

SOME FACTORS AFFECTING THE MAINTENANCE OF BILINGUALISM IN CARINTHIA

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The intent of this article is briefly to characterize the present-day sociolinguistic situation in the southern portion of the Austrian province of Carinthia (Slov.: Koroška; Ger.: Kärnten).¹ The major emphasis here will be placed on some of the factors affecting the maintenance of bilingualism in Slovenian Carinthia because of the potential decrease in this bilingualism. The persistence of bilingualism in this region is essentially the persistence of the Slovene-speaking ethnic minority.² There is, first, a summary survey of the historical trend toward complete assimilation of the Slovene-speaking population. The remainder of this article deals with positive and negative post-World War II factors which are affecting the maintenance of bilingualism.

THE HISTORICAL TREND TOWARD ASSIMILATION

The mere fact that the Slovene population in Carinthia already is bilingual is a significant step toward its complete assimilation.³ Certain elements of the Slavic-speaking population must have been bilingual from the eighth century onward, at which time the Slavs of Carinthia first came under German rule. At the time of this initial contact, a very small percentage of the Slavic-speaking population in southern Carinthia was bilingual, while today almost 100% of the Slovene speaking population of school age or older is bilingual to some extent. The greater part of Carinthia was assimilated into a monolingual German-speaking population by the end of the Middle Ages. German became the language of the government and later of the towns and cities. This pattern of development also occurred in the region which is now present-day Slovenia. To be educated or urbanized meant that one spoke German, Slovene being the language of the uneducated rural population. With the advent of the Slovene romantic period in the nineteenth century, however, ethnic consciousness was awakened among the Slovenes. The trend toward complete assimilation finally was confronted with a factor other than the illiteracy of

the people. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that a renewed decline in the percentage of the Slovene-speaking population in Carinthia began with industrialization, the introduction of the railroads, and the increase in compulsory education in the last half of the nineteenth century,⁴ since all these factors would have contributed to a potential increase in the density of communication between the Slovene and German ethnic groups.

Following World War I, a plebiscite was held to determine the political fate of most of Slovene Carinthia.⁵ Even though the majority of the population in the plebiscite areas was Slovene, the vote was in favor of remaining with the new Austrian Republic rather than joining the equally new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After World II, during the course of which more than two hundred ethnically conscious Slovene families were deported by the Nazis and German declared the sole language of communication, a renewed bid by Yugoslavia to acquire southern Carinthia failed. These confrontations for possession of Carinthia following each of the world wars and the Germanization program of the Nazis took a numerical and psychological toll on the affected population. Historically speaking, therefore, the pressure on Slovenes to assimilate completely to German has been prolonged and great.

NEGATIVE FACTORS

Against the background of this general historical trend of assimilation, the following factors which have served to perpetuate it will be considered: 1) divisions within the Slovene-speaking minority, 2) the political system of neighboring Slovenia, 3) the Austrian governments, 4) discrimination and the lack of Slovene owned and operated industry. German nationalists will be shown to have taken advantage of the latter three factors in further promoting the first.⁶

Among the greatest present-day obstacles for the persistence of bilingualism are the political and attitudinal divisions within the bilingual population itself. The Slovene speakers can be divided into two groups: the ethnically conscious and the nonethnically conscious.⁷ The former can then be subdivided according to political affiliation. This split is formalized by the existence of two competing organizations, the National Council of

Carinthian Slovenes (Narodni svet koroških Slovencev) and the Union of Slovene Organizations in Carinthia (Zveza slovenskih organizacij na Koroškem). The National Council is a Catholic organization while the Union supports Communist Yugoslavia. Each group publishes its own weekly newspaper and is represented in the villages by local cultural organizations. The two umbrella organizations rarely work together and occasionally act at cross-purposes. These activities foster a serious division among the ethnically conscious Slovenes.

