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Bilingual education in the ethnically mixed areas along the Slovene–Italian border

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The paper focuses on education language policy in Slovene Istria and of Slovenia in Italy. On both sides of the Slovene-Italian border there is an ethnically mixed population of Italians and Slovenes, an Italian minority in Slovenia, and a Slovene minority in Italy. On both sides of the border apparently similar systems of bilingual education have been developed: schools with the minority language as the language of instruction. The authors discuss some data from a study performed in the period from 2006–2008 among eighth-grade pupils of primary schools along the Slovene–Italian border where the two different socio-ethnic groups are in close contact. Pupils on both sides of the border were tested to establish their levels of knowledge of the Slovene language (as L1 and L2), and of Italian (as L1 and L2). The conclusion includes suggestions regarding the extent of the need to upgrade bilingual educational models applied in these mixed border areas in accordance with the goals of minority preservation, protection and development as an added value of bilingual environments.

Introduction

Modern European societies are confronted with globalisation on the one hand and European integration on the other. As a state searching for mechanisms to protect its own (national, political and economic) interests, Slovenia endeavours to create conditions that will enable an effective participation in the processes of European integration. The Slovene experience in managing ethnic and minority policies can set an example for many EU member states. Slovene and European bilingual environments serve as laboratories in which the ethnic, linguistic and cultural settings provide possibilities and solutions regarding the promotion of European citizenship.

The success of bilingual education is the result of a complex sociological strategy, which needs to be dealt with in the broadest political context. We need to answer questions of how this strategy is defined, what it means to the individual and the society and who the subject of our research is. There are various different typologies of bilingual education. Specific social and linguistic objectives require certain language roles, pupils' status, class, organisation and programme contents. The results of a successful bilingual education are important not only for the individual but also for the society as a whole. They help establish equality between different ethnic groups,

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enhance the knowledge of languages and cultures, encourage acceptance of the other and at the same time enable immediate socio-economic progress in the environment.

In the past fifty years, the various models of minority schooling and bilingual education employed throughout the world have often been the focus of political, social and economic debates. This has influenced the processes of their development and amendment procedures. The recent political changes in central and eastern Europe have affected the status of individual ethnicities and indirectly the contents of their social and cultural activities.

The models developed in ethnically mixed areas of Slovenia are based on the tradition of national education, the density of the nationally populated and culturally defined regions, and the direction of national and European policies. The Slovene ethnic area spills over the political borders of Slovenia. In our case, the model of minority education with Slovene as the language of instruction in Italy is a comparable category in ascertaining the level of protection of minority rights in the European area.

In the target research project 'Efficiency of Bilingual Education Models in Ethnically Mixed Areas—Challenges and Advantages for a Europe of Languages and Cultures' the aim of the researchers of the Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska (UP ZRS), the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana (UL FF), the Institute for Ethnic Studies (INV) and the Slovene Research Institute (SLORI) was to determine: (a) what aspects of bilingual education in Slovenia need to be developed and promoted in the new socio-economic situation of European integration processes; and (b) what pitfalls of these processes can be anticipated and identified on the basis of the success of implementing the bilingual model in schools of ethnically mixed areas from the aspect of pupils' school success. Consequently, we predicted; (c) the degree to which bilingual education models should be improved and further developed to promote minority preservation, protection and development in such a way as to make the system of minority education competitive with its majority counterpart even when minorities have assumed a new role due to the growing movement of people, goods and capital in Europe in the future. At a time when minorities are assuming an increasingly important role in the integration of border areas, there is a danger that the formal and informal status of minority languages, and consequently, of minorities themselves may be lowered on account of a lingua franca, most likely English.

The above-mentioned study (Čok et al. 2008) was designed as a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of bilingual education within two linguistically (ethnically) mixed Slovene territories: Slovene Istria and Prekmurje. The research also compared the models of bilingual education in Slovene Istria (Slovenia) and in the regions of Trieste and Gorizia (Italy). In narrowing down the scope of this project, this paper will present the research results on the system of bilingual education in the Slovene-Italian border area.

Both sides of the border are host to an ethnically mixed population of Italians and Slovenes, a Slovene minority in Italy and an Italian one in Slovenia. Apparently similar systems of bilingual education, schools with the minority language as the language of instruction, have been introduced. The levels of development, efficiency, similarities and differences in minority education in the Slovene-Italian border area present a mirror reflecting historical events of the past as well as modern times marking European countries in transition.

