politicians and politics in general. The Montenegrin flag emoji in the display name of this user reinforces that this is Montenegro-aligning content. As the data show, the features of script, grapheme, and emoji often co-occur in social media content.



Figure 30 Use of the marked grapheme (Kafa MNE, 2024)<sup>21</sup>

Table 9 Analysis of Figure 30

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
30	Kafa FCJK	prešednik	marked	Latin	Montenegrin politician Andrija Mandić	Montenegro aligned	shame, disappointment
30	Kafa FCJK		emblem	Montenegrin Flag (MN)	display name	Montenegro aligned	pride, support

<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/Kafa2005/status/1749789341923098887>

Compare Figure 30 with Figure 31 below, by user 'jabučka' [little apple]. Both posts criticizing current Montenegrin politicians were written on the same day in January 2024. Figure 31 is commenting on the current president of Montenegro, Jakov Milatović, the prime minister, Mickey Spajić, and Mandić once again. Like the previous example, the display name uses Montenegrin flag emojis and the red heart emoji, which enhances the Montenegrin alignment of the post by use of red, as in the Montenegrin flag, and by way of its standard meaning of “love.” The post is written using the Latin script, and the marked grapheme <ś> is used in the word preśednik, or “president.”

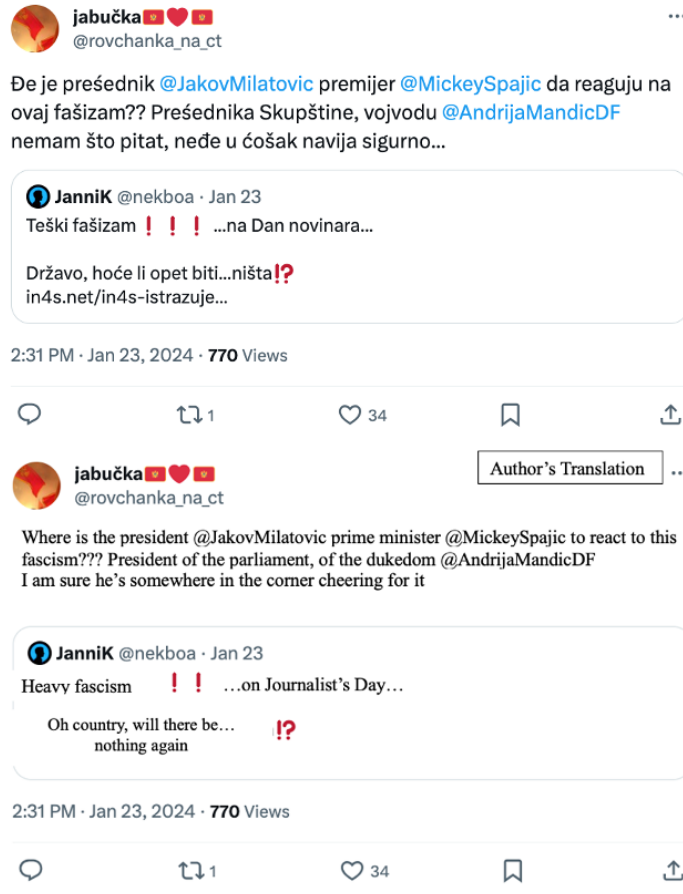




Figure 31 Use of the marked grapheme (jabučka, 2024)<sup>22</sup>

Table 10 Analysis of Figure 31

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
31	jabučka	prešednik	marked	Latin	political figures of Montenegro	Montenegro aligned	cynical
31	jabučka		emblem	MN Flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	pride, support
31	jabučka		emblem	Red heart	display name	Montenegro aligned	pride, support


<sup>22</sup> [https://twitter.com/rovchanka\\_na\\_ct/status/1749786855984280035](https://twitter.com/rovchanka_na_ct/status/1749786855984280035)

Similarly to the previous two examples, user ‘patriotizam i renesansa’ [patriotism and renaissance] in Figure 31 combines the Montenegrin flag emoji and the grapheme in a post criticizing the president and prime minister and calls them idiots, which itself is a strongly disaligning rhetorical move towards the Serbia-aligned politicians.



Figure 32 Marked Montenegrin grapheme (patriotizam i renesansa, 2023)<sup>23</sup>

Table 11 Analysis of Figure 32

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
32	patriotizam i renesansa	prešednika	marked	Latin	actions of Montenegrin politicians abroad	Montenegro aligned	cynical, sarcastic
32	patriotizam i renesansa		emblem	MN flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	pride, support

<sup>23</sup> <https://twitter.com/CGkarijatida/status/1704166662079951112>

The previous three examples highlight a pattern of using emojis, graphemes, and script choices to share content that is expressly Montenegro-aligned and Serbia-disaligned due to the nature of the content criticizing Serbia-affiliated politicians who are seen as actively abetting the attack on Montenegrin independence.

While the examples provided so far illustrate a typical use of Montenegro-aligning semiotic resources, there are instances where apparent mismatches occur. Figure 33 below displays a comment by user 'Cool Breeze' on a picture of Jovan Radulović Jodžir, a prominent social media influencer and one-time candidate for the presidency of Montenegro during the campaigns of spring and summer of 2023. Jodžir gained popularity through various videos shared on social media platforms, including one featuring Serbian tennis superstar Novak Đoković, known for his occasional controversial political views and tennis skills, he is also considered a national figure in Serbia, representing the country globally. Jodžir ran as an independent candidate. The comment by 'Cool Breeze' could be interpreted as either a troll response or an expression of support. In internet language, *trolling* describes a situation, typically in online discourse, in which a user tries to deliberately upset or offend others or instigate discord on a thread or post. A search of this user's post history suggests that they mock both Serbian and Montenegrin politicians and academics, thus it is likely a troll post (see Dynel, 2016, for more on the pragmatic mechanisms behind internet trolling).

In the often-chaotic political ecosphere of Montenegro, a political candidate who is a social media influencer is likely an easy target for cynical or sarcastic reactions. By using Cyrillic along with the marked Cyrillic Montenegrin grapheme <ć> (not to be confused with the standard Latin grapheme <ć>), 'Cool Breeze' indicates Montenegrin support and solidarity, even if meant humorously, toward the presidential candidate. However, this position is modified by the weight

of the Cyrillic script. There is a mediation in the interaction between script and grapheme use. If the user aimed to show Montenegrin pride through standard means, they could have easily used the Latin script, as it is the default for most platforms and devices. However, the choice of Cyrillic, and especially the use of the Cyrillic grapheme, are explicit choices, especially since this grapheme does not exist as a pre-made grapheme in most digital language kits and needs to be formed with a series of additional keystrokes to add a diacritic to the base grapheme. In this way, the use of Cyrillic is intentional. It is unclear whether it is because this user holds a Serbia-alignment or whether this user is just someone committed to using only Cyrillic, but the effort required to produce this text in Cyrillic suggest this is an ideological position of this user. Regardless of whether the actual human behind the user 'Cool Breeze' considers themselves Serbia-aligned or Montenegro-aligned, the user can perform both alignments using a combination of script and graphemes, for discursive effects of humor or trolling. The awareness of the two competing Montenegrin identities allows for this kind of discursive play or trolling to take place, since users can show disdain for one group, without being bound to the other group through the mismatch of semiotic resources.



Figure 33 Use of Cyrillic and the marked grapheme (Cool Breeze, 2023)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> [https://twitter.com/dane\\_breeze/status/1637432356968493057](https://twitter.com/dane_breeze/status/1637432356968493057)

**Table 12 Analysis of Figure 33**


Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
33	Cool Breeze	пресе́дник	marked	Cyrillic	presidential candidate for Montenegro	Serbia dis-aligned	pride
33	Cool Breeze	Cyrillic as base script	standard	Cyrillic	presidential candidate for Montenegro	Montenegro dis-aligned	neutral
33	Cool Breeze		co-speech gesture	Flexed biceps	presidential candidate for Montenegro	Neutral	Support, strength

Figure 34 by user “O'Brien” shows similar patterns to previous data, that is, a Montenegrin flag emoji and another use of the <ś> grapheme. Like the previous examples, the content of this post is also political, and it is criticizing the ethical committee that is supposed to oversee the 2023 population census in Montenegro (see the second vignette in chapter 6.2 for more on the census). Along with the use of Montenegro-aligning marked graphemes and Montenegrin flag emojis, the user's name includes an emoji of the Ukrainian flag. By doing so, the user appears to be taking a stance of support towards Ukraine, in the Russian war on Ukraine. The use of this emoji is an aligning move that relates this user to anti-Russia ideologies, which mirrors the position of the West and of Montenegro in its social, cultural, and political support of Ukraine.

O'Brien    
@zabranjen2021

Prešednik komisije za praćenje izrade ovoga softvera, kojeg je predložila opozicija, Boris Markovic, prije mjesec dana je podnio ostavku. Možda bi bilo vrijeme da se neko iz opozicije oglasi tim povodom, a preporučujem im i ovaj tekst da pročitaju..



From pobjeda.me

10:04 PM · Jan 22, 2024 · 636 Views



O'Brien    
@zabranjen2021

Author's Translation

The president of the commission for monitoring the development of this software proposed by the opposition, Boris Markovic, resigned a month ago. Perhaps it is time for someone from the opposition to speak out on this occasion, and I recommend that they read this text as well...



From pobjeda.me

10:04 PM · Jan 22, 2024 · 636 Views





**Figure 34 Use of marked grapheme (O'Brien, 2024)<sup>25</sup>**

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<sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/zabranjen2021/status/1749538575463424076>

**Table 13 Analysis of Figure 34**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
34	O'Brien	prešednik	marked	Latin	committee for monitoring 2023 census	Montenegro aligned	cynical, authoritative
34	O'Brien		emblem	MN flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	pride, support
34	O'Brien		emblem	UKR flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	support

In Figure 35, the Twitter/X account for PKS (*Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore*, a Montenegrin ethno-nationalist political group) is quoting its leader, Tatjana Knežević Perišić, about organizing a Montenegrin coalition only with honest groups who pay taxes to Montenegro. When referring to the party leader, the post author uses her title *prešednica* or ‘president,’ with the marked Montenegrin grapheme <š>. This choice serves as a signal for members of this political party, and the content of the message is supportive of Knežević Perišić, thus his post signals a strong alignment towards Montenegrin cultural identity by way of the grapheme, the Latin script, and the content of the message:



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore**

@PKS\_CG



Prešednica PKS CG Tatjana Knežević Perišić :

“Ako se zaista napravi veliki crnogorski blok, PKS će razgovarati i reći sljedeće: Da za zajedništvo, da za slogu, ali bez kadrova koji su nepošteno radili! Ne može se busati u grudi ljubavlju prema Crnoj Gori,



10:54 AM · Jan 16, 2021



1



2



37



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore** @PKS\_CG · Jan 16, 2021



a krasti od nje, ne može se pjevati himna, a ne plaćati porez toj istoj državi!



1



20



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore**

@PKS\_CG

Author's Translation



President of PKS CG Tatjana Knežević Perišić: "If a big Montenegrin block is really created, the PKS will talk and say the following: Yes for unity, yes for harmony, but without the staff who worked dishonestly! You can't beat your chest with love for Montenegro,



10:54 AM · Jan 16, 2021



1



2



37



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore** @PKS\_CG · Jan 16, 2021



and steal from it, you can't sing the national anthem and not pay taxes to that same country!"

