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Whose language? Exploring the attitudes of Bulgaria's media elite toward Macedonia's linguistic self-identification

Many nations have their obsessions, myths and long-term aspirations. Bulgaria's dream is called Macedonia. So strong has been this reverie, it pulled Bulgaria into several military conflicts over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Bulgaria has long considered Macedonia to be a part of its land, language and population, but it gained little in open warfare. It never fulfilled in its entirety the claim to Macedonia's land. Macedonia's language, population and identity were never definitively ascertained as Bulgarian. Diplomatic maneuvers did not bring a satisfactory solution, either. Yet the consequences of this yearning shaped Bulgaria's history in many ways and left an imprint on the psyche of more than one generation. The very name Macedonia has become synonymous with unfulfilled promise[1] and it would be a rarity to find a Bulgarian who remains indifferent as the subject is brought up[2].

The following study investigates one aspect of the attitudes toward Macedonia among decision-makers in Bulgaria's contemporary journalism – the 'elite' media professionals who by and large share the beliefs and collective memories of their compatriots. The study, which is a part of a larger journalism research project completed between 2001 and 2007, probes for journalists' attitudes toward Macedonia and tests in a new setting an established model of mass communication, the third-person effect.

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[1] *Istorija na Bulgaria: Uchebnik za kandidat-studenti i zrelostnici* [A history of Bulgaria: A textbook for candidate-students and high-school graduates], ed. by V. Gyuzelev, Marin Drinov Academic Publishers, Sofia 2000.

[2] R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878–1918: A history*, Columbia University Press, New York 1983; R. J. Crampton, *A short history of modern Bulgaria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. 1987; R. J. Crampton, *A concise history of Bulgaria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. 1997.

The author's overarching research interest was to explore elite journalists' perceptual biases and predispositions, and thus attempt to predict how any partiality among media decision makers may affect the overall media tenor in a potentially volatile part of the world. The purpose of this study, on the other hand, was not to ascertain or refute the veracity of certain interpretations of political history of the Balkans. Those are better left to historians.

Bulgaria's aspirations toward Macedonia

When Petar Stoyanov, Bulgaria's then president, said in 1996 that "Macedonia is the most romantic part of Bulgaria's history,"[3] he was well understood by his compatriots. The view of Macedonia as a historically Bulgarian province torn away from the motherland by scheming neighbors and Great Powers is so common that it does not need any further clarification on the streets of Sofia, Plovdiv or Varna. Stoyanov's words captured precisely a popular nostalgic feeling. Macedonian media condemned them as yet another manifestation of "Bulgaria's revisionism."[4]

Since mid 19th century, Bulgaria had been one of the several nation-states – basically, all of Macedonia's neighbors sans Albania[5] – who claimed at least some of the territory and population of Macedonia as rightfully theirs. Stavrianos wrote that Bulgaria was the first nation to assert its rights over the Macedonian territory and population on ethnic and religious grounds, even before Bulgarians regained their statehood in 1878 after five centuries of subjugation by the Ottoman Empire[6].

Bulgarian Principality briefly comprised most of Macedonian lands between the San-Stefano Peace Treaty of March 3, 1878, which ended the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War, and July 13, 1878, when the Berlin Treaty marked the birth of the modern Bulgarian state, albeit in an abridged format[7].

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[3] BTA, "Daily bulletin in English", November 21, 1996.

[4] *Nova Macedonia*, "Editorial" 1996, p. 7.

[5] It is perhaps a twist of historical irony that Macedonia's governments in the 1990s have been quite ambiguous in their policies toward the large Albanian minority, which encompasses about 25% of the population. In 2001, clashes between Macedonians and Albanians put the country on the brink of a full-fledged civil war.

[6] L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York University Press, New York 2000.

[7] Bulgaria's official state holiday is still March 3, and not July 13, reflecting the popular attitudes toward these two events. R. J. Crampton, op. cit.

For generations of Bulgarians thereafter, these five and a half months have been perceived as a vicious slide from triumph to disaster, which has never been fully amended. The Berlin Treaty stripped Bulgaria of some 60% of its territories accorded to the newly liberated country through the San-Stefano agreement. Crampton, among others, stressed that the loss of so-called San-Stefano Bulgaria, and above all of Macedonia, "burnt deeply into the Bulgarian national psyche."[8] Indeed, he concluded that most of Bulgaria's great decisions – most of them resulting in great failures – over external policy since 1878 have hinged on the issue of Macedonia.

All told, in the 20th century, Bulgaria fought four wars, inspired by the national ideal of regaining Macedonia's land and population, and restoring the desired San-Stefano boundaries. Numerous guerilla actions, political killings and unspeakable suffering of the civilian population resulted from the attempts to resolve the so-called Macedonian Question by force. After decades of struggle, Bulgaria ended up with only a relatively small part of the Macedonian territories it had claimed, but enduring scores of humiliations in the process[9].

As far as Bulgaria is concerned, military or any other radical action had not been on the agenda since the end of the Second World War[10] and the Macedonian Question remained on the backburner of the Balkan diplomacy as an issue for quite some time. It resurfaced in a new form with the end of the communist rule in Bulgaria in 1989–1990 and the turmoil in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The return of this once hotly contested issue proved it had never truly gone away in the first place, even though it has now morphed along with the new geopolitical realities[11].

Duncan Perry observed in a 1995 chapter on Bulgarian nationalism: "That Bulgaria still does not recognize Macedonian nationality is both backward looking and a measure of importance of history to Balkan people."[12]

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[8] R. J. Crampton, *A concise history*..., op. cit., p. 240.

