

THE POLITICAL, ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC BORDERS
OF THE UPPER ADRIATIC AFTER THE DISSOLUTION
OF YUGOSLAVIA¹

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After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, not only political borders, but also language attitudes and linguistic behavior in the Upper Adriatic changed and continue to change rapidly.

This paper addresses recent linguistic developments in the region between Trieste and Rijeka (Fiume), including the Istrian peninsula, and the islands of Cres (Cherso) and Lošinj (Lussino). In this part of the Upper Adriatic Romance and Slavonic populations have been living together since the eighth century. Istria must be considered a territory where political borders have often been reshaped, even very recently, but where there are still no clear ethnic or linguistic boundaries.

Today, the following varieties can be heard in Istria (including the islands and Fiume), where a majority of the population is bi- and trilingual. The three standard varieties are Croatian, Italian and Slovenian. The non-standard varieties are:

- a) the indigenous Slavonic varieties, which are predominantly Čakavian and Kajkavian;
- b) Istroromance, an indigenous Romance variety (in some places of the south-west of the peninsula);
- c) the Istrovenetian koiné;
- d) the Istrorumene (north and south of Učka mountain) and the Istro-montegrine (at Peroj near Vodnjan) varieties;
- e) the varieties of the immigrants who came to Istria after World War II: non-indigenous Slovenian and Croatian varieties, Albanian varieties, Serbian varieties, and others.²

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² Malecki 1930, Crevatin 1982, Filipi 1989, Milani-Kruljac 1990, Necak-Lük and Necak 1990, Kobav 1991, Ostanek 1991, Crljenko 1995, Jahn 1995, Orbanić 1995.

In antiquity, Istria was populated by Mediterranean peoples. Beginning in the 8th century BC, the Indo-European tribes of the Illyrians, Histrians, and Venetians moved into the area. The Romans conquered Istria in 177 BC. By the third century AD Istria was linguistically completely latinized. The time of coexisting Romance and Slavonic populations began with the arrival of the Slavs during the 7th and 8th centuries. This was followed by a period of changing political and economic hegemony in the region (Francescato and Salimbeni 1976). At the beginning of the second millennium Venice took over economic and political power in most parts of Istria, as well as in the rest of the eastern coast of the Adriatic. While Latin can be considered the High Variety in Istria since the Roman occupation, during the Middle Ages Slavonic varieties came to be increasingly used as High Varieties, and not solely in the ecclesiastic context: from the first centuries of the second millennium several important documents written in Glagolitic script have survived. The sociolinguistic situation during the Middle Ages can be described as *diglossia* with Latin as High Variety (HV), and numerous diatopically different Romance and Slavonic varieties as Low Varieties (LV): Church Slavonic, a less far-reaching HV, also played a role in the area.

Between 1470 and 1797 all Istria was under Venetian rule, except for the Habsburg possession of Pazin. For this period we must note that Venetian as the *lingua franca* of the Republic of San Marco had become a variety with a certain prestige. It rose to assume a place between the HVs and the LVs, first in the coastal towns of Istria and later on even in parts of the hinterland.

Time and again during the last millennium, Romance and Slavonic settlers moved into Istria to repopulate a countryside abandoned as a consequence of epidemics and wars. As a result we find in Istria a unique patchwork of dialects and linguistic islands, interesting language-contact situations, and linguistic convergence phenomena:

- “Mixed” varieties develop, i.e. language varieties with a Slavonic linguistic base but strong interference from the Romance language system and a predominantly Romance lexicon.
- Slavonic and Romance indigenous Istrians and new immigrants are “venetianised” linguistically, in some cases also “slavicised” (Milani-Kruljac 1990).

From the end of the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th century we therefore find a kind of triglossia with Latin as HV, Venetian as Medium Variety (MV), and the local idioms as LVs³. An ethnic, and above all, linguistic conflict arose during the second half of 19th century: the Venetian hegemony collapsed in 1797 and Istria came under Austrian rule. The official languages were then Croatian, Slovenian, Italian and German, but not Venetian, which was nevertheless still the *lingua franca* in Istria and also in the Austrian Navy. In the 1910 census of Austria 41.5% of the Istrian population claimed Croatian as their every day language, while 36.5% named

Italian, and 13.7% Slovene. (Only standard languages were considered, which, in a situation like the Istrian one, naturally produced certain difficulties (Brix 1982).)

