

## TOWARDS THE STUDY OF SLOVENE

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The paper which follows considers a number of topics relating to the formal study of the Slovene language and explores causes for past neglect, the question of need and audience, and several aspects concerning pedagogical materials. Although comments are framed and discussed within the context of the English speaking world, conclusions are nonetheless pertinent at a broader level.

The end of the twentieth century is fast approaching, and the study of the Slovene language in the English speaking world remains practically virgin territory. This is all particularly sad in view of the fact that the *Freising Fragments* represent not only the oldest datable Slavic manuscript (ca 1000 A.D.) but the first written record of Slovene as well.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for the failure of a large number of scholars to turn their attention to the preparation and dissemination of pedagogical materials for Slovene are obvious enough. Slovenia is a small nation whose native speakers, both at home and abroad, number far less than three million. As such, the language has been relegated to the unfortunate status of a 'minority language' both among its sister Slavic languages and among the languages of the world. Scholars tend to devote their research efforts to the study of numerically stronger languages for which the reward, both in terms of audience and possibilities for financial support, are greater. Additionally, research of a pedagogical rather than theoretical nature is held in considerably lower regard in the academic community, and is less likely to lead to professional promotion. Scholars willing to risk their careers on the creation of pedagogical aids are, in their own turn, attracted by the prestige of working with languages of highly visible cultures. The languages of smaller nations, particularly those that are part of larger political federations, thus remain ignored, and their cultures are interpreted within larger socio-political entities. Reflecting on the relationship between politics and language, George Shevelov has commented on the predicament experienced by several 'minor' Slavic nations through the ages. He proposes that the difficulty in gaining visibility is directly related to an absence of political clout within the dominant system. Their lack of a substantial voice in self-determination has also delayed the process of establishing and stabilizing a standard literary language. Thus the languages and cultures of a number of Slavic peoples remain relatively invisible within and without the Slavic world.<sup>2</sup>

The preceding are universal problems to which the Slovene lands have not been immune. Smaller nations face a kind of double diaspora. On their native soil they are perpetually concealed in larger federations, and in emigration they emerge, at best, as 'ethnics.' Interest in ethnics throughout the English speaking world reached a peak in recent decades, and was probably felt most strongly in the United States. This awakening has, however, served primarily the larger minorities. What chance could Slovenes stand, for example, against minorities numbering in the millions such as Jews, Poles or Italians, all of whom in their turn were vying for the limelight amidst black, feminist and gay socio-political movements? Thomas Magner has written about immigrant cultures in America, concluding that the surfacing of ethnic awareness in the 1960s and 1970s ". . . has been a kind of death spasm and that ethnic groups, to the extent that they are definable, are now subsiding and disappearing."<sup>3</sup> Whether or not Magner's gloomy predictions are true, the study of a 'minority' language need not be doomed from the outset. Indeed, language instruction is an issue separate from ethnic questions, and possibilities for the study of Slovene (or any

other 'minor' language) in the English speaking world should be available. There is a need, and there is an audience. These are intimately intertwined and mutually dependent.

There is a small but growing number of scholars who need to publish their work on matters Slovene, and there is clearly an audience to read it. The existence of an organization such as the Society for Slovene Studies, with its journal, demonstrates that fact. The journal receives regular submissions from scholars on many aspects of the social sciences and linguistic and literary topics. It is also noteworthy that the readership is based on several continents and comes from many walks of life, and that the authors include Slovenes and non-Slovenes alike, based in many countries.<sup>4</sup> One might wish that London, Ottawa, Canberra, or Washington, or Big Industry in the English speaking world, would give more attention and financial support to the study of Slovene and Slovenia, but (short of the unforeseeable) this is not likely to be the case. While some support comes from time to time, it must not be viewed as central or crucial, but rather as a beneficial bonus. The primary benefit is the satisfaction of the need for information, shared with an audience without political, economic or social constraints.

