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SOUND MAP OF SERBIA

Abstract. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia has set preservation of cultural heritage as one of its goals in the period between 2008 and 2011 while filming, revision, additional categorization and digitization of tangible and intangible cultural heritage has been one of its strategic priorities. Considering the fact that the UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has not been ratified in the country yet, there is a danger that, without this legal instrument, some significant elements may be lacking in establishment and additional categorization of cultural heritage and, automatically, in the strategy of their digitization. In keeping with this Convention, according to which languages, dialects, speeches and toponyms fall into the category of intangible heritage, this work pleads for the need of preservation (by means of digitalization) of oral tradition and local linguistic varieties. The whole idea is based on the example of the British Library web site where, in the framework of the Sound Archive, linguistic and dialectic map of Great Britain has also been presented.

Introduction

Digital era, when the presentation of the cultural heritage in Serbia is in question, began in 1996 and lasted for less than a decade, thanks to the persistence and enthusiasm of a few people. It gained the character of an organized activity in 2002 when eight eminent institutions founded The National Centre for Digitization. At last, in 2007 the idea of safeguarding of cultural heritage, which had been promoted by The Centre, became a national project, too. The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia has set this project as one of its strategic priorities in the period between 2008 and 2011 and has emphasized “revision, additional categorization and digitization of tangible and intangible heritage” as its main goals.

As a result of its digital boost nowadays we have “binary rendition” of our culture’s capital works as well as involvement in European and not since a long time ago in World’s Digital Library. Among the digitized materials one can find: books, serial publications, maps, engravings and fine arts works, musical works, photo and sound documents, etc. In the multitude of various materials, at present widely available thanks to WWW, nevertheless the absence of a very important segment of our cultural heritage is conspicuous and that is the one which belongs to the corpus of intangible cultural heritage.

Convention for safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage

According to the UNESCO’s Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2003, different forms and appearances of creative works belong to it and are specially related to: language, dialects, speeches and toponyms, oral literature of all kinds, folklore in the shape of music, dance, games, rites, customs, different arts, skills and crafts – everything which is passed on from generation to generation, and which represents a creative reaction to its surroundings, living conditions, nature and history and which gives to a certain community a sense of identity and continuity of existence. This Convention has been

by now ratified by about hundred countries, but Serbia is still not among them. Following the announcements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all the necessary preparations for the very act of ratification are carried out and the Parliamentary passage of the law is expected in this year. On the importance of signing this Convention for recognizing and safeguarding of their own values the example of neighbouring Croatia can bear witness since their Ministry of Culture soon after the ratification formed the list of preserved intangible cultural goods and it has already included 65 units in it (traditional crafts, skills, rituals, customs, speeches and toponymics of certain regions).

In the light of the main idea of this paper, the Convention could be of an extreme importance in this country for inciting the conscience on the importance of local speeches and linguistic varieties and as a current regulation it would imply an obligation of their preservation. In the period in which the Ministry of Culture set out digitization and intangible cultural heritage as one of its priorities, it is a unique opportunity for paying attention to the importance of preservation of rich linguistic heritage and for pointing out to some possible solutions.

Reasons for taking care of language, dialect and speech preservation

According to experts' estimates, there are 5000–7000 languages in the world today (this wide range in estimates is the result of a difficulty in the drawing the line between a language and a dialect) and from that number even up to 80 per cent are “unwritten”, i.e. they function only as spoken languages. A huge number of languages have only a small number of speakers and their physical disappearance and assimilation into bigger and more dominant communities also mean the disappearance of their source languages. In 2008, the International year of the languages as was pronounced by the UN, Kaicijro Macura, secretary general of the UNESCO, warned on the danger of disappearance of even 50 per cent of languages in a few generations.

Like living organisms, languages are already subjected to constant change. These are natural processes, and this applies to the written, codified languages, as well as to the unwritten ones. Languages are not, in spite of this, completely whole in the synchronous plane, but are scattered in territorial and social varieties – dialects and local speeches, sociolects, slang, etc. In the modern world, so-called small languages are especially endangered by the process of globalization and local speeches are also endangered by contemporary mass media and by the process of general social transformation. But considering that languages, dialects, speeches and toponymics are primary signs of cultural diversity and richness of a country, they should be, like all the other cultural goods, attached to “the virtual vault of spiritual heritage”.

