

## Book Review

**Bunčić, Daniel. 2016.** *Biscriptality. A sociolinguistic typology*. Edited by Daniel Bunčić, Sandra L. Lippert, and Achim Rabus (Akademiekonferenzen 24). Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter. ISBN: 9783825366254 (paperback), 425 pp. €52.00

Reviewed by **Agnes Kim**, Department of Slavonic Studies, University of Vienna, Spitalgasse 2, Hof 3, 1090 Wien, Austria, E-mail: agnes.kim@univie.ac.at

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The collective monograph under review originates from two interconnected projects: It is essentially based on the unpublished habilitation thesis in Slavic linguistics by Daniel Bunčić (2011). This text is extended and complemented by contributions which were originally presented and discussed at the 2011 conference on “Sociolinguistic and Cultural Scenarios” of biscriptality in Heidelberg, organized by the three editors of the book, Daniel Bunčić, Sandra L. Lippert, and Achim Rabus.

The effort made by the editors to produce a true collective monography and thus a single coherent text rather than conventional conference proceedings was probably the main reason for the volume not to appear until 2016. Additionally, special attention was paid to the book’s layout and typesetting. No less than 128 figures illustrate the case studies and contribute to the clarity and comprehensibility of the text, especially when it comes to historical text material. In addition, the editors sought to represent the object scripts not only through numerous illustrations, but also within the running text by typesetting it with suitable scripts and fonts.

Similar attention was paid to the representation of quotations in other languages. Extensive quotes are reproduced using the original language and typeset; the English translation follows. If quoted in the running text, the original version is put in brackets.

Concerning the content, *Biscriptality* is an essential contribution to the emerging sociolinguistics of written language (cf. Blommaert 2013; Villa and Vosters 2015). It is orientated towards the description and analysis of the relation of written language to society and focuses on writing systems and their distribution in biscriptal language communities. Thus, it highlights situations in which more than one writing system is employed to write the same language (cf. p. 54). With regard to the term “writing system”, the authors apply the definition given by Lyons et al. (2001). A writing system is thus seen as “an implementation of one or more scripts to form a complete system for writing a particular language”.

*Biscriptality* additionally takes orthographies into account, which the editors regard as standardizations of writing systems (cf. p. 20).

The book comprises six chapters. Out of these, five (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) are authored exclusively by Daniel Bunčić and most likely based on Bunčić (2011). In these chapters, Bunčić develops a theoretical framework for the analysis of sociolinguistic scenarios of biscriptality and later evaluates it on the basis of 34 case studies, which are presented in the main section of the book (Chapter 4) and authored by eleven contributors. The appendix contains a comprehensive, 46-page bibliography (pp. 355–401) and indices of languages, writing systems as well as personal names. This suggests that *Biscriptality* has the potential of becoming a major reference work in the field of the sociolinguistics of writing.

This review first focuses on the theoretical framework texts, before turning to the case studies.

Chapter 1 (pp. 15–26) briefly lays out the scope of the study and defines basic terms, concepts and their relation to each other, e. g. *writing systems* (cf. above). It also indicates with which names certain scripts and writings systems are referred to and how transcriptions and transliterations are given throughout the text.

The second chapter (pp. 27–50) of the book provides an overview of research on biscriptality beginning with the early nineteenth century. Daniel Bunčić observes a large number of competing concepts, terms and definitions of what the book under review addresses as biscriptality, concluding that “the current state of the terminology could hardly be worse” (p. 50).

In Chapter 3 (pp. 51–71), he therefore develops a typology of sociolinguistic scenarios of biscriptality and suggests a consistent terminology. In doing so, he is essentially inspired by Unseth (2005) and thus aims at applying sociolinguistic concepts developed to primarily describe spoken language to the analysis of written language. Along the social axis, he distinguishes between three scenarios of biscriptality, each of them following well-known sociolinguistic concepts of language variation.

(1) Following Ferguson’s (1959) concept of *diglossia*, the first scenario is called digraphia: The usage of the involved writing systems is determined by the social stratum the writer belongs to (*diastatic*), by the register (*diaphasic*), medium (*medial*) or by conditions of communication (*diamesic*, cf. Koch and Oesterreicher 1985 and, for the term, Kabatek 2000) in which the text is written. In this scenario, the writing systems oppose each other *privatively*. For example, in the case of diaphasic digraphia, certain text types (such as religious texts) may be written or printed exclusively in one writing system. The other writing system cannot be used for these purposes (cf. pp. 56–59).

