

## SLOVENE LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING

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*“...the study of language policy should not be limited to formal, declared and official policies but rather to the study of powerful mechanisms that are used in most societies nowadays to create and perpetuate ‘de facto’ language policies and practices.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract

This paper deals with the most significant aspects of language policy in Slovenia. Although language policy strategy is a wide-ranging endeavour in which relationships among individual languages in a linguistically diverse society are regulated, for operational reasons this paper concentrates on activities related to Slovene (i.e. the state, official and national language) and only touches on the basic language policy measures for minority languages in the Republic of Slovenia in order to round off the sociolinguistic picture of the country. It should be noted that the huge amount of documents related to language legislation makes thorough analysis impossible in such a short text and therefore only the most relevant legal material is presented.

Keywords: language policy, status planning, legislation, Slovenia.

## PLANIFICACIÓ DE LA SITUACIÓ DE LA LLENGUA ESLOVENA

### Resum

*En aquest article es tracten els aspectes més significatius de la política lingüística d'Eslovènia. Malgrat que l'estratègia de la política lingüística és una empresa d'ampli abast en què es regulen les relacions entre les llengües d'una societat lingüísticament diversa, per motius operatius aquest article es concentra en les activitats relacionades amb l'eslovè (per exemple, l'estat, llengua oficial i nacional) i només esmenta de passada les mesures bàsiques de la política lingüística per a les llengües minoritàries de la República d'Eslovènia amb l'objectiu de completar la imatge sociolingüística del país. Cal assenyalar que la gran quantitat de documents relacionats amb la legislació lingüística impedeix fer-ne una anàlisi exhaustiva en un text tan breu i, per tant, només es presenta el material jurídic més rellevant.*

*Paraules clau: política lingüística; planificació de la situació; legislació; Eslovènia.*

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<sup>1</sup> Shohamy, Elana (2006). Introduction, p. XVI.

## Summary

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## 1 Introductory observations

Although a series of interconnected factors –demographic, cultural, economic, social, psychological, etc.– are part of a given language policy strategy and contribute to its functioning in the framework of a given socio-political entity, legal recognition of a language and legal prescriptions about its use are often seen as being of decisive importance for actual language practice. Hence official recognition is frequently viewed as one of the most powerful guarantees for either maintaining or spreading a language, while in the absence of legal measures the way seems to be paved to language shift and consequently attrition and eventually language loss. Inadequate and detrimental legal solutions have a similar effect.

Regardless of the ideological orientation of the language policy –more or less traditional/conservative or more or less liberal/permissive– at least some legal regulation seems to be indispensable. In view of the comparatively complex language contact situation in a linguistically diversified society, there is a need for a set of rational and primarily institutional procedures to be implemented to put in place appropriate linguistic resources for public communication (corpus planning<sup>2</sup>) and influencing the attitudes of the population (speakers) with regard to these resources (status planning). However, in many cases the actual state of regulation of the status of languages comes from the relatively random activities of public authorities and social actors rather than from a systematic global plan. Such was also the case with Slovene, the current official and state language of the Republic of Slovenia, which at many points throughout history progressed from one stage of functionality to the next, i.e. gradually spread its functions into public domains, often thanks to favourable circumstances and support from and promotion by prominent individuals rather than to the official support of the hosting state.

On the other hand, the course of events by which institutions, groups and individuals exert a direct or indirect influence on a language and on language use, either in a segment of society or society as whole, is strongly dependent on a sociolinguistically appropriate assessment of relations among different languages in a society as well as on an appropriate legislative approach and decision making. However, in many instances formal legal provisions do not achieve the desired aim without several additional conditions being met. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that the (formal) status and the prestige of individual languages in a linguistically diverse society do not always correspond. On the contrary, one might say that for many languages concordance between their (formal) status and their prestige is not a matter of course and much more so in multilingual states. This is quite evident in the European context of equal EU members' official languages; all of them are official languages both in their relevant country and at the EU level, yet nevertheless there are huge differences as to their prestige and the consequences with regard to their actual use in public debate can be anticipated and are easily observable. Even more diversified situations can be observed in the framework of individual states' sociolinguistic landscape.

In Slovenia language status and prestige (dis-)concordance follows this general pattern. Namely, the territory settled by Slovenes has some rather interesting and sociolinguistically relevant characteristics. The area is a “crossroads” of several peoples and language families: Germanic, Romance, Slavic and Finno-Ugric. Hence for centuries Slovene has been in direct contact with German, Italian, Serbo-Croatian and Hungarian. Already in 1938 a Russian linguist, Isačenko, a professor at Ljubljana University, identified the Slovene lands as an area where different languages and their varieties exist together, each of them performing clearly delimited functions, while speakers using these languages and varieties never cross the implicit line (Isačenko 1938). Isačenko did not give a name to this phenomenon. However, without doubt what he was talking about was diglossia, which was defined under this name only twenty years later by Fergusson (Fergusson 1959).