After World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire Istria became part of Italy. Fascist language policy prohibited the use of all non-Romance idioms in Italy, the Croatian and Slovene schools in Istria were closed and the social and economic networks of the Slavonic inhabitants of Istria were disrupted. As a consequence of the linguistic and cultural persecution a significant part of them (the exact number is still not known; some speak of about 70.000) chose to emigrate to Yugoslavia or overseas (Čermelj 1974, Wörsdörfer 1994). After World War II and the liberation of Istria by the Tito partisans, the majority of the peninsula was incorporated into the Yugoslavian state. A small part in the northwest, around Trieste, became part of the Free Territory of Trieste, which in 1954 was divided between Italy and Yugoslavia. In the years between the end of World War II and 1954, about 90% of the Italophone population of Istria, but also a significant part of the Slavonic population, all in all more than 200.000 Istrians, left their homes and went west. We can illustrate the exodus of the Italians from the coastal regions using Koper (Capodistria) as an example:

Table 1. The change in the ratio of different ethnic groups in Capodistria 1910-1971 (Juri 1989).

year	population (100%)	Italians	Slovenes	Croats	others
1910	8,993	87.9%	4.9%	1.7%	5.3%
1945	6,138	87.4%	12.2%	0.3%	0.1%
1956	5,717	8.8%	81.3%	6.2%	3.7%
1971	18,298	2.9%	84.6%	8.4%	11.0%

The table clearly shows the dramatic decline of the Italian part of the population, as well as the strong rise in the number of Slovene and Croat inhabitants, who came in to replace the Italians.

The Italian ethnic component in Istria, which previously had been the socially dominant group, providing about half of the pre-war population, became a smaller minority than the newly immigrated Serbs, Muslims, etc., who had come from other parts of Yugoslavia to repopulate the regions left by the Italians. The official language after World War II was Croatian in the Croatian part of Istria, and Slovene in the Slovenian part. The districts which belonged to the Free Territory of Trieste have since been officially bilingual: Koper (Capodistria), Izola (Isola), Piran (Pirano) and Buje (Buie). The same is true for a few more municipalities in the south of the peninsula. Since the Slavonic linguistic component constitutes the demographic majority, and since both the Croatian and Slovenian languages now have the status of High Varieties, the Romance varieties of Istria have been strongly influenced by the Slavonic varieties in the course of the last half century (Milani-Kruljac 1990).

³ According to the relativistic model of Muljačić 1994.

But in spite of this demographic development, and in spite of the numerical insignificance of an Italian minority of about 22.000 people (in 1991), Venetian to this day functions as an important means of communication, as a *koinè*, at least in the coastal regions of Istria. Besides the 22.000 people who consider themselves ethnically Italian, there are about 60.000 bilingual Slavs with near-native competence in Venetian, and an important part of the population has both a linguistic and an ethnic double identity.

Even after the nationalisms of our century with the resulting ethnic persecutions and assimilations the ethnic borders in the region are all but clear. This is also true for the linguistic borders, although in the course of modernisation the dialects became "covered" (in the sense of Kloss: *überdacht*) by the respective HVs: Italian, Slovenian and Croatian. Besides the standard varieties, the Slavonic population speaks south-Slavonic dialects, and the Romance population speaks now mostly a sort of colonial Venetian, so-called Istro-Venetian.

Today, Trieste and the small town of Muggia in the northwest of Istria are part of Italy, a small territory in the north is part of Slovenia and the rest is part of Croatia. Between the 1981 census and the first census after the dissolution of Yugoslavia taken in 1991, the number of people declaring themselves to be Italian almost doubled. Moreover, every sixth inhabitant of the region opted for a "regional" declaration in the census instead of a national one⁴. The latter phenomenon is most frequent in the Croatian part of Istria, while in the Slovenian part and in Rijeka (Fiume) the national declarations prevailed.

Table 2. National identity as declared by the inhabitants of Croatian and Slovenian Istria, Fiume/Rijeka, and Quarner-islands in the census of 1991.

nationality 1991:	Croatian	Italian	Serbian	Slovenes	Regional	other/missing
total: 528,099	298,211	21,964	36,364	60,493	41,231	69,836
total: 100%	56.47%	4.16%	6.89%	11.45%	7.81%	13.22%

In the Croatian part of Istria the shift in identity between the 1981 and 1991 censuses is quite evident: many people who declared themselves Croatian in 1981 opted for a regional declaration (Istrian) while the number of declared Italians rose. The number of "others" decreased because of the fact that in 1991, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, fewer people declared themselves Yugoslavian.

⁴ In this context it should be kept in mind that there existed in Rijeka (Fiume) after World War I, as well as in Trieste after the World War II, more or less strong movements for independence from both Yugoslavia and Italy.

Table 3. National identity as declared by the inhabitants of Croatian Istria without the Quarner-islands and Fiume/Rijeka in 1981 and 1991.

