

SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDIES OF SLOVENE EMIGRATION ISSUES

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Sociolinguistics is a discipline that differs from general, theoretical linguistics in that it is not so much interested in the linguistic structures *per se*, in abstraction, but rather focuses on the language use and the rules that govern linguistic interactions in their social context. Language is not perceived as something static, isolated and independent of extralinguistic factors, but rather as a phenomenon that changes constantly both on the societal and individual levels depending on a number of social variables. One such variable on the societal, global level is for instance the status of a given language, which may be either prestigious or stigmatized in relation to other languages, whereas on the individual level such factors range from the social status and role of the interlocutors to their education, sex, ethnicity and the like.

Immigrant issues make for an important part of sociolinguistic studies. Of particular interest in this respect are bilingualism and multilingualism. In our case this translates into researching the contact between Slovene and the dominant language of the country of immigration. Owing to their nature, the phenomena typical of language contact situations lend themselves to interdisciplinary study. Linguistic behavior in immigrant communities can be addressed from different perspectives, stemming from sociology to ethnolinguistics, anthropology, social psychology and communication theory. The demarcation line between some of these perspectives is at times very vague, which is true especially of the socio- and ethnolinguistic view of bilingual language use. It was perhaps for this reason that in 1981 Nelde suggested a new term, »*contact linguistics*«, which best captures the nature of the phenomenon under investigation and encompasses all of its elements.

In this purpose of this article to provide a brief survey of the language-oriented immigrant research to date on the one hand and to suggest possible directions in which this research might continue in the future on the other. A closer look at what has been

accomplished so far is somewhat disappointing as we would expect more extensive studies by a larger number of scholars. The relatively small number of studies in this area comes as an even greater surprise in view of the fact that there exist numerous studies of bilingualism in the linguistically-mixed border regions of Slovenia, Italy, Austria and Hungary (Nečak-Lük & Štrukelj 1984, Minnich 1988, Križman 1989, Priestly 1990, Arko 1990, Zorko 1991, Lausseger 1991,...). While there is no doubt that both situations share certain common characteristics, it is nevertheless true that immigrant situations are different in several respects. For one thing, the geographical and time distance is much greater than in the case of those Slovenes who live just across the border, and has given the immigrant communities a very specific character of enclaves with rules and norms of their own. Regardless of the reasons, though, most research in this area, except for mine (Šabec 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992), comes from researchers who are either themselves immigrants or non-Slovenes.

The great majority of the studies deal with the linguistic situation of American Slovenes, while immigrants in other countries are yet to be »discovered«.

Among those who have addressed the issue on a global, macro-level is Toussaint Hočevar (1978), who writes about geographical distribution, age structure and comparative mother tongue maintenance of Slovene immigrants in the U. S. In his study he relies on the census data for the years 1940 and 1970. He believes that mother tongue is the most important sign of Slovene ethnic identity and therefore takes into consideration only those persons who report Slovene as their household language during their childhood.

He finds that during that period the number of those who spoke Slovene decreased by 45 %. The decrease varied from state to state, which was a consequence of migration within the U. S. He also notices a decreasing number of Slovene speakers in the 1st generation (owing the weaker immigration) and in the 2nd generation (owing to their negative perception of their own ethnic identity). On the other hand, he observes as opposite trend in the 3rd generation, which he attributes to a conscious effort on the part of these immigrants to preserve their ethnic heritage.

In comparing Slovene to some other linguistic groups he finds that both the Slovene language and ethnic identity are being lost

at a much faster rate than with Ukrainians, Scandinavians, Germans, Serbs, Croats, French, Russians, Poles and Hungarians. Despite these negative trends he sees encouraging signs in the 3rd generation immigrants and believes that these will succeed in maintaining their ethnic and linguistic identity in the future. He even recommends some measures that could enhance these efforts. Among them are more intensive cooperation with Slovenia, radio broadcasts in Slovene, and setting up educational courses in Slovene.

His findings with regard to the 3rd generation are surprising when he compares them to those of other researches for both Slovene and most other pairs of languages in contact, who all find that language maintenance in the 3rd generation is generally on the decline.