Such a linguistic constellation strongly influenced the perceptions of Slovene native speakers with respect to their own language and the languages of their neighbours, i.e. foreign languages. The latter were almost *sine qua non* for economic survival while their mother tongue served as the core of their individuality and identity in view of its connectedness to the community, to the nation. One might conclude that even today the repercussions of such a centuries-lasting position of Slovene as the language of informal domains performing informal functions, as opposed to the contact languages of German, Italian and Hungarian performing high

<sup>2</sup> While corpus planning of the majority of languages spoken in Slovenia started way back in history and today follows the demands of modern life, the corpus planning of the Romany language is at the very beginning.

functions, are traceable in the communication practices of Slovene native speakers. Today Slovene is the official language of the Slovene state, a multifunctional language equipped to perform all functions both low and high. However, in many instances a foreign language is still used instead of Slovene in oral and written communication without any obvious sociolinguistic reasons, pointing to a discrepancy with actual Slovene language status and prestige rooted in historical and socio-psychological reasons.

## 2 Language policy and its historical context

Language policy and language planning in Slovenia<sup>3</sup> are closely related to the perception of the Slovene people's evolution into a modern nation in which language and culture are considered the foundations of Slovene ethnic identity and a permanent argument in aspiring to a Slovene state. This sensitivity concerning ethnic identity markers, with language in first place, is due to the historical status relationship among languages in this region at the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as well as to the language policy and inter-ethnic relationships in the post-First and post-Second World War Yugoslav states. This is because throughout the history of the Slovene people in the course of its development into a modern nation, endeavours were made to achieve Slovene language autonomy, expressed in striving for the high language functions held by different foreign languages in different periods – Latin, German, Italian, Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian. In the absence of other sources of political power – i.e. state administrative mechanisms – language and culture functioned as a frame of reference for national unification. A prototype of this statement can be read in a study on the synchronic situation in Slovene language development (Vidovič Muha 1996): “The two basic elements that define Slovene throughout its entire history, i.e. lack of statehood (in terms of complete functionality) until 1991 and, at least in European terms, a small number of speakers, have been counterbalanced by a strong sense of the linguistic and general cultural commitment of its speakers to their national entity. In these circumstances, one can understand that the normativization of Slovene literary language was largely influenced by a linguistic policy which – because of its incomplete standards – depended heavily on day-to-day politics.”<sup>4</sup> This urgent need to provide for a socio-political form which would guarantee that the Slovenes could establish and express themselves as a modern nation under their own authority and assume responsibility for the fate of the Slovene language is also reflected in the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, underlining that the Constitution is adopted “proceeding ... from the historical fact that in a centuries-long struggle for national liberation we Slovenes have established national identity and asserted our statehood”.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that from the late 7<sup>th</sup> century until 1991, i.e. until the founding of an independent Slovenia, the areas settled by the Slovenes were under the jurisdiction of a larger, multinational state has affected the attitudes of Slovenes towards ethnic and language issues right up to the present. In line with the post-First World War peace treaties, for geopolitical reasons and due to inter-war great power bargaining substantial parts of the territory settled by Slovenes were assigned to other states. According to the estimations, up to one third of the Slovene population remained in the neighbouring states while on the Slovene side of the border members of the neighbouring nations became national minorities (Germans, Hungarians and Italians).

## 3 Language policy addressees

A rather ambiguous atmosphere with regard to ethnic and language issues gradually developed among Slovenes: on the one hand, understanding the language and ethnicity issues of others, expressed in a rather generous attitude to their language and ethnic identity needs, but on the other a feeling that the Slovene language and ethnic identity were threatened and endangered by stronger neighbours. This is also reflected in the Slovene language policy concept today: “This perception that the Slovenian nation is a small nation and hence particularly vulnerable to foreign pressures and the (geo-political) appetite of the neighbouring nations and states has been a very strong incentive for the development of legislation regulating the use of

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information see Nečak Lük Albina, 2004. ‘Slovenia - Language policy and language planning issues’. In Bugarski, R. and Hawkesworth, C. (eds.), *Language in the Former Yugoslav Lands*. Slavica Publishers, Indiana University, Bloomington.

<sup>4</sup> Vidovič Muha 1996, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, Preamble, p. 17.

languages [i.e. Slovene, Hungarian and Italian] in Slovenia. In general, such legislation has been adopted with the intention of protecting the Slovenian language.”<sup>6</sup>

Although small, the population of Slovenia displays quite a diverse linguistic picture: along with Slovene, over 11 language categories/groups were registered in 2002 when the last field collecting of data on the ethnic and language features of the population took place. Since then demographic information has been taken from the Population Register and data about the ethnic and language structure are no longer accessible. According to the data from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, Slovenia had a population of 2,062,874, nearly 5% of them foreign citizens.<sup>7</sup>

