

Past and contemporary issues of Slovenian language policy*

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Abstract

The article briefly presents the key periods and levels of the Slovene language planning, along with related language policy measures. It looks back at the beginnings of codification of the Slovene language and outlines planning of the Slovene language status in various state formations. More detailed information is provided on the current language policy concepts in the independent Slovene state. New language relationships are pointed out, especially the Slovenian-English language contact, which figures as one of the evermore prominent issues in the national language policy programmes of the country.

Keywords: language policy, language planning, language contact, Slovenia

Slovenska jezikovna politika v preteklosti in v sočasju

Prispevek strnjeno predstavi ključna obdobja ter ravni načrtovanja slovenskega jezika skupaj z odnosnimi jezikovno političnimi ukrepi. Ozre se na začetke načrtovanja jezika in oriše status slovenštine v različnih državnih sotvarjih. Podrobnejše razčleni oblikovanje aktualnih jezikovno političnih konceptov v samostojni Sloveniji. V zaključku opozori na nova jezikovna razmerja, predvsem na slovensko angleški jezikovni stik, kar postaja ena čedalje bolj izpostavljenih vsebin v nacionalnih programih za jezikovno politiko Slovenije.

Ključne besede: jezikovna politika, jezikovno načrtovanje, jezikovni stik, Slovenija

* This upgraded study (Nećak Lük 2004, Nećak Lük 2017) on Slovenian language policy is dedicated to my dear colleague, Academician Prof. Dr Janez Orešnik, as promoting the Slovene language was an inseparable part of his scientific and pedagogical agenda.

The adjective "slovenski" has two English equivalents, Slovene and Slovenian. In this text, I use the variant Slovene to denote identification and identity aspects, i.e., ethnicity, language, etc., and Slovenian to denote concepts related to Slovenia as a state, i.e. Slovenian language policy, etc.

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1

Language policy and language planning in Slovenia are closely related to the perception of the Slovene people's evolution into a modern nation, language and culture being considered the foundations of the Slovene ethnic identity and a permanent feature in the struggle for Slovene statehood through history. This sensitivity concerning ethnic identity markers – with language in the first place – is due to the historical status relationships among languages in this region under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as to the language policy and interethnic relationships in the post WWI and WWII Yugoslav states (Table 1). Namely, throughout the history of the Slovene people, in the course of its development into a modern nation, endeavours to achieve Slovene language autonomy have been present. In absence of other power resources – namely administrative state mechanisms – language and culture functioned as a frame of reference for national unification.

Table 1: Language policy and language planning in the Slovene ethnic territory until 1940:
successive corpus + status planning

Until the 19th century	19th–20th century	1919–1940
SELECTION + CODIFICATION	CODIFICATION + IMPLEMENTATION + ELABORATION	IMPLEMENTATION + ELABORATION
Folk (local culture) language	Regional (Land) language	Regional (State) language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious texts - First linguistic text in 16th century (Trubar 1550) - Transition from folk (cultural) language to literary norm - Slovene language in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prekmurje literary language - Pan-Slavic, Ilirian movements - 1848: Slovene texts in AH Official Gazette - 1848: Slovene profesional newspaper - development of disciplinary terminology - Slovene in regional (Land) administration and army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slovene language in school - Slovene language in regional administration, cultural institutions, enterprises and media - Slovene + Serbo-Croatian in state institutions - 1919: University of Ljubljana - 1938: Slovene Academy of Science and Arts

2

Between the two world wars, the centralistic Yugoslav policy was built upon a theory that the Slovenes, Croatians, and Serbs were not autonomous nations but only three tribes of one emerging nation. Their languages were considered to be three dialects of one (emerging) language. Although the most brutal centralistic pressure lasted but a short time, being strongly opposed to by Slovenian and Croatian elites and political agents, the stigma obviously left deep roots in the collective memory of the Slovene people. Interethnic relations in post-WWII Yugoslavia were marked by continuous vigilance on the part of the most prominent Slovene language (and cultural) policy-makers towards any sign of centralization.

