

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN BORDER REGIONS: SOME RESEARCH DATA ON
THE PERCEPTION AMONG THE PUPILS OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The article presents some data from a case study performed among pupils (13–14 years old) and their parents from two towns along Slovene/Italian border (Nova Gorica and Gorizia/Gorica) where two different socio-ethnic groups live in contact: on the Slovenian side there is a relatively homogeneous Slovene community, whereas on the Italian side there is an ethnically mixed population of Italians and Slovenes. The paper focuses on the presentation of some empirical data concerning the perception of language diversity, the perception of the knowledge of the 'neighbouring language', the subjective evaluation of the 'neighbouring language', the relations between the Italian and Slovene language and other languages, especially English, among pupils and their parents on the two sides of the border.

Key words: Border area, language diversity, perception, minority language, foreign language, neighbouring language, language competence

DIVERSITÀ LINGUISTICA IN REGIONI FRONTALIERE: ALCUNI DATI DI RICERCA
SULLA PERCEZIONE TRA GLI ALLIEVI DI DUE SCUOLE SUPERIORI

SINTESI

L'articolo presenta alcuni dati tratti da uno studio analitico realizzato tra gli alunni (di 13–14 anni d'età) e i loro genitori di due città sul confine sloveno-italiano (Nova Gorica e Gorizia/Gorica), dove due diversi gruppi socio-etnici vivono a contatto: dalla parte slovena c'è una comunità slovena relativamente omogenea, mentre dalla parte italiana esiste una popolazione etnicamente mista di italiani e sloveni. L'articolo s'incentra sulla presentazione di alcuni dati empirici relativi alla percezione della diversità linguistica e della conoscenza della 'lingua contigua', alla valutazione soggettiva della 'lingua contigua', e alle relazioni tra la lingua italiana, quella slovena e altre lingue, specialmente l'inglese, tra gli alunni e i loro genitori su ambo i lati del confine.

Parole chiave: area di confine, diversità linguistica, percezione, lingua minoritaria, lingua straniera, lingua contigua, competenza linguistica

INTRODUCTION

Regions divided by borders represent some kind of a »natural laboratory« in which multiculturalism or multilingualism is the objective reality. Research in such a laboratory also means observation, perception, analysis of phenomena and relationships between languages and cultures, and consequently also between various ethnic groups. Borders – e.g., state, political, socio-economic, linguistic – mark each region and give it a certain specific dimension by which it is distinguished from other regions. Linguistic borders do not always correspond with national ones, and this gives border regions additional specificities. It is these specificities that undoubtedly affect the lives and attitudes of people and the way they view themselves and others, which was the subject of our interest and research.

Border regions represent contact between two or more different cultures and languages. In such an environment, bilingual or multilingual speakers are a reality. Although in communication between groups living in contact borders may change, they are always the result of political and socio-economic factors in the environment. In border regions, language has a communicational and symbolic dimension, it is the indicator of diversity, and although it is not always the most important symbol that marks the borders between communities, it is an important indicator of an individual group's status and of relationships between groups (Barth, 1969). Here one should start from the assumption that individual languages in such environments have different (mostly unequal) communication functions and that individual speakers in addition to their own language first learn those languages that enable them to be included in the wider communication space. In each observed border region, it is possible to set up a hierarchy of languages as a hierarchical pyramid (Calvet, 1999), which has a varied functional configuration due to various factors (linguistic policies, power in the »language market« etc.). In the hierarchical pyramid, the position of languages coming into contact in a certain border region also reflects the relation of the groups and shows whether the groups live one beside the other or one with the other (Nećak Lük, Musken, Novak Lukanovič, 2000; Novak Lukanovič, 2003).

At a given moment it is almost impossible to distinguish linguistic processes from social ones because in every environment language and society are always closely interconnected and interwoven. Language is part of an individual's personality, and linguistic habits are

the most important components of social habits. Language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social structure and the system of social values. It is through language communication or linguistic behaviour that individuals reflect the social norms required by a certain position and through this their attitudes towards other people are also determined.

In individual border regions, different communities coming into contact have different roles and positions, so that their languages also have different roles. In specific situations, the decision by an individual or a group to use or learn a certain language or certain language variant is always related to social factors, and this also leads to their different perception and acceptance of individual languages. The perception of language diversity by an individual is thus reflected in his/her attitude towards individual languages. Attitude towards language is a complex phenomenon and includes both the acceptance of individual languages, knowledge of individual languages and also the influences of situational factors. Which language or which language form will prevail in a certain context largely depends on the subjective opinions of the individual, as well as their linguistic capacity and motivation to learn and use language. All of these indicators can be united under the syntagm »attitude towards language« (Baker, 1992). The scientific literature discusses attitude towards language both theoretically and empirically by using statistical analysis. In the interpretation of empirical data it is not enough to detect an attitude and analyse and evaluate it with statistical methods; attitude towards language needs to be placed into the context of its environment and analysed on the basis of additional factors. Border regions with their specificities strongly mark an individual's perception of language and language diversity.

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY

Selected border region

The selected area is on the Slovene-Italian border, and comprises the city municipalities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia/Gorica.¹ On the Slovene side, there is a region with a relatively homogenous Slovene community and on the Italian side there is an ethnically-mixed region with Slavic, Latin and German ethnic groups in contact. The two different ethnically-marked regions create both similarities and differences between the populations concerning the perception of language(s) as a result of various historical, political, economical and cultural factors.

1 In the year 2003 the population of Nova Gorica was approx. 36,155; ethnically the majority of citizens were Slovenes (83.2%) and the rest of inhabitants were from other Republics of former Yugoslavia (Nova Gorica, 2009). In the city of Gorizia/Gorica live approx. 37,000 inhabitants (Gorizia, 2009). There are no data about the ethnic stratification of the population.

