Slovene

The article on Slovenian language was prepared on the occasion of the European Year of Languages in 2001 by Dr Janez Dular*.

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Slovene is a fully developed and internally richly-structured modern language. The codification of literary Slovene in grammars, dictionaries and normative reference books has a rich tradition stemming from the 16th century (the first Slovene book was printed in 1550). In a year that the European Union has proclaimed the European Year of Languages, it is especially important to turn our attention to the role of the less commonly used languages and to language planning policies capable of staving off pressures of assimilation and of the melting pot of languages.

Linguistic Situation

Slovene is an Indo-European language with a highly developed inflectional system (e.g. preservation of the dual). Together with Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian, it is classified within the South Slavic branch of the Slavic languages, although it also has many features in common with the West Slavic branch. The geographic territory of Slovene lies in one of the most complex linguistic contact areas in Europe, where Slavic converges with Romance, Germanic and Finno-Ugric. In comparison to the majority of other Slavic languages, Slovene has a number of characteristic features in the areas of phonology, lexicology and morphology. To orthographically represent its 29 phonemes, Slovene uses 25 Latin letters, including three with a wedge (č, š, ž).

Slovene is the official and state language of the Republic of Slovenia. It is a minority language with a recognised status as a second official language in the southern part of the Austrian province of Carinthia, in the eastern part of the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and in the western part of the Hungarian county of Vas. In addition to this contiguous settled territory, Slovene is used in emigrant communities in a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere, primarily as a language spoken at home. Slovene is the native language of approximately 2.4 million people: about 1.85 million of them live in the Republic of Slovenia, about 140,000 in the adjacent territory of neighbouring countries, and about 250,000 in diaspora, primarily in Germany, France, Sweden, Canada, the United States, Argentina, Australia and in other countries of the former Yugoslavia. There are about 11,000 members of the Hungarian and Italian indigenous minorities using their languages in the Republic of Slovenia, and about 140,000 persons with Croatian or Serbian as their native language are scattered across Slovenia, where they have settled from the republics of the former Yugoslavia.

Despite the fact that Slovene is limited to a relatively small territory and small number of speakers, dialectologists have established the presence of 46 clearly defined dialects, divided into six regional groups: Carinthian, Upper Carniolan, Lower Carniolan, Littoral, Rovte, Styrian and Pannonian.

Historic Overview

The beginnings of the Slovene pre-literary tradition (the manuscript period)
Linguistic, archaeological and historiographic sources indicate that two waves of Slavic settlement reached what is now Slovene territory in the last quarter of the 6th century, submerging the remnants of the Romanised Celtic and other indigenous populations of the disintegrating Roman Empire. A West Slavic wave arrived first, from the northeast, followed by a South Slavic wave from the southeast. Contact with West Slavic was broken off by the settlement of the Hungarians in the Pannonian Basin in the 9th century. Nonetheless, this initial two-pronged settlement, despite the mixing of the population, has left its traces in dialectal divisions in the northwest and southeast.

Around the year 750, what was until then the independent Alpine Slavic principality of Carantania fell under Bavarian hegemony and then, during the period of conversion to Christianity, it was gradually politically incorporated into Charlemagne's empire. In accordance with the emperor's decree, missionaries from Salzburg and Aquileia were required to recite the basic Christian prayers together with the people in the vernacular language. Because they were not well-acquainted with this language, they used written prayers and sermons as an aid. Some copies of these texts have been preserved (e.g., the Freising Fragments from circa 1000) and they show that in the 10th century Slovene was already beginning to take shape from Alpine Slavic as a distinct language. This, then, is considered the beginning of the Slovene pre-literary tradition (the manuscript period). There is solid evidence that long after the loss of Carantania's political independence the language of this tradition continued to be used not only in the Church, but also in the political workings of the state, for example in the enthronement ceremony of the Carinthian duke until 1414.

The marked dialectal divisions of Slovene and inclusion in a state dominated by the German language were key elements in the further development of the Slovene language. Dialectal divisions were heightened by difficult travel conditions and the geographical fragmentation of Slovene territory, by the sharp demarcations of feudal and ecclesiastical units without a powerful common centre (the Ljubljana bishopric was founded only in 1461) and by contact with other languages. The influence of dialect features and the German adstratum is therefore quite noticeable in manuscripts preserved from the 16th century and earlier.

