

Migration: language policy and linguistic integration

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Our times have been marked by increasingly intensive human migrations. Linguistic communities are now composed of increasingly diverse groups of plurilingual individuals, and this diversity is on the rise with the arrival of new individuals. This has resulted in radical changes in communication practices, and it has been accompanied by rapid developments in language resources and technologies, and services they make possible. All of these factors give rise to major challenges for modern societies, not least among them the linguistic and other types of integration of immigrants into their new community. Such integration is usually linked to the “porosity” of that community – among other things, to the expectations of the community’s majority population and to political decisions, each of which is driven by ideologies of one kind or another.

Because societal challenges always spawn intriguing research questions, we have dedicated this thematic issue of *Slovenščina 2.0* to migration, linguistic integration and the (language) policies that govern them. There are three main reasons for choosing this topic.

More and more, people are moving from crisis areas (and here we do not distinguish between political, economic and climate crises) to safer places, and as these crises intensify so too will migration. Because Western European countries are particularly exposed as such safe places, immigration from “third countries” is being increasingly restricted – one of the restrictive measures being the tightening of language requirements for adult immigrants. Slovenia is no exception in this regard. Indeed, Slovenia has been following the stricter European state policies for the last few years. For example, since 2020 the

Labour Market Act¹ has required those seeking employment to prove their knowledge of Slovene (at level A1 of the CEFR), and in November 2024 the Aliens Act² introduced (allowing for some exceptions) compulsory knowledge of Slovene for family reunification (albeit through an informal test at the so-called survival level) and for permanent residency (at level A2 of the CEFR). In 2023, the *Strategy for integration of foreigners who are non-EU citizens into the cultural, economic and social life in the Republic of Slovenia* was adopted.³ This strategy outlines how linguistic and other types of integration will be developed. But the first instances of its implementation do not give cause for great optimism: though the 2024 regulation on the provision of support for the integration of non-EU citizens⁴ does grant adult immigrants somewhat greater access to learning Slovene (by raising the number of lessons from the previous 180 to 240, and by introducing optional informal language programmes of so-called survival Slovene), the implementation of this provision hinges on public procurement. There, price alone plays the decisive role, not the professional competence of those providing services, which would guarantee the quality and efficiency of the service, i.e. the carrying-out of the language courses. The first reason for having chosen immigration as the focal point of this thematic issue therefore pertains to political decisions.

The second reason is related to the first: because the world is changing so rapidly and is growing so complex, a rethinking of changing communicative needs and practices is required – regardless of whether it is a matter of a person’s first or other languages. This raises a number of questions: how do majority language communities accept immigrants? What are their expectations in terms of how to communicate with them? And do their expectations reflect actual communication needs and practices? Moreover: which (linguistic) abilities, knowledge and skills do new language users need? For which situations, societal roles and linguistic tasks should they be equipped? And are these expected (and often ideologically determined) abilities, knowledge and

1 *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*, no. 75/2019.

2 *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*, no. 48/23 and 115/23.

3 Retrieved from https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MNZ/SOJ/Novice/2023/11-November/Strategija-vkljucevanja-tujcev-17.11.2023_pop.docx

4 *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*, no. 27/24.

skills (still) in line with the changed circumstances? Furthermore: do immigrants want to acquire these abilities, skills and competences? Are the ways these abilities, skills and knowledge are acquired keeping pace with developments in other areas related to new technological solutions? And finally: how many and what kind of opportunities for communication do immigrants have in their new linguistic community? Thus, the fundamental questions are these: How do changing social realities and political decisions affect people's linguistic behaviour? When do somebody's requirements become another person's need? The second reason is therefore primarily social in nature.

The third reason is a professional one: two years ago, at the Obdobja symposium "At the Juncture of Worlds: Slovene as a Second and Foreign Language,"⁵ we noticed a dearth of discussions on Slovene in immigrant contexts. This thematic issue is therefore an attempt to fill in this gap, while at the same time continuing the discussion of the two public panels (which have also been made available as transcripts in two other issues of *Slovenščina 2.0*).⁶

We have invited experts from Slovenia and abroad to reflect on linguistic integration from various perspectives and in consideration of the various stakeholders. We would like to sincerely thank all of the authors and reviewers who have taken up our invitation.

Although the lion's share of this journal issue deals with presenting the situation in Slovenia, we felt it was important to place the Slovene context within the European one, and at the same time to compare the Slovene context to that of neighbouring countries (Austria, Croatia) and to that of a country that is a little further away (the Czech Republic). Thus, **Rocca** establishes the linguistic policy framework and foregrounds the tightening demands for knowledge of national languages and knowledge of the new culture and society in the Council of Europe member states.