(2) If the writing systems are distributed *equipollently*, i. e. along diatopic (national, administrative or regional), ethnic, or confessional borders within a language community, Daniel Bunčić calls the scenario scriptal pluricentricity, referring to the model of *pluricentric languages* as introduced by Kloss (1978 [1952]), Clyne (1992) and Ammon (1995) (cf. pp. 59–60).

(3) In comparison to the preceding scenarios, in the third the use of any writing system involved cannot easily be predicted in advance by considering external factors. Bunčić describes this situation of bigraphism as a “very special sociolinguistic situation” (p. 61), in which the usage of a writing system is determined by its indexical values in the given situation of usage. The sociolinguistic concept that Bunčić relates this situation to is Bakhtin’s (1981 [1975]) *heteroglossia* (cf. pp. 60–62).

Bunčić also takes graphematic features of writing systems into account. On this axis, he distinguishes between another three levels: *scripts*, *glyphic variation*, i. e. variation in the shapes of single signs, and *orthographies*. A combination of both axes results in nine scenarios of biscriptality, namely (cf. p. 67):

- *digraphia*, *diglyphia* and *diorthographia*
- *scriptal pluricentricity*, *glyphic pluricentricity* and *orthographic pluricentricity*
- *bigraphism*, *biglyphism* and *biorthographism*

These scenarios are illustrated in 34 case studies in the work’s main section, Chapter 4 (pp. 74–319), which will be dealt with below. Chapter 5 (pp. 321–333) adds some general observations to these case studies.

In Chapter 6 (pp. 335–341), Bunčić evaluates the typology described above on the basis of the case studies. He identifies its major weaknesses and provides solutions. For instance, in some cases it proves difficult to distinguish between the graphematic categories, even though they appear to be quite clear-cut. Even the boundary between glyphic variants and orthographies is not as self-evident as it seems to be from the perspective of alphabetic writing systems when it comes to, for example, the distinction of traditional and simplified Chinese characters.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the author suggests treating the three graphematic levels as “prototypical categories” with “fuzzy edges” (p. 336).

When it comes to the sociolinguistic criteria, Bunčić finds pluricentric variation to be easily distinguishable from the other types. Problems in distinguishing a privative opposition type from a diasituative variation type

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<sup>1</sup> In the according case study by Henning Klöter and Daniel Bunčić (pp. 204–209), the authors list this variation as an example of orthographic pluricentricity. As a main criterion to treat simplified and traditional Chinese characters as two orthographies rather than glyphic variation they mention that “certain simplified or traditional characters can be judged as ‘correct’ and other graphic variants as ‘incorrect’ on the basis of official norms” (pp. 208–209).

mainly occur “with cases from not-so-recent history” and probably arise from “a lack of information” (p. 336). Thus, the author calls on what is known as the “bad data problem” in historical sociolinguistics. Still, he concludes that the “heuristic model worked out well for the vast majority of cases”, even though the proposed scenarios “ought to be seen as prototypical categories, into which real cases of biscriptality can be grouped according to family resemblance” (p. 337).

The author comments on the relative frequencies and diachronic dynamics of the types of biscriptality and finds that glyphic variation is the scarcest type on the graphematic level, followed by scenarios in which two orthographies are involved. Bunčić explains this as follows: “For a speech community to use two orthographies there have to be social institutions supporting each of these orthographies”. Variation in the use of scripts, on the other hand, seems to be the most common (cf. p. 338).

On the social axis, pluricentricity is “by far the most widespread form of biscriptality”. According to Bunčić, this is the case because it “does not require individual biscriptality” (cf. p. 339). In addition, he concludes that cases of pluricentricity might be the most productive type of biscriptality, as the majority of the examples described in Chapter 4 originate from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (cf. p. 340).