There is also a split among those Slovenes who are not ethnically conscious, but it is not as clearly defined. Cultural apostates who attack anything and everything Slovene in an attempt to demonstrate their Germanness represent one side of this division. Some go so far as to join the Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund and the Kärntner Heimatdienst, organizations labeled neo-Nazi by the ethnically conscious Slovenes. The other side consists of nonorganized individuals who still speak dialect Slovene among themselves and with the ethnically conscious Slovenes. Yet these same individuals do not register their children for bilingual instruction in the schools. During recent censuses this group has professed itself as "Windisch." The Windisch, according to Martin Wutte (1930), are an independent ethnic group which resulted from contact between the German and Slovene cultural and linguistic spheres. Thomas Barker (1960), however, considers Wutte's introduction of this meaning for the term to be simply propaganda on the part of a German nationalist in order to accelerate the assimilation of the Slovene population. Indeed, the term Windisch was first used officially in a census only in 1939, by the Nazis, who at the time were determined to complete the Germanization of the remainder of Carinthia.⁸ Yet the term was retained after World War II and has contributed to a further weakening of the Slovene minority. According to official Austrian census figures the number of Slovene speakers, including those professing to be Windisch, declined from approximately 42,000 in 1951 to 25,000 in 1961. Of these Slovene speakers, moreover, 19,728 in 1951 and 11,469 in 1961 registered in various Windisch categories.⁹

Thus there exists a wide attitudinal spectrum within that segment of the Carinthian population possessing a knowledge of Slovene. This spectrum can be consolidated

into three broad categories: the divided group of ethnically conscious Slovenes, the cultural apostates who comprise perhaps the fiercest antagonists of the former and, finally, between these two extremes, a group of uncertain and changing identity which is rapidly being assimilated into the German majority.

It might be assumed that the existence of the Republic of Slovenia as a neighbor to the south would be a major factor supporting the preservation of Slovene in Carinthia. This is not entirely correct, however, due in large part to the fact that Slovenia is a part of Communist Yugoslavia. German nationalists have consistently made good use of this fact in their propaganda, with the result that a great many monolingual German speakers living in Carinthia believe that the Slovene population eagerly awaits a Yugoslav annexation of the province, this despite Yugoslavia's disavowal of all claim to the area when it co-signed the Austrian State Treaty of 1955. In the eyes of many Germans and nonethnically conscious Slovenes, however, the impression exists that to be an ethnically conscious Slovene is to be a Communist and, by implication, not to be a loyal citizen of Austria. The effect of this kind of propaganda was publicized nationally in Austria in 1975 by the television documentary "Angst an der Grenze," during which one person interviewed stated that he feared Yugoslavia would invade Carinthia. When asked why, this person said this was what he read in the newspapers. The presence of this kind of fear and animosity makes an individual think twice before professing to be a Slovene in Austrian Carinthia.

The greatest single coup of the German nationalists in recent decades surely was repeal of a 1945 law which provided for compulsory bilingual instruction for all students in areas having Slovene speakers.¹⁰ They accomplished this in 1958, when bilingual instruction was made "voluntary" by the governor of Carinthia by means of an edict, the legality of which has been questioned.¹¹ This edict, which was later formalized into law by the federal government, definitely was against the spirit of the Austrian State Treaty, of which the section on minority language education was acceptable to the co-signers due in large part to the 1945 law. How great a victory this was for the German nationalists is illustrated clearly by census figures from the Zilja Valley (Gailtal): for the 1951 census, 34% of the population professed (or,

rather, confessed) to knowing Slovene; after bilingual instruction became optional, though, only 3% of the students continued with Slovene.¹² Finally, in the 1961 census only 9% of the population admitted using Slovene.¹³ On paper this is indeed a significant gain for Germanization. It will become an actuality as the older speakers die out, since in considerable measure they have ceased teaching even the local dialect to their children. Their feeling is that a knowledge of Slovene no longer is beneficial to the children but, rather, may even be detrimental.

Not only has the German nationalist pressure coerced many nonethnically conscious Slovenes into denying their ethnic identity (or linguistic affinity) with regard to the school question, it has also brought a return to the prewar situation in that it is again extremely rare for an ethnic German to know Slovene. This situation dictates that if even one ethnic German is to be included in a conversation, that conversation must be conducted in German rather than Slovene, which in some villages can drastically reduce the utilization of the latter.

