

## THE POSITION OF THE PREKMURJE SLOVENE LANGUAGE TODAY IN RELATION TO THE ONCE DOMINANT HUNGARIAN CULTURE

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**Abstract:** Prekmurje Slovene holds a special place among Slovenian dialects, because in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and until 1919 it was an independent written language with its own literary tradition – we are talking about the Prekmurje literary language. And even today, when most of the Prekmurje Slovene has lost its literacy, the Prekmurje culture, with its language and literature is something special, distinct and independent. In this technological and limitless time, it is losing its identity. It is therefore necessary to research and describe contemporary Prekmurje, and to place it in an international context. Interestingly, the Slovak language is its closest Slavic language.

The international visibility and differentiation of the Slovene-Slovak linguistic-cultural-literary space necessitates contrastive research. The extreme north-eastern edge of Slovenia, Prekmurje, has always been linked to Slovakia – mainly through cultural and religious contacts in the past and present, as well as because of linguistic similarities. Another point of contact is the similar sociolinguistic situation of Prekmurje and Slovakia – cultural contact and bilingualism with Hungarian language and culture. Hungarian nationalist politics also played an important role in Prekmurje, deliberately defining the undisputed Slavic language, the Eastern Slavic literary variant of Prekmurje Slovene, as a Wendish language, and the Slovenes in Prekmurje as Wends. The Wendish theory in Prekmurje Slovene (promoted by Aleksander / Sandor Mikola) is a myth promoted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for assimilation of the Prekmurje Slovenians and it is still present in certain Hungarian nationalist circles.

In this article, we would like to present not only the linguistic and cultural situation in Prekmurje, but also the position of Prekmurje Slovene in the contemporary linguistic environment as reflected in active users of social networks who are interested in the Prekmurje language. By analysing the use of the language in the prominent Prekmurje media and by describing the position of Prekmurje Slovene in contemporary society of Prekmurje, including social

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networks, we want to update the view of Prekmurje Slovene, which is generally presented only as a literary language of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, modern Prekmurje Slovene and its position in modern society after 1919 are generally forgotten in linguistic and cultural research. Therefore, in addition to contrastive discourse analysis and a structural analysis of the Prekmurje Slovene in the media, we also conducted surveys and structured interviews among users of contemporary Prekmurje Slovene.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, the Prekmurje tongue, the standard Prekmurje language, Wendish theory, Hungarian culture, Slovenian culture

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

After the Springtime of Nations (1848), the Slovene language was studied mainly through the prism of the Central Slovene area (Gorenjska-Dolenjska dialect group, the Ljubljana centre) and the western and northern parts of Slovenia with the cities of Klagenfurt (now the Republic of Austria) and Trieste (now the Republic of Italy). Due to the administrative connection within the Austrian Empire, the Štajerska part, which was more closely interconnected compared to the Hungarian Slovenes, gradually became part of the Slovene national consciousness. Culturally, Štajerska joined the core of Slovenia with the transfer of the diocese in 1859 from St. Andraž to Maribor, which was done by Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek (1800 – 1862), who was also a classmate of the greatest Slovenian poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the author of the Slovenian national anthem, France Prešeren, at the Ljubljana Lyceum. In this way he united the Štajerska Slovenes within one diocese and laid a solid foundation for the further cultural development of the Slovenes in Štajerska. The Hungarian part of the Slovene cultural space, meaning the area between Mura and Raba, which was often forgotten until 1919 and was not considered a constitutive part of the Slovene nation. “The first inexorable step on the way to United Slovenia came to a standstill in 1848 (the United Slovenia program of Matija Majar Ziljski) because the program was unfinished and did not attract all Slovenian minorities – it was exclusive to all Hungarian Slovenes in Prekmurje and Porabje” (Jesenšek, 2019a, p. 183). Nevertheless, the linguistic and cultural proximity of the Prekmurje Slovene language to Slovene and Slavic cultural area, directed Prekmurje in the direction of the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, although the Hungarians during the process of Magyarization after 1848 wanted to erase the Slovene language and later convince the people of Prekmurje through the Wendish theory (author Aleksander / Sandor Mikola) that they weren’t Slavs but rather Wends. Fortunately, this

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assimilative and manipulative action, which manipulated linguistic facts (the Slavic origin of Prekmurje), was not successful. The Slovene language of Prekmurje, both spoken and written, still exists and keeps developing, at least in the part of Slovenia of the Mura-Raba province (Prekmurje). What was once the Prekmurje literary language with its own literary and publishing tradition until 1919, was later reduced to being mainly a dialect, is now increasingly gaining ground in the written language code, especially as a language of literature (Tivadar, 2017). In Porabje, however, due to demographic factors (emigration of Porabians and low birth rate) and neglect of the Slovene language in education, parts of the northern Prekmurje dialect (the so-called porabščina, dialect in Porabje) have almost completely disappeared and there are very few writers and speakers of Porabje left. The attitude towards the Hungarian language in Prekmurje is significantly different than in Porabje. Hungarian is present only in the bilingual area, where the Prekmurje dialect itself is scarce. In Porabje, Hungarian is the predominant language of communication, while the Porabje dialect is spoken mainly by the older generation.