Socio political and historical background

Protection of minorities in Slovenia

After the declaration of independence of Slovenia in 1991, the political, social, cultural and economic contexts of the country altered considerably, while there has been almost no change in language policy and planning. The grounds for a social organisation that protects languages spoken by its citizens were prepared before independence, by means of legislation and the Constitution (Republika Slovenija 1991). The latter determined Slovene as the national language and expressed the necessity to protect the autochthonous minority languages.

The 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Republika Slovenija 1974), particularly Articles 250 and 251, granted the Italian and Hungarian minorities the right to 'freely use their language, express and develop their native culture, and in order to do so, establish organisations and use their national symbols'. Due to the democratic regulation of the juridical and normative system prior to independence, the conservation of minority languages and cultures has continued after 1991. Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia determines Slovene as the official language in Slovenia; Hungarian and Italian too are considered as official languages in the areas of Italian and Hungarian national communities. Slovenia also signed (on 3 July 1997), ratified (on 4 October 2000) and put into force (on 1 January 2001) participation in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe 1992).

The 1991 Constitution guarantees the members of the two ethnic groups protection of fundamental human rights, including the right to use the mother tongue, to maintain and develop the mother tongue culture and national peculiarities (Article 5), and special common rights, including the free use of the mother tongue in private and public life (Article 11) and of national symbols, the establishment of various associations and organisations, the development of cultural activities, the right to information and education¹ in the mother tongue, and participation in matters of general public concern through minority group representatives in the Parliament and local government. The implementation of those rights is financially and morally supported by the Republic of Slovenia (Article 64).

From a historical perspective, the ethnic specifics of Slovenia encountered great changes in the past and, for that particular reason, resulted in a degree of sensitivity towards the question of the Slovene language as the language of the state and other languages in this region even before attaining independence in 1991. The conservation of minority languages in Slovenia is regulated by the ethnic autochthony principle that guarantees rights to autochthonous minorities regardless of the number of their speakers. As a compulsory part of the education system of the majority, the minority language is guaranteed its conservation and expansion.

Although Italian ethnic group rights have always been protected legally and formally, the number of its members was reduced after the annexation of the coastal area and its hinterland by the former Yugoslavia. The population of seaside towns was replaced by that from the interior areas of Slovenia (managing and administrative cadres) and from other Istrian towns and hamlets (Slovene and mostly Croatian peasants). Thus, the autochthonous and minority population, and the Italian ethnic (Istrian–Venetian) population that had held the absolute majority until 1946, number today less than 2%. Later on, in the 1950s, the post-war exodus was facilitated by ongoing territorial and demographic development processes, rather than a lack of a formal protection of the autochthonous Italian minority (Čok 2003, 96).

Today, bilingual areas in Slovene Istria are defined in the Statutes issued by the three coastal municipalities Koper–Capodistria, Izola–Isola and Piran–Pirano as areas in which members of the autochthonous Italian national community live and where the Slovene and Italian languages are equal in public and private life.

The Slovenes in Italy

After the Second World War, the Slovenes developed their national identity within the borders of Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while the Slovene people in Italy ended up as a minority community within the political and socio-economic context of a different country. Hence, the Slovene community in Italy is an autochthonous minority; it exists mainly along the border between Italy and Slovenia and also to a lesser extent along the border between Italy and Austria and precisely in three provinces of Friuli–Venezia Giulia: Trieste–Trst, Gorizia–Gorica and Udine–Videm. In this region, which is characterised by the presence of historical minorities (Friulian, German and Slovene), Italian is the dominant language.

Unofficial estimates by the Italian government suggest a population of 80,000 Slovene speakers. The Slovene Research Institute (Bogatec et al. 2004, 4) has ended up with a slightly different evaluation: there are approximately 95,000 members of the minority, 100,000 speakers of the minority language and 183,000 people who understand the minority language.

After the Second World War the protection of the Slovene minority in Italy was defined by the Peace Treaty signed in Paris (on 10 February 1947) between the Allied Powers and Italy, and by the 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 (on 5 October 1954). The protection of the Slovene minority was reconfirmed on the same basis in the Osimo Agreements between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Italy (on 10 November 1975). After Slovenia's independence, the Slovene and Italian governments confirmed the Osimo Agreements, which are still operative. In between, Italy signed, but has not yet ratified the EU Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The Slovene community is entitled to some rights granted by the state of Italy. Article 6 of the Italian Constitution (Repubblica Italiana 1947) states that the Italian Republic protects linguistic minorities through special measures. Pieces of legislation arising from national and regional laws, municipal and provincial statutes and decisions have regulated the right to use Slovene in public. This right has been more or less fully anchored by the Italian state with the Law 482/1999 Regulations on the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities (on 15 December 1999) (Repubblica Italiana 1999) and particularly with the Law 38/2001 Regulations on the Protection of Slovene Linguistic Minority in the Region of Friuli–Venezia Giulia (on 23 February 2001) (Repubblica Italiana 2001).

