

## MARKETING MINORITY LANGUAGE AS A VALID TOOL IN THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL OF MINORITY LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF THE SLOVENES IN ITALY

*The concept of marketing minority languages rests on the model that conceptualises minorities as communities formed by concentric circles of minority members. Every concentric circle corresponds to a group of minority members of different intensity, from those who represent the core of the linguistic minority, to those who merely speak a couple of words in the minority language. Marketing minority languages as an approach towards the preservation of minority languages presumes that it is possible to motivate inhabitants of a territory, where two linguistic communities live, to learn and use the minority language in their everyday life. Therefore, it assumes that linguistic minority members can and do move from one concentric circle to another, and that they can be motivated to come closer to the core of the linguistic minority. As such, marketing minority language can represent a valid tool in the fight for survival of minority languages, as well as a means against assimilation of the linguistic minority members.*

*The article applies the concept of marketing minority languages to the Slovenian minority in Italy and explores new perspectives of development for the above mentioned community.*

Keywords: linguistic minority, marketing minority languages, Slovene minority in Italy, language use, language planning, language prestige, language acquisition, concentric circles minority model.

PROMOCIJA KOT UČINKOVITO SREDSTVO BOJA ZA PREŽIVETJE MANJŠINSKIH JEZIKOV: PRIMER SLOVENSKE MANJŠINE V ITALIJI

*Promocija manjšinskih jezikov je pristop, ki stremi k ohranjanju manjšinskih jezikov. Ta pristop predpostavlja, da je mogoče prebivalce območja, kjer živita dve jezikovni skupnosti, spodbuditi, da se manjšinskega jezika učijo in da ga uporabljajo v svojem vsakdanjem življenju. Promocija manjšinskih jezikov torej predstavlja zanesljivo sredstvo v boju za preživetje manjšinskih jezikov, kakor tudi sredstvo za boj proti asimilaciji pripadnikov jezikovne manjšine.*

*V članku avtorica aplicira koncept promocije manjšinskih jezikov na primer Slovenske jezikovne manjšine v Italiji.*

Ključne besede: Jezikovna manjšina, promocija manjšinskih jezikov, Slovenci v Italiji, raba jezika, načrtovanje jezika, prestiž jezika, pridobivanje znanja jezika, manjšinski model koncentričnih krogov.

## INTRODUCTION

A minority language is a language that is spoken by a minority of the population of a country or region. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages defines minority languages as those that are *“traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population; and as those that are different from the official language(s) of that State”*.<sup>1</sup> A group of people who speak a minority language forms a linguistic minority.

Legislative and constitutional arrangements in single countries usually define linguistic minorities that could be found in their territory. Most linguistic minorities can and often do get some sort of official support from the state, such as education through/of the minority language or financial support for educational, cultural, sports and other activities for linguistic minority members.

However, minority languages are sometimes marginalised within nations for a number of reasons. Occasionally they are viewed as a threat. For some they seem to represent some kind of support for separatism, thus a threat to the political establishment. Moreover, immigrant minority languages are often also seen as a threat and as a sign of non-integration of these communities. Another reason for the marginalisation of linguistic minorities is the small number of speakers. And frequently, the number of minority language speakers is also severely declining.

A considerable number of researchers (Baker 1985, 1992, 2001; Cooper 1989; Crystal 2000; Fishman 1991, 2001; Giles et al. 1977, Williams 2000), have studied strategies and proposed models to combat the decline and death of minority languages. David Crystal in his book *Language Death* (Crystal 2000) proposed several factors that may help a minority language to progress. He postulates that an endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their prestige within the dominant community, increase their wealth and increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community.

Marketing minority languages is an approach to linguistic minority issues that focuses on fostering and promoting the use of minority languages in the territory, settled by two linguistic communities. Therefore, such an approach could be used as a means to combat the decline and foster the progress of minority languages.

The Slovene language in Italy is a minority language that has been slightly, but constantly declining in the past decades. The Slovene (or Slovenian) linguistic community in Italy is therefore one of the linguistic minorities that could profit



1 See Art. 1, Par. a) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted by the Council of Europe on June 25, 1992, open to signature on November 5, 1992, entered into force on March 1, 1998, ETS No. 148.

from the aforementioned approach towards linguistic minority issues. In this article I shall try to briefly outline how such a line of activities could be developed. In order to do that, I shall devote the first part of the article to a brief outline of the characteristics of the Slovene minority in Italy, in order to frame the current situation regarding the Slovene minority language in Italy.

