

## ON LITERATURE IN DIASPORAS AND THE LIFE SPAN OF THEIR MEDIUM

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“The language is ready, or can be quickly made ready, to define the artist’s individuality. If no literary artist appears, it is not essentially because the language is too weak an instrument, it is because the culture of the people is not favorable to the growth of such personality as seeks a truly individual verbal expression.”

Edward Sapir<sup>1</sup>

Almost a whole year after first choosing my topic for this symposium,\* I now would feel more comfortable with a title such as the following: “On poetic language in the literature of a linguistic diaspora at the moment of separation from its native language.”

1.0. If I thus narrow the focus of my topic, the discussion seems to be reduced to, first, a string of well-known and self-evident facts, and second, an argument with a rather contradictory proposition. The self-evident part of my discussion resides with the process of assimilation in societies; the contradictory part of the argument consists in the fact that the breaking of the umbilical cord between a homeland and its diaspora does not necessarily mean the end of the existence of a poetic language in that diaspora. At the moment when the native resources of a language die out, the poetic talent in an ethnic diaspora is already producing creations in the medium of a new adopted language. This fact, although obvious, logical, and confirmed by observation, does (in my opinion) deserve a sociolinguistic interpretation.

And it stands to reason that, in assimilative processes everywhere, the strength of a minority ethnic community, its social make-up, and its cohesiveness may be important factors. In smaller ethnic communities, such as those of Slovene Americans, as far as can be judged on the basis of their three- or four-generation span,<sup>2</sup> ethnic enclaves preserve their language in the family life of the first generation but rarely in that of the second; and slightly longer in church life, in religious traditions; but certainly not on the street. In formal and informal situations communication is in English. When children leave home, they very often leave their ethnic communities for good. The higher the level of education that they take with them to North America, the longer they cling to their Slovene language; the higher the level of education that they acquire in English, the easier and the quicker is their Americanization.

In sociological terms, every such minority community in North America, dominated by its preoccupation with folklore, ethnic customs, dances, ethnic art and ethnic food, tends to preserve a kind of “residual ethnicity.”<sup>3</sup> Even in the Slovene North American communities, which may be rightly proud of the fact that they descend from a high, language-centered society and culture such as those of Slovenia, this stream of ethnic culture becomes steadily shallower and less able to act as a creative agent in the cultural life of the community as a whole. The fossilized ethnic life holds no attraction for the educated young ethnics, who can give expression to their talents only through the medium of the dominant

culture in their North American country.

Thus, by implication, a Slovene-American or Slovene-Canadian creative literature with a Slovene poetic language can exist, and does exist, only in its first generation of men of letters: e.g., Etbin Kristan (1867-1953), Ivan Zorman (1889-1975), Anna Praček-Krasna (1900-1988) and Karl Mauser (1918-1977) in the U.S.A., Ivan Dolenc and Irma Ožbalt in Canada—all of them writers and poets who were born and educated in Slovenia and who, for the most part, were first published there also. The second generation of poets and writers of Slovene descent, e.g., Frank Mlakar (1913-1967), or Rose Mary Prosen, who were born, educated and first published in America,—this generation invariably has produced literary creations in English.<sup>4</sup> Louis Adamic (1899-1951) was an exception: born and partly schooled in Slovenia, he became parted from the Slovene language, and, having been first published in English in the U.S.A., became known as an English writer. Otherwise, there is not one first-generation Slovene North American who was born, educated and first published in Slovenia, who has been literarily creative in English in North America; and there have been no men of letters of Slovene descent who were born and educated in North America who have written and published there in Slovene.

It is to these facts that we wish to extend our sociolinguistic model used in the investigation of standard languages.<sup>5</sup>

**2.0.** On the whole, literary standard languages, and even simpler literary languages, perform two kinds of functions in society: first, the so-called *inherent* functions, i.e., those for which a human language exists as a tool of personal communication; and, second, so-called *social* functions, i.e., those which are ascribed to human language because of its existence as a tool of societal communication.

**2.1.** Among the inherent functions the primary one, of course, is the *communicative* function in all its different forms and varieties, written and spoken, conversational, relating to the mass-media, scholarly, professional, administrative, and so forth; while the secondary one is the *aesthetic* function, to serve the poet as a means to materialize his poetic expression. The aesthetic function is best implemented in *poetic language*.<sup>6</sup>

Living language is functional, i.e., it is “efficient,” if it is capable of regeneration, or simply of change; on the intellectual level, if it is able to meet the demands of its users as an instrument of *referential* meaning; on the level of poetic expression, if it is adequate to meet the needs of a well-developed matrix of *emotional* and *poetic* expressiveness.

