

FACTORS FAVORING SLOVENE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

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Introduction

Because there are fewer than 2,000,000 Slovenes in Yugoslavia, an important issue for the Slovene community and for Slovene scholars is the preservation of the language. A major focus of Professor Lencek's career has been a deeper understanding of the complex sociolinguistic variables affecting Slovene language maintenance. Virtually all Slovene language issues, including standardization and dialect variation, writing and spelling, and linguistic borrowing, affect the future of the language within the federation of Yugoslavia.

In recent years, many scholars and non-scholars alike have expressed concern for the future of the Slovene language. Without doubt, many factors seem to threaten the continued viability of Slovene. The steady increase in the non-Slovene population of "guestworkers" (*priseljenci z juga*) in Slovenia, the low birthrate among Slovenes, and established patterns of Slovene and Serbo-Croatian language use seem to favor the steady replacement of Slovene by Serbo-Croatian. Indeed, taking note of such factors, Paternost (1984:239) suggests that Slovene "exists in spite of historical odds," and Toporišič (1984:256) fears that recent developments "are undercutting its roots."

Yet recent events do not warrant a purely pessimistic outlook, for not all changes in the Slovene language situation will damage the prospects for Slovene language maintenance. Therefore this article will examine factors which seem to favor the spread of Serbo-Croatian, and then outline evidence suggesting that, despite these factors, the underlying pattern of Slovene language use has not changed in recent years. A possible explanation for current uncertainty about the future of the language will be proposed. Though important reasons for concern exist, it will be argued that Slovene remains a stable, viable, and dynamic language which is successfully withstanding the sociolinguistic pressures imposed upon it by recent economic and demographic changes in Yugoslavia.

Factors Favoring the Spread of Serbo-Croatian

Paternost (1984:240), describing the "sociolinguistic tug of war" between Slovene and Serbo-Croatian in Slovenia today, suggests that Slovenes are divided between those "who would like to deny their language as soon as confronted with non-Slovene speakers" and those "who consider their language as an 'untouchable relic' or treasure." Toporišič (1984:256) expresses deep concern for the fact that many Slovenes "do not affirm or assert the Slovene language in all its functions in life." Many Slovenes believe there is an increasing danger that their language will gradually be replaced by Serbo-Croatian, with its much larger population of speakers and wider functional range of use in Yugoslavia.

This concern for the future of Slovene is based upon a set of demographic and economic factors which seem to indicate that use of Slovene will decrease in the decades ahead. Most importantly, demographic changes indicate that the Slovene speaking proportion of the population of Yugoslavia will continue to decline. Between 1971 and 1981, for instance, Slovenes declined from 8.2% to 7.8% of the total population of the country. Moreover, the mean age of Slovenes is 36.0 years for females and 32.5 years for males, while the mean age for residents of Kosovo, for example, is over ten years younger (*SPY* 1985:40). Along with Croatians and Hungarians, Slovenes are increasing at a much lower rate than

other groups. Montenegrins, for example, increased in 1984 by 11.4 per thousand, while Slovenes increased by only 3.8 per thousand (*SPY* 1985:39).

These demographic data suggest that Slovene will be spoken by a steadily decreasing proportion of the population of Yugoslavia. In addition, it appears that the Slovene speaking population within the Republic of Slovenia will continue to shrink in relation to the number of speakers of Serbo-Croatian. Since 1961, Slovenes have dropped from 95.65% of the population of the republic to 90.52%. This change is a result of steady migration to Slovenia from other republics and a lower Slovene birthrate. Many migrants become permanent residents. Between 1953 and 1981, while Slovenes declined from 96.5% to 90.5% of the republic population, Montenegrins permanently residing in Slovenia increased by 90%, Macedonians by 325%, Muslims by 550%, Serbs by 90%, and Albanians by 90% (see *SLS* 1985:72). Moreover, the number of guestworkers from other republics has dramatically increased in recent decades. At the end of World War II, only 25,000 guestworkers resided in Slovenia. By 1960, the number had increased to over 200,000 (*SLS* 1985:75). Thus in 1981, in a republic population of about 1,900,000, there was one guestworker for every ten permanent residents, and among permanent residents, nearly one in ten was not a native speaker of Slovene.

Contact between Slovenes and speakers of Serbo-Croatian increased in other ways as well. The influx of tourists from other republics has increased significantly in recent years. Between 1970 and 1981, the number of tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina was up nearly 400% (*SLS* 1985:398). Thus Slovenes are regularly exposed to and have contact with speakers of Serbo-Croatian. This contact nearly always takes place in Serbo-Croatian, because few speakers of Serbo-Croatian learn Slovene. As a result, "the Slovene speaker is constantly confronted with the rejection 'I don't understand you'" (Toporišič 1984:251).