Marketing minority languages is an approach to linguistic minority issues that rests on the concentric circles minority model. In the second part of the article, I shall delineate the concentric circles minority model and apply it to the Slovene linguistic minority in Italy.

Finally, I shall explore how the marketing minority languages approach could be applied to the Slovenian minority in Italy, and identify the fields where its application could bring most progress to the Slovene linguistic minority.

I shall start with some basic data regarding the Slovene minority in Italy.

#### THE SLOVENES IN ITALY: WHO THEY ARE, WHERE AND HOW THEY LIVE

The Slovene minority in Italy is an autochthonous minority, often referred to as a national, ethnic or linguistic minority.<sup>2</sup> The Slovenes (or Slovenians) in Italy settle the eastern part of the region Friuli - Venezia Giulia/Furlanija - Julijska krajina, next to the border with Slovenia. Slovenes can be found in the three provinces of Trieste/Trst, Gorizia/Gorica and Udine/Videm. Due to historical, political, legal and geographical reasons, the Slovene linguistic minority in Italy cannot be viewed as a homogeneous community, both from a linguistic point of view and according to the historic perspective on the legal protection framework of the single parts of the territory settled by minority members. Above all, the situation of the Slovene minority in the two territories in the province of Udine/Videm - Slavia Veneta/Beneška Slovenija and Val Canale/Kanalska dolina -, differs to a great extent from the situation in the 14 counties in the provinces of Trieste/Trst and Gorizia/Gorica. The two realities are so different, that a single marketing approach to the two realities would not make any sense. Therefore, this article refers only to the part of the Slovenian minority that settles the provinces of Trieste/Trst and Gorizia/Gorica,<sup>3</sup> and does not take into consideration the two territories in the



2 In this article I shall predominantly refer to the Slovene minority in Italy as to a linguistic minority or linguistic community. This does not indicate that the Slovene minority in Italy is only a linguistic, and not an ethnic or a national minority. On the contrary, the decision to refer to it as only a linguistic minority stems from the fact that this article focuses on the language as one of the most important criteria of membership of the Slovene community in Italy, and does not take fully into account other aspects of minority membership, such as identity, ethnic origin, etc.

3 When I mention the Slovenes in Italy in the paper, I refer to the Slovenes in the province of Trieste/Trst and

province of Udine/Videm. Moreover, the activities and solutions proposed in this article are not directly applicable to the two aforementioned territories in the province of Udine/Videm.

It is extremely difficult to establish the number of Slovenes in the region Friuli - Venezia Giulia/Furlanija - Julijska krajina. According to international legal agreements and standards the number of linguistic minority members does not constitute a criterion to establish the existence of linguistic minorities.<sup>4</sup> This refers to both the absolute number of linguistic minority members as well as to the percentage of linguistic minority members among inhabitants of the territory under scrutiny. However, there is a difference between international legal requirements and concrete situations (Komac 1987: 43). The number of minority members represents a form of power and legitimacy for the survival and progress of the linguistic minority, and above all for the fulfilment of minority rights.

However, if an educated guess should be given regarding the number of Slovenes in the region Friuli - Venezia Giulia/Furlanija - Julijska krajina, the Italian authorities unofficially estimate that there are 80.000 Slovene speakers in Italy (Popolazioni di lingua Slovena 1994: 273). However, according to a survey carried out in 2002 by the Slovenian Research Institute in Trieste/Trst and SWG, the agency for public opinion surveys from Trieste/Trst, there are 95.000 members of the Slovenian linguistic community, 100.000 speakers of the Slovene language and 183.000 people on the territory understand Slovenian (Bogatec 2004). According to these data, there are approximately 90.000 people in the territory who understand and speak the minority language, and another 90.000 people who can to a certain extent understand the minority language, but are not able to speak it.

The status of the Slovene linguistic minority in the two provinces of Trieste/Trst and Gorizia/Gorica is defined by a comprehensive legal framework, stemming from national legislation and international multilateral and bilateral agreements. The protection of the Slovene minority in Italy rests on Art. 6 of the Italian Constitution, which states that the Italian Republic protects linguistic minorities with special measures.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there are two Acts that refer directly to the protection of linguistic minorities in Italy: Act no. 482, of December 15, 1999 "Legal provisions regarding the protection of historic linguistic minorities" proposes a general framework for protection of linguistic minorities in Italy. However, it is Act no. 38, of February 23, 2001, "Legal provisions for the protection of the Slovene

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Gorizia/Gorica, too.