In these regions, the role of language and culture had a special significance throughout history. During the period of strained relationships between the Italian and the Slovene population from the second half of the 19th century onwards and especially during the period of Fascism, in this region as well as elsewhere along the Slovene western national border, language represented the first line, the limit, a defence line and an identification starting point for each of the national communities.

Circumstances that were unfavourable for creating harmony between these two communities continued to exist even after World War II and, as is well known, issues related to the Slovene minority in Italy have not been satisfactorily resolved to this day (Bufon, 1995). Due to unresolved historic facts, it is entirely clear that even today the problem of communication between the Italian and Slovene side in this region cannot be discussed and treated merely as a problem of a practical nature regarding communication, but that the strong symbolic function of a language should also be taken into account in analysing communications.

Although expansion of the European Union changed the meaning and significance of »state borders«, the Slovene-Italian border region is still marked by the »border«, which is defined by language, culture, history, space and economy. Even before the beginning of integration processes in Europe, towns on both sides of the border were connecting with each other in the fields of economy, culture, urban planning, environmental protection, infrastructure, etc., in spite of the state border. Many scientific studies stressed the meaning of cross-border initiatives (for example Bufon, 1995; 2002; Gasparini, 2001; Uršič, 2001). The intensity and content of cooperation and linking in this border region were naturally quite varied and oscillated over different time periods, primarily due to various political and also economic circumstances on both sides of the border, which led to differences in individual perceptions of the significance and role of language and cultural diversity. However, over the entire past periods of interconnections and links, the fact that very little attention was paid to the problem of communication between individual groups in this region remained unchanged.

Since conflicts and/or agreements between individual languages or individual groups always change in parallel with wider social trends, Slovenia's accession to the European Union certainly represents a challenge for

language relationships in the border regions discussed. Another challenge for relationships between individual languages in the era of globalisation, especially during the past decades, is the expansion (primarily) of English as a mediating language with an expansive function. Interculturalism and the role of an individual language have also arisen in response to globalisation processes (Rizman, 1994). Even within the European Union, the question of a unified communication space and thus the position of individual languages on the »language market« is opening up with the common market and free flow of capital and people (Grin, 1996).

Aims and hypotheses of the research project

Our purpose in conceiving the research project was to deal primarily with the border region, in which different languages are present – state language, the language of the neighbouring state, and foreign language.²

The data interpretation was based on the following research hypotheses:

- children and parents perceive the language and cultural diversity of their living space;
- they accept the measures aiming at intercultural communication (learn the language, use media, cooperate in different ways, etc.);
- the value of language on the »language market« is presumed to be the dominant force in the choice of language learning in the border area;
- the presence of minority and minority language in chosen border area affects intercultural communication, as well as the perception of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The sample and work methodology

The research project was conceived as a pilot study.

The sample³ was administered at selected schools among two target population-children, aged 14, and their parents, and its aim was perception of inter-generational differences. In Nova Gorica the opinion poll was carried out in two classes of the Milojka Štrukelj elementary school. On the Italian (ethnically heterogeneous) side two classes with the majority language (the Vittorio Locchi elementary school; questionnaire in Italian language) and two classes with the Slovene language (the Ivan Trinko elementary school; bilingual

2 The aim was to find the difference among categories: own community and neighboring community, own language (this was state language – Slovene for Nova Gorica and Italian for Gorizia/Gorica – not taking into account mother tongue language of respondents, which was in many cases different from the state language).

3 The questionnaire was in Slovene, Italian or both languages, depending on school. There were 37 structured questions (of open and closed type):

- referring directly and indirectly to languages (language use, self-evaluation of their own competence ...);
- presenting different standpoints regarding individual languages – official, neighbouring, foreign
- referring to crossborder cooperation and culture.

Slovene/Italian questionnaaire) were included into the research project.

The empirical part (i.e., the opinion poll) of the research project on the Italian side was carried out with the assistance of the researchers from the I.S.I.G.⁴ Gorizia immediately before the entry of Slovenia into the European Union (namely, at the end of 2003).

A group interview was conducted with children at all the three schools; parents answered the questions anonymously, and the questionnaires were sent back in sealed envelopes. The entire research project sample⁵ numbered:

- 122 children, the number of boys (54.9%) slightly exceeding the number of girls (45.1%);
- 152 parents.

On the part of parents, mothers were more frequent respondents than fathers, although statistical data show that fathers represent a relatively large share (in Nova Gorica 52% women, 48% men; at both schools in Gorizia/Gorica 56% women, 44% men). Statistically, the lowest number of responses came from the school with Slovene as a teaching language, i.e., the Ivan Trinko school.⁶

At the Ivan Trinko school, where children and their parents were given the bilingual questionnaire, most of the children responded in Slovene (85.4%), while parents responded almost equally in Slovene as in Italian (only a little more than half of them answered the Slovene questionnaire – 56.4%). In the analysis of the results of open questions, a qualitative method was applied, while the acquired data, presented in the article, were analyzed with different statistical methods.⁷

Some selected results and discussion

Language variety of the sample

The results indicated that most children – regardless of the school they attend (82.8%) – have lived in the border area all their life, which means they are very familiar with this setting. The highest percentage of the children that have moved to Gorizia/Gorica over the last decade, attends the Locchi school (23.7% – 9 children);

this agrees with the answers concerning the language of the early childhood period (different regional dialects of the Italian language were stated, which proves that they have moved to Gorizia/Gorica from different parts of Italy). However, a relatively lower number of children (16,3% - 7 children) moved to Nova Gorica, at least according to our sample. These children also stated non-Slovene language as their early childhood language, in most cases one of the languages of the former Yugoslavian nations. Likewise the analysis of language network shows that most of the children that have moved to the border area (Gorizia/Gorica or Nova Gorica) over the period of less than a decade, use different languages for different communication purposes (at home, with parents, brothers, grandparents, relatives, friends, at workplace, and in different public situations), which no doubt also affects their perception of linguistic/cultural diversity.