5 Pirih Svetina, N., & Ferbežar, I. (Eds.). (2022). *At the Juncture of Worlds: Slovene as a Second and Foreign Language: Vol. Obdobja 41*. University of Ljubljana Press. 10.4312/Obdobja.41.2784-7152

6 Ferbežar, I., Cetina, I., Ihan, A., Stabej, M., Zdravković, L., & Zupančič, T. (2020). Round table »(Close) encounters of language policy makers.« *Slovenščina 2.0: Empirical, Applied and Interdisciplinary Research*, 8(1), 92–112. doi: 10.4312/slo2.0.2020.1.92-112; Stabej, M., Černilec, B., Ferbežar, I., Guner, F., Heferle, T., Samobor, A., & Štrukelj, K. (2023). Public consultation on the requirements for knowledge of Slovenian. *Slovenščina 2.0: Empirical, Applied and Interdisciplinary Research*, 11(2), 1–28. doi: 10.4312/slo2.0.2023.2.1-28

Konrad, Ebner and Kremmel, Đurđević and Cvitanušić and Vodičková research the linguistic integration policies in their own countries, and are interested in the possible language requirements and provision. We can identify pan-European trends in these policies – trends which also Slovenia is following. The authors all raise concerns about equality, social justice and human rights. **Samobor** focuses on this universal concern in the context of tightening language conditions for family reunification in Slovenia. She sheds light on this matter from a legal perspective and thereby – in the “clash” between institutional demands and the individual’s right to family life – explicitly shows the power relations at play.

The presentation of the situation in Slovenia can be observed from different directions. First, in terms of context: along the vertical axis of the Slovene education system and upwards to the work organisations. Further, they can be approached as more general outlines to very concrete solutions that present both implicit and explicit strategies for learning Slovene, thereby offering both a holistic and a fragmented view of Slovene language proficiency, as well as showing the perspectives of various involved parties. In keeping with this, the first two articles focus on institutional decisions that affect the infrastructure related to learning Slovene in the Slovene education system: **Knez** offers a general outline of the systemic solutions of recent years and how these are practically implemented; **Kern Andoljšek**, meanwhile, presents a concrete tool for identifying language deficiency among immigrant adolescents, and surveys teachers on the tool’s usefulness. The next two articles deal with Slovene writing skills, which are usually developed through explicit teaching approaches. **Stritar Kučuk and Pirih Svetina** analyse the written production of “Leto plus” students (aimed at foreign university students who are regularly enrolled as students in Slovenia) and seek solutions that will yield more effective Slovene language teaching. **Eniko** analyses conjunctions in the written productions of participants in the Slovene proficiency exams and of those who use Slovene as a first language, problematising the existing assessment criteria and broaching the thorny subject of the (overly high) expectations examiners have in terms of textual coherence as a grading category. **Ferbežar and Huber** present possibilities for more implicit approaches to learning Slovene. They see these

possibilities as existing in systematic language support in the workplace, although their research does not (yet) identify a specific need for such support in work organisations in Slovenia, either on the part of employers or that of immigrant workers. Immigrants also have a voice in **Pirih Svetina**'s article. She focuses on the integration of students immigrating from other countries into a new (study) environment and measures the positive aspects and shortcomings of the existing language support within "Leto plus." Her article stokes reflection on the challenges of quantifying the social value that such support actually produces. In the final discussion, **Stabej** reflects on the notions of national, linguistic and civic belonging and points out the traps of stereotyping such belonging. He argues that the self-evident use of Slovene in the public space within our Babylonian reality also depends on the inclusiveness of the Slovene linguistic community.

The attitude of developed societies towards migration and linguistic integration, which in many respects also colours our scholarly considerations, presents a number of paradoxes. We have already mentioned the flight of immigrants to safer Western countries. Although these countries stand up for human rights as a matter of principle, in practice they restrict or even deny these rights – even though, in yet another paradox, many developed economies are increasingly dependent on "foreign labour." In this regard, the attitude towards immigration in Slovenia also seems paradoxical. A 2022 Slovene Public Opinion survey⁷ reveals that we are only conditionally in favour of it. The survey indicates that Slovenes would allow only some or very few people of other national origins to immigrate (three-quarters of those surveyed think that way). According to the Statistical Office of Slovenia (SURS, 2023), the proportion of those coming to Slovenia from distant cultural and linguistic backgrounds is growing, although the majority of immigrants are still citizens of what used to be a common state, i.e. Yugoslavia.⁸ This may be why three-quarters of the respondents feel that

7 Hafner Fink, M., Kurdija, S., Uhan, S., Medvešek, M., Bresljanac, M. and Malnar, B. (2024). *Slovenian Public Opinion 2022/2: Mirror of Public Opinion, Attitudes towards and integration of immigrants, Survey on brain health (Synapse), Health and lifestyle* [Data file]. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, Slovenian Social Science Data Archives. ADP - IDNo: SJM222. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.17898/ADP_SJM222_V1

8 SURS, 2023. Retrieved from <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/Data/05N3121S.px/>

they are well or very well integrated into Slovene society. But there is a cause for concern: as many as 20% of immigrants always or very often feel like foreigners in Slovenia, while a tenth of respondents have been discriminated against in the last 12 months on account of their ethnicity (SJM, 2022). We can only guess at how this information is linked to linguistic integration. The vast majority of respondents evaluated their knowledge of Slovene to be good or very good, but perhaps the ones who feel discriminated against are precisely those who are linguistically deficient in Slovene.

And here another paradox should be pointed out: at the level of principle, we recognise multilingualism as an objective social phenomenon and encourage plurilingualism as a subjective capacity. Yet at the same time, in the case of national languages, we cannot truly let go of the concept of monolingualism. Politicians and policies are encouraging monolingualism through stricter language requirements; language communities, meanwhile, expect monolingualism, because it offers simplification in our increasingly unpredictable world. We don't live monolingualism, but many of us live from it.

(Linguistic) integration is a social agreement with consequences for all involved. Therefore, any professional debate on it is necessarily also a social and political one. And thanks to the authors of this thematic issue, it is also a profound human(istic) one.