In this article, we want to highlight the influence of Hungarian language and Hungarian culture in the past, as well as the process of assimilation and the survival and current life of the Prekmurje dialect. Since 1919, especially after 1948 (Information Bureau) and the Iron Curtain, the contact with the motherland and Slovene space was almost completely severed. The Porabje dialect thus developed separately, including a greater preservation of archaic elements. The basic purpose is to emphasize the importance of multiculturalism and the preservation of authentic culture, which is essential for the development of any society. The region between Mura and Raba has always been multicultural from a linguistic, religious and ethnic point of view. Jewish culture played a very important role, but it experienced the Holocaust after 1941 and is practically non-existent in Prekmurje today.

## **Methods and Material**

One research method within the article is contrastive discursive analysis of past and current scientific, professional and also media texts and sources, including authors such as professor Martina Orožen and the academic and professor Marko Jesenšek, both are experts when it comes to the Prekmurje language, history and literature. Through reviewing of scientific and professional literature, historical sources and various media responses, we made a new synthesis of linguistic and cultural development in the Mura-Raba region, and at the same time we defined today's public speaking image in Prekmurje through auditory analysis of radio. A survey based on auditory

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analysis and a structured interview with radio host Marjan Dora were conducted in 1999 (Tivadar, 2003).

We tested the language awareness of Prekmurje people using the method of structured interviews and surveys in 2013 (Novak, 2013) and 2020 (Hajdinjak, 2020), through which we obtained contemporary data on the attitude of Prekmurje speakers towards their dialect and language use in general. The most recent survey from 2019 (Hajdinjak, 2020) included 114 respondents of different ages and different social backgrounds. In order to determine language awareness in Porabje, we also surveyed 13 Porabje citizens in June 2009 (born 1956 – 1983) who were all participants of the regular training at the Slovene Language and Culture conference in Porabje (Tivadar, 2012).

## **Prekmurje<sup>2</sup> Slovene Language and Hungarian Culture**

In the area of Prekmurje, the Prekmurje literary language (1715, Catechism of Ferenc Temlin) was formed at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was the foundation for a strong Prekmurje regional consciousness. Štajerska intellectuals and professors, especially Dr. Fran Kovačič and Dr. Matija Slavič (he was also the rector of the University of Ljubljana between 1932 – 1934 and 1939 – 1940), were also the most important negotiators at the Paris Peace Conference, which in 1919, to the considerable surprise of Hungarian diplomats, awarded Prekmurje to the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS) (Tivadar, 2020a). The border between Hungary and the Kingdom of SHS was then confirmed by the Treaty of Trianon, which is still perceived by some Hungarian historians as very unjust (Tivadar, 2021). However, we must emphasize that the “unjust” setting of borders has led to multiculturalism, which should be an advantage of the newly created and intellectually open modern countries. The linguistic and cultural space between Mura and Raba was once a single space where members of different communities coexisted. The Hungarian and Slovene communities were the most numerous, and the Jewish community was also very important, but it almost completely disappeared after the Second World War. The long-standing supremacy of Hungarian culture, including violent aristocratic rule among the majority population in Prekmurje, caused resistance from the Slovene population in

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<sup>2</sup> In the article we use the term Prekmurje and derivatives from this root (Prekmurje language or tongue, Prekmurje culture), as well as the term Porabje and derivatives from this root (Porabje language, Porabje culture). We must emphasize that Porabje was until 1919 part of the unified Mura-Raba province, which then gradually administratively and partly linguistically (greater influence of Hungarian) began to secede from the rest of the Slovenian region. We would like to mention that the term Pomurje is completely inappropriate for the Hungarian equivalent Muravidék, as Pomurje means two Slovenian provinces, Prlekija and Prekmurje, which today also belong to the unified statistical Pomurje region.

