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4: THE CASE OF THE SLOVENE MINORITY IN AUSTRIA Tom M.S. Priestly, University of Alberta

1. Introduction

Rather than try to describe at any length the linguistic situation in the bilingual area of Austrian Carinthia, I have chosen today to dwell on some questions about ethnicity in that province which I consider enormously important and for which I can offer no simple answers. Before I get to these questions, however, I shall first suggest a historical cause of some of the prevalent Carinthian language attitudes, and then explain why it is so difficult to give you a simple description of the Carinthian sociolinguistic situation.

2. The legacy of the Habsburgs

Though not a historian, I understand that much of the background to the 'language question' in Carinthia can be traced to the policies of the Habsburgs of the 19th century, and in particular the governmental attempts to solve the problems posed by the ethnic heterogeneity of the Empire. In Carinthia, as in other Austrian provinces, these policies and tactics resulted in language (which, as elsewhere in Europe, was by now the manifest symbol of ethnicity) becoming—potentially, at least—both *politicized* and *intellectualized*. Given this state of affairs, it only took a historically very short period for this potential to be realized: namely, from the last year of what had hitherto been a relatively uneventful World War I up till the 1920 plebiscite. I suggest that these developments explain the speed with which the Germanophone intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals so quickly perfected the irrational *Windischentheorie*.¹ The results, seventy years later, are striking; many of the basic tenets of the *Windischentheorie* are now—unwittingly, in most cases—accepted as facts by the Slovene minority (cf. Priestly 1990a); and the average Slovenophone forester or farmer or shopkeeper or artisan, who has no intellectual pretensions and who tends to vote along party-political lines (in a place where all the major parties are distinctly Germanophone), is normally quite uninterested either by academic or by political appeals for Slovene language-support. The average Slovene-speaker, rather, is only swayed by emotional appeals; and, as I shall shortly

¹ It is interesting to note that similar developments seem to have taken place in the Slovene minority area of Hungary, where official statements about the ethnic identity of that minority had remarkable similarities to Carinthian German pronouncements deriving from the *Windischentheorie* (see Fujs 1990). A contrastive study would be of great interest.

argue, emotional appeals are logically suspect in today's society; indeed, they may also be tactically inexpedient. The nineteenth-century intellectualization of the 'language question' therefore seems to have had an extremely negative long-term effect on the 'ethnolinguistic vitality' (see below) of Slovene in Carinthia.

3. The complexity of the linguistic situation.

My recent contrastive study (Priestly 1990b) of two neighbouring communities in Austrian Carinthia shows, among other things, how difficult it is to draw conclusions about the process of Germanization in that province. One hundred and fifty years ago Borovlje and Sele were more or less equally Slovenophone; now, however, there is a vast difference in the language-use in the two communities. Analysis shows that there are simply far too many reasons that explain the Germanization of Borovlje and the non-Germanization of Sele: the demography, the economics, the history, religious factors, educational factors, political factors, cultural factors, the administrative system,—all have as it were conspired towards today's enormous differences between the two communities; and it is extraordinarily difficult to determine which factor or factors were crucial. If we broaden our field of vision, similarly, we find that scholars are far from agreement as to which factors have been most important in the spread of the German language in the province as a whole. Moreover, there is very little uniformity: the three main regions of Zilja, Rož and Podjuna vary enormously, and within each of these areas individual communities vary among themselves just as Borovlje and Sele do; indeed, to adapt the famous linguistic dictum, 'chaque village a son histoire.' It is thus very difficult to satisfyingly explain the past.²

One final comment before turning to the questions that interest me today. It is essential to point out that the proper description of language use and of the basis for (and hence prospects for) language maintenance and language revival in Carinthia has hardly been started. As recently shown by Howard Giles and others (Giles & Johnson 1987; Giles, Leets & Coupland 1990), only multidisciplinary analyses (of the kind just mentioned by my colleague Emidij Susič, but not limited to the analyses he describes) will provide measurements of what is called "ethnolinguistic vitality." And this has yet to be done.

I now turn to questions that we have to answer if we wish to make any progress with an analysis of the interrelationship of language and ethnicity in Carinthia.

² And, given the sudden political upheavals to the South and East of Carinthia, it is equally difficult to foretell the future. Whereas a few years ago I would have agreed with the most gloomy predictions about the fate of the Slovene language in Carinthia, now the situation is such that nobody can be sure of anything; note that only just recently, on 30 September 1990, a new programme of support for Carinthian Slovenes was announced by Janez Dular, Minister for Slovenes Abroad (*Naš Tednik*, XXXI/40 (Oct. 5, 1990) 7), and, since the climate for Austro-Slovene cooperation has (at least potentially) greatly improved, this programme may have some chance of success.