Figure 35 Use of marked grapheme (Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore, 2021)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> [https://twitter.com/PKS\\_CG/status/1350380910051528704](https://twitter.com/PKS_CG/status/1350380910051528704)

**Table 14 Analysis of Figure 35**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
35	Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore	prešednica	marked	Latin	formation of parties for Montenegrin elections	Montenegro aligned	support, patriotism

Figure 36 is from the same account and was posted around the same period. The content of this post refers to the president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić and in this case, the same title of 'president' does not get the special Montenegrin grapheme, even though it is a perfectly acceptable location for the grapheme. Besides differences in gender agreement and grammatical case, the words are the same, but differ in use of the marked grapheme and digraph (*prešednica* is singular, nominative, and feminine compared to *presjednika*, which is singular, accusative, and masculine). The author of the post uses the digraph form of the consonant, which, as mentioned, is relatively standard across the BCMS languages, except for in Serbian, but which avoids the markedness of the Montenegrin form.



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore**  
@PKS\_CG



PKS CG javno poziva srpskog predsjednika Vučića da prestane da obmanjuje puk svojim konstrukcijama i izmišljotinama na račun crnogorske istorije i da u svojoj državi Srbiji pronade koji datum

9:01 AM · Jan 28, 2021



2



8



68



**Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore**  
@PKS\_CG

Author's Translation



PKS CG publicly calls on Serbian President Vučić to stop deceiving the people with his constructions and fabrications at the expense of Montenegrin history and to find a date in his country of Serbia

9:01 AM · Jan 28, 2021



2



8



68



Figure 36 Use of digraph instead of marked grapheme (Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore, 2021)<sup>27</sup>

Table 15 Analysis of Figure 36

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
36	Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore	presjednika	standard digraph	Latin	formation of parties for Montenegrin elections	Serbia dis-aligned	cynical, authoritative

Given that this is a nationalist, pro-Montenegrin group posting, it would be unusual for them to use a pro-Serbian grapheme, such as the simple <s> grapheme, in a lexical environment

<sup>27</sup> [https://twitter.com/PKS\\_CG/status/1354701096820862984](https://twitter.com/PKS_CG/status/1354701096820862984)

for which a stronger alignment can be taken. However, the marked grapheme <ś> is possibly too strong of a Montenegrin alignment for a post that is addressing the Serbian president. The post's content calls for Vučić to use memorable Serbian historical dates and events in his political speeches and rallies, rather than use Montenegrin ones, clearly drawing a line between the social and historical heritage of Montenegro versus Serbia. Given that Vučić is not Montenegrin, does not support explicitly pro-Montenegrin values, and is not being evaluated positively in this post, the use of the <sj> digraph here is a middle position between the standard Serbian form and the marked Montenegrin form.

Outside the political arena, marked Montenegrin graphemes are recognizable as signs of Montenegrin alignment and can be used to form jokes metalinguistically addressing the use of the graphemes themselves. Figure 37 presents a user with a Cyrillic display name, a Serbian flag emoji, and a gray wolf emoji. These features suggest that this user is Serbia-aligned, at least in their online presence. Wolves are often seen as a Serbian national symbol, partially due to the connection between the presence of wolves in Serbian folklore and mythology and the popular name 'Vuk' (e.g., Vuk Karadžić), which means 'wolf' (see Marjanović, 2005, for more on Serbian national and historical symbols). The user's display name 'Сиви Вук' also translates to 'gray wolf,' so there is a doubling down of wolf imagery and Cyrillic script. It is unclear what exactly the pirate flag emoji means in this context, but it likely adds to the online persona of user 'Сиви Вук' and how they view their online persona (potentially also a troll of some kind). This user mocks the Montenegrin graphemes using a verb, *veliš*, which is a variant of the verb *to say* and is often considered a rural or 'folksy' verb lacking an infinitive and only occurring in limited tenses. Laughing emoji support the claim that this content is to be taken as a joke or an insult (see section 4.2 on co-speech gestures), and the letters 'LOL' (originating from internet speech 'laugh out loud' in English) are


superimposed over the image of a famous comedic actor from Yugoslavia. The marked graphemes are the direct target of the user's joke. The Serbia-aligned emojis, the use of the Cyrillic script, and the content criticizing Montenegrin graphemes align the post with Serbian cultural practices.



Figure 37 Mocking the marked graphemes (Сиви Вук, 2023)<sup>28</sup>


<sup>28</sup> <https://twitter.com/Iapodes/status/1720795485374476799>





**Table 16 Analysis of Figure 37**



Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
37	Сиви Вук	ś, ź	standard	Cyrillic	public survey on Montenegrin language acceptance	Montenegro dis-aligned	mocking
37	Сиви Вук		emblem	SRB flag	display name	Serbia aligned	neutral

Similar discourses about the use and acceptability of marked Montenegrin graphemes also occur on Reddit. Figure 38 is taken from the subreddit r/montenegro in a post responding to a meme about the new letters (see the discussion chapter). In this example, three users discuss their experiences and feelings about these letters. User u/TigrastiSmooth claims <ś> is ‘cool’ but that <ź> is useless and remarks on how they recall hearing the <ś> as a child in common words like *sjutra* (or, *śutra*) meaning ‘tomorrow.’ While this user claims to appreciate the grapheme and acknowledges that it can be heard, they are uncertain about seeing in writing and in contexts calling for formal grammar, like school. This state of mixed emotions reflects the changing standards in orthographic practice— what is expected and normal to see in spelling for one generation is not necessarily what the next generation encounters. In response, user u/mneguy weakly supports the letter <ś>. Despite the user saying that they cannot get used to the grapheme and that it marks an ‘older’ style of speech, they are aware that it exists, if not in their own practices. Finally, user u/MicoGrimizni strongly supports <ś> as the ‘best’ letter and as one that is used regularly. They do not support the <ź> grapheme and provide no additional comment. This debate on grapheme usage is a common division of perspectives on these graphemes. The words using the <ź> grapheme are often the less commonly used words (like in English, not many words begin with a





<z>). Words like *ženica* ‘pupil [of an eye]’ are not often used in daily discourse, compared to words like *šutra* or “tomorrow.”


 TigrastiSmooth · 3 yr. ago  
nah, š je kul. ž je bezveze

   Reply  Share ...





 mneguy OP · 3 yr. ago  
Nikšić 



š je koliko toliko dobro ali mi je u izgovoru uvijek ubijalo u pojam. Iako ga sve stariji upotrebljuju se nikako ne mogu navići na njega

   Reply  Share ...





 TigrastiSmooth · 3 yr. ago · edited 3 yr. ago


Stvar navike, pretpostavljam, ili lokacije. Od kad znam za sebe svi oko mene koriste š, mladi i stari, pa i ja. Ako neko kaže "sjutra" zvuči nekako izvještačeno. U pisanom obliku već druga priča. Školu sam odavno završio, pa nisam navikao da vidim ova nova slova u nekom formalnom tekstu.

   Reply  Share ...

 MicoGrimizni · 3 yr. ago  
Nikšić 





š najbolje slovo, i koristi se redovno. ž not so much.



   Reply  Share ...

 TigrastiSmooth · 3 yr. ago





Author's Translation


nah, š is cool. ž is nonsense

   Reply  Share ...





 mneguy OP · 3 yr. ago  
Nikšić 



š is as good as it gets, but in pronunciation it always killed the idea. Even though the older people use it, I can't get used to it

   Reply  Share ...

 TigrastiSmooth · 3 yr. ago · edited 3 yr. ago

A matter of habit, I suppose, or location. Ever since I can remember, everyone around me has been using š, young and old, including me. If someone says "tomorrow" it sounds somewhat artificial. In written form, it's a different story. I finished school a long time ago, so I'm not used to seeing these new letters in some formal text.

   Reply  Share ...

 MicoGrimizni · 3 yr. ago  
Nikšić 

š the best letter, and it is used regularly. ž not so





   Reply  Share ...

Figure 38 "š is cool. ž is nonsense" (mneguy, 2020)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup>[https://www.reddit.com/r/montenegro/comments/kf0m31/comment/gg5nabs/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=web2x&context=3](https://www.reddit.com/r/montenegro/comments/kf0m31/comment/gg5nabs/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3)

**Table 17 Analysis of Figure 38**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
38	TigrastiSmooth	ś	marked	Latin	Montenegrin grapheme	Montenegro aligned	support, positive
38	mneguy	ś	marked	Latin	Montenegrin grapheme	Montenegro aligned	support, positive
38	TigrastiSmooth	ś	marked	Latin	Montenegrin grapheme	Montenegro aligned	support, positive
38	MicoGrimizni	ś	marked	Latin	Montenegrin grapheme	Montenegro aligned	support, positive

The graphemes <ś> and <ž> are robust markers of a Montenegro alignment, along with emoji, script choice, and message content. These graphemes are also often invoked in metalinguistic discourse as a salient category of Montenegrin nationalist symbols, which representing a dialect or speech practice that has entered the level of social consciousness. Thus, these semiotic resources are evident and recognizable to users in the Montenegrin online social sphere.

## 5.2 Emojis as semiotic resources

Like graphemes, emojis are individual units that can bear pragmatic content and impact the affective and aligning qualities of the surrounding discourse. For example, Figure 39 shows Matija Dragnić, a young man who was the center of attention of Montenegrin media for a short while in early 2021 (Dnevne novine, 2021). Dragnić was a member of the Montenegrin army and was stationed in Nikšić, an industrial city in the north of Montenegro which is a city often described as pro-Serbian due to its proximity to the Serbian borders. He was given a dishonorable discharge from the Montenegrin army because of an Instagram post in which he allegedly showed support for Montenegrin independence from Serbia and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, instead of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This event followed a previous incident in which he had an altercation with his army colleagues after they taunted him with pro-Serbian jokes. While the official reason for his discharge was for inciting national, racial, or religious hatred, many in Montenegro saw it as retaliation for supporting the pro-Montenegro movements, so he briefly became a symbol for Montenegrin strength and self-determination in the face of Serbian occupation (Portal Luca, 2011).



**Stefan Todorović**  
@MetaforasH



Niđe ovo na svijet bijeli nema, zaljubljenik u svoju državu koji bi sutra život dao za nju dobio otkaz od iste te države! Polako, samo polako, brate naš, proći će ovo sve, a tebe želimo da vidimo, ka' što i 'očemo, ka' generala!

Svi smo mi Matija! 🇷🇺



7:25 PM · Apr 1, 2021



7



36



257



**Sergeja\_zovite** 🇷🇺 @Bojan29144105 · Apr 1, 2021



Aaaaaa braatt najveci kralj, kralj kapa dolje 🙌🙌🙌 🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺 sotona 🤪🤪🤪



3



**Figure 39** Emoji use and Matija Dragnić (Stefan Todorović, 2021)



**Stefan Todorović**  
@MetaforasH

Author's Translation

There is no place in this whole world, in which a lover of his country who would give his life for it tomorrow, got fired from that same country! Slowly, just slowly, our brother, this will all pass, and we want to see you, as we want, as a general!

We are all Matija! 🇷🇺



7:25 PM · Apr 1, 2021



36

257



**Sergeja\_zovite** 🇷🇺 @Bojan29144105 · Apr 1, 2021

Aaaaaa brother the greatest king, the king hats off  
👉👉👉 🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺 Satan 😂😂😂



3






**Figure 40 Translation of Figure 39**<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <https://twitter.com/MetaforasH/status/1377673503147757570>

In this image, Dragnić is sitting on a chair beneath a Montenegrin flag with a framed photo on the wall of Krsto Popović, a Montenegrin soldier from the early twentieth century and one of the leaders of the Greens party (the Zelenasi). Dragnić is wearing a bright red shirt very similar in hue to the national color of Montenegro, and he is making a 'L' shape with his thumb and index finger. The post is strongly imbued with the red color that is found in most Montenegrin nationalist symbols and which creates a visual link to the Montenegrin flag. This post displays many Montenegro-aligning signs, from the current flag of Montenegro to important cultural hero Popović, the red color of the clothing, and a gesture that is often described as an 'L' standing for the word 'liberty' (or, more precisely, *libertà* in Italian). This gesture is used in defiant contrast to the infamous three-finger salute which is used in many Serbian contexts (see Figure 42 below for more on the Serbian salute). The use of the Montenegrin flag emoji in the text of the post and repeated in the comments serves to enhance the Montenegrin alignment.

