

ON LITERATURES IN DIASPORAS AND THE LIFE SPAN OF THEIR MEDIA*

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Almost one year after the first choice of my topic, I would today feel more comfortable with a concentration of its focus on something like this: »On Poetic Language in a Literature of a Linguistic Diaspora at the Break of Its Continuity with Its Native Language.«

1.0 By narrowing down the focus, our discussion seems to be reduced to a string of known and self-evident facts, and to an argument with a rather simple, contradictory proposition. The self-evident part rests with the process of assimilation in societies, the contradictory part of the argument with the fact that the break of the umbilical cord between a homeland and a diaspora not necessarily means an end of the existence of a poetic language in a diaspora. In the moment the native resources of a language die out, the poetic talent in an ethnic diaspora creates already in the medium of the new adopted language. This fact, most obvious, confirmed by observation — in our opinion — deserves a sociolinguistic interpretation.

And it stands to reason that in assimilative processes everywhere the strength of a minority ethnic community, its social make-up, and its cohesiveness may be important factors. In smaller ethnic communities, such as those of Slovene Americans, as far as it can be judged on the basis of their three-four generational span,¹ ethnic enclaves preserve their language in family life of their first generation, rarely of the second generation; slightly longer in church life, in religious tradition, but certainly not on the street. In formal and informal situations the communication is in English. When children leave home, they very often leave their ethnic communities for good. The higher is their education they bring to America, the longer they cling to their Slovenian language; the higher is their education they acquire in English, the easier and quicker is their Americanization.

In sociological terms every such minority community in America, dominated by a preoccupation with folklore, ethnic customs, dances, ethnic art

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¹ The notion of generations is crucial in the process of ethnic assimilations. An American immigrant of the first generation is a person born in the old country; the second generation immigrant — a person born in the U.S.A. from parents of first generation; the third generation immigrant — a person born in the U.S.A. from parents of second generation.

and ethnic food, tends to preserve a kind of »residual ethnicity«.² Even in the Slovene American communities which may be rightly proud of the fact that they descend from a high language-centered society and culture as the Slovene culture and society is in Slovenia today, this stream of ethnical culture gets steadily shallower and less able to act as a creative agent in the cultural life of the community as a whole. The fossilized ethnic life holds no attraction to the educated young ethnics who can give expression to their talents only through the medium of the dominant American culture.

Thus, by implication, a Slovene American creative literature with a Slovene poetic language can exist and exists only in its first generation of men of letters, e.g., Etbin Kristan (1867—1953), Ivan Zorman (1889—1975), Anna Praček-Krasna (1900—1988), Karl Mauser (1918—1977), Ivan Dolenc, Irma Ožbalt, Tom Ložar in Canada, writers and poets — born, educated and, as a rule, first published in Slovenia. A second generation of poets and writers of Slovene descent, e.g., Frank Mlakar (1913—1967), Rose Mary Prosen — born, educated and first published in America, invariably creates in English.³ Louis Adamic (1899—1951) is an exception: born and partially schooled in Slovenia, he withered away from Slovene language; he first published in America in English and became known as an English writer. There are no first generation Slovene Americans, born, educated, first published in Slovenia, who would create in English in America, and no men of letters of Slovene descent, born, educated in America who would write and publish in Slovene in America.

It is to these facts that we wish to extend our sociolinguistic model for investigation of standard languages.⁴

2.0 On the whole, literary standards, or simpler literary languages, perform two sorts of actions in society. First, the so-called *inherent* functions, i.e. operations for which a human language exists as a tool of communication; and secondly, the so-called *social* functions, i.e. operations which are ascribed to human language because of its existence as a tool of communication in a society.⁵

Living language is functional, i.e. serving its »efficiency« if it is able of regeneration, or simply of change; on intellectual level — capable to meet the needs of its users as an instrument of referential meaning; on the level of poetic expression — adequate to meet the needs of a well-developed matrix of emotional and poetic expressiveness.