For historical reasons, up to 2001, some formal rights had been mostly limited to the provinces of Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica. Here the condition and the development of the Slovene language have always been influenced by a series of factors linked to a lack of possibilities for the public use of the Slovene language, which could be solved through legal measures. These however, have, not yet been completely implemented, eight years after the signing of the Slovene minority protection law.

As opposed to the Slovene Coast (Slovene Istria, where most Italians in Slovenia live) in Italian regions with a Slovene population, the Slovene and Italian languages are not equal in public or private life. The Slovenes are considered bilingual because they speak Slovene and Italian and their respective dialects. The Italians, save for rare exceptions, do not know Slovene, even passively. In their interactions with the Slovenes they use only Italian. Due to this situation the Slovene language used by the Slovene speakers in Italy appears full of dialectal varieties. The colloquial variant, which could be defined as a 'local' variant despite not being a dialect, differs in some measure from the colloquial variety used in Slovenia and the proper Slovene standard. The 'local' standard presents established loans and static interferences that occur at all levels of language (Carli 2002, 103).

Minority language protection framework

Language policy in education in Slovene Istria

In the nationally mixed region of Slovene Istria, the schools operate with the Slovene and Italian languages of instruction. It is mandatory for the pupils of the schools with the Slovene language of instruction (SsloL1–S) to learn the Italian language and for the pupils of the schools with the Italian language of instruction (SitaL1–S) to learn the Slovene language as a second language (L2 hereafter) respectively. The educational model of the nationally mixed region of Slovene Istria can be marked as a socially firmly supported preservation model (Baker and Jones 1998) with an enrichment component (i.e. the possibility for pupils of the majority community to acquire the Italian language).

Thus, the bilingual educational model for primary education in Slovene Istria provides that all children attending primary schools (SsloL1–S) must possess sufficient knowledge of Italian.² Communication and mutual comprehension among the Slovenes and the Italians are found to be good here; moreover, the prestige and function of Italian as the minority language, implemented by the juridical and linguistic policy, neutralises the pressure of assimilation of the Italian language.

The Italian national minority is guaranteed an educational option starting in kindergartens and going all the way to the *matura* (baccalaureate) examination. The syllabus of SitaL1–S includes Slovene as a compulsory subject at all levels, taught for at least three periods per week. The didactic concept of Slovene as L2 has been intensively developed over the past few years.

Mainly English, but also German and Italian are taught as foreign languages (FL hereafter) in primary schools in Slovenia. Learning the neighbouring languages has always been a priority in Slovene schools. German, Italian, Hungarian, Croatian and Serbian have been taught in individual regions according to the traditional cultural and economic contacts. The majority of the Slovene population is fluent in English; generally, Italian and German are spoken as well. French used to have a strong teaching and learning tradition that in time grew weaker, while English was spreading. Learning objectives, teaching approaches, teaching/learning methods, didactic techniques and levels of language proficiency described in the curriculum for language teaching are based on the document by the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001).

In compulsory education in majority schools in Slovene Istria, Slovene is the language of instruction, as a subject and a learning medium. The 9-year elementary school is divided into three 3-year cycles. In the first cycle, pupils develop literacy;

in this cycle of elementary education, topics and activities of Slovene language learning are closely connected with other subjects. In the second and third cycles, pupils gain awareness of the Slovene language as a system, they read and analyse literary and non-literary texts, to consolidate their spoken and written production in the standard (literary) variant. In the eighth and ninth grades, external differentiation takes place in which pupils can reach the objectives either at a lower, medium/basic or higher level. After the second and the third cycle, a national examination (Elementary School Act, Article 64) is used to test the standards of knowledge attained where Slovene as L1 (next to mathematics) is a compulsory examination subject.

For the pupils of the ethnically mixed area of Slovene Istria attending SsloL1–S school, Italian is taught as an L2. Their formal introduction to the second language takes place before they start with primary school: children are taught the second language already at nursery level, where the curriculum provides them with their first contacts with the second language in playful activities, so that they learn to recognise it and to appropriate its basic lexical nucleus. On the whole, it is extremely rare that children aged five or six years have had no contact with Slovene or Italian as their second language before they enter nursery or elementary school.

