

DRAFT paper

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Language and workplace

Introduction

Research projects with holistic approach to the link between language and economy, and connecting economy theory with language market in Slovenia, are not to be found in literary sources; the only sources to be found are those dealing with the role of language and culture in economy (e. g. Pogorelec, 1983, Nečak-Lük, 1993; Osojnik, 2004). Slovenia did not participate in the European research project on the impact of proficiency in foreign languages upon economy - ELAN (Hagen, 2006), which included 15 states. The results of this project would have indicated the link between the language proficiency and language use, and the successful economic activities of various businesses in Slovenia, as well as provided a comparison with other European states. The present text only brings selected research results, acquired within some research projects carried out in some contact regions in Slovenia¹. The presented results indicate the presence of »economic« variables in the choice and use of language at work post, and represent a basis for further, in-depth research on the role of language in Slovene economy. This presentation includes a minority language and a foreign language.

In Slovenia, bilingualism at institutional level is formally guaranteed in the ethnically mixed territories; therein belongs bilingual functioning. Linguistic diversity is formally respected in the surroundings, financial means for its implementation is ensured. The financial support of the declaratively stated possibilities is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. In this context, the linguistic diversity (knowledge of two languages) has a direct value, linked to the allowance for bilingual functioning. This is only valid for public institutions in the territories where an employed individual comes into contact with customers. Knowledge of languages or being bilingual represents a value to this individual and provides an advantage in the labour market (Erreygers, Jacobs, 2005). Although bilingualism is regarded as an advantage by many, the economic effect of bilingualism in Slovenia has so far not been sufficiently researched and

¹ Let us mention a few research works which perceived, while analysing language processes, the link between language and economy:

- A. Institute for Ethnic Studies project «Perception of linguistic and cultural diversity in border towns», 2004-2006, head Sonja Novak Lukanovič;
- B. IES project «Bilingualism in Slovenia», 2005-2007, head Sonja Novak Lukanovič.

scientifically confirmed. There are also no research works dealing with the cost-effectiveness of bilingualism.

The presentation will stress the different value of the language in the workplace of public institutions or private businesses.

1. Language and workplace: public institutions

The possibility of performing bilingualism is additionally stimulated, at least in the segment of public institutions, by the allowance for bilingual functioning. This allowance is an important economic element, from the aspects of both macro and micro economy. From the macro-economic aspect, the allowance for bilingual functioning represents expenses in the budget that the state is obliged to ensure in order to obtain the formal realization of bilingual functioning at all levels. At micro level this means that the allowance for bilingual functioning is linked to an individual and to a workplace, and has a multi-layer significance - the individual is motivated to learn the second language, as the knowledge of both the languages of the majority and the minority provides the opportunity of employment. The use of the two languages at the workplace also brings financial stimulation. It is hard to say whether the financial stimulation (additional 3% to 6% to the basic salary) is sufficient for the motivation of individuals, especially of the majority members, to adopt the other's language.

The provisions on the equal use of the languages of the two national minorities in the ethnically mixed territories are contained in the laws and regulations defining the functioning of the administration, as well as of the state and judicial authorities (courts of law, prosecution, notaries), and also in provisions on external bilingualism. Both the languages, Slovene and Italian or Slovene and Hungarian, are equal in the functioning of administrative, state or judicial authorities (Law on Public Administration).²

On the basis of compliance of variables of ethnolinguistic vitality it is ascertained that the possibility of the use of the national community language exists in the ethnically mixed territories of Slovenia and in regions with languages in contact. This possibility proves the non-discrimination of the language and the provision by the state, by the Constitution and numerous legal stipulations, of the basis for the use of the two languages. The financial stimulation for bilingual functioning is a concrete mechanism of the state helping to provide for additional conditions which

² Law on Public Administration (Official Gazette of the RS, no 52/02, from June 14, 2002); Amendment Acts of Law on PA (Off. Gaz., no 56/03, June 13, 2003);

- Amendments and Completion Acts of Law on PA (Off. Gaz., no 61/04, June 4, 2004);
- Amendments and Completion Acts of Law on PA (Off. Gaz., no 123/04, Nov. 18, 2004);
- Amendments and Completion Acts of Law on PA (Off. Gaz., no 93/05, in force since Oct. 21, 2005)

enhance the use of minority language. This could be regarded as additional stimulation for individuals, or as a contribution of the society to the promotion of minority language use. Undoubtedly the financial stimulation contributes to/promotes the possibility of minority language use.

But regardless of the financial input of the state, which must be ensured for the realization of bilingualism, in the curve (foreseeing that higher financial investment brings better results) a point is reached when the language use - in various domains - and the language competence do not increase in accordance with the degree of input. It can therefore be concluded that efficiency has its limits. This means that any policy, even when increasing the financial input, reaches a certain point, but cannot reach over certain limits. Numerous other socio-political factors must exist in order to surpass these limits, the result of which is much more complicated, complex and also prolonged. The decisive role in this goes to the majority population - its attitude and adoption of the minority itself and its language.

2. Language and workplace: businesses

We were interested in the attitude towards minority and foreign language in businesses/private institutions, operating in ethnically mixed territories in Slovenia. The results of our research work show that the demand for the knowledge of minority - Italian or Hungarian - language is only present if language command signifies a condition, linked to successful functioning and higher profits, e.g. if communication in the minority language increases sales. The command of Italian and Hungarian is often an advantage also because the minority language is at the same time the language of the neighbouring state with which the company is in business contacts. In this sense the command of minority language has added value for an individual, representing a value, measurable with economic indices (Novak Lukanovič, 2002, 2003). The businesses, however, *operating in the ethnically mixed territories, having seat outside of these territories*, have a very one-sided understanding of bilingualism as shown in interviews³ with leading individuals in selected businesses, according to whom bilingualism is only related to minority members. They see no point in the implementation of institutional bilingualism, believing that the members of the Italian and Hungarian nationalities have a good command of Slovene, while at the same time emphasizing that Slovene in

³ This article only mentions a partial result of the basic research project of ARRS «Language and economy», head Sonja Novak Lukanovič (2008-2011). The sample included 50 businesses situated in the border region: Slovene-Italian, Slovene-Austrian, Slovene-Hungarian, oriented towards South-Eastern European markets and businesses with foreigners as majority owners. The interview had 55 questions. Individual answers were subject to qualitative analysis.

ethnically mixed regions is not merely the official language but also the state language.

