

SITUATIONALLY-MOTIVATED SPEAKING HABITS AMONG CARINTHIAN SLOVENES

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1. Introduction

In southern Carinthia, a contact zone for three major languages and cultures which has been inhabited by Slavs since the 6th century, geographical, cultural and historical factors led to the development of an unusually large number of Slovene dialects. Located on the north-western edge of the Slovene speech area, these dialects can be divided into five major groups,¹ all preserving, to a greater or lesser extent, linguistic peculiarities from older stages of the language.² The differences between the various dialects are exceptionally large, especially on the phonological and lexical levels, sociolinguistic factors preventing the evolution of a single, common, colloquial variety of Slovene which could be used as a functional means of communication throughout the bilingual area in Carinthia.

This linguistic state of affairs is the result of developments stretching back over the centuries, governed by many internal factors, but certainly by outside influences as well. On the one hand, Carinthian Slovenes have been living side by side with their German neighbours for hundreds of years; on the other, they have lived in geographical isolation and seclusion from their fellow Slovene-speakers over the border in what is now the Republic of Slovenia. This situation, and the fact that Carinthian Slovenes developed their own political and social structures at a very early stage, are clearly reflected in the vernacular.³

1.1. Stanislaus Hafner, the first Slavist to carry out detailed studies on communicative patterns in bilingual areas of Carinthia, described Carinthian bilingualism as follows:

¹ The Ziljsko/Gailtal, Rožansko/Rosental and Podjunsko/Jauntal dialect groups as well as the Mežiško/Mießtal and Obirsko/Obir dialects.

² See also Ramovš 1935 and an extensive review of literature on Slovene dialectology in Hafner/Prunč 1980.

³ In spite of this, the development of a Slovene vernacular in Carinthia was never forced into conflict with the Slovene language as a whole. For more information on the Slovene minority in Carinthia see Barker 1984.

“In certain areas of this province, German-speaking and Slovene-speaking Carinthians live together, side by side, i.e. two speech communities are integrated in *one* historical, [political] state and economic unit. In neither case do the linguistic boundaries correspond to administrative, historical or state boundaries. For communication within the group, different language varieties complying with more or less stable norms for every social class are available to both speech communities. Indeed, speakers can select the standard language, the colloquial variety, the regional dialect or supraregional and regional functional and social linguistic forms.”⁴

In Carinthia’s bilingual areas, a second standard spoken variety has developed alongside Standard German, an *interdialect* or a kind of German lingua franca exhibiting typical phonetic, prosodic and syntactic interference from Slovene. The German spoken by bilinguals has “less distinctive regional, functional and social variations” than their Slovene, in other words, “the basic forms of German do not have a highly characteristic, complete profile.”⁵

1.2. Sociopsychological factors have brought about profound changes in language and speech behaviour over the last few decades in Carinthia, as in all language contact zones, confronting language research with totally new methodological tasks. Thus, a whole new series of approaches is required to complement the conventional results of research on Slovene dialectology, which is predominantly based on facts pertaining to the historical development of the language and describes Carinthian Slovene dialects as relatively consistent systems.

1.2.1. Up to the end of the 19th century, societal and socio-cultural resources still supported the more or less natural survival of regional and local Slovene dialects⁶ in bilingual Carinthia. Within a relatively closed speech community, language was passed

⁴ Hafner 1980: 13.

⁵ Hafner 1980: 14 and 16.

⁶ A “local dialect” should be understood as a “basic” or “folk” dialect (Wiesinger 1983: 185), generally used today only by members of the older generation who have lived in a particular village all their lives when speaking to each other and to younger members in their families.

on from generation to generation. In those days, the sociocultural climate had hardly any influence on everyday Slovene usage in village communities, with the result that borrowed elements could adapt to most of the rules in the system of the receiving language, e.g. a loanword was modified phonologically and morphologically to fit in with grammatical rules in the underlying system of the local Slovene dialect.⁷ This applies to influences from German and standard Slovene as spoken at school.