A good example: sound archive of the British Library

A very good example of the preservation of linguistic heritage can be found in Sound Archive of the British Library which possesses over 3 million units and is one of the biggest in the world. The overwhelming number of the sound material units is digitalized, and one of the online collections called Language & Literature – Sounds Familiar? (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/>) – represent a dialectic and accents map of Great Britain. On its home page users make a picture that “...Great Britain is a wealthy landscape of regional accents and dialects, which witnesses the continuity of the society and its changes, local history and everyday life...” This collection was mainly created as a result of survey made in the Leeds University in the 50s’ of the previous century which researched in detail 313 locations in Great Britain and when mostly older people from rural areas who kept their authentic local speeches were interviewed. Audio recordings from the collection Oral History:

Millennium Memory Bank 1900–2000 were also used in the linguistic purposes. Being available online, this collection also consists of spoken statements on the themes from everyday life by 6000 people of different age, education and social milieus on the basis of which the spirit of the British society in the 20th century could be reconstructed.



The collection all in all consists of 76 sound recordings and over 600 short audio clips. Through the option Your Voices it gives students an opportunity and calls them to send their audio recordings (with the enclosed instructions) in order to make the sound map richer. Thanks to the accompanying texts, explanations and interactive maps, the linguistic map of Great Britain appears to be an excellent teaching aid. It gives an opportunity of following of historic changes in the language and comparing lexical, phonologic and grammar variants and in the synchronous plane, on the regional level and inside of a single region (linguistic characteristics of speakers of different sex, age, education, professions and ethnic minorities).

Possibilities for forming of sound map of Serbia

At this moment there are many favourable circumstances for the realization of the idea of forming a sound map of Serbia. First of all, it is certain that there already exist quite a number of spoken recordings scattered in many different institutions. It is well known that it is compulsory on the Faculty of Philology to collect spoken recordings from certain regions as a constituent part of the linguistics exam. Also, under the patronage of the UN, soon after the bombardment of Serbia, in Kosovo and Metohia an extensive project was carried out of gathering oral materials which can now be found at the Institute for the Serbian Language, but they have not yet been systematized and scientifically processed. Local radio stations as well as the local libraries, museums and archives are possible owners of sound recordings. Besides, not the very getting of new sound recordings should demand considerable financial resources.

For realizing of this project the existing experience in digitization of cultural heritage is of big importance. When the libraries are in question, among institutions which are the leaders in that business that kind of experience is not missing even in digitization of sound materials. Beside National Library of Serbia (digitization of old gramophone records) and Belgrade City Library (audio archives of the cultural programmes in Belgrade City Library),

even one of the public libraries in the inland, Town Library “Vladislav Petkovic Dis” in Cacak , made a foray in doing this.

Furthermore, within the framework of the idea on forming the National Sound Archives in National Library of Serbia (also made on the model of Sound Archives of the British Library), started up in 2007, sound map of Serbia would represent a huge contribution to the ambition to collect, systematize and present all the sound materials scattered over the country.

Finally, a big chance for promotion and realization of this idea makes the fact that the Ministry of Culture right now works on the digitalization of cultural goods and makes a strategy for their preservation.

As the counterweight to these favourable conditions, there is an insufficient awareness that local speeches are not irregular but just non-standard forms of a language and they should not be suppressed but cherished and preserved as cultural goods which in the most unique way depict certain climate.

Probably the most missing and necessary assumption for the realization of such an idea is – a project. This project would imply making a plan: collecting sound recordings, i.e. drawing geographic borders for certain linguistic characteristics, training of the interviewers (on the technique of collecting sound recordings, choosing the speakers and the very field research), transcriptions and linguistic scientific data processing and, in the end, digitization by choosing and implementing standards for bibliographic descriptions.¹ Uniting a number of institutions in carrying out this idea is imposed as inevitability. Sharing the job inside the Institute for the Serbian Language and/or in the Department for the Serbian Language and Literature and the National Library, thus among experts of different qualifications – linguists, librarians and computer experts, and under the wings and with the support from the Ministry of Culture, seems to be the most purposive.