**Table 18 Analysis of Figure 39**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
39	Stefan Todorović		emblem	MN flag	solidarity with Matija Dragnić	Montenegro aligned	pride, support
39	Sergeja_zovite		emblem	MN flag	solidarity with Matija Dragnić	Montenegro aligned	pride, support
39	Sergeja_zovite		co-speech gesture or emblem	Backhand index finger pointing up	solidarity with Matija Dragnić; ‘L’ for liberty, contrasting three-finger salute of Serbia	Montenegro aligned	pride, support

As discussed previously (see section 3.3.2.), the flag emoji is an emblem (McCulloch, 2020), standing for the concept of the independent nation of Montenegro. Co-occurring with this use of the flag emblem are several other emojis. The laughing faces suggest a positive affect in this post, whereas the ‘finger pointing up’ emoji is a symbolic imitation of the ‘L for Liberty’ gesture that Dragnić is making in the picture. This example shows how this emoji, a pointing index finger, is used in this context to represent a protest gesture and, in doing so, creates an alignment between the original post and the responding comment.

Similarly, Figure 41 is a post responding to a Montenegrin victory in a sports competition and the Montenegrin flag emoji is once more used in the display name and alongside the pointing finger emoji. This post appears to be a Montenegro-aligning post, though the display name is written in Cyrillic. While the reason for this singular use of Cyrillic is not necessarily apparent, the name is immediately followed by a Montenegrin flag emoji, thus having the effect of softening




the 'Cyrillicness' of the display name. In this post, alignment is conveyed by a combination of script choice, grapheme usage, emojis, and post content.



Figure 41 "Bravo Crna Goro!" emoji use (Џефердар, 2022)<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> <https://twitter.com/dzeferdar/status/1483154454539116549>

**Table 19 Analysis of Figure 41**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
40	Џефердар		emblem	MN flag	Montenegro winning sports match	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
40	Џефердар		emblem	MN flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
40	Џефердар		co-speech gesture or emblem	'L' for liberty, contrasting three-finger salute of Serbia	Montenegro winning sports match	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
40	Џефердар	Cyrillic in handle	standard	Cyrillic	display name	Montenegro disaligned	neutral

To return to the finger-pointing gesture, the 'L for Liberty' is a salient semiotic act because it stands in defiance to the prevalent three-finger salute (*tri prsta* or 'three fingers') which is used often in Serbian culture, such as in sports games and political rallies. It is also occasionally used by politicians, but depending on context, may not be received well.<sup>32</sup> The Serbian three-finger salute extends the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger while the ring and pinky fingers are down. Users of the gesture often claim that it represents the holy trinity of the Christian faith, and its use has been documented in the 19th and 20th centuries as a symbol of resistance towards outsiders

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Milorad Dodik, president of Republika Srpska, the Serbian administrative entity in Bosnia, was seen using the three-finger salute on a visit to Montenegro and was called a fascist by Montenegrin media for doing so (Durović, 2024)

and occupiers. Through this link the gesture became a symbol associated with war and oppression (Perica, 2002, p. 18).

Figure 42 is a post shared on Twitter in 2016, in which Emojipedia recounts a proposal at UTC147 (Unicode Technical Committee conference 147) for the three-finger salute to be considered for emoji status, among other hand gestures. While the content of the post says nothing about ethnic, national, or religious associations with the gesture, the comments immediately show that other users strongly react to the gesture. The first commenter writes "SERBIJA!!!" using English with a modified BCMS spelling (compare to *Serbia* in English and *Srbija* in BCMS Latin). The second commenter writes "Serbian sign!" with an emoji of a smiling face with hearts. The third commenter makes a joke about the Serbs intercepting the conference and by implication, having their gesture made into an emoji. Finally, the fourth commenter tags another user and says "YOO," likely in a bid for their attention and while this response does not explicitly mention the *Serbness* of the gesture, this user has both an Orthodox Cross and a Serbian flag emoji in their display name.



Figure 42 Three finger salute emoji (Emojipedia, 2016)<sup>33</sup>

If historical Serbian symbols can be refashioned and recontextualized into digital environments for identity work, so too can old Montenegrin symbols. In Figure 43 below, the PKS party (the same Montenegrin ethno-nationalist party from Figures 35 and 36) is thanking and honoring party member Fikret Hadžialijagić for his support as a committee member. While the word *predsjedništva* [presidency] in this post bears the standard Ijekavian spelling found in

<sup>33</sup> <https://twitter.com/Emojipedia/status/737647084208295936>

Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro, the image's subject in the post is wearing the flag of the Zelenaši. As a reminder, the Zelenaši were the Green party, who were guerrilla rebels that resisted Montenegro's union with Serbia (refer to section 2.1.2.) Thus, the post has a positive affect and expresses a positive alignment towards Montenegro. The green flag being worn by the individual in the image echoes the user's profile picture, which is a close-up of the symbols on the green flag. An emoji of the red Montenegrin flag is in the main content of the post, including a green heart emoji which parallels the flag and the profile picture. The visual parallelism between the image being commented upon and the text itself creates a richly layered alignment with Montenegrin independence and self-rule. The use of the 'green heart' emoji representing the Zelenaši shows that in many contexts, historical symbols are being resurrected to show alignment and support in the contemporary political and social space of Montenegro and Serbia.

 **Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore**  
@PKS\_CG

Član Predsjedništva PKS Fikret Hadžialjagić.  
SVAKA ČAST DRUŽE NAŠ! 🇨🇷❤️



2:34 PM · Feb 1, 2021

17 23 223 1

 **Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore** Author's Translation  
@PKS\_CG

Member of the Presidency of the PKS, Fikret Hadžialjagić.  
ALL HONOUR, OUR FRIEND! 🇨🇷❤️





2:34 PM · Feb 1, 2021

17 23 223 1

Figure 43 Green heart and Montenegrin flag emojis (Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore, 2021)<sup>34</sup>

**Table 20 Analysis of Figure 43**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
42	Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore		emblem	green heart	committee member of Montenegrin nationalist party	Montenegro aligned	proud, affection
42	Patriotsko Komitski Savez Crne Gore		emblem	MN flag	committee member of Montenegrin nationalist party	Montenegro aligned	proud, affection

As an example of what a prominent Serbia-aligned post might look like, see Figure 44. The user МартинеZ' ('MartineZ' in Latin script) shares a post in English commenting on the language abilities of professional tennis player Novak Đoković, who besides being an important cultural and national hero for Serbia, is multilingual. This user writes in Cyrillic in both their post and display name and has the Orthodox Cross emoji in their name. The content of their post states that 'God willing, [Novak Đoković will be] the future president of Serbia." This post shows how emojis, script choice, and message content align, but in this case to form a strong message of support for Serbia, rather than Montenegro, as previous examples showed.

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<sup>34</sup> [https://twitter.com/PKS\\_\\_CG/status/1356234365517312001](https://twitter.com/PKS__CG/status/1356234365517312001)



**МартинеZ**   
@martinezz333



Даће Бог, будући преседник Србије.

[Translate post](#)



**José Morgado**  @josemorgado · Nov 18, 2023

Novak Djokovic is doing an interview in a 4th different language in the last 10 minutes.



5:36 PM · Nov 18, 2023 · 160 Views



Figure 44 Orthodox emojis and Đoković (МартинеZ, 2023)

 **МартинеZ**   
@martinezz333

Author's Translation

God willing, the future president of Serbia

 **José Morgado**  @josemorgado · Nov 18, 2023

Novak Djokovic is doing an interview in a 4th different language in the last 10 minutes.




11:36 PM · Nov 18, 2023 · 160 Views



Figure 45 Translation of Figure 44 <sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <https://twitter.com/martinezz333/status/1726006579424624809>

**Table 21 Analysis of Figure 44**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
43	МартинеZ		Emblem	Orthodox Cross	Orthodoxy	Serbia aligned	religious, national pride
43	МартинеZ	use of Cyrillic	Standard	Cyrillic	Serbian language standard	Serbia aligned	neutral, supportive

Returning to Montenegro aligning posts, Figure 46 combines all the resources discussed so far– flag and gesture emojis, imagery from historical and contemporary Montenegro, and culturally-bound insults at perceived political enemies. The commenters who disagree with such a strong Montenegrin alignment use emojis of Serbian flags and Orthodox crosses, along with their own culturally significant insults.





gathering in the Northern Montenegrin city of Nikšić (see Figure 39 for the case of Matija Dragnić, also in Nikšić). The user also employs many red hearts, red flags, and the 'L for Liberty' gestures. These resources produce a strong sense of Montenegrin national pride and support against the Serbian political movement. However, the commenters are responding to the original post through taunting and insulting, along with other signs, expressing Serbia aligning and Montenegro disaligning positions. In the first comment, a user with the Cyrillic display name Реља Крилатица (Relja Krilatica) uses the insult "poturice" which is roughly translated as "wannabe Turks," drawing on the conversion to Islam of some Serbs during the Ottoman invasion, as recounted in the literary works of Njegoš, among others. This insult is a direct response to the original poster calling the Serbian faction in Nikšić "posrbicama," which means something like "wannabe Serbs" and which is used in analogy to poturice<sup>37</sup>. The second commenter, using the Cyrillic display name Бобанчина (Bobanchina), has emojis of both the Orthodox Cross and Serbian flag in their name and they are encouraging a fight between the Serbia-aligned Montenegrins in Montenegro and the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrins.

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<sup>37</sup> see Filipović (2024) for a 'dictionary' of some of these relevant ethnic insults used in Montenegro.

**Table 22 Analysis of Figure 46**

Fig.	User	Variable	Type	Form	Cultural Reference	Alignment	Affective Stance
44	zelenas2121		emblem	MN flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
44	zelenas2121		emblem	MN flag	display name	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
44	zelenas2121		co-speech gesture or emblem	'L' for liberty, contrasting three-finger salute of Serbia	cheer for Montenegro	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
44	zelenas2121		emblem	red heart	Cheer for Montenegro	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
44	zelenas2121		co-speech gesture or emblem	raised fist, fist pump	protests against Serbian church in Nikšić	Montenegro aligned	proud, support
44	Реља Крилатица	Cyrillic username	standard	Cyrillic	display name	Serbia aligned	neutral
44	Реља Крилатица	poturice	standard	Latin	common insult for Montenegrins	Montenegro disaligned	rude, insulting
44	БОБАНЧИНА	Cyrillic username	standard	Cyrillic	display name	Serbia aligned	neutral
44	БОБАНЧИНА		emblem	Orthodox cross	display name	Serbia aligned	proud, support
44	БОБАНЧИНА		emblem	fast up button	display name	unclear	unclear
44	БОБАНЧИНА		emblem	SRB flag	display name	Serbia aligned	proud, support

Table 22 represents some of the most salient markers of alignment found in Figure 46. While the table is quite extensive, there may even be more potential signs available for creating identity and ideology, which illustrates the rich and productive power of visual and textual content to produce meaning on social media.

The preceding section shows how emojis can be used systematically and recognizably as alignment tools for producing national and political identity. Emojis, in both their emblematic and gestural forms, are 'highly multifunctional' supporting non-verbal communication (Davis, 2021, p. 430) and while their effect might be stronger or weaker depending on the context, combining emojis, graphemes, and script choices can make a powerful aligning force to accompany content a user shares in a post.