Italian as L2 forms a compulsory part of the educational programmes in 17 primary schools and 7 upper secondary schools (grammar schools, technical and commercial vocational training schools, hotel, nautical and medical schools). The presence of Italian language speakers (i.e. with members of the minority ethnic community) in their day-to-day environment provides pupils with opportunities to use the language at first-hand outside school. In classes, the pupils are introduced to Italian in sequence, namely after the mother tongue; they start learning it as the compulsory second language in the first years of elementary school, continuing up to the *matura* examination. This confirms early learning of a second language and its extensive teaching.

Italian is the teaching and learning language in schools in nationally mixed areas where Italian is a language of instruction. As a rule, teachers and experts collaborating in the Italian educational curriculum are members of the Italian ethnic group. The teaching of Italian as the mother tongue is thus part of the broadest framework of language and literature instruction. Particularly, the mother tongue as the fundamental means of forming, expressing and expanding the empirical and cultural horizons stands out as the area that is addressed in the work of all teachers.

In schools of ethnically mixed areas (SitaL1–S), Slovene as L2 is taught from the first grade onwards. Prior to this, children are already introduced to the Slovene language in nursery schools. Slovene as L2 is taught as a subject. Special didactics of early second language learning have been developed for over 20 years there, while the monitoring, training and cooperation of teachers take place within the framework of Slovene language teacher training. During Slovene lessons, pupils attending SitaL1–S schools get to know the Slovene culture and learn to develop a tolerant and cooperative attitude towards the environment and how to coexist with ‘the other’ (people of other nations). The basic objective of teaching Slovene as L2 is a planned development of the pupils’ personal language repertoire as an instrument for effective spoken and written communication in the language of the environment, passing on those elements of Slovene culture that are different from the Italian.

Language policy in the education of Slovenes in Italy

In Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica the Slovenes are served with an encompassing Slovene-medium system in primary and secondary schools, as well as kindergartens. The province of Udine–Videm has a private bilingual Slovene–Italian kindergarten and a state bilingual Slovene–Italian elementary and junior secondary school. During the academic year 2008/2009 there were 3917 pupils and students attending the Slovene kindergartens and schools in Italy.

The Slovene schools in Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica were founded during the time of the Austro–Hungarian Empire and abolished under the Fascist regime. They were re-established at the end of the Second World War due to special measures stated in the London Memorandum. The state of Italy regulated them in 1961, when they were formally recognised as state schools with Slovene as the teaching language. They form part of the Italian school system and are therefore subject to the jurisdiction of the Italian Ministry of Education.

There are two school cycles: the primary (ages 3–11) and secondary (ages 11–19) cycles. The primary cycle is divided into kindergarten (ages 3–6) and elementary school (ages 6–11), and the secondary cycle consists of schools at the junior secondary (ages 11–14) and senior secondary (ages 14–19) levels. (Hereafter we will unify the naming of these cycles with the one that is in use in Slovenia and refer to the school period between ages 6 and 14 as ‘elementary school’.)

Basic curriculum guidelines are laid down by law. Instruction takes place according to nationwide curricula, which are adapted by the teaching staff. The school subjects are therefore based on the same syllabuses as generally used in Italian schools, but they are taught in Slovene (L1), with the exception of Italian language and literature, which is in Italian. Hence, in addition to the subjects shared by the entire Italian territory, Slovene language and literature are introduced. The history and geography syllabuses include some specific units, and Italian is not taught as L2, but as L1. Mainly English, but also German, are offered as foreign languages (FL). In kindergartens the language used is Slovene, rather than Italian.

In mainstream schools where the minority language (Slovene) is not part of the curriculum, the majority language (Italian) is used as the medium of instruction. Here, courses in Slovene may be introduced on the basis of Article 4 of the aforementioned Law 482/1999 Regulations on the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities, but learning the neighbouring language is rather an exception.

Slovenes in Italy have always dedicated a great deal of attention to schools with Slovene as the language of instruction (SsloL1–I), not only striving for their continuing cultural and linguistic existence and development, but also, in recent years, to achieve implementation of norms set by the protection law. In the last decade, changes in the language and the ethnic structure of the school population have been the main topics of discussion in civil society due to an increase of pupils from inter-married Slovene–Italian families or families with other ethnicities. There are also numerous children from former Yugoslav republics and some from Italian families. Those from non-Slovene families account for approximately 50% of the total SsloL1–I population. The level of knowledge of the linguistic codes (Slovene and Italian) varies from a good mastery of both languages to the mixing of various language elements from both, and to mastery of one language only (mostly Italian).

