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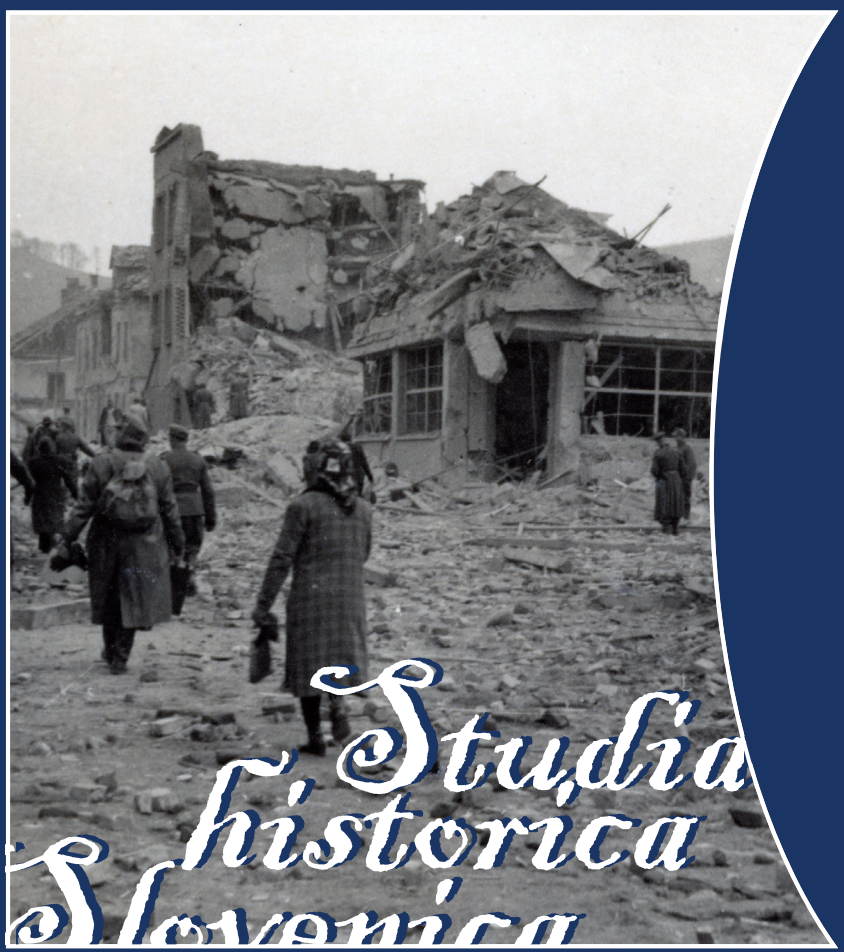

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Transforming Language Ideologies in the Styrias and in Prekmurje

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Abstract:
The article examines how monolingual ideologies shape language policies and identities in the Slovenian-Austrian border region through a qualitative analysis of interviews. Rooted in ethno-linguistic nationalism, these ideologies continue to influence language policies, particularly through linguistic purism and a persistent "discourse of threat". Monolingual narratives often overlook historical multilingual realities and cross-border communities. Interview data show that younger generations are shifting toward linguistic pragmatism, embracing local dialects, English, and a European identity. Overall, while nationalistic discourses still linger, generational change and EU integration foster a more inclusive understanding of languages and identities in the region.

Keywords:
German, Slovene, Styria and Prekmurje, linguistic capital, discursive practices, vernacular nationalism, qualitative analysis

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1. Introduction[1]

The last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were characterized by the relatively late emancipation of the bourgeoisie from aristocratic rule (compared to Western Europe), the rise of the labor movement, and the growth of ethno-linguistic nationalism. The latter led to growing tensions between the speakers of different languages within this multiethnic state, especially in cases where communities speaking a dominant language confronted those speaking a suppressed one.

