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 Language Issues in an Emerging Expanded European Union - Case Study on
 Slovenia

Abstract

The paper deals with communication in an emerging expanded European Union, as seen by the future university-educated population of Slovenia. A survey was conducted on a random sample of 100 3-year students of 10 different programmes at the University of Ljubljana. The survey was aimed at discovering the future status of the Slovene language within the framework of the European Union as well as the status of Slovenes and Slovenia. The students' opinions on the present situation and their linguistic (and cultural) diversity awareness were investigated. The authors deduce to what extent Slovenia and Slovenes are prepared in the field of languages to enter the EU, and make some suggestions about how the state should act in order to facilitate this process. The analysis shows that Slovene students are not fully aware of language related issues concerning Slovenia's entering the European Union.

I. Introduction

With Slovenia's independence in 1991 the Slovene language became a sole national language with all the essential functions (earlier, it had not been used e.g. in the army and in international relations). Thus it rose for the first time in its history from subordination to another language.¹ The consequences of Slovenia's integration into the European Union (EU) will be twofold: on the one hand, free movement of labour force will change the role of Slovene within Slovenia, as there will be more foreigners living and working in Slovenia, and on the other hand, Slovene will become one of the languages of a multinational "state", within which Slovenia expects enhanced international cooperation in various fields. Its present economic power would mostly place Slovenia in the position of a subordinate partner. According to the present regulations, Slovene should acquire the status of an equal official language of the EU.

Having made the political decision of joining the EU, Slovenia must take on the responsibility to ensure a future existence and fully-fledged development of Slovene, and within the framework of the EU, to provide due protection for Slovene as a small language². If not, it agrees to a degradation of Slovene to a third-class language³, and

¹Besides Slovene, Italian and Hungarian are official languages on limited territories of the respective ethnic minorities. The status of all three languages is defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. In Yugoslavia, Serbo-Croat was constitutionally not the superior national language, but in reality it dominated both Slovene and Macedonian.

²Within the EU context, Slovene is a small language at least in three respects: in respect of the number of speakers (2 million native speakers as opposed to 100 million native speakers of German, around 60 million native speakers of French, of Italian, and of English, etc.), in respect of the economic and technological power of Slovenia (as the home country of the majority of speakers of Slovene), and in respect of the relatively weak influence Slovene culture (particularly literature) has had in European history. (Cf. Toporišič 1991: 143, "To me small language is a language of a relatively small (less important...) community within the framework of a large (more important...) one, ..."; transl. R. Ž.) As such, Slovene needs special care in the EU, because as Nelde (1991: 60) puts it, "numerically weak or psychologically weakened language groups tend towards assimilation...". And Toporišič (1994: 95, 139) claims that the Slovene readily assimilates to foreigners by switching to their language in order to show his/her intellectual capabilities for language-learning. In this way he tries to compensate for his/her feelings of inferiority arising from centuries of oppression and from the small number of speakers of Slovene (ibid.).

³Rupel (1993) says that Slovene reached second category (when it got freed from the domination of the Serbo-Croat language and rose from the level of third-class and local language); he gives English as an example of first-category language.

consequently to a considerable degradation of Slovenes (with Slovene as their only first language), at least of one or two generations that have not yet mastered another language and developed a new identity. At the same time, Slovenia should prepare its citizens for fruitful coexistence with foreigners inside Slovenia as well as for a successful life and upward social mobility outside their home country, mostly by providing them with foreign-language mastery⁴. In doing so, it is crucial to take account of the views and expectations of Slovene citizens, but also to inform and educate them about the consequences brought by language contact. With not enough action from the state, the very increase in the number of foreigners could have serious repercussions: much of Slovene pre- and post-independence nationalism (directed especially at members of the other Yugoslav nations), which had its roots in various things, manifested itself through language differentiation. As the answer to any problem or to any accusation of nationalism, the domination of Serbo-Croat over Slovene would be brought up. In the EU, this kind of behaviour could be a great handicap to Slovenia⁵. From Slovenia's political confidence in its success in the EU, and from its efforts to enter the EU as soon as possible, one can conclude that the Slovenes are fairly well-prepared for accepting multiethnicity, language diversity and "foreignness" on the whole. On the other hand, the fact that Slovenia's 1991 independence and the accompanying nationalistic atmosphere are less than ten years behind might lead one to conclude that such feelings may not be completely dead yet, that Slovenes' national and linguistic identity and self-confidence are not yet very strong, and that Slovenes may still feel somewhat threatened. Another indicator of the atmosphere in Slovenia is the even more recent and similarly unfavourable response to the influx of war refugees from the former Yugoslavia (cf. Nečak Lük 1997: 1418).