Table 2: Slovene language planning in the post-WWII Yugoslav federation – status planning

Administrative levels		
Federal	Republic	Regional/Local
Official use of Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, Macedonian in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - federal organs and institutions - communication among republics and autonomous regions (Kosovo and Voivodina) - federal affairs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - legislation - the economy - foreign policy - army 	Slovene was the official language in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia: gradually Slovene enters all channels of communication (modern media included), except for when giving commands the army	Slovene + Italian = official languages in Istria (coastal communes) Slovene + Hungarian = official languages in the mixed area of Prekmurje

Table 3: Slovene language planning in the post-WWII Yugoslav federation – corpus planning

Levels		
Federal	Republic	Regional/Local
Impulses from the common self-management system are also reflected in the Slovene language: Lexical + discourse style innovation introducing self-management terminology and discourse convention	Terminological modernization Stylistic development Modern grammar	Specific socio-cultural features incorporated into Italian and Hungarian languages (language manuals, textbooks, newspapers)

In Slovene public opinion it is widely accepted that Slovene language status planning and – along with it, its corpus planning – together with the gradual spreading of its functions into the channels of public communication, remained a non-concluded process until the creation of an independent Slovene state in 1991.¹ In spite of the fact that at the end of the 1980s the Slovene language was one of the three equal state languages at the federal level (Tables 2 and 3), it was still deprived of some functions, which, in the eyes of Slovenes, were considered a sign of a full (complete) nationhood. Two facts excited the opposition in Slovenia in this regard: On the political and constitutional level, it was the issue was the role of the language of commanding in the army, while in context of communication praxis it was the issue of the language of wider communication, i.e. Serbo-Croatian.

Commanding in the army units was reserved for the Serbocroatian language only, also in Slovenia; the demand to assign this function to Slovene has its roots in the fact that Slovene was the language of commands in the territory of Slovenia during the WWII, and even in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Over time, however, the status of Slovene in the army units located in Slovenia rose, and by the 1980s the written text of the solemn oath was in the language of the soldier – i.e., in Slovene for Slovenians – although the oral oath remained in Serbo-Croatian. Moreover, the army's educational activities and inscriptions on the army property in Slovenia were also in Slovene, as was communication with civilians.

¹ The appeal for the new Slovene Constitution, the Slovene Writers' Association and the Slovene Sociological Association, can all be considered as attempts to foster other dimensions of Slovene statehood, i.e. the political and cultural, as well as military dimensions (D. Rupel, J. Menart 1988).

Attempts to assign to Serbo-Croatian the role of the language of wider communication, so that it would function as a kind of a *lingua franca* in public discourse all over Yugoslavia, were met with strong opposition in Slovenia. Such discrepancies along with the abovementioned historical load have largely contributed to the instrumentalization of language issues for the unification of the Slovene public opinion regarding the necessity of Slovenian independence.

Regardless of the abovementioned conflict issues, many prominent Slovene linguists admit that after the WWII, in spite of some limitations, the Slovene language status has steadily increased and its functions have spread significantly (Pogorelec 1996).

3

After the declaration of an independent Slovenia in 1991, the continuity of language planning and the promotion of cultural pluralism were also expressed by new Constitution. The status of the Slovene language changed significantly; today it is the only official language on the level of the Republic of Slovenia, i.e. the national/state language. The official function of Slovene as the national language encompasses all spheres of life, in both internal and external channels of communication. It goes without saying that, immediately, Slovene acquired all functions in the activities of the army.

All professional institutions, associations and individuals engaged in language planning continued their work without interruption. However, on the language policymaking level continuity was broken with the country's independence. Namely, in the 1970s, following an initiative by the Slavic Association of Slovenia, a body of experts, named Slovene Language in Public (Use) (*Slovenščina v javnosti*), was organized in the framework of the then Socialist Alliance of Working People of Slovenia (*Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva*). Later it was transformed into the Language Council (*Svet za jezik*), which had several sections and working groups pursuing two basic aims: to stimulate public attention and sensitivity for language topics, and to dwell upon the respect of the legal norms regarding the Slovene language in the Yugoslav federation, on the federal and national level. For realization of the first task a working group, named the Language Tribunal (*Jezikovno razsodišče*) was

formed. Although its main goal was to promote the language culture among Slovene language speakers by discussing and assessing the use of Slovene in the mass media and other public institutions that could have an influence on the language of public and private communication, its existence excited a lot of controversy in other Yugoslav republics.

4

The changed socio-political situation after 1991 soon revealed some problematic issues. With independence of Slovenia, a more relaxed attitude towards the Slovene language seems to have developed. On the one hand, this is manifested by a rather shallow respect for language norm in public, written and oral discourse. Along with this, the influence of American culture and modes of expression increased. Before this, the endeavour for the autonomy of the Slovene language was expressed, among other things, in purist efforts that were mostly oriented against the influence of Serbo-Croatian. Such vigilance seemed to become obsolete after the common destiny of the two languages parted. The growing impact of political and economic integration, i.e. of globalization, was reflected in Slovenia both culturally and economically, with impacts on the language. The growth of communication technology also brought many English language patterns which was especially reflected in the speech of young generations.

