

A SLOVENE TEXT FOR NON-SLAVISTS

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Dr. Susel contributes a very important viewpoint in his paper, that of the scholar who, though not a philologist, nonetheless needs to study Slovene to advance his own research. The non-Slavist will, in Dr. Susel's scheme, comprise an appreciable part of the audience for a Slovene textbook.

. . . Certainly a course designed to give a reading knowledge of Slovene, and perhaps some minimal verbal competence as well, is needed. Not only in graduate school, but also in various professional meetings and in my capacity as Managing Editor for Yugoslavia for the journal Southeastern Europe, between 1974 and 1977, I frequently encountered persons who knew Serbo-Croatian well but who were substantially uninformed and uninterested about Slovenes and Slovenia. Rarely do these persons cite Slovene sources in their work, except perhaps in translation. Queries about this usually produced responses flavored with a mixture of embarrassment and deprecation. It would be useful to have Slovene, they admit, but even among the Yugoslavs it is a marginal language at best and unless one is researching a topic which in a major way involves the Slovenes it is just not worth the additional bother to acquire Slovene.

I mention this because one of the questions we ought to ask is how many non-Slavists are there likely to be, how widely dispersed geographically, and in how wide a range of disciplines, who will want to learn Slovene? Even in major institutions involved in Slavic studies, such as Indiana, Columbia, Ohio State, and so on, there are likely in any given year to be only a few. To institute a regular course in the catalogue would be a risky business for any institution. If we could gather the total number all across the country, then probably it would be a respectable figure, but how to bring them together, even on a regional basis, to

Susel: Slovene for Non-Slavists

have a viable course? And, finally, we must consider the wide range of disciplines involved: history to economics, sociology, anthropology, doubtless extending in individual cases to medicine, geology, etc. All of these factors need to be kept in mind when thinking of structuring a basic Slovene language course.

It would not be useful to take time to describe how individuals might come to need Slovene as a research tool. So I will go directly into a discussion of what strikes me as more pertinent factors associated with such a course. First, the issue of when to have such a course and how intense to make it. Since the student's primary need is speed, it seems best to aim for summer sessions, or periods of five to eight weeks per semester. Classes should be held five days a week, with four as a minimum. Sufficient hour credit should be given so that the students will not be able to take more than one other course at the same time. When I had a choice between a French language exercise, for example, or reading in Habsburg history for some other concurrent course, the history invariably won. Also, I believe we can assume that those who enroll for a Slovene language course will be quite serious about it, which is often not the case for those enrolled in French or German classes, where the main motivation--as indeed it was for me--may be fulfillment of catalogue or degree requirements. But because those who study Slovene surely will do so for a specific and probably compelling reason, it should be possible to pitch the intensity of the course at a higher level than normal for such offerings.

To schedule Slovene language courses during the normal academic year, especially if a semester system is involved, strikes me as too protracted. Another alternative is actually arranging for such courses to be offered in Slovenia, but this is probably not feasible, and besides there are likely to be too many distractions.

Speaking now from a personal point of view, let me say a few things about the internal structure of such a

Susel: Slovene for Non-Slavists

course. It seems to me obvious that one of the first things to do is give the student, especially if there is no previous Slavic or even other foreign language background, a sense of the grammar and a "feel" for Slovene. Learning the basic verbs, sentence structure, and vocabulary is essential. Yet it would be a mistake to spend much time on pronunciation drills and the acquisition of "extraneous subtleties." In this category I would include, for example, wasting time with vocabulary and drills about food, family relations, animals, etc. Instead, in my view, we should introduce as soon as possible basic reading texts with a carefully graduated vocabulary and grammar progression. I think here it might be possible to look at the graduated difficulty that surely appears in the reading material used in the basic schools in Slovenia. Someone interested in learning the language as an adult would not mind starting out with the sort of text that Slovene children in their second, third, or fourth years of school confront, especially if the material contained useful basic information. Thus, for example, someone involved in the history of the Slovenes might appreciate from the beginning a simple account of the installation procedure of the Carinthian dukes. Such material would reinforce interest more than if at the same stage the person were learning about farm animals and colors. Perhaps I speak too strongly from personal experience, but a student of Slovene interested in such fields as history or economics should not be compelled to read selections from literature or philosophy. The course must be sufficiently flexible so that the typical student will from very early on be confronted with the kind of written material he or she actually will be using for research purposes. There must be the presumption by those who design and instruct a Slovene course for non-Slavists that the students who take it have limited and specific objectives for doing so . . .

When the course advances to the point where students can be given reading assignments in their own area of interest, it seems to me it should be possible to group such persons into broad categories. Thus, for example, students interested in history, economics, political science and government, could all pretty much

Susel: Slovene for Non-Slavists

handle the same body of material. So a body of reading texts which included all these fields should be available. Emphasis should be placed here not only in a steady expansion of basic vocabulary and grammar, but also the inclusion of words and phrases which might be particular to these fields. Every field, especially outside history, has its own jargon. Persons in the sciences, in chemistry, physics, geology, etc., would be more difficult to accommodate, yet it must be possible to have material for them, also, with the same criteria as I mentioned for the first grouping. Surely a person whose interest is geology or chemistry, for example, would prefer material about the Karst region over an analysis or description of the writings of Cankar or Prešeren. A similar grouping might occur for those in such areas as sociology, anthropology, archaeology and similar fields. Practical considerations doubtless would preclude more than two or three such categories. The same results might also be achieved in some other way, of course, but I re-emphasize the point that students, especially from the diverse backgrounds we are certain to get, must have such options in order to maintain interest and achieve positive results.

A project to design a Slovene language course of the kind I have been discussing seems to me to require a multidisciplinary approach. Those involved in language instruction must bear the primary responsibility, since they are the ones familiar with the techniques pertinent to the field. Yet there must also be consultation from persons outside the language instruction area, from individuals whose perspective is quite different

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