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Prekmurje, which, in addition to the well-prepared negotiating positions of Dr. Matija Slavič and colleagues (especially Jožef Klekl and Ivan Jerič) convinced with the decision-makers in Paris and their envoys on the ground to join Prekmurje to the Kingdom of SHS. Prekmurje awakener Jožef Klekl Sr even spoke of millennial slavery under the Hungarians (Tivadar, 2019). After the tolerant and Slavic-oriented period of Cyril and Methodius, the Hungarians gradually ruled the Pannonian area through their nobles, and after 1848 they began the process of Magyarization in the Hungarian part of the then Austro-Hungary. The process of Magyarization was very well researched by Slovak historians (Mannová, 2005), as Slovakia had even more non-Hungarian intellectuals and townspeople who were prevented from attending university and working in public. The Hungarian Slovenes shared their fate with the Slovaks. A similar development aimed at increasing the Hungarian population could be seen in Slovakia as well: Uneven economic development of individual Hungarian regions and Magyarization after the Austro-Hungarian Treaty (1867) caused deformations in the demographic development of individual nationalities. During the period of dualism (1867–1918), Hungarian statistics show an above-average increase of Hungarians and a highly below-average increase of other non-Hungarian nationalities (Mannová, 2005, p. 215). Lažeta writes about Magyarization in Prekmurje at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and says that in Murska Sobota “with the aim of Magyarizing Prekmurje, around 1878 the Magyarizers founded a Hungarian casino, which published the newspaper *Muraszombat és vidéke*, (*Murska Sobota and the Surroundings*), and in 1893 a Magyarizing society called the Hungarian Educational Society of Vendska Krajina (Vendvidéki Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület), whose purpose was to suppress the Prekmurje language to the benefit of the Hungarian language.” (Lažeta, 2019, pp. 26–27). Here, Lažeta cites the words of the president of this association, who says: “The preservation and strengthening of Hungarianism in this region is our most important national matter” (Lažeta, 2019, p. 27).

In Slovenian linguistics, the belief that Prekmurje prints of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were written in literary language and not in the dialect became established. Prekmurje's written tradition is also evidenced by books we have records of but are unfortunately lost today. Jesenšek writes about the *Agenda Vandolica* (1587), a Prekmurje ritual that is lost, however Mihael Bakoš also writes about it in 1784 (Jesenšek, 2019b, p. 241). The Prekmurje literary language existed at the same time as the Central Slovenian literary language, differed from it, and also moved closer and further away from Kaikavian in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jesenšek, 2004, p. 179). The definitive joining of Prekmurščina to the Central Slovenian literary language also happened with the administrative annexation to the rest of Slovenia in 1919 or 1921, when the Treaty of Trianon was adopted. After 1848, non-Hungarian intellectuals from Prekmurje mostly studied in Ljubljana, from where they brought free-thinking ideas to Prekmurje. The process of “Slovenization” (promotion of literary lan-

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guage) in Prekmurje and Porabje took place also through Mohor's books (Tivadar, 2020b) and the work of priests from central Slovenia in Prekmurje (through missions, for example, in Beltinci 1903) (Tivadar, 2020b) and also in Prlekija (establishment of the Salesian Marian Shrine in Veržej in 1912 on the initiative of Dr. Fran Kovačič). These educational and professional activities of Slovene Prekmurje Catholic priests from the ravenska part of Prekmurje to Porabje, where they also had numerous subscribers to Mohor's books (Jerič, 2019; Tivadar, 2020b), were the basis for the Slovene national consciousness movement and later rallies leading to the Kingdom of SHS. The basic binder was certainly the Prekmurje language, which was Slavic and thus closer to the newly formed Slavic state.

The Hungarian authorities emphasized being Hungarian and the Hungarian tradition, as well as the supposed difference between Slovenian and Wendish speaking Prekmurje people, who represented a very large community in the region between Mura and Raba. After the testimony of participants at the Paris Peace Conference and Prekmurje priests, the Hungarian authorities simply could not believe that they had lost Prekmurje (Jerič, 2019). Prekmurje, as a Slovene-Hungarian autochthonous multicultural province, which also has such a status through Hungarian member of Parliament in the Slovene parliament, can be a kind of model of coexistence of different countries, especially since the 1980s, when democratization began in the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia cultures and nations. A comparison with Porabje already shows us an important difference, as Slovene communities in once entirely Slovene villages have been replaced by the Hungarian-speaking community, in which fewer and fewer individuals identify as Slovenes. If after the delimitation of the border under the Trianon Treaty in 1920 there were around 7000 inhabitants in Porabje who used Porabje language in everyday communication, according to the last census in Hungary in 2011 this number decreased to a bit over 1000 (Josipovič, 2016; Tivadar, 2020a). Thanks in large part to the economic contribution of Opel and other German-Austrian companies, the presence of the German language has been strengthened. Recently, Slovene-Hungarian cooperation has intensified in the linguistic, cultural and economic fields. Respecting the cultural and linguistic importance of both nations and historical facts, the development of both communities on both sides of the border will only increase through programmes of economic and cultural cooperation, such as the newest projects of the Hungarian Self-governing National Community (more Muravidéki Magyar Önkormányzati Nemzeti Közösség, n.d.).