The increase in the non-Slovene population of Slovenia reflects regional economic inequalities in Yugoslavia. The movement of both guestworkers and permanent residents from other regions is a direct result of the relative health of the Slovene economy. Most importantly, unemployment in Slovenia is the lowest of any republic. Only 15,000 workers were officially listed as unemployed in the entire republic in 1984, while in Macedonia, with approximately the same number of people, 128,000 workers were listed as unemployed (*SPY* 1985:45). In addition, the workforce in Slovenia has a higher average education; a higher proportion of the workforce is engaged in manufacturing; and the workforce has a higher degree of productivity than any other republic (*SPY* 1985:37, 67, 84). Despite serious economic problems, Slovenia maintained a net balance of payments surplus in 1984, and it was the only republic to do so, indicating that the gap between the economic health of Slovenia and other republics is continuing to grow.

While these economic factors draw potential workers from other regions, a higher standard of living also makes permanent residence in Slovenia very attractive. By virtually every measure (e.g., literacy, availability of electricity, quality of medical care, and housing), Slovenia is the most developed region. Thus a higher standard of living has combined with economic and demographic factors to increase the population of speakers of Serbo-Croatian, and thereby reduce proportionately the use of the Slovene language within Slovenia.

Slovene Language Maintenance

Clearly, the use of Serbo-Croatian in Slovenia is increasing as the non-Slovene proportion of the population increases. Yet maintenance of a language is only partly dependent upon the numerical strength of its speakers. It is not necessarily the case, for

instance, that the recent decrease in the proportion of Slovenes from 95.65% to 90.53% of the population will have a significant impact on the future of the Slovene language. Even after this decrease, Slovene remains by far the most widely spoken native language in the region. The question which must be answered, if the possible decline of Slovene is to be assessed, is whether demographic and economic factors have resulted in a restriction in the functional range of Slovene language use among the Slovene population.

In order to assess whether use of Slovene has declined, numerical strength is less important than its range of functions (see Ferguson 1959; Tollefson 1981:3-15). In general, maintenance of any language depends on its having clearly defined domains of use (e.g., home, school, government, publication). Languages without clearly defined functional domains will tend to be displaced by dominant languages, while those with clearly defined functional domains will tend to be relatively stable and not easily displaced, even if the number of speakers is small.

As Lencek (1984:57) points out, Slovene historically has had enormous unifying, separating, and prestige value within the Slovene community. Because spoken Slovene is characterized by significant dialect variation, and "literary Slovene represents the only common standard which unites the speakers of Slovene" (Lencek 1982:26), the most important domains of use for assessing Slovene language maintenance are formal, literary, and educational domains.

Recent evidence suggests that Serbo-Croatian has not begun to replace Slovene in these crucial areas. In higher education, first of all, Slovene continues to be predominant. At the highest level of education, between 1974 and 1981, the total number of non-Slovenes from Yugoslavia enrolled as doctoral students in Slovenia increased only from nine to fourteen. Similarly, during the same period, the number of degrees awarded to university students from other republics increased only slightly (from 18 to 31), while the number awarded to Slovenes increased by more than 40%, from 114 to 184 (*ŠVZ* 1976:68, 70; *ŠIN* 1982:98, 102).

Overall enrollment in higher education also reflects continued predominance by Slovenes. In 1974, Slovenes constituted 88.0% of total enrollment, and in 1981, 90.3% (*ŠVZ* 1976:47; *ŠIN* 1982:54). Moreover, during this period there was a sharp decrease in the number of Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Muslims enrolled in Slovene institutions, and a slight increase only in the number of Hungarian students (*ŠVZ* 1976:46; *ŠIN* 1982:54). Between the early 1970s and the early 1980s, there was a decrease in the number of students from every other republic who were enrolled in Slovene institutions of higher learning.

The study of Slovene in schools has also remained strong in recent years. At the Filozofska fakulteta in Ljubljana in 1974, for instance, 12.5% of the students completed degrees in Slovene, while in 1981 the proportion was 14.6% of enrollment (*ŠVZ* 1976:27, 55; *ŠIN* 1982:25, 55). In elementary schools, however, the proportion of students who selected Serbo-Croatian as an optional subject of study increased substantially from 1974-75 to 1981-82 (*OSŠ* 1976:45; *OSŠ* 1982:51). Training of language teachers has not changed substantially in the past decade. Despite predictions of increased enrollment of children who speak Serbo-Croatian, the number of teachers trained at the pedagogical academies in Maribor and Ljubljana to teach Serbo-Croatian has increased only slightly (*ŠVZ* 1976:51; *ŠIN* 1982:75-76).

Other measures of Slovene language use also indicate that Slovene is not losing its role as a literary and educational language. The circulation of Slovene newspapers has increased in the past decade by nearly 10% while the proportion of books published in Slovene has

remained constant and the number of hours of television and radio broadcasts in Slovene has increased substantially (see *SKJ* 1976:119-121; *SPY* 1985:137-140).

An additional indication that Slovene retains a stable set of uses is that scientific publication is often in languages other than Slovene. Although school science textbooks are in Slovene, publications intended for communication with other language communities are almost exclusively in other languages. As Toporišič (1984:253) points out, "it happens again and again that an original Slovene discovery is not always revealed in Slovene, but in a foreign language, **as it practically used to be over the centuries**" [my emphasis, JWT]. That this practice has taken place for centuries suggests a highly stable functional differentiation between Slovene (used for communication among Slovenes) and other languages (used for communication with non-Slovenes).