The results showed that most children in Nova Gorica (72%) gave Slovene as their mother tongue. As for the rest (28%), they mostly gave languages from the former Yugoslavia (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, etc.). At the Italian school in Gorizia/Gorica, children mostly (68.4%) gave Italian language as their mother tongue; a relatively large number of children gave Friulian language (21.1%), and in single cases other languages were mentioned (10.5% – Ukrainian, Spanish, etc.)

Most children attending the school in Gorizia with Slovene as a language of instruction gave Italian as their mother tongue (53.7%) next came Slovenian (39%), and lastly three of them mentioned some other language as their mother tongue (7.3% – German, Bosnian, Croatian).

Most parents from Nova Gorica gave Slovenian as their mother tongue (72.3%), only parents from the Italian school mentioned Italian (68.8%). However, results concerning parents from schools with Slovene language point at linguistic diversity – Slovene language (56.4%) prevails, but Italian (23.1%), Friulian and other languages are also present.

It is interesting that a relatively large number of children (almost half) from the school with Italian as the

4 Istituto di sociologia internazionale (Institute of International Sociology), Gorizia/Gorica, Italy.

5 The total number included in the research was 122 children and 152 parents. There were 43 children in Štrukelj, 38 in Locchi and 41 in Trinko. Regarding the number of parents there were 65 in Štrukelj, 48 in Locchi and 69 in Trinko.

6 The reason why parents of children attending the Trinko school with Slovene as a language of instruction did not respond in greater number is very complex, and no doubt reflects the attitude of people towards minority issues. Such a result could hardly be substantiated with the analysis of the research project results. We can only suppose that even though the empirical research itself (the questionnaire contents) does not concern the minority field directly, it was probably the people in charge of the research project, the bilingual nature of the questionnaire, and – last but not least – the topic of cultural and linguistic diversity itself, that dissuaded parents from participation, as they probably understood the research as an analysis of minority schooling, perhaps even as a way of controlling their opinions. After all the result can also be purely coincidental, arising from the fact that parents must be tired of opinion polls and questionnaires, etc.

7 The data were statistically analyzed, using Friedman, Wilcoxon and Mann-Whitney tests.

language of instruction (the Locchi school), whose mother tongue is Italian, gave a written evaluation of another language learnt in early childhood. As the second language they stated a number of variants of Italian (the dialects of Sicily, Napoli, Trieste/Trst, Tarvisio/Trbiž, etc.), which means the language they use at home is mostly dialect. The number of dialects proves that families – at least partly – originate from different parts of Italy and have moved to Gorizia/Gorica.

The answers of children attending the school with Slovene as a language of instruction in Gorizia/Gorica concerning their early childhood language show the early acquisition of two or even three languages. Results indicated the intertwining of Slovene and Italian language. Despite giving Italian as their mother tongue, they learnt Slovene in early childhood. The children attending the school with Slovene as a teaching language are bilingual, mostly living in mixed families where parents have different mother tongues. Also, the results of our research project on the language of communication between parents and children or other family members, respectively, as well as on their choice of language in public context, confirm that the children from the Ivan Trinko school who participated in our project are indeed bilingual.⁸

Attitude towards language

Many studies report that attitude towards language is hard to measure and define; it is a subjectively coloured and hard-to-measure value; it implies certain feelings; it is an emotional response of people to certain situations; it is a complex psychological whole, including knowledge, feelings and behaviour; it is never composed of one, but of several interdependent components (Howard Giles, Miles Hewstone, Peter Ball, 1983); and at the same time it is very sensible of local circumstances and political and historical changes in the community, and this is also confirmed by the results of our study.⁹

By performing a statistical analysis of responses, we attempted to detect differences in the standpoint of the responders related to:

- the significance of their state language for people on the other side of the border;

- the significance of the language of the neighbouring state for people of the region in which they are residing;
- the significance of a foreign language.

A statistical analysis indicated differences in the attitudes of the respondents towards individual assertions referring to the importance of language for business, for communication, for finding work in their own towns and for finding work on the other side of the border, as a sign of good education, for knowing the culture of others, for social prestige, for training and study, and for communication in the EU.

The results of the study showed that the respondents differed in their evaluation of the significance of the state/neighbouring/foreign language. Most of the respondents from both groups (children and parents) strongly agreed with the assertion that knowledge of languages – the state language and the neighbouring language – is important in business contacts in the border region. Statistically speaking, this assertion stood out from all others, therefore it was emphasised in our further analysis. As the most important foreign language¹⁰ most respondents (there were no differences between schools or generations) cited English, which however was given special significance for communication within the European Union, while it was not deemed important for business relationships within the border region. The degree of agreement between children in individual schools with these assertions is indicated in Table 1.

In our analyses we were especially interested in the attitude to the neighbouring language, which is related to the *us vs. them* relationship (our community: neighbour community, our language: neighbouring language). An attempt was therefore made to find out how respondents assess the need for knowing the language of the neighbouring country, i.e., whether they agree that it is essential for business contacts that they should learn the neighbouring language, whether they agree that it is important for people on the other side of the border to learn their language for business contacts and whether they agree that knowledge of the English language is necessary for business contacts in the border region. By using special statistical methods (the Friedman test) it was found that they strongly agreed (with no differences

8 There are different taxonomies defining the bilingual family, among them Baker's definition (Baker, 1988). Baker considers several parameters – parents' mother tongue, the language of communication within family (among parents, children, brothers, grandparents, aunts ...), the language used in school, setting, different situations, and official language.