In this paper, we focus on the formerly bilingual region in the historical Duchy of Styria and Prekmurje, the Slovenian-speaking region of the former Kingdom of Hungary adjacent to the east. Since the end of World War I and the subsequent dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this region has been divided between two countries: Austria to the north of the Mur/Mura[2] river and Slovenia to the south of it. Bilingualism has largely disappeared, resulting in a monolingual German speaking north and a monolingual Slovenian-speaking south. Knowledge of the respective other language is now taught in schools, primarily in the standard varieties. The regional varieties of the other language are typically unknown or, if known, often more difficult to understand than the respective standard form. In Slovenia, knowledge of German is – due to a variety of factors – far more widespread than knowledge of Slovenian is in Austria.

This paper aims to shed light on the discursive practices that have shaped contemporary perceptions of the neighbor's language – i.e., how Slovenian speakers perceive German, and vice versa, how German speakers perceive Slovenian – and their implications for present-day language use. To this end, we examine meta-linguistic discourses from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and compare them with views expressed by people on both sides of the border, gathered through interviews conducted in 2023 and 2024. Our goal is to demonstrate how historical discourses have influenced current understandings of the languages spoken in the region (in all their varieties), how these discourses have evolved over time, and how they continue to shape contemporary meta-linguistic discourses. We therefore interviewed teachers and students in schools, as well as other adults whose linguistic biographies made them particularly relevant to our study. In doing so, we aimed to capture a broader, intergenerational perspective that reflects the region's complex and turbulent history from the late 19th to the early 21st century.

[1] This article was written as part of the research group at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Maribor, No. P6-0372 (B): *Slovenian Identity and Cultural Awareness in Linguistic and Ethnic Contact Areas in the Past and Present,* funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

[2] Throughout the paper, we name both the German and the Slovenian names of toponyms the first time they are mentioned. Thereupon we use the German form for places in Austria, the Slovenian form for places in Slovenia.

Section 2 provides an overview of the theoretical background and the methods used for data collection and analysis, including a summary of the individuals we interviewed. Section 3 examines historical developments in the region concerning language and language policy, from the late 19th century to the post-World War II period, in order to contextualize our data historically. In Section 4, we present our findings by discussing key excerpts from the interviews and identifying a sequence of discursive layers that broadly align with meta-linguistic macro-discourses shaped by significant historical events. Section 5 offers an overall conclusion of our findings.

2. Theory and method

Concepts of language in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor states are closely tied to ethno-linguistic nationalism, particularly in the form that Benedict Anderson describes as *vernacular nationalism*[3]. This form of national self-identification is based on ethno-linguistic affiliation through vernacular languages. It was primarily promoted by the bourgeoisie and, later, adopted by segments of the aristocracy as a means of reclaiming legitimacy, especially as their rule increasingly came under scrutiny throughout the 19th century. However, it is important to note that the ruling Habsburg dynasty largely avoided using language as a tool to legitimize its authority. Given that Austria-Hungary was a multiethnic and multilingual empire, vernacular nationalism often provoked strong emotional responses and posed a threat to the cohesion of the state. One of the most striking examples of this tension was the so-called *Badeni Crisis*. In 1897, Austrian Prime Minister Badeni decreed that Czech would be recognized alongside German as a language of official administration in Bohemia and Moravia (today's Czech Republic). This decision sparked widespread protests from German nationalists, not only in Bohemia and Moravia but also in German-speaking cities such as Vienna and Graz. The intensity of the backlash ultimately forced Badeni to resign, and no satisfactory resolution was reached before the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918.[4] This episode is emblematic of the late 19th-century situation and marks the beginning of the period this paper examines. While the high aristocracy tended to be cautious about linguistic and increasingly ethnic-based notions of nationhood, the bourgeoisie emerged as

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London–New York, 2006).

[4] Hans Mommsen, "1897: Die Badeni-Krise als Wendepunkt in den deutsch-tschechischen Beziehungen", in: Detlef Brandes (ed.), *Wendepunkte in den Beziehungen zwischen Deutschen, Tschechen und Slowaken 1848–1989* (Essen, 2007).

the driving force behind vernacular nationalist ideologies. These ideas gradually replaced older forms of belonging – rooted in territory, religion, or aristocratic allegiance – with the concept of a linguistically homogeneous nation, competing with others for cultural and political dominance.