<sup>4</sup> This position has been explicitly put forward by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1974 on their 10th meeting (Petrič 1977: 92).

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of the Italian Republic, published in the Official Gazette No. 298, Special issue, December 27, 1947; and published in the Official Gazette No. 2, on January 3, 1948.

linguistic minority in the region Friuli – Venezia Giulia/Furlanija – Julijska krajina” that deals specifically with the protection of the Slovenian minority in Italy.

Moreover, the protection of the Slovene minority in Italy rests heavily on obligations undertaken by the Italian Republic according to international bilateral and multilateral agreements. The protection of the Slovene minority in Italy was, for example, included in the Peace Treaty signed in Paris on February 10, 1947 between the Allied Powers and Italy<sup>6</sup>, and in the subsequent Special Statute as Annex II to the London Memorandum of Understanding among the Governments of Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, signed in London on October 5, 1954<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, a protection framework for the Slovene minority in Italy was included in the Osimo Agreements, signed on November 10, 1975 by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Italy.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Italy has also signed and ratified the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities<sup>9</sup> and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages<sup>10</sup>.

The above mentioned legal documents represent a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of the Slovenian minority in Italy. It includes provisions regarding kindergartens and public education through minority language; teaching of the minority language; public use of the minority language, including traffic signs; media and publishing in the minority language; sports’ and cultural institutions, activities and facilities; cross-border relationships with the state in which the same language is used in identical or similar form. However, the most prominent trait of the above mentioned legal framework is its orientation towards creating opportunities and possibilities rather than mere obligations.

The above mentioned legal framework and above all the two aforementioned acts<sup>11</sup> offer to the Slovene minority in Italy opportunities that could be taken



6 Peace Treaty signed in Paris on February 10, 1947 between the Allied Powers and Italy. *Medunarodni ugovori Federativne narodne republike Jugoslavije, izdanje ministarstva inostranih poslova, 1947, No. 4.*

7 Special Statute as Annex II to the London Memorandum of consensus among the Governments of Italy, United Kingdom, United States of America and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, signed in London on October 5, 1954. *Službeni list SFRJ, Medunarodni ugovori, Beograd, 1954, No. 6, 7-9.*

8 Osimo Agreements between Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Italy, signed the 10.11.1975 in Osimo (Ancona). *Official Gazette of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Mednarodne pogodbe, Beograd, 1977, No. 1, 2-6.*

9 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted by the Council of Europe on November 10, 1994, open to signature on February 1, 1995, entered into force on February 1, 1998, ETS No. 157.

10 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted by the Council of Europe on June 25, 1992, open to signature on November 5, 1992, entered into force on March 1, 1998, ETS No. 148.

11 Act no. 482, of December 15, 1999 “Legal provisions regarding the protection of historic linguistic minorities” proposes a general framework for protection of linguistic minorities in Italy and Act no. 38, of February

advantage of to foster the progress of the linguistic minority. However, the Slovenian linguistic minority in Italy, as similar linguistic communities around the world, seems to be unable to take full advantage of such possibilities (Brezigar 2004: 72-77). The predominant attitude of minority members and institutions toward such opportunities is more reactive than proactive, more oriented toward maintaining the status quo, instead of striving for new solutions and adjusting to the new situations that the linguistic minority is facing. Change is predominantly viewed as a threat and perceived as if "*things were going from bad to worse,*" even if that may not always be the case (Brezigar 2004: 80-83). What is clearly missing in the current activities of the Slovene minority in Italy are a pragmatic, proactive approach toward minority issues and above all, a positive approach toward possibilities and opportunities that could be taken advantage of within the existent legal framework. A set of goals and activities that would help the minority to move into this direction could be developed by using marketing strategies, techniques and tools to foster the position of the Slovene language in the territory. However, the use of marketing strategies, techniques and tools calls for a specific approach toward minority issues, best incorporated into the concentric circles minority model. Therefore, I shall now explain how the approach called marketing minority languages works, and on what foundations, premises it is based.

#### MARKETING MINORITY LANGUAGES THROUGH THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES MINORITY MODEL

The concept of marketing minority languages lies on the concentric circles minority model. This model has been developed on the basis of the minority/majority relationship between the German and Danish population on the German/Danish border by Jørgen Kühl (1997). The concentric circles minority model explains the dynamics of organisation and harmonious coexistence of the minority and majority population in the territory inhabited by members of the two communities.