The idea of the EU includes fruitful coexistence of diverse nations, cultures, and languages, and the preservation of this diversity, prevention of the melting pot effect (European Commission, MLIS 1995: 11 and elsewhere). This goal can only be pursued with extensive promotion and financial support of multilingualism, and by providing appropriate school programmes aimed at multilingualism; but this should be done in all member countries, not just in those that do not have a major language as their national language. In this respect the MLIS report (European Commission 1995) puts particular emphasis on the development of translation tools, translation practice, and language engineering industry in general, in order to enable individual languages to participate in the world without having to rely on some higher-category language. At the same time, this would facilitate an expansion of the markets to the areas of the lesser spoken languages. But the market forces pose a threat, since many (small and medium-size) enterprises may well prove unwilling to deal with the adaptations for small markets, which are as a rule also accessible through a major language. For the most part, the MLIS report (ibid.) leaves the care for the preservation of individual languages and for the language-specific translation and language engineering issues to the member countries concerned. In this respect linguistically small markets are most vulnerable, as it may be rather difficult to stimulate the private sector to invest in this field, owing to the rather large sums of money required.

The present education system in Slovenia only has one obligatory foreign language in primary school, from 5th through 8th grade. In the schoolyear 1995/96, there were

⁴A major factor in the increasing necessity for foreign-language mastery is the fact that the line between a life inside and outside one's country is becoming blurred, due to the fast development of the so called information society. And "at worst, citizens unable to communicate comfortably in the widely spoken languages could be *denied full participation* in our increasingly information-based society" (European Commission, MLIS 1995: 7).

⁵"The climax of political language conflict is reached when all conflict factors are combined in a single symbol, language, and quarrels and struggles in very different areas (politics, economy, administration, education) appear under the same heading language conflict" (Nelde 1991: 61). It is a fact that language is a most "suitable" category for differentiation and stigmatization. If an economically subordinate country should get itself into such things, it will most probably become even more firmly fixed in its underprivileged position.

81.4% of primary-school pupils with English as their first foreign language, 17.6% with German, and 4.1% with the language of the environment (on minority territories). The ratio between English and German as the first foreign language stays more or less the same in secondary school. As their second foreign language, more than half of 95/96 fourth-year secondary-school pupils studied German; English and Italian were roughly equal in the second and third place, and all other languages lagged far behind.⁶ Some two-year secondary-school programmes do not even include a foreign language. Quite a few "full-length" (four-year) secondary-school programmes, though, have three foreign languages, but the third mostly has an ephemeral, non-four-year status. Primary and secondary schools with German as the first foreign language are concentrated in the country's east part (in Štajerska and Koroška - close to the Austrian border, the districts of Novo mesto and Kočevje - once populated by many Germans), which indicates that the (potentially or historically) "natural" bilingual situation has been well exploited. But interest in German as the first foreign language is diminishing even in these areas (with English taking up its place); German is increasingly being taught as the second foreign language or on a voluntary basis. (The primary school reform, currently underway, will introduce a nine-year primary-school programme, with an obligatory first foreign language taught from 4th through 9th grade and an elective second foreign language from 7th through 9th grade. The choice of the first language (and the selection of the second foreign language electives) will be in the domain of each individual school (as has also been the case so far), and is expected to reflect the desires of the children's parents. Therefore, it may reasonably be expected that the first choice will mostly continue to be English. The completion of the reform is scheduled for 2000.)

The education system seems more or less suited to bilingualism Slovene - English, at least on the level of proficiency, although some secondary-school programmes with three foreign languages (the third mostly an elective) demonstrate the goal of multilingualism fairly well. Judging from the total of first foreign language lessons taken by the average Slovene secondary-school leaver, his/her level of mastery of English is quite high. This gives the Slovene education system some credit, since the MLIS report claims that "while the basis is excellence in the mother tongue, proficiency in foreign languages is becoming almost as important" (European Commission 1995: 5). But after maximally four years of learning, the level of one's second foreign language cannot on the average be anywhere near fluency. (However, the seven years' learning time of the arriving system (3 + 4) will make an important step in the direction of multilingualism.)

The EU has its official languages (at this point 11), which are equal in status and into which all official documents of the EU are translated; but it also has its working languages, especially English and French. In reality, then, these two languages dominate over the others, and it can be expected that any future language learning will include at least one of these, for purely practical reasons. The choice of languages in the concept of multilingualism is thus to some extent predetermined, despite the MLIS principles (European Commission 1995). And if one believes Nelde (1991: 70), who says that "as is well known, learning motivation in adolescents declines significantly in the acquisition of third and fourth languages", then the only possibility for attaining multilingualism would be intensive language training of children. But a more probable outcome is that the level of a third language (second foreign) will on the average be lower, with proficiency achieved in only one foreign language. This would run counter to the principles of the MLIS report, but in accordance with the present situation in the majority of the domains of life (in Slovenia). Many of these have English as their link language (trade, information, etc.). With few exceptions (e.g. Hungary), the high prestige value of English in European countries endangers all multilingualism planning in schools (Nelde 1991: 70). But if English enjoys such prestige, this is probably not

⁶The numerical data are from Rudolf 1998.