The latter statement does not hold completely true: Of the 14 extensive case studies that deal with pluricentric variation in Chapter 4, seven refer to purely historical and seven to contemporary situations. Of course, this count by the reviewer does not include the large number of examples only mentioned briefly in Daniel Bunčić’s summaries. Still, in comparison to the other scenarios, the tendency is clear: Out of the 20 other case studies, 16 describe historical situations of biscriptality and only four contemporary ones.

These observations are the basis for a detailed review of the most extensive part of the book. Chapter 4 comprises 245 pages of case studies, which are arranged according to the nine scenarios of biscriptality developed in Chapter 3. For each of them, between two and seven detailed case studies are followed by a synopsis authored by Daniel Bunčić, in which he also refers to other cases. The case studies themselves vary in length and detail: The longest two span 20 pages each,<sup>2</sup> whilst the shortest one on the confessional orthographic pluricentricity in Upper Sorbian

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Bunčić, Elena Kislova & Achim Rabus: “Russian diaphasic diglyphia” (pp. 102–122, on the diglyphia in Russia following the introduction of the Cyrillic civic type in the early eighteenth century) and Alexandra von Lieven & Sandra L. Lippert: “Egyptian (3000 BCE to ca. 400 CE)” (pp. 256–276, on the bigraphism in Old Egypt that involved hieroglyphs as well as the hieratic and demotic script).

(from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century), written by Daniel Bunčić, is only one page long (pp. 224–225).

Again, most of the case studies are authored or co-authored by Daniel Bunčić. The other contributors are specialists in the region and/or language which they represent in the book: Anastasia Antipova and Daniel Bunčić examine the scriptal pluricentricity along confessional lines in Belarussian (pp. 158–167). Carmen Brandt contributes a comprehensive analysis of scriptal pluricentricity in Hini-Urdu (pp. 149–158). Ekaterina Kislova co-authors the extensive section on the diglyphia in Russia after the introduction of the Cyrillic civic type in the early eighteenth century (pp. 102–122). Henning Klöter and Daniel Bunčić discuss the orthographic pluricentricity involving simplified and traditional Chinese (pp. 204–205), while Alexandra von Lieven and Sandra L. Lippert give a detailed account on bigraphism in Old Egypt involving hieroglyphs and the hieratic and demotic script (pp. 256–276). The latter author also sheds closer light on one period of Old Egyptian script history, which was characterized by scriptal pluricentricity (pp. 183–186). Helma Pasch adds a perspective on situations of biscriptality in West and East Africa, where both the Latin alphabet and an adaption of the Arabic script (*Ajami*) are in use and vary according to the type of scriptal pluricentricity (pp. 180–183) or bigraphism (pp. 250–254). Achim Rabus both co-authors the already mentioned case study on digyphia in Russia as well as a chapter on minority bigraphism in Rusyn (pp. 246–250) and another one on bigraphism in Old Church Slavonic, involving Glagolitic and Cyrillic (pp. 254–256). Jürgen Spitzmüller and Daniel Bunčić give a detailed account of the biglyphism in German, which until 1941 was written in both blackletter and roman glyphs of the Latin script (pp. 282–300). Last but not least, Constanze Weth contributes to a section on biorthographism in Occtian (pp. 308–314).

The case studies exclusively authored by Daniel Bunčić comprise almost half of Chapter 4. Out of them, 43 pages are dedicated to five accounts<sup>3</sup> on historical as well as contemporary biscriptality in Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian.<sup>4</sup> These sections combined can be read as a socio-linguistic history of the use of writing systems in these varieties and/or languages. In Section 5.1 (pp. 321–324), Bunčić explicitly addresses this diachronic

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3 Listed by length, the according chapters are: “Serbo-Croatian/Serbian: Cyrillic and Latin” (synchronic bigraphism, pp. 231–246), “Serbo-Croatian as a scriptally pluricentric language” (synchronic scriptal pluricentricity, pp. 167–180), “Poljica: diaphasic digraphia” (historical diagraphia, pp. 82–88), “Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian spelling” (synchronic orthographic pluricentricity, pp. 209–215), and “Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic Cyrillic in Bosnia” (historical glyphic pluricentricity, pp. 198–200).