A second important theoretical concept is that of *linguistic capital*[5], which refers to the idea that language skills function as a form of personal capital that influences an individual's economic status – and conversely, that different languages are assigned varying degrees of economic value. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of the Habsburg Empire, where the various languages spoken were not regarded as equally valuable, and the emancipation of linguistic communities was an ongoing site of struggle. The inequality among languages was especially evident in their official status. The *Kronländer* 'crown lands' – the constituent states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – distinguished between *Landessprachen* 'regional or official languages used in administration' and *landesübliche Sprachen* 'languages commonly spoken in the region'. In some Kronländer, these categories overlapped – for instance, in Carniola (central Slovenia), both German and Slovenian were recognized as Landessprachen. In contrast, in Carinthia and Styria, only German held official status as a Landessprache.[6] Consequently, Slovenian was systematically excluded from official use in Styria, resulting in significant inequality between the two languages in terms of linguistic capital. This inequality did not end with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; rather, it continues today, driven by economic disparities between German-speaking countries and modern Slovenia.[7] While Slovenian today enjoys full official status in the independent Republic of Slovenia, the imbalance persists within the broader context of the European Union. Knowledge of German remains a valuable asset, as it enhances access to better-paying jobs in German-speaking countries.[8] This dynamic also carries an ideological dimension: the two languages are symbolically assigned different values, reflecting broader cultural imaginaries that contrast a "poor", post-communist East with a "wealthy", capitalist West.[9]

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5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

6 Michaela Wolf, *The Habsburg Monarchy's Many-Languaged Soul. Translating and interpreting, 1848–1918* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia, 2015), p. 63.

7 See e.g. Jens Arnholtz and Janine Leschke, "Revisiting the EU's new mobility regime: the impact of mobility and policies on labour market hierarchies within and across the EU", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49, No. 16 (2023), pp. 4071–4091.

8 See on the language strategies of daily cross-border commuters from Slovenia to Austria Alja Lipavic Oštir, "Varietäten des deutschsprachigen Raumes im Sprachrepertoire der Grenzgänger", in: Monika Horňáček Banášová and Simona Fraštíková (eds.), *Aktuelle Fragen und Trends der Forschung in der slowakischen Germanistik III* (Nümbrecht, 2018), pp. 192–217.

9 See e.g. Katarina Tibaut and Alja Lipavic Oštir, "Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Slowenien", *German as a foreign language* 2024, 25, No. 1 (2024), pp. 15–40, or Saška Štumberger, *Slovenščina pri Slovencih v Nemčiji* (Ljubljana, 2007) (hereinafter. Tibaut and Lipavic Oštir, "Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Slowenien").

To address our research question, we conducted interviews with individuals of different age groups in Austria and Slovenia, focusing on the historical Duchy of Styria and the neighboring region of Prekmurje. We employed semi-structured interviews[10], characterized by minimal interviewer intervention and a question style designed to elicit narrative responses from participants. Our initial contacts in the border region were individuals we believed to have a strong understanding of the local linguistic dynamics. For this reason, we approached teachers in public schools as well as professionals working in public services. From there, we employed a snowball sampling approach to expand our pool of interviewees.