Two years ago, at our meeting in Honolulu, Andrej Moritsch—speaking about ethnic identification in Carinthia—was quite outspoken in a number of respects. Having pointed out that "Ethnic identity is not inborn, but is the result of the process of socialization which all of us are subjected to," he went on to explain how irrational his own *slovenskost* was, being based on (typically Carinthian) beliefs such as: "a person has only one mother and therefore has only one mother tongue," and: "whoever betrays their own mother tongue is also betraying their mother..." Given a society that is changing so fast, Moritsch argued, the problem of ethnicity must surely be faced, and resolved, *rationally*. No longer was it possible, he said, to answer the question: *Why is one Slovene?* by answering *Because it is natural and requires no justification*. "If future development is to be directed towards a multiethnic and multicultural society," he said, "we must examine the inherited content of our ethnicity so that we may be able to find a place for it in that society."³

In the same vein, in his latest study on language and ethnicity, Joshua Fishman (1990) implicitly⁴ demonstrates that the justification offered for minority language-maintenance is often 'irrationally messianistic' and 'ultra-conservative.' He gives as typical examples (1) appeals to the belief that a certain group should speak language X because it is 'natural' and/or 'God-given' to speak X; and (2) appeals to the fact that the ancestors of the group members spoke X as justification for the group members to continue speaking, or to learn again how to speak, X. (Appeals of this kind have of course not seldom been heard in Slovene Carinthia.) Fishman points out (and his arguments are difficult to fault) that neither of these justifications is easily tenable nowadays, and, moreover, that neither is politically expedient—and this is as true for Europe as it is for North America, especially in the 1990s and especially in areas contiguous to Eastern Europe. Rather, Fishman argues that one should rely on rational (and, preferably, incontrovertible) arguments to support [language maintenance and] language revival; he suggests two such arguments, viz., (3) that individualism is a source of personal happiness, whereas general uniformity leads to a bland and uninteresting form of existence; i.e., what he terms the *self-actualization* role of language; and (4) that individuals have the right to *cultural self-determination*. This last point requires scrutiny: for self-determination can only be valid in unconstrained circumstances; and this means that the prerequisite for free choice, viz. the absence of economic and social pressure from the linguistic/ethnic majority, must be in place first; and this is not the case in Carinthia... And yet, as long as irrational arguments for the maintenance/revival of Slovene⁵ are the norm, how can one expect rational circumstances for self-determination?

3 Moritsch 1988 (my translation of the German version, TMSP); see also Smith 1981: 45-62.

4 Fishman writes about what he calls "the reversal of language-shift," i.e., successful efforts to reverse the loss of one language when it has been partly replaced by another; but what he says applies also, and equally, to minority language- *maintenance*. Note that Carinthian Slovenes must aim at 'reversing language shift' in much of the area that was Slovene-speaking 50 years ago, if they wish to be able to sing such songs as "Rož, Podjuna, Zilja" with anything more than nostalgia.

5 Exemplified, in their most extreme form, by the recent attempts to relate the origin of the Slovene nation to the Etruscans; see Lencek 1990.

arguments for the maintenance/revival of Slovene⁵ are the norm, how can one expect rational circumstances for self-determination?

5. Why should we pay attention to the *zavedni Koroški Slovenci*?

The casual reader of the Slovene press in Carinthia (*Naš tednik*, *Slovenski vestnik*) might suppose that calls for Slovene language maintenance and language revival are typical. But go to any village and you will find that holders of these views are in the minority. In Sele, and in other ethnically conscious communities in Carinthia that I know, it is fair to say that whereas the majority of inhabitants may more or less agree with these views, their support for them is only passive; the same majority will seldom do anything active (other than actually speaking the language, of course) to promote the use of Slovene. The question therefore must be asked: Why should the objective outsider pay any more attention to a few vociferous Slovenophones than to a few vociferous Germanophones, if both groups use irrational arguments?

6. Conclusion, and a note on 'Awareness of the norm'

I do not pretend to have any answers to the above questions; I do however suggest that answers should be sought. I will illustrate this by responding to one of the questions posed in the introduction to this round-table discussion.

It has been pointed out that an important factor in language maintenance is an awareness of the norm (i.e., of the standard language) on the part of its potential users. Without disagreeing with this viewpoint, I wish to suggest that even more important than *awareness of the norm* is *knowledge of the norm*. I will take this as self-evident; for awareness is fruitless without knowledge. Now, in the bilingual region of Carinthia, only a very small intellectual élite have an active command of Standard Literary Slovene (what Carinthians call *šrift*). It is very clear that if this élite will be all that is left in two generations' time, then the use of Slovene—of any variety, be this standard or dialect—in Carinthia is doomed to extinction. For *šrift* to be—for the vast majority of today's Slovenophones—anything more than a language-variety that is used in church and otherwise only occasionally, then these Slovenophones must not only have some reason to learn it, some interest in it; they must have a sound knowledge of their own maternal dialect to use as a structural base; for without a structural linguistic base, they will be incapable of properly learning any other language-variety, be this Slovene, German, or any other.⁶ And for successive generations to learn enough of their maternal dialect to serve as a basis for this learning, there must be some pride in those dialects... which they do not have. And here I come full circle to the

⁵ Exemplified, in their most extreme form, by the recent attempts to relate the origin of the Slovene nation to the Etruscans; see Lencek 1990.

⁶ This has been pointed out by many people before, but is far from being a universally recognized truth; indeed, it is often treated as a heresy. See Priestly 1988, 1989.