A possible role of libraries in realization of the comprehensive project

According to the Law on the library activities (Official Messenger RS 34/94, Act 2) library holdings make books, magazines and newspapers, texts, musical works, fine arts reproductions, atlases, maps of settlements, sound documents, reprographic materials, posters, ads, photo documents, video and film recordings and other works which are copied through printing or in some other way, manuscripts and memorized materials, as well as the reference stuff related to the library materials. Since oral materials are not strictly mentioned anywhere in the Act, the awareness that they could also be legitimate materials is not sufficient even in our library circles. Nevertheless, in IFLA/UNESCO’s Manifesto for Public Libraries “the increase in the awareness on cultural heritage” and “the support for oral tradition” are mentioned among the most important tasks for the libraries. To confirm this, in the year in which the Section for audio-visual and multimedia materials was founded (1999), in the framework of the annual IFLA conference in Thailand, a fore-conference was held on the subject of “Collecting and preserving oral tradition”. Even then, a decade ago, among the presenters’ works the question of digitalization of oral heritage was dominant and the examples of oral collections available on the Net were presented. So, when oral materials are concerned, audio recordings not only of famous persons but of the ordinary people – anonymous story-tellers also belong to legitimate library materials. And since local collections represent socio-cultural, historical and ethnological values which are not only shown in texts but also in speech and folklore, collecting and presenting these recordings

¹ Existing experiences in this field can help in making of this project. One of them is the project *Creation of a digital corpus of Bulgarian dialects* (on which Nikola Ikomonov and Milena Dobreva made a report at the third SEEDI conference held in Cetinje 2007).

could be the biggest contribution to safeguarding and promotion of local culture and its diversity. Considering that modern technologies enable the most efficient aspect of presentation and the greatest accessibility of materials, public libraries could publish collections of “local voices” among other digitalized local materials. Different collections formed at the same time, should not necessarily have a linguistic purpose as primary. Those could also be collections of oral literature and oral history.² Afterwards both could be used for linguistic purposes (as it was the case with the linguistic map of the United Kingdom, in which the recordings from the oral history collection – Millennium Memory Bank 1900-2000 were used).

The effects of library activities in this field would be manifold. Safeguarding and protection of rich local linguistic colouring are the most important of them. Since the accessibility on the Web gives “an opportunity for further development, interpretation and usage of the heritage”, with these even our scientific community would get important sources of research. Spoken recordings which are available online could be used in a series of disciplines: linguistics (sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, dialectology, historic linguistics, etc.), anthropology, ethnology, and so forth. These recordings could be of use for large audience in getting to know linguistic richness of a country, and for those scattered round the world it could make the closest connection with their homeland. Besides, presentation of such materials gives an opportunity to the very libraries to expand a spectrum of their services and to “surprise” their users with diversity of their collections. And finally, small sound collections of public libraries could, lately united and systematized, become an important contribution to the corpus of materials of a future national record and tape library.

(Translated by Gorana Rajović)

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Colorado Voices. <http://archive.li.suu.edu/voices/>

Town Library, Cacak. <http://www.cacak-dis.org.yu/digbibl/index.html>

Library of American Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/idex.html>

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. <http://www.kultura.sr.gov.yu/?jez=sc&p=633>

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. <http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=3639>

National Library of Serbia. <http://www.digital.nbs.bg.ac.yu/scc/muzikalije.php>

² The oral history - a scientific discipline dealing with the theory and practice of recording, keeping and interpretation of the information based on personal experience and attitudes of the examinees who were the participants or witnesses of certain events. One of the most famous collections of oral history is the collection American memory in the Library of American Congress in Washington, DC.

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ЗВУЧНА КАРТА СРБИЈЕ

Министарство културе Републике Србије је међу циљеве свог деловања за период од 2008. до 2011. године истакло очување културне баштине а као један од стратешких приоритета „снимање, ревизију, докатегоризацију и дигитализацију материјалног и нематеријалног културног наслеђа“. Будући да у земљи још увек није ратификована УНЕСКО-ва Конвенција о очувању нематеријалне културне баштине, постоји опасност да без овог правног инструмента изостану неки битни елементи у утврђивању и категоризацији културних добара а самим тим и стратегији њихове дигитализације. Следећујући ову Конвенцију, по којој у нематеријално културно добро спадају и језици, дијалекти, говори и топонимика, у овом раду се пледира на потребу очувања (путем дигитализације) говорне традиције и локалних језичких варијетета. Читава идеја почива на примеру веб сајта Британске библиотеке на коме је, у оквиру Звучног архива, презентована језичка и дијалекатска мапа Велике Британије.