



Voicing folk for the academy: Interdiscursivity and collective identity in a north Dalmatian ethnography, 1899–1900

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Received 26 December 2005; received in revised form 24 February 2007

Abstract

This paper examines the specific discursive realizations of ‘folk identities’ in a north Dalmatian ethnographic account from the end of the nineteenth century in the context of early Croatian institutional-ethnographic practice. By treating the text in question as a site for the dialogic-interactive mediation and production of ‘authentic’ collective identities between local/folk (dialectal) and centralized, academic-institutional (standard) discourses, it also aims at reassessing its value as a historical and philological source for the study of ethno-cultural identity formation in the region. Adopting a pragmatic/discourse-analytic perspective, and devoting particular attention to dialogic aspects of the entextualization and contextualization process, our investigation seeks to elucidate latent and overt ideologies, categories and ‘performances’ of identity in the ethnographic text-as-interdiscursive-construction. The analysis reveals the different levels/orders and strategies/processes of discursive identity formation that emerge from the text, as indexed e.g. by stereotypical predications and attributions. It concludes – and confirms – that systematic and methodic attention for dialogism and polyphony is indispensable to a reliable historical pragmatics of ‘ethnographic reality’, ‘identities’ included.

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Keywords: Identity; Performance; Dialogism; Ethnographic discourse; Croatian (Bosnian, Serbian)

1. Introduction

This paper examines the specific discursive realizations of ‘folk identities’ in a north Dalmatian ethnographic account from the end of the nineteenth century in the context of early

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Croatian institutional-ethnographic practice. By treating the text in question as a site for the dialogic-interactive mediation and production of ‘authentic’ collective identities between local/folk (dialectal) and centralized, academic-institutional (standard) discourses, it also aims at reassessing its value as a historical and philological source for the study of ethno-cultural identity formation in the region. Adopting a pragmatic/discourse-analytic perspective, our analysis seeks to elucidate latent and overt ideologies, categories and ‘performances’ of identity in the ethnographic text-as-interdiscursive-construction, devoting particular attention to dialogic aspects of the entextualization and contextualization process.

The first impulses for a Croatian programmatic ethnography of ‘folk culture’ (‘folk’ being synonymous with ‘peasant, rural’ and referring to the ‘genuine, traditional’ essence of ethnocultural identity) were given with the formation of a Committee for Folk Life and Folk Customs within the Yugoslav (now Croatian) Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb in the late 1880s, which also heralded the beginning of modern Croatian ethnology. (The Croatian lands at the time enjoyed cultural and administrative autonomy within the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.) In 1896 the Academy started the edition of its fundamental ethnographic periodical for ‘South Slavic folk life and customs’ (*Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih Slavena* – henceforth ZNZO), as the publishing channel of a program which involved the production of local and regional ethnographies by ‘literates from the people’. These amateur ethnographers described the everyday culture of their native villages and regions in response to, and on the basis of, a standardized elaborate questionnaire-cum-manual, developed and issued by the Academy, notably by Antun Radić (1897, published in ZNZO II). For approximately 25 years – until just after the foundation of the Yugoslav state – this form of ethnographic practice flourished through the responses to Radić’s questionnaire from the various targeted rural/peripheral areas (viz. in North and Central Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia, as well as in Habsburg-ruled Bosnia-Herzegovina, with sporadic contributions from Serbia and Montenegro). The development of a systematic text production aimed at the ‘recuperation of authentic folk culture’ and its embedding as ethnographic/ethnologic discipline in an emblematic-national scholarly institution in this period can be seen in the European context of nation-state formation and concomitant processes of ‘national awakening’ and ‘national integration’, although scientific-disciplinary concerns, social programs such as the education of the peasantry, and internal vacillations between European and non-European (Slavic, Balkan, Mediterranean) affiliations had equally important shares in the development of early Croatian ethnology (Prica, 2001; Dadić, 1982; for Greece, cf. Herzfeld, 1982).¹

Among other things, Radić’s highly detailed 1897 manual/questionnaire *Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu* (‘Foundations for the gathering and study of data on folk life’ – henceforth *Osnova*) contains separate sections for the description and characterization of local, regional, ethnic, confessional and linguistic/dialectal ‘group belonging’, i.e. collective identity in the village community or native region of the ethnographer/respondent. At the same time, as a rule, ethnographies in accordance with the *Osnova* were written in the respondents’ local vernacular, and as such constituted dialectological documents as well (which yields important information concerning normative views on language use and language as a marker of

¹ The institutionalization of modern ethnography in Croatia ran parallel to that in Serbia, where the Serbian Academy founded the ethnographic periodical *Srpski etnografski zbornik* in 1894. The corresponding program for the collection of ethnological/folkloric data was initially based on the questionnaire of Jovan Cvijić (1896). A Bosnian academic program of comparable scope or impact did not exist, apart from the questionnaire for ‘South Slavic ethnology’ circulated earlier by the Viennese philologist Friedrich Krauss (1884). Further on the development of early Croatian ethnology and folklore studies, see e.g. Bošković-Stulli, 1997:97ff., 2002:273ff.

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