In 2002, out of 1,964,036 people, 1,631,363 declared Slovene as their ethnic affiliation and 1,723,434 declared Slovene to be their mother tongue. The three minority communities, explicitly named in the Constitution and enjoying collective protection and special rights, show the following structure: Hungarian: 6,243 by ethnic affiliation and 7,713 by mother tongue; Italian: 2,258 by ethnic affiliation and 3,762 by mother tongue; and Roma: 3,246 by ethnic affiliation and 3,834 by mother tongue. The missing numbers pertain to members of ex-Yugoslav nations and nationalities,<sup>8</sup> migrants from other countries, undeclared ethnic and language association and missing data.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1 Native speakers of Slovene

In concordance with the socio-psychological attitude described above, since the end of the First World War, when for the first time Slovenes joined a multinational state – the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – through their own decision, concern for the language and cultural identity wellbeing of their compatriots living outside the state’s borders has been on the agenda of the Slovene state’s duties. Today, three communities of native Slovene speakers are explicitly mentioned in the Constitution with regard to Slovene language policy protection and promotion: 1. Slovenes in Slovenia; 2. Slovenes in three geographically contiguous territories in Austria, Italy and Hungary;<sup>10</sup> and 3. Slovenes abroad in the diaspora where the highest numbers are in Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Canada, Argentina and Australia.

Provisions concerning the Republic of Slovenia’s obligations towards these communities in terms of promoting Slovene language and culture in their settlement areas also featured in the Constitution of Slovenia as a Yugoslav Republic. Today they are contained in the current Constitution:<sup>11</sup> “It [the state] shall maintain concern for autochthonous Slovene national minorities in neighbouring countries and for Slovene emigrants and workers abroad and shall foster their contacts with the homeland.” A series of documents<sup>12</sup> and statutory legal acts<sup>13</sup> regulate the Slovene state’s obligations to these communities, including helping them to preserve their language. Slovenia has also ratified some international and bilateral legal acts on the same grounds.<sup>14</sup> Tasks relating to the Slovene minority in neighbouring countries and Slovene emigrants around the world

6 Roter 2012.

7 This is 143 more than three months earlier; it is interesting to note that during this period the number of Slovene citizens decreased while the number of foreign citizens increased and reached nearly 5% of the population. <http://www.stat.si/statweb/en/show-news?id=5148&idp=17&headerbar=13>

8 According to the 2002 Census, the structure of ex-Yugoslav language native speakers was the following: Albanian 7,713; Bosnian 31,499; Croatian 54,079; Macedonian 4,760; Montenegrin 462; and Serbian 31,329. As for the German minority, which is often the object of argument in the minority and language protection debate, 1,628 people declared German to be their mother tongue, while only 499 declared themselves to be German by ethnic affiliation and 181 declared themselves to be Austrians by ethnic affiliation.

9 [https://www.stat.si/popis2002/en/rezultati\\_obcine\\_prebivalstvo\\_dz.htm](https://www.stat.si/popis2002/en/rezultati_obcine_prebivalstvo_dz.htm).

10 The feeling of the loss of vital parts of the Slovene nation due to unjust drawing of borders is also often expressed in the term “Slovene cultural realm” which suggests that the territories settled by Slovenes on both sides of the state border constitute an ethnolinguistic entity.

11 Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, Article 5.

12 Resolution on Relations with Slovenes Abroad 2002, Resolution on the Position of Slovene Autochthonous Minorities in Neighbouring Countries and Related Activities of State and other Bodies in the Republic of Slovenia, Strategy on Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenes Abroad, 1996.

13 Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenes Abroad, 2006, and Act Amending the Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenes Abroad, 2010.

14 Act Ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Act Ratifying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Agreement on Ensuring Special Rights of Slovene National Minority in the Republic of Hungary and Hungarian National Minority in the Republic of Slovenia.

are carried out by the Government Office for Slovenes Abroad, which also draws continuity from Yugoslav times.<sup>15</sup>

The right of deaf persons to use their language is regulated by the Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language.<sup>16</sup> The Act provides for their access to information using techniques adapted to their needs and also the scope and manner of exercising the right to a sign language interpreter in connection with the equal inclusion of deaf people in the living and working environment and in all forms of social life, with the same rights, conditions and opportunities as people with no hearing deficit.

### 3.2 Native speakers of other languages

At the same time special rights, i.e. rights compensating for the forceful separation of the minority population from the bulk of their nation by border changes, are formulated for Italian and Hungarian national communities in the Constitution.<sup>17</sup> Based on this laws were also drawn up providing for the official status and equal use of their languages in their settlement areas. While education in the mixed regions is regulated by a general act, a series of sector-specific acts (over 50) regulate the realization of the rights of these two communities, language-related rights included.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the Hungarian and Italian communities, the Roma population is expressly named in the Constitution: “The status and special rights of the Roma community living in Slovenia shall be regulated by law.”<sup>19</sup> In accordance with this constitutional demand, legislation on the Roma community and the promotion of the Romany language was also prepared, regulating the state’s responsibility for the maintenance and development of Romany: “The Republic of Slovenia supports the maintenance and development of the Romany language and culture and the informative as well as the publishing activity of the Roma community.”<sup>20</sup> The protection of the special rights of the Roma community is currently also being implemented through a number of sector-specific acts.<sup>21</sup> Among the relevant documents, the National Programme of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Roma for the period 2010-2015 and the National Programme of Measures for the Roma for the period 2010-2015 (NPUR 2010-2015) expressly require the state to safeguard the Romany language: “The state has also been, and should in the future, paying special attention to preserving and developing various forms of the Roma language, culture and informative as well as publishing activity...” The Romany language is also referred to in the Education and Schooling Strategy for the Roma in the Republic of Slovenia 2004.<sup>22</sup>