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## ***Prekmurje Literature and Linguistic and Cultural Richness Through History***

The area between Mura and Raba has always been on the periphery of the main language groups (Hungarian and Slovene), so certain peculiarities could be preserved in these places. One of these peculiarities is the language, the Slovene language of Prekmurje, which also has a literary tradition. The oldest accurately dated linguistic monument is the Treaty of Martjanci from 1643, followed by the *Martjanci Songbooks* (*Martjanska pesmarica*) used by both Catholic and Protestant believers (Tivadar, 2020b, p. 163), and the first printed book known so far is the Mali katechismus by Ferenc Temlin translated from Hungarian in 1715, before this first Prekmurje book discovered so far, there are records of an even older Prekmurje book, which has not been found so far (Agenda Vandalica; Jesenšek, 2019b). It is important to point out that the Prekmurje literary language has been created in Protestant and Catholic press, as evidenced by the work of the Catholic writer Mikloš Küzmič and his contemporary evangelical Števan Küzmič. Seven books by Mikloš Küzmič played an important role in ecclesiastical literature in educating the people of Prekmurje and raising awareness of the Prekmurje literary language, among them especially *Szveti evangejeliomi* (1780) and the most frequently reprinted *Kniga molitvena* (1783).

The two largest Christian communities still cooperate and strengthen the linguistic and cultural image of Prekmurje, the evangelical part in the central Prekmurje (centre Murska Sobota) and the Goričko area, while the Catholic part also in the central and south Prekmurje. In the whole of Prekmurje, both communities coexist and jointly create the Prekmurje culture.

In secular literature, the Prekmurje literary language reached its peak in the national awakening work of Jožef Košič. According to Mikloš Küzmič, *Zobrisani Szloven and Szlovenka med Mürov i Rábov* (1845 – 1848) or *Zgodbe vogenszkoga kralesztva* (1848) reached the highest level of sophistication of the Prekmurje language and brought it, in terms of expressiveness and style, closer to the literary genre (Jesenšek, 2005).

After 1848, the national idea began to spread more intensively, which also influenced language development. This also influenced Prekmurje, where Hungarian national ideas began to spread. Hungarian nationalists even founded their own associations, which printed Prekmurje books with the aim of separating the Prekmurje language from the Slovene language (Smej, 2013). On the other hand, through the education of priests and other intellectuals in Slovenia (from nearby towns Veržej in Prlekija to Maribor and Ljubljana) they also strengthened the Slovenian national consciousness. The spread of Catholic influence and the Central Slovene standard language in Goričko also influenced the formation of a certain opposition on the evangelical side. Therefore,

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at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hungarian Lutheran teacher Aleksandar / Sandor Mikola began to expose the so-called Wendish theory, which was used by the Hungarian political authorities to weaken the unified Prekmurje Slovene consciousness. The Wendish theory claims that the Slovene or “Wendish-speaking” Prekmurje people are not part of the Slovene nation, but an ethnic community that is a “transition between the Western and Southern Slavs” (Kozma Gabor as cited in Novak, 2021, p. 142). This last quote is a written thought of the Hungarian historian Tibor Zsiga in 1996, which was not rejected by modern Hungarian historians – the only ones who protested were the ethnologist Dr. Vilko Novak and ethnologist Marija Kozar-Mukič, a Slovene from Porabje. After the democratic changes of 1989, the term “Wends” was again used more and more frequently in Hungary, as pointed out by Kozar-Mukič (Novak, 2021, p. 31). In 1996, a book by Tibor Zsiga (Zsiga, 1996) was published in Prekmurje (Lendava), which does not reject the Wendish theory. To the casual reader, it may seem that he even supports the Wendish theory. Vilko Novak, an ethnologist and Slavist who worked in Porabje and Prekmurje, disputed the scientific nature of the acceptance of the Wendish theory in Prekmurje that was stated in Zsiga's book (more in Novak, 2021). The Prekmurje literary language, which after 1919 and the annexation of Prekmurje to the rest of Slovenia gradually withdrew from the Slovene literary language, at least in written public communication, has been unequivocally, since the emerging of literary texts (from the aforementioned Ferenc Temlin, Mikloš and Števan Küzmič, Jožef Košič), called Slovene (“szlovenski”), the structure of the language itself is Slavic and was attested as such in numerous texts (Škafar, 1978).

### *The Formation of Prekmurje After 1919*

According to Slovenian diplomats, 1919 was a turning point, in addition to the return of Primorska, the annexation is comparable only to independence (Lipušček, 2019, p. 130). In 1919, Slovenes did not yet have their own country, the Hungarians returned in 1941 and reoccupied Prekmurje. The diplomatic victory would not be possible without the Prekmurje culture and language, which was developed by all Prekmurje intellectuals and inhabitants of Prekmurje during their daily lives, regardless of religion, national origin, worldview or social status. And with this, through their intermediaries, Slavič and Kovačič, they also convinced the decision-makers in Paris in 1919 and 1920.