Teachers are only qualified to instruct children whose mother tongue is Slovene and lack suitable qualifications to teach Slovene as the second or third language, as

would be required by the users' linguistic characteristics, for Slovene as L2/FL is not formally envisaged in this area. In practice, Slovene as L2/FL is taught in the first grades of elementary school, despite the fact that, in theory, teachers are supposed to follow the rule that the language of instruction should be exclusively Slovene.

Target research project 'Efficiency of bilingual education models in ethnically mixed areas – Challenges and advantages for a Europe of Languages and Cultures': discussion of results

Brief description of the project: research problem, objectives, methodology

As was pointed out in the introduction, the target research project 'Efficiency of Bilingual Education Models in Ethnically Mixed Areas – Challenges and Advantages for a Europe of Languages and Cultures' was designed as a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of bilingual education within two linguistically mixed Slovene regions (Slovene Istria and Prekmurje) and the cross-border mixed area in Italy (provinces of Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica). The control group was chosen from smaller elementary schools outside ethnically mixed regions (Postojna, Žalec). Within the area of linguistic studies, the project extended into L1, L2 and FL communication competence research, and also into studying the degree of bilingualism used when performing an open-ended task (guided composition). In addition, a structured questionnaire on students' opinions was formulated, examining the extent to which objectives connected with the topics from Italian or Slovene history and culture had been understood. This, however, will not be dealt with in this article which presents the part of the research that is related to bilingual education in the Slovene–Italian border area.

The models of bilingual education in Slovene Istria (Slovenia) and in the regions of Trieste and Gorizia (Italy) were the subject matter of the research. This was not limited to procedures adopted to preserve the national language (Slovene), but also to levels of protection of the minority languages in both countries. In examining the



Figure 1. The explored sites of the Slovene-Italian border area.
Source: Map adapted by Pertot from <http://www.teleturismo.org>

quality of educational work, one of the objectives was directed towards investigating and comparing communicative competence in the first and the second language as well as establishing levels of bilingualism.

Through testing in the chosen subjects (L1, L2, FL), we evaluated the following: literacy, skills of comprehension, communication and expression in the pupils' first language; success in second and in foreign language learning. Language tests for L1, L2 and FL differed partly in content and scope, but were nevertheless based on related objectives: writing and comprehension of text genres, namely a letter, a description or a dialogue. In order to assess their L1 performance, pupils were asked to compose a guided longer (160–200 word) text (letter to a friend on hobbies) within 30 minutes; for L2 they were asked to produce a description of a situation (a sequence of events based on pictures), and for FL their task was to write a short dialogue (based on the same pictures used for L2) in 20 minutes.

The assessment criteria were based on 11 descriptors of writing (6 descriptors: satisfactoriness, text coherence and purposefulness, presentation of the problem or 'informativeness', presentation of viewpoints on the problem and argumentation) and of linguistic competence (5 descriptors: orthographic and grammatical accuracy, cohesion, syntactical structure, text segmentation or length), and abstracted from valid curricula for Slovene and Italian as the first language (L1), Italian and Slovene as the second language (L2) and English as a foreign language (FL) in the eighth grade of elementary school. The pupils' texts were corrected and marked on the basis of the stated descriptors by researchers (whose expertise is in the respective field) and external experts (in Slovene, Italian and English), working at the University of Primorska. Having completed the database input and performed an accurate inspection of the compliance of descriptors with the marking scale for language skills, the team was able to process the first database. The total score obtained for the 11 descriptors was then distributed along a three-level scale designating whether the objectives were: (a) reached; (b) partly reached; and (c) not reached.

The method included a descriptive analysis of the data, a comparative analysis of a sample (pattern), as well as quantitative and qualitative data processing and interpretation. Statistical techniques used in data processing included frequency distribution of variables, cross tabulation, a chi-square, a T-test and an analysis of variance. The examined population included eighth grade pupils from elementary schools. The sample size was 527, with 267 of the participating pupils from the Italian–Slovene border area. Guided group surveys were carried out in all elementary schools included in the sample from 8–28 May 2007. This was performed by six experienced assistants, in cooperation with seven researchers. All assistants attended a training course prior to the start of the research to become thoroughly acquainted with the research objectives and the questionnaire.

We now offer a descriptive presentation of the results that relate to bilingual education in the Slovene–Italian border area.