In indigenous (natural, primary) speech communities where a standard language really serves as a means of communication, linguistic devices are always available via *intellectualization* modification of the means available to

² For the concept of »residual ethnicity«, see J.A. Fishman and V.C. Nahirny, »Organizational and leadership interest in language maintenance,« *Language Loyalty in the United States*, ed. J.A. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 151.

³ For Frank Mlakar, note in particular his novel: *He, The Father* (1950), and his drama: *Francie* (1966); for Rose Mary Prosen: *Poems by Rose Mary Prosen* (1971), and *O The Ravages* (1977).

⁴ Cf., Rado L. Lencek, »On Dilemmas and Compromises in the Evolution of Modern Slovene,« *Slavic Linguistics and Language Teaching*, ed. Th.F. Magner (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1976), 112—152. — Idem., *O jeziku in zavesti narodnega porekla*. New York: Slovene Ethnic Heritage Studies Center, 1978.

⁵ Cf., *The Word and Verbal Art. Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovsky*. Translated and edited by John Burbank and Peter Steiner. Foreword by Rene Wellek. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977.

language for new functions — either through activization of grammatical categories and forms no more in active use in a language,⁶ or through adaptation of patterns and models of genetically related languages,⁷ or through creation or simply adaptive borrowing to extend the lexicon as far as its speakers need for everyday communication.⁸ In the language of immigration, i.e. in secondary speech communities, in its non-educated strata, such needs can be stimulated only by contact with the dominant speech community and activated by vulgar, non-adapted borrowings (e.g. *kara* 'car', *kare* [plural], *bojs* 'boy' *bojsi* [plural], and most crude loan translations from English (e.g. *maš rada tukej?* 'do you like it here?').⁹

Similarly, the poets and writers of a primary speech community in order to express themselves more adequately, draw continuously from the living resources of its rural dialects and dialectal usages. This kind of adequacy, nourished only within a primary speech community, is less likely to effect the purely rational needs of expression, but rather falls within the more intimate personal life of its users — to impart a more vivid and intimate flavor to a poetic language. This stimulus to enrichment of the poetic and standard language, is in the long run entirely absent in a secondary speech community. And these seem to be the ultimate limits of the search for the appropriate expression on intellectual and poetic level, above all of a poet's search for a verbal »realization« of a poetic image. It is no accident that such creative search can not be done by a second generation poet in emigration.

3.0 The social function of literary standards express relationships between language and society in which a language is used. These functions are entirely symbolic though they do represent societal forces, we call them functions, with which language influences speech communities and societal reactions, we call them attitudes with which speech communities respond these forces and functions.

Four such functions are distinguished, and three attitudes. A *separatist* and a *unifying* function — the unifying function arises as a consequence of the fact that usually a standard unites several dialectal areas into a single speech community; the separatist function, as a result of the fact that normally a standard sets off a community as separate from other speech communities — are correlated with an attitude of *loyalty*. A *prestige* function —

⁶ The intellectualization of Modern Slovene on the grammatical and word-formational level does not significantly differ from the same processes in other Slavic languages. The language possessed formal resources for the categories of abstract thought, but the noneducated speaker did not make much use of them. Thus, the category of verbal aspect, inherent as it is in the grammatical structure of the Slavic languages, in spoken Slovene became dangerously weakened in competition with the category of »Aktionsart«; but at a certain moment of its history, it was activated in the literary language. The use of passive constructions is being developed much further than it existed in the vernacular. The forms of some participles, certain types of adjectives, verbal substantives were either renovated or resurrected under the influence of Church Slavonic. Cf., Rado L. Lencek, *The Structure and History of the Slovene Language* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1982), 289—290.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 291—292.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 292—293.