We see some of the reasons why the study of Slovene and Slovenia has remained on a small scale. Relatively speaking this will in fact always be the case, and to believe otherwise would be self-delusory. Smallness is in fact not negative, and scholarship on Slovenica certainly needs no justification. Scholarship justifies itself. It has been demonstrated that there is an interest on the part of researchers and readers. Neither group should be allowed to dwindle, and the question is how to tap the potential in order to replenish and enlarge these groups. Serious and original research requires direct access to documents, or to native informants. Virtually all the researchers working in Slovenica today have at least a working knowledge of the Slovene language. This number needs to be expanded, and the following sections of this paper are devoted to the question of materials currently available and what is required.

The simple answer at the present is that much work lies ahead. The amount of materials available for the study of the Slovene language at any level intended for English speakers remains small. For many years crucial gaps existed which needed to be filled before serious work could be started on a series of grammars and readers. One such gap concerns comprehensive dictionaries. The Academy Dictionary is now nearing completion, and will provide the basis for various specialized works, including English-Slovene and Slovene-English dictionaries. Those now available from Ljubljana are generally small and designed with the speaker of Slovene, not the speaker of English, in mind. In order to be useful for speakers of English such dictionaries will have to provide extensive information on grammar, usage and style.<sup>5</sup> There was also a need for extensive scholarly work describing every aspect of the Slovene language. This lacuna has now been filled with the publication of the pioneering work by Rado Lencek.<sup>6</sup> Grammars can now be written on the basis of this work, together with the Academy Dictionary and descriptive works from Slovenia. They will need to be supplemented by a series of readers at different levels, with texts representing different fields of knowledge. An important step in this direction has been taken with the recent publication of a comprehensive literary reader by A. Ceferin.<sup>7</sup>

The most pressing need now, however, is for an elementary grammar designed to serve an English speaking audience of a diverse nature, including college/university students and other adults who wish to gain fluency in Slovene. The latter may include persons of Slovene ethnic background, and researchers from a variety of fields. Ideally such a grammar would be eclectic and emphasize a combination of communicative skills in the living standard language, together with a solid mastery of the grammatical facts. These should be rein-

forced with 'old fashioned' translation drills aimed at reinforcing skills at every level. Such a book would meet the needs of people wishing to travel to or work in Slovenia, and of those striving to gain an ability to read documents in the original. No single textbook combines these features at present, although what we have at our disposal today has, mercifully, progressed far beyond that fascinating 'Grammar' written by V.J. Kubelka in 1912, which was compiled for Slovene immigrants seeking United States naturalization. It contained sentences of the following type:

"Vstop v Združene Države je zabranjen vsem idijotom slaboumnim in umobolnim, vsem siromašnim osebam, o katerih se domneva da bodo prišli na skrb javni dobrodelnosti, vsem, ki imajo kako ostudno ali nevarno nalezljivo bolezen, vsem pohabljenim, slepim, gluhim, gobavim in osebam z boleznijo, po kateri so nesposobni za delo, vsaki osebi, ki je prestopila 60 leto, ako ne položi za njo kak njen rojak, ki je ameriški državljani varščine od \$1000.00—nadalje ljudem ki so pristaši mnogoženstva, dekletom v drugem stanu, maloletnim otrokom (do 16 leta), ako niso v spremstvu staršev, osebam, ki nimajo pri sebi najmanj \$25.00—in delavcem, ki pridejo pod kako pogodbo na delo v Ameriko."<sup>8</sup>

For years scholars of Slavic linguistics seeking descriptions of the Slovene language resorted to de Bray's condensed grammar<sup>9</sup> as well as to Bidwell's outline.<sup>10</sup> These two works, particularly the excellent one by de Bray, are serious scholarly works never meant for the acquisition of speaking and reading skills by a broad audience. A viable alternative for many learners has been attendance at the annual seminar in Ljubljana; while this is extremely pleasant, one would of course prefer a six or eight week session, rather than two weeks, in order to make a more dramatic improvement in one's language skills.

