

Dialect levelling and the change of semiotic space

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Betina's variety is a Croatian Čakavian variety spoken on the island of Murter in central Dalmatia. Romance influence has left visible traces in the island's vocabulary as well as in many other Čakavian varieties of the Eastern Adriatic coast. Betina's variety, while in contact with other more dominant dialectal varieties or the Croatian standard variety, as a consequence of the language accommodation, loses its most salient, mostly Romance, characteristics which leads to the loss of distinctiveness at the local level in favour of distinctiveness at the regional level. This paper proposes a semiotic approach to the problem of dialect levelling and assumes that it occurs not only because of the above mentioned and by many known sociolinguists and dialectologists confirmed reasons, but also as a consequence of alteration and transformation of the semiosphere. In Lotmanian terms, a semiosphere is the semiotic space of the culture in question. Without the semiosphere, language not only does not function, it does not exist. The paper attempts to individualize the extra-linguistic factors of language change that causes the disappearance of characteristic dialectal features of Betina's variety. Since a language or a dialect can function only in interaction with its semiotic space, pertinent to that culture, its change leads to language change and to dialect loss. The analysis will be conducted on a selected lexical corpus of Romance origin and it will involve interviews with young speakers living in Betina. The research is expected to confirm that in Betina, particularly in the vocabulary of young speakers, the Romance elements are rapidly disappearing as a consequence of a rapid disappearance of human practices and cultural objects that once had an important role and which used to create very particular and distinctive semiotic spaces.