

## SOME RAPID GRAMMATICAL CHANGES IN CARINTHIAN SLOVENE

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### 1. Introduction

In the summer of 1985, I participated in a pilot project<sup>1</sup> to investigate the possible occurrence of 'linguistic simplification' in the Carinthian dialects of Slovene. Given, among other factors, the radical increase in bilingualism among the Slovene-speaking population of Carinthia over the last several generations and the concurrent reduction in the number of active Slovene speakers, it was expected that the best chance of success would lie in contrasting the speech of non-ethnically conscious Slovene speakers in a number of villages with that of older informants in the same villages. This would also permit the discovery of any regional variations in linguistic change which might exist. Unfortunately, because the question of what language/dialect one speaks and what that speech form is called is, in Carinthia, a very political one, it proved to be more difficult than anticipated to find willing 'nezavedni' informants.

Of necessity, therefore, it was decided that the informants in the two categories to be compared would have to be ethnically conscious Slovenes. It was hoped that the greatest variation in usage would be found in the speech of two widely separated age categories, under 30 and over 60. As a consequence, any variation found to exist would most probably be attributable to trends of linguistic change in the speech form of the people actively using the language, as opposed to possible signs of 'linguistic decay' exhibited as the speech form falls into disuse.

To maximize the chances of finding significant variation, it was decided to look at parts of the grammar where it was suspected that inter-generational differences would more likely be found. The areas chosen were ones such as irregular noun declensions, the supine/infinitive distinction, case government by verbs which do not take a preposition, pronominal adjectival agreement, and the case government of various prepositions.

If you simply tape conversations between two speakers of a dialect, these areas of grammar are especially difficult to collect data for, because they seem to occur too seldom. Since almost all of the Slovene speakers in Carinthia are bilingual, it was decided to have the informants translate phrases and sentences from German into the local Slovene dialects. The data obtained in this manner seem to be quite representative of the local dialects, because when the author's informants hesitated while responding, it was usually in an attempt to avoid German vocabulary as opposed to indecision concerning matters of grammar. Even prompting of the informants for, or with, the desired form, when necessary, did not seem to have any ill effect on the data collected.

Due to the survey nature of this preliminary research, the data collected tend to be somewhat sketchy. Furthermore, the data discussed here represent only a subset of what was collected—the questionnaire took about an hour to administer. In an effort to find general trends of change, I attempted to get comparable data in four different villages. Because of logistical problems and the reticence of many people to act as informants, I do not have a great number of informants from any one village. Consequently, there are not enough data to talk about frequencies. However, I hope that this paper, which should be

viewed as an interim report on work in progress, will show that change is indeed taking place.

For the main thrust of this paper, I have chosen to discuss changes affecting certain case endings in the nominal declensions in just two villages in southeastern Podjuna/Jauntal, Globasnica/Globasnitz and Dob/Aich. Four tables<sup>2</sup>, for speakers of various generations in these villages, are presented.

## 2.1. Feminine and Masculine Locative and Instrumental Singular

Table 1 shows the variation elicited for feminine and masculine locative and instrumental singular. The feminines, at the top of the table, are separated from the masculines by a solid rule. The horizontal hyphen rules separate the two cases. If the dialect counterpart of the Standard Literary Slovene [SLS] root was used by the informants, only the suffix is given.

SLS uses the *-i* suffix for the feminine locative singular. As can be seen, this is also used in Globasnica and Dob except for one speaker who uses the reduced vowel *ə* instead. The feminine instrumental singular, however, shows considerable variation from SLS. The older speaker in Globasnica uses the *-i* suffix as do four of the five younger speakers. In Dob, however, we find that the older and middle speakers use the *-ə*, but the younger speakers are divided in their usage. It can be noted that the middle-aged speaker from Dob uses the *-ə* ending for both cases.

With regard to the masculines, *v štebnu* is the current SLS for 'in Šteben'; in earlier times, though, we would find the *-i* suffix being used for the locative of masculine place names.<sup>3</sup> This is reflected by the older speaker in Globasnica and the divided usage of the older speakers in Dob. The younger speakers, however, have normalized *šteben* as a regular masculine noun, using the *-ə* suffix.