Matija Slavič succeeded in defending Sloveneness to the border as it exists today, the divide between the rivers Mura and Raba, but he and Kovačič failed to convince diplomats that the border should be on the river Raba, which had a predominantly Slovene population at the time. According to historical sources cited in historical monographs (Jerič, 2019; Kovačič, 1926; Lažeta,



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2019; Lipušček, 2019), it is not clear whether Slavič deliberately excluded the hilly part of Prekmurje because of Evangelicals who lived there together with Catholics – as already noted, Slovene Porab villages were Catholic and Catholic priests from Prekmurje cooperated with them (see Jerič, 2019). Slavič's work did not end in 1919, he also worked on the delimitation commission between 1920 and 1924, which he describes in his article *Prekmurje Borders in Diplomacy* (Slavič, 1935). In joining Radgona and Porabje, which remained on the Austrian and Hungarian sides, Douglas W. Johnson, a cartographer from the United States, who took part in defining borders at the Paris Peace Conference, under the influence of Italian, Austrian and Hungarian diplomats, decided to the detriment of the Slovenian side, which does not diminish his positive role in annexing Prekmurje from Lendavske gorice to Trdkova.

### ***The Importance of the Prekmurje Linguistic and Cultural Space for the Slovene Language***

Hungarian nationalist manipulations, such as convincing the people of Prekmurje that they were Wends, were possible due to the difference between the Prekmurje literary language and the Central Slovene literary language and the millennium of administrative separation of Prekmurje from the rest of Slovenia. Knowing the development of the Slovene language, we can already speak historically of two literary norms, namely East Slovene and Central Slovene. Even the basic Pannonian vocabulary, which derives from Proto-Slavic, does not differ from Central Slovene (e.g. *imeti* (have), *delati* (work), *baba* (grandmother), *mati* (mother), *žena* (wife), *zlato* (gold), etc.). The distinctive words of the Pannonian language space are developmentally grounded in the Cyril and Methodius period and are reflected in the original Pannonian meaning: *ograd* (garden), *bratva* (harvest), *črešnja* (cherry), *domanji* (domestic), *lanec* (chain), etc. (Jesenšek, 2006). There are three reasons for the dual development of the Slovene language: the early dialectal marked distinctiveness of this linguistic space (Alpine: Pannonian Slovene), administrative and political division and the formation of central and eastern cultural space (Orožen, 1996). After 1919, a uniform standard language was gradually established in Prekmurje based on the tradition of Primož Trubar and Dalmatin's Bible and the already unified Central Slovenian literary language. Prekmurje, once a literary language, today lives primarily as a spoken language and partly as a media language. However, and literary creativity is also re-emerging in Prekmurje (Tivadar, 2017).

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## Prekmurje Consciousness Today

Until the unification of the Slovene literary norm and even beyond, the Slovenes between Mura and Raba developed their own literary language, a version of the Slovene language that had been in development since the arrival of Methodius and Cyril continued on in Protestant and Catholic texts, and even in literature and journalism.

The grammar of Prekmurje in Slovene Prekmurje was first designed by Košič, in a translation of Hungarian grammar (*Krátki Návuk Vogrszkoga Jazika za Zacsetnike*, 1833), and was supplemented by Kardoš's language manuals (Jesenšek, 2019a). August Pavel later codified neo-Slovene terminology in Slovene grammar, which was written in Hungarian (*Vend nyelvtan*, 1942). This was only translated into Slovene as late as in 2013 and published in book form (Bajzek Lukač & Jesenšek) (*Prekmurska slovenska slovnica / Vend nyelvtan*).

The term literary language refers to the common language of all dialect groups of a country. It differs from other versions of the language (dialects, colloquial language, etc.) in that it is written, that is codified in grammar. This gives us the reason that we can label a language as an independent literary language.

Due to their uniqueness, both linguistic and cultural, and their distance from the centres (formerly Budapest, now Ljubljana), Prekmurje and its inhabitants cultivated an independent regional consciousness. Linguistically, Prekmurje is not uniform either: “Prekmurje is divided into three dialects: northern, central and southern. /... / Porabje is considered to be a northern dialect, because Porabje does not have too many special features – the border, the 'watershed' between Prekmurje and Porabje is formed only by hills, high max. 350 – 400 m” (Rigler, 2001, p. 375). After 1919 and the entry into force of the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Porabje separated from the rest of Prekmurje. After 1945 and especially after 1948 (Informbiro period and the dispute between the Soviet Union and the SFRY), the differences between Goričko and Porabje, which were linguistically and culturally part of one province and also the Prekmurje dialect, increased: “Now, / after 1945 / of course, there were growing differences, because the state border severely severed mutual contacts and at the same time redirected Prekmurje to Slovene literary influence, while Porabje does not feel this influence and remains under Hungarian influence” (Rigler, 2001, p. 375).