**The Reformation - foundation of the literary language**
The era of the Slovene literary language begins with Primož Trubar, the principal sponsor of the Reformation in the Slovene lands. His Abecedarium and Catechismus were published in 1550 in a language coloured by features of the central Lower Carniolan dialect of his native Dolenjska region but based on Ljubljana's sermonic practice. During the next forty years, Trubar and other writers of the Reformation further cultivated the literary language and published about 50 books in it, including a translation of the entire Bible in 1584. A Slovene grammar, written in Latin, was also published in 1584, followed by a multilingual dictionary in 1592. Later writers tried to uphold this tradition of the literary language through to the end of the 18th century, although this became ever more difficult due to the increasing dialectal differences in Slovene. Gradually, regional characteristics became so strong that new literary norms were introduced in certain regions. These attempts triggered a reflection on the need for a revised central Slovene literary language that would be more acceptable to speakers of non-central Slovene dialects and an effective means of communication for new spheres of life. Significant modifications by language planners working to develop the language followed various and variously productive directions from the end of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century.

**Literary revival**
The first wave of changes occurred in the context of the reforms under Maria Teresa and Joseph II, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The use of Slovene in public life began to spread beyond the church into public schools and offices, and the literacy rate of the population increased. There was a need for the translation of state regulations and the writing of textbooks and manuals in economic and other fields; in addition, there arose an interest in the literary arts in Slovene. After 200 years a new translation of the Bible appeared (1784-1802), and the first Slovenian-language newspaper began to be issued (Lublanske novice "Ljubljana News", 1797-1800). Writers gradually began to abandon the more pronounced Lower Carniolan elements of the literary language, and the new state of affairs was codified in Jernej Kopitar's grammar of 1808.

It was on this foundation that Slovene belles-lettres prose began to develop, and the status of the literary language was considerably elevated by the high-quality poetic creations of France Prešeren (Poezije, 1847). The second wave of changes, triggered by the March Revolution of 1848, led first of all to a change in the orthographic system. A number of prominent cultural figures and linguistic authorities subsequently agreed, in the spirit of the political movement called Zedinjena Slovenija ("United Slovenia", which demanded the combining of all Slovene-populated regions into a bounded political unit within the Austrian Empire), to preserve the great majority of elements inherited from the central Slovene literary standard in the Slovene translation of the Austrian state legal code. However, they also decided to allow the introduction of certain "new elements" that were primarily in use in non-central dialects and at the same time justifiable by the conditions in other Slavic languages and by etymological reconstruction. The agreement was codified in the school grammar of 1854.

During the second half of the 19th century, Slovene began to be used in the state parliament in Vienna, in the regional provincial assembly, at cultural events (reading societies) and at political mass-meetings (rallies called tabori). In these oral situations, however, it was difficult to overcome the great dialect differences between educated speakers from various Slovene regions in the absence of firm rules for pronunciation. The Slovene pronunciation norms (Stanislav Škrabec) were thus the most important decision for the development and growth of the public prestige of Slovene at that time and later. The appearance of a Slovene-German dictionary (Maks Pleteršnik, 1894-1895), a Slovene orthographic dictionary (Slovenski pravopis by Fran Levec, 1899) and a Slovene grammar for secondary schools (Anton Breznik, 1916) made the Slovene literary language truly a language for all Slovenes.

**The general appearance of Slovene in public life**

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War and the establishment of the Yugoslav state represented a significant historical watershed for the Slovenes, because they had thereby escaped from more than one thousand years of German political hegemony and its accompanying linguistic expansion. Slovene began to be used at all levels of public communication. Still, this was not the end of cultural and political questions connected to language. The borders of the Yugoslav state were set in such a way that approximately one third of Slovene speakers remained outside the country (some 400,000 in Italy, over 100,000 in Austria and about 10,000 in Hungary) and these were soon threatened with brazen linguistic assimilation (it was under Italian rule that, for the first time in history, the use of Slovene was even banned in church). Within Yugoslavia as well, Slovene was not on an equal footing for long. Under a centralist doctrine espousing a single Yugoslav nation, Slovene began to be displaced from the military, the railway system and other state institutions by Serbo-Croatian. An entire series of the most visible cultural figures opposed this "Yugoslavism", and it did not win over the wider public.

Under these circumstances, studies by Slovenists at the new university in Ljubljana were of great help in raising consciousness of the individuality of the Slovene language. The
language-oriented criticism of new books was cultivated by the periodical press, many newspaper language columns addressed the most frequent barbarisms in the language, three improved editions of the Slovene grammar for secondary schools were published, and the second Slovenski pravopis (1920) was followed by an improved edition of this most authoritative guidebook on good usage in general (1935). A series of bilingual dictionaries, an unabridged monolingual Slovene dictionary (Glonar, 1936) and two dictionaries of foreign words appeared. Models of cultivated Slovene speech were offered in schools, in theatres, in churches and - beginning in 1928 - on the radio. The Slavistično društvo ("Slavistic Society"), founded in 1935, published the professional journal Slovenski jezik ("The Slovene Language"). All of these endeavours contributed a great deal to the high cultural level of public language.