accompanied by some great uneasiness and feelings of endangeredness. And this may be a sign that people have come to accept English as their (future) second language, serving as the language of supraregional communication, and that there is a kind of functional bilingualism, or diglossia, emerging. If the EU and the member countries try to realize the idea of multilingualism despite the practical character of diglossia "mother tongue + English", they obviously have a long way to go. On the other hand, natural bi- or multilingualism is present almost throughout Europe (in language- and state-border areas), and this gives the concept of multilingualism a much firmer basis, at the same time preventing the emergence of bilingualism "mother tongue + English" (Nelde 1991: 70). It seems, then, that a multilingualism of the kind "mother tongue + English + regionally determined language/s" is a likely development.⁷ Still, with increased mobility of people within the EU the influence of natural bi-/multilingualism can be reduced quite a lot. And any instance of diglossia (especially one involving a nation-bound language in the role of link language) can easily lead to a conflict situation, to feelings of superiority or inferiority, and even to attempts at applying linguistic supremacy to other domains of life. This is why it is important to de-emotionalize the conflict indicator, language (Nelde 1991: 71), but also to try to protect regional languages by systematically developing them in all language functions and varieties as well as by preparing suitable school programmes. These (in Slovenia) should provide a good command of speaking and writing skills, and broadly based knowledge of all aspects of Slovene (or the language in question), with focus on the standard (literary) variety.

Some countries have attempted to protect their languages by means of an advisory language office or by means of legislation.⁸ With this kind of actions, care must be taken not to label a link language or any other language as "an enemy", so as not to encourage nationalism, but to present care for the mother tongue merely as protection of some pride-worthy ethnic characteristics. (In this respect, attention must be paid not to over-indulge in expelling foreign-language traits which invade the language.) The relatively small number of native speakers of Slovene and the relative smallness of the Slovene market, the peripheral status of Slovenia in the EU (at least in the beginning), the EU's practical need for one or more link languages and the consequent incomplete range of uses of the Slovene language, the expected mobility of people in the EU, and the above mentioned historical-psychological traits of Slovenes are all factors which could contribute to the fact that Slovene may well have a lot of difficulty in the future as regards its existence and development. The strongest support should come from the state of Slovenia. But the possibility of similar future developments of many other small European languages⁹ renders the goal of retaining Europe's language diversity a difficult task and calls for action from the EU as well.

⁷It is odd, in this respect, that after the politically understandable abandonment of Serbo-Croat in primary school (following Slovenia's independence), there seem to be no attempts at reviving interest in Croatian among the Slovene youth. After all, Croatian is the principal language of a neighbouring country and although there are no classic bilingual/minority areas, a kind of natural language-contact bilingualism certainly does exist in the state-border region.

⁸"In order to promote the Slovene language cultivation and to influence patterns of language behaviour a Council for the promotion of the Slovene language in public use functioned during 1980-1990" (Nečak Lük 1997). The Slovene Ministry of Culture launched a project to establish a national language office a few years ago, but it has not been realized. Besides the Constitution and certain international declarations, some legislative steps towards the protection of Slovene could be seen in various clauses of many laws, such as the Citizenship Law, the Standardization Law, the Mass Media Law, the Criminal Action Law, etc. However, these legislative regulations differ from the notorious French law of the use of French (cf. Koch 1991: 156-7).

⁹According to the MLIS report (European Commission 1995: 9), there are over 45 national and regional languages and major regional variants on the territory of the EU full member states, spoken by 380 million people. After Nelde (1991), there are around 35 languages on the territory of the European Economic Community. It is obvious from these figures that the EU includes numerous small languages, if we consider the fact that just native speakers of the four largest languages account for 284 million, although it is true that many of these may be bilingual (German - 100, French - 65, Italian - 60, English - 59) (data from Gunnemark: 1991, cited in Zadavec: 1996).

II. Methodology

The study is based on a survey conducted by means of a questionnaire with 34 questions. We decided to poll 100 third-year students at the University of Ljubljana. At the end of the academic year, they have been moving in university circles for at least three years, which to our thinking is reason enough to assume that they have already formed their opinions on the related issues, and that their views are no longer likely to undergo radical changes; thus, these views offer a rather reliable image of this generation of university-educated Slovenes. We took ten groups of ten randomly chosen students, each group from a different study programme, and made an effort to make as variegated a selection of programmes as possible, comprising students of diverse orientations and social and geographical backgrounds. The selection was as follows: chemistry, biology, sociology, communication theory, civil engineering, electrical engineering, dentistry, economics, landscape architecture, agronomy. Students of Slovene, English, and other languages were deliberately left out, as the very choice of their study subjects and their own interests might influence their answers too much; in a sense, these students do not represent the average (foreign) language users. However, in the future they may prove notable moulders of public opinion on the topic. As such, they might be an interesting group for a similar survey.

The sample is small and it ignores the numerical relations between students of individual subjects; still, it can indicate roughly the situation with the coming university-educated population in Slovenia, their desires and their expectations for the future.

III. Analysis Results and Discussion

Since the individual questions that the study tries to investigate are interconnected, and individual replies to items of the questionnaire often highlight more than only one of them, the discussion will not answer the questions separately but as integrated thematic units which formed during the analysis.

The study tried to answer the following questions:

- A Do Slovenes find multilingualism a quality? Does monolingualism of their community (with Slovene or hypothetically with English) bother them?
- B What is the future of Slovene (in the eyes of Slovenes)?
- C What kind of language policy do Slovenes want in the European Union (EU)?¹⁰
What kind of language policy would suit Slovenes and the Slovene language?
- D What kind of feelings is a major link language associated with?
- E In what way and to what extent are Slovenes prepared for the EU - both with respect to foreigners coming to Slovenia to live and work there, and with respect to their own going abroad?
- F Is the function of a major link language only the basic communication or does it involve a good command of the language on all its levels, all-round communication in every possible way? Which do Slovenes find more important, quality or quantity of the level of link language mastery?