### 5.3 Summary of data

The following tables organize the semiotic resources demonstrated in the data section of this dissertation. The use of a table to represent the variables found in these data is just for convenience and ease of visualization and should not be taken to imply any kind of quantitative or statistical relationship between the data and real-world communicative practices. Table 23 presents the grapheme data and is organized by figure number (for easy reference), example (e.g., carrier word for the grapheme), script choice, and alignment. The second table displays the emojis used for the data selected to be presented in this project. This table is organized by figure number, emoji shape (the visual icon), type (whether emblem or co-speech), description (based on labels taken from Emojipedia), and alignment.

**Table 23 Tally of graphemes from selected data**

















Row #	Figure	Example	Grapheme	Script	Alignment
1	10	[isolation]	ž	marked Latin	Montenegro aligned
2	37, 38	[isolation]	ž	marked Latin	Montenegro disaligned
3	10, 38	[isolation]	š	marked Latin	Montenegro aligned
4	37	[isolation]	š	marked Latin	Montenegro disaligned
5	30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 39	prešednica, prešednik, predšednika, prešednika, šutra	š	marked Latin	Montenegro aligned
6	NA	NA	ž	marked Latin	Montenegro aligned
7	33	пре́седник	ć	marked Cyrillic	possibly Serbia-aligned
8	NA	NA	џ	marked Cyrillic	unclear

According to Table 23, almost all instances of the use of the marked Montenegrin graphemes were produced in contexts that were Montenegro-aligning. However, there were a few instances where the characters were mentioned in isolation to mock them directly. In those cases, the marked graphemes were Montenegro disaligning. In my data collection, I found no examples of the use of the marked Latin grapheme <ž> or its marked Cyrillic counterpart <џ> beyond metalinguistic discussion of these graphemes. This is likely due to the few words that use this character, compared to the relative commonness of words using the marked <š> (words like

'tomorrow' and 'president'). I found only one use of the marked Cyrillic variant <ć>. While it was likely used to show Montenegrin pride towards a potential presidential candidate, the context remained unclear to determine with certainty.

Table 24 presents a selection of the most salient and most common emojis found in the presented data:

**Table 24 Tally of emojis from selected data**

Row #	Figure	Emoji	Type	Description	Alignment
1	6, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 39, 41, 43, 46		emblem	Flag of Montenegro	Montenegro aligned
2	28		emblem	Flag of European Union	Serbia disaligned
3	29, 37, 42, 46		emblem	Flag of Serbia	Serbia aligned
4	37		emblem	gray wolf	Serbia aligned
5	39, 41, 46		co-speech or emblem	Index Finger Pointing Up	Montenegro aligned
6	43		emblem	green heart	Montenegro aligned
7	46		co-speech or emblem	raised fist	Montenegro aligned
8	42, 44, 46		emblem	orthodox cross	Serbia aligned
9	34		emblem	flag of Ukraine	context dependent
10	37, 39		co-speech	rolling on the floor laughing	context dependent
11	37		co-speech	face with rolling eyes	context dependent
12	37		co-speech	grinning squinting face	context dependent
13	37		co-speech	face with tears of joy	context dependent
14	33		co-speech	flexed biceps	context dependent
15	31, 46		emblem	red heart	Montenegro aligned
16	46		emblem	thumbs up	context dependent

In Table 24, flags, as emblematic gestures, are the most common emojis found in these data, along with the Orthodox Cross emoji. In the data presented, the marked Latin grapheme <ś> and the emojis of the Montenegrin flag and ‘index finger pointing up’ appear to be the most common markers of Montenegrin alignment. In contrast, standard graphemes, Cyrillic text, and the Serbian flag and Orthodox Cross emojis seem to mark a Serbia alignment. In the discussion section, I will describe how these resources are combined to share alignment and circulate language ideologies.

## 6.0 Discussion

Research addressing sociolinguistic questions and issues in Montenegro has focused chiefly on Montenegro as a part of the larger Yugoslavia and was often in the form of comparisons between language use in Serbia and in Croatia, thus limited research is available on the context of the Montenegrin language especially as it is used on the internet, which is still a fairly new invention. The internet and social media have become crucial tools of communication in the modern day, and it is essential to address these domains in order to understand the language and culture of Montenegro in a contemporary context. My dissertation focused on the use of semiotic and linguistic resources to differentiate between competing conceptions of Montenegrin national identity in online discourse. Specifically, I studied linguistic identity as it is divided into categories of Serbia-aligned Montenegrins and Montenegro-aligned Montenegrins. My research indicated that users of Montenegrin language social media spaces often promote a strong Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin identity category through the marked use of script, graphemes, and emojis. However, the identity category of the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin is less clear-cut and is more challenging to identify. As a result, to present a Serbia-aligned Montenegrin style, which is a recently emergent style, one needs to use a combination of features, for example, marked graphemes which index a Montenegrin cultural identity and Cyrillic script, which is connected to Serbian linguistic and religious practices. Overall, my findings suggest that the use of these semiotic and linguistic resources plays a crucial role in shaping and distinguishing different conceptions of Montenegrin national identity in online discourse. For instance, the use of emojis, script choice, and marked graphemes are all tools that a user can employ to communicate alignment with a cultural or national identity and the ideologies that are connected to the identity.

Variables in social practice are construed as signs and they undergo many processes between their recognition and their linkage to social identity. These processes of indexicality and enregisterment draw on a user's indexical field, in which alternatives of the social variables are employed to create styles, which can then be used to reenact social types. As signs are circulated and recirculated in this manner, they carry with them bits of ideology that contextualize their existence and which motivate their selection from a field of alternatives. Because ideologies in the social world are rich, complex, and functionally unlimited, what can become a sign to be used in meaning making is open-ended. As Irvine writes: "[a]nything metapragmatic can be swept up in ideologies or reveals them if pushed far enough; it is ideology all the way down" (2022, p. 232). Anything that can be recognized, commented upon, or revealed to a user can be taken up as a sign and thus become a carrier of ideology.

This study collected data from social media posts on Reddit and Twitter/X to demonstrate how ideologically driven communicative acts can create social categories relevant to social life for people in a region of complex social, cultural, and historical relationships and how those acts can be employed on social media to build affiliation between groups (Zappavigna, 2012). This discussion will demonstrate one semiotic path these signs take to produce categories of identity and how they are reflected in other digital products. One example is the use of these semiotic resources to produce memes, which can be thought of as bundles of semiotic resources for producing and circulating ideologies of language and identity (Gal, N., et al, 2016; Shifman, 2013, 2014; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015).

I will show how the data I present in my analysis undergo the semiotic processes of indexicality, enregisterment, bricolage, and language ideology. Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin and Serbia-aligned Montenegrin identities will be shown to participate in these semiotic

ideological processes, in some way, reflecting identity differences on both a local level and a national level, as Montenegro forges ahead in pursuit of its own journey.

This discussion concludes with a vignette describing the ongoing issues surrounding the 2023 population census in Montenegro. The census has been a controversial and challenging process, and it presents a contemporary case study of the issues that language identity and ideology can cause in the real world.

### **6.1 Ideologies, identity, and memes**

Emojis and graphemes are ubiquitous semiotic resources that are commonly used on various online platforms and have become standard tools for acts of alignment and ideology circulation. These resources then become topics of discourse and commentary themselves and are available to be the subject of new meta-level discussions about identity and language use. This can be seen in the context of internet memes. Memes have emerged as a popular form of online engagement, often characterized by their viral nature and ease of circulatability (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). Memes are complex semiotic materials that are shared and re-shared online, taking on different meanings and contexts across various social media platforms. In their analysis of social movements online, Gal, Shifman, and Kamp (2016) discuss how virtual spaces have become important sites for public discourse (boyd, 2008; Jenkins, 2006) and that memes are a tool for negotiating social practices because they "...both reflect norms and constitute a central practice in their formation" (Gal et al., 2016, p. 1700; Shifman, 2014). Memes are not simply "frivolous [jokes]...lacking in their capacity to communicate sophisticated ideas," (Denisova, 2016), but they play a serious role in the conducting of public discourse, especially in terms of political discourse

and social movements (Halversen, A., & Weeks, B. E. 2023; Lambrecht, 2023; Soh, 2020). In this section, I will discuss how bricolage unites various semiotic resources to create a style. I will then present several memes that demonstrate how the ideologies behind script and grapheme use are combined into these cultural and national semiotic bundles. After that, I will discuss the semiotic lifecycle of some of the signs that we have analyzed in this dissertation and examine how they circulate ideology.

The utilization of various resources, including visual media (like emojis) and text (like script choice and spelling variation), can be viewed as a form of *bricolage*, which involves the combination of pre-existing materials in unique ways to create a new or distinct style. Bricolage involves bringing together disparate materials and re-contextualizing them for use in a novel context (Eckert, 2008). Bucholtz (2002) draws from earlier sociological and anthropological research and observes that creating discursive style frequently involves a type of bricolage (Hebdige, 1979; Levi-Strauss, 1966) and that so-called *bricoleurs* often engage in "self-appropriations" by taking elements from one cultural background and imbuing them with new meanings to create innovative styles that can challenge audience or viewer's expectations. Callesano (2023) used the term "mediated bricolage" to describe the type of bricolage that takes place on social media. Mediated bricolage refers to the use of various resources, such as text and emojis, by communities which are connected via social media practices, including commenting or use of hashtags, to participate in this creation of style. By employing mediated bricolage, these communities can create distinct styles that reflect their unique identities and can challenge social and cultural norms. When constructing a Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin identity, uses of graphemes and emojis are components of social interaction, combined into a post or thread or timeline through processes of bricolage. Thus, these semiotic acts are turned into a style that is

recognizable and accessible for Montenegrin language users on platforms like Twitter/X and Reddit to claim as their own and to use as necessary when performing acts of identity. Memes are an excellent example of bricolaged semiotic material. This process of bricolage reflects a creative and innovative approach to the use of language and other semiotic resources, resulting in the formation of a unique identity that is both recognizable and accessible to Montenegrin language users.

Figure 48 is a meme that highlights the divide between Montenegrin and Serbian. It is a humorous variation of the popular 'Is there a doctor on this flight?' meme (Know Your Meme, 2023), usually set in an airplane or on a street where someone is suffering from a medical emergency. In the meme, someone calls out for a doctor, and the responding person usually responds with what they are a doctor of, as in their profession, which is often non-medical. This response is often intended to poke fun at a profession or to be self-deprecating. In this meme, the responding 'doctor' is a doctor of the Montenegrin language, possibly a linguist or philologist. The joke is that the doctor's expertise in the Montenegrin language is useless in treating heart attacks. To add to the humor, the only help the doctor offers is represented in the form of a speech bubble with the two Montenegrin graphemes, which the meme suggests are pointless and nonsensical, echoing points made in previous exchanges (recall Figures 37 and 38, which mock the marked graphemes). It is unclear whether this meme is intended as friendly self-deprecation or mean-spirited bullying; however, the Cyrillic username of the user who shared the meme suggests that it could be the latter. In the original thread from which this meme is taken, this user is mocking recent poll results on language identity in the face of the upcoming population census (see the vignette that follows this section). So it is almost certainly a joke at the expense of the Montenegrin language.



партибрејкер @partibrejk · Nov 4, 2023



партибрејкер @partibrejk · Nov 4, 2023

Author's Translation



10

150



Figure 48 "Is there a doctor on board?" meme (партибрејкер, 2023)

This meme is mocking the Montenegrin language, specifically the use of the graphemes. However, the meme neglects to account for other prominent features of Montenegrin speech, such as palatalizations, hyper-iotations, and lexical choices (that are beyond the scope of the present study), to target this one especially visible component of the new standard, the graphemes (in their Latin form, no less). Moreover, the use of Cyrillic script in the poster's display name aligns with the Serbian language, which reinforces the minimization of the Montenegrin language standard. This is because Serbian is regarded as a standardized language in the region, whereas Montenegrin is still undergoing that process and it is meeting with immense resistance from the Serbia-aligned social forces in Montenegro. The joke in the meme is about the perceived uselessness or helplessness of the doctor's field of study, and by applying it to the discipline of Montenegrin language and linguistics, it participates in the delegitimation (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Ross & Rivers, 2017) of the Montenegrin language standard.

