

2: THE CASE OF SLOVENE IN KOPRŠČINA

Jana Kobav, Visiting Lecturer, Indiana University

I would like to devote the time I have at my disposal to highlighting the present state of the Slovene language on the bilingual territory of the Obala (the Slovene Littoral) and its hinterland.

It is impossible to achieve a thorough understanding of the problem without looking back at the not-so-remote history of the area that extends along the present border with Italy, a border that has divided many relatives, that has hindered or decelerated collaboration for certain periods.

Before World War I the entire Slovene territory including Primorsko had for centuries been subject to the Austrian monarchy. After World War I Primorsko became part of Italy; towns along the coast became predominantly inhabited by Italians, while the surrounding villages were mainly Slovene. In the period before World War II Primorsko was thus not really connected to other parts of Slovenia because it economically and politically gravitated to the Trieste/Trst basin, and because of the configuration of the topography.

Bert Pribac, the Primorsko poet living in Australia, talked about this separation when visiting Slovenia last year. He remembered that, when he chose his bride from the "upper" part of Slovenia, his mother's reaction was: "Kaj Slovenko boš vzela?" The famous Primorsko Slovene sculptor Jože Pohlen often recalls his youth in the village of Hrastovlje, and the women who woke, almost in the middle of the night, to go to Trieste by donkey-cart either to work there in the cheap labor force (as they still do today), or to sell milk, vegetables and lumber. Even people who lived as far from Trieste as Hrastovlje can thus be seen to have gravitated to Trieste; and this inevitably influenced their language habits.

Many Istrian Slovene villages border on Croatia, and the consequence is the Šavrinsko dialect variants which extend from the village of Črnikal to the valley of the Dragonja. Some dialect variants traditionally use typically Croatian reflexes: e.g., the 'soft' /č/ in the place-name Puče; /a/ for /e/ in *na* "not"; /a/ for 'schwa' in *daž* "rain", *pas* "dog." The Slovene /u/ is pronounced as a vowel between /u/ and /i/ in *Pučé* and *jugna* "dance floor." Borrowings from Italian vocabulary are used in everyday speech, thus *pamidori*, *cuketi*, *koromač* for Standard Slovene *paradižniki*, *bučke* and *janež*; and *vala* (a word that has also been adopted in Dalmatia) for Standard *dolina*. There are also Croatian-sounding words such as *hiti*, *konac* for Standard *vrže*, *nit*. These dialects are now the objects of research, so that this part of the Slovene heritage can be preserved.

Many inhabitants of Koper were born in the neighboring villages but now no longer speak their original dialect. To preserve this dialect a group of women came together and established a folk group called *Savrinke*.

Dressed in folk costumes they wittily offer their audiences an authentic impression of traditional women's habits, language, songs and behavior. The younger generations in these villages are educated in Slovene local schools, and for the most part live and work in Koper, Izola and Piran, with the result that today these dialects are merging with the Slovene taught in school; and only the old people still living in the villages speak the dialects.

Immediately after World War II there were many settlers of Italian origin living in the region. They even spoke different Italian dialects in each town along the coast—Koper, Izola and Piran—a fact that is difficult to understand nowadays, since fast transportation has made this into a homogeneous area. At one time, even as recently as just before and just after the last War, many people traveled by donkey-cart as their everyday means of transport, with the result that they never traveled far or mixed very much.

After the division of the Free Trieste Territory between Yugoslavia and Italy, many settlers moved to Italy—even if they had previously lived in the so-called 'Zone B'—and the subsequent Yugoslav policy was to populate the area with immigrants from the hinterland; and, as year succeeded year, more and more Slovene was spoken in this region.

Nowadays Italian is used on Koper Radio and Television, where—although they have introduced some Slovene programs—they still predominantly broadcast for Italians. Until late spring this year [1990], most of the inhabitants of the Littoral could only receive Ljubljana Channel 1 Television; very few could watch Ljubljana Channel 2 or Zagreb TV. A natural consequence is that we, the inhabitants of the area, choose among a variety of Italian programs. The only Slovene program that we never miss is the mid-evening half-hour news broadcast on Ljubljana 1. Thus—in spite of the fact that Italian has almost ceased to be used in everyday speech—it is still present in the media in the evenings, if not earlier. It cannot be denied that these programs are highly competitive with respect to Ljubljana TV, so that our children are usually as fluent in Italian as they are in Slovene, even if we do not communicate orally in Italian at all.