Hočevar's study is interesting in that it provides a broader survey of the situation. Its major shortcoming, though, is that it relies on census data which is not the most reliable source of information and which does not always reflect the actual state of affairs, especially when referring to language. It is a well known fact that many Slovene immigrants were listed by U. S. immigration authorities as Austrians, Italians, Yugoslavs, Krainers, Slovaks and the like. The same inaccuracy goes for registering their mother tongue. Furthermore, the study does not go beyond the descriptive stage and fails to address the reasons for language loss. The factors selected for the study are limited to age, sex and geographical distribution, even though it is clear that these three alone by no means exhaust all the possible influences on language maintenance or loss.

Another scholar who has contributed to the sociolinguistic studies of American Slovenes in a very significant way is Joseph Paternost. In a series of articles, published mostly in *General Linguistics* and *Slovene Studies* he focuses on the sociolinguistic aspects of American Slovene and particularly on the issue of language maintenance and loss. His findings are based mostly on empirical data gathered by means of questionnaires that he distributed to immigrants of Slovene descent in Pennsylvania and Minnesota, where he himself lived for considerable periods of time.

Among the issues that he examines is the relationship between language use on the one hand and factors as occupation, education, religion, and membership in ethnic organizations on the other. The

largely qualitative approach that he uses could perhaps be improved by greater emphasis on quantitative factors.

He finds there that are considerable differences in the degree of bilingualism between different generations. It is interesting that, in addition to the usual three generations, he includes the fourth, but does not make a distinction between the pre-war and post-war group of immigrants. He speaks about an unstable, transitional form of bilingualism. Younger generations attribute very little importance to language maintenance, religion and their ethnic origins. They are gradually assimilating in mainstream society and are becoming »Euro-Americans«. Traces of ethnic heritage are seen to some extent only in the maintenance of certain traditions that have to do with ethnic music and food.

He supplies concrete examples of speech by members of individual generations and analyzes interferences between the two languages on phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical levels. In most cases these are borrowings and adaptations, when the immigrants adapt English words to their mother tongue by equipping them with Slovene suffixes, modifying their pronunciation, employing the Slovene word order and the like.

In another article he deals with Germanicisms, which are perceived by older immigrants as authentic Slovene words. He also touches upon the influence of American Slovene on the English of the younger generations, but unfortunately does not go into a more thorough investigation of this issue.

In an article about the social meaning of language among American Slovenes he compares the referential and stylistic properties of some loanwords in American Slovene. He also discusses reasons for the use of Slovene in contexts where English is normally used. Slovene may be used, among other things, for humorous reasons, or to exclude somebody from the conversation. He cites examples from the *Ameriška domovina* and the *Nova doba*, where a mixture of both languages is used in order to achieve a humorous effect. It is interesting that such language use also occurs in written texts as well as in speech, where it is more common.

Paternost's contribution to the study of American Slovene is extremely valuable, especially because of the numerous examples he documents and the various perspectives from which he addresses the issue.

Linguistic humor in the American Slovene of the early immigrants is examined by yet another researcher, Joseph Kess. The focus of his interest is word play and linguistic ambiguities. Unfortunately, his article is very short and does not explore the topic in greater depth. The same is true of his article on loanwords in the American Slovene press. Another topic that he discusses is the change and assimilation of North American Slovene names.

Another researcher who deals with the language of American Slovenes is Rado L. Lenček. In his article on problems and perspectives of ethnic identification of postwar immigrants he draws the conclusion that Slovene is basically limited to use within the family and that it is preserved within the first generation. The situation is only slightly better for religious contexts, whereas in the sphere of public life Slovene is simply not used. Whether or not Slovene will be preserved depends also on the degree of education and the country where it was obtained. Those immigrants who gained higher education in Slovenia cling to Slovene longer, whereas those who were educated in the U. S. lose their facility in Slovene much more quickly (a fact confirmed by my own findings). Another topic he addresses is that of the so-called »*melting pot*«. He believes that Slovenes do not fit the concept of the »*melting pot*« rather they exhibit traits of pluralism and multicultural values.

The language of American Slovenes is also the topic of an unpublished M. A. thesis by Judy Kegl (1975), a third-generation immigrant herself. She describes the linguistic situation in Chicago with special emphasis on code switching. Unfortunately, her methodology is flawed at times, definitions not sufficiently clear and the so-called »*observer's paradox*« very strong. All of this somewhat diminishes the validity of her results.

