

THE CASE FOR A SLOVENE LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK

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Professor Derbyshire's paper begins with a survey of Slovene teaching materials and an evaluation of their methodology. He continues with the following call for a fresh approach to the problem of creating a Slovene language primer for English speakers.

. . . There are, of course, sufficient pedagogical materials published in Slovenia for native speakers at all levels, but those textbooks prepared especially for foreigners do not meet the needs of an English-speaking audience. To varying degrees there remain difficulties in access, both linguistic and pragmatic (i.e., in terms of purchasing), to the Slovene produced materials. We shall, therefore, have to direct our sights elsewhere. Outlined below is a proposal which is somewhat idealistic and suggests a solution, both traditional in concept and goals and at the same time slightly non-traditional in its proposed implementation for a Slovene language textbook.

The traditional part of this proposal is the preparation of an original grammar, prepared in English by an individual or group of individuals, which would present the basic structure of the Slovene grammar as is normally done in elementary courses of Slavic languages. The basic structure of a highly inflected language such as Slovene or other Slavic languages includes a presentation of complete noun and adjective declensions in the singular and plural, plus dual for Slovene, pronominal declensions, the verbal tenses and aspects, participles and imperatives, plus the comparatives and superlatives of adjectives and adverbs, an introduction to numerals, including the telling of time and dates, prepositions and case governance, and the concept of prefixes. An exposition of this material should be accompanied by drills and exercises, including translations from English to Slovene, as well as

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simple reading exercises. The non-traditional part of this proposal is that the material, if limited to a basic vocabulary of no more than a few hundred words, should be presented in such a way as to guarantee its being mastered in the equivalent of one academic semester. To the seasoned Slavist accustomed to Russian textbooks which take at least one year to cover the equivalent material, such a proposal may appear dubious. That the proposal is feasible, however, can be attested by a textbook such as the one authored by Rudy, Nebel and Youhn for Russian (*Russian: A Complete Elementary Course* [New York: Norton, 1970]), which is arranged on the same principle. It is my opinion that a textbook of elementary Slovene for American audiences cannot afford the luxury of a traditional format for three reasons. First, Slovene, unlike Russian, is not likely to enter university curricula to be studied leisurely and in depth over two, four or six semesters. Second, many who come to the formal study of Slovene will have a working knowledge of at least one Slavic language and will not require certain concepts to be reinforced with numerous drills. Third, irrespective of background, or lack of it, virtually everyone who undertakes a study of Slovene will do so for some very specific reason, i.e. this will not be an undergraduate audience like that of Russian with students shopping for something exotic to fill a language requirement, to probe some aspect of Russia's culture, or to prepare for a fantasized job with the U.N., State Department, etc. Our audience will be diverse but with rather clearly defined goals and a need to attain them quickly. Thus, the structure of Slovene must be presented in a minimum amount of time. Precisely because those who undertake its study will not be a homogeneous crowd, it is important that each person acquire those essentials which will enable him or her to begin reading serious material in specific fields of interest at the earliest possible date. The more difficult points of grammar and exceptions can be handled through carefully edited texts and additional accompanying drills.

A further advantage to the proposal outlined above is that a rapid acquisition of the structure of Slovene will enable a person to visit Slovenia and to participate

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in a seminar or summer institute at an earlier date than most language students. Despite a restricted vocabulary, a grasp of the basic linguistic structure of the language will allow basic communication to begin, with speech habits being reinforced in situ. The above proposal also implies the hope that an adequate summer language institute of Slovene will take place in the not too distant future in this country or more preferably in Slovenia. Such an institute will prove most valuable to those with some previous knowledge of the various language skills.

Several years ago a group of interested scholars formed an organization, the IUCEELP (Inter-University Council on East European Language Programs), dedicated to the guaranteeing of instruction in all of the languages of East, Central and Southeast Europe. For a number of reasons those plans have remained unrealized. The implementation of a "Slovene plan" is feasible and realizable in a reasonably short period of time. This will be a service to those of us devoted to the advancement of Slovene language and culture, as well as the broader goals of organization such as IUCEELP. An integral part of that plan must be the creating of elementary language materials. This is an urgent matter and should not be delayed further.

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