The Republic of Slovenia’s responsibility for these communities is also set out in bilateral and international agreements. The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2000. When the instrument of ratification was deposited, Slovenia informed the Secretary General of the Council of Europe that the Italian and Hungarian languages are considered regional or minority languages in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia. The statement also stipulated that the provisions under Paragraphs 1 to 4 of Article 7 apply as appropriate to the Romany language. Therefore, Slovenia also applies the provisions under Paragraphs 1 to 4 of Article 7 in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Article 7 for the Romany language.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to underline that in order to exercise their rights, the members of the Hungarian and Italian communities establish their own self-governing communities in the geographic areas where they live. For the Roma community and in addition to the role of state bodies, monitoring of the realization of their rights

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.uszs.gov.si/en/for\\_slovenians\\_abroad](http://www.uszs.gov.si/en/for_slovenians_abroad)

<sup>16</sup> Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Article 64.

<sup>18</sup> Act Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education. See the list at <http://www.un.gov.si/en/minorities/>.

<sup>19</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, Article 65.

<sup>20</sup> Act on the Roma Community in the Republic of Slovenia, Article 4 (published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 33/07).

<sup>21</sup> The list can be seen at [http://www.un.gov.si/en/legislation\\_and\\_documents/legal\\_acts\\_roma\\_community/](http://www.un.gov.si/en/legislation_and_documents/legal_acts_roma_community/)

<sup>22</sup> Along with the Supplementation of the Education and Schooling Strategy for the Roma in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Republic of Slovenia Office of National Minorities, <http://www.un.gov.si/en/minorities/>

is also the task of representative bodies of Roma on city and municipal councils and the Council of the Roma Community in the Republic of Slovenia (established on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007).

For members of other ethnic groups who are not expressly mentioned by name in the Constitution, the right to use their language and script is guaranteed<sup>24</sup> and their cultural activities, including mass media production in their languages, are financially supported.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4 The relationship with previous language regulations

Today Slovene public opinion is in no doubt that Slovene language status planning, and with it its corpus planning and the gradual spread of its functions into public communication channels, was an incomplete process until the creation of an independent Slovene state in 1991. This is also reflected in the preamble to the Constitution.

In spite of the fact that since 1963 the Slovene language featured as one of the equal state languages in communication at the Yugoslav federal level and was expressly prescribed as the language of all state institution activities in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, even within this framework it was still deprived of some functions which, in the eyes of Slovenes, were considered a sign of complete nationhood. Opposition arose because the language of command in the army was Serbo-Croatian, while in practice Serbo-Croatian was also the language of wider communication among speakers of the various Yugoslav languages. Command in Yugoslav army units, including in Slovenia, was reserved for Serbo-Croatian; the demand to assign this function to Slovene had its roots in the fact that Slovene was the command language in the territory of Slovenia during the Second World War and even in the times of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.<sup>26</sup> Gradually the status of Slovene in army units and their activities in Slovenia was augmented. In the 1980s the written text of the solemn oath was in the language of the soldier (although the oral oath was still in Serbo-Croatian), while educational activities and lettering on army objects in Slovenia were in Slovene, communication with non-military citizens was in Slovene, etc. However, it was precisely because of the abovementioned historical burden that the language issue was so strongly “instrumentalized” for the unification of Slovene public opinion on the occasion of the trial of a group of four people charged with betraying military secrets. In spite of the fact that Serbo-Croatian did not figure as the dominant state language in the federal Constitution, attempts to assign to it the function of the language of wider communication, so that it would function as a kind of a *lingua franca* in public discourse all over Yugoslavia, was also met with strong opposition in Slovenia and was seen as disregarding the provisions on the equal use of national and minority languages in public communication. Irrespective of these and other conflict issues, many of the prominent Slovene linguists acknowledge that after the Second World War, and in spite of some limitations, the status of Slovene steadily increased and its functions spread significantly (Pogorelec 1996).

With the establishment of an independent Slovenia all professional institutions, associations and individuals engaged in language planning continued their work without interruption. However, on the language policymaking level continuity was broken. In the 1970s, following an initiative by the Slavic Association of Slovenia, a body of experts responsible for “Slovene language in public [use]” was organized within the framework of the then Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Slovenia. Later on it became the Language Council, which had several sections and working groups pursuing two basic aims: to encourage public attention to Slovene language topics, and to focus on respect for the legal norms regarding Slovene language use in the Yugoslav federation at the federal as well as the republic level. A working group named

<sup>24</sup> Article 62 (Right to Use One’s Language and Script): “Everyone has the right to use his language and script in a manner provided by law in the exercise of his rights and duties and in procedures before state and other bodies performing a public function.”