The masculine instrumental singular for the older speakers shows the *-əm* suffix. However, the younger speakers in both Globasnica and Dob show a preponderance of the *-ə* ending, without the *m*, regardless of which masculine root was selected, the native *stol* or the German loanword 'Sessel'. This process had already started with the middle generation in Globasnica: One speaker, when attempting to speak SLS, used the phrase *z janezu* instead of *z janezom* for 'with Janez'.<sup>4</sup>

The general trend that can be seen, then, is that in both the feminine and the masculine, a single suffix is beginning to be used for both the locative and the instrumental: respectively, *-i* and *-ə*. This is, however, only a trend that is presenting itself, and which is not yet complete in all instances for all speakers.

If only the masculines were considered, it might seem plausible that the final *-m* of the instrumental was simply dropped, although the loss of a final nasal consonant often entails the nasalization of the preceding vowel. However, the fact that the feminine instrumental suffix is going from the reduced vowel schwa to *-i* indicates that the explanation ought to be sought elsewhere. Let us look at another declensional class to see if help is forthcoming.

## 2.2. Neuter Consonant Stems

The neuter consonant stems constitute a numerically very small declensional subclass, there being only about three dozen in SLS.<sup>5</sup> Table 2 is divided into upper and lower halves. The upper half has a typical *s*-stem, *drevo*, in both the locative and instrumental singular, while the lower has three different *n*-stems: *vreme* in the locative, and *seme* and *ime* in the

**TABLE 1**  
**Feminine and Masculine, Locative and Instrumental Singular**

gCn	StdSl	Globasnica		Dob		
		Old <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>5</sup>	Old <sup>2</sup>	Mid <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>3</sup>
fLs	v hiš-i	-i	-i	-i	-ə	-i
fIs	pod miz-o	-i	-i 4 -ə 1	-ə	-ə	-i 2 -ə 2
mLs	v Štebn-u	-i	-ə	-ə -i	-ə	-ə
mIs	pod stol-om	-əm	-ə 3 -əm 1 žesln-ə 1	-əm	-əm	-ə 2 žesln-ə 1

**TABLE 2**  
**Neuter Consonant Stems**

gCn	StdSl	Globasnica		Dob		
		Old <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>5</sup>	Old <sup>2</sup>	Mid <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>3</sup>
nLs (s)	na dreves-u	drewias -ə	drewias -ə drew -ə paml̥nə (m.)	drewias -u drew -ə	drewja	drew -ə
nIs (s)	za dreves-om	drewias -əm	drewias -ə paml̥nəm (m.)	drewias -əm	drew -ə	drewias -ə drew -ə
nLs (n)	pri vremen-u	wreman -ə	wreman -ə wrjaman -ə wriman -ə wremen -u wremen -əm	wreman -ə vreman -u	wreman -ə	wriman -ə wreman -ə
nIs (n)	z semen-om	semen -ə	semeān -əm semen -ə sem -ə semí ?	seman -əm səman -əm	seman -ə	seman -ə
nIs (n)	z imen-om	iman -ə	iman -ə imen -ə ime ?	iman -əm	iman -ə	iman -ə iman -ə imen -ə

instrumental. For each sub-subclass, both the locative and instrumental cases are represented. Differently from Table 1, here the full forms are provided instead of just the suffixes. The table has been constructed so that the suffixes are separated from the stems and printed at the right of each cell for ease of comparison. It will be noticed that there are some instances of an *-u* suffix, clearly indicating interference from the standard language.

Let us look first at the upper half of the table. One way of eliminating the irregularities of the consonant stems is to use another root entirely. In this case we can see the root *paml*, which has been borrowed from German, being used by one of the younger speakers in Globasnica. Note, however, that the *-m* is used in this instance for 'behind the tree'. As we saw with the development of the masculine instrumental singular, we also find the loss of final *-m* across generations in both Globasnica and Dob for the *s*-stems.

