

Predrag Piper, Ivan Klajn, and Rajna Dragičević. *Normativna gramatika srpskoga jezika* [Normative grammar of the Serbian language]. 4th revised and enlarged edition. Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 2020. 766 pp. ISBN 978-86-7946-377-7.

Reviewed by Danko Šipka

Speakers of English may marvel at the word “normative” in the title of this grammar. This word simply rolls off the tongue of Slavic linguists, in sharp contrast to their English-speaking colleagues. Indeed, the single most important difference in ways of maintaining the standard language variety between the English-speaking world and the world of the Slavs is the amount of public prominence given to linguistic norms and those who prescribe them. In the English-speaking world, the standard language variety is maintained by an army of editors, copy editors, language teachers, and others, an army without generals, which tacitly implements the norm. In the world of the Slavs, the spotlight is on the generals—linguists who prescribe linguistic norms and offer normative advice on the product of their work: the norm, as they call it. Serbs are no exception, and this grammar, *Normativna gramatika srpskoga jezika* [Normative grammar of the Serbian language], is proof of the pudding.

The grammar is normative because its authors provide notes to guide users in matters of the linguistic and epilinguistic norms of the standard language variety. For example, when discussing the use of the letter *đ*, the authors note that it is inappropriate to replace it with *dj* (which is a widespread non-standard practice). To provide another example, when discussing the comparative form of adjectives, the authors note that the comparative form of the adjective *visok* ‘tall, high’ is *viši* ‘taller, higher’ rather than *višlji* or *visočiji* (which are common non-standard forms). I have counted well over 500 of such notes throughout the text.

The prominence of this grammar in Serbian culture can be seen in the fact that it has been endorsed by major cultural and political institutions of this ethnic group. The initiative to pen the grammar came from the Serbian Language Standardization Board, a panel of linguists representing major universities, academies of science, and other Serbian cultural institutions (in Serbia and neighboring countries where Serbian is used). The grammar was published by Matica Srpska, the most prestigious Serbian cultural association. Two ministries of the Serbian government funded the work on this grammar

and its publishing. As can be seen, there is formidable firepower behind these linguistic generals, but that is not all.

The first edition of this grammar was authored by Predrag Piper and Ivan Klajn. Both these linguists were academicians of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and professors at the University of Belgrade (which completes the circle of most prestigious Serbian cultural institutions). This first edition was published in 2013; the second revised and expanded edition followed in 2014. The third edition was the ijekavian version of the second edition (i.e., the version for Serbian speakers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia). The present volume is the fourth revised and expanded edition of this grammar, which also includes a third author, Rajna Dragičević, a professor at the University of Belgrade, who mostly contributed to the section about lexical morphology (i.e., word formation). In addition to the expansion of the lexical morphology section, major new reworking in this fourth edition is also to be found in the section on syntax, penned by Predrag Piper. Sadly, Klajn (1937–2021) and Piper (1950–2021) are not among us anymore.

The present grammar is composed of the ingredients that one typically expects in a grammar of a Slavic language. It commences with an introduction (pp. 5–16) and next discusses the script (17–20) and phonology (21–32). Morphonology (morphologically conditioned phonological alternations) is next (33–46), followed by inflectional morphology (47–232) and lexical morphology (233–330). Syntax comes at the end (331–634). The volume is equipped with a standard apparatus (references, symbols and abbreviations, and an index).

What is particularly important about this grammar is that the authors see it (as discussed on pp. 7–10) as a tool in a partnership between what the authors call *codifiers* (linguists who establish the norms of the standard language variety), *educators* (those who educate about those norms, e.g., teachers, parents), and *realizers* (all users of the standard language variety). This is a significant paradigm shift compared to the previous tradition of grammarography, where the users of the standard language variety were expected to obey linguistic authorities without any questioning. While one can question if such a partnership is actually in place, this change in attitude toward democratization of standard-language maintenance should definitely be applauded. The place of this book in a bicentennial history of Serbian grammars and how it relates to the previous tradition is outlined in Šipka 2021.

The presentation of grammatical material in this book follows a traditional structuralist model (e.g., phrase structure and basic clausal analysis in syntax), which means that it continues an established trend in Serbian grammarology (as seen in other recent monolingual grammars, such as Stevanović 1986, 1989; Stanojčić and Popović 1992; and Klajn 2005). This is a logical solution, given that this approach to grammar is taught in schools,

which guarantees wide familiarity with the presentation of the material. As is typical in grammars of this type, the text is segmented in paragraphs, which are often cross-referenced. All grammatical rules are exemplified well, which is also an established tradition in this grammatographical tradition. It is commendable that in their examples, the grammarians use quotes from authors (as a rule, literary writers) far less often than was the case in previous grammars of comparable size (e.g., Stevanović 1986, 1989). Most of the time, this information about the author is sheer ballast for the reader and can be appropriately omitted whenever possible.

This grammar is certain to contribute to fostering Serbian language arts (or, as they are called in Slavic countries, “the culture of language/speech”, e.g., Serbian *jezička kultura*, Polish *kultura języka/językowa/mowy*, Russian *kul'tura reči*). As such, it will go through numerous new editions in the future, which, in turn, offers prospects for its further improvement. In addition to further elaboration and specification of the rules stated in the grammar (which is a matter of course in each new revision of reference works of this kind), the following areas lend themselves to amelioration.

First, the text would benefit from recognizing its target audience and its needs. Right now, there are places where some level of linguistic sophistication is expected from the user and others where everything is explained without any expectations. For example, when discussing vowels, the authors state, “[a]ccording to the horizontal place of formation of sounds in the mouth cavity, the vowels are: front: I, E; central: A; and back: O, U” (23; English transl. D.Š.), without saying that these features rest on the position of the tongue. In contrast, when discussing voiced and voiceless consonants, the authors do explain the physiological background of the feature: “According to the voice parameter, the consonants in the Serbian language are voiced or voiceless. When voiced consonants are pronounced, vocal cords vibrate. When voiceless consonants are pronounced, vocal cords do not participate” (24; English transl. D.Š.). If the audience should include those without linguistic knowledge, the former description needs to be expanded on. If some level of linguistic knowledge is expected from the user, the comment about the vocal cords in the latter description is superfluous.

Second, there is still room for improvement to make the grammar user-friendly. Most of the text is a plain narrative. The text would no doubt benefit from more frequent use of tables and illustrations. For example, a drawing of the vowel diagram would be helpful in the section on phonology, a table summarizing the types of verbal inflection would help in the section on morphology, etc.

Third, the narrative itself could be better streamlined. Quite often, the text reads like an excerpt from an essay, rather than a collection of grammatical rules. Making the description simpler and more impersonal would go a long way toward bringing the text closer to the user. Another aspect of streamlining

would be to separate three content areas that are right now blended in the single narrative: (i) the discussion of general linguistic categories (i.e., what an ending is), (ii) the presentation of the rules of Serbian grammar, and (iii) the commentary about historical and current developments around the rule in question. It is commendable that normative notes have been set out in a separate section following paragraphs to which they pertain. A similar segmentation could be done with the three aforementioned content areas, which are currently intertwined. That segmentation, too, would make the text much easier to follow.

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Danko Šipka
 School of International Letters and Cultures
 Arizona State University
 Tempe, AZ, USA
 danko.sipka@asu.edu