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## **BOSNIAN KPELLE TRIBE**

### ***Summary***

*Can a person think outside the confines of his or her language? This question, to which there is no clear answer, has been, among others, the driving force for cognitive linguists. Viewing language as just another cognitive ability, it presupposes that thinking and talking are inseparable. However, a people (in a nation, e.g.), even though they are speakers of the same language, cannot all think in the same way. It must be concluded that they cannot all speak in the same way either. One must realize that a society consists of several stratifications and that the way of thinking from one to another may differ. One such division that this paper is going to take into account is the one according to people's place of birth or residence. The paper will namely try to show that there is a difference in the way of thinking and thus conceptualizing language between two, different groups of people – one living in an urban area, and the other living in the countryside. To what extent does our surrounding decide on our choice of words in a certain context? For this purpose, we have decided to perform a research similar to the one done with the African tribe Kpelle that resulted in the conclusion that there is a significant difference between the population in rural and urban areas. The research part of this paper will show significant differences in the grouping of certain words across the aforementioned stratification. The introductory part will briefly explain the concept of framing and the underlying processes – why we choose a certain word in a certain context.*

**Key words:** framing, Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, language, culture, social stratification, urban, rural

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## BOSANSKO KPELLE PLEME

### ***Sažetak***

*Da li osoba može razmišljati izvan okvira sopstvenog jezika? Ovo pitanje, na koje nema jasnog odgovora, predstavlja pokretačku snagu kognitivnih lingvista. Gledajući na jezik kao na jednu kognitivnu sposobnost, pitanje podrazumijeva činjenicu da se govor i razmišljanje ne mogu razdvojiti. Međutim, pripadnici jednog naroda, unatoč činjenici da pričaju istim jezikom, ne mogu svi razmišljati na isti način. Može se zaključiti da shodno tome ne mogu svi ni pričati na isti način. Društvo je mnogostruko razdijeljeno po raznim osnovama, a način razmišljanja ljudi koji pripadaju tim određenim slojevima može biti različit. Jedan način podjele može biti na osnovu mjesta rođenja ili prebivališta. Ovaj rad uzima upravo tu podjelu u obzir. Naime, pokušat ćemo pokazati da ima razlika u razmišljanju, a samim tim i konceptualiziranju svijeta kroz izražavanje tj. upotrebu jezika između dvije grupe ljudi – onih koji žive u urbanoj sredini i onih koji žive u ruralnoj sredini. Do koje mjeru naša okolina utiče na izbor riječi u određenom kontekstu? U ovu svrhu smo uredili istraživanje po uzoru na istraživanje provedeno na Kpelle plemenu u Africi, koje je pokazalo znatnu razliku između stanovnika urbane i ruralne sredine. Istraživački dio ovog rada će pokazati znatne razlike u grupiranju određenih riječi između dvije već pomenute grupe. Uvodni dio će ukratko objasniti koncept 'framing' (ili stavljanje u okvire) i sve procese koje se dešavaju pri procesu 'framing' – tj. odgovoriti na pitanje zašto biramo određene riječi u određenom kontekstu.*

***Ključne riječi:*** *framing, Sapir-Whorfova hipoteza, jezik, kultura, društvena raslojenost, urbano, ruralno*

### **Introduction**

Throughout history people have always talked about language and its purpose. We can see traces of it in ancient Greece when we read the works of their philosophers. We also have certain aspects of it explained in religious books, and finally it reached its climax in linguistic studies. Many linguists have talked about language and culture and their relationship and perhaps one of the most significant theories is the Sapir – Whorf Hypothesis: ‘... language is not simply a way of voicing ideas, but is the very thing which shapes those ideas. One cannot think outside the confines of their language. The result of this process is many different world views by speakers of different languages’ ([www.mnsu.edu](http://www.mnsu.edu)). Namely, this hypothesis does not directly deal with culture but it rather says that our vision of the world is mainly characterized by the language that we use, and whatever does not exist in language does not exist in the world

itself. Therefore, the culture is a constituent part of the world around us. This „statement“ has come across many objections and, among many others, cognitive linguists have had their own vision of this problem. They consider that language belongs to our cognate abilities, but that it does not determine our perspective of everyday life and the world around us. Cognitive linguists also claim that our language directly depends on the society we live in and that many factors from our surrounding affect almost every element of our language and it only remains for us to notice changes that occur in the language due to outside influence.