The meme depicted in Figure 49 follows the format 'change my mind' (Know Your Meme, 2023) in which American-Canadian conservative Steven Crowder sits at a table at Texas Christian University. The original form of the meme is taken from a photograph of the event and the banner on the table originally read, "Male Privilege is a myth / Change My Mind." This type of meme is often used to make provocative or controversial claims, sometimes referred to as being "edgy" on the internet (see Tagliamonte, 2016, for more on internet slang). In this case, the banner asserts that the Montenegrin graphemes <ś> and <ž> are "the most disgusting letters in our language," which serves as the starting point for the ensuing discussion playing out in the comments. The banner is the centerpiece and opening of the discourse, which is continued in the post's title, leading to the statement, "especially when they are forced into textbooks and parliament," which calls attention to the standardization efforts of academic and political institutions.

Posted by u/mneguy Nikšić 3 years ago



Pogotovo kada ih forsiraju u udžbenike i parlament

Shitpost



Posted by u/mneguy Nikšić 3 years ago

Author's Translation

Especially when they are forced into textbooks and parliament

Shitpost



Figure 49 "Change my mind" meme (mneguy, 2020)

The focus on graphemes as the main bearers of the Montenegrin language standard is a common practice in social media discourse (though similar claims cannot be made about ‘offline’ discourse), but it is important to note that there are several other features that could have been considered as well. In fact, a contemporary grammar dedicated to Montenegrin, by Čirgić, et al. (2020), outlines numerous such features. Suffice it to say that the marked (Latin) graphemes do much of the ‘heavy lifting’ in performing the Montenegrin language identity, by both supporters and detractors. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the use of the term ‘most disgusting’ in this context seems to suggest the existence of a natural ranking of letters based on their apparent ‘disgustingness’ and the use of the superlative *najodvratnija* itself suggests a strong emotional or affective reaction to the use of the graphemes.

Figure 50 is a meme that was collected from the r/montenegro subreddit on Reddit and it is a humorous, mostly-visual joke taking aim at stereotypes of Montenegrin identity and indirectly, the Montenegrin language. This meme consists of two panels, with the top panel displaying the standard word for a lightbulb (*sijalica*) in both the Serbian and Montenegrin languages. The bottom panel, on the other hand, features a newly created word that represents an exaggerated and caricatured version of the word for a lightbulb, which would be unique to Montenegrin because of its use of the marked grapheme. It should be noted that this word *šaktilica* is novel creation for purposes of the joke. It is a joke based on the verb ‘sjakti’ (presented in its regular use in Figure 51), which means something like ‘to shine, glitter, light’ but can also be found in an Ijekavian version as *šakti*. The meme satirizes the Montenegrin language by uniting multiple semiotic resources together in bricolage to perform an enregistered persona. In this case, the meme uses Montenegrin cap (*kapa*) and mustache (*brkovi*), which are important Montenegrin national symbols and which are commonly seen in historical pictures of Montenegrin men, to create a

humorous caricature of a national Montenegrin trope. Figure 52 shows an example of the kind of person who is a likely target of the meme, Montenegrin national hero, Jole Piletić, who is sporting a cap and a mustache very similar to the lightbulb character.



Figure 50 Sijalica/Šaktilica meme (deleted user, Reddit, 2022)



**Figure 51 "sjakti" post (Aneta, 2021)**






**Figure 52 Jole Piletić, national hero of Montenegro (Wikimedia Commons, 2024)**

The previous section presented memes which show how graphemes, for example, undergo semiotic processes in order to become part of a style that can be used to mock or entertain social media users with knowledge of the Montenegrin language context. These graphemes are reproduced in discursive acts, like commenting, sharing, and re-posting, and they spread rapidly across the internet through digital content, like memes, to become markers for the identity category of Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin. The ideologies behind the usage of these graphemes are thus also carried from one context to another and eventually become a recognizable style performed by a culturally salient persona, such as the lightbulb in Figure 50. The semiotic life cycle of the Montenegrin graphemes is demonstrated in Table 25, inspired by Silverstein (2003) and Johnstone and Kiesling (2008). While indexicality is a never-ending, iterative process, Table 25 shows the use of the marked graphemes at various stages of the process. Signs can be at different stages of meaning making for different people and communities though, so Table 25 is just one way to visualize this process.

The first panel of Table 25 shows the grapheme <ś> as a first-order indexical. This means that the use of the marked graphemes are simply ways of communicating for some groups of people somewhere (e.g., Montenegrin internet space). Their use does not necessarily invite metapragmatic commentary or social awareness as it is merely reflecting how a user writes. Recalling Figure 35, reproduced in this table, the post's author used the marked Latin grapheme <ś> in the word “preśednica” [president], but they do not directly comment on this use of the grapheme (something like ‘look what I am doing’) nor is the grapheme the explicit topic of discussion. It is merely a part of that user's language repertoire. The second panel of Table 25 demonstrates second-order indexicality, where these marked graphemes begin to invite social commentary and evaluation from those who encounter the form and are aware that it is different in some way. In this example,

the commentary is mocking and cynical, as seen in the reproduction of Figure 37 below, in which a Cyrillic-using, Serbia-supporting user is mocking the presence of the marked Latin graphemes in the ongoing Twitter/X thread. The post reflects the user's metapragmatic awareness of using the grapheme to mark Montenegrin identity and that awareness allows the user to mock the graphemes. This panel shows the second-order indexicality of the sign because it is now overtly linked to a social group, in this case "Montenegrin." Finally, the third panel of Table 25 shows the third-order indexicality that arises when a sign is fully overt and codified. These signs can be made into a joke or used in an ironic performance of an enregistered persona, for example a Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin, or a Montenegrin nationalist figure. Memes are excellent vehicles for third order indexicality, as they metalinguistically comment on the use of signs through both visual and textual means and by nature, memes tend to be shared in humorous, ironic, or otherwise metadiscursive contexts, thus making them likely sites for revealing metalinguistic and ideologically driven discourses.

Table 25 Montenegrin orders of indexicality









Indexical	Application	Example
<p>first-order</p>	<p>&lt;ś&gt; and &lt;ž&gt; are variations in pronunciation and spelling in Montenegrin, which can be 'correlated with a socio-demographic identity' (Johnstone &amp; Kiesling, 2008, p. 8)</p>	 <p>Ref: Figure 35</p>
<p>second-order</p>	<p>&lt;ś&gt; and &lt;ž&gt; are becoming linked to a social type and given 'an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation' (Silverstein, 2003, p. 212) and linked to ideologies of 'localness' (Johnstone &amp; Kiesling, 2008, p. 8)</p>	 <p>Ref: Figure 37</p>
<p>third-order</p>	<p>&lt;ś&gt; and &lt;ž&gt; are used in explicit metadiscourse and increased codification, often performed in 'ironic, semi-serious' ways (Johnstone &amp; Kiesling, 2008, p. 9)</p>	 <p>Ref: Figure 50</p>

Signs that become enregistered can perform the semiotic work of carrying ideology in their use. In the Montenegrin context, these resources are used to distinguish between any number of cultural and linguistic ideologies, all of which are tied to the complex and rich history of the region, including Montenegro's initial period of independence, to its joining of Yugoslavia, to its close union with Serbia, to its independence once more.

Table 26 illustrates the changing indexicalities of each identity configuration from a Montenegrin cultural perspective. Each panel recalls previously introduced data so that its role in the process of identity construction can be presented more clearly.

Table 26 Shifting indexicalities of script and grapheme choice

 <p>10.XII1954. srpski i hrvatski pisci i lingvisti postigli su Novosadski dogovor o srpskohrvatskom književnom jeziku Zaključeno da je narodni jezik Srba,Hrvata i Crnogoraca jedan jezik s dva izgovora,da su oba pisma,ćirilica i latinica,ravnopravna i da jezik ima zajednički pravopis</p> <p>10:56 AM · Dec 10, 2023 · 5,496 Views</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serbo-Croatian (historical) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Cyrillic and Latin scripts</li> <li>• Standard orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 4</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
 <p><b>Jakov Milatovic</b> @JakovMilatovic</p> <p>Predsjednik Crne Gore / Председник Црне Горе / President of Montenegro</p> <p>334 Following 21.7K Followers</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. BCMS (current) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Cyrillic and Latin scripts</li> <li>• Standard orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 28</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
 <p><b>Александар Вучић</b> @avucic</p> <p>Official account of the President of Serbia Званичан налог председника Србије</p> <p>Follow</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Serbian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Cyrillic script</li> <li>• Standard orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 26</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

 <p><b>Milo Đukanović</b>  @DjukanovicCG</p> <p>Predsjednik Crne Gore / President of Montenegro  2018-2023</p> <p>📍 Montenegro 📅 Joined May 2017</p> <p>109 Following 31K Followers</p>	<p>4. Montenegrin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Latin script</li> <li>• Standard orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 27</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Cool Breeze</b> @dane_breeze</p> <p>Moј преседник. 🙄</p>  <p>1:34 PM · Mar 19, 2023 · 176 Views</p>	<p>5. Serbia-aligned Montenegrin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Cyrillic</li> <li>• Marked orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 33</li> </ul>
<p> <b>jabučka</b>  @rovchanka_na_ct</p> <p>Đe je predsednik @JakovMilatovic premijer @MickeySpajic da reaguju na ovaj fašizam?? Predsednika Skupštine, vojvodu @AndrijaMandicDF nemam što pitat, neđe u ćošak navija sigurno...</p> <div> <p> <b>JanniK</b> @nekboa · Jan 23</p> <p>Teški fašizam !!! ...na Dan novinara...</p> <p>Državo, hoće li opet biti...ništa!?</p> <p>in4s.net/in4s-istrazuje...</p> </div> <p>2:31 PM · Jan 23, 2024 · 770 Views</p>	<p>6. Montenegro-aligned Montenegrins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Latin</li> <li>• Marked orthography</li> <li>• Reference: Figure 31</li> </ul>

The first panel depicts the initial language identity of Montenegrins as speakers of 'Serbo-Croatian.' This configuration draws on the role of grammar and standardization efforts in Yugoslavia, which used both Cyrillic and Latin scripts and standard orthography to delineate its

linguistic boundaries. The second panel is like the first, with the exception that it reflects the newest macro-level identity of the South Slavic former Yugoslav languages of the Western Balkans. This most recent umbrella category, commonly known as BCMS, is again united using Cyrillic and Latin scripts and standard orthographic forms. These two varieties are essentially the same, except they represent different periods and ideological states (e.g., Yugoslav versus post-Yugoslav identities). An example of the use of these linguistic ideologies can be seen on the Twitter/X profile page of the current Montenegrin president, Jakov Milatović, in panel 2. He straddles both cultural spheres of Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin and Serbia-aligned Montenegrin as a so-called centrist with close ties to Serbia while also supporting NATO and E.U. integration. These fissures in identity are reflected in the use of script as an enregistered sign.

Panels 3 and 4 focus on local identities that are more specific than the all-encompassing Yugoslav identity represented in Panels 1 and 2. The third and fourth panels present the profiles of two long-time political figures who have played significant roles in the social and political spheres of Serbia and Montenegro. Panel 3 features the Twitter/X profile page of Aleksandar Vučić, the president of Serbia. His profile is in Cyrillic and uses standard orthography, the traditional way of writing Serbian language. Although there is also English text, its use seems primarily intended for readers outside of Serbia. However, the absence of Latin Serbian in his profile effectively erases any communities of Latin-script BCMS speakers who might want to access his information. Panel 4 features the profile of Milo Đukanović, who was Montenegro's long-time president and a key figure in the country's independence movement. His profile uses Latin script and standard Ijekavian orthography, which has been the norm for Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro since at least the Vienna Literary Agreement. Like Vučić, Đukanović's profile has the effect of erasing communities who are readers and writers of Cyrillic

BCMS. However, both Vučić and Đukanović represent normative standards for their respective cultural spheres, and as important cultural leaders, they adhere to their national standards completely. Vučić and Đukanović employ their respective national language standards and do not focus on their particular audiences, unlike Milatović, who was featured in the previous table and in Figure 26 and who was reaching out to much more of his constituency, by use of both Latin and Cyrillic scripts.