	Croats	Italians	Serbs	Slovenes	Regionals	Others/missing
1981	72.20%	3.61%	4.06%	1.58%	1.69%	16.86%
1991	58.48%	6.76%	4.72%	1.59%	16.29%	12.16%

Here the pattern of demographic change is also very interesting: the Serbs and "others" can be found mostly in those towns which had been abandoned by the Italians during the exodus, while Italians and especially "Regionals" live mostly in the countryside. The latter shows that the less mobile, rural population identify themselves more strongly with their region of origin than with an illusion of nationality created by and brought into their world from an external, modern reality.

Table 4. National identity as declared by the inhabitants of towns as opposed to the countryside.

	all	Croats	Italians	Serbs	Slovenes	Regionals	Others
towns	58.8%	57.7%	53.2%	84.6%	66.1%	42.3%	77.3%
country side	41.2%	42.3%	46.8%	15.4%	33.9%	57.7%	22.7%

It is important to understand that Istria is not at all homogeneous. There are areas where the Italian population is still quite strong, while other areas have always been ethnically and linguistically (at least at the Low Variety level) almost exclusively Slavonic. The examples of the region of Buje (Buie) with the towns of Umago (Umago) and Novigrad (Cittanova), and the villages of Momjan (Momiano) and Grožnjan (Grisignana), and the municipality of Buzet (Pinguente) will illustrate this state of affairs.

Table 5. National identity as declared by the inhabitants of the Municipality of Buie/Buje.

	Croats	Italians	Serbs	Slovenes	Regionals	Others
1981	65.59%	11.50%	3.08%	2.65%	1.01%	16.17%
1991	39.46%	23.15%	4.19%	3.16%	16.31%	13.73%
Umago	47.97%	9.82%	6.45%	2.63%	12.82%	20.31%
Cittanova	51.63%	14.70%	4.16%	2.74%	14.95%	11.82%
Momiano	21.50%	46.80%			15.50%	
Grisignana	20.20%	34.70%	5.20%	2.10%	25.40%	

Table 6. National identity as declared by the inhabitants of the Municipality of Pinguente/Buzet.

	Croats	Italians	Serbs	Slovenes	Regionals	Others
1981	93.25%	0.34%	0.75%	1.42%	0.12%	4.12%
1991	59.40%	2.76%	0.78%	1.61%	28.18%	7.27%

In the Slovenian part of the region the Slovenian and Italian standard languages have pushed back the dialects. The latter have, generally speaking, a low prestige and are not used in formal situations. In recent years only a modest sociolinguistic renaissance of the indigenous varieties of the Capodistriana area (Koprščina) can be observed. The Low Varieties in the Croatian part of the peninsula, on the other hand (often in a Neolatin-Slavonic mixture), have experienced a big come-back in the last decade. While the Slavonic standard varieties have a high status, standard Italian is restricted to very few sociolinguistic domains e.g. mass media and the written domain, i.e., only in very formal official domains, because in nearly all domains Romance-speaking Istrians can use Istrovenetian (or a Slavonic variety) instead of standard Italian. Therefore, following the terminology of Berruto, we can call the sociolinguistic relationship between standard Italian and Istrovenetian 'diglossia', and the sociolinguistic relation between the Slavonic HVs and Slavonic and Romance Low/Medium Varieties (like Istrovenetian and Čakavian) 'dilalia' (Berruto 1987, Jahn 1996b).

Istrovenetian as an important koinè of the region had never been replaced by standard Italian. The third phase of standardization in Italy, characterized by internal migration during the decades of industrialisation after World War II, did not reach Istria, simply because it didn't belong to Italy at that time. One problem, which can only be briefly mentioned in this context, concerns the situation of the many students in Istria who learn Italian as L2 in school. They will never be able to make use of this knowledge in their Istrian environment, where besides the Slavonic standard – Slovene or Croat – either Istroslavonic or Istrovenetian varieties are spoken, but no standard Italian. This fact creates serious difficulties for the Italian minority and the students in their schools. The use of non-standard varieties in the Croatian part of Istria is probably influenced by two factors: first, people feel linguistically insecure because of the standardization of the Croatian language after the independence of the country, so that they prefer to express themselves in the language variety they know best (rather than accidentally using a "Serb" word); and secondly, by using the regional or local dialect they can express their regional identity as a sort of oral protest against the choirs of nationalism and the centralist policy of the Croatian government⁵.

