

The Legacy of Multilingualism in the Adriatic during Austria-Hungary

Anita Sujoldžić

Research Professor, Institute for Anthropological Research, anita.sujoldzic@inantro.hr

Anja Iveković Martinis

MA, Research Assistant, Institute for Anthropological Research, aimartinis@inantro.hr

Abstract

The paper presents preliminary results of research of primary sources (newspaper advertisements, postcards, official documents), which show the effects of language and education policies, economic conditions and social relations on language practices in Pula/Pola (Austria) and Rijeka/Fiume (Hungary) during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In spite of different policies, Italian maintained its prestige in both cities, indicating the strong connection between language, culture and social class.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag stellt erste Forschungsergebnisse von Quellen (Zeitungsanzeigen, Postkarten, offizielle Dokumente) vor, die die Wirkung von Sprache- und Bildungspolitik, von der Wirtschaftslage und den sozialen Beziehungen auf Sprachpraxis in Pula/Pola (Österreich) und Rijeka/Fiume (Ungarn) während der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie zeigen. Trotz der verschiedenen Politiken, die Italienische Sprache erhielt sein Prestige in beiden Städten, was auf die starke Verbindung zwischen Sprache, Kultur und soziale Klasse hinweist.

Introduction

While Europeanization processes have renewed scholarly interest in intercultural encounters and multilingualism, the increasing recognition that such current practices are not unprecedented, calls for a more empirically grounded research to uncover them as a historically-rooted phenomenon. The Institute for Anthropological Research in Zagreb, Croatia, is currently running a research project titled *Historical Perspectives on Transnationalism and Intercultural Dialogue in the Austro-Hungarian Empire* (TIDA), funded by the Croatian Science Foundation. The project proposes that the coexistence of regional, national and supranational allegiances in multiethnic and multilingual Austria-Hungary provides an appropriate context for the study of intercultural and multilingual practices within the traditionally neglected area of South-eastern Europe. While

existing scholarship has been predominantly concerned with the development of nationalism and national languages, the role of transnational and multilingual practices in the lives of „ordinary people“ has largely been overlooked, although the Empire was clearly a contact zone of migrants and travellers, where people drew on the practices of their various places of origin to organize social relations, and where contests over their multiple languages and cultural logics took place, along with intercultural dialogue. In order to uncover these past lived forms, the project takes an alternative approach, focusing on the re-creation of intercultural identities that were denied by the modernist discourse of national, linguistic and religious hierarchies. Since communicative practices constitute a primary dimension of intercultural exchange, multilingualism and hybrid urban language varieties defying national standard languages represent major signifiers for non-national or multiple attachments. The paper illustrates efforts to answer the question of how multilingual and intercultural practices were experienced on the micro-level of everyday life in different parts of the Empire.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a constitutional union of the Empire of Austria (also known as Cisleithania) and the Kingdom of Hungary (Transleithania) and it existed from 1867 to 1918. Following the 1867 reforms, the Austrian and Hungarian states became co-equal. According to the Compromise, foreign affairs and the military were placed under joint oversight, but all other governmental faculties, such as legislation in the areas of justice, commercial affairs, education, religious matters and interior affairs, were the concern of the individual states, including **language policies**. Ethnic and linguistic diversity in Cisleithania was regulated by Constitutional Decree XIX, which specified that all nationalities are equal, all traditional languages are equal, in culturally and linguistically mixed areas no other language apart from those spoken by the local population may be enforced in education, and there is no official lingua franca. On the other hand, in Transleithania the Nationalities Law (1868) stated that all citizens of Hungary, whatever their nationality, constitute politically “a single nation, the indivisible, unitary Hungarian nation” and that there could be no differentiation among them, except in respect of official language use and then only insofar as necessitated by practical considerations. Although non-Hungarian languages could be used in local government, churches and primary schools, Hungarian became the official language of the central government, as well as in secondary schools and universities, and was introduced in non-Hungarian primary schools as a compulsory subject. In this way a hierarchy among the languages was postulated, unlike in Cisleithania.