Equality vs. practicality

The responses indicate that the students do not value very highly an EU system which would regulate only one language as the official (supraregional) language in the EU. As much as 66.7% want an equal status for Slovene among all other European languages, at least as far as those official documents are concerned which relate to all member countries. Although this percentage is high, the number of those who think

¹⁰The respondents were asked to understand the term EU in its broadest sense, i. e. including associate members and other candidates for full membership.

official documents should only be in English and/or the three largest European languages still strikes as rather high, the more so if we consider the fact that even now all official documents are being translated into all of the 11 official languages. The majority of the students apparently wish to live in an EU with a coexistence of all European languages. They seem to value foreign language mastery and a language-diverse society, as none of them is impartial to any European language dying out. However, they can't have had in mind all of the European languages, since very few have a rough picture of the number of languages existing on the territory of an extended EU. They state an average number of 17.7. This figure differs greatly from the reality, even if we count only the present full members of the EU.⁷ The respondents are only partly aware of European language diversity, and apparently they are not really interested in small third-category languages, of whose existence they are even not aware. The fact that Slovene used to be one of these only a while ago seems to have disappeared from their consciousness. A mere 17.2% of the students find it necessary for all official EU documents to be translated into all of the EU's languages, not only into individual members' official languages.

The opinion that all languages should be equal is expressed in all more or less direct questions about the status of languages. However, with questions aimed at the usage of foreign languages in individual functions and instances of communication, the students hesitate about or even refute their conviction about equality; rather, they opt for a more practical view, namely the domination of English as the sole language of communication among speakers of different languages. As many as 43.2% think that foreigners coming to live and work in Slovenia need to master only Slovene and English. If we add the other combinations featuring Slovene and English together, the figure far exceeds one half; only 23.2% opt for Slovene only, with no other language necessary, although this seems a reasonable principle for a community trying to manifest equality of languages. Knowledge of any other language proves desirable, but far from obligatory. English is far ahead also among languages that individuals working in certain professions in Slovenia should master. A fat 96.9% think that all students in Slovenia should speak English. Not far behind (73.9%) are those who would like all students to know German too; the need for further languages seems a lot more insubstantial. 77.9% of the students believe that all Slovene citizens should master one or more foreign languages. 56.7% of these require only English, and another 21.6% want English and German. The need to speak English either solely or in combination with other languages is expressed by all of the above 77.9%. Wavering between equality of all languages and the consciousness of the practicality of having only a few link languages can also be noticed elsewhere. Although 43.7% of the students think that the EU should have a single official language, nearly all of whom count on English, no more than 10.4% believe that EU documents should only be in English. Most of those who wish to have only one official language apparently favour a flexible concept of official language, with the EU not only permitting but also supporting the development of the other languages.

If we take a look at the situation in the EU, where the official languages are supposed to be equal in rights, we see that in fact there are also the so-called working languages, used in the European institutions. Besides English, the working languages include French and to a lesser extent German, but Slovenes seem to feel too little connection to French to have an attachment to it. The hesitation in the EU and its institutions between formal equality of languages and preservation of language diversity on the one hand, and a usage reflecting tendency to privilege and promote English and maybe some other language on the other, is paralleled by the hesitation among the students polled.

Besides the fact that it is the language of the richest, the biggest, and the most important European country, an important factor in explaining the status of German among Slovene students is, naturally, its bordering on Slovenia and the Slovene

language. German's supremacy over French in Slovenia is understandable; it is due to the geographical distance of the French language, the present economic dominance of Germany, and to Slovenes' cultural bonds to the other Central European nations, including Germans, who are the strongest and the most influential within this cultural circle. A large part of Slovenia (Štajerska, Gorenjska, the central region with Ljubljana) received the Austrian television signal long before the introduction of cable television. Now, cable system operators offer packages which include around seven German-speaking channels and mostly only one French-speaking channel. Slovenes are connected to Austria and consequently to the German language also by common history, as the break-up of Austria-Hungary is not as far away as Napoleon's short-lived Illyrian Provinces, when Slovenes were under French rule. The fact that the case of German has more to do with belonging to a common cultural circle than with some curious Slovene-German bond is confirmed by the success Slovene folk bands have in both Austria and Germany, or rather everywhere where "Oberkrainer"¹¹ music is popular.

Slovene language and Slovenes

The students do not see Slovene as a language of much international prominence. Although two thirds would want several official languages in the EU, they mostly favour the combination English - French - German (43.6%), and the triple combination is even further ahead if we add the variants that featured a fourth and a fifth language (72.7%).