[9] R. J. Crampton, *A concise history*..., op. cit.

[10] That is, since the 1947 proposal of Bulgaria's then leader Georgi Dimitrov to Marshal Tito for a Balkan federation of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, which would include Macedonia.

[11] J. Pettifer, *FYROM after Ochrid*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst 2002; *The new Macedonian question*, ed. by J. Pettifer, St. Martin's Press, New York 1999; J. Phillips, *Macedonia: Warlords and rebels in the Balkans*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2004.

[12] D. M. Perry, *Bulgarian nationalism: Permutations of the past*, in: P. Latawski, *Contemporary nationalism in East Central Europe*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1995, p. 62.

The language dispute

Anderson, who posited that nations are "imagined communities," described common language as the precondition to establishing national distinctiveness[13]. In the absence of substantial religious differences between the majority of Balkan neighbors (Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Romanians, Macedonians are all nominally Eastern Orthodox), the language, as Todorova[14] observed, developed into a principal source of national identity in the Balkans. Bulgarians have long prided themselves as the land where the Cyrillic script was developed in the 9th century CE[15]. May 24 is celebrated widely as the Day of Slavic Writing, with Byzantine brothers Cyril and Methodius, and their immediate pupils having been canonized by the Orthodox Church[16]. By most accounts, May 24 is one of the best-loved annual holidays[17] and Bulgarians traditionally are taught at school to cherish their own language[18]. For instance, a recent suggestion by a hapless expert to switch from writing in Cyrillic to using the Latin alphabet (similarly to Croatia, which shares essentially the same language with Serbia, but with a different script) was met with a firestorm of protests and popular indignation[19].

Bulgaria has never recognized the existence of a separate Macedonian language, instead considering it to be an artificial creation based on a dialect. Only in February 1999 did Bulgaria relinquish half-heartedly its stern denial to even consider an alternative proposition[20]. This argument spanning most of the 1990s became known as the "language dispute," and it

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[13] B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London 1983.

[14] M. Todorova, *Balkan identities: Nation and memory*, Hurst & Company, London 2004.

[15] R. J. Crampton, *A short history...*, op. cit.

[16] Bulgaria's major university in Sofia bears the name of St. Climent Ohridski, the most prominent trainee of Cyril and Methodius.

[17] Not the least because it is coming close to the end of the traditional school year, which no doubt makes this time exciting for most students.

[18] C. D. Karadjov, *Unimagining a nation: Media framing of the language dispute between Bulgaria and Macedonia in the 1990s*, Paper presented at the 18th Annual Intercultural Communication Conference, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, March 2001.

[19] S. Bozhilov, *Za i protiv kirilitsata* [For and against the Cyrillic script], "Nova televizija", May 16, 2005.

[20] J. Phillips, op. cit.

strained significantly the relationship between the two countries. Bulgaria's refusal to acknowledge the language of Macedonia as "Macedonian" produced spectacular diplomatic snafus, especially when it came to signing official documents. Bulgarian diplomats refused to do so in both languages as the protocol requires. Several potentially useful agreements between these Balkan neighbors were put off indefinitely if only for the absence of linguistic accord[21].

New governments in Skopje and Sofia took a more moderate approach toward each other in 1998–1999. Particularly, Bulgaria's ruling coalition felt strong enough to brave the public opinion, bringing a *de facto* resolution to the language issue for the time being[22]. The issue was not resolved, however, but likely just "swept under the rug" for the sake of diplomatic convenience[23].

Bulgarians are far from neutral toward Macedonia today and the instability of Macedonia itself makes it a country potentially vulnerable to foreign influences. National surveys of voting-age Bulgarian population found in 1999 and again in 2006 that some three-quarters of the respondents[24] considered Macedonians to be of Bulgarian ethnic origin, and the Macedonian language – a mere dialect of Bulgarian[25]. School history textbooks adhere to the position that the present-day Macedonian nation is an artificial creation and a result of political manipulation, coercion and open violence, mostly instigated by Serbia, but also by Greece and even Romania[26].

For instance, Gyuzelev[27], in a popular textbook widely used in high schools, offers a typical explanation of the transformation of Bulgarian populace and especially language into "Macedonian" at the end of 19th

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[21] C. D. Karadjov, op. cit.

[22] Standard, *Makedonskijat ezik – naj-posle reshenie* [Macedonian language – a solution at last], p. 2–3, 1999.

[23] As above, p. 3.

[24] Unfortunately, the results of this survey were not broken by ethnicity. A popular speculation that could be heard in Sofia in the late 1990s had it that Bulgaria's Muslims (about 10% of the population) may be biased in their responses toward non-recognition of Macedonian nation/language because of the tensions between the Albanian (Muslim) minority in Macedonia and the mainstream Slav population. This is not very plausible, but possible.

[25] BBSS Gallup International, *Bulgaria: Annual index*, BBSS, Sofia 1999.

[26] *Istorija na Bulgaria...*, op. cit.

[27] As above.

century: "Serb propaganda indoctrinated the population that it is not of Bulgarian origin, but of Slavic, with its own history and culture, different from that of Bulgarians. Authors of Macedonism prepared textbooks using Macedonian dialect, and adding Serb words."[28]

Such views have been sanctioned for a long time by most authoritative state-endorsed historical literature, such as the 900-plus-page volume jointly published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History and Bulgarian Language Institute in mid 1970s[29].