Another possible solution to this rather irregular morphological situation is to eliminate the consonantal part of the stem completely, thus regularizing the noun for much of the declension, with the short form used throughout rather than in the nominative and the accusative only. This can be seen to be happening to a certain extent in both Globasnica and Dob—in the latter even starting with one of the older speakers.

In the lower half of the table, where we have the *n*-stems, we also find this loss of final *-m* across generations in Dob. However, the 84-year-old informant in Globasnica has already lost that final *-m*, although one of the younger speakers has used the *-m* in the word for 'seed', *seme*. At the same time, we also see the *-əm* suffix being used quite improperly in the locative of the word 'weather' where we should historically have the *-ə* suffix as most of the speakers in both villages do.

In the examples for 'seed', we find the use of the short form of the stem in the instrumental, *z semə*, which is comparable to the use of *drew-* in Dob.

Another potential regularization involves the root vowel, which because of non-fixed stress and historical change was realized differently in different cases. In, e.g., the word for 'weather', the changes resulted in the forms *wrjamə* and *wre'man ə*<sup>6</sup> in the Globasnica area. This sort of alternation can be quite susceptible to normalization. This is, in fact, just what happened for the second younger speaker in Globasnica, for whom the vowel of the nominative has spread to another case. This normalization, then, overrides the historical regularity which might be found across many lexical items.

In the Globasnica data, there is a hint of a possible chronology for the change in the instrumental suffix—that is, that it began with the *n*-stems and is now spreading to the *s*-stems. This is supported by further data not provided in the table: the older speaker retains the *-əm* suffix for both 'wheel' and 'feather', SLS *koló* and *peró*, while all of the younger speakers have switched to simply the *-ə* ending or now use a different root entirely.

The neuter consonant stems, then, are following the same pattern of development as the masculines with regard to the case endings. Before, however, drawing any conclusions, let us look at another declensional type.

### 2.3. Instrumental Singular of Feminine *i*-stems

Table 3 shows the instrumental singulars of nine *i*-stems. The four in the upper half of the table have the stress on the root in SLS, while the five at the lower carry the stress on the suffix. Here we wish to consider two different phenomena across generations: the placement of stress, and the vowel of the suffix in the dialect forms.

With regard to stress placement, the forms used by the older speakers in both Globasnica and Dob can be seen to retain perfectly what can be taken as an older stage. On the other hand, the younger speakers in both villages have almost completed the retraction of stress

in the five nouns at the bottom of the table—in only one instance, that of a younger speaker's form for *peč* in Dob, is the stress retained on the suffix.

The expected instrumental singular suffixes in these dialects are: when unstressed, *-jə* or *-ijə* (final unstressed *-ə* having been reduced to schwa); and, under stress, *-jǝ* or *-jǝ* (nasality being somewhat variable in its occurrence, even when stressed). The older speakers in Dob show fairly good retention of these expected reflexes for the stem-stressed forms, only *luč* showing any discrepancy.

The elderly female informant in Globasnica, on the other hand, provided three different suffixes for *pesem* during elicitation, none of which was the expected one. One of these, however, the *-i*, was the only one she used with the other three nouns in the top half of the table.

The older generation in Dob, therefore, possesses almost what could be considered the pristine dialect system for the *i*-stems, while in Globasnica the suffix-stressed forms have remained, but the unstressed endings have been radically altered.

Let us turn now to the differences between the generations within each village, beginning with Globasnica. The younger generation has clearly continued the use of the *-i* suffix as the unstressed ending in the top half of the table. However, with the retraction of stress for the items in the bottom half of the table, we do not find the quite logical *-jə* suffix. Rather, we find the adoption of *-i* by all speakers for four of the forms and by all but one speaker for *sol*. We are thus heading toward a new normalization which happens to coincide with that found for the feminine in *-a* as exemplified in Table 1.

Turning to the younger generation in Dob, we see that the *-i* suffix predominates for all forms except *pesem*. The other suffixes used are older forms used by previous generations. The trend, however, is clearly in the same direction as that taken in Globasnica.