In what follows, we will try to illustrate with some preliminary data how such policies legitimized or delegitimized the statuses of different languages and language groups in two Adriatic towns: Pula in the Austrian part of the Empire and Rijeka which belonged to the Hungarian crown. During the period of the Dual Monarchy, both towns experienced vibrant urbanization and industrialization. Pula became Austria's main naval base and a major shipbuilding centre, and grew from a small provincial town into an industrial city and a regional centre. Rijeka became a major commercial port of the Hungarian part of the Empire and developed several important industries. This development facilitated mobility and immigration of military personnel, civil servants, merchants and other professionals from different parts of the Empire, while better access to schooling led to urbanization of the rural population which moved to the cities from nearby villages. The heterogeneous urban populations which developed as a result of these processes were involved in transnational practices framed by variable political and discursive structures of mutually constitutive power relations within a threefold Italian, German and Hungarian hegemony. Nevertheless, cross-boundary interdiscursivity between national, imperial or non-national discourses was possible not only through migration, but also through the common use of multilingualism as a major form of communication.

Pula (Pola)

As the main Austrian naval port, Pula was an ethnically, culturally and linguistically highly heterogeneous community. Although the official language of the Navy was German, Italian managed to maintain its dominance in everyday use. Civil servants and military personnel in state institutions spoke German, qualified workers and members of the middle and lower-middle classes spoke Italian, while unqualified workers, who were mostly from Istrian villages, strove to replace their Croatian village dialect with the Venetian dialect of Italian (specifically the variant spoken in Pula and called *polesano*), in order to ensure more options for employment and social advancement. However, the period of the Dual Monarchy also saw the accelerated growth of the Croatian and Slovenian national movement in Istria, somewhat later than in Croatia-Slavonia (in the Transleithanian part of the Empire), with a resulting consolidation of national awareness among the Croatian- and Slovenian-speaking Istrian population. This development, along with higher levels of education and a somewhat better economic situation in the Slavic-language population (D'Alessio 2006; 2008), led to a gradually growing presence of the Croatian (and to a lesser extent Slovenian) language in the public sphere in urban centres, contributing further to the existing linguistic diversity.

Immigrants from different parts of the Empire would generally assimilate into one of the main national or language groups in the town - German, Croatian or Italian. People of Slavic origins (Czech, Polish, Slovakian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin...) would mostly associate with the Croatian-speaking segment of the population and, according to D'Alessio, they (particularly the Southern Slavs) could fit in very well and "identify perfectly" with the Croats (D'Alessio 2008: 240, 243).

Due to Austrian education policy, there were both Italian- and German-language elementary and high schools in Pula, as well as several Croatian-language elementary schools run by the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Society for Istria, a society which promoted, funded (through donations) and ran Croatian- and Slovenian-language educational institutions. However, based on an estimate made by Fran Barbalić, school supervisor for the Pula district, a number of Croatian-speaking children attended Italian-language schools, either due to a lack of Croatian-speaking teachers or in order to learn Italian as a language of social mobility (Barbalić 1918). On the other hand, both Italian- and Croatian-speaking children frequently attended German-language schools, since they were known to be very well organised and staffed with excellent teachers.¹ The German-language state gymnasium, founded in 1890, was particularly important in encouraging inclusive and cosmopolitan attitudes among the students and distancing them from nationalist influences. Primarily intended for children of German-speaking navy and state employees, the school promoted the official supranational imperial ideology of the Habsburg dynasty (Dobrić 2003: 42-43). We can therefore conclude that a large number of bilingual children attended Italian- and German-language schools. Italian was also taught as a subject in Croatian-language schools and Italian-language schools frequently offered Croatian language as an elective subject. Apart from single-language schools, it is important to note that there was also a number of so-called *utraquist* schools in Istria during this period, which were intended for children from two language communities (usually Italian and Croatian). In these schools, in the first 2 or 3 forms classes would be taught in one language, with the other language present as an obligatory subject, and then the languages would switch, and the other language would then be the main teaching language, with the first language as an obligatory subject. According to Demarin (1978), there was also a trilingual crafts school in Pula, with classes in Italian, German and Croatian.

¹ Barbalić (1918) estimates that as many as two thirds of the children in German-language schools in Pula did not speak German as their first language.

