

REVIEW

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1. The context

The 1st Slovenian Symposium on Orthoepy was held on 15 December 2020. In this contribution, I review the subsequent volume, which includes fifteen papers presented at the symposium.

Orthoepy—the study of accepted pronunciation—appears to be a rather outdated concept at the dawn of the third decade of the twenty-first century. In the international academic space, it has been almost entirely replaced by phonology and related fields. The idea that pronunciation of words should be regulated and standardized for a particular speech community appears to be rather anachronistic, but in this case, it is based on the linguistic, or dare I say, philological tradition in Slovenia. There are several factors contributing to this situation. First, Slovenian dialects are highly varied and the concept of a unified standard goes a long way towards improving mutual intelligibility and social cohesion. A sociolinguist might say it is also about establishing the power dynamics favoring certain groups (e.g., higher social classes, the educated) over others. Second, the dialects vary in many ways, but what is particularly striking is the phonological variation. Slovenian vowel systems, for instance, range from as little as seven (Cerkno; Rigler 1981) to fourteen contrastive vowel qualities (Kneža; Logar 1981). So, there is a clear pressure to single out a variety that is acceptable to most speakers.

Third, there is a strong tradition of prescriptivism. This is particularly clear when looking at the development and changes in the

Slovenian orthography. The orthographic rules of Slovenian are often tied to the phonological content of words, and every few decades or so, the rules are updated to reflect use, including the pronunciation (e.g., loanwords, specific phonological patterns). While the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts published three updated orthographic manuals since World War II, a companion orthographic manual is still lacking. One reason for this situation may have to do with the fact that the most recent dictionary and orthography of Standard Slovenian include the relevant pronunciation information, including prosodic information (stress, tone) and morphology. Another reason has to do with the state of phonological research. In the second half of the twentieth century, Slovenian phonological research has moved away from historical reconstructions to structuralist, descriptive methods. As well, new technologies allowed for a more precise characterization of various articulatory and acoustic properties of Slovenian sounds. As such, Standard Slovenian has become less of an abstraction of the situation in the dialects and more a particular speech variety, often defined geographically (central dialects, Ljubljana), in terms of social class (upper middle, educated) and style (formal, slow, reading). This variety has been taken as the representation of Standard Slovenian in the works of phoneticians (Toporišič, Srebot-Rejec, Šuštaršič, Tivadar and others).

The key challenge of this situation is that the findings of phoneticians have not been incorporated in the descriptions of Standard Slovenian. For instance, though no acoustic study of Standard Slovenian has shown a consistent length or vowel quality difference between long and short vowels (Bezljaj 1939; Srebot Rejec 1988; Petek et al. 1996; Tivadar 2004), most contemporary descriptions of Slovenian still distinguish vowel length. In fact, as pointed out by Greenberg (2003), vowel length has not been consistently contrastive even at the outset of defining Standard Slovenian in the modern sense in the 19th century. Vowel length is central to the vowel system of Slovenian, and hence there have been increasing calls to update the description of Standard Slovenian so that it is closer to its actual realization in the speech community. The contemporary phonetically informed descriptions, such as Šuštaršič et al. (1995) and Becker & Jurgec (2020), do not contrast vowel length.

2. The content

The discrepancy between the descriptions of Standard Slovenian phonology and its realization among the speakers is what led to the 1st Slovenian Symposium on Orthoepy, which featured eighteen talks by twenty-four authors. Of these, fifteen papers ultimately appeared in the published volume, which is the topic of this review. Full disclosure: I presented a talk at the symposium but opted not to submit a paper.

The papers are preceded by four short introductory contributions, which are written versions of the welcoming remarks at the symposium. What is remarkable about these contributions is that they all recognize the value and challenges of standardization of spoken Slovenian. Peter Štih, the president of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and a historian, stressed the value of restraint when standardizing speech. Oto Luthar, the director of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and a historian as well, recognized that there might be opposing views on standardizing speech which may be difficult to reconcile. In this context, Luthar values the compromise between the data-driven and theory-imposed approaches. Roman Kuhar, the dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, described how the rigid prescriptive practices have been relaxed over the years, as practiced at the national radio and television. Kozma Ahačič, the head of the Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language, pointed out that researchers working on Standard Slovenian should seek compromise. Finally, Marko Snoj, the secretary of the Philological and Literary Section of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts framed the main theme of the symposium as being about the role of tone and quantity in Standard Slovenian.