‘we can think of culture as a complex network of frames. Often, when we debate or argue about issues in a culture, we can frame the issues in several different ways. There is a wide variety of reasons why we frame experience in the way we do. Since we want to convince people of our truth concerning the issues, we frame the issues in ways that we believe will influence others. At other times, it is our emotional attitude to the situation that leads us to frame the situation in a particular way. And it is also possible that we redefine debated issues by introducing new frames or stressing frames that were previously unstressed in the discussion of the issue’.(Kovcses)

The previous passage confirms that the choices we make are not determined by our language and its influence. We do it because we want to achieve something and we will unconsciously reframe our already established frames in order to achieve it.

Since man lives in a society, there is also a different stratification of that same society. The human society can be divided according to different criteria, however, the division we are currently interested in this paper is the one that divides society into an urban and a rural part.

Namely, the purpose of this paper will be to try and prove that people, based on the choice of words and expressions they use, can be distinguished to those living in urban and to those living in rural areas. Specific locations for this research will include the town of Zenica, an urban area, and the village Gradišće, located 10 km away from Zenica. The motivation for this research came from the lecture by prof. Zoltan Kovcses, who mentioned a research

done with the African Kpelle tribe who were given a group of words that had multiple possible connections among them (e.g. hoe, orange, knife and potato) and their grouping of these words into pairs (hoe and potato, orange and knife) showed that they were very much distinct from western European people who had done different grouping. Of course since they were illiterate they were given objects that they needed to pair together rather than group the words written on a piece of paper. Their pairings were created simply by the experience they had while living in the world and the criteria that they used is directly influenced by their everyday life.

Therefore, we have decided to use a similar principle in the area of Zenica to see whether we can confirm our hypothesis that there is a difference between people living in urban and in rural areas, or whether we will get the same results which will prove that our level of urbanization has not gone that far.

## GROUP DESCRIPTION

In our research, we have used six groups of terms. Every group consists of four terms. The basis for the choice of words was the original group of words used for research with the Kpelle tribe. The researchers used the following terms: *hoe, potato, knife and orange*. We can see that these terms can be grouped in two ways. We can group *potato* and *orange* in the category of plants and *knife* and *hoe* in the category of tools and that is exactly what the people from Western Europe did in the original research. On the other hand, the people from the Kpelle tribe grouped *orange* with *knife*, since we use knife to peel the orange and *hoe* with *potato* since obviously we use a hoe to plant the potato. The difference we see here in original grouping clearly shows that our language and framing are directly influenced by our everyday world.

In addition to the original group we have also decided to use five more groups of words that are more specific for the culture that we belong to and of course that have something in common with both urban and rural areas of the society because they are the key points whose distinction we have tried to show. All the items mentioned in each of the groups are common for both urban and rural population. The only difference is how they perceive them. If we take into consideration that today's urban society has grown

out of old rural societies, we could say that there should be no greater difference in categorization of the same concepts.

However, we may not forget that society has changed and language as such also has had to change under the influence of social progress and even the examples with the Kpelle tribe support this statement. Also we did not take into consideration loan words from other languages and words that belong to modern and internet slang in order to try and be objective as much as possible.

Groups in our research were marked with roman numerals (I – VI) and combinations between the group members with letters from A – Z.

In every group we created a list of four major combinations that should comprise most of the results based on our previous knowledge about our culture which is solely based on our life experience.

**Group I** has four members and it is the original group consisting of the following members or terms: *hoe*, *orange*, *knife* and *potato*. The four main combinations in this group are:

Combination A – *hoe* with *potato*  
Combination B – *knife* with *orange*  
Combination C – *hoe* with *knife*  
Combination D – *potato* with *orange*

**Group II** consists of the following members: *hay*, *scythe*, *knife*, and *apple*. The scythe and hay are taken into account because of the fact that people in rural area do farming and these terms are familiar to them. The next two members, knife and apple were taken as an analogy to the original research. The expected result was that the people from urban areas would group *scythe* and *knife* together as tools and *apple* with *hay* as plants which would show that their perception is very much different from the people in the country, which in a way would show that they perceive same items in two different ways by putting them into two categories: either being tools and plants or tools and the job they are meant for. The four main combinations of this group are:

Combination E – *hay* with *scythe*  
Combination F – *knife* with *apple*  
Combination G – *hay* with *apple*  
Combination H – *knife* with *scythe*

**Group III** consists of the following members: *plum, brandy, grapes* and *wine*. The reason for these group members is obvious and not only this culture specific but in general. Namely brandy is made from plums in the countryside and wine from grapes. The possible four combinations for this group are:

Combination I – plum with brandy

Combination J – grapes with wine

Combination K – brandy with wine

Combination L – grapes with plum

**Group IV** consists of the following members: *barley, scythe, beer, water*. The reason for choosing barley and scythe is that you can use scythe to mow barley. However, barley is also used for making beer along with water. There is also one very specific thing about scythe and water. There is an old saying among people that not everyone can mow with scythe properly and that those who can't should provide fresh water for those who can. Therefore, we have the following combinations:

Combination M – barley with scythe

Combination N – beer with water

Combination O – barley with beer

Combination P – scythe with water

**Group V** consists of the following members: *sickle, wheat, hammer, and nut*. The reasons for choosing these group members are also very obvious and again much closer to the country people. Namely, sickle is traditionally used for harvesting wheat in the fields around Zenica and hammer is generally used for breaking nuts. However, since this society was under socialist rule for around 40 years hammer and sickle can also be an option, especially for older people and naturally wheat and nuts can belong to the category of plants.

Combinations for this group are:

Combination Q – sickle with wheat

Combination R – hammer with nut

Combination S – hammer with sickle

Combination T – nut with wheat

**Group VI** consists of the following members: *hammer, nail, screwdriver* and *bolt*. These terms are not country related but rather professional terms used by craftsmen. The possible combinations in this group are:

Combination U – hammer and nail  
Combination V – screwdriver and bolt  
Combination W – hammer and screwdriver  
Combination X – nail and bolt

Besides these main categories that we suggested, respondents also provided several other combinations: *hammer and bolt, screwdriver and nail, potato – knife, hoe – orange, brandy – grapes, plum – wine*. The first two pairs can be justified by the fact that we have different bolts and that we sometimes have to use a hammer. Screwdrivers can also be used for taking out old nails from the wood. Potatoes can be peeled by knife and hoes can be used for digging around an orange tree. The last two pairs are questionable and may be added up to the error done by respondents because, even though we can find the link between plum and wine and grapes and brandy these combinations are less likely to happen.

The respondents taken into account for this research were of different age and social background. We have also included an exact number of respondents from both city and village. The respondents were also from three different age groups, young, middle-aged and old. Respondents also included both men and women belonging to all age groups.

### Results overview

The research results will be divided into two sections: country results and town results followed by a parallel overview and comparison of the results

#### Country results:

Combination A – hoe with potato.....	12 (answers)
Combination B – knife with orange .....	12
Combination C – hoe with knife .....	3
Combination D – potato with orange .....	3
Combination E – hay with scythe .....	15
Combination F – knife with apple .....	15
Combination G – hay with apple .....	3
Combination H – knife with scythe .....	3

Combination I – plum with brandy .....	15
Combination J – grapes with wine .....	15
Combination K – brandy with wine .....	3
Combination L – grapes with plum .....	3
Combination M – barley with scythe .....	5
Combination N – beer with water .....	5
Combination O – barley with beer .....	13
Combination P – scythe with water .....	13
Combination Q – sickle with wheat .....	15
Combination R – hammer with nut .....	15
Combination S – hammer with sickle .....	2
Combination T – nut with wheat .....	2
Combination U – hammer with nail .....	14
Combination V – screwdriver with bolt .....	14
Combination W – hammer with screwdriver .....	3
Combination X – nail with bolt .....	3

**Respondent combinations:**

Knife – potato .....	3
Hoe – orange .....	3
Hammer – wheat .....	1
Sickle – nut .....	1

**Town results (group I):**

Combination A – hoe with potato .....	17 (answers)
Combination B – knife with orange .....	17
Combination C – hoe with knife .....	0
Combination D – potato with orange .....	0
Combination E – hay with scythe .....	18
Combination F – knife with apple .....	18
Combination G – hay with apple .....	0
Combination H – knife with scythe .....	0