In Austria, we conducted a total of 11 interviews with participants of various ages who either live in or originate from Bad Radkersburg/Radgona and the surrounding villages. Five adult men and four adult women were interviewed individually, while the remaining two interviews were conducted with high school classes in Bad Radkersburg specializing in languages. Both classes included students from Slovenia who are completing their secondary education in Austria. Among the adult participants, three individuals are originally from Slovenia but work and partially reside in Austria. One interviewee grew up bilingually (German–Slovenian) on the Austrian side of the border. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

In Slovenia, we conducted a total of seven interviews with individuals of various ages who live or work in the border region, ranging from Goričko in Prekmurje to Jakobski Dol/Jakobsthal. Among them, two are German teachers, and two others come from families with a migrant background, as their parents had worked in Germany for a period of time. What all participants have in common is that they live along the present-day border with Austria, specifically in the regions of Goričko and Slovenske Gorice/Windische Bühel. Participants were selected regardless of whether they had family ties to the German-speaking area – for example, as children of former *Gastarbeiter*[11] in Germany. None of the interviewees are daily cross-border commuters from Slovenia to Austria. Only one participant completed high school in Bad Radkersburg and now lives in Graz as a university student. In addition, we conducted interviews in a primary school in the Dolinska region and in a high school in the Prlekija region. These included 15 female and 2 male teachers, as well as seven school classes with students aged between 13 and 17. The interviews lasted between 10 and 90 minutes. Due to organizational constraints, the school interviews conduct-

[10] See e.g. Lioness Ayres, "Semi-structured interview", in: Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (London, 2008), pp. 811–812.

[11] A German term for foreign workers compensating manpower shortage in the aftermath of World War II.

ed in Austria were generally longer than those in Slovenia. All interviews were conducted during 2023 and 2024.

The data analysis is based on *content-structured qualitative content analysis*[12], with the aim of identifying and summarizing recurring topics, themes, and aspects within the material. The categories used in this initial analysis were developed, defined, and reviewed through an iterative process informed by both theoretical considerations and the specific data set.[13] This constituted a first, broad-level examination of the material. To more precisely address our research questions, we subsequently conducted a second level of analysis using the *Discourse Historical Approach* (DHA) of Critical Discourse Analysis[14], which is designed to explore discourses in their historical and socio-political contexts. Within this framework, discourse is understood as a macro-topic-related set of semiotic practices that express validity claims among discourse participants with differing perspectives. Discourse analysis, then, involves uncovering these practices within what people say about a macro-topic – in our case, the languages spoken in the region. The analysis focused on identifying five discursive strategies:

1. *Nomination* – the discursive construction of social actors or entities, such as references to the linguistic boundary in German nationalist pamphlets (see Section 3).
2. *Predication* – the assignment of qualities or characteristics to these entities, such as stereotypical attributes linked to a particular language.
3. *Argumentation* – the use of reasoning to justify claims or positions, often involving topoi (i.e., usually unquestioned, alleged truths) that lend legitimacy to an opinion.
4. *Perspectivization* – the expression of a speaker's subjective positioning or viewpoint regarding the discursive object.
5. *Intensification* and *mitigation* – the amplification or downplaying of propositions, indicating degrees of certainty, emphasis, or reservation.

[12] Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse* (Weinheim–Basel, 2015) (hereinafter: Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*).

[13] Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*, p. 61.

[14] Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)", in: Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (Los Angeles, 2009), pp. 87–121.

3. Historical background

3.1 The late Austro-Hungarian Empire

The late 19th and early 20th centuries in Styria were marked by increasing tensions between German and Slovenian vernacular nationalism, culminating in the atrocities committed during the period of National Socialism and the subsequent forcible expulsion of the German-speaking population from Yugoslavia. Austrian–Slovenian relations remained limited during the era of socialist Yugoslavia, from 1945 on to the early 1990s, and only began to intensify after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which led to Slovenian independence and, ultimately, Slovenia's accession to the EU in 2004.