Selected project results relating to bilingual education in the Slovene–Italian border area

The use of the minority language in state education systems and the possibilities to learn both the minority language and in the minority language differ greatly at transnational levels. As can be gathered from the above presentation of bilingual education along the Slovene–Italian border, despite certain differences the linguistic

organisation of classes in Italian minority schools in Slovenia (SitaL1–S) and in Slovene minority schools in Italy (SsloL1–I) is mostly comparable. In both sets of minority schools the medium of instruction is the minority language (Slovene in Italy and Italian in Slovene Istria), while the majority language as the second language has the status of a subject (Italian in Italy, Slovene in Slovenia). In terms of acquisition of the language of the environment, (Slovene) majority schools of Slovene Istria cannot be compared to (Italian) majority schools in Italian areas inhabited by Slovenes, for in the latter the minority language (Slovene) is not taught.

In the schools of Slovene Istria, apart from children who have acquired Italian or Slovene as their mother tongue in the family circle in early childhood, there are also those whose mother tongues are yet other languages. Questionnaire replies on which language they consider as theirs have revealed that a large number of pupils attending SitaL1–S see both the majority and minority languages (48%), and to a lesser extent the majority language (25%), as their own. In SsloL1–S, where the majority language is predominant (64.2%), it is interesting to note that 8.5% of pupils feel that both the majority and the minority languages are their own. There is an even larger percentage (17.9%) of those who consider both the majority and the immigrant languages, mainly Serbian and Croatian, as their own.

Pupils from four SsloL1 schools in Italy who participated in the research were from Trieste–Trst (three schools) and Gorizia–Gorica (one school). Most of them have been living in this territory from birth. Many children from these schools (42.1%) included in the project chose the option ‘bilingualism’ as their first language (i.e. considering both Slovene and Italian as their own languages). Somewhat fewer (37.3%) defined Slovene as theirs, and 8.7% felt that only Italian was their language. Approximately the same percentage of pupils (7.9%) stated that their language was an immigrant language. There is a smaller percentage (4%) of those who consider both the minority and the immigrant languages as theirs.

A comparison between the overall examination results in the minority language as L1 of SsloL1–I pupils with SitaL1–S pupils shows that those of SitaL1 in Slovene Istria have a significantly better communicative competence in the minority language (Italian) than in the minority language (Slovene) than do their counterparts in Italy’s Slovene minority schools. Most of the latter (70.6%) reached the stated objectives only partially, while almost half of the pupils in SitaL1 of Slovene Istria were successful in Italian tests.

The overall minority language assessment results (Slovene tests) in the Slovene community in Italy point to a mostly lower linguistic competence (i.e. knowledge and application of language rules). By contrast, pupils attending SitaL1–S perform better as regards the language of their minority (Italian). When considering the language regarded by the pupils of SsloL1–I as theirs and the language they use to communicate with their parents, it becomes evident that the Slovene language assessed in the research as L1 in Italy is in fact not the only language for most children. Whilst Slovene L1 is defined as the first language or the language of instruction of the school it is not the first language of all the pupils. The same is true on the reverse side for Italian.

As opposed to weakness in Slovene, pupils of SsloL1–I reached good results in the majority language (Italian as L2), both in terms of linguistic knowledge as well as in writing skills. Those of SitaL1–S achieved lower test scores for their competence of the majority language (Slovene as L2). This points to reduced linguistic competence in Slovene despite the fact that this is the first language on the Italian side of the border

and the majority language in minority schools of Slovene Istria. Compared to Italian, accuracy of expression in Slovene is more difficult to attain for the surveyed population regardless of whether Slovene is their first or second language. A possible explanation is the difference in the language structure of both languages (Slovene and Italian). Bilingual Slovene–Italian speakers perceive Slovene, when compared to Italian, as being more abstract (Pertot 1996, 60).

Slovene assumes the role of L1 in SsloL1–S and in SsloL1–I, while in Slovene Istria Italian is also the first language in SitaL1–S. All L1 participants showed better writing communication skills than other types of linguistic competence. We assume that one of the reasons for this is the communicative approach used for teaching and learning established in recent decades at school, which is also applied in mother tongue classes.

As for the schools in Slovene Istria and the control schools from central Slovenia, the percentage of objectives reached in Slovene for L1 in writing communication is also high for pupils of SsloL1–I who, on the other hand, obtained lower scores for their linguistic competence. These results suggest that good writing communication skills are not necessarily proportional to overall levels of linguistic competence. We assume that this group's success in writing was enhanced too by the communicative approach of teaching and learning as established in Italian state curricula.

