

# **The Role of Slovenian during the Slovenian War of Independence: from a Secondary Language to the “Language of the Victors” – Marco Jakovljević, University of Zagreb**

## **Introduction: Challenges and Approaches**

- 1) The linguistic dimension of the Slovenian War of Independence (1991) remains under-researched.
- 2) Psychological warfare through language use by the Slovenian Territorial Defence and the general population has received minimal academic attention.
- 3) Analysis relies heavily on audiovisual material (e.g., documentaries, war footage) due to the lack of scholarly sources.
- 4) Objective: Explore how the Slovenian language functioned as a tool for national assertion and resistance during the conflict.

## **Slovenia and Slovenian Language in Yugoslavia**

- 1) Slovenian language has always been a form of national resistance for the Slovenes against the various conquerors and empires that ruled the Slovenian lands over the centuries (Pirjevec 2015);
- 2) In Yugoslavia, even though there the status of Slovenian language was way better than when Slovenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was still marginalized. The Serbian variant of Serbo-Croatian language was dominant. Slovenians faced limited representation in textbooks, films, and public materials in their language (Šmid 2016);
- 3) During the 80s, Slovenian scholars advocated for a greater emancipation of Slovenian (Gabrič 2015);
- 4) Only in the republican Territorial Defence Slovenian was widely used and replaced Serbian in most cases. (Jelušič 2001)

## **Slovenian language during the 1991 war**

- 1) Slovenian propaganda war and extensive use of media: Slovenian journalists spoke Slovenian to the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) conscripts, which rarely could actually understand what they were being told or asked;
- 2) Civilians usually surrounded the YPA soldiers and started speaking in Slovenian with them, in a clear attempt to make them feel uncomfortable and undesired;
- 3) Slovenian soldiers and officers would use exclusively Slovenian when negotiating with YPA officers, which had evident difficulties when trying to promptly react to the requests of the Slovenian side;
- 4) An unusual use of Serbo-Croatian is seen only in serious occasions, for example when dealing with YPA conscripts who have been wounded or who are in a state of shock.

## **Aftermath: Slovenian, the language of the victors**

Post-war linguistic policies reflected Slovenia's desire to distance itself from the Balkans: No official language rights granted to Serbs, Bosniaks, or Croats—the largest ethnic minorities in Slovenia.

The Slovenian language became a symbol of European civility and cultural distinction (Hansen, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

- 1) The war solidified Slovenian's role as a marker of national identity and independence.
- 2) The deliberate linguistic strategy during the conflict underscored its symbolic power as both a practical tool of resistance and a post-war political statement.