Several publications have examined the national conflict between the German-speaking and Slovenian-speaking populations in Styria during the late Austro-Hungarian Empire.[15] As Pieter M. Judson explains, the German nationalist narrative was based on the concept of linguistic boundaries. At the time, there was no sharp linguistic border as exists today; rather, a German–Slovenian bilingual area stretched roughly from the border with Carinthia in the west to the city of Bad Radkersburg in the east. The local population, however, did not identify with language, but rather with the region – such as a valley – in which they lived.[16] Research by Janez Cvirn on everyday life in the southern part of historical Styria confirms that most people identified with their home region, rather than through ethno-linguistic concepts of nationality, and that switching between German and Slovenian – even within families – was com-

[15] Janez Cvirn, "Meščanstvo v Celju po razpadu Avstro-Ogrske", in: Marija Počivavšek (ed.), *Iz zgodovine Celja* (Celje, 1996), pp. 191–216; Janez Cvirn, *Trdnjavski trikotnik. Politična orientacija Nemcev na Spodnjem Štajerskem (1861–1914)* (Maribor, 1997); Janez Cvirn, "Deutsche und Slowenen in der Untersteiermark: zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation", in: Harald Heppner (ed.), *Slowenen und Deutsche im gemeinsamen Raum* (München, 2002), pp. 111–125 (hereinafter: Cvirn, "Deutsche und Slowenen in der Untersteiermark"); Jerneja Ferlež, "Prebivalstvo Maribora 1848–1991", *Studia Historica Slovenica* 2, No. 1 (2002), pp. 79–125; Jerneja Ferlež (ed.), *Deutsche und Maribor. Ein Jahrhundert der Wenden: 1846–1946* (Maribor, 2012) (hereinafter: Ferlež, *Deutsche und Maribor*); Martin Moll, *Kein Burgfrieden. Der deutsch-slowenische Nationalitätenkonflikt in der Steiermark 1900–1918* (Innsbruck–Vienna, 2007); Gerhard M. Dienes, "Und immer wieder das deutsche Bollwerk. Graz und die slowenischen SteirerInnen. Ein Überblick. / In vedno znova nemški okop. Gradec in slovenski Štajerci. Pregled", *Signal. Jahresschrift des Pavelhauses – Letni zbornik Pavlove hiše* 07/08 (2008), pp. 99–116 (hereinafter: Dienes, "Und immer wieder das deutsche Bollwerk. Graz und die slowenischen SteirerInnen. Ein Überblick"); Filip Čuček, *Svoji k svojim: na poti k dokončni nacionalni razmejitvi na Spodnjem Štajerskem v 19. stoletju* (Ljubljana, 2016); Tamara Griesser-Pečar, *Maribor / Marburg an der Drau. Eine kleine Stadtgeschichte* (Wien–Köln–Weimar, 2011) (hereinafter: Griesser-Pečar, *Maribor / Marburg*); Jernej Kosi, "Razglednice kot vir za razumevanje procesa slovenizacije (post)habsburške slovenske Štajerske", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* (*Zbornik Andreja Studna*) 64, No. 1 (2024), pp. 450–466 (hereinafter: Kosi, "Razglednice kot vir").

[16] Pieter M. Judson, "Versuche um 1900, die Sprachgrenze sichtbar zu machen", in: Moritz Csáky and Peter Stachel (eds.), *Die Verortung von Gedächtnis* (Wien, 2001), pp. 163–173.

mon. This situation prompted German nationalists to create artificial hysteria in order to legitimize their claim that there was an ongoing struggle for Styria between Germans and Slavs. Their discursive strategies relied on an ideological distinction: the allegedly lazy and indifferent inhabitants of monolingual German-speaking areas were contrasted with German speakers living in multilingual regions, who were portrayed as maintaining an authentic German character that needed to be defended, particularly against "Slavization". The country and the people were ideologically equated – attempts were made to describe the landscape as inherently German, shaped by German hands. German culture was depicted as superior, while all other ethnic communities were portrayed as merely inhabiting what had been created by Germans. Slovenes, however, were rarely mentioned in German nationalist pamphlets, as their very presence undermined the German nationalist claim to originally German lands.[17]

In the 1860s, Slovenian nationalists, on the other hand, organized large popular assemblies to promote Slovenian national consciousness, advocate for the introduction of Slovenian in education and administration, and support the political program *Zedinjena Slovenija* 'United Slovenia' – the proposed unification of all Slovenian-speaking regions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a single entity, detached from the existing Crown Lands. In the years leading up to 1918, national politics in Lower Styria[18] became increasingly radical. For instance, the Maribor/Marburg Germans and their Slovenian supporters warned the Emperor in Vienna about the "highly treacherous policy of the Slovenes".[19] The Slovenes' aspirations for autonomy within the monarchy – most notably the May Declaration of 1917 – were never realized under Austro-Hungarian rule.