Government, as illustrated above with respect to the school question, has been a negative factor in regard to the persistence of bilingualism. In order to examine further the role of the government, however, it is necessary to quote Article 7, Section 3, from the State Treaty:

In the administrative and judicial districts of Carinthia, Burgenland, and Styria, where there are Slovene, Croat, or mixed populations, the Slovene or Croat language shall be accepted as an official language in addition to German. In such districts topographical terminology and inscriptions shall be in the Slovene or Croat language as well as in German.¹⁴

The government of Austria has failed to fulfill the terms of this section. First, according to a 1959 law, only in three out of nine judicial districts is Slovene accepted as an official language.¹⁵ Second, the erection of bilingual topographical signs was delayed until 1972, when a law finally was passed which stipulated that signs were to be placed in villages whose Slovene-speaking population was at least 20% according to the 1961 census (Note: and not according to the 1951 census, which would be more

logical for a 1955 treaty). Also, all persons who had registered as "Windisch," "Deutsch-Windisch" or "Windisch-Deutsch" were counted as members of the German majority.¹⁶ These signs were immediately defaced and destroyed by German nationalists and Slovene cultural apostates.¹⁷ In many instances this was done in the presence of police and persons even were photographed in the act of tearing down signs, but no one was ever arrested or prosecuted. This illustrates the government's apparent intention to act as an assimilatory force.

The final negative factor to be considered is job discrimination and the lack of Slovene owned and operated industry. Job discrimination, as might be expected, is not conducted openly, but instances can be documented, among them the case of a man whose job disappeared and whose apartment lease was not renewed because he registered his children for bilingual instruction and continued to receive a Carinthian Slovene newspaper after he was warned not to by his German nationalist employer. Such tactics would be obviated at least partially if Slovene owned industry existed in Carinthia. This is not the case, however. Indeed, a few years ago German nationalists successfully blocked the establishment of a Yugoslav Slovene electrical appliance factor in Pliberk (German: Bleiburg). This factory—a branch of the Gorenje enterprise—would have provided hundreds of well-paid jobs for Carinthian Slovenes, enabling them to profess their Sloveneness without fear of economic reprisals. Also of considerable importance, the plant would have provided a further domain for the use of Slovene and forty or more extra hours per week during which Slovene could be spoken. The lack of Slovene owned industry, therefore, clearly is in the interest of the German nationalists and, conversely, of great detriment to the survival of the Slovene minority.

THE CHURCH AS AN AMBIVALENT FACTOR

Having considered factors which are affecting bilingualism in Carinthia in a negative sense, attention now will be given to an ambivalent factor: the Roman Catholic Church. The Church does provide a domain for the use of Slovene. Since the ecumenical reforms of the 1960s, Standard Slovene has been used in the Ordinary of the Mass. However, this remains a positive factor only so long as individual ethnically conscious Slovene

priests are able to turn aside the demands of the cultural apostates and German nationalists for a purely German service.¹⁸ As much as such priests promote the persistence of bilingualism others, who are cultural apostates or German nationalists, tend to Germanize the population within their own spheres of influence. The percentage of Slovene used at Mass in bilingual parishes thus ranges from zero to one hundred, depending on the individual priest. It is obvious, therefore, that the Church is a positive factor only in so far as its local representatives are strong willed ethnically conscious Slovenes.¹⁹

POSITIVE FACTORS

Among the factors which promote the retention of bilingualism in Carinthia are: cultural organizations, banks and farmers' cooperatives, and the Slovene high school.

As was indicated above, both the National Council of Carinthian Slovenes and the Union of Slovene Organizations in Carinthia function as umbrella groups for local chapters. The activity of these chapters varies from one locality to another. Some groups have only a chorus which performs infrequently, while others possess not only a chorus but a theatre group as well, and sponsor a variety of cultural activities such as films, puppet shows, etc. These activities provide contact with the standard language to Slovenes with widely varying formal training in what is known as Standard Slovene. Another major function of these activities is to provide Slovenes with the opportunity to demonstrate publicly their interest and pride in their cultural heritage.

The second major factor to be considered is the role of Slovene controlled and operated banks and farmers' cooperatives.²⁰ Where these organizations are strongly supported they provide the Slovenes with another domain in which to use their language. Also, they promote a spirit of mutual dependence among their Slovene members. Finally, and not inconsequentially, membership in the cooperatives is financially beneficial.

The last major positive factor to be considered is the Slovene high school which is located in Celovec (German: Klagenfurt), the capital of the province. Although this school was opened in 1957, it did not acquire

its own building until 1975. This school provides academic university preparatory education for ethnically conscious Slovene students, many of whom continue their studies and become doctors, lawyers, teachers, and university professors, thereby providing the nucleus for an activist young intelligentsia.