In addition to the already discussed studies there are some researchers who are not linguists or sociolinguists and for whom language is not the focus of their interest, but who nevertheless touch upon it. Here we should mention Linda Bennett, who in her Ph. D. dissertation (1976) on the patterns of ethnic identity among Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Washington, D. C., selects language as one of the factors determining ethnic identity, but finds that it is not relevant in this respect. The probability that the mother tongue will be retained by members of the 2nd and 3rd generations exists only in those homes where both parents speak it fluently, where they insist on their children learning it and where

there are strong ties with Slovene-speaking grandparents and/or other relatives. It is of some interest, that there exists, despite the low level of competence in Slovene, an interest in subscribing to both American Slovene periodicals and publications from Slovenia.

The weak point of Bennett's study is that it relies on answers collected from only 56 informants and that these are ethnically mixed. Only 10 are Slovene, which can hardly be seen as representative of a larger community.

The language issues are also briefly dealt with by Irena Birsa, who wrote about the Australian situation, by Majda Kodrič, whose main concern is 2nd generation immigrants, and in Nives Sulič's ethnological study *Thank God I'm Slovenian*.

This brings me to my own work in this area. Among the motivations for my researching the language in the immigrant context was precisely the relatively small number of such studies, which were for the most part very fragmentary in character and, what is more, often inconsistent and lacking in systematicity. This last refers also to the great deal of confusion in terminology, where distinctions between borrowing, calques, interferences, loan-words, code switching and other bilingual phenomena were often blurred. Finally, my study would fill the gap in the research of English-Slovene code switching, which was until then almost completely unresearched compared to other language pairs.

My aim was therefore to provide a more comprehensive and especially more systematic description of the linguistic situation among American Slovenes that would be based on a sufficiently large corpus of empirical data. In addition to the general issues of language maintenance and shift I wanted to focus specifically on code switching, which is defined as the alternate use of Slovene and English by one or more interlocutors within the same conversation. Contrary to borrowing, code switching does not involve morphological adaptation of the donor words into the recipient language, which means that the two codes remain essentially discrete.

I did my fieldwork in Cleveland, the city with the largest number of American Slovenes in the U. S. I gathered data in four time intervals between 1987 and 1989. Three techniques were used: tape-recorded conversational interviews, follow-up self-report questionnaires on language use and language attitudes, and participant observation. A total of 200 immigrants belonging to different generations participated in the study. 420 hours of tape

recorded speech data was collected and 185 questionnaires filled out by the participants. Interviews were of particular importance as they allowed me access to the maximally spontaneous, natural discourse, which was not the case with most previous studies where pre-prepared questions were used and where the roles of interviewer were very rigidly structured.

The questionnaire consisted of questions about demographic data and immigration-related issues, language use and language attitudes, and the participants' socialization patterns and their involvement in ethnic organizations. All responses were statistically processed in order to determine the degree of significance for individual variables (chi-squares) and to establish which factors encouraged or discouraged the maintenance of the Slovene language. Among the factors that encouraged mother tongue maintenance were the following: ethnic marriages, learning Slovene during childhood and speaking it as a household language, relatively high or low self-rating of competence in Slovene and in English respectively, attributing great importance to the maintenance of Slovene, subscribing to Slovene publications, listening regularly to ethnic radio, having over 50% of friends of Slovene descent and regular contact with them, maintaining contacts with Slovenia, and participating in ethnic events.

Among the most important factors that had a negative impact on the maintenance of Slovene were inter-marriage and social and geographical mobility. Younger generations in particular frequently move out of their parent's original neighborhoods, which essentially ends their participation in ethnic activities and severs their links with the community. They no longer base their social life on ethnic ties, but on other criteria (business relations, friendship outside the community).

The study showed a strikingly high degree of intergenerational variation, not only between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd, but also between pre-war and post-war groups. The 1st generation of pre-war immigrants came to U. S. with no previous knowledge of English. They lived in ethnically segregated communities and were able to more or less successfully function in their mother tongue. The impact of English was seen primarily in the process of borrowing and adaptation on different linguistic levels (e. g. »kara« for »a car«). This is the generation that until this day prefers Slovene and still speaks »broken English«. The 2nd pre-war generation learned

English only upon entering kindergarten or elementary school. Their competence in the two languages is the most balanced of all. They spoke Slovene at home and English elsewhere. As they often felt the stigma of being ethnically different, most of them chose not to teach their children Slovene. As a result, there are very few 3rd generation immigrants who speak Slovene. When in the 1960's the U. S. experienced ethnic revival and a search for roots, the 3rd generation American Slovene found new pride in their ethnic heritage, but realized that it was already too late for the language.