A rather large percentage (87.4%) want Slovene papers of identification with foreign languages added. 67%, however, support Slovene names for domestic enterprises, and only 1% of the students want these to be English. This discrepancy seems rather unusual since enterprises need an international ID just as much as individuals, but it can be explained in terms of a recent mass media campaign against foreign names of domestic enterprises (among which English names prevailed). And then there are the 24.5% who wish these names to belong to whatever language or even be made up, nonsensical, as long as they are easy to read and pronounce in as many European languages as possible. And these 24.5% match badly with those who want English to be an official language (instead of the present 11 official languages). The majority of the latter want the names of domestic enterprises to be Slovene, which should even be regulated legally; in their view, then, English would be just the language of communication among member countries, and even this only on the level of formal, operational communication, while individual languages would remain on their national territories, their existence facilitated by legislations.

The majority of the students opt for some kind of bi- or multilingualism of all Slovenes. This is supported by the above mentioned fact that 43.2% expect foreigners coming to Slovenia to speak both Slovene and English, a further 8.4% Slovene, English and German, and a further 5.3% expect only English. Thus as much as 73.6% expect foreigners in Slovenia to master English, either solely or in combination with an/other language/s. Only 7.4% think that foreigners in Slovenia need not know Slovene.

The 77.9% who think that every Slovene should master a foreign language indicate the same kind of bilingualism, since more than half of these believe this should be English. The next combination is English with German (22%).

They want English to serve as the language for communication with foreigners inside Slovenia as well as outside Slovenia. Besides the above mentioned 77.9% who think that every Slovene should master a foreign language (all of them count on English as least one of the foreign languages), there is also the students' near-agreement on their

¹¹The very name for this type of music is indicative of its origin. "Oberkrainer" is German for Upper Carniola, which in Austria-Hungary included the region where the Avsenik band came from, trailblazers in Austria and Germany as well.

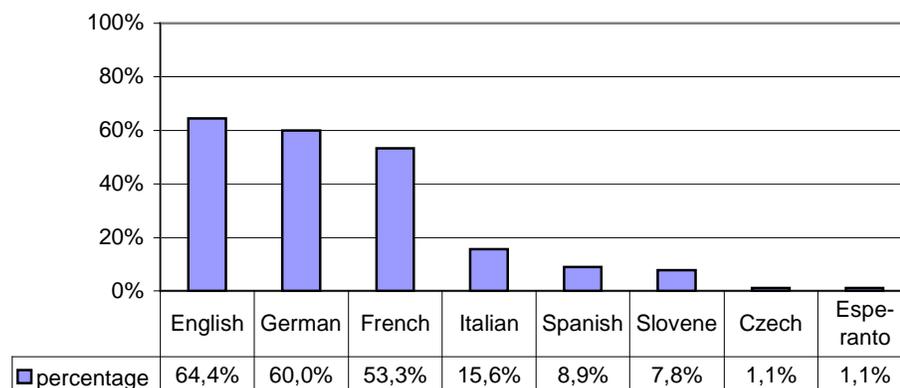
wish for Slovene to survive (97.9%), which is indicative of their wish for bilingualism. A factor to confirm the bilingual idea are the 68.1% who do not consider the use of English as a link language discriminating against other languages.

From the Slovene foreign-language education programme, one could infer that this is the future Slovene reality, rather than a mere wish. The new primary school law will impose a first foreign language from 4th through 9th grade. It does not dictate that the language should be English, but English already dominates extensively as the primary (and secondary) school foreign language, and the tendency to drop German as the first foreign language and take English instead is growing (cf. Introduction). With regard to the present European reality, where French (besides English) is being used as working language much more than German, it may be worthwhile to consider the ratio between pupils with German as their first foreign language and those with French, and perhaps to try and stimulate an increase in the number of the latter group.

EU

The answers to direct and transparent questions about a bilingual future with English as a sole pan-European link language showed more reservation on the part of the students. As noted earlier, the majority declines a regulation declaring only one language the official. Two thirds agree with two, three, or even more languages as official link languages. Most (43.6%) think that the function would be best performed by a combination of English, French, and German. The three languages appear in 71% of the answers if we take account of all the combinations in which they occur. After a huge gap, there comes Italian as fourth in percentage. Also, English, German, and French appeared in this order as the most important languages in the EU, with Italian and Spanish far behind, and any other languages occurring only exceptionally. The students seem bothered by a special status of English; a situation with a single official language is apparently too centralist, therefore they resort to a less practical variant with several official languages. The fact that the proposed official languages do not include Slovene further indicates that they see a centralist system with English as a great problem, somewhat 'imperialistic' perhaps, as they are prepared to have to learn three foreign languages instead of one.

Chart 1: If in your opinion more than a single language/a few languages should be legally establish for Union-level communication, which would you choose?



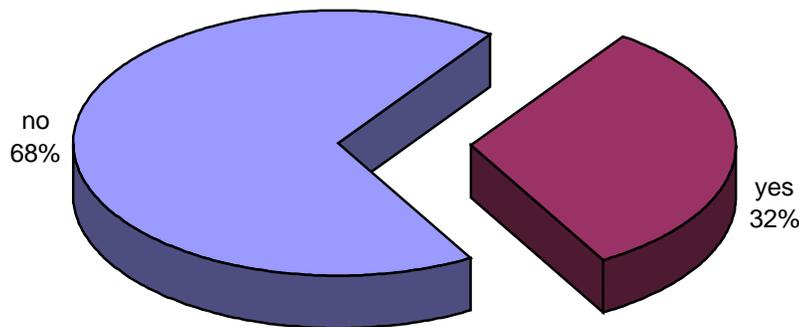
It has been mentioned that all official documents concerning all member countries should be translated into all official languages of member countries. Thus, individual languages would to an extent remain part of EU's political life.

