

The Institute for Bulgarian Language and the provision of the normative framework of the Bulgarian standard language

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Abstract. This article examines the role of the Institute for Bulgarian Language at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in providing the normative framework of the Bulgarian standard language. The focus is on the theoretical and applied scientific aspects of the codification of its norms, the effectiveness of which is ensured through various projects of the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language. From the perspective of the major theoretical principles that are followed during codification, the article presents the characteristics of the official spelling dictionaries developed by the Department and the functions of language consulting - an important segment of linguistic cultivation that accompanies and aids codification and its distribution among the language community. The contributions of the latest Department's projects to the provision of the normative framework of the standard language are presented: the project *Study of public attitudes and value orientations towards the modern Bulgarian standard language as a factor in the codification of its norms* and its platform Bulgarian Language Resources Online, BERON, which, in compliance with public expectations, grants free access to a digitalized version of the *Official Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language*.

Keywords: codification of Bulgarian standard language, spelling dictionaries, language attitudes, language consulting, digital resources of a normative character

Introduction

From its very establishment 155 years ago - in the distant year of 1869 - the Bulgarian Literary Society, which was transformed into the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) in 1911, set the issues of the Bulgarian standard language as a priority. Among the first and most prominent tasks formulated by the Society were the writing of a scientific grammar and a Bulgarian language dictionary in response to the public necessity of a common standard language, which, according to the founders of the Society, guarantees national prosperity - "great success of our national growth" (Periodichesko spisanie 1870, 13).

Soon after its establishment, the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS was entrusted by the state with two functions related to normativity: to ensure

a uniformity in spelling by studying the standard norms and reflecting the changes in them, and to prepare the publication of a comprehensive spelling dictionary to serve as a standard for spelling and pronunciation¹ (Tomov 2001/2002). Through the institutionalization of codification, BAS in the face of the Institute for Bulgarian Language became a universally recognized source of authority in the field of standard language. The efforts of the Institute in the areas of studying, codifying and disseminating standard norms are tightly connected to the deepening of the symbolic function of standard language in its various manifestations (unifying, separatist, frame-of-reference, prestige, and participatory) (see Garvin 1993, 42-43). Alongside this, codification is directed towards the maintenance of balance of the two fundamental structural characteristics of standard language - flexible stability and intellectualization. The activity of the Institute for Bulgarian Language in the field of normativity is concentrated in two of its divisions: the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language and the Department of Bulgarian Lexicology and Lexicography. The Department of Bulgarian Lexicology and Lexicography works on the multivolume *Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language (Rechnik na balgarskiya ezik)* (1977-) (Kolkovska, Blagoeva 2024). The dictionary is a thesaurus-type resource that presents the lexical richness of the Bulgarian language from the National Revival to the present day, with the lexical contents being consistently enriched with new lexical items and new meanings of existing words.

The Department of Modern Bulgarian Language is the main division working on the codification of standard norms. It studies and researches the grammatical, pronunciation and spelling norms, periodically prepares and publishes academic spelling dictionaries, and has recently been making the codified norms accessible through online resources. Alongside this, the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language provides language consultation services through the Language Consultations Service - an important activity which ensures feedback from the language community.

As a reference point for the performance of activities related to the normativity of the standard Bulgarian language, the theory of language cultivation (Gavranek 1967) has been adopted, also known as the theory of standard language or the theory of language planning. In the case of a developed standard language, as is such with the Bulgarian language today, the role of the language cultivation as a scientific discipline with an applied character is especially important. In the field of this scientific discipline are the studying of innovations on different linguistic levels, the establishment of tendencies in the development of the standard Bulgarian language, the assessment of the perspective of variants through the utilization of scientifically supported criteria.

The complex research and applied scientific activity of the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language in the field of language cultivation is a kind of intersection, a dynamic link between the development of the theoretical aspects

¹ Government order No. 936 from November 27, 1950, restated in 1983.

of codification as a tool for the normalization of the standard language and the practical work on its description, dissemination, clarification and application in various spheres of public language communication. In this context, the Department is developing the long-term project *Language Culture and Language Policy*. Its primary goal is the study and codification of the objectively established standard language norms at all levels of language, along with the associated expert and consultancy activities. In the foundation of the outlined activities lies the understanding that codification is an ongoing process (Aleksandrova, Tomov 2019), which corresponds to the dynamic nature of the standard language.