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Raziskava\\_Polozaj\\_in\\_status\\_pripadnikov\\_narodov\\_nekdanje\\_Jugoslavije\\_v\\_RS.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Raziskava_Polozaj_in_status_pripadnikov_narodov_nekdanje_Jugoslavije_v_RS.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> The role of Slovene in past military activities was also underlined in the appeal for the new Slovene Constitution by the Slovene Writers’ Association and the Slovene Sociological Association: “... in the military sense, they [i.e. the proposed theses for the Slovene Constitution] are based upon the traditions of anti-Germanic and anti-Christian rebellions in medieval Carinthia, peasant risings, anti-Turkish fights, heroic defence of the Western border in WW1, military revolts in the Austrian army, the military actions of the first modern Slovene army forces under General Maister, and above all the Slovene army during the National Liberation War, when organization of our forces was exclusively Slovene, and they were victorious despite the worst possible conditions.” Rupel, Menart (1988), p. 6. Dimitrij Rupel, Janez Menart: *Gradivo za Slovensko Ustavo* (Materials for the Slovene Constitution). *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, Ljubljana, 1988, p. 6.

the Language Tribunal was set up to carry out the first task. Although its main role was to promote language culture among Slovene language speakers by discussing and assessing the use of Slovene in the mass media and in other public institutions that could have an influence on the language of public and private communication, the existence of the Language Tribunal engendered a lot of controversy in other Yugoslav republics. When assessing the importance of the work of the Language Council and the Language Tribunal, two important outcomes should be underlined: the first is the accelerated development/creation of Slovene terminology in several disciplines, and the second a manifest impact on the awareness of native Slovene speakers of their responsibility for the language's vitality and prestige. Based on such a legacy, further language planning of Slovene after 1991 in an independent state seemed a matter of course.

## 5 The current state of language policy

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991, Slovene was explicitly proclaimed as the official language of the Republic of Slovenia. Its formal status is determined by the Constitution:<sup>27</sup> “The official language in Slovenia is Slovene. In those municipalities where Italian or Hungarian national communities reside, Italian or Hungarian shall also be official languages.” Since 2004, the basic rules on the public use of Slovene as the official language of the Republic of Slovenia have been determined by the Act on Public Usage of Slovenian Language. The public use of Slovene in specific areas is also determined in greater detail by a number of other sector-specific laws. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for monitoring the implementation of legal provisions relating to language use, but other ministries are also obliged to participate in carrying out duties in this area as specified in Article 26 of the main piece of legislation. In line with this law, on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the National Assembly passed the first resolution on the national programme for language policy for the period 2007-2011.<sup>28</sup>

After the declaration of an independent Slovenia in 1991, continuity of language planning and promotion of cultural pluralism was also expressed by the Constitution. The status of Slovene has changed so that today it is the only official language at the national level, i.e. the state language. The official function of Slovene as the state language encompasses all spheres of life in internal and external channels of communication. It goes without saying that its use has also been extended to the armed forces.

The changed socio-political situation after 1991 soon exposed some sensitive points. It seems that with independence, a looser attitude towards the Slovene language developed. This was apparent in the rather limited respect for language norms in public written and oral discourse. In addition, the influence of American culture and modes of expression increased. Until then, efforts for the autonomy of the Slovene language had been partly expressed through purism, mostly oriented against the influence of Serbo-Croatian. This vigilance seemed to become obsolete after the common destiny of the two languages ended. The growing impetus of political and economic integration, what is called globalization, was reflected in Slovenia and not only in economic subordination. In a small nation like Slovenia it soon revealed itself to be also a socio-cultural and communication phenomenon. The growth of communication technology brought many English language patterns into the communication and way of life of Slovene society; via the mass media, and specifically electronic communication channels, American culture is steadily invading Slovene society, the impetus of English being most evidently expressed in the speech of younger generations.

In fact, one could argue that a paradoxical thing happened; parallel to its status promotion into a state language, there has been no obvious substantial increase in the prestige of Slovene. On the contrary, there are signs that in certain sectors of the population its prestige has been diminishing. Many warnings have been given about a kind of Slovene-English diglossia which is seemingly spreading in Slovenia. The alarm has been triggered on account of public signs, the language used at academic and professional gatherings, the language of scientific publications and the language of university lectures and seminars, degree papers and postgraduate theses, which are increasingly in English. A particular cause for alarm is communication

<sup>27</sup> Article 11.