Link language (English)

If people's attitude towards a language depended solely on its usefulness, they would certainly value a useful language highly and accept it gladly; the more so, if a particular

link language is also the language that the people in question see as the most suitable for such a role, and which they themselves use most often to communicate with foreigners. But the status of link language can have a negative influence as regards attitudes to the language, since such a language can constitute a threat to the local language by gradually supplanting it. At first in the fields of various professions, economy, or foreign affairs, but increasingly also in more and more public domains, and eventually perhaps in private life. However, to many of the students (68.1%) English does not pose such a threat. And even fewer students (8.2%) expect Slovene to die out within the EU, so this aspect may not influence their attitude towards English at all.

Chart 2: Do you find the use of English as the EU link language discriminatory towards other European languages/nations?



The majority of the students hold English their dearest language, a much smaller number stated French. The reasons for the popularity of English can be found in its usefulness, as the percentage of those with English as their favourite language is much higher among those who want English to be the official EU language (52% : 74%). Questions about structural qualities of languages show that the students do not favour English because of its structure or some other linguistic characteristics, since in a direct comparison with Slovene, they see Slovene as the language with better organized grammar, punctuation, and other linguistic levels (34.7% : 44.5%). They favour English only with regard to precision of technical vocabulary¹², and with regard to its word-formational means¹³. They find the languages to be equal in richness of the vocabulary and in punctuation conventions, while the organization of Slovene, in their opinion, dominates that of English in the fields of grammar, morphology, foreign-word borrowing, and the similarity between transcription and pronunciation ("phoneticness" of written language). The major strength of English seems to be precision of technical vocabulary, where 77% of the students favour English and only 6% Slovene (the rest are "can't say"). The ratio is approximately the same as the one of "phoneticness" of written language, where the favoured language is Slovene (8.7% : 78.3%). This and the 79.1% who think that the small number of speakers of Slovene (both native and non-native) is a drawback, indicate that the main reasons for the extremely widespread popularity of English are its usefulness and the fact that it is so very widely spoken. This popularity, then, is not conditioned by the language itself.

¹²The conviction that English has more precise terminologies can to some extent be accounted for by the fact that Slovene students are thoroughly familiar with English technical terms, as they often have to read professional and scientific literature in English because Slovene texts sometimes simply do not exist. And the lack of professional literature in Slovene is undoubtedly a reason for the absence of Slovene technical vocabulary. Very often Slovene terminologies simply borrow technical terms from English, subject them to Slovene grammatical paradigms, and forge Slovene pronunciations.

¹³The explanation is related to Note 12. The abundance of English borrowings used in Slovene professional/scientific (but also everyday) language creates the impression that English has a better/simpler word-formational system than Slovene. Conversely, the respondents believe that Slovene more easily borrows and adapts foreign words (34% : 46%).

However, usefulness itself is not enough. Besides the above mentioned usefulness that German has for Slovenes because of the same cultural background, there is also the fact that Slovene students interact with German speaking people oftener than with speakers of any other language. Still, German, which comes second in all questions regarding the importance and usefulness of languages, is associated with fewer positive attitudes than, say, French, Italian, or even Swedish. There is a widely accepted opinion among Slovenes that German sounds harsh and cacophonous, while especially French and Italian are commonly associated with some kind of euphony. English is probably not even judged from this point of view, as Slovenes' ears are exposed to it so often that they may soon no longer feel it as a foreign language. They are exposed to English from all possible sides and in all possible ways, through pop culture, through technology, through sports, and through very many (though not all) professions. The case was similar for Slovenes in the former Yugoslavia, where our ears were inundated with Serbo-Croat, so that we would often fail to notice that a person was speaking in Serbo-Croat. This was particularly true of certain environments where the exposure was the most intense (e.g. television).

Foreign-language mastery¹⁴

As far as the knowledge of foreign languages is concerned, the students are fairly well prepared for the EU. Practically all of them speak English, most of them speak Serbo-Croat¹⁵ and 59.8% speak German. On the average, a student speaks 2.78 foreign languages. All of those who do not speak English would like to learn it. 30.1% of the students (together 89.9%) would like to speak German as well. As far as the wish to learn a foreign language is concerned, the most popular language is French (50%), followed by Italian (43.3%) and Spanish (39.2%). On the average, a student would like to speak 5.1 languages (English, Serbo-Croat, German, French and Italian), i.e. the four most important languages within the EU plus Serbo-Croat. The latter is still very much present with the generation that finished primary school in the former Yugoslavia. Its presence is gradually decreasing, but it is not expected to disappear completely. It is still possible to follow all three national Croatian TV channels, however, they have lost a lot of their viewers due to foreign as well as domestic competition. Moreover, Slovenes very often spend their holidays in Croatia. Slovenes' knowledge can be expected to decrease and become restricted to Croatian only, since we have lost almost all contact with Serbian, the latter having been prevalent in the former Yugoslavia. A major reason for Serbian (i.e. Serbo-Croat closer to Serbian) having been the most widespread language in Yugoslavia was the fact that all men learnt it in the army, where in practice it served as the only language of communication. Another reason might be the fact that the capital of Yugoslavia was Belgrade and that the Serbians were the nation with the largest population in Yugoslavia. As seen on the case of Carinthian Slovenes (a Slovene ethnic minority in Austria) the relative similarity of Slovene and Croatian is not enough for the level of Slovenes' command of Croatian to stay at the level that the command of Serbo-Croat once reached. So it may be reasonable to try to revive interest for Croatian among the Slovene youth, which should not be too difficult (cf. Note 7). Some difficulty might arise from the present economically non-prestigious status of Croatia.