The scientific merit of such claims from a historical, linguistic or political science perspective is beyond the scope of this work. The climate of opinion they have created, on the other hand, is quite definitive.

By and large, Bulgarian media seem to reflect a predominant understanding of Macedonians as fugitives from their "true" Bulgarian character. Media are particularly critical of what is perceived as an official government policy to subdue the expressions of Bulgarian identity on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia[30]. Stories of people beaten by authorities in Macedonia for identifying themselves as "Bulgarian" popped up with some regularity in Bulgarian newspapers in the 1990s[31].

In a mid-1990s study of the image of the "other" on the Balkans, Sofia-based ACCESS Foundation found that media in Bulgaria tend to present Macedonians as a generally friendly people with a flawed, Serb-leaning and pro-communist government[32].

The ACCESS study also found that although Bulgarian media allow for alternative opinions on the nature of Macedonia to appear, mostly in the form of Q&A interviews, the press usually frames the problem from a Bulgarian viewpoint. Contradicting views, when they are present in Bul-

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[28] As above, p. 253.

[29] *Macedonia: Documents and materials*, ed. by V. Bozhinov and L. Panayotov, Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), Sofia 1987.

[30] See: *Standart, Otnovo biti bulgari v Makedonija* [Bulgarians assaulted again in Macedonia], p. 1–2, September 25, 1996.

[31] They still do, although the most recent (February 2005) story that preoccupied Bulgarian media was on a journalist with a dual Serbian-Bulgarian citizenship who was sentenced (and pardoned) by the authorities in Serbia for calling someone a "Serboman," that is, blindly serving Serb interests. (SOURCE)

[32] ACCESS, *Obrazat na drugija na Balkanite* [The image of the other on the Balkans], Sofia 1999.

garian media, are usually rebuffed on the spot by pundits or qualified in some way that casts doubt on their credibility.

The non-profit Macedonian Scientific Institute in Sofia is a major publisher of related literature. This organization claims on its web site to have a "long-term research programme."[33] Some of the titles of its publications provided for reference on the web site are quite self-explanatory: *The National Liberation Movement of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and Thrace, vol. 1–3*; *The Bulgarians in Aegean Macedonia, Myth or Reality; The Fabrication of the So Called Macedonian Language; Greek and Serb Propagandists in Macedonia, New Documents*[34].

While textbooks and scholarly literature in Bulgaria seem to favor a particular interpretation of Macedonia's history, no diversity of opinion on Macedonian issues can be found in popular literature, either[35]. Publications advocating "non-Bulgarian" views on the problem are virtually non-existent on the bookstands[36].

Of course, as already noted, quite substantial numbers among Macedonians would not agree with any Bulgarian claims toward their land, language or nationality[37], which creates the potential for a serious conflict. The disagreements are especially acute at the linguistic level, because unlike claims to territory or national identity, which can be sidestepped in bilateral relations or under international pressure, the refusal to recognize a Macedonian language has already lead to significant diplomatic tensions. It also hits at the core of national identity as it is understood in the Balkans.

In this respect, understanding journalists' perceptual biases becomes even more important because media professionals, by the virtue of their occupation, are quite sensitive to issues of language and also have the

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[33] Macedonian Scientific Institute (2004), *Macedonian Scientific Institute – History* [Online]. Available from http://www.macedoniainfo.com/index_eng.html [Retrieved: August 29, 2004].

[34] As above.

[35] Quite predictably, these views are met with consternation by the authorities in Macedonia, and, as far as one can observe, by a significant numbers in the population.

[36] T. Petev, *Knigoizdavaneto v Bulgaria – predpriemachestvo i otgovornost* [Book publishing in Bulgaria: Entrepreneurship and responsibility], Unpublished lecture, Department of Journalism, Sofia University (May 16, 2000).

[37] M. Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, war and the Great Powers, 1804–1999*, Viking, New York 2000.

ability to be "the agents of power," following Herbert Altschull's self-explanatory term[38].

The third-person effect

One can only wonder why the third-person effect was not conceptualized earlier than 1983, the year of the formulation of its basic hypothesis. The main premise – that others are more susceptible to extraneous influences that we are – is instantly recognizable by most of us. To make up for the lost time, since 1983 the third-person effect has received full attention from researchers, and the empirical evidence of its manifestations is abundant.

In fact, Davison, whose 1983 oft-cited article first conceptualized the third-person effect, acknowledged to have nurtured the idea for years. The initial thrust to Davison's thought came from the story of an all-Black military unit, stationed in the Pacific, which was withdrawn from combat area and disbanded, after being showered with Japanese propaganda leaflets. The flyers contained appeals to the Black soldiers not to fight in "a white-men war," in which Blacks, ostensibly, had nothing to gain[39].

Unit's commanding officers, all Caucasian, feared that the Japanese propaganda may indeed find fertile ground in soldiers' psyche, and resorted to preventive action. As Davison pointed out, no evidence was ever found that Black soldiers' morale was affected. The effect of that Japanese propaganda attempt on officers' thinking and decisions, on the other hand, was striking[40].