1.2.2. Industrialization, technological advances and social progress in the 20th century have had negative effects on the Slovene speech community in multicultural contact zones in Carinthia. The societal inequality of the two languages and new sociocultural conditions⁸ have caused fundamental changes to take place in the speech habits of bilinguals. German, as the dominant language of the province, is accepted as the general, necessary and inevitable lingua franca while Slovene has a much more restricted use due to a lack of bilingual interaction situations and interlocutors. In addition, it is not possible to expand dialectal systems, making it permanently necessary to take over elements from German varieties, and less frequently from standard Slovene. Furthermore, many Carinthians have a negative attitude towards bilingualism and in many situations there is a strong functional division of language, the way people behave often conforming to the expectations of society as a whole.

1.3. Fewer and fewer speakers consider Slovene to be their first language. One of the effects of powerful socioeconomical changes (extensive Germanization) is that many bilinguals, especially adolescents and children from assimilated families and mixed marriages, are gradually losing their language group affiliation and along with it their personal, cultural and ethnic identity:

“Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, indi-

⁷ Cf. Lausegger 1991: 95.

⁸ When observing linguistic situations, it is necessary to incorporate the whole sociocultural context — or sociocultural networks (Gumperz 1976).

vidual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it. Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men with specific identities.”⁹

Bilingual children and adolescents are increasingly confronted with questions relating to their bilingual and bicultural environment.¹⁰ In linguistically-mixed marriages in particular, children often do not know which language is supposed to be their first language.¹¹

1.4. Recent developments in the Republic of Slovenia have given rise to relatively vigorous growth in instrumental bilingualism.¹² Numerous businessmen are dependent on Slovene daytrippers who come to Carinthia solely to do their shopping; they only want to learn the Slovene which is relevant to and necessary for their own professional survival. Thus applications from Slovene-speakers for jobs in banking and commerce are given preferential treatment. This only used to be true of businesses in villages close to the border but over the last few years this trend has spread to all larger commercial centers.

2. The linguistic situation in small towns and villages

2.1. Demographic and occupational structures in bilingual localities have changed fundamentally over the last few decades, due to increased migration, newcomers from German- and Slovene-speaking parts of the province, tourism and other factors, all bringing about changes in the linguistic situation. Even when Slovene is spoken as a first language — and used for primary socialization in the home — German is simultaneously present in the mass media and the new social environment.

2.2. The Slovene speech community in Carinthia is, probably, bilingual without exception. The relationship between the two languages differs greatly from speaker to speaker and varies within individuals as well. As a rule, only members of the minority group are bilingual, with a few exceptions, giving rise to a “one-sided, natural, collective, Slovene-German bilingualism with

⁹ Berger and Luckmann 1966: 173.

¹⁰ Cf. Aleemi 1991: 129.

¹¹ Cf. Aleemi 1991: 82.

¹² I.e., bilingualism of a practically-oriented nature which is only sufficient for basic everyday situations (Kremnitz 1990: 26, 61).

German mastered to differing degrees," in other words "a mixture of diglossia and bilingualism."¹³

Many decades ago, German-speakers who moved into Slovene parishes were more or less obliged to integrate into their new social and linguistic environment. In many churches, services were held exclusively in Slovene and newcomers had to acquire a partial competence in the language, at least for religious purposes. In most parishes today, services are held in both languages or the Slovene liturgy has even been replaced by the German. Thus it is no longer necessary for German-speakers to acculturate linguistically.

2.3. The social communicative function of Slovene has decreased sharply in most villages, leading to a massive decline in linguistic competence among adolescents and children in particular. Colloquial Slovene, and more seldom Standard Slovene, can only be used as a functional means of communication in Slovene organizations and associations, in Slovene banks and businesses, in shops and shopping districts close to the border, in bilingual schools during Slovene lessons and in the liturgy.

Local Slovene cultural associations often arrange for experts from Slovenia, such as theatre directors, choir conductors, music teachers, etc., to work alongside their members, who may have poor or a total lack of Slovene. Under these circumstances there will obviously be frequent switches between different varieties of Slovene and even between Slovene and German.

In places where Slovene has largely lost its societal significance as a means of communication and at best can only be used by identity-conscious bilingual speakers in closed circles (in individual families), there is tremendous pressure on the remaining bilingual speakers to assimilate and renounce their Slovene heritage, imposed by the immediate social context and negative attitudes towards bilingualism. Thus, in many villages there are only one or two families left who speak Slovene in private in their own homes.

3. Language acquisition in bilingual families

General language acquisition in bilingual families in Carinthia is best exemplified by Gombos's three-generation model (1988:

¹³ Hafner 1980: 21 f.