Businesses (included in our research) *with the seat in ethnically mixed territories* have a different standpoint towards bilingualism (at least at the declarative level). Most of these businesses are headed by individuals originating from the bilingual territory, having themselves been part of bilingual education. They exposed the importance of having command of both languages - Slovene and minority, since the seat of the respective business was in the nationally mixed territories, where both languages are official languages.

In the ascertaining of the degree of language competence of the minority language, the majority of the respondents in our research uses the terms «*active*» or «*passive*» language command, although the extent of active or passive command is not specified. Active command of Slovene and minority language is obligatory for all leading posts. Active language command is the capacity of spoken communication with partners, customers and other individuals in contact. The degree of the minority language competence is not specifically tested, documents confirming bilingual schooling or oral information being sufficient. Minority language command is not specifically evaluated (contrary to the employees in public sector), but it is essential for obtaining a job. This condition, however, is not always insisted upon. The expression used is »rather important« and the majority believes the minority language command not to be relevant for employment. This attitude is not in favour of the implementation of institutional bilingualism.

Much more exposed is the significance of the foreign language command. Regarding the degree of foreign language command there is no difference among businesses as to their seat or ownership structure. All businesses demand the command of foreign language - mostly English - for the leading posts. Foreign language command (English) is a precondition for a post related to foreign markets (commercialists, economists). There is no difference as to the size of respective businesses, neither as to their location within or outside the ethnically mixed regions. The terms used in the ascertaining of the degree of foreign language command are »active or passive«.

The degree of foreign language command is defined in two ways:

- The majority demands a certificate of language command;
- Apart from the certificate, the majority tests language command directly, in an interview preceding employment or by special tests (written translations, oral communication with native speakers).

Although all respondents emphasized that foreign language command (just as minority language command) is a condition for employment in leading posts, the question whether they would employ an individual with professional education adequate for the post in question, but without the foreign language command or

sufficient competence, gave no uniform answers. For businesses situated in the ethnically mixed region this condition is not »obligatory« and is adopted to the post or respective professional. It should be considered that the ethnically mixed region of Prekmurje belongs amongst underdeveloped regions of Slovenia and that adequate experts are hard to find. Inasmuch as experts without adequate language command are employed, additional foreign language training is available - within language schools or individually. In such cases education costs are covered by the respective firm.

The analysis of employment advertisements⁴ in Slovene newspapers (*Delo*, *Primorske novice*, *Večer*, *Vestnik*) showed that most advertisements do not specifically state the demand for language command, and that in the ethnically mixed regions the command of two languages is not required. It is interesting though, that in many advertisements the demand for good, very good or even excellent, satisfactory or basic language command is stated. The demand for good, very good or fluent command of Slovene often appears; these advertisements relate to employment in public sector, commerce, banks and insurance. Even in this case there is a question as to the meaning of these conditions, as well as to the definition of good, very good or fluent language command. This is not harmonized with certificates of formal or non-formal education.

The demand for foreign language command, appearing in employment advertisements, and the analysis of interviews among the leading individuals in selected businesses located in the ethnically mixed regions, show that employees in businesses are subject to additional training. There is no uniform manner of language training. Bigger businesses (human resources and capital-wise) have organized training for their employees within firms, while workers in smaller firms attend language classes in language schools. If a workplace claims a foreign language command, the costs of such training are covered by the company. This was also confirmed by the analysis of responses of the participants of language school in Lendava, carried out in 2009.

The results analysis indicated that companies - especially in the field of economy - have their own education and language policy of non-formal education. On the basis of available sources we studied the existence of specific language/education planning, relating to selected languages in individual surroundings, resulting from the demands of local economic activities. Analysis results showed that formal language policy (regardless of the setting in question) does not conform to changes and demands of economy. The market demands and mobility of human resources are only manifested in non-formal education.

Conclusion

⁴ We analyzed newspapers during 2 months in 2011; 3965 advertisements were published, the majority in *Delo* and *Večer*. Among these, special attention was given to 112 advertisements having demands concerning language command.

In the ethnically mixed regions in Slovenia, language in interrelation with economy is always dealt with as a multi-dimensional value, contributing to the preservation of language diversity in the region and enabling multicultural communication. It should be taken into account that the Constitution-determined ethnically mixed regions in Slovenia are at the same time border regions, which signifies that the minority language does not only mark the region's language diversity, but also simultaneously represents the language of the neighbouring state, which results in the upgrading of the values of individual paradigms determining the link between language and economy. Although the minority language is strongly characterized by its non-market value, its most important value lies in the fact that it determines the value of language diversity and inter-cultural communication. Adequate language, and above all education, policy provides added value to minority language. Also, in the ethnically mixed regions in Slovenia the link between language and economy is usually mentioned in connection with motivation, i. e. in cases when an individual is economically motivated to learn a language, and to use it in specific situations. In many cases, the economic variable affects the forming of individuals' attitude towards a specific language, also minority language. To sum up, all this means that the economic factor is in many various ways - directly or indirectly - linked to all aspects having impact upon language processes in a setting.

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