9 For example: in certain environments, it was the political situation that at certain times affected the formation of attitudes of individuals or the community towards language. For example, Bourhis (1983) reports that changed political situation in Québec was associated with changed habits regarding the French and English language.

10 The respondents were asked to state a language which is not their state language or the language of the neighbouring country. English was chosen as the first foreign language in the Štrukelj school by 87.7% of the children and 87.7% of the parents, in the Locchi school by 94.7% of the children and 91.7% of the parents and in the Trinko school by 94.7% of the children and 87.2% of the parents.

Table 1: Attitude to the state/neighbouring/foreign language.
Tabela 1: Odnos do uradnega/sosedskega/tujega jezika.

(Scale 1–5, 5 = I fully agree, 4 = rather agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 1 = fully disagree;
 Statistical method: Friedman test)

Standpoint: State language	Štrukelj	Locchi	Trinko
Knowledge of one's own language is necessary for people on the other side of the border in business contacts with across-border partners	4.39	4.47	4.46
Knowledge of one's own language makes communication in the EU possible	3.85	2.84	3.49

Standpoint: Neighbouring language	Štrukelj	Locchi	Trinko
Knowledge of the other's language is necessary for people on this side of the border in business contacts with across-border partners	4.07	4.13	4.15
Knowledge of the other's language makes communication in the EU possible	2.95	2.32	2.78

Standpoint: Foreign language	Štrukelj	Locchi	Trinko
Knowledge of a foreign language is necessary for people on both sides of the border in business contacts	3.63	3.59	3.49
Knowledge of a foreign language makes communication in the EU possible	4.33	4.95	4.51

between schools) with the assertion that people on the other side of the border need to know their state language for business contacts. This means that they strongly emphasised the significance of their own language (state language) for other people. At the same time, they also relatively strongly agreed that they should know the language of their neighbours. There was however a notable statistical difference between the generations: adults agreed more with this assertion while their children were not so sure that it was necessary. In a way, this was an expected result, since adults are employed, and as was shown by the analysis of responses on the use of languages in the workplace, the respondents frequently encounter other languages during their work.

The results of statistical analyses showed that the respondents do not attribute a great importance to the knowledge of language for the social standing of an individual or for communication between inhabitants, but they do strongly emphasise the association between language and economy (business contacts, employment), which means that they were very pragmatic in their evaluation and viewed the significance of knowing languages only by virtue of direct material benefits.

Knowledge of a non-mother tongue is understood as a human capital which enables people to acquire financial resources and thus ensure a higher standard of living. As an investment, individuals view knowledge of a

language also in terms of direct profit and at the same time it also brings them long-term profit, i.e., easier access to another market, knowing the other market better and more confident and even quicker success in concluding contracts (Grenier, Vaillancourt, 1983).

Self-evaluation of knowledge of individual languages

Through the questions posed, an attempt was made to detect the subjective evaluation of knowledge of individual languages. We have to stress that all the answers to the questions about language knowledge in our survey could be interpreted only as an individual's perception of proficiency and not as his or her real mastery. The results regarding the subjective evaluation of proficiency versus an objective mastery of language must be kept in mind also when comparing the data regarding the two generations, pupils and parents. In evaluating their knowledge, pupils probably related their perception also to the requirements of the school curriculum, not only to the hypothetical perfect language proficiency. The actual mastery by a children and by a parent, both claiming to possess an active knowledge of some language, could thus differ considerably. Nevertheless the data remains fully informative for our purposes, i.e., to individuate the trends of interest, and the spread of familiarity with different languages.

The children and students assessed their language (state, neighbouring, foreign) knowledge on the following level (understanding, speaking, reading, writing). Knowledge of a language was assessed using the following six point scale: 6 = very good, 5 = good, 4 = neither good nor bad, 3 = bad, 2 = very bad, 1 = none). The differences between the generations were not statistically detectable, therefore only students' results are presented (see Table 2).

There were statistical differences in the self-evaluation of knowledge of one's own language (state language) between individual schools with respect to understanding, reading and writing, while in terms of speaking there were no statistically detectable differences between the schools (Kruskal-Wallis test). All respondents assessed their knowledge of their own (state) language relatively highly at all levels (above 5), and in the statistical evaluation regarding the Slovene language, respondents from Nova Gorica stood out (Table 2).

Statistical differences between the schools were detected in the evaluation of the language of the neighbouring country at all levels, which was expected, as our study sample also included a school with curricula conducted in the Slovene language (the Ivan Trinko school in Gorizia/Gorica). For students at this school, the Slovene language is more than just the neighbouring state's language, for them Slovene has a different meaning. It is therefore understandable that they evaluated their knowledge of Slovene with relatively high marks and it was comparable to the Italian language. Regarding

ing their knowledge of the Slovene language, students from the Ivan Trinko School evaluated writing the lowest. A comparison of the evaluation of the neighbouring state language could be possible only between the Locchi and Štrukelj Schools, and even in this comparison it would have to be considered that the Locchi School lies in an ethnically mixed region in which Slovene is the minority language and the additional dimension should be taken into account (Table 3). The result of comparison of the Štrukelj and Locchi schools regarding knowledge of the neighbouring state's language (without taking into account situational factors) indicate that knowledge of the Italian language is at a higher level among students from Nova Gorica than is knowledge of the Slovene language among students from the Locchi School. Their evaluation of their own knowledge of the Slovene language was very low. Naturally this is a conclusion reached as a result of a statistical analysis of subjective responses of individuals.