The concentric circles minority model describes who forms a minority. According to this model, the minority is formed by members of different intensity. The degrees of intensity of different members are represented by three concentric circles, which divide the minority into three layers: the core, the medium layer and the outer layer of the minority. The centre of the model is composed by core members of the minority. These are the people that declare themselves as minority members. They master the minority language; they share the values and the

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23, 2001, "Legal provisions for the protection of the Slovene linguistic minority in the region Friuli - Venezia Giulia/Furlanija - Julijska krajina".

culture of the minority. They take an active part in the minority cultural and sports life, they respect (local) customs related to the linguistic minority.

The medium layer of minority members is formed by people that use the minority language. But for them the minority language is not the only language they use with family members. This group of people does not tie the language to the affiliation to a linguistic or ethnic minority. Although the majority language is also a language they use with family members, they see themselves as minority members. These people characterise themselves as minority members, they adhere to a strong minority cultural tradition, and they use both minority and majority language with their family members.

The outer layer of minority members is formed by people who do not identify themselves as minority members, but they *“like the minority and minority members so much to enrol their children in minority language medium schools”*. The education of minority members will have an effect on their children, who will not only learn the language at school, but will also capture the values and culture of the minority. The third layer is therefore formed by a group of people who usually do not speak the minority language. However, they might be able to understand it, they enrol their children to minority cultural and sports associations, they participate in other minority activities, and they contribute to minority institutions and cherish typical (local) minority celebrations.

If I apply the concentric circles minority model to the situation of the Slovene minority in Italy, the core of the Slovene minority is formed by those who identify themselves as Slovenes, who take active part in the activities carried out by and for the Slovene minority in Italy. An example of this could be the celebration of the day of culture on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. This is a particular feast day, important for Slovene minority members, but unknown to Italian majority members.

The members of the medium layer usually use both the Slovene language and Italian language as their daily family-life language. They identify themselves as Slovenes but they do not see the use of Slovenian language as the ultimate sign of “being a Slovene”, or as a prerequisite for membership in the Slovene minority.

The outer layer of the Slovenian community is formed by people who do not speak the Slovenian language, but encourage their children to learn it. They support their children in their inclusion in the minority life through cultural and sports activities.

It is important to stress that all the three layers of people - the core, the medium and the outer layer - are parts of the minority, although in the medium and outer layer we can already notice phenomena of *creolisation*<sup>12</sup>.

According to the concentric circles minority model, members of the linguistic minority can move towards the core of minority or away from it. When they move away from the core and they possibly even leave the minority, they are *de facto* moving towards the core of another linguistic community. That could be, for example, the linguistic majority of the territory inhabited by members of the two linguistic communities. Such a process could be perceived as a path towards assimilation of the linguistic minority.

However, we can imagine a reverse process taking place as well. Members of the linguistic majority can be attracted to the linguistic minority, and can be even moving closer to the core of the minority. Such a process could be perceived as a kind of reverse assimilation, where the linguistic minority attracts and retains members of the linguistic majority. In practice, such a process is usually not a *de facto*, active or aggressive reverse assimilation of the linguistic majority, but more an effort to “replace” some of the members that have previously abandoned the linguistic minority. Such a process is usually aimed at counteracting a unilateral flow of loss of members of the linguistic minority towards the linguistic majority.

Even a superficial glance at the Slovenian minority in Italy makes it clear that most minority members could be found in the hard core of the minority. Due to a growing number of mixed marriages, the number of minority members in the outer layer has been steadily growing in the past decades. However, members in the medium layer seem to be scarce, especially due to a minority policy of refusing alleged traitors of the minority.

The fact that the minority is not confined to the core members, but includes also the medium and outer layer, indirectly means that the model dictates a completely different relationship towards people in the medium and outer layer from the previous ones. This is probably the biggest challenge that the Slovenian minority in Italy has been facing in recent years: people in the medium and outer layer should not be perceived as traitors who have abandoned their nest and moved away from the core of the minority toward the majority community, but a category of people who share minority values and are possible candidates for the accession to the core of the minority.



12 Creolisation refers to the generation of a new, mixed culture that is the result of interaction between the two linguistic communities.