¹⁴We inquired about the students' "knowledge/non-knowledge of languages" (which is an everyday Slovene way of asking this and indicates nothing about the level of command), as the usual labels "poor command", "good command", "active command", "passive command", "read", "write", "speak", "understand", etc. seem even more subjective. Their contribution would thus not be very great, the analysis would get much more complicated and the questionnaire answering time would increase.

¹⁵ Even if Serbo-Croat as a language does not exist anymore, we decided to use this term for the sake of simplicity, since it is well known by all the students, who studied Serbo-Croat in primary school. To be politically correct, we should have asked about the knowledge of one of the three languages that evolved from Serbo-Croat, namely, Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian. However, this would have been quite complicated and the distinction might well have confused the students.

A comparison of the popularity, the knowledge and the usage of foreign languages shows that Slovene students may have an aversion to the languages of the neighbouring countries, still, they are practical enough and value the knowledge of these languages fairly highly, as they are simply closer and more useful. This is evident with German and noticeable with Italian, which is not far behind French in the usage rate while in popularity it lags far behind (together with German). Comparing Italian and French also indicates a difference between classifying a language among the great European languages (where Italian lags far behind French although they share the number of native speakers) and complying with Slovene needs (both with the question about the need to know a foreign language for all Slovenes as with the question about the need to know a foreign language for individuals in certain professions, such as tradespeople, politicians, police force, managers, scientists, customs officers, etc. Italian precedes French in both of these questions.)

According to the students' opinion politicians should also be engaged in learning foreign languages. Only 14.6% think it would be better if politicians used an interpreter. It is difficult to say whether this reflects a wish to save money or a wish for politicians to represent a country in which everybody speaks foreign languages. But it points to a hurt national pride since we do not want to use our mother tongue abroad even when this is possible. In international politics, interpreters are very common. Who, except some native bilingual individuals, would want to discuss the most important matters in a language for which one can never be sure one masters completely? Moreover, every negotiator that does not use his/her mother tongue is automatically in an inferior position, not only because his/her command of the foreign language is not as good as his/her command of his/her mother tongue, but also because he/she loses in negotiation by agreeing to the conditions on language that the other side proposed.

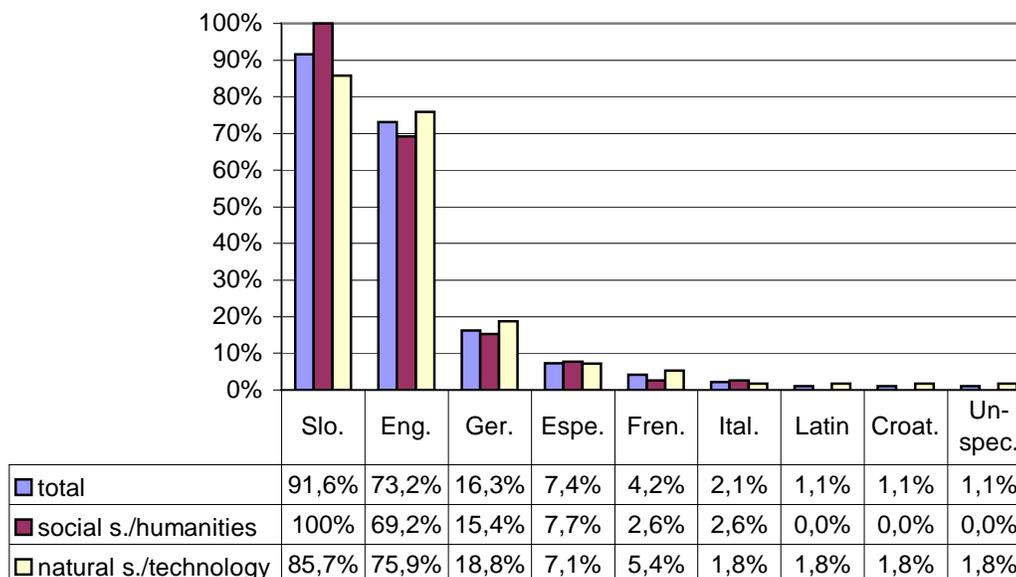
Judging from the second question, it is not the case that knowledge of foreign languages has only the promotional function, in fact, two thirds of the students think that it is more important for a politician to speak one language well rather than have a mediocre knowledge of three languages. From this answer we can deduce the functions that a language can or must perform if its role is to be a link language in a wide context. Since the students prefer better command of one language, they obviously find it more suitable to have one language with all communicative functions than several languages or one language that they could use only for the most basic communication.