There were no detectable statistical differences between the schools in their evaluation of knowledge of a foreign language (most respondents chose the English language) (Table 4). Knowledge of a foreign language – its understanding, speaking, reading and writing – were assessed as relatively good, which was expected. A high subjective evaluation of the level of knowledge of the language is also confirmed by the attitudes of these students and their parents regarding the significance of a foreign language in all areas, namely education, employment and communication.

Table 2: Self-evaluation of the state language – children.
Tabela 2: Samoocena znanja uradnega jezika – otroci.

Scale 1–6: 6 = very good, 5 = good, 4 = neither good nor bad, 3 = bad, 2 = very bad, 1 = none

	School	Mean	N	Std. deviation
I understand the language of my state	Štrukelj	5.72	43	1.098
	Locchi	5.82	38	.393
	Trinko	5.63	41	.536
I speak the language of my state	Štrukelj	5.60	43	.979
	Locchi	5.47	38	.603
	Trinko	5.32	41	.650
I read the language of my state	Štrukelj	5.63	43	1.001
	Locchi	5.55	38	.602
	Trinko	5.46	41	.596
I write the language of my state	Štrukelj	5.49	43	1.055
	Locchi	5.18	38	.652
	Trinko	5.10	41	.768

Test Statistics (a, b)

	I understand the language of my state	I speak the language of my state	I read the language of my state	I write the language of my state
Chi-Square	7.350	8.918	5.273	12.873
Df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.025	.012	.072	.002

a - Kruskal Wallis test
 b - Grouping variable: school

Table 3: Self evaluation of the neighbouring language.

Tabela 3: Samoocena znanja sosedskega jezika.

Scale 1–6: 6 = very good, 5 = good, 4 = neither good nor bad, 3 = bad, 2 = very bad, 1 = none

	School	Mean	N	Std. deviation
I understand the language of the neighbouring state	Strukelj	4.07	43	1.549
	Locchi	1.89	38	1.503
	Trinko	5.41	41	.631
I speak the language of the neighbouring state	Strukelj	3.51	43	1.778
	Locchi	1.58	38	1.388
	Trinko	5.12	41	.781
I read the language of the neighbouring state	Strukelj	3.28	43	1.906
	Locchi	1.45	38	1.179
	Trinko	5.12	41	.714
I write the language of the neighbouring state	Strukelj	2.53	43	1.564
	Locchi	1.42	38	1.081
	Trinko	4.73	41	.923

Test Statistics (a, b)

	I understand the language of the neighbouring state	I speak the language of the neighbouring state	I read the language of the neighbouring state	I write the language of the neighbouring state
Chi-Square	62.438	60.055	62.592	66.738
Df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

a - Kruskal Wallis test
 b - Grouping variable: school

Table 4: Self-evaluation of a selected foreign language.
Tabela 4: Samoocena znanja izbranega tujega jezika.

Scale 1–6: 6 = very good, 5 = good, 4 = neither good nor bad, 3 = bad, 2 = very bad, 1 = none

	School	Mean	N	Std. deviation
I understand the most important foreign language	Strukelj	4.81	43	1.052
	Locchi	4.61	38	.718
	Trinko	4.34	41	1.237
I speak the most important foreign language	Strukelj	4.47	43	1.297
	Locchi	4.42	38	.722
	Trinko	3.95	41	1.203
I read the most important foreign language	Strukelj	4.56	43	1.402
	Locchi	4.61	38	.855
	Trinko	4.07	41	1.421
I write the most important foreign language	Strukelj	4.35	43	1.307
	Locchi	4.39	38	.790
	Trinko	3.93	41	1.349

Test Statistics (a, b)

	I understand the most important foreign language	I speak the most important foreign language	I read the most important foreign language	I write the most important foreign language
Chi-Square	4.637	7.426	4.513	3.896
Df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.098	.024	.105	.143

a - Kruskal Wallis test

b - Grouping variable: school

Our inquiry into the sociolinguistic situation of the area would also confirm the statement about the influence of the media on the spread of the knowledge of Italian as the neighbouring language (NL). The pupils involved in our research were not able to learn Italian at school. But they do watch TV programmes in this language: according to our data 48.8% of the interviewed pupils of the Štrukelj School often watch TV programmes in Italian, 27.9% do it sometimes, and 20.9%

seldom.¹¹ When analysing the extent to which the pupils of the Locchi School watch TV programmes in the neighbouring language the situation is completely the opposite, as it is evident from Figure 1.

When comparing the same kind of data regarding the parents of the two schools, we obtain a very similar picture (Figure 2).

11 In all the cases where we aimed to evaluate the frequency of a single behaviour or action, the response categories given in our questionnaire (with the exception of *never*) were too vague (e.g., *often*, *sometimes*, *seldom*). Due to this methodological mistake that allowed the respondents to operate with different frames of reference when choosing the listed answers, the actual frequency in range of numbers cannot be pointed out.

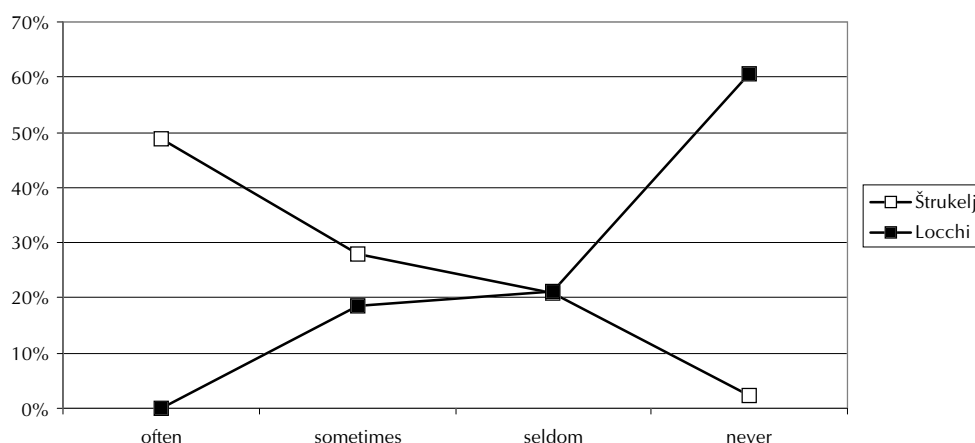


Fig. 1: 'I watch TV programmes in the neighbouring language' – pupils of the Štrukelj and Locchi Schools (in percent).