The Porabje dialect, as far as it has been preserved, has remained archaic, and Hungarian also has a great influence in the Porabje dialect. In the rest of Prekmurje, which is now part of the Republic of Slovenia, literary Slovene has a great influence. Changes in the dialect also took place in the area of the

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Prekmurje metropolis of Murska Sobota, especially after 1945. In this part, the Prekmurje regional language began to develop (Toporišič, 1992), which no longer had so many clear dialectal characteristics of Ravensko, as speakers from other parts of Prekmurje and elsewhere moved to the central part of Prekmurje. Intonation and phonetic image (voices and voice changes) remained typical of Prekmurje.

Today, based on dialectological research in the past and the described sociolinguistic changes, the Prekmurje dialect is divided into four parts: Goričko Prekmurje dialect, Ravensko Prekmurje dialect (according to recent research and the greater role of Murska Sobota as a metropolis could also be called central Prekmurje dialect, see map below), Dolinsko Prekmurje dialect and Porabje Prekmurje dialect. At the same time, we must point out that in Lendava and other parts of Prekmurje where a large Hungarian minority is present, people speak mostly in a literary way with a noticeable Hungarian intonation.



**Figure 1**

*Presentation of the distribution of Prekmurje*

*Novak, V. (2013). Prekmurje, prekmurščina in regionalni razvoj: analiza najbolj poslušane oddaje v prekmurščini na radiu Murski val [Diplomsko delo]. Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta, p. 42.*

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## *Prekmurje Slovenian Language in the Media*

Since 2003, we have been intensively monitoring the linguistic image of the Prekmurje Slovenian media. The basic finding in the research between 1999 and 2003 (Tivadar, 2003) was that the speakers on the Prekmurje radio Murski val generally speak in Slovene literary language, with the exception of some shows (*Kak je inda fajn bilou* (*Those Were the Good Old Days*) and *Geza se zeza* (*Geza Fools About*)). In a research ten years later (Novak, 2013), we found that the Prekmurje language was consistently spoken only in the contact show *Geza se zeza*, which had many listeners. Which actually makes sense, since the state and the radio itself do not include in their regulations any requirements for language policy – a certain number of contents that would be spoken in the standard language, some in dialect – in our case in the Prekmurje language. These contents are also supposed to include the Porabje dialect and Romani language, which now has its own broadcasts both on Murski val radio and on the national television RTV Slovenia. Roma radio presenters were also trained in the use of each of these languages. Radio broadcasts in the Prekmurje tongue were just a coincidence, and the Prekmurje tongue is primarily part of the Prekmurje image. Radio shows in the Prekmurje tongue in 2003 were: *Zamurjenci* on Sunday mornings (the Prlekija dialect was also present, the show is a good example of *central Prekmurje tongue*), *Propöler* (*Propeller*) and *Kak je inda fajn bilou* (*Those Were the Good Old Days*) on Mondays and *Geza se zeza* (*Geza Fools About*) on Thursdays.

In these Prekmurje broadcasts (today, in 2023, only the *Propöler* show remains, which especially represents the so-called Central Prekmurje tongue), there is no awareness of the importance of preserving the dialect, which has historically played also the role of literary language. The blame and responsibility for this condition is also constantly shifted around to someone else. Through the analysis of the show *Geza se zeza* (Novak, 2013), which was one of the most listened to shows in the Prekmurje language on radio Murski val, this research proves that the language is still flexible and alive enough to be capable of quality communication and that the show, through the linguistic aspect of the preservation and awakening of Prekmurje tongue, is proof enough that such broadcasts are important and welcome for the dialect, despite a decrease in their number. Based on the analysis of radio broadcasts, the issue of a new division of the Prekmurje tongue within the media space into three parts was raised: Porabje Prekmurje tongue, Prekmurje of the older generation and the Central Prekmurje tongue. The latter in particular covered the Prekmurje media space and in our opinion represents a “threat” to the other two and the existence of the language (the Prekmurje tongue), as it approaches the literary language – typical Prekmurje words are lost in general use in the media, replaced by Slovene literary words. Also, once typical Prekmurje words

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are generally lost in the speech of the younger population, which is addressed in the next subchapter.

Through interviews (Novak, 2013), it was discovered that the people of Prekmurje want more content in the regional media (TV, radio, newspaper) in the Prekmurje tongue, which was confirmed by the following research (Tivadar, 2020a).