With this episode in mind, Davison tested the idea of perceptions of differential impact of mass communication, and formulated this statement: "People will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on attitudes and behaviors of others."[41]

Generally, individuals will expect persuasive communication to have greater effect on others – members of any different group – than on them-

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[38] J. H. Altschull, *Agents of power: The media and public policy* (2nd ed.), Longman, New York 1995.
[39] W. P. Davison, *The third-person effect in communication*, "Public Opinion Quarterly" 1983, no. 47, p. 1–15.
[40] As above.
[41] As above, p. 3.

selves. Davison predicted that such expectations, justified or not, may provoke action on part of those, who perceive themselves immune to the particular persuasive message, but see others at risk to be swayed in some respect by its influence. Hence, the officers' decision to remove the all-Black unit from its positions, ostensibly avoiding mass desertions, or worse, mutiny. Such seemingly prudent reaction on part of the commanders, was, in fact, entirely unjustified, except for the strong perception that these U.S. troops were affected by the Japanese propaganda[42].

After this introduction of the third-person effect hypothesis, it has been tested empirically in numerous settings, such as the persuasive effect of product commercials and PSAs[43], support for censorship on pornography[44], voting behavior[45], negative political advertising[46], defamation[47], television shows[48], impact on policy makers[49], public opinion and policies[50],

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[42]   As above.

[43]   A. Gunther, E. Thorson, *Perceived persuasive effects of product commercials and public service announcements: Third-person effects in new domains*, "Communication Research" 1992, no, 19, p. 574–596.

[44]   A. Gunther, *Overrating the X-rating: The third-person effect and support for censorship of pornography*, "Journal of Communication" 1995, no. 45, p. 21–39.

[45]   D. Rucinski and C. Salmon, *The "other" as the vulnerable voter: A study of the third-person effect in 1988 U.S. presidential campaign*, "International Journal of Public Opinion Research" 1990, no. 2, p. 345–368.

[46]   J. Cohen and R. G. Davis, *Third-person effects and the differential impact in negative political advertising*, "Journalism Quarterly" 1991, no. 68, p. 680–688.

[47]   J. Cohen, D. Mutz, V. Price and A. Gunther, *Perceived impact of defamation: An experiment on third- person effects*, "Public Opinion Quarterly" 1998, no. 52, p. 161–173.

[48]   D. L. Lasorsa, *Real and perceived effects of "America"*, "Journalism Quarterly" 1989, no. 66, p. 373–378.

[49]   D. L. Lasorsa, *How media affect policy-makers: The third person effect*, in: *Public Opinion, the Press and Public Policy*, ed. J. D. Kennamer, Praeger, New York 1992.

[50]   D. C. Mutz, *The influence of perceptions of media influence: Third person effects and the public expression of opinions*, "International Journal of Public Opinion Research" 1989, no. 1, p. 3–23; D. C. Mutz, *The political effects of perceptions of mass opinion*, "Research in Micropolitics" 1994, no. 4, p. 143–167; D. C. Mutz, *Reading Public Opinion: The Influence of news coverage on perceptions of public sentiment*, "Public Opinion Quarterly" 1997, vol. 61, no. 3, p. 431–451; D. C. Mutz, *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect Political Attitudes*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1998.

the O. J. Simpson trial[51], to mention only a few. Cohen and Davis,[52] in particular, found that the magnitude of third-person effect is more pronounced with negative news, or with perceived negative framing of the story's characters.

Neuwirth and Frederick further scrutinized some of the background assumptions in third-person effect studies[53], while Perloff (1993, 1999) and Paul et al. (2000) offered some comprehensive and useful reviews of the third-person effect literature[54].

Of particular interest to this project are the findings by Rucinski and Salmon, who studied how respondents perceived that harm to "others" might be caused by certain messages[55]. These researchers built up on Davison's suggestion that when communication is understood as biased or propagandistic in some way, deservedly or not, the perceived differential impact on "others" vs. "us" is maximized[56].

A by-product of this finding is that people who hold more extreme views on an issue will think of others as more fallible to "misleading" information. When such strong ideologues (in the broadest sense of this term, which certainly includes nationalists) detect that media are framing their cause in a negative way, this will trigger concern not about their own beliefs, but about the "vulnerable others" who may be swayed by the "misrepresentation" of reality. In a study by Perloff, highly-involved supporters of a cause (Israelis and Palestinians) were found to exaggerate the magnitude and directional influence of news coverage on a group of "regular" television viewers, and the resulting reaction was rather hostile[57]. Both sides accused media of prejudice, favoritism, bias and lack of fair-

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[51] P. D. Driscoll, M. Salwen, *Self-perceived knowledge of the O. J. Simpson trial: Third-person perception and perceptions of guilt*, "Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly" 1997, no. 74 (3), p. 541–556.

[52] J. Cohen, and R. G. Davis, op. cit.

[53] K. Neuwirth, E. Frederick, *Extending the framework of third-, first-, and second-person effects*, "Mass Communication and Society" 2002, no. 5(2), p. 113–140.

[54] See: B. Paul, M. B. Salwen and M. Dupagne, *The third-person effect: A meta-analysis of the perceptual hypothesis*, "Mass Communication and Society" 2000, no. 3(1), p. 57–85; R. M. Perloff, *Third-person effect research 1983–1992: A review and synthesis*, "International Journal of Public Opinion Research" 1993, no. 5, p. 167–184; R. M. Perloff, *The third-person effect: A critical review and synthesis*, "Media Psychology" 1999, no. 1, p. 353–378.

[55] D. Rucinski and C. Salmon, op. cit.

[56] W. P. Davidson, op. cit.

[57] R. M. Perloff, op. cit.

ness. Quite similar to Perloff's were findings by Vallone et al.[58] In these studies, mainstream broadcast materials were used as stimuli, which makes them easily generalizable.