Questions that need to be answered at this point stem from the relationship between the linguistic minority and linguistic majority and regard membership changes between the two communities: how can a person become a member of the linguistic minority, how can he/she move towards the core of the minority and how can he/she move away from the core minority?

Marketing minority languages is an approach to minority languages that tries to explain the dynamics and mechanisms of such membership changes in linguistic minorities. It provides tools to counteract the processes of assimilation of linguistic minority members. In addition, it brings new perspectives to the study of linguistic, ethnic and national minorities. Marketing minority languages relies on approaches and mechanisms stemming from social marketing, best defined as *“the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to improve their social welfare and that of society”* (Andreasen 1994: 110). Social marketing is therefore the systematic application of marketing strategies and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social good (Kotler and Zaltman 1971). Social marketing is sometimes perceived as the planning and implementation of standard commercial marketing practices to achieve non-commercial goals. However, this is an over-simplification of the function of social marketing. The primary goal of social marketing is the promotion of a social good, while in commercial marketing the goal is primarily a financial one. The approach of marketing minority languages therefore sees the language as a social good, important enough to be nurtured and preserved. Therefore, it considers the minority language a social commodity that can and should be acquired.

This view stems from the human capital theory and maintains that anyone who knows two languages – the minority and the majority one – can access to two linguistic and cultural frameworks. Such a person has at his/her disposal two tools for understanding and interpreting the world, and has access to two cultural heritages. Accordingly, the person that only knows one language, for example the majority one, can access to only one cultural heritage, to one view of the world. Therefore, the monolingual person is worse off than the person who knows two languages.

In a territory where two linguistic communities are present, inhabitants have at their disposal two linguistic means that could be taken advantage of. According to human capital theory, there is a big incentive for all the inhabitants of the territory to acquire the knowledge of the minority language. Therefore, also majority language speakers could and should learn and use the minority language. This is, of course, in net contrast with the *de facto* situation in Friuli – Venezia Giulia/Furlanija – Julijska krajina, where the predominant approach has been to teach both languages, Slovenian and Italian language, only to minority members,

while Italian speakers were neither obliged nor encouraged to learn the minority language. The result of such a policy has been that the Slovenian minority can only lose speakers, and not gain them; while the Italian majority can only gain speakers and not lose them. This has been proven to be a lose-lose strategy for the Slovenian minority in Italy, since the membership of the minority has been steadily declining, without any prospects of shifts.

An important consequence of the marketing approach towards linguistic minorities and the application of the concentric circles minority model is that membership of the linguistic minority is not fixed any more. Membership is not predetermined by birth, it is not grounded on decendency or “pure blood” succession and the linguistic minority is not formed by core members alone. According to this model and approach, people who are less devoted to the linguistic minority are also part of it, even if they do not cherish the minority language as members of the core do, or even if they may not be able to speak the minority language properly. They represent a means of spreading information about the minority community, about its culture and customs into the majority community. They represent potential core members of the minority. They can move to the core of the minority, if they wish to do so.

It is important to note that the concentric circles minority model outgrows the questions related to the promotion of minority community and minority language. The model puts forward the fact that the boundary between linguistic and ethnic communities is permeable, transitional in only one direction – from the minority to the majority, while it is obstructed in the opposite direction – from the majority to the minority. This is particularly true in the case of unbalanced language situations and lack of a marketing approach towards the minority language. In such a situation what happens is a one-way assimilation, represented in this model by the one way permeability of the concentric circles.

The concentric circles minority model pulls down the existing boundaries of what represents a minority and creates a theoretical framework for the expansion and progress of linguistic minorities. This represents a big shift from the classical understanding of ethnic and linguistic minorities, where the affiliation to the minority is *de facto* more or less predetermined on the basis of objective criteria, such as ethnic origin, religion, mother’s tongue, etc. This model empowers the already established criterion of self determination of every single individual as to which community he/she belongs. The concentric circles minority model empowers such a criterion by stressing the voluntary choice of each individual as to which ethnic and linguistic community he/she belongs. According to this model, members of the linguistic minority may decide to join the linguistic majority, and members of the linguistic majority may decide to join the linguistic minority. Therefore, the concentric circles minority model converts a nearly one-way

transitional boundary into a two-way transitional boundary, where minorities can “gain” members. This is of extreme importance, since a linguistic minority is condemned to decline or extinction, if it sets itself the goal of preserving its current members. However effective the minority is in maintaining its members and their descendants, the minority will lose some of them, primarily due to emigration and assimilation. The strategy for preserving minority communities that rests on “blood purity” of its members is therefore condemned to failure.