The local newspaper that is published twice a week in Slovene, *Primorske novice*, provides basic information about the activities in the wider Primorsko region, and is therefore read by many. However, neither the Slovene-language Radio/TV programs, nor the Slovene-language newspaper, are proof-read, and remain linguistically under a strong Italian influence. This problem has often been raised, but not yet been solved: the usual excuse is the expenses involved, and the media wish to remain competitive.

Since we are all considered inhabitants of a bilingual territory, all our official forms and documents—such as identity cards, passports, driving licenses and school records—are printed in both Italian and Slovene. The names of streets, squares, villages and towns, and of schools and other institutions, are all bilingual. Recently a village on the hills above Izola changed its name back to the original *Corte*: immediately after World War II the name was changed to *Dvori*, a literal translation of "Corte," but the inhabitants could never become used to the new name. However, the

originally Italian forms of *Capo d'Istria*, *Isola* and *Portorose* were more or less preserved in their present names, *Koper*, *Izola* and *Portorož*.

The Slovene coastland region has for many years seen a strong immigration from the South of Yugoslavia, and the influence of Serbo-Croat has tended to be quite noticeable in certain areas of work, especially in the forwarding agencies, in shipping, and in the customs service. Many Slovenes, also, graduated from the Business Naval College in Reka/Rijeka, and introduced Croatian expressions into the vocabulary of shipping, where Slovene words are very scarce. Many unskilled workers brought their families to Primorsko, but their children—being educated together with Slovene children—do not use their ancestral language in everyday outdoor communication, though some traces of their origin remain in their speech. Usually these children find it much more practical to be successful at school and to make friends, for which purposes they soon learn Slovene.

There are however many older people, such as the Istrian Croats and those who immigrated to Primorsko 25-30 years ago, who still speak Serbo-Croat and somehow did not become accustomed to the Slovene language. For these, too, the situation is changing nowadays, since almost no Slovene is now willing to speak Serbo-Croat. On the other hand, in the fifth grade our schoolchildren have to learn Serbo-Croat (and there are schools which provide classes in Serbo-Croat for sixth-graders after school). In the fifth grade English is introduced, with five hours of instruction per week. As a result the fifth-graders spend half of the time in school learning languages: Slovene, English, Serbo-Croat and Italian.

As Italian is considered a language of the region, our children have to learn it from kindergarten on. The number of hours per week of Italian in some high school grades has tended to be very close to the number of hours of Slovene; and this has resulted in an even stronger linguistic influence upon Slovene. Our high school students in Koper have a 34-hour school week, i.e., at least two hours per week more than other students in Slovenia, simply by virtue of the inclusion of classes in Italian; but this is still preferable to the policy some years ago, which was to delete hours of math or physics in favor of Italian within a 32-hour week. In any case, we are very sorry to observe that there is no reciprocal Slovene-language instruction in either Italy or Croatia.

There are many Slovene parents on the Littoral, among them many intelligentsia, who send their children to Italian kindergartens; but there are very few who register their children in Italian schools thereafter. The basic reasons for these decisions are the relatively lower fees and the the provision of free books and writing equipment in the Italian kindergartens, and the much smaller classes—sometimes as low as groups of 8 in comparison to 20 or more in Slovene institutions. When the Slovene kindergartens were overcrowded, during periods of increased population growth, it was still possible to find a good place in an Italian one. Now the situation has changed: many nurseries have closed down because there are not enough toddlers; and many parents can simply not afford the costs.

Last but not least, learning Italian in the first grade often presents quite a challenge to children who have no previous knowledge, as compared to those who speak it in the home with either parents or grandparents and who can thus communicate fluently with their Italian teacher from the first day. Since our children are graded from the first grade onwards, their parents try to make it easier for them by sending them to Italian kindergartens. The parents often believe that it is an intellectual and educational advantage for their children to be able to speak another language. There are nevertheless some bright children who have learned to speak Italian just by watching Italian TV programs. Whatever the wishes of the parents, it is very difficult to prevent our children from watching Italian-language programs, especially cartoons: the Italian channels show cartoons dubbed into Italian, whereas Ljubljana TV shows only foreign cartoons with subtitles, which young children cannot read. Moreover, there is a substantial difference in quality between the Italian and the Slovene programs.