A notable exception to the dearth of elementary grammars of Slovene for speakers of English is the two-volume publication from the Slovenian Research Center of America in Cleveland, by Gobetz and Loncar. It is an admirable grammar of Slovene for young persons of Slovene ethnic background.<sup>11</sup> Pedagogical needs for an ethnic community and those for an academic or adult community are, however, far from identical, and it is the latter need which remains unfilled.

In the early sixties the Army defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, made available a 210-hour course in Slovene.<sup>12</sup> This was written for military personnel and carries the learner through at least the intermediate level. It does not meet the needs of a general audience, and upon the availability of a new comprehensive elementary textbook attention can be turned to the post-elementary levels.

There have, of course, been grammars of Slovene written in non-Slavic languages in Europe, but those are of no use to speakers of English who do not read the language in which the grammar is written.<sup>13</sup> Finally, there exist several books written in Slovene and published in Yugoslavia.<sup>14</sup> Some of them are excellent, indeed, but they are primarily monolingual and therefore accessible only to persons of Slovene ethnic background who already know some of the language, or to the Slavist with some considerable facility in one or more Slavic languages. Furthermore, these books are not always readily available in Ljubljana, much less in other countries.

The study of Slovene, a highly inflected language like most Slavic languages, presents special difficulties for speakers of English not encountered in the commonly studied languages of Europe. These difficulties are compounded by lack of the time to acquire one's knowledge over a more leisurely three- or four-year sequence, as is typical of the

study of Russian or other major languages of Europe. A large amount of information must be presented cohesively and quickly; the final part of this paper will suggest those topics that need to be mastered in order to gain a good 'basic' knowledge of standard literary Slovene, at an active (speaking and writing) or passive (reading and translating) level. For those wishing to understand and speak Slovene it goes without saying that the sound system of the language must be emphasized from the very beginning. Stress, vowel quality and quantity and voicing/devoicing features need to be learned from the teacher or from tapes. For both groups the lists below comprise the grammatical categories that are important for a good knowledge of Slovene.

- Nouns: 1. all three genders  
 2. all declensional cases  
 3. all three numbers, including the dual.  
 4. frequently-encountered irregulars, e.g., *človek/ljudje*
- Adjectives: 1. gender, case, number  
 2. definite/indefinite  
 3. regular comparatives and superlatives  
 4. frequently-encountered exceptional comparatives, e.g., *dober/boljši*
- Adverbs: 1. regular and often-used irregular comparatives and superlatives  
 2. derivation
- Pronouns: 1. personal  
 2. interrogative  
 3. indefinite and negative (type: *nekdo, nikdo, vsakdo, marsikdo*)
- Numerals: 1. 1 - 1,000,000 (cardinal and ordinal)  
 2. gender distinctions  
 3. declensions  
 4. case agreement
- Prepositions: 1. usage  
 2. case requirements
- Verbs: 1. infinitive  
 2. present, past, future tenses  
 3. conjugation, including irregulars, e.g., *biti, imati*  
 4. aspects  
 5. imperatives  
 6. supine  
 7. adjectival and adverbial participles  
 8. conditional  
 9. optative

In addition to these grammatical categories, a basic course should provide information on word formation and syntax, as well as giving special attention to expressions of time and age.

It may be argued that these suggestions comprise more information than is needed for an elementary course in Slovene, e.g., that the dual or the supine are unnecessary. It must however be kept in mind that no category, whatever its statistical frequency, has been included which is not encountered in the contemporary spoken or written language. Additionally, those who approach the study of the language will, first, be motivated by

specific and often urgent reasons to so do, and will need all the above grammatical structures (and more) in order to achieve their goals; and/or, second, will come to their study with some knowledge of Slovene from their own background, or with some knowledge of another Slavic language (typically Russian or Serbo-Croatian), which will enable them to proceed more quickly. Those who undertake a study of Slovene will not be a homogeneous crowd, and it is important that each person be given the chance to acquire those essentials which will enable him or her to begin to speak or read materials in specific fields of interest at the earliest possible date.