⁹ Cf., Joseph Paternost, »Slovenian language on Minnesota's Iron Range: Some sociolinguistic aspects of language maintenance and language shift«, *The Dilemma of the Melting Pot: The Case of the South Slavic Languages*, ed. R. L. Lencek and Th. F. Magner (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 125.

reflecting the consciousness of pride derived from possession of a standard literary language — is correlated with an attitude of language *pride*. A *frame-of-reference* function — functioning of the standard language as a system serving to orient the speaker in matters of correctness and of perception and evaluation of poetic speech — is correlated with an attitude of *awareness of a norm*. When systematized into a sociolinguistic mini-system, these functions and attitudes serve us not only as a guide to understand the language planning practiced for today and tomorrow; they may also be used as parameters to measure the development of language in general and their literary standards of yesterday and tomorrow, we submit — as well as models to illustrate the terminal conditions of the existence of languages and their final evaporation in a society.

A TABLE accompanying this paper is intended to illustrate these positions for three stages in the evolution of the Slovene language in the old country, and very tentatively two stages in the evolution of the Slovene language in the emigration. The stages in the evolution of Slovene at home are posited at the levels of its natural dialects, its ethnic vernacular, and of today's contemporary standard language (CSS = Contemporary Standard Slovene). The stages in the changes of language in Slovene American communities are suggested to exist at the levels of the Slovene language use in its first generation (column »Emigration 1«) and at the level of a second or/and a third or fourth generation (column »Emigration 2«). In column »Emigr. 1«, we separate the language usage of non-educated (including those with no more than elementary education) and educated speakers; in the »Pre-CSS« language situation, the »Dialect« and the ethnic »Koine« usages represent non-educated usage, the Contemporary Standard Slovene (CSS), by definition — an educated language.

TABLE

Sociolinguistic categories function/attitude	In the old country			In emigration			
	Pre-CSS		CSS	Emigr. 1		Emigr. 2	
	Dialect	Koine		Non-Ed.	Ed.	SLE.	ENG.
Separatist/Loyalty	+	±*	+	0	+	0	+
Unifying/Loyalty	+	+	+	+	+	0	+
Prestige/Pride	+	—*	+	—*	+	0	+
Frame of Reference/ Awareness of Norm	0*	(0*)	+	—	+	0	+

A »plus« in our Table indicates that the level of the language has or had a major role in a particular sociolinguistic function, and is or has been significantly the object of the associated attitude; a »minus« indicates that neither seem the case. A »zero« in our Table indicates that a particular sociolinguistic function and its attitude seem to be not applicable for a particular level of the language, i. e. not yet developed in the »Pre-CSS« evolution, or not practical any more in the »In Emigration« column. An asterisk (*) suggests that the indicated sociolinguistic function/attitude differs in degree or/and quality from the same sociolinguistic function/attitude characterizing modern standard language. A »parentheses« () indicates less specific evidence.

In more concrete terms, in reference to our »In Emigration« columns, we could summarize sociolinguistic situation as follows: The first generation of emigrants speaks its native language as brought from the old country:

the non-educated — one of its dialectal varieties, the educated — a colloquial form of the Contemporary Standard or literary Slovene, at least one of its varieties. After some time, both levels of this language — under the impact of English, the dominant language and the language of prestige — heavily and increasingly abound in borrowings. The subsequent waves of non-educated immigrants join their relatives and neighborhoods in America where Slovene dialects prevail; thus dialects tend to strengthen and perpetuate in emigration. Individual educated arrivals, some with good knowledge of English, however, tend not to stay with ethnic communities.

At first generation level the knowledge of English among the non-educated is mostly passive, receptive — and the unifying and separatist functions of Slovene lose their relevance, whereas the attitude of linguistic loyalty still persists. There is, of course, no room for the frame-of-reference function and for the awareness of norm in this situation. On the other hand, the educated emigrant would tend to keep sociolinguistic categories, functions and attitudes toward his native standard language, long after his immigration — more or less intact.

It has been from among such immigrants, educated, well versed to write Slovene, very often already published in the old country, that the tradition of a Slovene poetic language has been, in different periods of time, but again and again transplanted to emigration communities in America. Limited to the first generation individual poets and writers exclusively, very often contingent upon their personal ties and links with the old country literature production and with literary movements at home, it never became an autonomous, self subsistent tradition on its own. It remained alive during the life time of individual poets and writers in emigration, but died and vanished with their death.

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