The explanation of such maximizing of the third-person effect given by Perloff is that respondents attend more closely and react stronger to schemata-discrepant information in the news[59]. To put this in terms relevant to this study, viewers who hold stronger nationalist beliefs and therefore possess more rigid, unyielding information-processing frames in their minds, will be disturbed by views in the news that are inconsistent with their own schemata. Perceiving hostile frames, the highly-involved persons will manifest fear that "incorrect" framing of the news will sway the undecided, weak, "immature" others.

Little doubt exists today that the third-person effect is a powerful perceptual artifact, which often is not grounded in the reality. It assumes highly involved audiences who see things in a different way and expect to behave differently from "others."

The third-person effect is an important phenomenon as far as professional journalists are concerned, because one of its most direct manifestations may be the willingness to impose **information restriction**s on the "vulnerable others" – which media decision makers are in the perfect position to achieve.

Method

This study presented two methodological challenges. The first one was the complexity of the problem, which led to some compromises in order to make the questionnaire and statistical analysis manageable. The second issue related to designing a sampling procedure that would identify and target only a certain professional elite among Bulgarian journalists, that is, those who hold the most power in determining media content.

Sample. During the changes of the 1990s, journalists' organizations built a membership that was hardly inclusive of all professionals in this field. Simply put, Bulgarian journalists did not seem likely to join a pro-

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[58] R. P. Vallone, L. Ross and M. R. Lepper, *The hostile media phenomenon: Biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the "Beirut Massacre"*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1985, no. 49, p. 577–585.
    [59] R. M. Perloff, op. cit.

fessional organization[60]. In part, this was a reaction to the times before 1989–1990 when virtually all full-time journalists, as well as writers, poets, artists, actors, musicians had to be members of their respective professional organizations in order to be allowed to practice their craft[61].

Another reason for the Bulgarian journalists' apparent aversion to professional organizations is that news professionals did not find them helpful in times of economic and political turmoil[62]. The fact of the matter is that a majority of the Bulgarian journalists has not become organized into any formal group. Journalists in Bulgaria are not required to obtain a license or registration to practice, so there is no professional roster. Therefore, editors, producers, reporters, photographers, freelancers and other media professionals are not listed comprehensively in any publicly available source.

To tackle this problem, this study conceptualized a sub-population of Bulgarian journalists, namely, the *elite journalists*, and sampled them using a two-step procedure.

First, the author obtained a 1998 publication by a major Bulgarian news agency, the *Who's Who of Bulgarian Journalism* (Sofia Press, 1998). In the preface, the editors explain their selection. Editors-in-chief of all Bulgarian media were approached with a request to nominate the most influential[63] editors and reporters on their staff. The resulting list contained about 400 names of journalists along with short biographical sketches and home addresses. After a revision, a copy of the journalists' *Who's Who* was mailed to 10 well-known editors at several news organizations with a request to update the original list[64]. In the end, the initial 400 names on the

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[60] I. G. Nikoltchev, *The post-communist Bulgarian journalist: Transition to democracy* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland – College Park), "Dissertation Abstracts International", 59, no. 10A, (1998): 3683. This is also confirmed by author's own experience. During his times as an active journalist (1990–1997), he recalls working with only a handful of reporters and editors who belonged to a journalistic organization.

[61] Even the process of becoming a journalist was tightly controlled: In order to be admitted to the Journalism Department at Sofia University, the prospective student had to be cleared by the regional Communist Party organization.

[62] E. Ognianova, *The transitional media system of post-Communist Bulgaria*, "Journalism Monographs" 1997, no. 162.

[63] Influence was defined as "being the best in the profession" as judged by their peers (Sofia Press, 1998, p. 7).

[64] The principal consultants for this revision were: Boyko Vassilev, anchor with the Bulgarian National Television; Dimitri Ivanov, commentator for Sega; Lyudmil Karavasilev, representative of United Bulgarian Bank and professor at the Department

list were reduced to 189 (eliminating all retirees, potential retirees, transfers to other occupations, and a number of provincial media professionals).

The second part – adding names – took considerably longer, because there was less agreement on that issue. The author, who accrued 10 years of journalistic experience in Bulgaria, had to intervene much more often, mostly by asking questions about the career prospects of a particular person. After several iterations of the list, an additional 59 names were added, all of them editors and senior reporters who rose to prominence during the 1990s.

The resulting list had 248 journalists, who, for all practical intents and purposes, could be considered the most influential individuals in Bulgarian journalism, above all with respect to the topic of this study[65].

The method may not be perfect, but it is far superior to having a convenience sample, as is often the case in studies of foreign journalists[66]. It is also much better, in this author's opinion, than randomly selecting journalists from a proprietary list assembled by unknown parameters[67]. The largest deficiency of this selection procedure is the undeniable degree of subjectivity in determining who is an influential journalist in Bulgaria and who is not. Yet it proved to be the only feasible and methodologically acceptable way of creating a sampling frame for this study.

Questionnaire. As previously noted, this project was a part of a much more complex study. All 248 journalists selected as "elite" received the full study questionnaire, and 133 completed questionnaires[68] were re-

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of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University; Milen Marchev, editor-in-chief of Sega Magazine and publisher of Metropolis Magazine; Venelina Gotcheva, editor-in-chief of 24 Hours; Georgi Nedelchev, senior editor with Monitor; Vassil Zahariev, deputy editor-in-chief of Standard; Lilia Popova, senior reporter with Sega; Yovo Nikolov of Capital; Iva Petroni, anchor with the Bulgarian National Television. The major consideration to select this particular people was author's personal knowledge of their careers and experience.