In multiethnic Pula, a number of daily and weekly newspapers were published in all three languages - German, Italian and Croatian - while some of them were bilingual (German-Italian *Pola*), one was trilingual (the Italian-Croatian-German *Omnibus*) and some were in Italian but targeted an ethnically Croatian readership (*Il diritto Croato*, which later switched to using French and Croatian and finally just Croatian (D'Alessio 2006:149)). The fact that both *Omnibus* and *Il diritto Croato* spoke primarily for the interests of Croats in Istria, although their content was in various languages, shows that linguistic choice was not necessarily a marker of national identity, but an indicator of transnational processes, and it exemplifies the linguistic, and to an extent also cultural, diversity of the population which considered itself ethnically Croatian or was for other reasons sympathetic with the “Croatian national cause” in Istria. While German papers were predominantly monolingual, sporadically introducing some texts in Italian, Italian papers (e.g. *Il Giornale di Pola*) frequently introduced German elements. Croatian papers introduced, mostly in advertisements, both Italian and German, as well as other Slavic languages, such as Slovenian, Czech or Polish.

The visibility of multilingualism in the public life of Pula is illustrated by a postcard with trilingual inscriptions (from German and Italian to Croatian) and handwritten text in a fourth language, Hungarian (Figure 1).





Figure 1. Postcard of Pula, 1912.

Rijeka (Fiume)

Rijeka was also a multilingual city, where at least four languages were spoken (Italian, Croatian, Hungarian and German), but the language of business and trade was Italian (Lazzarich 2009, Marác 2012). The Italian language and culture were dominant in public life as well, while Hungarian was mostly limited to state institutions and companies. The use of the Italian language does not indicate ethnic, or even political identification, because the reason for its widespread use was the dominant Italian cultural influence and the fact that most educated people in Rijeka received their education in Italy (usually in Padua), regardless of their ethnic background (Lukežić 2002). On the other hand, the use of the Croatian language was mostly limited to lower social classes, often living on the city's outskirts, although the city on the whole was ethnically largely Croatian.

From 1870, all schools in Rijeka, regardless of their language of instruction, were subordinated to Hungarian school administration. Although at the beginning the ethnic composition of students in particular schools was respected, Hungarian was introduced as a subject in all schools, in order to enable all citizens of Hungary to learn the official language of their country. During the following decades, Hungarian slowly became the language of instruction of a number of subjects, even in Italian- and Croatian-language schools, in spite of

protests by parents of non-Hungarian children. In 1882, a Hungarian higher grammar school was established to ensure the continued education of Hungarian children in this language. Later, the same happened with the High Commercial School, the Naval Academy, three state high schools and three state primary schools. However, in spite of these efforts in education, the policy of imposing Hungarian as official language was not successful, and the use of Hungarian in public life remained marginal and limited to institutional and official contexts.

At the turn of the century, newspapers in Rijeka were published in as many as four languages (Croatian, Italian, Hungarian, German). Although some of them, such as *Kvarner* and *L'imparziale*, were bilingual (Lazzarich 2009), the majority of daily and weekly papers were monolingual in one of these languages and were mutually competing for readers. In this period, there was a sudden flourish of urban culture and industrial and commercial activity in the Rijeka region. Increased internal and international trade resulted in the establishment of new crafts and manufactures, as a basis for industrialization (Klen 1988), and in the development of a wealthy merchant class. Rijeka was home to some of the biggest and most successful factories in the region, which imported raw materials from different parts of the world and in some cases employed foreign workers. However, in spite of intense transnational practices, the proportion of monolingual newspaper advertisements (either Italian, Hungarian or German), directed to speakers of particular languages, was still considerable. In spite of the dominance of Hungarian (and to a lesser extent Italian), many foreign companies used German. Also, some businesses were owned by ethnic Croats, e.g. in the lumber trade, as well as retail shops, pubs, restaurants, steamship companies and some of the banks, and they frequently introduced Croatian into the commercial sphere, targeting Croatian speakers.

In spite of political tensions between the ethnic groups, some commercial and class relations transcended these divisions. The mercantile class in Rijeka favoured those political options that promised them freedom to do business, rather than siding with either of the nationalist agendas. In the late 19th century, class divisions were far more important in Rijeka than national (ethnic) ones, especially for the middle and labour classes, who depended on efficiently transcending national boundaries in struggling to achieve their specific class interests. In the process, they frequently introduced other languages in their advertisements, as illustrated by the invitation to workers to join the celebration of the 1st of May, 1911, written in Italian, Hungarian and Croatian (Figure 2). However, most other examples of multilingualism are related to the sphere of business and industry and display bilingual and

rarely trilingual combinations of Hungarian, Italian and German. Bilingualism between Croatian and these languages was mostly limited to administrative regulations and activities like banking.