<sup>28</sup> Many participants in language policy creation, linguists and cultural workers at the forefront, consider that the main responsibility for the language as a matter of the national interest should be assigned directly to the government as such and not to individual ministries. The standpoint is the same with regard to the position of the Slovene language service (see below); namely, the restricted attitude had been expressed by installation of the service in the framework of the Ministry of Culture, as if language matters belong to the area of culture instead of being positioned as the national interest of society as a whole.



in foreign enterprises in Slovenia, where frequently Slovene is no longer used even in employees' personal documentation.

With the aim of monitoring and limiting these detrimental phenomena, i.e. the invasion of English and other foreign language influences in public discourse in Slovenia, in 1992 the former "Slovene language in public [use]" section at the Slavic Association of Slovenia was restored. In 1993 an initiative was launched whereby within the Parliament a group of linguists and other experts would be engaged in basic language planning and would also consider legislation in this field. In March 1994 a group of experts was nominated as a permanent working body of the parliamentary committee for culture, education and sport<sup>29</sup> with the task of offering suggestions regarding language policy and language planning to the Parliament and the wider public.

In its founding charter the following three main groups of tasks and activities of the working group are enumerated:

- Proposals shall be prepared concerning language planning in the institutions of the Slovene state and individual fields of administrative and public life (administration, judiciary, economics, education, sport, science, culture, mass media and the health service). The group will define the tasks of the state and its institutions in the process of implementing Slovene language policy. With this aim, the working group shall examine legal prescriptions regulating the status and the level of communicative competence in the enumerated fields. Where necessary, appropriate changes and amendments shall be proposed.
- The working group shall discuss and prepare an initiative for an efficient language policy in Slovenia.
- The working group shall consider the status of the Slovene language of the Slovene minorities in Italy, Austria and Hungary. Its initiatives will help in asserting an adequate position for Slovene in the public life of Slovenes outside the borders of Slovenia.

## 6 Language legislation

At the same time, several individuals concerned about the Slovene language, mostly linguists, writers and academics, suggested that issues regarding the status of Slovene should be regulated by a special law. The proposal, however, did not come from the working group; the first draft of the law (on the use of Slovene as the official language) was prepared in early 1997 (January 14<sup>th</sup>) by the then Minister of Culture.<sup>30</sup> In the draft two separate topics were regulated: the first was the domains of Slovene official language use that should be regulated by law and the second the setting up of a State Language Committee/Office for Language. In the first part, several domains were cited:

- The functioning of public institutions. Respect for the Slovene norm is set forward in this framework and the use of Slovene in its higher variety in internal and external communication is considered obligatory in enterprises; in view of the frequency and differing levels of formality of contacts with customers, several levels of communicative competence of employees can be prescribed (on top of basic competence, obligatory for all, good competence, active competence and top-level competence can be required). Active competence is envisaged as one of the conditions for acquiring Slovene citizenship.<sup>31</sup> Public registrations, public information (i.e. advertising, performances<sup>32</sup>) and education are fields of special attention in the planned law.

29 In the working group, headed by Prof. Dr. Breda Pogorelec, the prominent Slovene language scholar, there were six language specialists, two lawyers and two psychologists.

30 Associate Prof. Dr. Janez Dular, himself a linguist.

31 Demand for Slovene language competence (which had to be proven by a special exam) had been set forward by the Act on Citizenship of the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 1, 1991) immediately after the establishment of the independent Republic of Slovenia in 1991.

32 Article 19 deals with the use of the Slovene language at public events with international participants financed from public funds and in the proceedings published from such events. The Slovene language title, foreword and abstracts are considered obligatory along with those in a foreign language. Exceptions from this rule must be approved by the State Language Committee.

- The task of the State Language Committee is to consider the systematic creation and implementation of language policy. Its fundamental role is to advise and assess activities related to language policy. Disregard for or misuse of the law is monitored through inspection in the relevant sphere of activity.

However, the idea was not unanimously and enthusiastically supported by the working group and in three years it did not manage to achieve a consensus. In 1999 the views of the working group were published; two members were against the law while others supported the idea and at the same time suggested certain modifications and supplements.

The draft on the use of Slovene as the official language had two major goals:

- To provide for integral regulation and ensure the use of Slovene in all spheres of public communication in the Republic of Slovenia.
- To bring into effect legislation relating to the use of Slovene in a more consistent manner through encouragement, consultation, administrative mechanisms and also penal sanctions.

The argumentation supporting adoption of a law on the use of Slovene as the official language is based on the assumption that the state needs a general law managing and sanctioning Slovene language status issues in the Republic of Slovenia, since the provisions of sector-specific laws regulating language status lack transparency – as a rule the details are not accessible to users, i.e. speakers. It was assumed that, due to its transparency, a general language law would additionally motivate language loyalty and thus promote the prestige of the Slovene language.<sup>33</sup>

The draft was opposed for a series of reasons. In the forefront was the unbalanced approach to general and specific issues – some communicative situations were dealt with in a general/superficial manner while others were approached very directly. In any case, in principle it is impossible for a law to capture all existing and newly emerging communication practices and hence it would soon become inefficient with regard to specific cases. Obviously the submitter was aware of this deficiency and proposed the establishment of an Office for Language, a kind of operational language policy/language planning and consultation body, which would help to manage newly emerging situations by interpreting legal provisions.