In *primary speech communities* where a standard language really serves as a means of communication, linguistic devices are always available through the *intellectualized* modification of the means available for new functions: either through the activation of grammatical categories and forms that are no longer in active use; or through the adaptation of patterns and models of genetically related languages; or through new creation, or simply through adaptive borrowing, to extend the lexicon to the extent that is required by the language’s speakers for their everyday needs. In the *secondary speech communities*, as for instance in emigration, needs of this kind can be stimulated only by contact with the dominant speech community, and activated only by vulgar, non-adapted borrowings (e.g., *kara* (pl. *kare*) ‘car,’ *bojs* (pl. *bojsi*) ‘boy,’ and crude loan translations, such as *ona je čakala za tebe* ‘she waited for you.’<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the poets and writers of a primary speech community draw continuously from the living resources of its rural dialectal usages in order to express themselves more adequately. This kind of *adequacy*, which is nourished only within a primary speech community, is less likely to affect the purely rational needs of expression, but rather falls within the more inmost, personal life of its users, *to impart a more vivid and intimate flavor*

to poetic language. This stimulus to the enrichment of the poetic and standard language is in the long run entirely absent in a secondary speech community. And these seem to be the ultimate limits of the search for the appropriate expression on the intellectual and poetic level, above all of a poet's search for a verbal realization of a poetic image. It is no accident that this kind of creative search can not be made by a second-generation poet in emigration.

**3.0.** The social functions of literary standard languages express relationships between language and the society in which the language is used. These functions are entirely symbolic, although they represent societal forces (here: *functions*) with which language influences speech communities, and societal reactions (here: *attitudes*) with which the speech communities respond thereto.

Four such functions, and three such attitudes, are distinguished. A *separatist* function and a *unifying* function are correlated with an attitude of *loyalty*: the unifying function arises as a consequence of the fact that a standard language usually unites several dialects into a single speech community; the separatist function results from the fact that a standard language normally sets off one community as separate from another. A *prestige* function, which reflects the consciousness of pride, deriving from the actual possession of a standard language, is correlated with the *language pride* attitude. A *frame of reference* function, i.e., the way in which a standard language functions as a system that serves to orient the speaker in matters of correctness, and of the perception and evaluation of poetic speech, is correlated with the attitude of *awareness of norm*. When systematized into a sociolinguistic mini-system, these functions and attitudes serve us not only as a guide for understanding language planning as practised for today and tomorrow; they may also be used, I submit, as parameters to measure the development of languages in general and their literary standards of yesterday and tomorrow, as well as models to illustrate the terminal conditions of the existence of languages and their final evaporation in a society.

*TABLE I* below illustrates these categories as they apply to both standard Slovene, as it evolved in the old country, and also—very tentatively—to the evolution of the Slovene language, through two stages, in emigration in North America. The stages in the evolution of Slovene in Slovenia are posited as follows: first at the level of its natural dialects and second at the level of its *koine* or ethnic vernacular, these two stages comprising the pre-Standard stages; and third, today's standardized CSS [= *Contemporary Standard Slovene*]. In this model, I suggest that the stages in the evolution of the language in North American Slovene communities are at two levels: first, as used by first-generation immigrants ("EMIGRATION I"), and second, as used by subsequent (second and/or third and/or fourth) generations ("EMIGRATION II"); under the former heading, I separate the language use of non-educated speakers (and those with elementary education) from that of educated speakers. Note the correspondences of these two columns, as far as education is concerned, with the columns under "Slovene in the old country," where both "DIALECT" and "KOINE" represent non-educated language, and "CSS" by definition represents educated language.

On this table a 'plus' sign (+) indicates that the level of language plays, or played, a major role in that particular sociolinguistic function, and correspondingly has (to a significant degree) been the object of the attitude associated therewith. A 'minus' (-) indicates that neither has been or is the case. A 'zero' (0) indicates that a particular sociolinguistic function and attitude are apparently not applicable for that level of language: i.e., the function and attitude had not yet developed in a pre-CSS evolutionary stage, or they are no longer practicable in the 'IN EMIGRATION' columns. An asterisk (\*) suggests that the indicated sociolinguistic function and attitude, with reference to earlier evolutionary

TABLE 1

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CATEGORIES: FUNCTION/ATTITUDE	IN THE OLD COUNTRY		IN EMIGRATION				
	PRE-CSS Dialect	CSS Koine	EMIGRATION1 Non-ed.	Ed.	EMIGRATION2 Sln.	Eng.	
Separatist/Loyalty	+	±*	+	0	+	0	+
Unifying/Loyalty	+	+	+	+*	+	0	+
Prestige/Pride	+*	-*	+	-*	+	0	+
Frame of Reference/ Awareness of Norm	0*	(0)*	+	-	+	-	+

stages, differ in degree and/or in quality from the same function and attitude as they characterize the modern standard language. Parentheses indicate conclusions based on evidence that is less clear.

In more concrete terms, with reference to the columns headed "IN EMIGRATION," the sociolinguistic situation may be summarized as follows. The first generation of emigrants speaks its native language as brought from the old country: the relatively non-educated speak dialectal varieties, and the relatively more educated speak a colloquial form of Contemporary Standard Slovene or literary Slovene, at least one of its varieties. After some time, both varieties of this language, under the impact of English as the dominant language and the language with prestige, heavily and ever-increasingly abound in borrowings. The subsequent waves of non-educated immigrants join their relatives in neighborhoods in North America where Slovene dialects prevail; in this way, dialects tend to grow stronger in emigration. Individual educated immigrant arrivals, some of whom have also a good knowledge of English, tend to live apart from the ethnic Slovene communities.