Academic spelling dictionaries

Academic spelling dictionaries present a description of the current norms in the field of pronunciation, spelling, punctuation and grammar. These dictionaries are official, meaning they are mandatory for the formal written communication. The characteristic *official* is related to the allocated rights of the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS to carry out the studying of the standard norms and their codification in which way codification in Bulgaria receives an institutional character of the academic type² (see Garvin 1993).

Academic spelling dictionaries ensure the unifying function of standard language which in its own right has a key significance for the effectiveness and productivity of public linguistic communication. Through their periodic updates, the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS brings the spelling standard and the occurring changes within it to the language community which is obligated to follow the spelling norms in the public sphere (education, science, institutional sector, media, politics, economy, business).

Academic spelling dictionaries codify not only the spelling but also the pronunciation and grammatical norms of the Bulgarian standard language. At the same time, through the scope of the headword list, they define the boundaries of modern standard lexis. Thus, they exceed their intended purpose as a spelling reference books and essentially become multifunctional reference guides for the norms of the Bulgarian standard language. The dictionaries provide

² The first academic spelling dictionary that is fully realized according to the task allocated to the Institute is published in 1983 under the title *Pravopisn rechnik na savremenniya balgarski knizhoven ezik* (Spelling Dictionary of the Modern Bulgarian Standard Language) (published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). In 2002, the following academic spelling dictionary is published, *Nov pravopisn rechnik na balgarskiya ezik* (New Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language) (published by “Hazel”), and exactly 10 years after it, *Ofitsialen pravopisn rechnik na balgarskiya ezik* (Official Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language) (2012, published by “Prosveta”), followed by the *Ofitsialen pravopisn rechnik na balgarskiya ezik. Glagoli* (Official Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language. Verbs) (2016, published by “Prosveta”). Some of the dictionaries are published in abridged variants, while the introductory parts of newer dictionaries are also published in separate editions.

additional information on both pronunciation (indicating the position of the stress) and the morphological particularities of inflected words, presenting the correct forms from the perspectives of pronunciation, spelling and grammar. To enhance their usefulness as multifunctional reference tools for the standard language, the dictionaries also include some data on word meaning and collocability (mainly in the presentation of homonyms).

The outlined features characterize academic spelling dictionaries as resources with a high degree of informativeness. In order to satisfy the need to represent the linguistic innovations that result from the dynamic nature of standard language, academic spelling dictionaries are supplemented and improved with each successive edition. Those are the reasons they retain a central position within the context of codification of the Bulgarian standard language as a whole. By regulating the use of the standard language in the public sphere, they also function in practice as the basic expressions of its norm. The codifying function of academic spelling dictionaries also determines their role as arbiters and their use in checking and controlling spelling and, more broadly, language competence.

Besides providing general and systematic information on spelling, pronunciation, and grammar, the aim of academic spelling dictionaries is to guide users' attention - through the introductory section and the alphabetical headword lists - toward those linguistic elements (words, word forms, phrases, sentences, and texts) whose usage is associated with doubts in written practice.

The described characteristics define the academic spelling dictionaries of the Institute for the Bulgarian Language as polyvalent normative reference books that provide a systematic presentation of the written form of the language. They offer information on the different levels of the linguistic system and their units of phonetics, morphology, word formation, and syntax. Through the macro- and microstructure of the dictionaries, as well as the relationships and connections between macro- and microstructural elements (introductory section - rule - headword list - dictionary entry), and through the use of meta-language, the spelling norm and its codification receive their full lexicographical representation.

In addition to serving as spelling and grammar reference books and reflecting the standard lexicon in its entirety, these editions are also expected to meet society's need for a clear, comprehensible, universally accessible, convenient, and practical language guide, which is the expression of their multifunctionality.

Over the years, academic spelling dictionaries evolve, expand and refine while retaining their traditional functions and structure. In response to the ever-increasing demand for quality and reliable linguistic information on the Internet, the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science, developed an electronic version of the *Official Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language*, marking the first implementation of a modern and up-to-date electronic spelling dictionary in Bulgarian linguistics (for details of the BERON project - Bulgarian Language Resources Online platform BERON - see further in the article).

Language consulting

An important segment of language cultivation, as a form of conscious influence on language, is language consulting, which accompanies and supports the codification of standard norms. It is a primary tool for direct communication between linguists and members of the language community which is distinguished by its institutionality (Tomov 2017, 43). The consulting function of the Institute for Bulgarian Language is predominantly carried out by the Language Consultations Service at the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language, established in 1951 at the initiative of Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin. Today, it has evolved into a prestigious academic centre for language consulting. The Service's recommendations are based on the current codified norms and are perceived as authoritative by users.