The fifteen papers in the main section of the volume address different aspects of the problem area. Broadly, the papers can be grouped by their main theme: defining spoken Standard Slovenian, challenging issues and examples, language infrastructure, training of public speakers, and dialectal variation.

Four contributions focus on the definition of spoken Standard Slovenian, typically exemplified by specific data-related issues. Hotimir Tivadar and Luka Horjak point out that there is a disconnect between how spoken Standard Slovenian is described in various sources (dictionaries, grammars) and how it is realized among the speakers. To make things worse, spoken Standard Slovenian remains largely phonetically understudied. Their prime example of this challenge comes from the growing *e-Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (e-Dictionary of Standard Slovenian, *eSSKJ*), which contains recordings that accompany transcriptions of headwords. They measure several instances of contrastive vowel length in these headwords. They find that the vowel length of the model speakers (linguists or trained speakers) indeed differs, with short vowels having shorter duration than long vowels. The caveat is that this length difference is achieved by changing the speech rate of the entire word, including consonants and unstressed vowels that do not contrast length. The results of this brief survey thus show that it is not that short vowels are actually short for these model speakers, it is that they pronounce the words with short vowels faster. This suggests that even for these speakers the length contrast is artificial and they cannot reproduce it even in citation form, where we would expect the largest differences. This is entirely in line with several studies that failed to show a statistically

significant difference between long and short vowels. They conclude that codification of spoken Standard Slovenian is particularly challenging because of the extensive dialectal variation, which should be considered when updating descriptions of Standard Slovenian.

Helena Dobrovoljc and Tina Lengar Verovnik continue this line of reasoning by arguing that the codification of spoken Standard Slovenian is a source of conflicting pressures. On the one hand, prescription can defy descriptive facts. On the other hand, historically based views on spoken Standard Slovenian are in conflict with structuralist approaches. They ask for a return towards more empirically grounded, scientific methodologies. Finally, they illustrate these challenges with concrete examples that are particularly problematic in the literature (e.g., the distribution of mid vowels, schwa, and pronunciation of loanwords).

Nataša Gliha Komac outlines the sociolinguistic aspects of spoken Standard Slovenian, with a focus on language policy. A key aspect of forming a long-lasting and consistent language policy is its consensus-building aspects, within academia and beyond. Gliha Komac also fleshes out the need to build up and further develop language infrastructure (in-depth studies, high-quality data, descriptions).

Matej Šekli advocates for a very different view of spoken Standard Slovenian. He focuses his argumentation on prosodic phenomena, particularly their historical developments. After detailing the diachronic and typological developments of the Slovenian prosodic system, he moves on to the discussion of Standard Slovenian. He is a proponent of a model of spoken Standard Slovenian that is based primarily on findings of historical linguistics. In this, Šekli diverges from the views of Toporišič by claiming that the speech of central Slovenia (Ljubljana) has never been the basis of Standard Slovenian. Instead, spoken Standard Slovenian is based on written Slovenian and thus has no consistent realization in the speech community. In this sense, he rejects the relevance and value of any sort of empirical (phonetic) studies when it comes to informing the standard variety. Instead, Standard Slovenian is something that can (and should) be learned, and the individual speakers' proficiency varies.

Many of the aforementioned contributions illustrate their points on specific, challenging and variable patterns in spoken Standard Slovenian, and this is even more so for the second group of papers. Tanja Mirtič reviews these issues from the perspective of the growing dictionary of Standard Slovenian. She identifies the following topics as particularly challenging: the distribution of stress and mid vowel, the *l* ~ *w* alternation (i.e., the pronunciation of the letter <|>), schwa, words with secondary/multiple stress, vowel length, and tone. All these issues are highly variable within the Slovenian speech community, and this variation is not always geographically conditioned.

The short contribution by Jože Faganel focuses primarily on the tonal contrasts in Slovenian and their role in the dictionary and grammatical descriptions. He also follows Šekli's view of prescribing the pronunciation based on findings of historical linguistics rather than actual use, the role of which should be limited.

Janez Dular also discusses the tonal contrasts of Slovenian, with examples of acoustic data in the literature. One key point Dular makes is that there is substantial variation, which is based on geographical variation, and this should be mirrored in the relevant dictionaries. Empirically, tones are perhaps the least studied among all phonological patterns of Slovenian. The core of his contribution is that the tonal variety of Standard Slovenian should be equal to the non-tonal one, and as such taught in school and included in speech synthesis programs.

