

*Influence Of Italian Language On Slovene Language In The Case Of Slovene
Minority Living In Italy*

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Abstract

It is possible to detect language interference among bilingual speakers as a consequence of language contact. Interference can occur only if there is open cultural and linguistic communication between the two linguistic communities, and it can be divided in four groups relative to phonetics, word formation and morphology and syntax. This is the case of the Slovene minority that lives in Italy and is daily exposed at the influence of Italian language on their mother language.

The Slovene minority living in Italy has various printed media. In the present paper I analyse some articles written by bilingual speakers, members of the Slovene minority in Italy. The present paper presents the violation of the norms of the Slovene standard language as a consequence of living and learning in a bilingual environment.

Key words: interference, Slovene, Italian, bilingual

1 Introduction

According to the Slovenian Government Communication Office, there are around 100,000 Slovenes living in Italy nowadays, although the estimations of their number vary (The Slovene Ethnic Minority In The Republic Of Italy 1999). This minority group lives in the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, mainly in the towns of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine, a border area between Slovenia and Italy. Because of this, the Slovene minority in Italy lives in a society where the national language (Italian) is not their mother language (Slovene). Consequently, those Slovenes are exposed to the impact of Italian language on a daily basis. A long-term and strong impact of one language on another, in this case the impact of Italian on Slovene, forms various language interferences that can be seen in the language used by bilingual speakers. The present paper deals only with the impact of Italian language on Slovene language in the Trieste area. It takes into account some issues of the *Mladika* magazine and the newspaper *Primorski dnevnik* to show the most common examples of interferences arisen from the language contact of the language pair Slovene – Italian.

2 Education And Bilingualism

Skutnabb-Kangass (1981) systematically defines bilingualism and points out the importance of education for a successful bilingualism. The two most important aspects are the role of the language of the majority, and the language of the minority in the educational process and the aim of education. The models of education, therefore, are the education that aims towards a strong preservation of bilingualism, and the education that aims towards a weak preservation of bilingualism. The goal of bilingual education – to preserve bilingualism – is oriented towards the majority population, the minority or both. School legislation that allows the members of ethnic communities to preserve their maintenance and development of language and culture is one of the human rights.

The Slovene national community in Italy has been under protective legislation since 2001, while the Italian minority living in Slovenia has been fully protected from the time of the existence of the ex Yugoslavia. The Slovene national community in Italy has several schools in which the teaching language has been Slovene since the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1774 (except in the fascism era between 1927-1945), and which are included in the Italian school system. The education in these schools is based on the same curriculum as it is provided for the Italian majority school. The only difference is in the use of Slovene language as the teaching language. Here Italian language is taught as the second language. In the Trieste and Gorizia areas it is possible to attend school in Slovene language from kindergarten until the end of high school. Minority schools deal with the problem of a decreasing number of children and the political decisions of the Italian government regarding the allocation of financial resources. In Italian schools Slovene language is not present as a teaching language. The Slovene schools in Italy play an important role also in the preservation of the identity and culture besides language (Pertot 2009). Bufon (1998) claims that minority schools are a reflection of cultural specificities of the minority population and an important factor for building European coexistence and integration, and therefore play an irreplaceable role in society.

3 Language Interferences

Weinreich (2008) uses the term *languages in contact* when the same persons use two or more languages for their communication, and this can generate some interferences

in bilingual speakers. When referring to the so called language interference, we usually think of those cases in which there is a deviation from the norm. Language interference can be divided in four groups relative to phonetics, word formation and morphology and syntax.

The appearance of interferences is subject to the “constructive coexistence” (Zuljan Kumar 2003). Because of this, interferences are not easy to prove, i.e. all the deviations from the norms of a given language among bilingual speakers do not occur as a consequence of language contact. An open communication between the two groups of language speakers is the prerequisite for the occurrence of interferences. Thus, interference is not a consequence of poor language skills.

Weinreich (2008) also points out the significance of extra linguistic factors like homogeneity, sociological and cultural differentiation of the bilingual group, demographic factors, political and social relationships between the two groups, stereotypes, the attitude towards bilingualism in a society etc. A language contact can be understood only if we place it in a wider psychological and sociological context. The direction of interference depends on which language is dominant in a certain society.