Language consultation is a specific genre distinguished by its dialogical, concrete, and individual character (Tomov 2017, 44). A distinctive feature of this genre is that it has the character of an instruction for action in case a user needs information to resolve a specific linguistic issue encountered in practice. The scope of language consulting is very broad and covers all areas of the Bulgarian standard language - spelling, pronunciation, punctuation, grammar, meaning and use of words, text formatting, history of language rules, etc. In addition to its main task of providing users with reliable and accurate linguistic information, the Language Consultations Service fulfills several other key functions essential to language cultivation: 1) analysing objective data on the reception and application of codified norms; 2) documenting new cases not covered by the current codification and developing well-founded opinions on their regulation; 3) recording innovations in the different functional areas of standard language use; 4) collecting and analysing data on how native speakers assess innovations in the Bulgarian language.

As a result of the analysis of the language consultation data, conclusions can be drawn as to how rational, effective and comprehensible the rules formulated in the normative reference books are, which today is an important sociolinguistic criterion taken into account in codification (see Tomov 2019). Together with the results of the research on language attitudes towards the codified norms, this supports the development of a longer-term strategy and the planning of possible changes in the codification - above all in its scope and meta-language, respecting the principle of flow and continuity, i.e., flexible stability.

In order to help maintain the unity and stability of the Bulgarian standard language, language consulting is gradually expanding its scope. Today - in line with the expectations and behaviour of modern users - it is carried out through different channels: other than via the telephone, users can also ask their questions by email and via the Language Consultations Service Online Guide³, as well as on Facebook.

³ <https://ibl.bas.bg/ezikovispravki/kategorii/>

Language consulting is a tool for the prompt and timely resolution of emerging linguistic issues in accordance with the principles of the current codification. Because it is static (unlike norms, which are dynamic), codification does not provide an explicit answer to all questions arising in practice. Moreover, its scope is not total - it cannot cover all linguistic phenomena at once, and new usages of language are constantly appearing that need normative evaluation and professional recommendation.

The Language Consultations Service has implemented a well-balanced and flexible system for providing responses to user questions and expert opinions. To this end, the advantages of each of the contact channels are exploited, and the user can choose one of them according to their specific needs. Expert opinions are issued upon request from various institutions and have an official character. In the Language Consultations Service Online Guide, the user can find the answer to their question themselves through an integrated search engine (by word, phrase or subject heading) or ask a question through the feedback form. The Guide is distinguished by its informative immediacy, as the answers contain up-to-date and new information that cannot be immediately included in dictionaries and grammars.

Language consulting also has an educational function - it popularizes the codified norms and increases the motivation for their acquisition and the public engagement with language issues.

The documentation of the questions and answers received by the Language Consultations Service allows for systematic monitoring and analysis of queries and their typology. To this end, the observations of the last six years have been summarized in two documents prepared by the Service⁴. The data from language consulting, together with the data obtained from the study of public attitudes towards the Bulgarian standard language (see below), highlight those segments of the codification that are stable, as well as those that require refinement and supplementation, which is crucial for its effectiveness.

The latest projects in the field of linguistic normativity of the Bulgarian standard language

Over the past few years, the efforts of the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language have been focused on the execution of two major projects of national significance in the field of linguistic normativity. Their implementation is fully in line with the role of the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS as a national institution entrusted by the state with the study and codification of standard norms as mandatory for official communication.

⁴ One of them is published, see *Monitoring na voprosite v onlayn spravochnika „Ezikovi spravki po internet“* (Monitoring of questions in the Language Consultations Service Online Guide). (<https://ibl.bas.bg/ezikovispravki/publicacii/trudove-i-sbornitsi/monitoring-na-vprosite-v-onlayn-spravochnika-ezikovi-spravki-po-internet-za-perioda-2018-2020-g>). The other is yet to be published.