There are very few children of Slovene origin in the Italian schools above the kindergarten level. Indeed, many Italian parents send their children to Slovene schools, because they are reputed to be better, and because subsequent access to higher education is easier. One element that speaks in favor of the Italian schools—but still does not influence many parents' decisions—is the provision of free textbooks: for in Slovenia textbooks have become very expensive, with prices equalling those in the U.S.A., whereas wages are far from equal.

As far as I can observe, our children speak more languages than the average Slovene children, but have a poorer knowledge of their mother tongue. At the elementary level, school teachers successfully promote reading activities among their pupils by using various competitions and award systems; and the books selected and recommended are interesting and the children apparently enjoy reading them. As soon as they reach high school, however, they are treated like adults—at least, judging by the titles of the books that they are required to read; and at this stage there occurs a sudden recession in their reading habits. The more the teachers press books on the students, the less their interest in reading seems to be. Our Slovene-language teachers have relatively strict curricula, which are quite reasonable at the elementary level but overly demanding at the high school level, especially in schools with scientific and mathematical orientations. The effect is certainly contrary to what it is supposed to be: students do not read the required novels, but simply copy out reports on the assigned readings, and learn a wealth of detail about literary styles on the one hand and about grammatical rules on the other; and when they leave school they are incapable of completing an application form or a curriculum vitae, or of writing, e.g., a letter of complaint. When they enter the job market, the result is a linguistically poor level of correspondence on almost all levels.

The Department responsible for the Slovene language at the University of Ljubljana is one of very few that does not register as many students as it allowed every year, or at least does not need to make a selection by examination among applicants to limit the number of freshmen. Given

more up-to-date curricula and teaching methods, students might be more likely to opt for Slovene language studies rather than, say, English or German: there are, for example, about four times as many applicants for the study of English than can be admitted.

This spring, incidentally, a craze for playing marbles in Koper has shown in young children a unique ability—when given free rein—for innovative word formation in Slovene: they invented more than 20 new names for marbles. Thus, according to the material they are made from: *navadenka*, *steklenka*, *porcelanka*, *lesenka*, *železenka*, *papirka*, *plastična*; according to their designs: *marsovka*, *enoperesna*, *dvoperesna*, even *petdesetperesna*, and *kačarka*, *italijanska kačarka*, *superka*; according to their colors: *belka*, *rumenka*, *rdečka*, *zelenka*, *nevidenka*, *kokakolka*. Also, size-distinctions gave rise to marbles ranging from *batko*, the largest, through *polbatko* to *amerikanka*, *cicibanka* and so on. The hypernym for "marble" was not *frnikola* but the word used for decades in Koprščina, *ščinka*.

We have to admit a considerable influence of the Italian language upon the Slovene of Koprščina, but one cannot deny a certain amount of reverse influence, that of Slovene upon the Italian in Trieste and its environs. One excellent example is the use of the second person plural personal pronoun *voi* as the pronoun of address, which contrasts with the normal Italian use of the third person singular form *lei*. In Trieste the use of *voi* is increasing, and this is most probably under the influence of the Slovene usage of *vi*.

A lack of interest in studying Slovene in the towns on the Italian side of the border is a serious obstacle to closer co-operation. There is however one really outstanding institution which cultivates the use on a high cultural level of the Slovene language for the general public, the *Stalno slovensko gledališče v Trstu*, which has put great efforts into preserving our language and heritage. With a carefully-chosen repertoire and by appointing the best Slovene performers, year after year it attracts the attention of theatre-goers in Trieste as well as from the Slovene Littoral. This spring they staged a brilliant performance of Tennessee Williams' *Rose Tattoo*, thus succeeding in combining a modern American text in a Slovene-language version upon Italian territory.

Notwithstanding all the pressures exerted upon the Slovene language in Koprščina and the broader Primorsko region, it has persisted and developed, and now, with the growing self-awareness of the Slovenes, has a firm basis to grow as a constituent of the whole.

3: THE CASE OF THE SLOVENE MINORITY IN ITALY

Emidij Susič, Università degli studi di Trieste

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present some data concerning the dimensions of our round table topic as they relate to the Slovene minority in Italy. These data, which relate to linguistic attitudes and to language use, were collected in several empirical investigations over the last twelve years.