

Pomak Self-Identifications in Online Blogs – An Insider View

This paper examines the complex nature of the contested identity of the Pomaks on the Balkans in online blogs. Pomaks are considered a living legacy of the complexities of the Balkan history. If we formulate identity as consciousness of belonging to a certain group, Pomaks are a good example how they can belong to several groups at a time and therefore simultaneously have several identities.

The starting point in approaching the topic of investigating the complex linguistic phenomena resulting from the multi-level identity, is the claim that language is a central feature of human identity. Pomak self-identifications have a long history of competing nationalistic ideologies and pre-national religious categories inherited from the Ottoman period (Brunnbauer 2002: 115; Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995: 25; Neuburger 2000: 182; Velinov 2001: 188). Neuburger (2000: 181) claims that no Muslim identity in South Eastern Europe has been more contested than that of the Pomaks.

Historically, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey have contested the identity of Pomaks, each country considering them as their own. Greek scholars regard the Pomaks as the descendants of ancient Thracian tribes who, to quote Seyppel (1989:42) over the centuries were “Hellenized, Latinized, Slavicized, Christianized, and were converted to Islam”. Bulgarian scholars have claimed that using the language is a powerful piece of evidence for determining Pomaks as Bulgarians. Due to the fact that Pomaks speak a Bulgarian dialect with numerous ancient Bulgarian constructions, it is argued that they must be of Bulgarian origin. Turkish scholars have abandoned the linguistic and cultural arguments, setting forth the religious affiliation of Pomaks. They trace the origins of Pomaks back to the descendants of various Turkic peoples who were already settled on the Balkans and had converted to Islam long before the Ottoman conquest in the region.

This paper focuses on analyzing the complex issue of Pomak self-identifications as viewed in online blogs, a view from inside. I use the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of Wodak and Meyer (2014, 2016) to tackle the persons, objects, phenomena processes and actions reflected in the blogs. This includes a selection of discursive strategies, namely, nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification or mitigation. The discourses will be analysed within the framework of stance (Du Bois 2007). Stance is defined as the interacting linguistic features that mark a speaker’s orientation to discourse. The speaker evaluates something (the stance object), and thereby positions himself, and thereby aligns with a second speaker. (Dis-) alignment evolves the variety of possible types of convergent and divergent positions the subjects can take. My concrete linguistic goal in this paper is to explain how aligning and disaligning stances are being built through the complex issue of Pomak self-identifications.