The 1st post-war generation differs from the pre-war ones in that it came to the U. S. mostly for political reasons. These immigrants were better educated and most had at least some working knowledge of English at the time of arrival. Also, they felt no need to settle close to each other. The 1st generation therefore does not resort to borrowing as did the pre-war immigrants, but rather to code switching. Another distinction between them and the pre-war immigrants is that the post-war immigrants speak standard colloquial Slovene, whereas pre-war immigrants spoke mostly regional dialects. Their children, the 2nd post-war generation, are in many respects similar to the 3rd pre-war generation. Like them, they are rapidly losing competence in Slovene, which is why my study includes no members of the 3rd post-war generation.

As far as code switching is concerned, I was interested in two aspects; functional or sociolinguistic and structural or linguistic. The functional part of the analysis focuses on the relationship between code switching as an independent variable on the one hand and dependent variables such as linguistic competence, language attitudes, situational components (conversational topic, setting and participants) on the other. Even though the responses pointed to the topic as being a very important factor, the actual linguistic behavior showed that there exists a discrepancy between the participants' self perception of their language use and reality. The setting factor was somewhat more significant in that a formal setting almost precluded code switching, while informal ones were more conducive to it. The decisive factor, however, was that of conversational participants. The role of the participants and the motivations for code switching were explained within the framework of the audience design (Bell 1984) and of the interpersonal accommodation theory (Giles and Johnson 1981, 1987). It seems

that the language choice depends on the interlocutors' social and psychological orientation and on their intention of either creating a social/personal distance between themselves and their addressees or of bridging this distance. In the former case the shared ethnic language is chosen, in the latter English comes into play. The extent to which Slovene is used depends on other factors such as competence and not only on the anticipated outcome of the interaction, but the principle of accommodating one's addressee remains nevertheless valid in all cases.

In the structural part of the analysis I primarily tested the validity of the constraints postulated in the literature for other language pairs. I found that, with the exception of one (the free-morpheme constraint), all others fail to explain the phenomenon of English-Slovene code switching. I therefore proposed a new, more powerful constraint that combines in itself syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components.

Partial results of my ongoing research have been published in some domestic and international journals, and presented at international congresses. Hopefully the entire study will be published in the near future. Until then I can conclude by saying that the American Slovene community in Cleveland shows signs of a rapidly declining bilingualism. This is of partly diglossic type, as there is no practical use for Slovene in non-ethnic contexts. The fact that the overwhelming majority of all respondents (86%) approves of code switching, as they feel that it is impossible to preserve Slovene in its »pure« form in an environment which does not favor the use of minority languages is the best indicator of language shift and possible language death. It should be pointed out, though, that such development is in sharp contrast to the immigrants' impressively strong ethnic awareness (see: Šabec 1992 for an analysis of the relationship between the two).

As for the future development of sociolinguistic research of immigrant issues, there are numerous areas that still need to be examined. I will mention just a few.

It is necessary to examine the linguistic situation in other immigrant countries, in Canada, Australia, and Latin American countries as well as in Europe, e. g. in Germany, France and Scandinavia. Such research would identify the differences and similarities between the linguistic situations in different social contexts and contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence it.

Similarly, linguistic situations between different states in the U. S. could be compared. Especially interesting would be comparisons of those communities that are not geographically, but also typologically different. For instance comparisons of fairly large and well-organized communities in terms of ethnic infrastructure, such Cleveland, and other where the number of immigrants is much smaller and where ethnic life is not so intensive would very likely yield interesting results.

A particularly interesting area to research would be the linguistic patterns of those immigrants who have only recently moved to a new country. Since their time of living in the new country would be relatively short, the influence of the immigrants' first language on the second would probably be much stronger than it is with those who have lived there longer. In addition to the classical interlingual influences in the area of morphology, phonology and syntax it would be interesting to observe what happens on the pragmatic level and in terms of the appropriateness of individual speech acts. We could establish whether, where and how communication breakdowns owing to different culturally-linguistic norms arise. Such is for instance the case of the early Slovene immigrants who, when addressing visitors or relatives from Slovenia, under partial influence of English, use the informal T-form instead of its formal counterpart. There are many potential sites of such conflicts, where a certain pattern is acceptable in one language, but may be inappropriate, impolite or even offensive in the other. Another topic with regard to the early pre-war immigrants would be an analysis of the so-called semilingualism or fossilization of the language, where parallels between this particular phenomenon and pidginization could be established or rejected.

Furthermore, factor analysis could be used in order to determine the role of language in the acculturation process more accurately.