The project *Study of public attitudes and value orientations towards the modern Bulgarian standard language as a factor in the codification of its norms*⁵ (2017-2019) was initiated by the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language. Its development is in connection with the application of the principle of taking language attitudes into account in the codification of standard norms, as enshrined in codification theory and in models of standardization of standard language (see Haugen 1972; Dokulil 1952; Daneš 1986; Garvin 1993). The necessity of applying this principle stands out even more clearly today, as modern language communication increasingly takes place in an Internet environment. As is well known, interactivity in information exchange, following the *one-to-many* model, is fundamental to this environment. That is why, more than ever, individual writing practices on the Internet exert pressure on codified written language - especially in cases of the erosion of codified grammatical norms as a result of processes of reorganization and restructuring of the grammatical system.

With the execution of the project, for the first time in Bulgarian linguistics, an analysis of the state of today's codification was carried out from the point of view of its recipients (users of the standard language) based on valid information⁶. The aim of the project was to obtain reliable feedback on the opinions of our language community regarding various aspects of the functioning of Bulgarian standard language today. A wealth of information was collected and analysed on a range of both general and specific issues related to the standard language. The analyses made (see Aleksandrova (ed.) 2019; Blagoeva (ed.) 2019; Stancheva 2021) are of key importance in making both more general and specific codification decisions.

A generalized list of language attitudes, both general and specific, was selected to fulfill the project tasks. The general attitudes - *positive, negative* and *neutral* - were made specific by measuring four specific language attitudes: *loyalty, pride, awareness of the standard norm, willingness to participate*. According to the theory (see Garvin 1993), these attitudes indicate the development of the different manifestations of the symbolic function of standard language (unifying, separatist, prestige, frame-of-reference, and participatory). Therefore, measuring and analysing these attitudes are crucial when making specific decisions regarding the management of language practice in formal communication.

Two sources of information were used in the nationally representative sociological study: a) the respondents' subjective evaluations of the standard language and b) the objective results of a short written test conducted during the

⁵ The project was funded by the National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science with contract DN10/5 of 15.12.2016 and was implemented by a team of linguists from the Department of Modern Bulgarian Language of the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS and Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", as well as sociologists from the Economic Research Institute at BAS.

⁶ Such information was gathered through a nationally representative sociological survey conducted through face-to-face interviews among 1,000 Bulgarian adults in the period 5-12 July 2017 in 125 nests in 92 settlements and conducted by Exacta Research Group.

interview. Combining the direct method with content analysis made it possible for the first time in our country to quantify the manifestations of the antinomy *stated opinion about standard language - actual linguistic behaviour* (see Daneš 1986, 208). The applied approach allowed: a) to measure objectively language attitudes towards the Bulgarian standard language; b) to measure the degree of deviation from grammatical norms in dynamic practice; c) to delineate the points at which codification practice needs to be optimized, as well as the approaches for achieving this; d) to identify stereotypes and misconceptions regarding language attitudes and linguistic behaviour, both within specific demographic groups and our language community as a whole.

The wealth of information gathered became the basis for detailed analyses of the state of our standard language and the codification of its norms at the macro and micro levels (see Stancheva 2019a; Aleksandrova (ed.) 2019; Blagoeva (ed.) 2019; Stancheva 2021).

At the macro level, on the basis of the analyses of the respondents' evaluations, conclusions were drawn for the first time in our linguistics about: a) the functions of the standard Bulgarian today and their hierarchy; b) the degree of obligatoriness of written standard language norms in different situations; c) the state of the current codification; d) the degree of influence of socio-demographic factors on language attitudes and linguistic behaviour. It was found that there is a high consistency between the instrumental and symbolic functions of the standard Bulgarian. The analysis of evaluations regarding the degree of obligatoriness of standard language norms provided grounds for the conclusion that today's Bulgarian language community is moderately conservative and currently reluctant to support changes in the written norms. It was also found that today's codification acts in the direction of deepening the manifestations of the symbolic function of standard language. Furthermore, it was concluded that the current codification is balanced in its content and acts in the direction of maintaining the unifying function of the standard language vertically (over time). The rationale for this conclusion is that there is no age group that does not self-identify with proficiency in the standard. It has been shown that the main disadvantage of codification most often cited by respondents is not of a content but of a technical nature - the lack of accessibility in terms of standard rules along two lines. On the one hand, respondents pointed to the complex meta-language of standard rules as a disadvantage, and on the other hand, they pointed to the lack of reliable sources about codification on the Internet. In addition, it was concluded that two of the 12 socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents - material status and education - have the strongest impact on language attitudes and linguistic behaviour, with the influence of material status being the most pronounced.