Paradoxically in the Prekmurje case of language and culture development, the Prekmurje identity is strongly emphasized (through music artists such as Vlado Kreslin, cuisine and various sports (especially football club Mura, who in 2021 were also the national champion of Slovenia) and other subcultural groups (Prekmurje rap artists, fan group Black Gringos, etc.)), while leading Prekmurje intellectuals, journalists and editors often considered speech in Prekmurje as an indicator of ignorance and illiteracy, and advocated the use of literary colloquial language: “The Prekmurje tongue is spoken by those who are weak and unable to defy the literary version.” (Murski val Marjan Dora as cited in Novak, 2013, p. 44).

### ***The Prekmurje Tongue and Prekmurje Consciousness on Social Networks***

As mentioned in previous chapters, the Prekmurje dialect is also used in written language today. In this form, it is widespread especially among the younger population, which is more relaxed and confident in writing and in communication in general in the dialect, which is confirmed by a survey conducted in 2020 (Hajdinjak, 2020) on the attitude of speakers to literary Slovene and the Prekmurje tongue. It is paradoxical that typical Prekmurje expressions are lost in the speech of young people, but replaced by literary expressions, which confirms the claim mentioned in the previous chapter that Central Prekmurje tongue, which is characterized by approaching the literary language, “threatens” the other two forms of the Prekmurje tongue. Based on the experience of teaching at one of the primary schools in Goričko in the past two school years, we can confirm that even younger speakers of this Goričko, Prekmurje dialect are already replacing many once typical Prekmurje expressions with those from standard Slovene. In our opinion, one of the possible reasons for changing the linguistic image of Goričko and Prekmurje in general could be (labour) migrations and mixed families, for example one of the parents coming from another language environment. Further research will be needed in the future to identify the causes (for example, socio-linguistic studies concerning bilingual areas).

With the aforementioned research from 2020, we wanted to find out where the place of the Prekmurje tongue is in the consciousness of local speakers, what is the importance of the literary language for them, which language is

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used in different speech situations, etc. The survey involved 114 respondents of different ages, mostly from families of intellectuals as evidenced from the survey conducted online. The analysis of the survey showed, among other things, that they rated their knowledge of the Prekmurje tongue as better than their knowledge of the standard language. The population aged 21 to 30 stood out with self-assessment, where 58 % of respondents rated their knowledge of the Prekmurje tongue as excellent, while only 26 % of those aged between 31 and 60 think the same. As we have found, it is inconceivable for most of the older generation to write an email or SMS message in dialect. They cite difficulties in writing certain terms as the reason, as the names for the same thing may differ between individual villages (e.g. *koma*, *kama*, *kan*, *kuma* for literary Slovene *kam*), and writing in dialect takes more time, so in writing they prefer to use literary language in communication (Hajdinjak, 2020).

The mentioned research also confirmed that the respondents use the Prekmurje tongue in everyday communication, i.e. in private and business conversations with colleagues, friends, family, superiors and in private-public speaking situations, which means communication via SMS messages, social networks, forums, etc. Also, based on experience, the claims are true, especially for the younger population, as evidenced by the rapid analysis of posts and comments below them. There is also the *Prekmurski slovar* group on the social network Facebook, where members (there were 12,965 of them on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2022) collect and discuss typical, often outdated or old Prekmurje words. The group was founded on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 by Akoš Anton Dončec from Verica, a native of Porabje, who specializes in the Prekmurje and Kajkavian tongues, he seeks historical and linguistic contacts between these two languages, and also researches Burgenland Croatian and Eastern Štajerska. The purpose of the group is to in this manner collect Prekmurje expressions or names for various objects and things (Hajdinjak, 2020). The daily discussions of many members of the group on social networks show that Prekmurje is a living language with a rich and diverse collection of terms, and based on discussions on such platforms we find that many typical Prekmurje words are forgotten because members do not know their meaning. A problem that arises and should be noted in this way of “collecting material” is the potential ignorance of the group members about the recording of various voices or accents, as they are mostly laymen or enthusiasts without the necessary expertise. Nevertheless, we believe that with professional judgment and the right approach to the collection and processing of material, this method of obtaining information can serve its purpose of making the Prekmurje language a functional spoken language among the younger and older generations.

The situation in Porabje is bad from a linguistic point of view, as there was a great assimilation due to exclusion from the Slovene space and the established boundaries between the literary and dialect – the dialect was often disturbing on all levels of the Slovene education until 1990 (Tivadar, 2009;

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2012). An additional problem was the transfer of the local priest Ferenc Merkli in 2010/2011, who after the death of Janoš Kühar (1901 – 1987) was the first local priest to hold masses in Slovene and spoke to them in the Porabje dialect (Cipot, 2010). This was also reported by the Slovenian national media (Peček, 2011), but his relocation did indeed take place and Porabje still does not have a Slovenian priest, which today further hinders the development of the language in Porabje. Researching the real state of the Prekmurje tongue in the Porabje region is also the task of researchers of the Slovene language and culture in the future.