At the first generation level, the knowledge of English among the non-educated is mostly passive and receptive, and the unifying and separating functions of Slovene lose their relevance, whereas the attitude of linguistic loyalty still persists. There is, however, no room for the 'frame-of-reference' function, or for the 'awareness-of-norm' attitude, in this situation. On the other hand, the educated immigrant would tend to maintain the sociolinguistic categories—both functions and attitudes with respect to his native language—more or less intact for a long time after his or her immigration.

It has been from among such educated immigrants from Slovenia, who are well versed in the writing of Slovene and have very often already published before leaving the old country, that the tradition of a Slovene poetic language has been (at different periods of time, but again and again) transplanted to emigration communities in North America. This tradition, exclusively limited to individual first-generation poets and writers, and very often contingent upon their personal ties with literature production and literary movements in the old country, never became an autonomous, self-sufficient tradition on its own. It remained alive during individual personal lifetimes, and vanished with their deaths.

This is the story of the poetic language in a linguistic diaspora in North America.

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## NOTES

- \* Paper presented at the *Symposium on the Contemporary Literatures and Cultures of the United States of America and Canada*, Bled, 9-14 May, 1988. A preliminary version of the paper appears in *Acta neophilologica* 21 (Ljubljana, 1988) 63-67.
1. Edward Sapir, *Language. An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 231.
  2. The notion of generations is crucial in the analysis of ethnic assimilations. An immigrant to America of the first generation is a person born in the old country; a second-generation immigrant is a person born in emigration to first-generation immigrant parents; and so on.
  3. For the concept of "residual ethnicity" see Joshua A. Fishman & V.C. Nahirny, "Organizational and leadership interest in language maintenance," p. 151 in J. Fishman, ed., *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).
  4. For Mlakar, note in particular his novel *He, the Father* (New York: Harper, 1950), and his play *Francie* [completed 1954, unpublished]; for Prosen, *Poems* (Cleveland OH: Cuyahoga Community College Press, 1971) and *O the Ravages* [reproduced as "unpublished manuscript," Cleveland OH, 1970-71].
  5. Cf. Rado L. Lencek, "On dilemmas and compromises in the evolution of Modern Slovene," *Slavic Linguistics and Language Teaching*, ed. T.F. Magner (Columbus OH: Slavica, 1976), 112-52; *O jeziku in zavesti narodnega porekla* (New York: Slovene Ethnic Heritage Studies Center, 1978); "O sociolingvističkim funkcijama standardnih jezika," *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane 9* (Belgrade: Medjunarodni slavistički centar, 1980), 75-90; "The Modern Slovene language question: an essay in sociolinguistic interpretation," *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question I: Church Slavonic-South Slavic-West Slavic*, eds. R. Picchio & H. Goldblatt (New Haven: Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies, 1984) 297-317; "Sociolinguistic premises underlying Adam Bohorič's 'Praefatiuncula' to *Arcticae Horulae* (1584)," *Prekursorzy słowiańskiego językoznawstwa porównawczego (do konca XVIII w.)*, ed. M. Basaj (Wrocław, 1986), 81-92; and "Sociolingvistične komponente Bohoričeve zamisli slovenskega knjižnega jezika," *Tretji Trubarjev zbornik* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica), forthcoming.
  6. Cf. *The Word and Verbal Art. Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský*, transl. ed. John Burbank and Peter Steiner, foreword by Rene Wellek (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
  7. Quoted from Joseph Paternost, "Slovenian language on Minnesota's Iron Range: some sociolinguistic aspects of language maintenance and language shift," 95-150 in R.L. Lencek & T.F. Magner, eds., *The Dilemma of the Melting Pot: The Case of the South Slavic languages* (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania UP, 1976), 125.

## POVZETEK

## O LITERATURI V DIASPORAH IN O ŽIVLJENJSKI DOBI NJIHOVEGA JEZIKA

Študija proučuje vprašanje ohranitve pesniškega jezika med izseljenci. Med manjšimi izseljenskimi etničnimi skupinami, na primer pri Slovencih v Ameriki, se rodni jezik redno ohrani še v drugi generaciji. Izseljenci, ki so prinesli iz domovine višjo izobrazbo, ohranjajo rodni jezik dalje, kot oni, ki se v novi domovini poslužujejo narečne govorice, v katero se laže in hitreje vrivajo angleške sposojenke, popačenke in nepravilnosti.

Slovenska izseljenska literatura se razvija le med izseljenci prve generacije, ki so prinesli s seboj knjižni jezik ali morda že svoje tiskane stvaritve. Ker v taki sekundarni jezikovni skupnosti ni primarnih studencev živega izražanja, je pesniški jezik, brez kontakta z domovino, nujno obsojen na hiranje in smrt.

Študijo spremlja razpredelnica, ki ponazarja nihanje socialnih funkcij (združevalne, ločevalne, prestižne, referenčne), ki jih opravlja jezik izseljencev v njihovem ameriškem okolju.