Focusing on more locally defined identity categories and the crux of what this dissertation is arguing, panels 5 and 6 present the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin and the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin identities, respectively. In panel 5, a user comments on the Montenegrin presidential elections that took place in 2023. The user shows their support for a new political candidate, who is a former social media influencer and not a serious contender in the election. To express their fine-grained language identity category, the user uses the Cyrillic script that indexes alignment with the Serbian cultural sphere. However, they also use the marked Montenegrin Cyrillic grapheme <ć> (corresponding to marked grapheme <ś> in the Latin script) to show their alignment with Montenegrin identity. The user seems to satirize or mock the political candidate by indexing both identity categories, without taking a completely Serbia-aligned stance. This is because the issue discussed is related to the Montenegrin elections, and the candidate is a Montenegrin influencer, so it would not be completely appropriate to use only Serbia-aligning resources. In contrast, panel 6 shows a strongly Montenegro-aligned identity, as indicated using the Latin script and the marked Montenegrin grapheme in the word "prešednik." Additionally, there are other Montenegrin identity markers used in this panel, which are outside the scope of this dissertation. For instance, the hyper-palatalization of "Đe" for the question word "gdje" [where] is tied to Montenegrin dialect (Čirgić, et al., 2020). Thus, there are at least two different locally-defined

language identity categories other than the categories of Yugoslav, BCMS, Serbian, or Montenegrin, and users may use combinations of multiple resources to express their particular identity, depending on the context and the purpose of their communication.

These examples serve to demonstrate that the use of script and grapheme is a recurring phenomenon in various cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts, which can lead to a wide range of outcomes in terms of identity management. The choice of script and grapheme carries a considerable ideological weight, influencing how that user is perceived by others and which identity categories they are associated with. These signs are the fundamental functional resources that are employed in constructing these boundaries, with emojis being used to accentuate or refine cultural alignments.

Another of the semiotic processes used to construct identity and circulate ideology is an axis of differentiation (Gal & Irvine, 2019). In this dissertation, the identity categories of Montenegro-aligned and Serbia-aligned Montenegrins are presented through the general process of differentiation. Although there may be countless semiotically-produced axes in this complex sociolinguistic situation, the central one for these data is that meaningful social categories in this context are divided along an axis of Serbia alignment and Montenegro alignment drawing on long-standing cultural and social ideologies of East and West. To express their Montenegrin alignment, the former group uses special graphemes, red and green hearts, Montenegrin flags, and index finger emojis. On the other hand, to perform their Serbian alignment, the latter group uses Cyrillic script, Serbian flags, and Orthodox Christian symbols. The axis of differentiation itself is the hinge on which these two identities contrast, drawing from different clusters of ideologically-driven positions. As discussed in the introduction, the ideologies of the East are often centered around traditional and conservative values, reverence for the Orthodox faith and its churches, Slavic

languages, and the Cyrillic script. This axis of differentiation plays a crucial role in the formation of identities and ideologies in this context. By using symbols and signs that are associated with one side of the axis, individuals can express their alignment with that particular identity category. The use of semiotic resources in this way highlights the importance of language, symbols, and signs in the construction of social categories and identity in this sociolinguistic context.

In terms of European geography, "East" and "West" are often considered two distinct regions with fundamental cultural and social differences. Eastern Europe, for example, is often seen as different from the West in terms of its traditional values, orthodox culture, and its complex and sometimes difficult history. Ideologically, the West is often thought of as more liberal, democratic, and secular. In this conception, the West places greater emphasis on international cooperation and the use of the Latin alphabet and English language, leading to the formation of organizations like the European Union and NATO, which promote these values. On the other hand, the East is often viewed as more insular and inward-looking, with a stronger focus on preserving its history and cultural heritage. Its focus on tradition and history has contributed to the preservation of unique cultural identities and practices, like maintaining the use of Cyrillic online, despite the growing dominance of the Latin script. However, these are not inherent or essential qualities of either region or of the people who live in these regions, but rather social positionings held by people based on the ideologies that have influenced their world views. As society evolves and new challenges arise, the East and the West may redefine what it means to be part of their respective regions. Montenegro is one such nation that is doing so now, in a post-independence space.

Irvine and Gal (2019) propose a productive approach for examining discourses that invoke language ideology. They discuss the process of differentiation that occurs in the construction and

production of categories based on contrasts and comparisons in the use of signs. This notion of an axis of differentiation is a set of binary contrasting ideas that are organized around a template populated by features or qualia (sensory properties of existence that can become linked to a sign, see Gal 2013, 2017). Irvine and Gal argue that the meaning of words and signs derives from the way they are used in contrast to other words and signs. This axis of differentiation then organizes how other semiotic relations are construed. Table 27 illustrates the central axis of differentiation around which the presented data circulate. Drawing on the ideological contrasts of East versus West and the resulting ideologies arising from those contrasts, graphemes, emojis, and script are used to create differentiation along this continuum.

**Table 27 Axis of Differentiation: Montenegro-Montenegrin/Serbia-Montenegrin**

<b>Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin</b>	<b>Serbia-aligned Montenegrin</b>
Latin script	Cyrillic script
Secular or limited Orthodoxy	Explicit Orthodoxy
Marked graphemes	Standard graphemes
Pro-NATO, EU	Anti-NATO, EU
Liberal, democratic values	Traditional, conservative values
Resistance to social assimilation	Preference for social cohesion

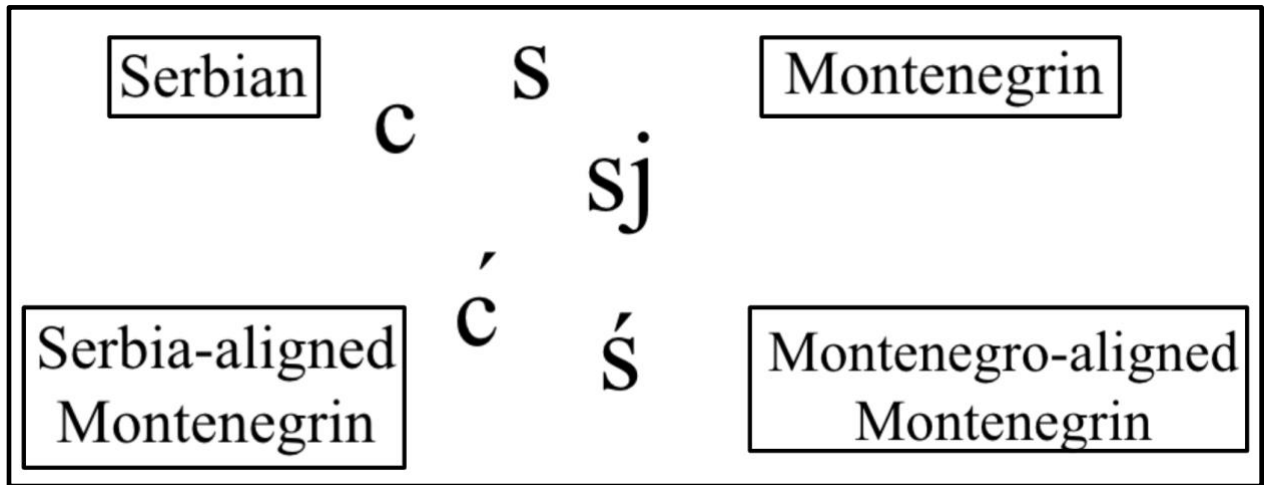
In constructing messages online, users on Reddit and Twitter/X rely mostly on script and grapheme usage to construct styles around this axis of differentiation. Emojis are employed to enhance the tone (Danesi, 2016; Herring & Dainas, 2017) of a post, usually to produce stronger alignments towards one of the two competing identity categories. Emojis are also used to produce an effect of humor (Kavanagh, 2010), particularly when mocking the Montenegrin language

standard. Emojis are also embodied gestures, thus they perform the co-speech work of depicting facial expressions (Crystal, 2011) and enhancing the emotional content of a post (Thompson & Filik, 2016), especially through the use of gestures of protest, such as the “L for Liberty” gesture or the “Serbian three-finger salute.” However, emojis do not provide a strong effect on their own, so they generally need to accompany text or other post content (Dürscheid, et al., 2019).

The Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin style is influenced by the country's history and culture. The Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin style is characterized by the use of Latin script, a preference for secularity, marked Montenegrin graphemes and emojis, and cooperation with the West through organizations like NATO and the European Union. They also support the liberal democratic values promoted by these organizations and desire a self-determining identity that is unique to them. On the other hand, the Serbia-aligning Montenegrin style uses the Cyrillic script and prefers orthodoxy, standard unmarked graphemes, Serbia-marked emojis, and traditional cultural values. The combination of these semiotic resources allows users to engage with what has been called a “digital participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2009; Ross & Rivers, 2017; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015) and especially provide a a secure public forum for communities which are only beginning to achieve empowerment in society (Gal et al., 2016), such as the movement supporting the newly standardized Montenegrin language.

This axis of differentiation is an emergent rubric, however, and should not be taken as prescriptive. Users are not permanently bound to one side of the axis or the other, nor are they required to accept every position in an axis. Users can employ emojis, graphemes, and script choice to engage in discursive acts of irony, sarcasm, satire, and trolling, among others. In so doing, they are using the elements of one side of the axis to subvert the meaning and support the other side of the axis.

Figures 53 through 56 offer a visual way of understanding the processes involved in the production of Montenegro-aligning Montenegrin style and Serbia-aligning Montenegrin style. These figures illustrate relevant signs found in this project but are certainly not limited to these options.



**Figure 53 Model of the indexical field of a Montenegrin grapheme**

Figure 53 models the indexical field in a Montenegrin language internet context, based on Eckert’s representation of the indexical field of /t/-release in an American English context (2008). In this figure, the indexical field is populated with the options for the marked <s> grapheme in a Montenegrin context, including both Latin and Cyrillic variants, as well as digraph forms. The boxes represent possible styles that can be produced by use of a particular grapheme variant. When composing a message, a user has these signs (and others) to choose from in the production of their message, to align themselves with a particular identity category or persona. These potential signs are limitless and are often tied to cultural, historical, linguistic, and religious arenas of life, though they may not always be.



Figure 54 Signs usage produces clusters of style through bricolage

In Figure 54, the signs become organized around into enregistered styles. Each sign is chosen out of a set of alternatives in the context of ideology. It is (often) ideological positioning which motivates users to write with the Cyrillic alphabet instead of the Latin one, for example. These styles are formed by signs and ideology is a part of each semiotic level. Figure 55 visually demonstrates the contrasting of the two relevant styles (Serbian and Montenegrin) along an axis of differentiation. Here the important contrasting axis is the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin (MAM) and Serbia-aligned Montenegrin (SAM) axis.