One of the ways how minorities can try to balance the transience of the boundary and foster the flow of people moving away from the majority towards the minority community is a suitable marketing strategy of the minority language, and therefore an indirect promotion of the linguistic (and ethnic) minority. With a marketing approach towards minority languages linguistic minorities can replace the drift of leavers from the linguistic minority with a drift of comers to the linguistic minority.

The marketing minority language approach is based on the premise that the linguistic minority can expand in terms of number of members and progress in terms of intensity and activity of members. Someone who is *a priori*, “by birth” a member of the linguistic majority can become a member of the linguistic minority. Someone who is in the outer layer of the minority can move towards the medium layer, or even to the minority’s core. Such transitions through concentric circles are possible by acquiring knowledge of the minority language, by increasing the use of minority language, through acceptance of minority values, traditions and customs.

#### MARKETING MINORITY LANGUAGES APPLIED TO THE SLOVENE MINORITY IN ITALY

Marketing minority languages is an approach that includes a comprehensive set of activities and measures that have a positive impact on the minority language in all domains of a person’s life. A comprehensive marketing strategy should therefore take into account the use of language at home, at work, during leisure activities, in contacts with authorities, etc. The ultimate goal of marketing minority languages is to create such an environment, where a person could actually “live” by using only the minority language.

Several researchers (Baker 2001; Cooper 1989; Fishman 1991, 2001; Giles et al. 1977, Williams 2000) have proposed models and frameworks to combat the decline of minority languages. Segments of these models and frameworks have been used by single minorities, such as the Basques, the Catalans, the Welsh, etc. to actually promote their minority languages (Brezigar 2002, 2004). According to the experiences of these communities, an encompassing marketing approach

should focus on four areas of marketing minority language: language acquisition, language prestige, language use and language planning. Therefore, I shall try to provide a short overview of the most significant problems that the Slovenian minority in Italy is facing in these 4 areas that are crucial for marketing minority languages. Moreover, I shall provide some basic guidelines on how to bring the existing approach toward minority issues within the Slovene minority in Italy in line with the principles underlying the marketing of minority languages.

In the domain of language acquisition we can distinguish between minority language acquisition by children and by adults. Children are expected to know the minority language when they enrol into Slovene-medium schools. Those who are not able to speak the minority language usually enrol into Italian-medium schools. According to the legal framework in place, Italian-medium schools can establish supplementary lessons of Slovene language within their curricula.<sup>13</sup> Some Italian-medium schools have already taken advantage of such opportunity. However, the possibilities in this field are far from exhausted.

If the Slovene minority strives to gain new members, teaching Slovene language to Italian-only speaking children could represent the first step towards fostering the Slovene linguistic minority. Therefore, according to the current situation regarding language acquisition by children and the opportunities offered by the legal framework, the Slovene minority should motivate, stimulate and persuade Italian-medium schools to offer their pupils the possibility to learn the minority language. Later on, some of these pupils should be attracted to the core of Slovenian minority.

However, the situation is quite the opposite. Slovene-medium schools fear that core minority members, who used to enrol their children into Slovene-medium schools, might enrol their children into Italian-medium schools with supplementary lessons of Slovene language. According to this line of thinking, instead of gaining new minority members, the Slovene minority would be losing the existing minority members faster than it has been happening in the past. The result of such an attitude is that the Slovene minority does not support attempts to gain new young speakers by making the most of opportunities offered by the legal framework, sticks to the old unsuccessful strategy of retaining the existing members and therefore subscribes to a future of slow, but steady decline.

In the field of language acquisition by adults, there seems to be a feeble, but constant interest by Italian-only speakers to learn the minority language (Brezigar 2004: 92). Payable courses of Slovene language are usually well attended, although most of them are not organised by institutions of the Slovene minority. Again,



13 See Bogatec and Bufon (1996, 1999) and Brezigar (2004: 90-114).

the focus of the Slovene minority is on the people who are already able to speak the minority language and not on those who may become minority members in 10 or 20 years, or whose children and grandchildren may represent the core of the Slovene minority in Italy in 30 years. A shift in focus on those who might be ready and willing to join the minority is probably the main task that the Slovene minority should undertake in the field of language acquisition.