Natural science/technology students vs. social science/humanities students¹⁶

Several questions show interesting differences between the two groups. Although both groups consider mastery of Slovene more or less a must for foreigners coming to live and work in Slovenia, there are obviously less emotions involved with technology students - as many as 15% of them do not demand that foreigners speak Slovene. A difference can be seen also with respect to the demand for knowledge of English. Interestingly, technology students appear as more tolerant of language diversity in Slovenia, since the percentage of technology students who want mastery of a particular language is higher than that of humanities students for virtually any of the indicated languages. More than 10% of technology students do not require knowledge of Slovene at all, while there is no such student in the humanities group. In answering a question about non/discrimination of English as the EU link language towards other languages/nations, 74.5% of technology students opted for 'non-discrimination', while the humanities group's 'non-discrimination' result was 58.9%.

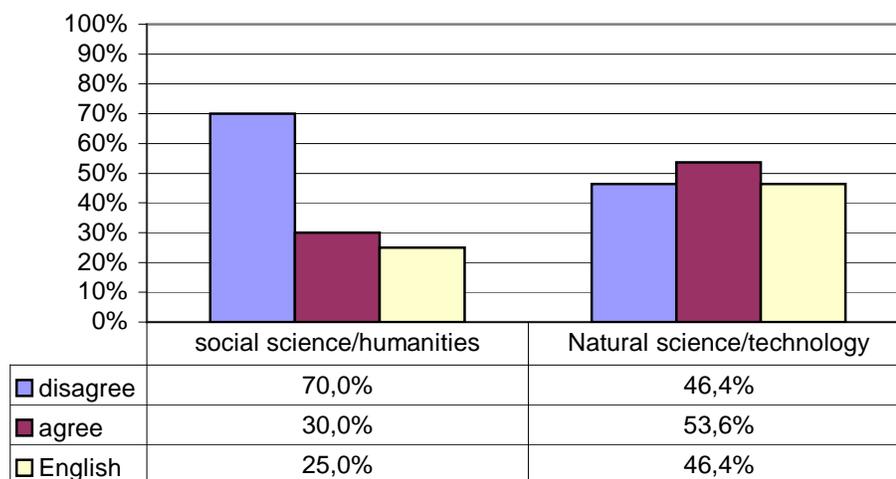
¹⁶From here on the first group will be referred to as 'technology students' and the second as 'humanities students'.

Chart 3: Which languages should foreigners coming to work or live in Slovenia speak/master?



Furthermore, over two thirds of humanities students object to a single official language; technology students objecting to this are below 50%. The students from both groups who opted for a single official language see English as practically the only candidate for this.

Chart 4: Do you agree that one language should be legally established as the language of Union-level communication? If you agree, state your choice.



On the other hand, the percentage of humanities students who require foreign language knowledge among all Slovenes is higher than that of the technology group (82.5% : 74.5%). Similarly, they want mastery of a larger number of languages among all Slovenes, and are more oriented towards multilingualism, whereas technology students are more oriented towards the mastery of a single foreign language, namely English.

One of the aims of the EU is to create a 'new', pluralist European identity (Žagar 1998: 15). According to the technology group, at least this part of the future university-educated population in Slovenia will not be so pluralist.

IV. Conclusion

The respondents clearly see language diversity as an advantage, however, 'their language diversity' ends at the official languages of individual countries. It is worth mentioning that the respondents are future university-educated people, so in general the level of language diversity awareness and tolerance should be even lower in the case of less educated people. In the future some sort of bilingualism with Slovene and English is likely to emerge in Slovenia, at least in the beginning functional, although Slovene students express a strong preference for an EU with more than a single official language. Also, they mostly do not see the use of English as discriminatory towards other languages. The respondents expect such a diglossic development all around the EU, for it can be concluded from the predomination of English among foreign languages that despite a rather strong wish to master several languages they count on the mastery of one foreign language to suffice; the one language would of course play the role of link language. In this respect Slovene should be given due attention and support from its home country, since in a case of functional bilingualism the existence of the less prestigious variety may be threatened. The reasons for an overwhelming popularity of English do not lie just in the fact that the language itself and everything connected with it is so widespread and in the language's consequent usefulness, but also in its neutrality in the eyes of the respondents. Slovene students would do fairly well in the EU; although they do not speak enough European languages at present, they would like to master more. It seems, somehow, that even if the EU succeeds in reaching multilingualism, this will more or less serve the purpose of tolerance and respect of 'foreignness', whereas practically-functionally there appears to be emerging a diglossic situation. In this respect the EU should redirect some of its efforts from trying to equalize the unequalizable languages to more feasible tasks.

Slovene students seem to some extent aware of numerous language issues which will be triggered by Slovenia's integration into the EU. Nevertheless their views of the subject remain indecisive and inconsistent, which is not a result of weighing different views but of wavering between equality of languages on the one hand and conceding to a single language in the role of link language on the other. The hesitation reflects a lack of understanding and an emotionally charged character of the topic. More education and informing about the advantages and disadvantages of the two options is therefore needed in Slovenia, so that we may enter the EU with greater confidence. For a small and economically rather weak country this seems especially important.

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