## Conclusion

The Prekmurje language is undoubtedly an invaluable asset for the Slovene language, which has been preserved to this very day, with unique lexicological and phonological elements unique to this particular region. Prekmurje's literary language has been developed since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by both Protestant and Catholic priests, so that as many people as possible could understand God's word in their own language. The tradition of Slovene language in churches has been there since the times of Cyril and Methodius. The period of nationalist movements, which reached its zenith with the March Revolution of 1848, and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pushed the development of the Prekmurje religious language into a wider political framework. Thus, a religious-linguistic conflict between the Protestant and Catholic Churches took shape in Prekmurje, which was also evident in 1919, when the Catholic clergy in particular were intensely committed to joining Slovenia or the then Yugoslavia. The Protestant community was afraid of its decline within Slovenia and therefore positively valued the so-called Wendish. Different perceptions of annexation to the Kingdom of SHS (1919) also led to a distinction between Lutheran and Catholic leaders. The Lutherans emphasized the Prekmurje or the "Wendish" language, while the Catholic ones relied mainly on the Slovene standard language. Especially with the reliance on the Štajerska part and inclusion in the Maribor diocese, the Slovene literary language prevailed in the Catholic Church. This politically motivated opposition, the Wendish theory, which was promoted by the Hungarian authorities, never really came to life in Prekmurje and the Prekmurje language has been preserved to this day, as shown by religious ceremonies on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, which is a public holiday celebrating the annexation of Prekmurje to Yugoslavia. The Prekmurje literary language, which Jožef Klekl Sr carefully developed in church and journalistic texts, gradually withdrew to the Slovene literary language after 1919. In the spoken language, that is, on the (supra) dialectal level, the Prekmurje tongue is still preserved, which proves

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the development of the Prekmurje tongue in various pop-cultural speaking positions, from rap through songs, theatre performances and film to online posts – Facebook, forums etc., where through written texts there is a kind of spontaneous standardization of language.

Based on the experience of the authors of this article in education (Porabje and Prekmurje teachers) and in journalism and presented research (Hajdinjak, 2020; Novak, 2013; Tivadar, 2012), we can extract an interesting fact regarding the use of the Prekmurje tongue. Despite today's displacement of typical Prekmurje words with literary terms, readers of the online media *vestnik.si*, which runs in parallel with the printed weekly *Vestnik* newspaper with more than 70 years of tradition in the Mura region, pay attention to journalistic use of Prekmurje terms. *Vestnik* is published in literary language, but due to the already described importance of the dialect for the inhabitants of this region as well as the history of columns that were mainly part of *Vestnik's* monthly supplement *Pen*, where in the past much content was written in dialect, journalists also use individual dialect expressions in order to outline more concrete content. Discussions about a typical Prekmurje word are often opened on social networks, where the media publishes its online articles, as this dialect is characterized by the fact that individual terms for a certain phenomenon differ in part or in whole from each other (e.g. the Goričko Prekmurje tongue: *tošln*, *tošlin*: the dolinsko Prekmurje tongue: *bankaš* (wallet).

Considering the development of the Prekmurje question and the preservation of the Prekmurje language, we can say that the decision in 1919 to join the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was most likely appropriate – the Prekmurje language in Porabje, which belonged to Hungary, practically disappeared. Children from Porabje are now learning Slovene again in schools, but mainly the literary language and not the dialect. This created a generation gap – the older inhabitants of Porabje speak the Porabje dialect, the young speak standard Slovene or Hungarian, while the middle generation, with exceptions, speak only Hungarian “Children who learn standard Slovene cannot talk to their parents and grandparents because they do not understand standard Slovene. /.../ The Porabje dialect is mostly spoken by the middle and older generation. If the topic is more demanding, they are forced to speak Hungarian, because the ancient Porabje Slovenian dialect is not adapted enough for communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The transition from dialect to standard Slovene should be gradual, as it was in Prekmurje after the annexation of SHS in 1919. There was no such transition in Porabje, because in 1920 the state border separated us from our brothers from Prekmurje. We did not have the opportunity to gradually adopt modern expressions from the standard language into the dialect of consumption. Other minorities have the same problems (Kozar-Mukič as cited in Pojbič, 2019). The knowledge of literary Slovene among young people also depends on the interest of individuals in learning and the work of teachers. The Slovene language in Porabje is today in a process of revitalisa-



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tion and parents' positive attitudes towards the language are encouraging (Munda Hirnök, 2017). The situation is much better, although not ideal, in the Slovenian bilingual area. With its active bilingualism, Slovene Prekmurje is an example of an appropriate cultural and linguistic policy and has also preserved a relatively small Hungarian community. The Prekmurje tongue survives now mainly as a spoken dialect and less as a written language and is an important part of Prekmurje culture.

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