The middle generation in Dob, even though represented by only a single speaker, shows a fair amount of variation. This variation was observed when the informant was asked to repeat responses. When my assistant—who was surprised by the variation—asked him why he had given different forms, he insisted that he had repeated precisely what he had said before. Clearly, his variation was not taking place at the conscious level. With the restricted amount of data we have here, he seems to be the missing link between the pristine older system and the newly evolving one.

## 2.4. The Feminine Dative Plural

Table 4 gives the responses to "Meine Schwester ist zu den Nonnen gegangen," all of which should have produced the dative plural of the feminine noun *nuna*. The older generation in both Globasnica and Dob as well as the middle generation in Dob gave the expected *-əm* suffix. To the contrary, all of the younger speakers in both villages gave the *-ami* suffix, although two of the Dob speakers also used *-əm*.

The *-ami* ending was already well established in the instrumental plural for the masculine with the older generation. *Zdovc*<sup>7</sup> has this suffix used with a masculine, *s cepcami*. My informants in Globasnica and Dob also used *-ami* with some irregular nouns. The extension of this suffix to the dative, replacing *-əm*, can be interpreted as the spread of the neutralization of the instrumental ending versus the dative/locative suffix distinction which we have seen in the singular.

Further evidence of this trend toward confusion of dative, locative and instrumental in the plural was provided by one of my acquaintances in Globasnica who used the phrase *pret desetix liətix*. This preposition should govern the instrumental, but here was used with the locative plural ending.

**TABLE 3**  
Feminine i-stems

StdSl	Globasnica		Dob		
	Old <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>5</sup>	Old <sup>2</sup>	Mid <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>3</sup>
z lúč-jo	-i	-i	-i -ji	-ji -jə	-i 3 -jə 1
s pámet-jo	-i	-i	-jə	-i	-i 3 -jə 1
s pésm-ijo	-i -ə -iji	-i 4 -ə 1 -ija 1	-ija	-i	-i 2 -ija 2
z nít-jo	-i	-i	-jə	-i -jə	-i 3
s sol-jó	-jó	-i 4 -ə 1	-jó	-i	-i
s peč-jó	-jó	-i	-jó	-jə	-i 2 -jó 1
z vas-jó	-jó	-i	-jó	-i -jə	-i
z miš-jó	-jó	-i	-jó	-i	-i
pod prst-jó	-jó	-i	-jó	-jə -jo	-i 3 -jə 1

**TABLE 4**  
Feminine Dative Plural

gCn	StdSl	Globasnica		Dob		
		Old <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>5</sup>	Old <sup>2</sup>	Mid <sup>1</sup>	Young <sup>3</sup>
fDp	k nun-am	x nun -əm	x nun -ami 4 q nun -ami 1	x nun -əm	x nun -əm	x nun -ami 2 k nun -ami 1 x nun -əm 1 k sgastr -əm 1

The data with regard to the plural are extremely scanty and need to be greatly expanded.

### 3. Summary of Changes

Although the results of this work on case endings are, of necessity, preliminary, certain fairly definitive statements can be made. Inter-generational differences are shown to exist within each village in the use of locative and instrumental singular case endings for various nominal declensions. Intra-generational variation within each village from one individual to the next is also demonstrated. Fluctuation within the speech of particular individuals is noted as well. Corresponding generations in the two villages are also seen to show differences in usage.

In isolation, it is suggested that the change of the instrumental singular ending of the masculines from *-əm* to *-ə* can be explained as the result of phonological change. However, while the change in the neuters does not counter this suggestion, forms found for *pesem*, the dative plural, the instrumental singular of adjectives in the masculine and neuter, and verb endings definitely do. Also the change from *-jə* to *-i* in the *i*-stems can not be viewed as phonological in nature.