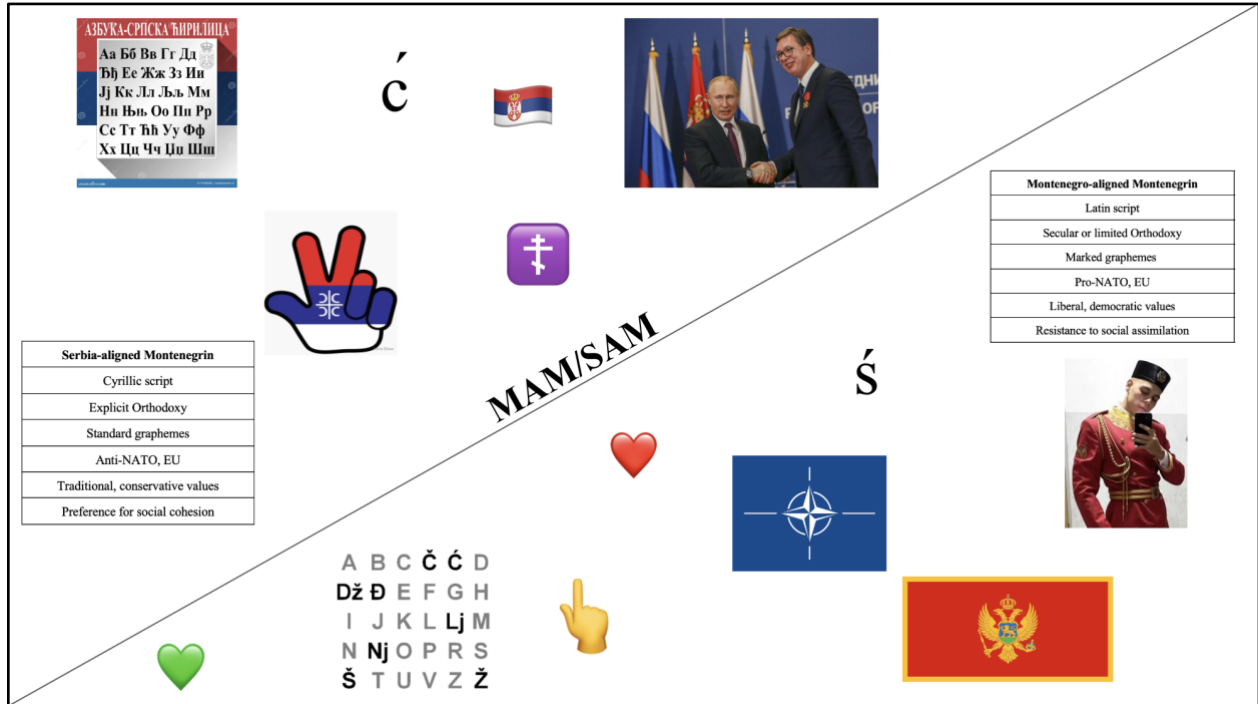
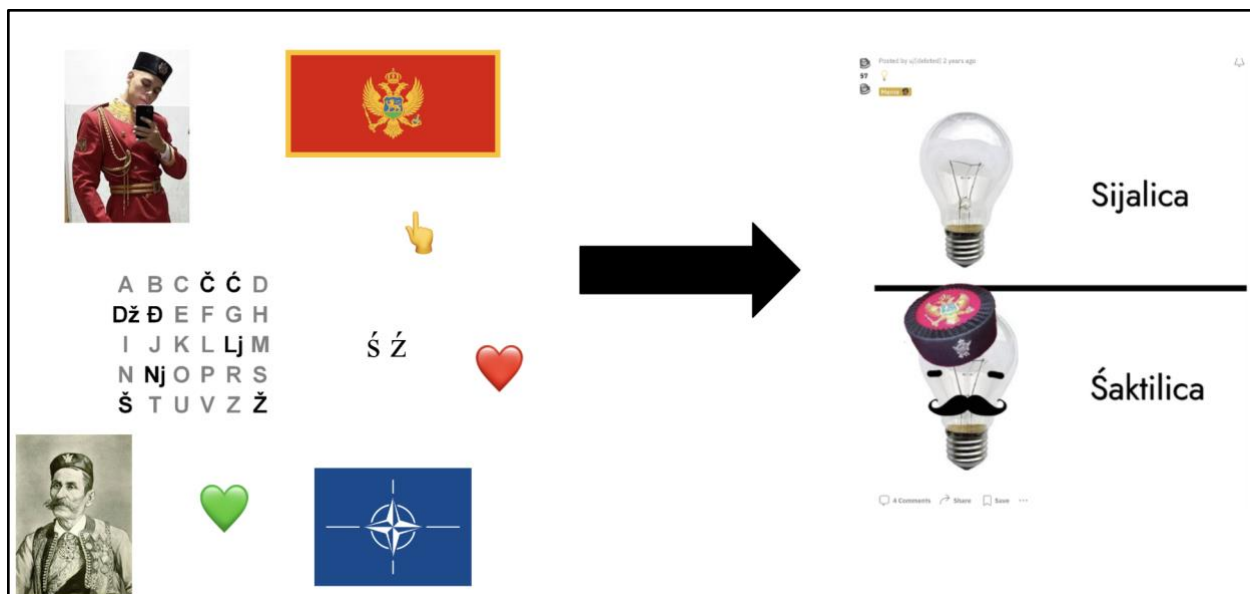


Figure 55 Two styles oriented around a MAM/SAM axis of differentiation

Figure 55 shows the signs that index the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin style, which are found on the ideologically "West" side of the axis (the right side). Similarly, signs that index the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin style are found on the ideologically "East" side of the axis (the left side). Figure 56 illustrates how the enregistered styles (for example, the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin style presented on the right side of Figure 55) can become social types, like the Montenegrin nationalist persona represented by the 'lightbulb' meme, which is a caricature of a Montenegrin national persona, like that of Jole Piletić (see Figure 52).



**Figure 56** Enregisterment of Montenegrin style and the formation of a MAM persona

These semiotic processes are iterative and continuously ongoing. Predicting which signs are taken up to perform social work and how that will happen is likely impossible. However, the data in this dissertation demonstrate how signs in different domains of human social life and across multiple modalities, can be pulled into the semiotic fray to create meaningful social categories and identity practices for a community.

I have shown that script, marked graphemes, and emojis are semiotic resources which create style and enregistered personae through the use of semiotic processes. Two competing styles located in the Montenegrin semiotic space are the Montenegro-aligned Montenegrin and the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin styles. This dissertation contributes to research on processes of meaning-making and identity construction in virtual spaces and shows that emojis and orthography can be used to reveal critical elements of social identity, national identity, cultural politics, representation, and voice, underscoring why examining language use as a social practice is crucial

as it can provide insight into the complex interplay between language, culture, politics, and social identity.

## **6.2 Vignette: the census and the Montenegrin Š**

In the spring and summer of 2023, parliamentary elections were held in which the party *Pokret Evropa Sad!* (PES! or PES) was elected into power. Their campaign, led by soon-to-be prime minister Milojko Spajić and president Jakov Milatović, claimed to be centrist in scope, unlike the supposedly more extreme parties that dominated public discourse in Serbia and Montenegro previously (Kajosevic, 2023a). As their first significant act, the new government, decided to finally hold the nationwide census. Censuses in Montenegro are typically held every ten years, with the last national census held in 2011. The 2011 census found that approximately 45% of the population identified as Montenegrin, 30% as Serb, and the rest as Bosniak, Albanian, or other national minorities (Objavljeni rezultati popisa, 2011). This was a marked increase over previous censuses in the percentage of people identifying as Montenegrin. However, the 2021 census was postponed due to the lingering effects following the litija protests against the law on religious freedom and the COVID-19 pandemic. Relatedly, there were fears of civil discord due to rising religious, ethnic, and political tensions in Montenegro. Sp census was to begin on November 1, 2023.

Beginning in September, organizations supported by the Serbian Orthodox Church posted billboards all around Montenegro claiming that Montenegrins are "Proud of our Serbia" and calling on citizens to identify themselves on the census as Serbs who, though they live in Montenegro, speak the Serbian language and follow the Serbian Orthodox faith. This action was perceived as a

attempt by the Serbia-aligned coalitions in Montenegro to inflate their numbers, and thus increase their political strength, by showing a marked majority over the pro-independence Montenegrin parties in the opposition (Janković, 2023). However, this stoked fear in many Montenegrins that a Serb-aligned majority could cause significant changes in the Montenegrin rights to independence and self-government. Jovan Vučerović, MP (member of parliament) of the conservative and pro-Serbia party *For the Future of Montenegro*, was quoted as saying “...if the percentage of citizens declaring themselves as Serbs who speak Serbian increases, that could open the way for constitutional changes” (Kajosevic, 2023e). In October, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Porfirije (born Prvoslav Perić), called on all Orthodox believers to register as Serbs, saying: “This is the birthplace of all Orthodox Serbs wherever they are... That’s why here we know what our religion is, here we also know that we belong to the Serbian people, and we are proud of that. And we know that we speak the most wonderful Serbian language...” (Kajosevic, 2023c) while speaking in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. Thus it appeared that the census, and the discourse surrounding it, was yet another attempt to delegitimize Montenegrin identity once again.

The census encountered several issues during its initial data collection process. Census takers were instructed to go door-to-door and ask residents questions on various topics, recording their answers in Cyrillic or Latin, per the resident's preference. However, reports surfaced that census-takers were given erasable pens (*piši-briši*, or "write-erase", see Figure 57), leading to accusations that they were being instructed to erase Montenegro-supporting answers and replace them with Serbia-supporting ones. This sparked debate, with calls for the statistical office, Monstat, to install software allowing residents to confirm that their data was entered accurately and that it represented their actual answers to the census takers. These issues and inconsistencies

led to Montenegro-aligned parties wanting to postpone the census until the issues were resolved. However, the Serbia-aligned government claimed they would decide through democratic means whether to hold or postpone the census. This was seen as a poor attempt to fake a pro-Western and pro-Montenegrin position by mimicking discourses of democracy with no intention to actually follow through. As opposition MP Jevto Erakovič said, "This is false pro-Western majority. So-called civic parties like Europe Now...are only a tissue infected by the worst Serbian nationalism...." (Kajosevic, 2023d). Ultimately, the census was eventually held in December 2023, though many felt that the issues were not adequately resolved.



**Figure 57 "Erasable Serbs or Erasable Montenegrins?" (Emilija Ja sam, 2023)**

The initial findings of the census were released in late January 2024, and the results showed an increase in overall population but a decrease in birth rate, making Montenegro one of the only Balkan countries experiencing some kind of population growth (Kajosevic, 2024). While the results of the census are still pending as of the writing of this dissertation and final results are expected to be released by mid-2024, it will be interesting to observe how the ongoing discussions around these numbers will impact any rise in identity and nationalism movements as Montenegro faces new political and social challenges.

The census has brought to light significant issues relevant to the relationship between Montenegro-aligned and Serbia-aligned political groups in Montenegro. For instance, the close historical relationship between Montenegro and Serbia became especially contentious through the so-called "Ask Grandpa" campaign (*kampanja pitaj đeda*). The campaign encouraged Montenegrins to ask their grandfathers whether they were Serbs or Montenegrins in their youth (Filipović, 2023). The campaign claimed that all Montenegrins were once Serbs and that the Montenegrin state, language, and identity were modern fabrications invented by Đukanović and his allies to gain political power and control (CDM, 2023). As a way of capturing differences in identity of a nation, the census has been used to support this claim. With each new decade, more and more citizens have been identifying themselves as Montenegrins in terms of nation, language, and faith than ever before, fueling concerns from the Serbia-supporting opposition that the country is falling prey to Đukanović's nationalizing schemes. However, Montenegro-aligned political groups argue that this claim is flawed because, in the past, Montenegrins did not have the option to self-identify in the census. Officially they were Yugoslavs, or Serbs, who spoke the Serbo-Croatian or Serbian languages. Until independence, many Montenegrins did not envision Montenegrin as a possible category for language, faith, and nationality. Figure 58 shows a section of the census, translated in English by Monstat, which displays the five or so questions that are really at the crux of the issues with the census.