The suppression of Slovene during the Second World War
During the Second World War, Slovenia was partitioned into German, Italian and Hungarian zones of occupation. In the German zone, the use of Slovene in public was immediately banned, and Slovene teachers and clergy were banished. In the Italian and Hungarian zones, the same goal had been planned by the occupying powers as a more long-term goal achieved through less severe methods. The recognition that the Slovene language - the core element of Slovene identity - was in mortal danger then became one of the main reasons for the mass-resistance movement among Slovenes.

The status of Slovene in Federal Yugoslavia
After the Second World War, Slovene regained the status of an official language in Slovenia, one of the republics of Yugoslavia, and it was also one of the state languages of the Yugoslav federation. Nonetheless, the old political and cultural linguistic problems (the privileged position of Serbo-Croatian, balancing of the Slovene stylistic norm) arose once more, joining new ones connected to the change in social administration, rapid urbanisation and the imposition of communist ideology. Approximately 200,000 Slovene speakers again remained as minorities in neighbouring regions of Italy, Austria and Hungary and their linguistic assimilation continued rapidly due to a lack of legal protection.

The field of linguistics responded effectively to new social needs and issues from the very beginning: the public was offered a guide to Slovene pronunciation, an enlarged Slovenski pravopis (1950), a Slovene grammar and a Serbo-Croatian-Slovene dictionary, and the study of the contemporary Slovene literary language was also introduced into Slovene studies at the university. Large-scale linguistic discussions and contributions in applied linguistics appeared in new periodicals devoted to the Slovene language. With the publication of the new Slovenski pravopis in 1962, a quarrel arose in Slovene language planning, shaking the prestige and effectiveness of the field so much that the next normative work of this kind did not appear until 28 years later. The principal technical achievements during this period were the academy dictionary of the Slovene literary language in five volumes (Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika I-V, 1970-1991) and the new Slovene grammar by Jože Toporišič (1976, 1984). Both works address the linguistic norms that are observed in the contemporary written and spoken language. On the other hand, in view of the great need for clear linguistic advice, applied and amateur linguists published a number of language handbooks with lists of old grammatical or orthographical errors, objectionable foreignisms and so on. In 1980, within the framework of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Slovenia, the Council for the Public Use of Slovene was established (with a special working group called the Language Arbitration Tribunal). Members of this internally-governed tribunal of linguistic policy issued declarations on burning politico-linguistic questions and on concrete examples of linguistic neglect. Their declarations did not carry legal weight, but under the given circumstances they aided in raising linguistic self-confidence and a sensitivity for language equality and language culture among Slovenes through their expert
argumentation and moral-political authority. When a group of Slovene civilians was tried before a military court in Ljubljana in 1988, and the court conducted its business in Serbo-Croatian, it brought to a head the impression that the preservation of Slovene linguistic individuality within the framework of the Yugoslav state was no longer a prospect. This was one of the prime arguments in the call for the 1990 plebiscite in which the population opted for the political independence of Slovenia by a conclusive majority.

**Situation Today**

In the new state of Slovenia, Slovene fully asserted itself immediately in the military, in the customs service, and in state protocol, and in every case its use has expanded into all areas that have opened up with the newest innovations in social and technological development, including the translation of international technical standards, e-mail, web pages, a spell checker and the Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika in CD format, and developmental programs for machine translation as well as the machine-based analysis and synthesis of Slovene speech. The growing interest in Slovene as a foreign language (it is taught in Ljubljana and at numerous universities abroad) and the fact that Slovene has worked in an exemplary fashion in the translated version of the Windows operating system are worth stressing.

Despite this positive development, the supplanting of Slovene in public communication has not come to an end. The pressure from Serbo-Croatian has been replaced by pressure from English. A great many businesses are registered under English names or reach out to their customers through advertisements and labels exclusively in foreign languages. In career advancement at universities and institutes, the officially adopted criteria for judging scientific success assign major value to the publication of papers in foreign journals, and therefore Slovene researchers are abandoning publishing in Slovene. The teaching of English as the first foreign language in elementary school is predominant, and pedagogically it is better organised than the teaching of Slovene. Due to the intensification of the phenomena described here, protests have arisen for some time from individuals and organisations in civil society, and SAZU (the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts) has added its statement of concern as well. On the initiative of the Slavistično društvo Slovenije, in 1994 a working group in the field of language planning and language policy was established within the parliamentary committee for culture, education and science. The principal activity of this working group is participation in the preparation of legal texts in which the status of Slovene as an official language may be specially defined. The government has defined the office's linking, harmonising, advisory and promotional roles in the planning and implementation of active linguistic policies. Likewise in 2000 and to the same purpose, a bill was set before Parliament, which regulates specifically the use of Slovene as the official language.

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