Sl. 1: 'Gledam TV programe v sosedskem jeziku' – učenci šol Štrukelj in Locchi (v odstotkih).

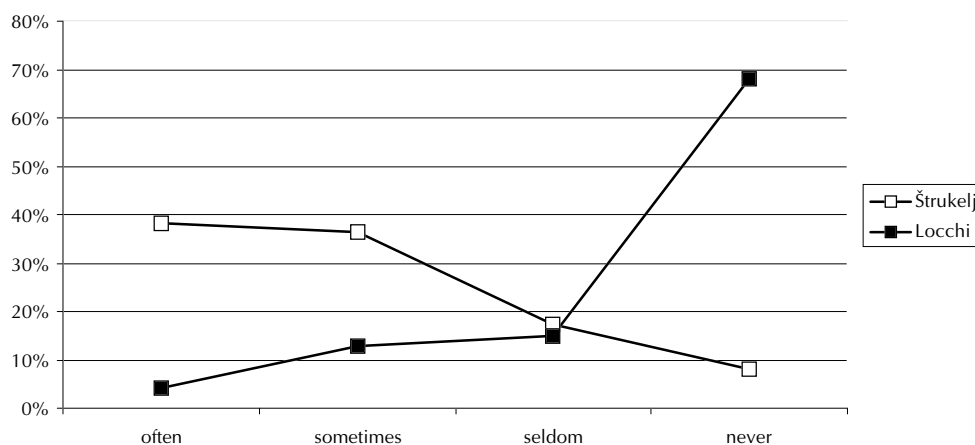


Fig. 2: 'I watch TV programmes in the neighbouring language' – parents of Štrukelj and Locchi Schoolchildren (in percent).

Sl. 2: 'Gledam TV programe v sosedskem jeziku' – starši učencev šol Štrukelj in Locchi (v odstotkih).

A comparison of general evaluations of knowledge of the neighbouring country's language

Since we were interested in general estimations of language knowledge, we asked inhabitants of the two cities, first, how good was their knowledge of the neighbouring country's language, and second, how good is the knowledge of their own language on the part of the neighbouring country's population. We put the answers to both the questions¹² together and analyzed them statistically to ascertain differences in the general appraisal

of the linguistic knowledge of inhabitants of the setting inhabited by our respondents, and inhabitants of the neighbouring state.

There are differences between schools with respect to the appraisals of the language command of the neighbouring country's inhabitants. If we compare answers to both the questions, a significant statistical difference can be perceived as much as with children as with parents from Nova Gorica (the Štrukelj school) (with children $p < 0.01$, with parents $p < 0.001$). The respondents are of the opinion that the population of Nova Gorica has a

12 The questions were: »In your opinion, how well do inhabitants of Nova Gorica and its surroundings in Slovenia speak Italian?« and »In your opinion, how well do inhabitants of Gorizia/Gorica and its surroundings in Italy speak Slovene?« The possible answers – very well, well, neither well nor badly, badly, very badly, not at all – were ranked on a scale from 1–6. The results of both question were statistically elaborated and can be seen in Figures 3, 4 and 5.

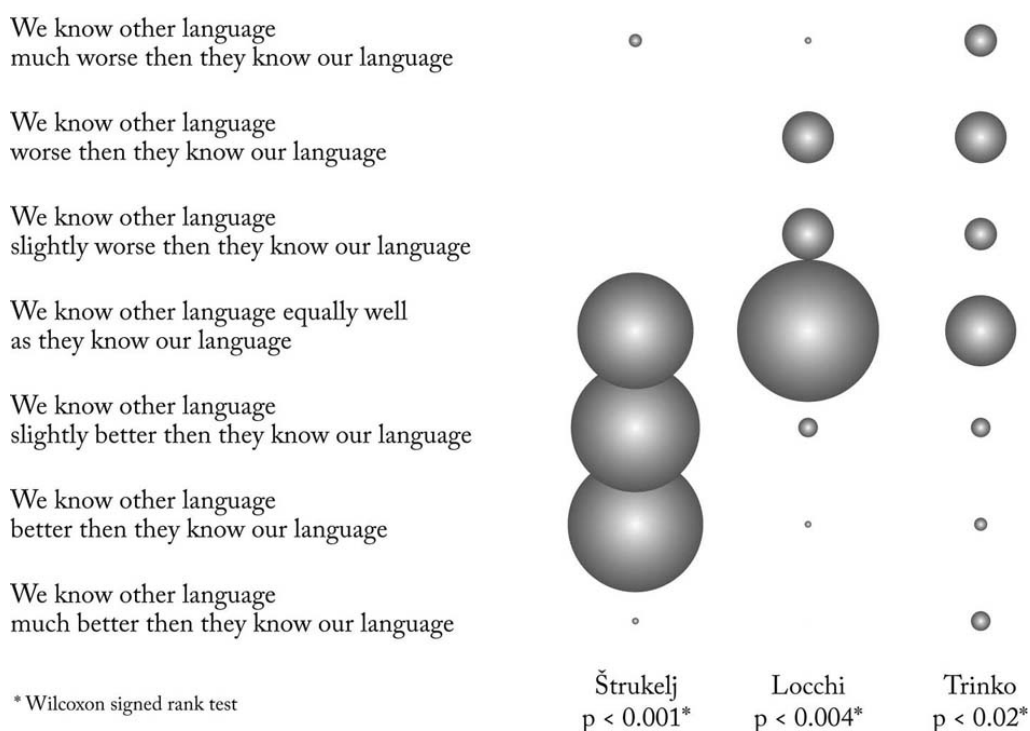


Fig. 3: Comparison of knowledge of languages on both sides of the border: parents.
Sl. 3: Primerjava znanja jezikov na obeh straneh meje: starši.