128): the grandparents speak or spoke only Slovene, the parents speak Slovene and German and the children only speak German.

Today, more and more parents are faced with the question as to whether they should raise their offspring monolingually or bilingually and whether bilingual education is an advantage or disadvantage for the societal and professional advancement of their children. Language acquisition has different repercussions on Slovene in

- bilingual families in which both parents speak and use Slovene
- linguistically mixed marriages, and
- assimilated (bilingual) families.

3.1. Bilingual families in which both parents use Slovene

In families who are strongly aware of their linguistic roots, children are raised bilingually. Both languages are generally acquired at the same time — Slovene from parents, siblings and grandparents, and German from the mass media and social surroundings following the principles of functional language division (simultaneous bilingualism).

As a result of major changes in socioeconomic conditions, the prerequisites for successive bilingualism, once the dominant form of acquiring both languages in Carinthia, have largely vanished. In the past, one language (the local Slovene dialect) would be acquired first followed by the other (German on starting school) in a natural process of socialization.¹⁴

3.2. Linguistically mixed marriages

In linguistically mixed marriages, children are raised in German, the language both parents have in common and the one used almost without exception. The principle of functional language division — each parent using a different language¹⁵ — or a bicultural upbringing, has only been observed in the rarest of cases, especially as many parents are not able to communicate with their children without switching languages or varieties. There is no longer any strong differentiation between the languages. In order to avoid conflict situations within the family, most parents prefer a monolingual upbringing.

¹⁴ See Kremnitz 1990: 24-40 for terminology on different forms of bilingualism and multilingualism.

¹⁵ Cf. Aleemi 1991: 17.

3.3. Assimilated families

Assimilated bilingual families who have abandoned their ethnic identity raise their children monolingually. Passive knowledge of the minority language, i.e. the local Slovene dialect, is acquired at best from grandparents. In numerous families, abandoning bilingualism for the children's upbringing is brought about by political states of affairs.¹⁶

4. Current research on linguistic behaviour

Alongside Austrian researchers, a number of linguists and anthropologists from other countries are also interested in the situationally motivated problems of Carinthian bilinguals.¹⁷ The following observations on the essence of their linguistic predicament gathered in the field by non-Carinthian observers are quite typical. Gumperz, for example, describes the mechanisms of the social network and language shift in the Zilska dolina/Gailtal (Gumperz 1976). In connection with the usage of both languages, he describes how most inhabitants also know the regional German dialect, at least on a conversational level, and how there are frequent switches between languages in the course of a single conversation. A long history of prejudice and discrimination means that it is considered impolite, or even downright rude, to speak Slovene in the presence of German-speakers, whether they are strangers or monolingual German villagers. Indeed, the rule of not speaking Slovene in mixed company is apparently so forceful that tourists can stay in the village for weeks on end without noticing that any language other than German is being spoken.

Priestly's study on cultural consciousness and situationally-motivated language choice among bilinguals in Carinthia — where, he believes, "language is *unquestioningly* assumed to symbolize ethnicity" (Priestly 1989: 79) — emphasizes numerous factors which are responsible for frequent language switches and

¹⁶ For example, the *Ortstafelkrieg* (translated by Barker (1984: 279-282) as "Town Marker War") in the early seventies, which evoked strong changes of attitudes towards bilingualism among the Carinthian population. Bilingual topographic signs, which had been erected under the provisions of the Austrian State Treaty in bilingual areas, were immediately removed by German nationalists.

¹⁷ It is not possible to mention individual papers here, but an essay by Maurer-Lausegger 1992 provides a succinct overview of the latest sociolinguistic research on bilingual Carinthia.

the restricted use of Slovene in the province. He describes his first encounters with bilingualism in a Slovene/German-speaking village in Carinthia in his role as a "stranger" as follows:

"During the author's first few weeks in Carinthia in 1978, everyone in the inn that he frequented would switch to German as soon as he came into the room for his evening meal, and then would gradually switch back again (the length of time before this switch operated became progressively shorter with each visit). Clearly, he was playing the role of "significant BYSTANDER". This switching behaviour appeared to be an unconscious act." (Priestly 1989: 85.)