After a delay of several years a revised draft was prepared and finally the draft of the bill was brought to the legislative procedure after pressure from a civil initiative. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 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, the Parliament would start the procedure to pass the bill. Meanwhile, however, a government decree was issued establishing the Office for the Slovene Language of the Government of Slovenia (in 2000).<sup>34</sup> With the reform of the state administration in 2002 the Office was moved to the Ministry of Culture and operated in the framework of the Directorate for Cultural Development and International Affairs under the name the Sector for the Slovene Language, while in 2011 due to staffing policy the body was renamed again and language care and promotion tasks were entrusted to the Slovene Language Service. Many consider this transferring of language matters from the governmental level to the Ministry of Culture as a sign of degrading the importance of promoting Slovene language status and use, while the renaming of the Office went hand in hand with a reduction in its powers and independence.

In 2004 the Act on Public Usage of Slovenian Language (APUSL) was finally passed, specifying Slovene as the official language, the language of written and oral communication in Slovenia, and the language by which Slovenia is represented in international contacts.<sup>35</sup> The main emphasis is on the basic rules and obligations regarding the public usage of Slovene in public communication. Obligatory use of Slovene is prescribed in

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33 Stabej 2000, p. 245.

34 Decree on establishing the structure and working sphere of the Office for the Slovene Language of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 97, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000, p. 10585; Prof. Dr. Janez Dular was appointed the first director of the Office.

35 Article 1 (Introductory provision). Exceptions refer to Italian and Hungarian as regional official languages and to the provisions of international treaties that are binding for the Republic of Slovenia and specifically also allow the use of other languages.

individual areas together with the necessary proficiency in Slovene prescribed for individual professions or workplaces in public bodies, for services and public authorization holders, and for acquiring citizenship. The use of Slovene on web pages, in education, in the media, in dealing with clients, on merchandise labelling, in the names of establishments, premises and other business spaces and at public events is regulated, including also possible exceptions to the rule, i.e. use of other languages in a given case.

A special section defines the tasks and responsibilities of national administrative bodies, anticipating the setting up of an inter-ministerial consultative coordination body with the Government with the aim of discussing draft bills and regulations in terms of their compliance with the provisions of this Act, language policy aims and language planning, and adopting a five-year national programme for language policy. The following sections specify inspection of the implementation of the Act and penalty measures for disregard of the Act's provisions.

Following Article 2, and in addition to the Act, the public use of Slovene in individual fields of public communication is regulated in detail by sector-specific acts depending on the particular features of these individual fields. At the moment over 200 sector-specific laws contain clauses relating to the use of Slovene in individual fields of life and work.<sup>36</sup>

## 7 Identity versus functional content

Two opposing views on language policy, evidently emanating from two different linguistic schools, have stemmed from the debate on the law. The reasons for different views on Slovene's formal language status can be described in terms of theoretical, disciplinary and generational variation.

On the one hand, there is a rather traditionalist, defensive approach or view of language (in our case, Slovene) as a symbol of ethnic identity and an ideal of national unity. In this view the Slovene language is the sacred symbol of the Slovene nation, the eminent marker of the Slovene identity; the visible token of the nation's vitality is impeccable Slovene in public use. According to this approach, at the moment, or rather throughout history, the language has been endangered because of foreign dominance, by insufficiently developed language competence and lack of respect for language norms by its speakers. Beneath this "introverted" approach to the Slovene language, the concept of a "national 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 is hardly present in this approach, and terms like open society and ethnic and language pluralism are exceptional in this discourse.

In opposition to this, which could be called a kind of "renewed" language activism, stands a more moderate, modern approach oriented towards the wider context of language acquisition and language use. In its view, the status of the Slovene language has been effectively regulated by the Constitution and the laws regulating individual spheres of activity. In the independent Slovene state, Slovene has gained the status of the state language and its prestige depends on the development and promotion of Slovene society as a whole. The quality of written and oral public discourse, then, depends on factors that are closely related to the general social climate and welfare. The role of education and the mass media has been underlined in this connection. The need for an unhindered, continuous process of preparation of basic works on the prescribed norm in central scientific institutions<sup>37</sup> (the Slovene Academy of Science and Arts and the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor) has been advocated since the production of linguistic materials such as an orthography, dictionaries, grammars, lexicography work etc. is essential for future development. Electronic corpus selection, the development of organized translation services and thorough linguistic research should bring about favourable language planning outcomes..

The features of the two legislative approaches towards language are integrated in the Slovene language law. The Scandinavian language model is followed; the language office should play a decisive advisory and

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36 An exhaustive list of sector-specific acts containing language clauses that figured already in the draft on the use of Slovene ... The list is permanently updated.