In the field of language acquisition by adults the Slovenian minority in Italy faces one major obstacle: the low prestige of the Slovenian language in Italy. The prestige as “perceived status” of the minority language seems to be substantially lower compared to the prestige of the majority language, particularly among Italian-only speakers (Brezigar 2004: 83, 122-124).<sup>14</sup> This situation hinders efforts aimed at increasing the number of Italian speakers who learn and actually use the Slovenian language. Although it is *de facto* impossible to change the perception of language status in a short span of time, particular attention should probably be devoted to activities that would increase the value of the Slovene language and Slovene minority in the eyes of the Italian community.

A second obstacle that should be mentioned when dealing with Slovene language acquisition by adults is the transfer from “knowledge” into “use”.<sup>15</sup> Although a certain number of Italian-only speaking adults learn the Slovenian language, they do not actually use it in their everyday life. For them, it is as useful as knowing any other foreign language, or even less. Knowledge of minority language is treated nearly as folklore, and not as a usable or even necessary means of communication in the territory where two linguistic communities live. This kind of behaviour among Italian speakers who have learned Slovenian is supported by the behaviour and values of the Slovenian minority in two ways. Firstly, according to the traditional values of the Slovenian minority, the main reasons to speak the Slovenian language are affective ones, and not economical ones (Brezigar 2004: 97, 103-104).<sup>16</sup> Since Italian speakers cannot easily develop affective reasons to use the minority language, which are basically incorporated in the education and upbringing of most members of the Slovene minority, they stick to the majority one. Secondly, Slovene language speakers do not expect Italian speakers to use the minority language. Even if the Italian speaker is able to communicate in the minority language, members of the Slovene minority would switch to the Italian language when communicating with him/her. As a consequence of the behaviour and values of the Slovene minority, Italian-speakers are not expected to actually use the minority language at any time, although they have learned it. And if Italian



14 For a thorough analysis of the status of the Slovene language in Italy see Kaučič-Baša (1993).

15 On transfer from “knowledge” into “use”, please see also Novak-Lukanovič (2006).

16 See also Bogatec and Bufon (1996, 1999).

speakers do not use the minority language, there is little chance that they could become minority members and move towards the core of the linguistic minority. A small, initial step forward in this field could be made by shaping and promoting economical reasons for the use of minority language both among minority and majority language speakers.

A further obstacle that hinders the progress of the Slovene minority in Italy regards language planning. In this domain, the situation of Slovenes in Italy is somewhat complicated. The Slovenes in Italy being a part of the nation that mostly lives across the border in Slovenia, where Slovenian is the majority language, the linguistic minority does not have either full responsibility or “full powers” to deal with language planning.<sup>17</sup> In practice this means that several institutions in the Republic of Slovenia de facto take care of language planning, while there’s no designed institution that takes care of the language planning that is necessary for the survival of the Slovene linguistic minority in Italy. The minority language, in fact, needs to be adjusted to the Italian legal, political and administrative system, where this system differs from the one in Slovenia. The lack of minority language planning, together with a slow and selective transfer of language planning results from Slovenia, poor language acquisition and decreasing number of speakers, make it difficult for minority members to “live” only in the minority language.

## CONCLUSION

Marketing minority languages as an approach towards the preservation of minority languages presumes that it is possible to motivate inhabitants of a territory, where two linguistic communities live, to learn and use the minority language in their everyday life. In accordance with the concentric circles minority model, it assumes that linguistic minority members can move from one linguistic community to another, and that they can be motivated to come closer to the core of the linguistic minority. As such, marketing minority language can represent a valid tool in the fight for survival of minority languages, as well as a means against assimilation of the linguistic minority members.

By applying the concept of marketing minority languages to the Slovenian minority in Italy, it is clear that the Slovene minority in Italy still has opportunities for improvement in the field of marketing minority languages. However, the



17 Full responsibility and “full powers” refer to the limited function that the Slovene minority has in the field of language planning. The responsibility for language planning lies within institutions and individuals that deal with language planning in Slovenia, where Slovenian is the majority language. Therefore, the Slovene minority in Italy has only a marginal role and is expected to represent only a small piece in the mosaic of Slovene language planning.

reason for concern in the case of the Slovenian minority in Italy is another: the linguistic minority still seems to be rejecting the only long-term viable solution for its prosperity and progress: a planned, carefully led and managed process to attract new minority members and retain them. The efforts of the Slovene minority in this field are still too sporadic, left to chance rather than planned, feared rather than exploited.

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