Minnich's observations (1988: 139) on the use of different codes in the bilingual areas of Carinthia are very similar to those quoted above:

"Regardless of the particular setting or occasion, Slovene is used only when all those within earshot of a verbal exchange control Slovene. Conversation takes place in German codes if anyone is involved, or is within earshot, who is unknown (a "bystander") or who is known not to use, or to condone the use of, Slovene."¹⁸

5. Linguistic behaviour in selected localities

The following descriptions of situationally-motivated speaking habits among Carinthian Slovenes apply only to middle- and lower-class families from rural areas where the Rozansko and Podjunsko dialects are spoken. Other classes and urban populations have been deliberately excluded, because circumstances and linguistic habits are somewhat different. Observations are based on investigations that were carried out by students studying Slovene in the Department of Slavic Studies at Klagenfurt University as part of a sociolinguistic project (1991) and in particular on the author's own experiences gathered over the last 15 years in the course of dialectological and socio-linguistic field studies in the bilingual regions of Carinthia.¹⁹

¹⁸ For the current speaking habits of bilingual adolescents and children, see Maurer-Lausegger (in print).

¹⁹ See also Lausegger 1985.

The students taking part in the project collected their data from residents in their home villages. These bilingual localities vary greatly in their socioeconomic profiles, ranging from places where the local Slovene dialect has preserved its dominant role in every-day communication, to bilingual villages where tourism is highly developed and to bilingual villages which have already been largely Germanized.

5.1. Villages

5.1.1. In villages with a predominantly Slovene population, older generation “local dialect” speakers, i.e. villagers who have hardly or indeed never left the village for a long period of time, use the local Slovene dialect in undisturbed everyday conversations (in their own villages). In most places, this situation does not arise very often nowadays.

5.1.2. Villagers whose jobs have introduced them to completely new social networks — often in neighbouring towns and villages — have been found to alternate between Slovene and German with increasing frequency, even within their own bilingual families. In many cases now, Slovene is only used when talking with members of the older generation while the local Slovene dialect has been largely abandoned for communication with people of the same age, adolescents and children.

5.1.3. Among the younger generation, loss of dialect has been observed on a massive scale, along with a general decline in bilingualism. When speaking with villagers whose command of Slovene is non-existent or inadequate, even those children who are bilingual are forced to communicate in German. Thus, bilingual families are largely restricted to using Slovene as a means of communication within their own four walls, even when they live in bilingual villages.

5.2. Schools and other localities outside the village

When young people develop more contacts outside the family because they have to commute to a neighbouring town to attend school or an apprentice training program, speaking habits also change, albeit in an individual manner, due to increased peer pressure to conform in a new social milieu. The company of young people of the same age, which is becoming increasingly more highly structured and purpose-governed, becomes increa-

singly important.²⁰ In this new social environment, the vast majority of young people either do not let it be known that they speak Slovene or they try to avoid speaking it if at all possible.²¹

5.2.1. In the classroom, bilinguals communicate in German almost without exception. Pupils attending the *Slovenska gimnazija* in Celovec/Klagenfurt or bilingual vocational schools in the province switch languages depending on the particular situation. If a group consists of pupils belonging to the same dialect group, the local Slovene dialect is preferred. If the members of the group speak different dialects, however, they converse in German. Over the last few years, the number of pupils from Slovenia attending Carinthia's bilingual schools has increased and regional colloquial Slovene is used for interaction with these classmates.

5.2.2. In the presence of strangers and German-speakers, bilinguals tend to use German. It is also used to greet and address people when entering their homes, if their ethnic identity and general attitude towards Slovene/German are unknown.

5.2.3. As a rule, older people use German with unfamiliar small children, especially those who have grown up in urban areas or in monolingual surroundings (for example, outside the bilingual region). It is tacitly understood that bilingual socialization does not occur in a monolingual sociocultural context or, at least, that the child is not capable of interacting in Slovene.

5.2.4. Speakers from all age groups, even the very old, have been increasingly observed to talk to their pets in German, especially to dogs and cats which used to belong to German-speakers or came from animal homes in a monolingual area. Cases of these animals being spoken to in both languages or Slovene alone are much less frequent.

5.2.5. Bilinguals speakers select an elevated variety of colloquial Slovene²² when talking with village priests coming from Slovenia, or with strangers from Slovenia and bilingual Trieste, who speak standard or colloquial Slovene and who happen to be in the village. If a bilingual priest comes from Carinthia, bilinguals mostly speak to him in the local dialect, at least in private.