4 Corpora and Methodology

Members of the Slovene minority living in Italy publish several printed media. Those with the highest number of readers are the *Primorski dnevnik*, a daily newspaper founded in 1945 and with 8,500 print editions and the monthly magazine *Mladika*. Founded in 1957 in Trieste, *Mladika* was first meant to be a magazine for filling in the emptiness that was a consequence of fascism dictatorship during the Second World War. A group of intellectuals decided to create a magazine in which the Slovenes living in Italy could publish their literary work and follow the cultural development in Slovenia and at Italy’s border. The authors of the analyzed articles taken from *Mladika* (hereinafter referred to as *M*) and *Primorski dnevnik* (hereinafter referred to as *PD*) are Slovenes that live in Italy, this means bilingual speakers.

The present paper deals only with written language as, like Caharija Pizzolito (1991) argues, in written language it is easier to see the impact of a “dominant” language on another language. Because of the time gap between the thought and writing, defensive mechanisms can be activated to prevent those interferences of which the writer is aware of.

Deviations from the Slovene language standard were reviewed and only those frequent cases that could be a consequence of language interferences were commented in the present paper. Every section has an explanation of Slovene language rules, an example of deviation due to the interferences found in the corpora, and a possible translation in Italian language that shows why the chosen example might be the result of language interference. It is not possible to generalize the results to all the language used in the magazine or even less to the language of all Slovenes living in Italy. The present paper is part of a larger research about interferences for the Slovene-Italian language pair that is still developing.

5 Analysis

There are several deviations from the Slovene language norm that might result from interference as a consequence of the language contact between Slovene and Italian language. According to Skubic (1997), we can see a lot of syntax influence of Italian language on Slovene, which is more important than the influence of vocabulary as it requires a close coexistence between the two ethnic groups. The most frequent examples found in the examined corpora are related to the sentence word order regarding the functional sentence perspective, deviations of the Slovene reflexive verb form, negation, position of the adjective following the noun. In his research, Skubic (1997) also points out the loss of the dual form, the use of the preposition “*od*”, noun deviations in the genre, number and the declination of the noun etc.

Word Order

Word order is determined by relatively accurate rules in every language. The basic word order in Slovene and Italian is the same, subject – verb – object. However, syntax requirements in the two languages differ from each other. Slovene as a synthetic language has flexible word order, Italian is an analytical language and its word order is less flexible.

Every language, according to Mathesius (1975) and the Prague School, uses certain sentence patterns. The patterning of the sentence into theme (the element about which something is stated and the basis of the sentence) and rheme (what is stated about the basis of the sentence) is called functional sentence perspective and it is determined by the functional approach of the speaker. If seen in the functional sentence perspective we can assume that in Slovene the perspective can change according to the communicative value of sentence parts with the changing of word order in the sentence. In Italian, on the contrary, the grammatical function of language has a greater impact on sentence patterns.

The basic norm for sentence word order is the same in Italian and Slovene and it follows the subject – verb – object order. Slovene language is, as said before, very flexible and the change of word order can impact the meaning of the sentence itself. The functional sentence perspective probably has a greater impact on Slovene word order than the grammatical principle. In Italian we assume that the factor with the major influence is the grammatical principle as the language is less flexible.

In Slovene language the subordinate clause does not begin with a subject if it is not strictly necessary for the functional sentence perspective of the sentence. In Italian the word order in the subordinate clause can be the same as the order in the main clause; it begins with a subject. In the analysed texts we found an example in which the subject is at the beginning of the subordinate clause, but this word order is in contrast with the Slovene grammatical principle as this order is not necessary for the functional sentence perspective: *V znameniti razpravi iz leta 1967 o osnovah kolektivnega vedenja Nesposobnost žalovanja prof. Alexader Mitscherilch in dr. Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen pišeta, da se Nemčija zdi izčrpana ter da nima moči, da bi priklicala na dan učinkovite politične ideje, ker večina prebivalstva se je strinjala z rasističnimi idejami nacistične oblasti. (M 5-6)*

Possible Italian version: *Nella nota discussione del 1967 sui fondamenti del comportamento collettivo L'incapacità di essere in lutto il prof. Alexander Mitscherlich e la dott.ssa Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen dicono, che la Germania sembra esausta e che non ha più forza per trovare idee politiche efficaci perché la maggior parte della popolazione era d'accordo con le idee delle autorità razziste.*