Test results also show that in writing both the pupils of SitaL1–S and of SsloL1–I reached almost equal results in the highest category (the objectives reached amounted in Slovenia to 62% and in Italy to 69.8%). However, since the number of pupils taking the examination was somewhat unbalanced (35 from SitaL1–S, 126 from SsloL1–I) conclusions from these comparisons are only tentative.

Taking into account the status relations between the two languages, it could be expected that achievements are highest in Slovene as L2 in SitaL1–S, and in Italian as L1 in SsloL1–I, and equal or somewhat lower in Italian as L2 and in Slovene as L1 in SsloL1–I. This would be feasible in view of the fact that Slovene is a state language in Slovene Istria; Italian is an official language and a compulsory subject in Slovene Istria majority schools, while Slovene has a limited use as an official language in Italy's regions of Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica, where it is not taught in majority schools. Although Italian has prestige outside the Slovene borders as being related to a tradition of high culture this is not reflected in the test results, either in the bilingual area or in relation to the language of the neighbouring country, with pupils at majority schools reaching the lowest results in the L2 examination – in this case Italian. Among the achievements in Italian as L2 in SsloL1–S and Slovene as L2 in SitaL1–S important statistical differences were discerned in favour of Slovene as L2. This means that in Slovenia, Slovene is better established as the communicative code among minority speakers than Italian as that of majority speakers.

Pupils of SsloL1 in Slovene Istria also tend to reach lower mean values in Italian as L2 than in English as FL. Comparing this group's test results in Italian as L2 with their results in English as FL, we find there is an obvious difference in favour of the English language. In the former case as many as 51% of pupils failed to reach the objectives, whereas for the latter this is 23.6%. This points to the greater popularity of English and therefore to the higher status of this language compared to interest in the language of the neighbouring country. On the other hand the pupils of SsloL1–I reached significantly lower examination results in English than their peers in Slovene Istria, which can be attributed to the different orientation of Italian curricula.

SSloL1 pupils in Italy obtained good results in Italian, both in terms of their linguistic competence and in writing skills. They are weaker in Slovene, predominantly in their linguistic competence. There are many possible reasons for this. Both languages (Slovene and Italian) are used in different speech situations and assume different, usually complementary, roles. A whole range of factors accounts for this, such as limited inter-generational language transmission, a strong adaptation of the language system to the dominant Italian language, the reduced public use of the Slovene language, and the scant social value assigned to it (Carli 2002, 103). These factors are likely to have affected the position and development of the Slovene language in Italy. Although the adopted protection law has regulated the position of Slovene in Italy, this right has not yet been completely implemented. People still tend to perceive inequality between Slovene and Italian. This wider social environment and the constituent parts of what is considered as collective identity consequently affect the choice of and attitude towards a language on the part of children (Pertot 2004). Apart from the lesser use and status of Slovene in Italy, modest knowledge of the language is also a result of inadequate teacher training for work with children who, when entering school, do not know or use the standard language of central Slovenia.

Observations and recommendations

Awareness of the official language status of Slovene affects motivation to develop linguistic–communicative competencies in the mother tongue among the members of minority and majority communities of Slovene Istria. A comparison of the interdependence of L1 and L2 and the respective identity shows that pupils perceive a stronger connection between their first language and their perceived identity than between the second and that identity. Elementary school pupils with Italian as the language of instruction present a deviation from the general pattern for they believe that the connection between language and identity is more important in the case of Slovene than Italian. This means that mastery of Italian in pupils of schools with Slovene as the language of instruction greatly depends on their frequency of use of Italian and expressing Italian (or mixed) identity and culture in the immediate environment (Čok 2008, 95). Since such possibilities are not as numerous as could be expected if we take into account the institutionalised bilingualism of the area, for students in the coastal region, who achieved the lowest results in the second-language examination, inter-linguistic and intercultural contacts need to be promoted.

The position and development of the Slovene language in Italy has been affected by a wide range of factors connected with its restricted use in public life. Among the Slovene minority members in Italy, Slovene is an in-group means of communication, mostly in the private sphere, while Italian is the norm in the public domain. Although the erosion and displacement of the Slovene language in certain domains coexists with new conceptual and social representations that differ from both Slovene and Italian monolingual language and culture in other areas of life (Pertot 2005), there is an undeniable trend towards developing better skills in the majority language. Therefore it appears clear that the maintenance of the Slovene language in Italy cannot be assured without implementing adequate language planning activities that are primarily orientated towards the promotion and valorisation of the language, not only among the members of the minority group, but also in society at large. Learning about and evaluating examples of good practice will serve to complement this. Therefore no analysis of the present situation should ignore the results that have already been

achieved. In the case of teaching Slovene in elementary schools this involves classes where Slovene is the second, if not already a foreign language for many children.