One could argue that a paradoxical thing has happened over the last three decades: while by becoming a full national/ state language the status of Slovene was promoted, there has been no obvious increase in its prestige. On the contrary, there are several indications that in certain layers of the population its prestige has been diminishing. Many warnings have been launched against a kind of Slovene English diglossia which seemingly is about to spread in Slovenia. Alarm has been triggered on account of the fact that public signs, the language of expert and scientific meetings, scientific publications, university lectures and seminars, diplomas and post-graduate works are increasingly in English. It is even the case that in many foreign enterprises operating in Slovenia the Slovene language is no longer used, not even in the personal documentation of the employees.

A burning question which has only recently been thoroughly elaborated as a part of the Slovene language strategy is the situation of Slovene in the European language policy. With the political decision of Slovenia to join the EU, Slovene exhibits the typical features of a small language. It appears to be even smaller in this European association of nations, ethnic communities and languages than it was in Yugoslav times.² This regards language acquisition planning, not only from the point of view of the foreign language acquisition planning in Slovenia, but also with regard to Slovene as a foreign (and L2) language.

2 Toporišič (1991:143) defines as small language a language of a relatively small community (in terms of power) within the framework of a larger one.

5

With an aim to limit and eliminate the above described detrimental phenomena, i.e. the invasion of English and other foreign language influences in public discourse in Slovenia, in 1992 the Slovene Language in Public (Use) (*Slovenščina v javnosti*) group was restored within the framework of the Slavic Association of Slovenia (*Slavistično društvo Slovenije*). In 1993 there was a call to establish a group of linguists and other experts within Parliament who would handle fundamental language planning, including consideration of any legislation in this field. Consequently, in March 1994 a group of experts was nominated as a permanent working body of the Parliamentary Committee for Culture, Education and Sport,³ with the task of producing suggestions regarding language policy and language planning to both Parliament and the wider public.

At the same time, several individuals concerned about the Slovene language, mostly linguists, writers and scientists, suggested that issues regarding the status of the Slovene language should be regulated by a special law. A member of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti* – SAZU) offered a study on language committees in Scandinavia as a possible model to follow in Slovenia (Orešnik 1995). However, the first concrete proposal did not come from the parliamentary working group, as the draft text of the law on the use of Slovene as the official language was prepared at the beginning of 1997 (January 14), by the then Minister of Culture.⁴ In the draft two separate topics are covered. The first is the domains of official language use, which should be regulated by law, and the second is the setting up of a State Language Committee.

The proposal was not unanimously or enthusiastically supported by the working group, and on November 5 1999, after almost three years of debate, its views were published: two members were against the law, and while the others supported the idea they suggested certain modifications and supplements.

3 In the working group, headed by full prof. Dr Breda Pogorelec, there were six language specialists, two lawyers, and two psychologists.

4 Associate prof. Dr Janez Dular.

6

Two opposing views of language policy that emerged from two different language ideologies are obvious in the debate on the law, and these can be described based on the differing theoretical, disciplinary and generational perspectives.

On the one side, there was a rather traditionalistic, defensive approach to or view of the Slovene language as an ideal of national unity. In this view the language is presented as the sacred symbol of the Slovene nation, the preeminent marker of the Slovene identity, and thus an external token of the nation's vitality is the public use of impeccable Slovene. According to this approach, at the moment – or better to say, through history – the language has been endangered because of foreign dominance, by insufficiently developed language competence and disrespect of its norms by its speakers. Beyond this, one could say an “introverted” approach to the Slovene language, the concept of a “nation state” based on the sovereignty of only one ethnic community, i.e. the Slovene nation, can be discerned. The modern tendency to see the state as a community of citizens of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds can hardly be traced in this approach, and terms like open society, ethnic and language pluralism are excluded from this discourse.

In opposition to this – one could call it a kind of “renovated” language activism – stands a more moderate, modern approach oriented towards the wider context of language acquisition and language use. In view of this, liberal argumentation on the status of the Slovene language has been efficiently regulated by the Constitution and the laws regulating individual spheres of activity. In the independent Slovene state, the Slovene language has gained the status of the national/state language, and its prestige depends on the development and promotion of the whole of Slovene society. The quality of written and oral public discourse thus depends on factors that are closely related to the general social climate and welfare, and the role of education and mass media has been underlined in this connection. The necessity for an unhindered, continuous process of preparation of fundamental works on the prescribed language norm in central scientific institutions (the Slovene Academy of Science and Arts, the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor) has been confirmed, with the production of linguistic materials such as orthographies, dictionaries, grammars, lexicographical works and so on being essential for future development. Electronic corpus selection, the development of organized translation services as well as ample linguistic research should also be fostered to support this work.