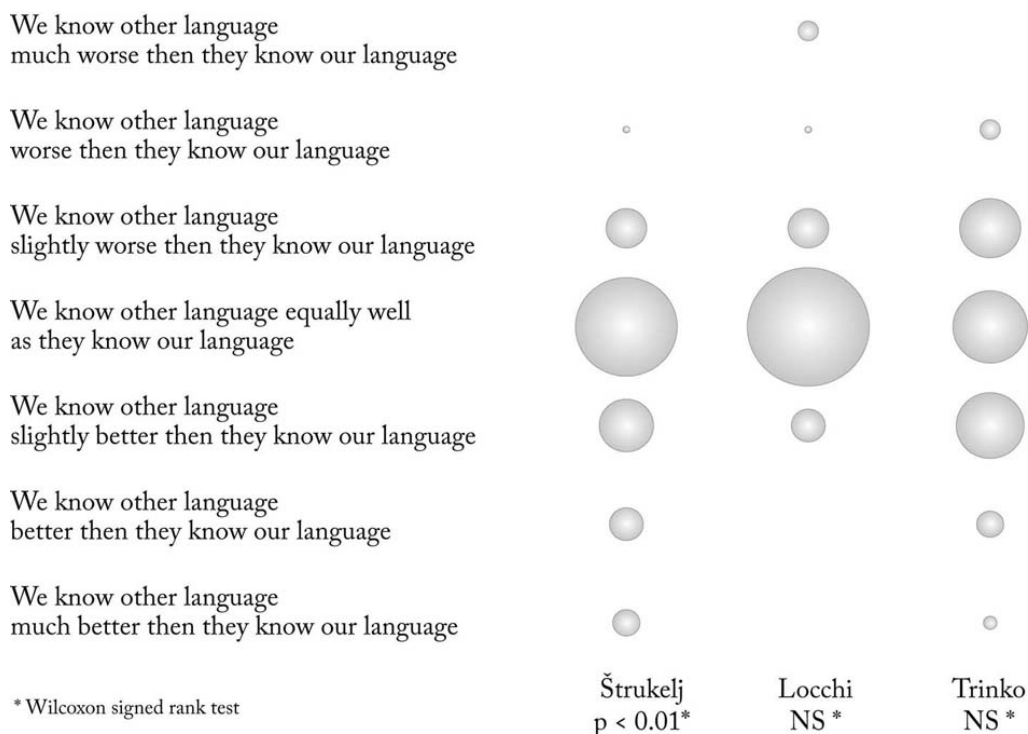


Fig. 4: Comparison of knowledge of languages on both sides of the border: children.
Sl. 4: Primerjava znanja jezikov na obeh straneh meje: otroci.

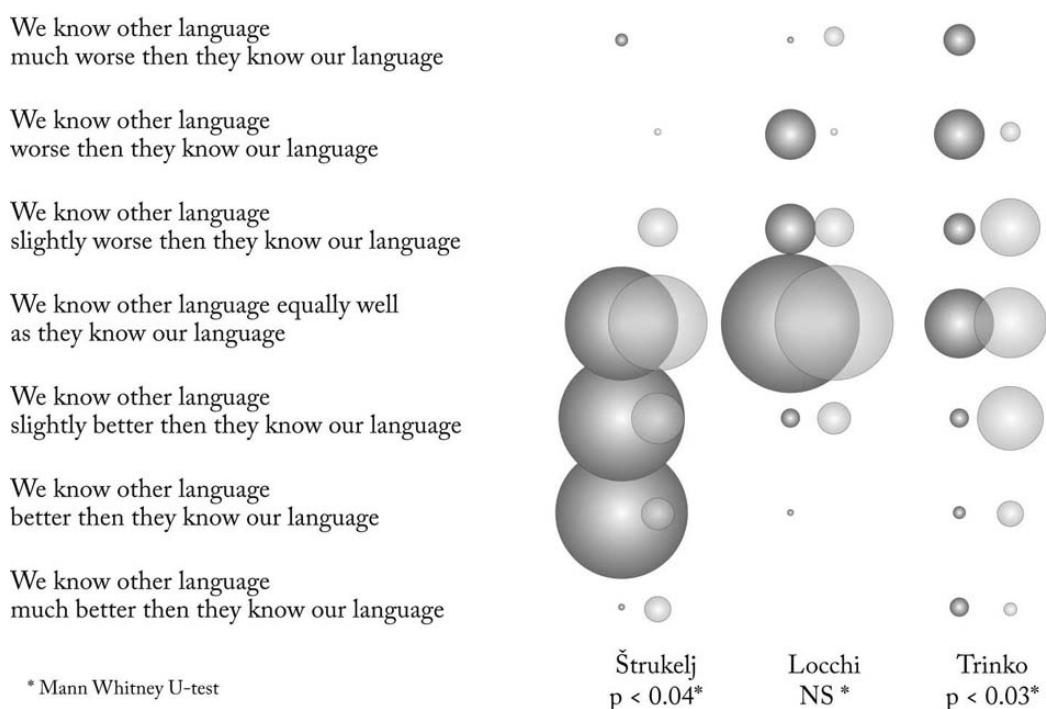


Fig. 5: Comparison of knowledge of languages on both sides of the border between children (light grey) and parents (dark grey).