Figure 2. 1st May celebration in Rijeka, 1911.

Conclusion

This paper shows that different language and education policies in the two parts of the Dual Monarchy affected in different ways multilingualism in the public sphere and the prestige and/or marginalization of particular languages. However, both language policies - with German not officially imposed as lingua franca in Austrian Pula and the official enforcement of Hungarian in education and other spheres of life in Rijeka - produced similar results. The Italian language maintained its symbolic prestige in the public life of both cities, while the languages of power (German and Hungarian) remained in restricted use. The most productive

multilingual speakers in both cities could be found among the marginalized Croatian speakers striving to achieve social visibility.

The dominant bourgeois ideology of late 19th century industrial and commercial centres, such as Rijeka and Pula, was not based on ethnic identity, but rather on cultural identity, which was directly connected to respective social classes. Croats who gained wealth and became a part of the bourgeois class tried to adapt to the local bourgeois society, appropriating their culture, language and other class characteristics (Klen 1988). This was not only true of Croats, it was true of anybody who aspired to be accepted by the social elite. Everybody who became a part of the middle and higher classes in Pula and Rijeka used Italian, as the language of art and high culture, and thus of the local bourgeois culture, and also often German and/or Hungarian, as dominant languages in political, economic and administrative matters related to the functioning of the Empire. It was not unusual even for lower-class Italian immigrants, who did not manage to become a part of the middle class, to become culturally Croatian (Ibid.). An anecdotal text in the Croatian journal *Danica* in 1847 says that even ethnic Hungarians settling in Rijeka start to communicate among themselves in Italian (Tkalčević 1847). This means that social mobility (both upward and downward) implied cultural and linguistic change, as well as other means of identification with the social class, e.g. political.

In conclusion, let us point out that the study of multilingualism in history is not only of historical or linguistic interest. The analysis of communicative practices in the everyday life of Adriatic towns points out the inadequacy of official classifications and ethnic categories for historical analysis. It allows us to gain considerable insight into how language use and social phenomena were mediated by power, ideology and economic interests. It also points out the close coherence between the choice of an individual linguistic variety and the gradual nationalization of the ideology of language. However, if historical, cultural and linguistic pluralism can carry a viable and relevant message, then we think it must first return to multilingualism from below – which means to peripheral peoples, to real respect for diversity, in order to create a public space for the other and to oppose mononational or homogenising projects.

Bibliography

- Barbalić, F. (1918) *Pučke škole u Istri: Statistički prikaz prema stanju neposredno pred početkom svjetskoga rata*, Pula: J. Krmpotić
- D'Alessio, V. (2006) "Croatian Urban Life and Political Sociability in Istria from the 19th to the early 20th Century", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, 8 (2006), pp. 133-152
- D'Alessio, V. (2008) "From Central Europe to the northern Adriatic: Habsburg citizens between Italians and Croats in Istria", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 13/2 (2008), pp. 237 – 258
- Demarin, M. (1978) *Hrvatsko školstvo u Istri*, Zagreb: Hrvatski školski muzej u Zagrebu
- Dobrić, B. (2003) *Kultura čitanja i nacionalni pokreti: Čitalačka društva i knjižnice u Puli u drugoj polovici 19. i prvoj polovici 20. stoljeća*, Pula: C.A.S.H.
- Klen, D. (ed.) (1988) *Povijest Rijeke*, Rijeka: Skupština općine Rijeka
- Lazarich, L. (2009) "Izvori o riječkim povijesnim novinama 1813. - 1918.", *Libellarium*, 1 (2009), pp. 65-79
- Lukežić, I. (2002) "L'Eco del littorale ungarico: jeka talijanska primorja ugarskoga - Prve moderne riječke novine", *Fluminensia*, 14 (2002), pp. 1-20
- Marác, L. (2012) "Multilingualism in the Transleithanian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918): Policy and practice", *Jezikoslovlje*, 13(2) (2012), pp. 269-298
- Tkalčević, A. (1847) „Kratki opis duga putovanja“, *Danica hrvatska, slavonska i dalmatinska*, no.40, 2.10.1847.