Linguistic variation on its dependence on small and medium-sized social networks (Milroy, 1980) could be explored in even greater detail. This concept was also used in my own study, but more could be done in terms of quantification with regard to the complexity and frequency of contacts between members of such networks (loose vs. close-knit social networks).

In addition to speech data, written texts could be explored.

And finally, it would be interesting to see how the recent social and political changes in Slovenia have influenced the way in which Slovene immigrants view the role of the Slovene language in their respective countries of immigration.

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POVZETEK

SOCIOLINGVISTIČNE RAZISKAVE SLOVENSKEGA IZSELJENSTVA

Nada Šabec

Namen članka je predstaviti dosedanje dosežke v raziskovanju slovenskega izseljenstva na področju sociolingvistike in nakazati smeri bodočega razvoja. Sociolingvistika je veda, ki se v nasprotju s teoretično lingvistiko ukvarja ne toliko s samim jezikom kot z njegovo rabo in s pravili, ki veljajo za jezikovne interakcije v družbenem kontekstu. Na jezik torej gleda kot na pojav, ki ni statičen, ampak se spreminja, njegova raba tako na družbeni kot na individualni ravni pa je odvisna od vrste družbenih dejavnikov. Tako ima lahko na družbeni ravni jezik prestižen status ali pa je stigmatiziran na individualni in je njegova raba odvisna od dejavnikov, kot s odnos med sogovorniki, njihova izrazba, starost, spol in podobno.

Ena glavnih stičnih točk med sociolingvistiko in izseljenstvom je proučevanje dvo- oz. večjezičnosti, v našem primeru jezikovnega stika med slovenščino in dominantnim jezikom države priselitve.

V primerjavi z jezikovno problematiko zamejskih Slovencev, je jezikovno stanje izseljencev razmeroma slabo raziskano in avtorji večine raziskav, razen mojih, so izseljenci sami ali pa tujci. Prav tako opažamo veliko neenakomernost glede raziskav posameznih izseljenskih skupnosti, saj se skoraj vse ukvarjajo izključno s slovenskimi izseljenci v ZDA.

V članku predstavim in kritično ovrednotim raziskave Lenčka, ki se ukvarja z dilemo t.i. »stalilnega lonca« in s problemi in perspektivami etnične identifikacije povojnih priseljencev, Kessa, ki piše o humorju v ameriški slovenščini, Keglove, ki opisuje čikaško jezikovno stanje, Hočvarja, ki ugotavlja stopnjo ohranitve materinščine na podlagi popisov prebivalstva v ameriških zveznih državah in še posebej Paternosta, ki je s svojimi številnimi članki o sociolingvističnih aspektih ameriške slovenščine in o problemu ohranjanja oz. izgubljanja slovenščine med priseljenci v Pennsilvaniji in Minnesoti dragoceno prispeval k boljšemu razumevanju slovensko-angleškega jezikovnega stika. Na kratko se dotaknem še nekaterih avtorjev, ki niso lingvisti oz. sociolingvisti in ki jim jezik ni glavni predmet zanimanja, ampak ga omenjajo le mimogrede (Sulič, Kodrič, Birska, Bennett).

V drugem delu govorim o svojem lastnem delu, katerega cilj je čim bolj celovit, sistematičen in verodostojen opis jezikovnega stanja med ameriški Slovenci v Clevelandu. Na podlagi doslej največjega vzorca informantov, pripadnikov različnih generacij predvojnih in povojnih priseljencev, in obširne baze empiričnih podatkov, zbranih z intervjuji, vprašalniki in opazovanjem, ugotavljam stopnjo dvojezičnosti (ta je prehodnega značaja in gre v smeri bližajoče se jezikovne smrti slovenščine), naravo odnosa med ohranitvijo jezika in občutkom etnične pripadnosti, še posebno pozornost pa posvečam specifični obliki dvojezičnega diskurza - kodnemu preklapljanju. Pojav proučujem s sociolingvističnega in lingvističnega vidika, pri čemer ugotavljam vrsto motivacij, ki privedejo do te-ga, in postavljam funkcionalne in formalne omejitve za njegovo rabo.

Končno nakažem možne teme prihodnjih raziskav, med katerimi so primerjave jezikovnega stanja med priseljenci v različnih deželah in v tipološko in velikostno različnih skupnostih ter bolj poglobljene študije posameznih jezikovno-stičnih pojavov.