**9. Citizenship**

1. Montenegro	3. Foreign country
2. Montenegro and foreign country	4. Stateless

---

(If circled 2 or 3, enter the name of foreign country)

If the person does not want to answer questions 10, 11, 12, and 12a answer 'He/she does not want to declare himself/herself' is put.

**10. National, i.e. ethnic affiliation**

---

**11. Religion**

---

**12. Mother tongue**

---

**12a. Language usually spoken by the person**

---

Figure 58 Controversial questions on the Montenegrin census (Janković, 2023)

The census was eventually postponed due to fears of ethno-nationalist tensions, similar to the discourse and discord surrounding the law on religious property and the litija movement in 2019-2020. The government's non-transparent actions around it have led to some civil unrest, especially in Montenegrin national media, and political groups aligned with Montenegro (and in opposition to the standing government) have even called for a boycott of the census. However, this decision would have resulted in significant fines from the state for those who choose to boycott (Jovanović-Vukotić, 2023). Figure 59 is an example of some of the intense political rallying around the census on social media by Montenegrin-aligned users calling for self-identification as Montenegrins in terms of language, faith, and nationality.



Figure 59 "How will you declare yourself?" (Montenheimus, 2023)

Local organizations conducted polls independently of the census to gauge public opinion on the questions asked in the census. These polls revealed that many Montenegrin citizens identified themselves as Montenegrin in terms of nationality, with a smaller percentage identifying based on language. Interestingly, one of the polls even utilized the marked Montenegrin grapheme <Ś> as a symbol to represent the gathered data, as seen in Figures 60 and 61. Over time, these marked Montenegrin graphemes have become significant markers of Montenegrin identity, gaining social awareness and being used as symbols encapsulating the entire movement for Montenegrin national and linguistic self-determination.

**CGO - CCE** @CGOCCE

Da crnogorski nacionalni identitet postoji nezavisan od srpskog smatra većina građana/ki 🇷🇸 (72%), dok je oko petine na suprotnoj poziciji (22%). U 🇪🇺 su stavovi oko tog pitanja podijeljeni, pa većina (38%) ne može da se odredi, zatim 33% smatra da postoji, a 29% da ne postoji.

Kada je u pitanju crnogorski jezik, u 🇷🇸 ga priznaje 63.5%, a ne priznaje 36.6% građana/ki. Na drugoj strani, više od polovine (56%) je onih u 🇪🇺 koji ga ne priznaju, a svega nešto više od petine (28%) onih koji ga priznaju.

Nalazi su dio projekta "Plenum o crnogorsko-srpskim odnosima", koji vodi #CGO sprovodi u saradnji sa @AddAcademy, i uz podršku @SwissEmbassyBlg. Stručnu podršku su pružili agencije #Damar i HOW.

8:40 AM · Nov 4, 2023 · 20.3K Views

32 24 95 3

**CGO - CCE** @CGOCCE Author's Translation

The majority of citizens 🇷🇸 (72%) believe that the Montenegrin national identity exists independent of the Serbian one, while about a fifth is of the opposite position (22%). In 🇪🇺, the views on this issue are divided, so the majority (38%) cannot be determined, 33% believe that it exists, and 29% that it does not exist.

When it comes to the Montenegrin language, in 🇷🇸 it is recognized by 63.5%, while 36.6% of citizens do not recognize it. On the other hand, more than half (56%) of those in 🇪🇺 do not recognize it, and only slightly more than a fifth (28%) do recognize it.

The findings are part of the "Plenum on Montenegrin-Serbian relations" project, which #CGO conducts in cooperation with @AddAcademy, and with the support of @SwissEmbassyBlg. Professional support was provided by the agencies #Damar and HOW

8:40 AM · Nov 4, 2023 · 20.3K Views

32 24 85 3

Figure 60 Poll on Montenegrin national and linguistic identity (CGO - CCE, 2023)



Figure 61 “Do you accept the Montenegrin language?” poll results (CGO - CCE, 2023)

Even in public discussions, such as polls aimed at the public, the Montenegrin graphemes are significant enough to represent the Montenegrin language. The issues surrounding the identities of Serbian and Montenegrin people and the role of language are constantly present in contemporary Montenegrin politics. Similar issues that arose during the census debates were also present in the discussions on the Wikipedia talk pages. These discussions reflect the ongoing evolution of the national language standard, where different public opinions are influenced by the discourse surrounding the elements of language, such as the marked Montenegrin graphemes.

Censuses have a long and complicated history in Montenegro, dating back to the 19th century before the formation of Yugoslavia. In particular, they have often been controversial processes, a development that has only intensified in recent years. The last census was conducted in 2011 after Montenegro gained independence from Serbia. In 2023, when the country attempted to conduct a new census, the process faced significant challenges. The proposed 2023 census

triggered protests in Montenegro, primarily driven by concerns about potential manipulation by Serbian parties within the newly formed government. Facing immense pressure and accusations of lacking transparency, the government ultimately postponed the 2023 census, acknowledging the need to address concerns and ensure a fair and accurate process.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This dissertation analyzed the use of language by Montenegrins on the social media platforms Twitter/X and Reddit to construct and negotiate between competing identity categories within the complex sociopolitical landscape of Montenegro. The analysis identified distinct speaker styles that emerge online using script, marked graphemes, and emojis, highlighting that there is a distinct cultural heritage and linguistic autonomy in Montenegro, separate from the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin identity that exists in the shared political internet space. Montenegro-aligned Montenegrins support the ideologies of contemporary Montenegrin statehood and its right to self-determination and recognize that Montenegrin national identity is separate from Serbia-aligned Montenegrin national identity.

This work found that social media users perform a Montenegro-aligned style using Montenegrin graphemes <ś> and <ź>, especially the former, which are absent in Serbian orthographic practices. These users also employ emojis representing membership in social groups of religion and nationhood to affiliate themselves with the ideology of an independent Montenegrin nation. In contrast, users belonging to the Serbia-aligned Montenegrin category often use Cyrillic script and a different set of emojis (e.g. Serbian flag, Serbian Orthodox Cross), and only rarely use the marked Montenegrin graphemes to perform minute shades of alignment, given the available resources.

The analysis showed that these graphemes and emojis function within an online Montenegrin semiotic space, consisting of a shared repertoire of linguistic resources recognized by communities living within this cultural context. The use of script, graphemes, and emojis is particular to this Montenegrin semiotic space and these resources are used to index cultural

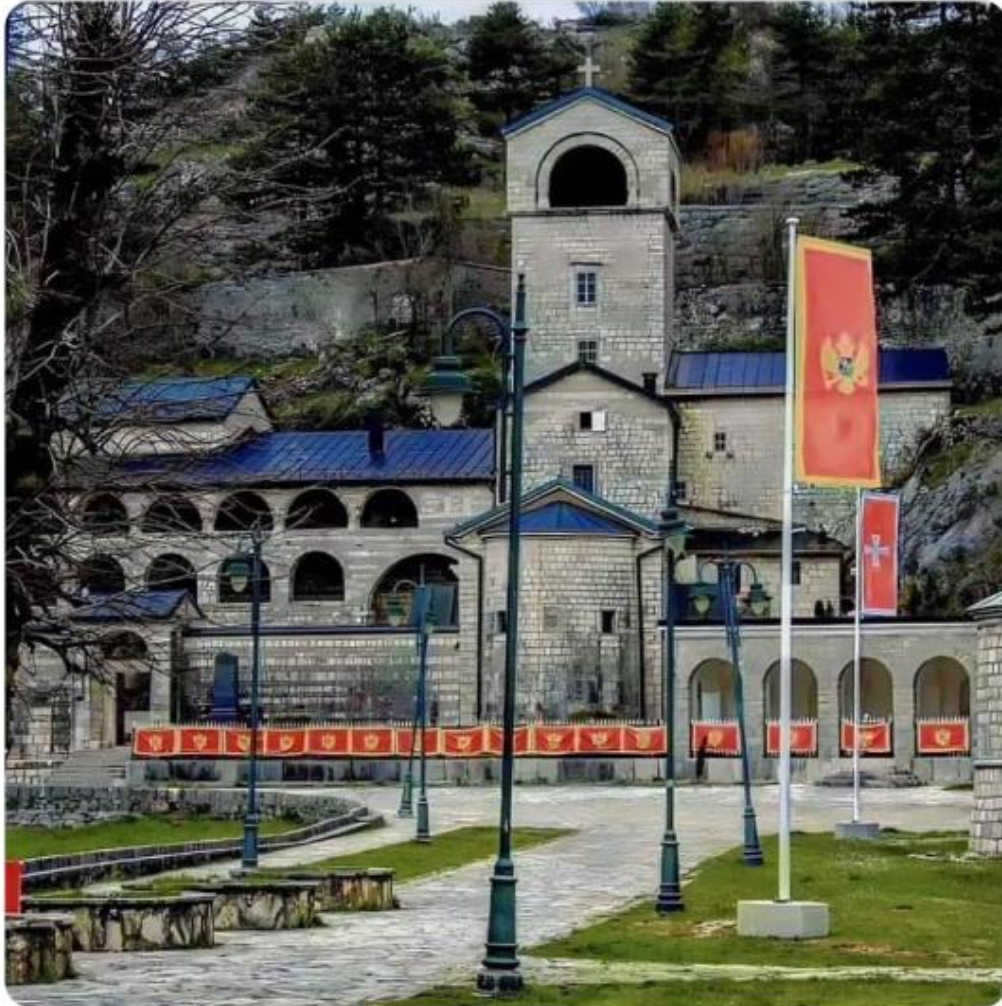
concepts specific to Montenegro and Montenegrin identity, through history (e.g., the resistance of the Greens party after WWI) and politics (e.g., through the discussion of current, former, and potential political candidates in the Montenegrin government).

Montenegrin online users engage in semiotic bricolage (Bucholtz, 2002; Eckert, 2008; Callesano, 2023), creatively repurposing existing signs and symbols to craft a recognizable speaker style that constructs and circulates ideologies intrinsically linked to Montenegrin national identity. The interactive nature of online discourse plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing this distinct speaker style. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of how language and identity operate in the dynamic space of social media. Examining the specific case of Montenegro sheds light on the complex processes surrounding the presentation of identities of nationhood and affiliation that occur online, where individuals actively construct and assert their identities through the strategic use of linguistic resources. Figure 62, in which many bright red Montenegrin flags flank the Serbian Orthodox Church in Cetinje, Montenegro, is a powerful image illustrating that these semiotic processes are differentiating the two identity categories, but both are still located in a Montenegrin cultural, historical, and linguistic context.

 **Montenimus**  
@montenimus1918

...

CRNOGORSKI !! 



7:11 PM · May 27, 2023 · 1,205 Views



↻ 2

♥ 71

🔖 1



**Figure 62 Montenegrin flags at the Serbian Orthodox Church in Cetinje (Montenimus, 2023)**

The findings presented here highlight the agency of online communities in shaping and contesting dominant narratives. Future directions for this research include the use of more computational and quantitative methods to operate on a larger dataset and to track online discourse

at a broader scale. Use of experimental methods (e.g., matched guise) can explore how some of these resources, especially the speech practices on which the marked graphemes are based, occur and how they might reflect identity categories offline. Additionally, data collection for this project revealed other patterns of typographic manipulations that were beyond the scope of this project but would be worthwhile for follow-up studies. There is additional variation in orthographic norms that seem to connect to other regional dialects and are used to mock politicians seen to be performing those dialects in political arenas. This study emphasizes the importance of language identity and standards for the future of Montenegro and the internet.

With the rise of the internet, we have seen how online behavior can affect the creation of identity, culture, and social evolution. The two vignettes presented here show how ideologically driven language debates result in real world issues for Montenegrins of all alignments, both online and off. This dissertation focused on the Montenegrin linguistic identity and how social media spaces have played a critical role in shaping a new national identity. Through analyzing semiotic processes, we gain insight into the formation of this nascent identity.

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