[65] That is, the design of this list excluded some quite prominent journalists who dealt exclusively with issues of fashion or technology, along with some game show hosts, whose prominence was by no means relevant to the studied problems.

[66] D. H. Weaver, *Journalists around the world: Commonalities and differences*, in: *The global journalist: News people around the world*, eds. D. H. Weaver and W. Wu, Hampton Press, Cresskill, NJ 1998.

[67] It is also much cheaper – use of proprietary lists of professionals in Bulgaria is no less expensive as it would be in the United States, about $2 per name.

[68] Another 6 questionnaires were partially filled, which excluded them from the scope of this study.

turned, for a response rate of 53.6%. The questionnaires were delivered by the author and associates to the respective media organizations and collected a few days later (with the exception of several provincial journalists, who received and returned the questionnaires by mail). More than a few journalists required a repeated request to complete the survey, yet the pressure was kept to a minimum and participation was entirely voluntary, without any incentives.

A Likert scale measuring journalists' attitudes was constructed following Eagly and Chaiken's recommendations[69]. All questions were asked in the context of "self" – that is, what the journalist thinks about the issue, vs. "others" – conceptualized as other Bulgarians (presumably, non-journalists).

The specific statements used for the Likert scale on language were generated from the literature and subjected to a pre-test with 87 students in two Bulgarian universities. The pretest eliminated items with low item-total score correlations. The resulting reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the remaining 10 items on the Likert scale was found to be .72 during the pre-test, which was deemed appropriate for use in the actual study.

To test for the third-person effect, Bulgarian journalists were asked to compare themselves as a group to two other groups. The situation, as presented, located the journalists and the said two groups of "others" in Macedonia, as explained below.

The first set of "others" was labeled "foreign observers." This term gained widespread use in Bulgarian media in the 1990s, starting with the foreign observers who arrived for the first democratic elections in June 1990s. It was mostly used after that to label scores of Westerners and non-Westerners who were monitoring the situation in former Yugoslavia during the 1991–1995 civil wars. By the early 2000s, Macedonia hosted some 5,000 such foreign observers at all times[70], and the very term was an acceptable shortcut in Bulgarian media for a non-military representative who had arrived to monitor a dangerous situation on behalf of a major international organization (e.g., the United Nations, European Union, NATO, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

The second set of "others" was conceptualized as Bulgarian tourists vacationing in Macedonia, which is a common occurrence, especially in

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[69] A. H. Eagly and S. Chaiken, *The psychology of attitudes*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1993, p. 51–55 and p. 64–72.

[70] J. Phillips, op. cit.

the cities of Ohrid (on the eponymous lake), Prespa and Struga[71], and in the capital of Skopje.

None of the situations is out of question, even though an element of artificiality exists in this as in most other third-person effect studies[72].

Methodological limitations. This study has two obvious limitations. The first one is related to the relatively small sample size and the non-random sampling procedures, which may have introduced biases in the sample selection or obscured some valid inferences. Yet obtaining limited data is better than no data at all – and given the dearth of research on Bulgarian journalists (Nikoltchev's 1998 project was the only serious attempt in the area during the 1990s), this study should be viewed as a preliminary exploration of a potentially very interesting subject.

The second limitation refers to the development of the instrument of this study. Again, to this author's knowledge, no researcher in Bulgaria has ever attempted to quantify attitudes toward Macedonia, with the exception of the occasional question or two included in other polls. The exploratory nature of the study makes some mistakes inevitable on such a complex topic. Only subsequent systematic research can lead to the full validation of sampling approaches, questions and findings presented here.

Research questions and hypotheses. Two overall research questions were posited for this study:

RQ1: *What is the attitude of elite Bulgarian journalists on the issue of Macedonian language, defined as whether Macedonian language is a mere dialect of Bulgarian or a separate language?*

RQ2: *What do elite Bulgarian journalists think is the average attitude of the rest of Bulgarians (non-journalists) on the same issue?*

Two hypotheses were formulated as well to test for the third-person effect on the issue of Macedonian language:

H1: *On the issue of Macedonian language, Bulgarian journalists would consider themselves to be less likely to undergo an attitude change under the influence of Macedonian media when compared with other Bulgarians (non-journalists).*

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[71] Ohrid, Struga, Prespa are names tightly related to Bulgarian history, as Ohrid was the capital of King Samuil, claimed today by both Bulgarians and Macedonians as the leader who ruled during a 'golden age' of his kingdom. Both sides are calling it, respectively, Great Bulgaria or Great Macedonia.

[72] R. M. Perloff, *Ego-involvement*, op. cit.

H2: *On the issue of Macedonian language, Bulgarian journalists would consider themselves to be less likely to undergo an attitude change under the influence of Macedonian media when compared with foreigners (foreign observers).*

Results

The Likert scale designed to measure the attitude toward Macedonian language comprised 10 statements selected during the pre-test, each item coded on a five-point scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with a midpoint of "undecided/cannot tell." Some of the items had reverse coding to forestall any design artifacts in the questionnaire, which was re-coded during analysis. Overall, results closer to 1 mean higher agreement with the general statement that Macedonia's language is a mere dialect of Bulgarian, and results closer to 5 mean stronger disagreement with this position.

The first task of this research was to address any potential reliability issues, so Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both Likert scale sets (journalists rating themselves and journalist rating other Bulgarians). The first alpha came out as .75 and the second was .71, which affirmed the stability of the scale from the pretest phase.