At the micro level, a detailed comparison was made between the respondents' self-assessment and their linguistic behaviour for their proficiency in nine grammatical norms in dynamic practice. This comparison made it possible to pinpoint very precisely the points at which: a) there is an elevated self-assessment in terms of mastery of certain rules; b) the so-called mass error in oral speech is also found in a written dimension; c) written speech turns out to be impervious to deviations from the norm in oral speech (see Stancheva 2019b).

For the first time, a typology of grammatical norms in dynamic practice with a view to codification was also proposed (see Stancheva 2019a). The conclusions drawn in the above-mentioned points also determine the direction in which the efforts of codification practice in the future should be channeled.

The project Bulgarian Language Resources Online platform BERON⁷ (2022-2024) was conceived and is being implemented in accordance with the requirement in theory (Danesh 1986) that codification should be widely disseminated among the language community. This requirement is applicable during the third stage of the codification process, defined as implementation into practice, and compliance with it ensures the successful operation of the unifying function of the standard language as an effective means of communication.

The efforts to realize the project were also based on the results of the study of language attitudes described above, namely, that according to more than two-thirds of the respondents, the lack of reliable sources of codification on the Internet is a serious obstacle to compliance with standard norms (see Stancheva 2021).

As of May 2024, the platform BERON (<https://beron.mon.bg>) grants free access to the digitized version of the *Official Spelling Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language* (2012), which is a major resource for the mandatory standard language norms in formal communication.

There are three main principles underlying the provision of information in BERON: a) completeness of language content with a focus on normativity; b) wide accessibility to the product through free access without user registration; c) intuitive (simple and user-friendly) interface for working with the platform (Fig. 1).

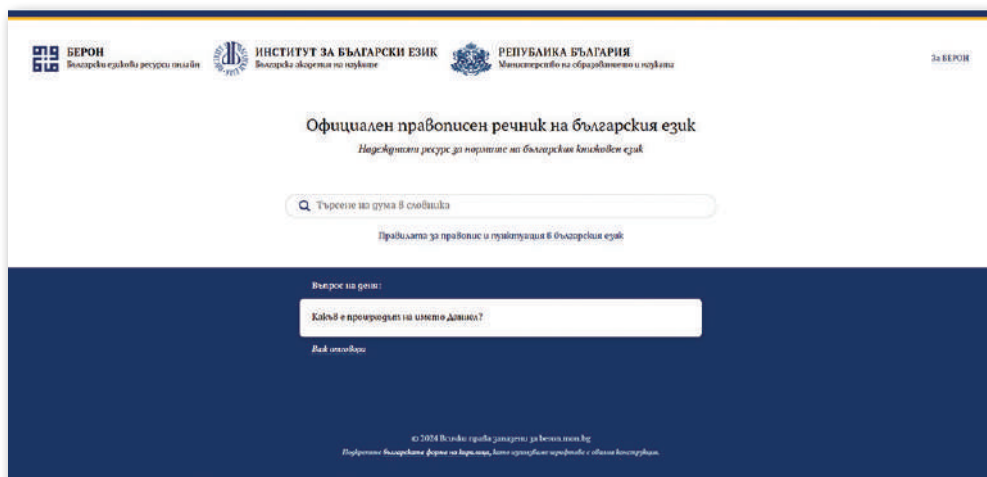


Fig. 1. Home page of the BERON platform

⁷ The BERON project is implemented with the financial support of the Ministry of Education and Science under the Agreement No. ΔO1-300/17.12.2021 between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS.

when searching. For the first time, the lemmas are audio-recorded and can be heard. This makes BERON the first truly pronunciation-oriented dictionary, adding significant value to the acquisition of standard pronunciation - especially for learners of Bulgarian as a foreign language.

Each lexeme is presented with its grammatical class (*verb, noun, etc.*) along with the grammatical categories inherent to that class (e.g., for verbs - *conjugation, aspect, transitivity, person*). In addition, the grammatical meaning of the relevant category, inherent in the lexeme being searched for, is also indicated. The definitions of the individual categories and their grammatical meanings, presented in a clear and accessible way, are also available on request. The platform follows the principle of accessibility of the meta-language of codification, in line with intuitive knowledge about the language (see Stancheva 2021). This allows the rules to be formulated as simple action-based instructions, which in turn ensures their easy application in writing practice.