The features of two legislative approaches towards language are integrated in the Slovene Language Law.⁵ As mentioned above, the Scandinavian language model is followed here, and thus the language office should play a decisive advisory and stimulatory role in language matters. On the other hand, there are elements of the French model integrated in the law, as it also has a repressive function, with penalties being foreseen for disrespect of the “proper” language use by institutions and responsible individuals.

The draft of the bill was brought to the legislative procedure, by the insistence of a civil initiative. On June 5, 2000 a public debate was organized and the bill was sent to the Parliamentary Committee for Social Activities. It was expected that after the debate in this body Parliament would start the procedure to pass the bill. Meanwhile, however, a governmental decree was issued establishing an Office for Slovene Language of the Government of Slovenia.⁶ On the other hand, the working group of the Parliamentary Committee for Culture, Education and Sport⁷ resumed its role as the advisory body to Parliament in the language policy and language planning matters.

7

The law triggered a series of activities – in fact, demands were put forward in the Act itself for the formulating of documents on a national programme for language policy and on ensuring the conditions for its implementation.

In 2007, the National Programme for Language Policy (NPLP) for the period 2008- 2011 was adopted as the main instrument envisaged by the Act on Public Usage of Slovene Language. The NPLP for the period 2012-2016 brought about a substantial change of focus. From protection the emphasis shifted to language matters in education and to language equipment demands (resources, technology, digitalization, standardization, language description, terminology and multilingualism, etc.). Compared to previous periods, greater attention was also dedicated to speakers with special needs. The Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy

5 In this aspect a certain similarity can be traced with the recently adopted Polish Law, the main difference being that professional linguistic matters remain in the competence of professional (nongovernmental) institutions, i.e. the Academy of Science and Arts and universities.

6 Decree on establishing, structure and working sphere of the Office for the Slovene Language of the Government of Republic of Slovenia, Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia, no. 97, October 20, 2000, p. 10585; associate prof. Dr Janez Dular was appointed the first director of the Office.

7 On February 2, 2001, the working group was enlarged; it had 13 members, most of them being the Slovene language specialists.

2014-2018 identified a series of goals and measures to be implemented at the inter-ministerial level. Support for the excellence of artistic and cultural production in Slovene, systematic care for the development of the communicative competence of all groups of speakers, including their reading skills, as well as the promotion of public use of the language were at the forefront of the planned activities.

The preamble to the current resolution (2021-2025) indicates a growing awareness that in Slovenia English is no longer just a *foreign* language, although this observation is implicitly expressed in a rather vague wording.⁸ Although it is not expressly named, English is still referred to in the document, since, in Slovenia as elsewhere, this language is gradually taking on the role of an *additional* language alongside Slovene – not only in university lectures, but also in some other public, formal domains. The term *additional* language is used for sociolinguistic situations when two languages simultaneously perform the same functions or occupy the same domains in the same social space. Such concurrent use of two languages sooner or later leads to the abandonment of one of them in the relevant domain, usually the weaker language.

8

Towards a conclusion. In its development, Slovene has reached the status of a fully functional language.

However, official recognition is but one in a series of powerful mechanisms that influence language status and language corpus planning. In this respect, the experience of the development of Slovene seems to be quite instructive. Namely, it is estimated that in the history of the language there have been two critical moments when Slovene, regardless of its small number of speakers, joined the ranks of privileged languages: “In the 16th century, it (i.e. the Slovene language, op ANL) was the 12th language that the Bible was translated into, and today it is one of the smallest languages that the ‘Bible of the modern age’ has been translated into: the Windows operating system and programs written for it” (Hladnik). The latter achievement, together with other language policy measures, also raises hopes for the vitality of Slovene and its increasing prestige in the future.

8 “...the Slovenian language policy must, through a variety of measures, ensure that Slovenian remains the dominant voluntary (and obvious) choice for native speakers in the widest possible range of private and public use, [...] with realistically and reasonably designed language requirements in individual areas of work.” Resolution on June 1 2021 on the National Programme for Language Policy 2021–2025 (ReNPJP21–25, p.10. <https://jezikovna-politika.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ReNPJP2021-2025-ENG.pdf>

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