The danger is that continued dominance of Slovene in education, publishing, and other literary areas might be weakened, if the non-Slovene population continues to increase at a rapid rate. Although demographic variables and relatively low unemployment in Slovenia seem to favor a steady increase in the proportion of the population speaking Serbo-Croatian, the major growth in the non-Slovene guestworker population seems to have stopped. The primary influx of guestworkers occurred before 1971, and recent data indicate a slight decrease in the guestworker population between the 1960s and early 1980s (see *SLS* 1985:75). Thus while demographic factors seem to favor the non-Slovene population, economic factors may be having less impact today than in the 1950s and 1960s in terms of increasing the number of speakers of Serbo-Croatian in Slovenia.

In sum, data suggest that Slovene language use remains stable in the important areas of education and media, and that the language retains clearly defined functions within the Slovene community. When the number of non-Slovene speakers increases, Slovenes use Serbo-Croatian more often, yet this change in the proportionate use of Serbo-Croatian reflects a stable sociolinguistic division of labor: Slovene is appropriate for intra-group communication among Slovenes, while Serbo-Croatian is appropriate for inter-group communication involving contact with non-Slovenes who speak Serbo-Croatian. This functional distinction is maintained because Slovenes speak Serbo-Croatian, while few outsiders speak Slovene. Although this imbalance in language learning is, in a sense, unfair and may express a colonial attitude toward Slovenia among speakers of Serbo-Croatian (see Toporišič 1984:251-252), the result is that Slovene has a powerful "separating function" (Lencek 1984:57) which serves to define and to maintain Slovene national identity. Moreover, it appears that this separating function has been central to Slovene language use since the sixteenth century. In a comparison of Slovene language use in 1584 and 1984, Toporišič (1984:247-258) notes major similarities between the current language situation and that of the age of Dalmatin and Bohorič. Though Toporišič (1984:258) expresses concern for the future of Slovene, his analysis suggests that Slovene language use is relatively stable:

"The social situation of literary Slovene in 1584 did not differ substantially from where we stand in 1984. Neither in the matter of substance, concerning the existence of a literary language called Slovene, nor in questions of its geographic extent, and in particular not in the basic premises and propositions concerning the policies and dialects of its social implementation and affirmation."

Conclusions

A poster for the Tenth Congress of Zaveza komunistov Slovenije held in Ljubljana

April 17-19, 1986, used a pop-art design of pieces of broken letters scattered on a field of blue. Though it appeared that the broken letters spelled out the name of the Congress, only the letter "Z" was complete; all other letters seemed to have blown apart, and were flying off in all directions as if an explosion had just occurred.

As Slovenia experiences the post-Tito economic and political crisis, which is characterized by rapid inflation, lack of political leadership, and increased internal conflict, the poster seems particularly appropriate. Its symbolism, perhaps unintentional, suggests the powerful economic, social, and political pressures threatening to destroy the cohesion of the confederation. These pressures have greatly increased the concern of the people of Yugoslavia for their material well-being and for the sociopolitical stability of the country.

Without doubt, Slovenes share this concern, which may be at the heart of recent worry about the future of the Slovene language. This possibility is suggested by the central role of language in Slovene national identity. As Professor Lencek recently wrote (1984:57): ". . .in the absence of stronger ethnocultural integrators such as a historical past, it is language—spoken and written and in particular literary language—which essentially defines and characterizes a national culture." Language thus possesses powerful "symbolic functions" (Lencek 1984:57). Through language, the forces which unify or threaten a national culture are given content and expression. When the national culture is endangered, such as in the current crisis facing Yugoslavia, then political and economic uncertainty may be expressed in the form of concern for the underlying basis of the culture, which, in Slovenia, is the Slovene language.

Yet fear of a decline in the Slovene language also reveals intense awareness of its value. This fear, paradoxically, provides evidence that the language will survive. Similar concern has been expressed for over 400 years, suggesting that it is central to Slovene national consciousness, and essential for Slovene language maintenance.

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POVZETEK

DEJAVNIKI V PRID OHRANJANJU SLOVENSKEGA JEZIKA

V zadnjem času zaskrbljenost za bodočnost slovenskega jezika osredinjena na družbene in gospodarske dejavnike, ki nekako podpirajo širjenje srbohrvaščine. Članek je povzetek teh dejavnikov, posebno demografskih sprememb prebivalstva Jugoslavije, soočenja Slovencev in srbohrvaško govorečih ter osebega neslovenskega prebivalstva v Sloveniji. Na podlagi dokaznega gradiva je rečeno, da si je slovenščina kljub tem dejavnikom ohranila vrsto funkcij in se zdi, da se uspešno upira sociolingvističnim pritiskom, ki so naklonjeni srbohrvaščini. Današnja skrb za slovenščino lahko igra pomembno vlogo v dolgoročnem ohranjanju jezika.