Even given the considerable variation in the speech of this limited number of informants, this analysis shows that a trend toward the neutralization of the case-ending distinction between the instrumental and the dative/locative is evident across generations in both villages. Rather than phonological change, what we have seen, then, is morphological change being brought about by the spread of the dative/locative singular suffixes to the instrumental singular in all four of the declension classes we have looked at. Different declensions and sub-systems appear to have differing rates of change toward the neutralization. This neutralization in the singular also seems to be having some impact on the endings used in the plural with the spread of the instrumental plural to the dative.

Concisely, then, it seems that in the singular of nominal declensions, the instrumental ending is in the process of being replaced by the dative and locative. This neutralization in the singular also seems to be having an effect on the endings in the plural, but there it is the instrumental ending which is being used in the dative.

### 4. Some Possible Catalysts for Change

At this stage of the research, it is difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions regarding the geographical extent of the changes we have glimpsed and the underlying reasons for them. However, we can consider some possible explanations for what is happening. My statements in this regard are VERY tentative.

Carinthia is a bilingual area, with people exposed to at least four different speech varieties (SLS and German, local Slovene and German, as well as other local varieties of Slovene). An attempt has been made to discuss these changes without recourse to citing possible interference from German. A case can be made, however, that various calques may be having an influence on the trends which we have examined. For example, German *mit* and *zu* take the dative: this could be providing some impetus for the Slovene dative/locative singular endings to be used for the instrumental, and at a subsequent time for the instrumental plural ending to be used with the dative plural, as evidenced by *x nunami* replacing *x nunəm*.

In developing their speech patterns, individuals have used conflicting sources for analogizing (cf. the development of English *ring*, *rang*, *rung* from the earlier, regular Old English *hringen*, *hringde*, *hringdon*). This indicates that things are still in a state of flux, and that more change and more variation are likely as people tend to normalize their behavior. However, these normalizations may be accomplished on an individual basis, a point which we will return to in a moment.

The old amount-of-use principle is also relevant here. Various scholars<sup>8</sup> have insisted that the less frequently a form is used, the greater its susceptibility to change. In my 45 minute taping of the 84-year-old woman in Globasnica, I found only about 40 examples of prepositions. Clearly, not all gender, case and number combinations were represented. With television making considerable in-roads, the amount of Slovene dialect heard by the younger generation has decreased (particularly the speech of parents and grandparents around the oven on cold winter evenings). This obviously cuts down on the frequency of peripheral irregular items being heard, thus increasing the probability of their being normalized in one way or another when they do get used by the younger generation.

We must also consider the varying degrees of community insistence on 'correct' usage in each of the varieties.

1. Great pressure on Slovenes to speak both dialect and Standard German impeccably—otherwise, they run the risk of being stigmatized.
2. Minimal to considerable pressure to speak SLS well depending on the 'zavednost' (of parents and the individual speaker), education, and career aims.
3. Minimal pressure to maintain 'good' speech habits while using the local dialect.
  - Too much variation in what is heard in the village dialect from speaker to speaker (e.g. grandparents, one or both parents using other dialects as people go farther afield to find a spouse)
  - Some (or many, or most) speakers insisting on the use of local German, not Slovene, when conversing with them
  - The need to expand spheres of habitual acquaintance to other villages to maintain a sufficiently wide circle of speakers to sustain the local variant—this compounds the problem by increasing the variety heard by a given speaker.

The considerable variation from one individual to the next raises other questions:

1. Is this the normal state of affairs in a speech community: that although the main portion of the grammar may be shared, the fringes (the non-central, non-productive, numerical-ly infrequent features) may be susceptible to considerable variation? Or is the core of the grammar susceptible as well in these circumstances? This could be tested further by looking at dominant productive nominal systems, but research must also include other parts of speech, and should be expanded to other linguistic domains such as syntax and the phonological realization of lexical items—e.g. both *x* and *q* being used for 'towards,' as shown in Table 4.
2. If the variation continues to intensify, we may possibly be viewing the start of 'language death'. We need to be careful in this assessment, because language death would seem to be more of a socio-cultural phenomenon than a linguistic one—a favorable change in people's attitudes toward the dialects could result in a new consolidation in the subsystems of the speech forms used in a given village or area, thus establishing a new relatively homogeneous speech form.