²⁰ Cf. Aleemi 1991: 25.

²¹ Cf. Kremnitz 1990: 66. Francescato (1981) also refers to the negative aspects of bilingualism acquired in difficult sociocultural conditions.

²² Slovene priests and the Slovene liturgy contribute a great deal to the survival of Slovene in the villages.

5.3. Code switching

Interference between the two language systems in close contact encourages bilingual speakers to make increasingly frequent use of code switching. Younger speakers, and middle-aged speakers to a lesser extent, interrupt the flow of dialect Slovene with single lexemes, phrases or even complete sentences from different German or Slovene varieties, depending on the situation and subject matter. Such a habit appears to be relatively rare among members of the older generation.

5.3.1 The linguistic system for the older, rural terminology of everyday life is relatively stable in contrast to all areas of modern-day life, where many neologisms are assimilated into the dialects. Local dialects are not in a position to expand and thus words are borrowed *ad hoc*, mainly from German and less frequently from colloquial Slovene if the situation so requires.

5.3.2. The communicative situation can even cause one and the same speaker to take over elements from regional colloquial Slovene in certain situations and from German in other situations (mini code-switching).²³

5.3.3. In very emotional situations, bilinguals switch languages more often. German is used more frequently for swearing and arguing whereas German or Slovene may be chosen for political discussions according to context and speakers' attitudes within the group. In such situations, parts of statements or even whole phrases and sentences from different linguistic varieties can be integrated into the overall discourse of the debate.

5.3.4. In a German-speaking environment, Slovene is occasionally used as a "secret language", e.g. for compliments and negative comments about tourists, at football matches and in similar situations.

6. Prospects

General attitudes towards German-Slovene bilingualism in Carinthia have become slightly more positive thanks to developments south of the border in the Republic of Slovenia.²⁴

²³ See Priestly 1989: 83 f. for more information, as well as Priestly 1980 and 1990.

²⁴ According to Aleemi (1991: 150), the general attitude in Germany towards raising children bilingually also appears to have improved over the last 15 to 20 years.

In spite of this, the prospects are not particularly favorable for bilingualism in Carinthia becoming socially desirable. Knowledge of Slovene dialects among young people in particular is rapidly declining and local dialects can only be used to an extremely limited extent. Most speakers do not have sufficient command of elevated varieties of the language to use them as a general means of communication. Indeed, the lack of a basic linguistic environment which would allow functional bilingualism to exist, the absence of a bilingual sociocultural context, today's media-dominated society and other factors only serve to encourage language loss and declining competence in bilinguals.

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POVZETEK

JEZIKOVNO OBNAŠANJE KOROŠKIH SLOVENCEV GLEDE NA SPECIFIČNE SITUACIJE

Sociostrukturalne razmere na dvojezičnem ozemlju južne Koroške v Avstriji se nenehno spreminjajo in močno vplivajo na manjšinski jezik. Nemščina je v deželi za komunikacijo nujna, je splošni občevalni jezik, medtem ko so možnosti za rabo družbeno podrejene slovenščine omejene, v mnogih krajih mogoče le še v zaprtih intimnih krogih. Za komunikacijo v slovenskih narečjih največkrat manjkajo nemotene govorne situacije in jezikovno kompetentni interakcijski partnerji. Študija temelji na podatkih, ki so jih zbrali študentje slovenistike na celovski univerzi v okviru sociolingvističnega projekta (1991), predvsem pa na lastnih izkušnjah avtorice pri dialektološkem in sociolingvističnem delu na terenu v zadnjih 15 letih. Kot povsod na jezikovnih stičiščih prihaja predvsem v jeziku mlajših govorcev iz socialno-psiholoških in sociolingvističnih razlogov do nenehnega rušenja narečnih sistemov, do upadanja jezikovne kompetence in sprememb v jezikovnem obnašanju. V družinah, kjer obvladata in uporabljata oba starša slovenski jezik, so govorne navade drugačne kot v jezikovno mešanih in asimiliranih družinah. Pripadniki mlajših generacij, ki prihajajo iz asimiliranih in jezikovno mešanih družin, izgubljajo narodno in jezikovno zavest, z njima pa se izgublja tudi jezikovna kompetenca v slovenščini.