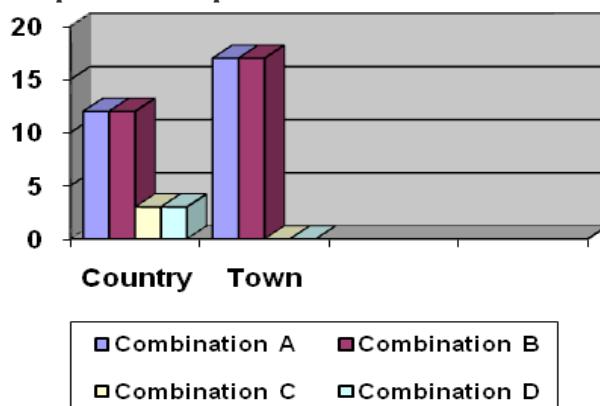
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Combination I – plum with brandy .....	14
Combination J – grapes with wine .....	14
Combination K – brandy with wine .....	3
Combination L – grapes with plum .....	3
Combination M – barley with scythe.....	4
Combination N – beer with water .....	4
Combination O – barley with beer .....	13
Combination P – scythe with water .....	13
Combination Q – sickle with wheat .....	14
Combination R – hammer with nut.....	14
Combination S – hammer with sickle.....	3
Combination T – nut with wheat .....	3
Combination U – hammer with nail .....	17
Combination V – screwdriver with bolt.....	17
Combination W – hammer with screwdriver ...	0
Combination X – nail with bolt .....	0

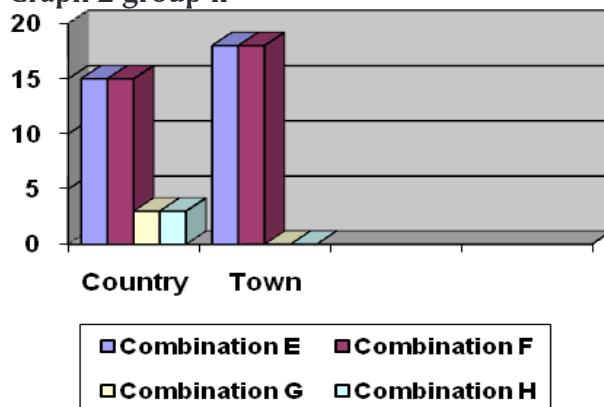
#### Respondent combinations:

hammer – bolt.....	1
srewdriver – nail .....	1
knife – potato.....	1
hoe – orange .....	1
brandy – grapes .....	1
plum – wine .....	1