Prof. Allan Gleason<sup>9</sup> has suggested that there is probably some as yet undetermined 'critical size' for a speech community and its ability to maintain a relatively slow rate of change in its grammar. This suggests various possibilities.

1. The major linguistic aim of a group near the critical size may be merely the continuance of the speech form as a means of communication and identification, with little regard for 'correctness' — the linguistic features which are not felt to have symbolic importance as identifiers then may become even more susceptible to modification, thus leading to ever more variation within the group as individuals normalize various segments of their grammars on the bases of individually (and separately) perceived analogies.
2. Individual innovations have a greater likelihood of wider acceptance, because fewer people need to be influenced. Thus the big fish in an ever smaller pond carries ever greater relative influence.

This last point raises intriguing, and frustrating, questions which I will conclude with. Would the speech of the 84-year-old woman in Globasnica have been more 'correct' twenty—or forty—years ago than it is now? (E.g., did she, earlier in her life, use the *-m* for instrumentals of *n*-stems?) Has her speech been susceptible to change over the course of her lifetime because of developments which were taking place around her?

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## REFERENCES

1. The research reported on here was part of a project investigating 'language simplification' in various Carinthian localities, carried out by Tom Priestly and myself, and made possible by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant 410-85-0290. I wish to thank Tom Priestly and H. Allan Gleason, Jr., for their criticism and advice. I also wish to thank Marija Trampuš who helped obtain and interview informants, and assisted with the transcription of the data. All remaining errors are, however, my own.
2. The number of informants in each category is given as a superior number at the head of each column. If there was not complete unanimity among the informants in a given category, the number of instances of each token or the tokens themselves are provided. At times, the number of tokens will be more than the number of informants, because some speakers provided more than one response. The gCn column label found in the tables stands for gender/Case/number.
3. For example, *Zdravo telo nar boljši blago, alj navk zdravje ohraniti* by P.K. Robida was published *V Celovci* by Janes Leon in 1846.
4. Since the final *-ə* on a noun in this dialect area is usually from a historical *-o* or *-u* (Pavle Zdovc, *Die Mundart des südöstlichen Jauntales in Kärnten* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1972) 118), the normal correspondence between the local dialect and the Standard would lead the speaker to select the *-u* ending based on phonological criteria, when in fact the choice really needed to be made on the basis of morpheme correspondence, dialect *-ə* to Standard *-om*.
5. Jože Toporišič, *Slovenska slovnica* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1984) 232.
6. These data are from the SAZU dialect files in Ljubljana.
7. Pavle Zdovc, *Die Mundart des südöstlichen Jauntales in Kärnten* (Doctoral dissertation, Vienna: 1971) xlviii.
8. E.g., Witold Mańczak, "Frequenz und Sprachwandel", in H. Lüdtke, ed., *Kommunikationstheoretische Grundlagen des Sprachwandels* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 37-79.
9. Personal communication.

**POVZETEK****NEKATERE HITRE SLOVNIČNE SPREMEMBE V KOROŠKI SLOVENŠČINI**

*Avtor podaja začetne izsledke raziskovanja slovničnih sprememb v slovenskih narečjih podjunskih vasi Globasnice in Doba. V obeh vaseh obstajajo jezikovne razlike med generacijami pri sklanjanju samostalnikov v mestniku in orodniku ednine. Prikazane so govorne razlike od človeka do človeka iste generacije in tudi med temi posamezniki razlike niso stalne. Razlike v rabi končnic so opazne tudi med ustreznimi generacijami obeh vasi. Analiza kaže, da obstaja težnja proti nevtralizaciji rabe končnic orodnika in dajalnika/mestnika od generacije do generacije v obeh vaseh. Zdi se, da se posamezne sklanjatve spreminjajo z različno hitrostjo. Ta nevtralizacija ima verjetno vsaj nekaj vpliva tudi na množinske končnice.*