The next step was to produce a summated rating, or an index, using the Likert scale items. On the set of questions referring to journalist's judgment of their own attitude toward Macedonian language's nature and origin, the mean was 1.51, with a SD = .81, SE mean = .70 and n = 133. This is a strong indicator that elite Bulgarian journalists were very much in agreement with the position that Macedonian language is a dialect of Bulgarian, and not an independently-developed language. Journalists evaluated the rest of Bulgarians with a mean score of 1.64 (SD = .68, SE mean = .57, n = 133).

The overall difference between these means was not significant, which is indicative that Bulgarian journalists consider themselves to be of the same mind on the issue of language as their average Bulgarian counterparts (again, this is what journalists think). A strong predisposition toward non-acceptance of the Macedonian language is apparent from this survey. For instance, despite the presence of a midpoint on the questionnaire, only about 2.2% of answers on all 20 items (10+10) fell into this category. This hints at established preferences among respondents, who obviously displayed little hesitation on the subject.

Third-person effect. The section of the questionnaire devoted to the third-person effect asked respondents (Bulgarian journalists) to answer how much Macedonian media might influence their own opinions about the nature and origin of Macedonian language. The two reference groups of "others" in this case were "Bulgarian tourists" and "foreign observers," all hypothetically sharing the same hotel with the journalists.

The self-reported assessment of respondents' knowledge of Macedonian media showed some inconclusiveness, averaging 5.03 on the 10-point scale (SD = 2.47, SE mean = .22), where 1 meant "absolutely no knowledge" and 10 – "extremely knowledgeable." This is not very surprising, because Macedonia does not boast particularly influential media and Macedonian newspapers, although not completely unavailable, are generally rare in Bulgaria. It also likely means that journalists based their judgment of media influence mostly on assumptions, that is, on preconceived notions rather than on solid observations.

Judging themselves on a 10-point scale, with 0 meaning "no influence at all" to 10 meaning "extremely strong influence" (of Macedonian media), journalists yielded a predictably low mean of 2.06 (n = 133, SD = 1.54, SE mean = .13). Obviously, the respondents saw very little chance that anything they view or read in Macedonian media may change their established viewpoint that Macedonia's language is a dialect of Bulgarian and not a separate language.

The hypothetical visiting Bulgarian group (tourists), as perceived by the journalists, was estimated to average 2.49 (n = 133, SD = 1.69, SE mean = .15). A paired-samples t-test was used to compare what respondents thought of their own likelihood of attitude change vs. the chance of such a change among the Bulgarian tourists residing in the same hypothetical hotel and subjected to the same presumed media influences. The paired difference was deemed to be significant at the ($p < .005$, $t = -2.92$, $df = 132$), thus rejecting the null hypothesis.

This finding **confirmed the presence of a third-person effect** as it concerns the perceived stronger influence of Macedonian media on Bulgarian tourists ("the others") compared with a group of elite Bulgarian journalists ("us"). In other words, elite Bulgarian journalists perceived their compatriots as more likely to be swayed by Macedonian media on the issue whether Macedonian language is a separate language (as is the official position of Macedonia) rather than the Bulgarian dogma that it is a dialect.

When the group of "others" was conceptualized as "foreign observers," the results were even more **uniformly supportive of the third-person**

effect. On the language issue, "foreigners" were rated with an average of 5.52 on the 10-point scale (n = 132, SD = 2.37, SE mean = .21). This lead to a significant difference with what journalists considered to be the likelihood of changing their own attitudes (p < .001, t = −14.24, df = 131).

This in itself presented definitive evidence in favor of the third-person effect when Bulgarian journalists are comparing the influence of Macedonian media on themselves and foreigners. Unlike the previous case, however, when the "others" were conceptualized as visiting non-journalist compatriots, in this case respondents clearly considered foreigners to be more susceptible to media influence. Such findings support the notion that a stronger third-person effect is present in comparisons with foreigners, which is consistent with research such as Perloff[73], among others.

Another questions probed whether personal contacts with Macedonians may lead to a re-evaluation of respondent's position on the language issue. It yielded a mean of 4.07 on the five-point scale, with 5 indicating "strong disagreement" (SD = .98, SE mean = .08, n = 135). This shows the unwillingness of sampled elite journalists to yield to any other opinion, even when it is expressed to them in person, and not mediated by mass communication.

Discussion

The fact that elite journalists in Bulgaria believe they are sharing attitudes presumed to be common in Bulgaria is not surprising at all and does not carry automatically negative connotations. Media professionals' seeming unwillingness to accept any other point of view, at least on the issue of linguistic identity of Macedonia, is a bit more troubling, though. After all, even if one accepts that Macedonian language was created artificially, it becomes apparent to anyone who has ever traveled to Macedonia that most locals insist on their distinctiveness from Bulgarians. Why Bulgaria's most influential journalists are unwilling to put history behind and accept this reality is an issue that merits further investigation. Journalists by definition are supposed to present the world as it is, not as they wish it to be[74]. In this sense, the findings of the present study are somewhat disheartening.

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[73] Perloff, *Ego-involvement*, op. cit.
[74] B. Kovach, T. Rosenstiel, *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*, Crown, New York 2001.