4 Following Bunčić (2008), the author treats these as varieties of one pluricentric Serbo-Croatian language (cf. p. 210).

perspective by summarising and linking the according case studies. He concludes that “one can see a continuous expansion of the Latin alphabet [...] ever since the 10<sup>th</sup> century and a simultaneous retreat of the Cyrillic (as well as Glagolitic) alphabet” (p. 324).

Another eight case studies by Daniel Bunčić focus on other Slavic languages, which of course reflects the author’s specialization on Slavic linguistics. When it comes to East Slavic languages, he covers diorthographia in thirteenth-century Novgorod (pp. 129–140). He also adds a further perspective on Belarussian by highlighting biorthographism in the early twentieth century (pp. 314–315)<sup>5</sup> and deals with orthographic pluricentricity in Soviet and emigré Russian in the early twentieth century (pp. 219–224). West Slavic languages are considered in five case studies: For Czech, diorthographia from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (pp. 140–143) and a biglyphism-scenario similar to the one in German (pp. 300–303) are discussed. The same is described for the Sorbian languages (pp. 303–305). Upper Sorbian (pp. 224–225) and Polish (pp. 225–227) are also referred to in the section on orthographic pluricentricity.

In his nine other case studies, Daniel Bunčić gives insight into various scenarios of biscriptality in East Asian languages,<sup>6</sup> Luvian,<sup>7</sup> Germanic,<sup>8</sup> Celtic<sup>9</sup> and Italic<sup>10</sup> languages.

To sum up, the Slavic focus of the book is clearly visible, especially in Daniel Bunčić’s accounts: Out of 34 case studies, 17 focus on Slavic languages (50 %). A page count gives a similar picture: 110 out of 204 pages are dedicated to Slavic languages (55 %). The editors are aware of this bias: Throughout the book, they remind the reader several times that, “from a global point of view”, the case studies only cover “the tip of the iceberg, and that many a relevant situation has been overlooked” (p. 341). Still, the selection is certainly sufficient for evaluating the proposed typology of biscriptal situations.

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5 Note that in Chapter 5 the diachronic development in Belarussian is summarized and compared to the situation in Serbo-Croatian (pp. 324–325).

6 “Xiangnan Tuhua: gender-based digraphia?” (historical digraphia, pp. 88–92), “Chinese: emerging digraphia?” (synchronic digraphia involving Chinese characters and their official transliteration Pinyin, pp. 92–96) and “Japanese men’s and women’s hands: diastratic diglyphia” (historical diglyphia, pp. 122–124).

7 “Luvian: medial, diaphasic and/or diastratic digraphia” (historical digraphia, pp. 78–82).

8 “Medieval Scandinavia: diamesic digraphia” (historical digraphia, pp. 74–76), “English orthographic pluricentricity” (contemporary orthographic pluricentricity, pp. 215–216) and “German orthographic pluricentricity” (contemporary orthographic pluricentricity, pp. 216–219).

9 “Early medieval Ireland: medial digraphia” (historical digraphia, pp. 76–78).

10 “Medieval Latin” (historical glyphic pluricentricity, pp. 200–202).

Due to its complexity, Bunčić (2016) is not an easy read. As the structure of this review suggests, there are at least two ways to approach the collective monograph:

- (a) One possibility is to focus on the theoretical framework and thus especially on Chapters 2, 3 and 6. The case studies are arranged according to this approach, but due to their large number the ordering principle may easily be overlooked when reading the book from the beginning to the end.
- (b) Another possibility is to consult *Biscriptality* for specific information on biscriptality in certain languages such as (especially) Slavic, Old Egyptian, Chinese languages and German. The fact that the case studies are grouped into typological categories makes it difficult to recognise the diachronic developments in those languages, which are covered by several case studies. Chapter 5 of course acknowledges this perspective and provides synopsis for Serbo-Croatian and Belarussian.

To sum up, *Biscriptality* is a very dense, detailed and innovative book. For sure, it meets its own goal of being “a first attempt at providing a typology of biscriptal situations on the basis of sturdy sociolinguistic and graphematic criteria” (p. 340). Not only does it propose a consistent typology and terminology for describing the use of two or more writing systems for one language, but it thereby also suggests a case-by-case approach to these phenomena, which has the chance of being fruitfully adapted for historical sociolinguistics.

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