37 In this regard a certain similarity can be traced with the recently adopted Polish law, the main difference being that professional linguistic matters remain in the remit of professional (non-governmental) institutions, i.e. the Academy of Science and Arts and the universities.

promotional role in language matters. On the other hand, there are elements of the French model integrated in the law; it has a repressive function as penalties are envisaged for disrespect for “proper” language use by institutions and responsible individuals.

## 8 Further language policy and language planning activities

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.<sup>38</sup> 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 Slovenian 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 2014-2018<sup>39</sup> 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 are at the forefront of the planned activities.

Since 2004 there has been a special budget line for implementation of language policy measures which are also in the interest of or for the benefit of speakers of other languages on Slovene territory and for supporting projects implementing language policy measures (research and analysis, digitalization, the creation of web tools, portals and user manuals, promotional/marketing activities, etc.) through public calls and contracts.<sup>40</sup>

## 9 Current Slovene language policy issues

Throughout Slovene history, ethnic and language issues have always been strongly linked to the establishment of Slovene statehood. With an independent Slovenia, the state was considered not only a guarantee of Slovene language status promotion but it was also expected that statehood would give strong impetus to the growth of the prestige of the Slovene language by providing a fresh incentive for its use and hence the self-confidence of Slovene speakers. However, many observers report that this is not the case.

Globalization trends have brought about new practices which are very difficult to regulate. Many of the language contact issues engendered by globalization found the Slovenian state somewhat unprepared. The language aspects of the flow of information are at an acceptable level as the electronic media in Slovene are highly developed and there has also been some progress in the mobility of goods (the declarations on merchandise articles were already labelled in all official languages, Slovene among them, in Yugoslav times). However, language questions concerning the mobility of people – in view of the internationalization of individual sectors of public life – seem to be the most delicate problem and affect some of the most crucial domains of Slovene language use. Although some areas where Slovene comes into direct contact with a foreign language, mostly English, were regulated by the Act on Public Usage of Slovenian Language,<sup>41</sup> it is evident from the numerous, almost daily infringements, and in spite of their penal consequences, that trust in the capacity of the Slovene language has been shattered. In the current international constellation, the power and resources of the state alone to find the right solutions for an equal place for and equal use of a national language in international public communication – a solution without detriment to a national language – seems to be an extremely difficult endeavour.

At the moment, and related to the relationship between internationalization and the role of the national language, i.e. Slovene, a heated debate is underway with regard to the language(s) of science and higher

<sup>38</sup> Article 26, Article 28 of the Act on Public Usage of Slovenian Language.

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/slovenski\\_jezik/Resolution\\_2014-18\\_Slovenia\\_jan\\_2015.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/slovenski_jezik/Resolution_2014-18_Slovenia_jan_2015.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.mk.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/sluzba\\_za\\_slovenski\\_jezik/](http://www.mk.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/sluzba_za_slovenski_jezik/).

<sup>41</sup> Such as language use in international cooperation, names of establishments, premises, etc., the language of public international, cultural, professional, commercial, sports, education and other events.

(university) education. The problem was triggered by a draft of the Higher Education Act with a proposal for English to feature as a teaching language along with Slovene at the university level, with the final decision assigned to the individual university concerned. The issue split the Slovene academic sphere in two, one side arguing that the position of English should be radically delimited by constitutional law since otherwise, due to its economic power and international prestige, English would gradually take over and oust Slovene from this domain which is crucial for successful Slovene language corpus, while the other side's most obvious argument was the threat to the international promotion and quality of the Slovene university system. Many fear that with English as a language of university instruction along with Slovene, a new, reversed kind of diglossia would develop, forcing Slovene from a high into a low language position, first in the university domain, then gradually in all educational domains and finally in the majority of public domains.<sup>42</sup>

## 10 Conclusion

Should an express answer to the question “The status of languages – does official recognition matter?” be necessary for the conclusion, my answer is: “Yes. It matters beyond any doubt.” Along with regulating the language-related course of events – language use and language planning – the influence it has on a language's prestige and speakers' attitudes towards it should be taken into account. Language use regulation endeavours may sometimes seem futile in the context of competition with a language of wider communication, either on a national or global level. However, it is precisely official recognition and measures resulting from status planning that give strength to a national language in this seemingly and actually unequal competition. In my view, official recognition is especially important with regard to language/corpus planning, which is strongly dependent on the appropriate financial support the state is obliged to provide along with language-related prescriptions.

However, as noted above, official recognition is but one in a series of “powerful mechanisms” (Shohamy 2006) 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 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was the 12<sup>th</sup> 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” (Humar 2007).<sup>43</sup> The latter point also raises hopes for the vitality of Slovene and its prestige in the future.

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<sup>42</sup> This is precisely the status that, after centuries of efforts by generations of Slovene intellectuals, was transcended by the first Slovene state entity after the First World War, when systematic language planning started with the establishment of the first Slovene University in Ljubljana in 1919.

<sup>43</sup> Neither of the two language planning activities had been officially supported by the authorities. On the contrary, the author of the first Slovene book, Primož Trubar, was exiled and his books were not only banned but also burnt.

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