(English: *In the famous discussion in 1967 on the foundations of collective behaviour The inability to be in mourning, prof. Alexander Mitscherlich and dr. Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen said that Germany seems exhausted and that has no more strength to find effective political ideas because most of the population was in agreement with the ideas of the racist authorities.*)

Reflexive Verb

A very typical influence of Italian language can be seen in the use of Slovene reflexive verbs. The examined language pair does not have the same reflexive verbs, and therefore we can find examples in which the use of the reflexive verb form, where the Slovene norm would expect an intransitive or a transitive verb, is only used because the same verb in Italian can be used in its reflexive form:

Boljšega začetka si zares ni bilo mogoče pričakovati: v istem večeru sta obiskovalce goriškega Kulturnega doma nagovorila tako italijanski premier kot papež. (PD 4.2.2011)

Possible Italian translation: *Non si sarebbe potuto immaginare un inizio migliore: gli spettatori della Casa di cultura goriziana sono stati indirizzati sia dal premier italiano che dal Papa. (One could not imagine a better start: viewers in the House of culture of Gorizia were addressed by the Italian prime minister and the Pope).*

Slovene language does know the verb *pričakovati*, but not its reflexive form *pričakovati si*.

Negation

Another frequent group of examples of deviation from the Slovene grammatical norm in the examined corpus is the formation of negative sentences. In Slovene language they can be formulated by using the double negative, whether in Italian this is not possible (Dardano & Trifone 2001). We can find sentences where there is only one negative element if placed before the verb (as is the norm in Italian):

Nič manj oster je bil odziv Sredinske unije, po oceni katere je vladni sklep "vulgaren in nasilen" in je bil sprejet izven ustavne legalnosti. (PD 4.2.2011)

Possible Italian version: *Non è stata meno recisa la risposta dell'Unione di Centro secondo il parere della quale la decisione del governo "vulgare e bviolenta" ed è stata presa al di fuori della legalità costituzionale. (It was no less blunt the response of 'Union of the Centre regarding the opinion of the government's decision as "vulgar and violent" and it was not part of the constitutional legality)*

Slovene standard language would require a double negation like: *Nič manj oster ni bil odziv...*

Relative Pronoun

Bilingual authors frequently use a calque – this means an invisible word-for-word translation as a consequence of a process of strong bilingualism – without knowing it. One of the possible examples concerns the use of the Slovene relative pronoun *ki*. In Slovene, this noun can be lean declined, but the Italian form *che/chi* cannot be flexed.

Tako za Ščeka ne more biti ideološka pripadnost tisto, ki narod ločuje na skupine in skupinice. (M 7)

Possible Italian version: *Così per Šček l'appartenenza ideologica non può essere quello che divide il popolo in gruppi e gruppetti.*

(Thus, for Šček the ideological belonging can't be what divides the nation in groups and little groups.)

In the example above also the relative pronoun should refer to the neutral gender (*tisto*), and therefore the Slovene linguistic standard would require the substantival pronoun for the neutral gender *kar*.

Adjective

In Italian the adjective can precede or follow the noun, depending of its distinctive or denotative function. The Slovene language norm requires the adjective before the noun if the utterance is not strongly emphatic.

Ti se niti ne zavedaš, da kjer ni sence cenikov, ampak ti ob pultu sedi slavni filmski igravec, so cene stratosferske. (M 4) in Italian: *Tu non ti rendi nemmeno conto che laddove non c'è neanche l'ombra di listini, ma siede al banco un attore famoso, i prezzi sono stratosferici.* *(You do not even realize that where there is not even a shadow of price lists, but sits at the desk a famous actor, the prices are stratospheric).*

In the stated example we can see also a calque regarding meaning. The adjective *stratosferski* can be used also in Slovene language, but it is not as frequent as *astronomski* when referring to prices.

Conclusion

The present paper presents some deviations from the Slovene language standard due to interferences caused by language contact of Italian and Slovene language on the borderline territory. The analysis has to be further expanded with an enlargement of corpora that will allow a deeper functional sentence perspective view and will permit to generalize the results. It now proves the existence of interferences and shows the most common and the most numerous groups of this phenomenon. It can be pointed out that also due to the possibility of the Slovene minority to have its schools, media and rights, the Slovene language, even if under a big impact of Italian, persists and does maintain some of its most difficult and particular features as the dual form for nouns, verbs and adjectives and the declination of the noun.

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