Sl. 5: Primerjava znanja jezikov na obeh straneh meje med otroci (svetlo siva) in starši (temno siva).

better command of Italian language than the other way round. However, the opinions of parents and children from the Italian school Locchi is slightly different. Parents' results point out a significant difference ($p < 0.004$) in the opinions – parents believe inhabitants of Nova Gorica to have a much better command of Italian language, as compared to population of Gorizia/Gorica and Slovene language, while children are more level in their opinions and do not perceive significant differences. Results obtained at school with Slovene as teaching language (I. Trinko, Gorizia/Gorica) are varied. There are no statistically perceptible differences with children, while the result is statistically significant with parents ($p < 0.02$). The difference is expected because the result refers to the minority sample, which is why the result related to Slovene language is better.

Due to the presence of the Slovene minority and the Slovene language a slightly different evaluation on the part of all the respondents was noticed among the Trinko sample.

CONCLUSIONS

The article presents selected research project results which highlight the position of languages in the Slovene/Italian border region. The study did not deal with different phenomena at the linguistic level (borrowing, code-switching, interferences, etc.); rather, our analysis was based on language within the concept of border area and with multicultural and multilingual characteristics. We paid attention to language diversity in the sample, as well as different roles of the languages in contact. Among the parameters shaping attitude towards language, one selected dimension was presented, along with language competence. Analysis of these parameters, placed into a wider social context, represents a sound basis for understanding the role and status of certain language, and for defining its vitality.¹³

The results presented confirm our hypothesis that individuals from this sample are well aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the border area. The influence

13 The analysis of languages dealt with in our research project cannot be based on a uniform concept, because of the differences in the role and status of each individual language (state language, minority language, foreign language).

of the border is perceived by the parents in the same way as by the children: no generational differences in standpoints have been established. With detailed analysis obtained on the basis of specific statistical methods, we perceived differences among the respondents with regard to individual schools, and evaluated different links between language and culture in the border area. It has been found that differences between schools are mostly related to the evaluation of the language command of the neighbouring country's population, while there are no statistical deviations with regard to attitudes towards individual languages. Statistical analysis of the results disproved our hypothesis that the Slovene language in the border area means more than just the language of the neighbouring state. The Slovene language is also the language of Slovene minority, and together with the Italian and Friulian languages it gives character to the Italian side of the area under discussion. That is why we expected this feeling to be present in the perception of the majority Italian population, as well as in the perception of people on the Slovene side; however, this was disproved by the research results.

Our hypothesis was also verified with the analysis of

empirical data; we found out that there are differences in communications between the Slovene and the Italian side, which the respondents are aware of, regardless of generation and school. They perceive the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region in different forms of cooperation – in social, cultural and economic sphere. Results showed strong links between language and economy, and the command of a »second« language represents an important, even a fundamental element of successful business cooperation in the border region. This is confirmed by the fact that most respondents approve of gaining command of the neighbouring country's language, be it Slovene or Italian, and within school programmes. Although the learning and knowledge of the neighbouring language opens new worlds and contributes to appreciation of diversity, our respondents mostly emphasized the importance of the economic aspect.

The results confirmed that the choice and use of language in intercultural communication is not just a one-sided decision; rather, it is the result of a multidimensional intertwining of an individual's subjective perception and respect of the value of languages, and of the objective social and economic reality of the area.

JEZIKOVNA RAZNOLIKOST V OBMEJNIH REGIJAH: NEKAJ REZULTATOV RAZISKAVE O DOJEMANJU PRI UČENCIH DVEH SREDNJIH ŠOL

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POVZETEK

V prispevku so predstavljeni nekateri izsledki študije primera, izvedene med učenci (starimi 13–14 let) in njihovimi starši v dveh mestih ob slovensko-italijanski meji (Nova Gorica in Gorizia/Gorica) na kontaktnem prostoru dveh različnih družbeno-etničnih skupin: na slovenski strani živi razmeroma homogena skupnost Slovencev, na italijanski strani pa prebiva etnično mešana populacija Italijanov in Slovencev. Na kulturno različnih obmejnih območjih, ki soobstajata v neposredni bližini, so se razvili različni procesi medkulturne izmenjave. Pri dojemaju in odnosu do jezika ali jezikov so etnične razlike med obema območjema (enim homogenim in enim heterogenim) skupaj z drugimi, drugačnimi dejavniki, vir podobnosti na eni strani meje in razlik na drugi.

Konflikti in/ali sobivanja med različnimi skupnostmi so vedno povezani s širšim družbenim stanjem. V tem smislu je jasno, da vsop Slovenije v EU predstavlja izziv za odnose med etničnimi skupnostmi na obravnavanem obmejnem območju, ki so se obdržale vse do danes. Dodaten izziv za odnose med različnimi jeziki v obdobju globalizacije, še posebej v zadnjih desetletjih, prihaja od razširjene uporabe angleščine kot 'lingua franca'. Po drugi strani enega od odzivov na globalizacijo predstavlja interkulturalizem in nova vloga svetovnih jezikov, ki je preseгла okvir izključne funkcije komunikacije.

Prispevek se osredotoča na predstavitev nekaterih empiričnih podatkov, ki zadevajo dojemanje jezikovne raznolikosti, dojemanje znanja 'sosedskega jezika', subjektivno vrednotenje 'sosedskega jezika', odnose med italijansščino in slovenščino ter drugimi jeziki, posebej angleščino, med učenci in njihovimi starši na obeh straneh meje.

Ključne besede: mejno območje, jezikovna raznolikost, dojemanje, manjšinjski jezik, tuj jezik, sosedski jezik, jezikovna kompetenca

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