A serious analysis of elementary school teaching practice in Italian schools with Slovene as the language of instruction and its effects needs to entail that we: (a) acknowledge the fact that Slovene lessons as L2/FL in lower grades of elementary schools are in fact already being implemented; (b) accept the fact that interpersonal communicative competences tied to the context in which children live does not coincide with the cognitive, academic knowledge that is not situationally conditioned, and that we strive towards raising the level of linguistic competences; and (c) underline positive results in tackling problems. Furthermore, the work of teachers who employ their own creative skills in teaching Slovene as L2/FL needs to be recorded, evaluated and used as a basis for deciding how and to what extent the Slovene-language school in Italy should be complemented or developed in order for it to keep pace with time-dictated changes and also with historical goals of preservation, protection and the development of minority languages and cultures.

The educational model for the development of multilingualism in Slovene Istria has so far failed to achieve the intended results. Taking into account the aforementioned research data, decrease in interest, and consequently also the level of success, in Italian as L2 when compared to English as FL as well as achievements in Italian as L2 when compared to Slovene as L2 or even Hungarian as L2 in Slovenia, it can be concluded that the ultimate objective (i.e. attaining bilingualism in the majority population) has only been partially met. Thorough analysis of the elementary school curriculum implementation in ethnically mixed areas of Slovene Istria is needed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of this model. Teachers also need to be trained to use new approaches to multilingualism and intercultural communication, which can be enhanced through cooperation between schools in the border area.

Taking into account the research results, we can present the following conclusions. The advantages of bilingual education both in Slovenia and in the regions of Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica can be asserted with a view on the changing socio-economic conditions related to the European integration processes. In underlining integration values, the promotion of languages used in mixed environments can form part of education on peaceful coexistence. As we have shown, there is evidence of children's awareness of the role and importance of their own language and that of others in multilingual environments. This is of primary importance for the formation of a European citizenry that forms part of a union whose founding premise is the preservation of the linguistic heritage of European ethnic communities (through multilingualism) and the development of individual plurilingualism.

In terms of attitudes towards the Slovene language and its use in the regions of Trieste–Trst and Gorizia–Gorica this implies sociopolitical dimensions which cannot just be addressed through education. But schools ought to take care of maintaining the quality of teaching to counteract the gradual impoverishment of the language and its possible assimilation. Satisfactory linguistic standards attained in elementary school present the basis for an effective knowledge transfer in the Slovene language. In the investigated settings, there could be grounds for using special approaches in the teaching of children for whom Slovene is L2/FL.

Providing L2 teachers with knowledge about didactics of multilingualism and interculturalism is essential, as well as training minority-language and second-language instructors in corresponding higher education programmes (study programmes of the first and second Bologna cycles). There is also a need to revise and complement existing

curricula as well as textbooks used in the humanities and social science subjects as well as art with topics presenting the culture and languages of other minorities in Slovenia.

The promotion of multilingualism in accordance with the EU strategy, *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* (Ministère de l'Éducation et du Sport de la République de Slovénie 2005), opens up a new European space for the establishment of linguistic and cultural diversity through education processes that honour diversity. Based on our results reached on the implementation of the bilingual school model in mixed regions of the Slovene–Italian border area we can conclude that on the one hand minorities are assuming an increasingly important role in the integration of the border areas, while on the other there is a danger that the formal and informal status of minority languages, and consequently minorities themselves, may be lowered at the expense of a lingua franca (particularly English). Integrating in mandatory education curricula topics of cultural, historical and political relations promoting tolerance and respecting differences can enable young people to form connections within the European community as a new civilisation model. For this purpose, language textbooks (L1, L2, FL) need to be complemented with topics of intercultural education and the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups.

In making the minority education system competitive with its majority counterpart, bilingual education can assume a new role that is potentially of economic value too in our era of increased movements of people, goods and capital in Europe. Research on European and national trends regarding bilingual education can, through international projects on the integration of education models, help to promote the consolidation of initiatives from the immediate and the wider European space.

Notes

1. Areas in which bilingual instruction is compulsory are defined in the Elementary School Act (1996), the Gimnazije Act (1996) and the Vocational and Technical Education Act (1996).
2. This is according to the 1996 National Elementary School Act (Articles 6 and 16); the 1996 Gimnazije Act (Article 8); the 1996 Vocational and Technical Education Act (Article 8).

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