The digital environment also allowed for the fullest possible representation of the paradigms (forms) of lexemes. In previous spelling dictionaries, this information was provided incompletely and selectively due to the limitations of print technology. The presentation of lexeme paradigms is in line with the principle of completeness of normative information. The BERON platform is in fact the first resource that presents lexemes with their full paradigms (i.e. with all their forms)⁸, which makes it possible to meet the needs of different user groups.

The presentation of the lexemes in the dictionary was consistent with the logic of the digital environment. Unlike the classic paper spelling dictionary, in which words are arranged alphabetically, in BERON each lexeme is linked to all

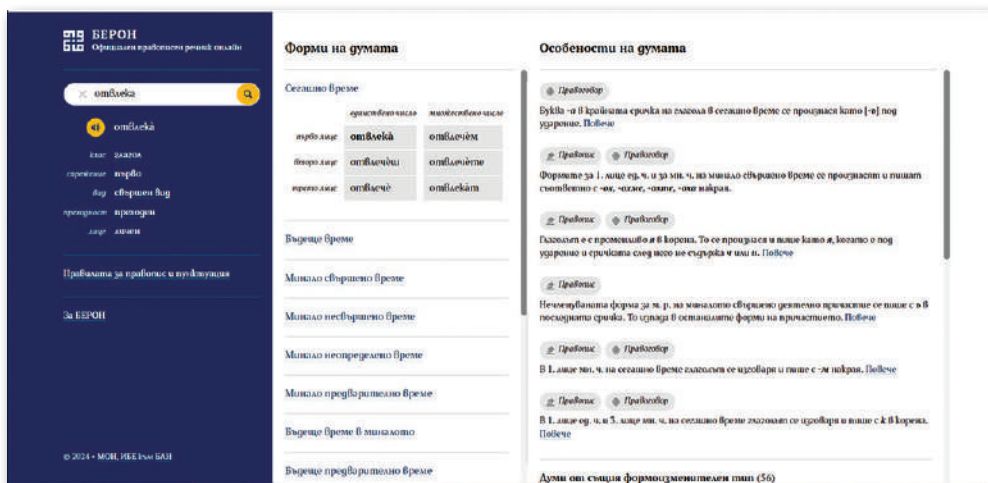


Fig. 3. Presentation of an individual lexeme in the BERON platform

⁸ The verb paradigms do not include the forms of the verbal category *renarrative*.

others of its type (according to the peculiarities of its form). When distinguishing inflectional types, a network of criteria relevant to form-change is applied - these are both systemic and functional (i.e., related to the use of specific forms within different grammatical categories) (Fig. 3).

The chosen way of structuring the information enables the user to make sense of common systemic and structural features of the language. Furthermore, structured in this way, this information has great potential for both the teaching of Bulgarian (both as a native and foreign language) and for research purposes.

The *Word characteristics* section places a distinct emphasis on normativity. It focuses on information related to the use of the searched lexeme in relation to its pronunciation, spelling and grammatical properties. The properties of the lexeme are selected in relation to deviations from codified norms that are frequently made in standard practice.

In all cases where a rule is part of a more general rule, a link is provided to the *Spelling and punctuation rules* section of the platform. This system of links enables the user, on request, to see the 'bigger picture' in which the rule in question operates, and thus to supplement their linguistic competence. Alongside this, in a number of cases, rephrasing of the rules in accordance with intuitive language knowledge is suggested to ensure their application, as previously mentioned. This is especially true for the rules governing solid, hyphenated, and separate word spelling in Bulgarian.

The *Question of the day* section on the platform's homepage also has a normative character. It provides answers to questions submitted by users of the Language Consultations Service of the Institute for Bulgarian Language.

It is no exaggeration to say that the BERON platform is currently the most comprehensive and reliable normative resource for the Bulgarian standard language. Its content is to be supplemented and enriched in line with the understanding of codification as a continuous and ongoing process. The supplementation and enrichment of the platform will allow to minimize the antinomy of the *dynamics of the norm - statics of codification*.

Conclusion

The rich and multifaceted activity of the Institute for Bulgarian Language at BAS in the field of linguistic normativity of the standard Bulgarian is related both to the application of time-tested theoretical formulations in the subject area of standard languages and to their supplementation with new tools for the study, analysis and dissemination of codified standard norms in a digital environment. As a national institution responsible for standard norms and their codification, the Institute for Bulgarian Language follows the path set by the founders of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - to create and disseminate normative linguistic resources which will be of benefit to society as a whole and every Bulgarian citizen, as well as all those with research interests in the field of the Bulgarian standard language.

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