Marko Snoj and Janoš Ježovnik discuss vowel quantity/length in Standard Slovenian. The first half of the contribution summarizes the historical developments that led to the contemporary vowel length distinctions across Slovenian dialects. The second half discusses the realization of the length contrast, where the authors posit four options, ranging from no contrast to quantity-only contrast and finally, quantity with accompanying vowel quality (with short vowels being more reduced). This characterization of variation remains a stipulation because no empirical data of any sort is presented.

Two papers discuss language infrastructure in the context of spoken Standard Slovenian. Jerneja Žganec Gros and Boštjan Vesnicer devote their contribution to language technologies when it comes to spoken language. In particular, they show that a database should be phonetically and phonologically balanced.

Darinka Verdonik reviews the currently available speech corpora for Slovenian and their potential use. She also previews some of the features of the newly created speech database *RSDO*, which should be publicly available at the time of publication of this review.

Two papers discuss how public speakers are trained in spoken Standard Slovenian. Rok Dovjak reviews the practices at the national radio and television. Nina Žavbi and Katarina Podbevšek write about the training at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film, and Television. They devote most attention to the teaching of prosody (tone and stress) and vowel quality, all of which are highly variable across the Slovenian speech community.

The last set of papers is devoted to dialectal variation. Vera Smole presents results of a pilot study of tone variation. The main point of her illustration is that the tonal patterns in the dictionaries diverge from the data she obtained from the speakers. In particular, there is more variation in the

data than presented in the dictionaries. Slovenian tones are highly variable when different dialects are compared.

Jožica Škofic and Karmen Kenda-Jež present the tonal and vowel length distinctions across the Slovenian dialects, based on the *Slovenian Linguistic Atlas*. They review several examples and illustrate how they can be used to inform spoken Standard Slovenian, specifically when it comes to variation.

Finally, Alenka Valh Lopert and Melita Zemljak Jontes discuss spoken Slovenian as realized in Maribor and its surroundings. The key topics of interest are vowel quality and quantity which diverge significantly from spoken Standard Slovenian.

The papers are followed by a statement of the symposium conveners, which addresses the larger methodological issues as well as specific phonological properties of spoken Standard Slovenian. They recognize the inherent variability of spoken Standard Slovenian that has to do with its dialectal variation. At the same time, they single out the formal, educated speech as the spoken standard. At the end, they include two declarations regarding Standard Slovenian. First, tonal and non-tonal spoken Standard Slovenian are equivalent. Second, quantity in Slovenian is facultative, but not preferred.

The statement is followed by responses of individual symposium participants (including authors) as well as the larger professional public. Responses differ in length and supportiveness of the joint statement. Several responses focus on the definition of spoken Standard Slovenian, particularly when it comes to its prescriptive elements, and about the relevance of empirical data, which is currently lacking.

3. The bigger picture

As mentioned in the introduction, the main reason for the symposium is the new dictionary of Standard Slovenian (*eSSKJ*). This is because such a dictionary is expected to include information about how words are pronounced. The issue connected with this, as well established in the literature, is that the prescribed phonological patterns are quite divorced from how speakers realize them. The two core issues that the symposium addressed are the tonal and vowel quality contrasts. These questions are largely academic, as most users of the dictionaries will not be able to produce these prosodic patterns.

The issues that dictionary users do care about are the phonological content of words that is not marked in the orthography, particularly the quality of mid vowels (e.g., whether *gozd* 'forest' is pronounced like *gost* 'dense' or *gost* 'guest') and stress position (e.g., whether the stress in *aneks* 'annex' falls

on the first or second vowel). These challenges are exacerbated by significant dialectal variation for core, native words as well as in loanwords. Moreover, these issues are understudied in the literature: large-scale empirical (experimental) studies of Slovenian phonology published in top-tier journals are rare, and the ones that exist are largely ignored by the policy-making bodies.

The main contribution of the symposium is towards seeking consensus among the researchers and policymakers working on phonological aspects of Slovenian. While forming a consensus on two specific issues (tone and vowel quantity) was an honest attempt by the organizers, I do not believe they were successful. The responses of the Slovenian linguists revealed a deep divide both in terms of the value of empirical studies (including the related infrastructure needs) and theoretical approaches. What is clear, however, is that spoken Standard Slovenian concerns many different kinds of researchers which have very diverse views of what spoken Standard Slovenian is. Finding consensus among these researchers may be an impossible task. The volume may also be informative to linguists working on other aspects of Slovenian and to linguists not working on any particular language as a case study of how to approach a particularly challenging topic of spoken language standardization.

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