It is hardly a surprise, too, that Bulgarian journalists will see their own compatriots as more difficult to sway on Macedonia-related issues than some possibly "clueless" foreigners. Bulgarians growing in their own country are presumed to share the same culture, not the least stemming from textbooks, media, collective mythology, and so on. The surprise came with the finding that elite Bulgarian journalists clearly do not trust Bulgarian visitors (tourists) to remain "unspoiled" by Macedonian media on the language issue. It is an unexpected result, because Bulgarian journalists' opinion of what other Bulgarians think on the language issue also did not promise such a development (there was no significant difference between the two variables). It is clearly a matter for further study why journalists view themselves as more "resistant" than their compatriots.

The evidence of a strong third-person effect when the "others" are assumed to be foreigners is logical and has been repeatedly confirmed in studies[75]. Bulgarians have long perceived themselves to be victims of the foreign Great Powers in losing Macedonia[76]. The underlying assumption is that foreigners (particularly Westerners) are "against Bulgaria" or at least care more about furthering their own national agenda than upholding historical justice in the Balkans. This probably accounts for the belief among the respondents that non-Bulgarians, if not a priori hostile, at the very least will have no vested interest in the Bulgarian cause and will fall prey to whoever advises them.

Patronizing attitudes toward Macedonia among Bulgaria's media professionals are not a mere matter of scholarly interest. A renowned Bulgarian journalist, Albena Shkodrova, explains the mechanisms which Bulgaria, as a larger and economically and militarily stronger country may use to bully its smaller neighbor[77]. Shkodrova discusses in particular the "lure of the Bulgarian passport"[78], which unlike its Macedonian counterpart opens the doors to virtually the entire world without the need for a visa (the United States, however, are a notable exception to visa-free travel for Bulgarians). Higher levels of economic prosperity in Bulgaria – especially after the entry into the European Union in 2007 – made it appealing to

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[75] R. M. Perloff, *Ego-involvement*, op. cit.

[76] R. J. Crampton, *A short history*, op. cit.

[77] A. Shkodrova, *Macedonia: Bulgaria's warm embrace*, in: *Balkan Crisis Report No. 537 by Institute for War and Peace Reporting* [Online], Accessed Jan. 21, 2005 from: http://iwpr.net.

[78] As above, p. 5.

Macedonians, whose own economy has been stalled by years of war and mismanagement[79].

Bulgarian government has instituted a relatively easy way for Macedonians to "reclaim" their Bulgarian identity, which includes full stipends for students wishing to study in Bulgaria[80] and granting of Bulgarian citizenship based on a simple "affidavit of origin"[81]. Under pressure from the European Union, the passport procedures have been somewhat tightened, requiring more documents to verify a Bulgarian identity, but it is still an easy way to achieve "cross-border mobility at the expense of a changed national identity"[82].

The big question is can Bulgarian media become complicit should such an "identity shift" be initiated by any future Bulgarian government? After all, as Giorgi (1995) noted for Eastern Europe as a whole, and Daynov[83], Ognianova[84] and Raycheva[85] for Bulgaria in particular, during times of transition media are more influential in providing bearings to the populace. In this context, any biases of journalists may become important and even crucial in shaping public attitudes and enabling policy decisions.

In the light of this study's findings, the next reasonable step would be to conduct a full-scale content analysis of Bulgarian media and make inferences about the actual effects of Bulgarian journalists' attitudes toward Macedonian language. Other aspects of attitudes toward Macedonia must be investigated as well.

Streszczenie

Wiele narodów ma swoje obsesje, mity i długofalowe ambicje. Marzenie Bułgarii nazywa się Macedonia. Jest ono na tyle silne, że w ciągu XIX i XX w. wciągnęło

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79 As above; J. Phillips, op. cit.

80 A. Shkodrova, op. cit.

81 Sega, *Bitkata za Balgarskija pasport* [The fight for the Bulgarian passport], Accessed May 14, 2005, from www.segabg.com.

82 As above.

83 E. Daynov, *Diskursat na mediite i prehodat v Bulgaria* [Media discourse and Bulgarian transition], "Chetvarta vlast" [Fourth power] 1997, no. 1, p. 16–19 (A quarterly publication of Free Speech Forum, Sofia).

84 E. Ognianova, op. cit.

85 L. Raycheva, *Bulgarian mass media in transition (1988–1994)*, Paper presented to the International Association for Mass Communication Research conference, Portorozh, Slovenia, June 27–30, 1995.

Bułgarię w kilka konfliktów zbrojnych. Bułgaria od dawna uważa Macedonię za na-
leżącą do jej ziem, języka i ludności, ale niewiele zwojowała w otwartych starciach.
Nigdy w pełni nie zrealizowała swoich roszczeń do ziem Macedonii. Z kolei język,
ludność i tożsamość Macedonii nigdy nie zostały ostatecznie uznane za bułgarskie.
Bułgarski rząd ustanowił stosunkowo łatwą metodę umożliwiającą Macedończykom
„odzyskanie" ich bułgarskiej tożsamości, obejmującą stypendia dla studentów chcących
studiować w Bułgarii i nadawanie obywatelstwa bułgarskiego w oparciu jedynie
o „oświadczenie o pochodzeniu". Pod naciskiem Unii Europejskiej procedury pasz-
portowe nieco zaostrzono wymagając większej liczby dokumentów pozwalających
zweryfikować tożsamość bułgarską, niemniej osiągnięcie „mobilności przekraczania
granicy" kosztem zmiany tożsamości narodowej jest nadal łatwe. Poważną kwestią
jest czy bułgarskie media mogą zostać zamieszane w te kwestie w przypadku gdyby
taka „zmiana tożsamości" została zainicjowana przez przyszły rząd bułgarski?