CONCLUSION

This presentation has been a survey of only some of the factors which have had and are still having positive and negative impact on the maintenance of bilingualism in Carinthia. An attempt has been made to describe the major social groups involved in the confrontation to emphasize the animosity and divisiveness which exist between the German and Slovene populations, and especially within the Slovene minority. These indications of internal division are welcomed and promoted by the German nationalists, one of whose aims is the complete assimilation of that Slovene minority. The old maxim "divide and conquer" has been put into practice quite effectively, with more and more Slovenes denying their ethnicity and not teaching even their native dialect to their children. The attacks made by the German nationalists and their Slovene apostate allies against the use of Standard Slovene in the schools, on topographical signs, in the church and elsewhere, and the equating of a profession of Sloveneness with a desire to have Southern Carinthia united with Yugoslavia, have successfully continued the stigmatization of the language and the social isolation of the ethnically conscious Slovenes.

In spite of these negative trends, however, the outlook for the Slovene minority is not entirely bleak. The attacks against the preservation of that minority have resulted in a hardening of the collective will of the ethnically conscious Slovenes. Leadership in keeping the Slovene question alive is being provided by an activist young intelligentsia proud of its Slovene cultural heritage. In conclusion, therefore, the maintenance of bilingualism in Southern Carinthia—which means in essence the perpetuation of the Slovene-speaking minority—will depend in great measure on two factors: first, the ability of the Slovene intelligentsia both to unite the various factions among the minority and halt further defections and, second, an increase in the variety and

number of speech events in which Slovene (Standard or dialect) can be utilized. The latter point probably is the most important, and must be achieved both in the cultural sphere and the economic, as, for example, by the introduction of Slovene owned and operated industry.

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NOTES

¹This article basically is a report on factors affecting bilingualism as observed by the author in 1975 over a period of eleven months of dialectological and anthropological fieldwork in Slovene Carinthia during which informants from over eighty villages were interviewed. The Canada Council and a University of Toronto Fellowship supported this research.

²Present estimates of the size of the bilingual population vary from approximately 20,000 to 70,000, depending on the source. My own belief is that there are approximately 50,000 persons, or ten per cent of the population of Carinthia, who are bilingual to some extent in Slovene and German.

³For a more detailed historical account of Carinthia with respect to the Slovenes, see Barker (1960) and Erjavec (1955), who follow the consensus opinion in their interpretation. Dates and places also are to be found in these sources.

⁴For a brief, but sound, description of Slovene instruction in the schools prior to 1945, see Ude (1971).

⁵See Pleterski, et al. (1970) for a thorough discussion of the plebiscite.

⁶A German nationalist in this context is an Austrian German ethnocentrist who demands the cultural and linguistic assimilation of the Slovene minority in Carinthia.

⁷Ethnically conscious Slovenes are defined here as those who claim varying degrees of cultural affinity with Slovenes beyond the Austrian border.

⁸Klemenčič (1960:102); see also Veiter (1970:285-300) for a more detailed discussion on the origin and use of the term "Windisch."

⁹Pleterski (1966:188-190).

¹⁰For a much fuller discussion, with extensive documentation, of postwar legislation affecting the Slovene minority, see Pleterski (1960).

¹¹Barker (1960:291).

¹²The 34% figure is from Veiter (1970:361), that of 3% is calculated from statistics provided in Barker (1960:291).

¹³Vieter (1970:361).

¹⁴It should be noted that the State Treaty does not specify a minimum percentage of Slovene speakers for the terms of that treaty to be fulfilled.

¹⁵Brumnik, et al. (1974).

¹⁶There were also "pure" categories such as "Slowenisch" and "Deutsch."

¹⁷Brumnik, et al. (1974:53-54).

¹⁸It is interesting to note that all four priests ordained in 1974 and 1975 in the Diocese of Krka (Gurk) have been Slovene. However, see Tischler (1957:74) concerning the great decline of Slovene as the language used by Carinthian priests since 1922.

¹⁹The official posture of the Diocese is to promote harmony. See the publication edited by Inzko and Waldstein, *Das Gemeinsame Kärnten/Skupna Koroška* (1974-).

²⁰Singer (1974).

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Editor's Note: An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at a Society for Slovene Studies session in Chicago, Illinois, in 1976.