A challenge lies before us. Further discussion on past neglect is obviated by tangible achievements in the form of a demonstrated need in the English speaking world for information in all fields relating to Slovenica, and by the audience who seeks it out. The task is to provide continuing and additional information. This can be accomplished in great part through the availability of language training in Slovene to speakers of English.

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## REFERENCES

1. Rado L. Lencek, *The Structure and History of the Slovene Language* (Columbus OH, 1982) 41.
2. From unpublished lectures by George Shevelov.
3. Thomas F. Magner, "The rise and fall of the ethnics," *The Journal of General Education* 25, 4 (1973) 253.
4. A review of more than ten years of publishing by the Society for Slovene Studies shows that the contributors to its publications include a healthy mixture of Slovenes, both emigrants and those living in Yugoslavia, second-generation Slovenes and, significantly, scholars of non-Slovene background. The last fact is important because it demonstrates that persons with no ethnic ties have been willing to take professional risks by developing and pursuing scholarly interests outside the main stream that is perhaps expected by their colleagues.
5. See W.W. Derbyshire, review of Komac and Škerlj, *Angleško-slovenski in slovensko-angliški slovar*, in *Slovene Studies* 5 (1983) 236-38, in which the suitability of this dictionary for speakers of English is discussed.
6. Cf. note 1.
7. Aleksandra L. Ceferin, *Slovensko slovsto-berilo: Slovenian Literary Reader* (Melbourne, 1984); reviewed by W.W. Derbyshire, *Slovene Studies* 8 (1986) 74-76.
8. Victor J. Kubelka, *Slovenian-English Grammar, Interpreter, Letter-writer and Information on Naturalization* (New York, 1912).
9. R.G.A. de Bray, *Guide to the Slavonic Languages* (London-New York, 1951). This work was republished in 1968 and again, in an expanded and revised edition of three volumes, Columbus OH: Slavica, 1980; the section on Slovene was reviewed by Tom M.S. Priestly, *Slovene Studies* 3 (1981) 92-103.
10. Charles E. Bidwell, *Outline of Slovenian Morphology* (Pittsburgh, 1969).
11. Milena Gobetz and Breda Loncar, *Slovenian Language Manual (Učbenik slovenskega jezika) I-II* (Willoughby Hills OH, 1976-77).
12. Anon., *Slovenian: 210-hour Non-Resident Language Refresher Course, I-VII* (Monterey CA, 1961-63).
13. Among the best are: Gunnar O. Svane, *Grammatik der slowenischen Schriftsprache* (Copenhagen, 1958) and Janko Jurančič, *Slovenački (slovenski) jezik*, 2nd ed. (Ljubljana, 1971). The latter was written for speakers of Serbo-Croatian.
14. For example, Franc Jakopin, *Učbenik slovenskega jezika (Slovene For You)* (Ljubljana, n.d.); Jože Toporišič, *Zakaj ne po slovensko (Slovene by the Direct Method)* (Ljubljana, n.d.); Ema Andoljšek, Ludvik Jevšenak and Tomo Korošec, *Povejmo slovensko* (Ljubljana, 1973); and Hermina Jug-Kranjec, *Slovenščina za tujce* (Ljubljana, 1978).

**POVZETEK****K ŠTUDIJU SLOVENŠČINE**

*Avtor navaja nekaj razlogov za to, da znanstveniki v angleško govorečem svetu niso pripravili dovolj in ustreznega pedagoškega gradiva, ki je potreben za študij slovenščine na vseh ravneh. Avtor obravnava družbene, politične in profesionalne vidike tega vprašanja in prihaja do zaključka, da potreba po takem gradivu obstaja in da je čedalje več osnovnih virov, potrebnih za izdelavo slovnice in čitank. Pregled prej objavljenih opisov slovenskega jezika za angleško govoreče se zaključuje s priporočilom, da naj bi bila v izčrpen osnovni tečaj slovenskega jezika vključena informacija za potrebe potencialnih odraslih uporabnikov vseh vrst.*