In spite of the fact that there is still a majority who would consider themselves Croatian or Italian, etc., rather than Istrian, the following tendencies can be observed:

- (1) attitudinal and linguistic convergence among the inhabitants of Croatian Istria in the name of "Istrianity";
- (2) the Slavophone Istrians generally feel closer to the Italophone Istrians than to Croats from outside Istria;
- (3) among Istrians, a variety with strong interferences is often spoken, a variety which allows mixtures inside of a convergence-continuum, with the imaginary extreme poles "pure" *Istrovenetian* and "pure" *Istročakavian*; this does not exclude interference between *Istročakavian* and standard Croatian, *Istrovenetian* and standard Croatian, and *Istrovenetian* and standard Italian (Milani-Kruljac and Orbanić 1989).

I therefore predict:

- (1) attitudinal and linguistic divergence of the inhabitants of Croatian Istria from the rest of Croatia (and, for the Italian minority, from Italy),
- (2) attitudinal and linguistic convergence of the inhabitants of the Slovenian part of Istria toward the rest of Slovenia (and, for the Italian minority, Italy) is occurring.

Slovenia, like many small countries, allows for relatively few "centrifugal" attitudes: the Slovenian state is far more accepted by Slovenian Istrians than the Croatian state is by Croatian Istrians. When inhabitants of Slovenian Istria use the word "Istria" they refer to the Croatian part of the peninsula, thus showing a weaker identification with the region; only about 3% of the population of the Slovenian Littoral declared themselves Istrian. Since Trieste is the economic and cultural focal point for western Slovenia (not least because of a strong Slovenian minority in the city), inhabitants orient themselves more toward the west than toward the south.

Consequently we have:

- (3) an attitudinal and linguistic divergence between the inhabitants of the Slovenian part of Istria and those of the Croatian part; and, furthermore,
- (4) an attitudinal and linguistic convergence of the inhabitants of Trieste (at least of the Italophone ones) towards the rest of Italy and lack of interest in the surrounding area.

These theses, developed from my previous research in the area, are now being tested in the context of my dissertation on "Ethnic Identity and Language Use in Istria" (Jahn 1996a).

Several investigations have shown that there is no strong correlation between mother-tongue (L1) and national or ethnic identity in Istria (Bogliun 1988 and 1989). I am interested in investigating the relationship between language use and ethnic identity in the region and in finding out which other factors besides L1 deter-

⁵ While in Croatian Istria a regionalist political party won almost every town and four of five constituencies for the national elections (see Jahn: 1996c).

mine identity, such as school and social networks. Previous linguistic, sociological and sociolinguistic studies have investigated almost exclusively nationally or linguistically homogeneous groups, or were carried out among school populations of the Italophone schools in Istria. Therefore, by including all parts of the population, my approach will reveal new aspects of the Istrian sociolinguistic situation.

In my research I have tried to combine quantitative and qualitative methods. I have carried out about 40 ethnographic interviews, asking for information about socialization, language use, attitudes, and linguistic biography. The same topics were addressed in written questionnaires, of which I have been able to collect 605 from all over Istria. The data from the questionnaires will be evaluated statistically.

A preliminary review of the material has shown that:

- (1) "Istrians" are less mobile, but more polyglot than persons who chose one of the national appellations.
- (2) "Istrians" use more non-standard varieties than persons who chose one of the national appellations. In general, they also develop more positive attitudes toward the regional language varieties than other ethnic groups. We can conclude from this that the use of the standard varieties plays an important role for the development of national consciousness.
- (3) There is a direct relationship between the rising regionalism and the renaissance of non-standard varieties in Croatian Istria; this is partly due to the in-group character of the non-standard varieties.

These tendencies remain to be evaluated in light of the quantitative statistical data from my questionnaires.

Far from offering final results, I hope my contribution shows that the new situation after the dissolution of Yugoslavia has made the attitudinal and linguistic reality in the Upper Adriatic even more complex, not the least due to the expressed regional identity of a considerable part of the population in Croatian Istria. This regional identity can be interpreted as "border identity" in a region which has been multiethnic and plurilinguistic in all historical periods.⁶ I also hope to have demonstrated that linguistic and sociolinguistic realities are very often more complex than a nation- or standard-oriented scientific tradition will be able to take into account. Let me finish by quoting the words of the great sociologist of language, Joshua Fishman:

If economics answers all questions with "supply and demand", psychology with "stimulus and response" and education with "it all depends", then the first contribution of the sociology of language to applied linguistics is doubtlessly to stress the fact that the relations and interpenetrations between language and society are "a little more complicated than that", whatever that may be (Fishman 1976 [1971]: 358).

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⁶ Orbanić, Medica and Šuran 1995, Šuran 1994, Bogliun 1994, Milani-Kruljac 1995, Jahn 1996c.