Windischentheorie, which has reinforced the arguments which favour the standard language to such a degree that all non-standard varieties are now thought of as something to be ashamed of. The result, therefore, is a neglect of the maternal dialect, and the inevitable inability to learn the standard; and this tendency—unless reversed—will render Slovene in Carinthia obsolete within a few generations. It is this circumstance which renders essential a re-examination of the justification of the link between ethnicity and language in the Carinthia of today.

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POVZETEK

OKROGLA MIZA O JEZIKOVNI LOJALNOSTI IN NARODNI ZAVESTI: NA PRIMERU SLOVENSKEGA JEZIKA

Pogovor za okroglo mizo o jezikovni lojalnosti in narodni zavesti je bil namenjen sproščenemu tehtanju vprašanja kulturnih reakcij jezikovnih skupnosti na sociolingvistične funkcije knjižnega jezika, to je sociolingvističnih razpoloženj in drž (angl. attitudes) do njih - v "treh Slovenijah": v osrednji matični Sloveniji, v slovenskem zamejstvu, in v slovenskem zdomstvu. Naključje je nanese, da se je težišče pogovora osredotočilo na probleme slovenskega zamejstva in da so posamezne govorniki v svojih nastopih razvili vrsto svojih stališč in pristopov k obravnavanju teh problemov.

RADO L. LENCEK je v svoji uvodni besedi "O razsežnostih sociolingvističnih jezikovnih razpoloženj (atitudinalnosti)" pokazal na poglobljene teme osnovne problematike diskusije v smislu kulturnih reakcij jezikovnih skupnosti na socio-lingvistične funkcije knjižnih jezikov. Za izhodišče je postavil štiri take funkcije in tri atitudinalnosti: ločevalna in združevalna funkcija sta v korelaciji z razpoloženjem jezikovne lojalnosti, prestižna funkcija v korelaciji z jezikovnim ponosom, poznanje jezikovne norme pismenega jezika v korelaciji z zavestjo govorečega, kaj je prav in kaj ne v pismenem jeziku; to zadnjo korelacijo v našem času ustvarjata in razvijata šola in raba knjižnega jezika. Teh funkcij in razpoloženj v treh Slovenijah ni jemati v abstraktnih merilih, pač pa jih je bolje ocenjevati kot razlike po intenzivnosti in kakovosti, kot pa razlike po substanci. Svojo uvodno besedo je govornik končal z vrsto atitudinalnih aforizmov škofa Antona Martina Slomška o slovenskem jeziku in o moralni odgovornosti do jezika, ki so ga od svojih starih prejeli kot svoj materni jezik, da ga s ponosom in lojalnostjo ohranjajo v jezikovni skupnosti, ki jim ga je predala.

JANA KOBAR je v referatu "Primer slovenskega jezika v Koprščini" podala svoje osebne poglede na nedavni razvoj in rabo slovenščine, tako knjižne kot narečne, in italijanščine v Slovenskem primorju, in še posebej na jezikovni položaj v Koprščini. Na ozadju zgodovinskih premikov, ki jih je doživljalo Slovensko primorje vse od začetka tega stoletja, je referentka pretehtala negativne in pozitivne vidike razvoja jezikovne prakse in sociolingvistične atitudinalnosti jezikovne lojalnosti, še zlasti z ozirom na jezik šolskega izobraževanja in kulturnega delovanja tega področja. Njeno ocenjevanje jezikovnega položaja v Slovenskem primorju danes in napovedi za bodočnost je navdajal stvarni optimizem.

Referat: "Primer slovenske manjšine v Italiji" *EMIDIJA SUSIČA* je bil posvečen problemom uporabe slovenskega jezika v predelih slovenskega življa v Furlaniji-Juljski Krajini. Njegova izčrpna obravnava položaja je slonela na obsežnem gradivu psiholingvističnih in sociolingvističnih raziskav jezikovne prakse na tem področju, še posebej v Gorici in Trstu, ki so jih doslej pripravili domači jezikovci, med njimi avtor sam, B. de Marchi in Inka Štrukelj. Ob koncu referata je govornik kratko povzel svoja lastna opazovanja o odnosu med rabo slovenskega jezika in socio-lingvističnimi atitudinalnostmi v korelaciji s sociolingvističnimi funkcijami, ki jih opravlja slovenščina v Furlaniji-Juljski Krajini.

Končno se je *TOM PRIESTLY* v svojem referatu "Primer slovenske manjšine v Avstriji" zadržal ob štirih, vse prej kot jasnih aspektih gledanja na slovensko Koroško. Tako se je ustavil ob škodljivi zapuščini intelektualizacije "jezikovnega vprašanja" devetnajstega stoletja; ob skrajni kompleksnosti sodobnega jezikovnega stanja na Koroškem; ob iracionalnosti mnogih razlogov v podporo vzdrževanja slovenščine; in ob zaskrbujočem variiranju osebne in kolektivne "etnične zavesti" med Slovenci na Koroškem. V zaključku svojega referata je govornik poudaril, da podcenjevanje in omalovaževanje krajevnih narečij v samih slovenskih skupnostih na Koroškem neizbežno vodi v usihanje in končno usahnitev knjižne slovenščine na Koroškem.