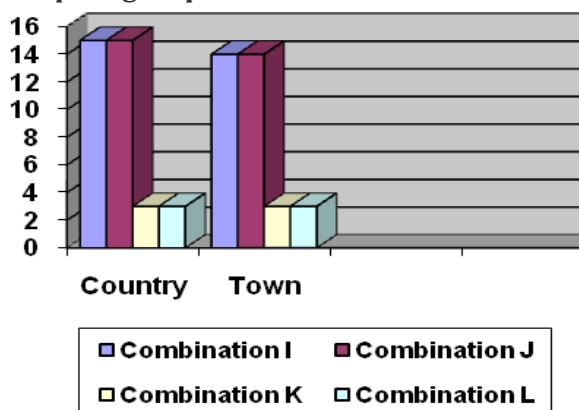
Graph 1 Group I



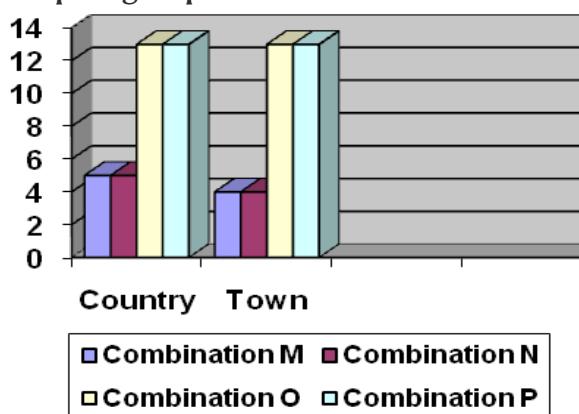
Graph 2 group II



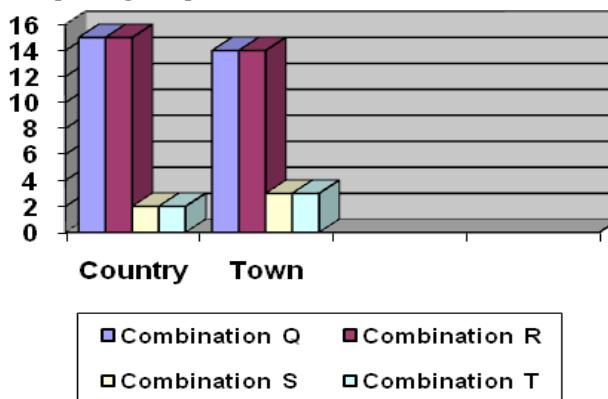
Graph 3 group III



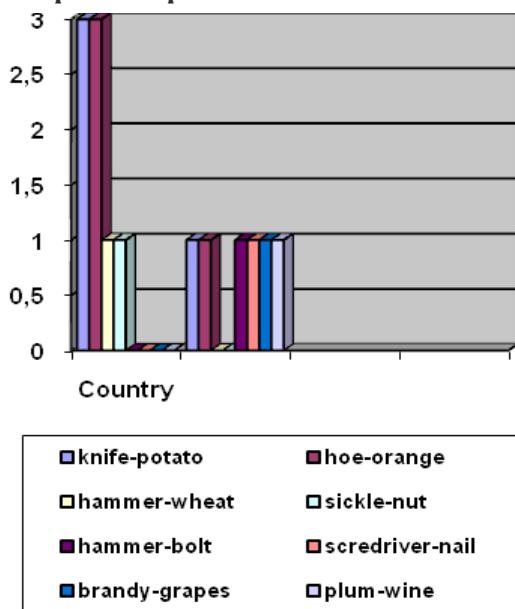
Graph 4 group IV



Graph 5 group V



Graph 6 Respondent's combinations



### Results analysis

Results show great similarity in language perception between the urban and rural population in the area of Zenica. According to graph 1 there is a slight difference between the city and the village in respect to their view of the problem that was put in front of members of the Kpelle tribe. This group also shows the greatest difference between urban and rural environment compared to all other groups that were offered to the respondents.

The interesting fact is that more people in the town actually chose combinations A (*hoe* and *potato*) and B (*orange* and *knife*) than it was the case in the countryside. However, if we remember the research done with the Kpelle tribe we may see that we have actually almost matching results which may actually take us to the conclusion that the people in Zenica categorize and perceive their world in a way similar to members of the Kpelle tribe.

We may also look at this from another perspective and see what the difference is between our society and the western society used in the original research. Namely, our society is quite different from the western society that was mentioned in the research with the Kpelle tribe. Therefore, we may say that our society has similar categorization of the world to the society of the Kpelle.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this seminar paper was to try and draw parallels between a previous research and a similar one done on the population of Zenica and a nearby village, Gradišće. The interest in this type of research came from a lecture by professor Kovescs and its main idea was to state the importance of the relationship between language and the surrounding environment, a principle that has to do with the quite popular belief that language and the process of thinking are very closely linked.

We have tried to offer a quick overview of this belief, and have thus shown that it was something that even the Traditional American School of Linguistics put focus on, especially through the works of Boas, Sapir and Whorf. In one way or another, all of them claimed that language and meaning are inseparable. This is something that has survived in the field of linguistics, and modern, cognitive approaches to language put great emphasis on this principle. The language is seen as a cognitive ability, like all other cognitive abilities. To emphasize this relationship, the influence of society, culture and environment has often been stated as vital. Numerous researches have been done to put forward evidence for this.

Among the most famous probably is the research conducted by Whorf regarding the language of the Hopi Indians. Even though it has later been criticized to a large extent, other, similar researches have been done, especially by cognitive linguists. One such research

is on the language of the African Kpelle tribe, something that we tried to apply to our, aforementioned surrounding.

The results did prove a difference in conceptualizing items in the two areas, however not to that extent that we had thought, or even not in the belief that we had put forward prior to the research. We had namely presumed that items in the rural test group would have been grouped in the manner of the Kpelle, that is, a more “rural” view of the grouping of the items. However, in general (which means in both areas) items were grouped in a similar way. In some cases, there was even an “opposite effect”, i.e. the urban part grouped the items in a “rural” way. After conducting the research we came to the conclusion that, since we did not ask the “urban” participants of their place of residence in the past, many of them might have actually been from one of the surrounding villages. Another possible explanation is that Zenica, a small community, largely dependant of the heavy industry of the local steelworks prior to the war, has after the war, grown more dependant of the agriculture, and the surrounding villages have come to play an important role in the development of the city. An obvious consequence of this is a small, but not insignificant, migration of people.

We believe that these reasons may have influenced the results in the way that they turned out to be. Another, probably equally important reason is that, Bosnia in general, even as a constituent part of former Yugoslavia never did rely on industry as much as on agriculture, and this, yearlong way of life, has probably influenced even the modern society. Also, taking into account that at least a fourth of the participants were over the age of fifty, thus remembering the days when agriculture played a more important role in the wellbeing of the entire society, leads us to a similar conclusion.

Nevertheless, the difference in conceptualizing is present, and a similar research, but on a larger scale, and with more precise data processing (regarding the information of the participants) may be, not only possible, but very interesting to conduct.