Fierce nationalism, however, was not deeply rooted in the rural population. The Styrian Social Democrats also opposed ethnic division, advocating instead for a united struggle for better working conditions rather than allowing workers to be divided along ethno-linguistic lines.[20] Nationalism was, by contrast, an endeavor deeply embedded in the Styrian anti-Habsburg bourgeoisie and, as Čede and Fleck demonstrate with regard to German nationalism, in academia,

[17] Cvirn, "Deutsche und Slowenen in der Untersteiermark", pp. 111–125.

[18] The term originally referred to the "lower" parts of Styria to the south of the Alps including the Graz basin. In the 19th century the primarily German-speaking part of Styria south of the Alps until roughly the contemporary border with Slovenia started to be named "Middle Styria", thus "Lower Styria" became the denomination for the southern, mostly Slovenian-speaking parts of the Crown Land. Today, "Lower Styria" refers to that part of the former Duchy which are now part of the Republic of Slovenia.

[19] Ferlež, *Deutsche und Maribor*, p. 56.

[20] See Michael Čulk, *Der Nationalitätenkonflikt innerhalb der deutschen und slowenischen Arbeiterbewegung des Kronlandes Steiermark 1867–1918. Diploma Thesis* (Graz: University of Graz, 2014), pp. 108–116.

where some scholars continued to promote German nationalist ideology well into the 20th century.[21]

3.2 World War I and its aftermath

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire brought substantial changes to the political landscape of Central Europe. The Duchy of Styria was divided between Austria – where it became the federal state of Styria – and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929), where it ceased to exist as an administrative unit. The Slovenian-speaking region of Prekmurje, formerly part of the Kingdom of Hungary, also became part of Yugoslavia. Despite the wishes of some inhabitants of the newly established Yugoslavia who identified with Austria and wanted to become part of the new Austrian state, political developments took a different direction. This was reflected in the incorporation of predominantly Slovenian-speaking Lower Styria into the SHS state in December 1918, establishing a political – but by no means national or linguistic – northern border with Austria. After Styria was divided into two ethno-linguistically defined nation-states – German Austria (which had to rename itself the Republic of Austria, as stipulated in the Treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919) in the north, and Yugoslavia in the south – both states pursued policies aimed at achieving ethnic homogeneity.

During World War I and the immediate postwar period, many citizens left cities in Yugoslav Slovenia like Maribor – some voluntarily, choosing to live in Austria; others driven by anticipated disadvantages; and some as a result of direct official expulsions.[22] As a consequence, the national composition of the city's population changed almost abruptly, and by 1921, the proportion of German speakers was estimated to be only around 35%.[23] This shift was due not only to emigration but also to a growing identification of the local population with the newly formed SHS state. It appears that, at this time, national identification finally began to replace earlier regional identification with Styria – particularly since the province had been divided between Austria and the SHS state. This political constellation was also reflected in language policy.

[21] Peter Čede and Dieter Fleck, "Wissenschaft ist nicht wertfrei – Deutschnationalismus am Institut für Geographie der Universität Graz mit dem Fokus auf Antislowenismus", *Grazer Schriften der Geographie und Raumforschung* 51 (2021), pp. 57–76.

[22] Griesser-Pečar, *Maribor / Marburg*, p. 229.

[23] For more on the context of the census results and on the population count itself, see, for example, Ferlež "Prebivalstvo Maribora".

The new Slovenian administration aimed to create a linguistically homogeneous and fully Slovenianized area in Lower Styria.[24] The goal was to transform a region in which German and Slovenian had coexisted for centuries across various everyday contexts into an integral part of the Slovene national territory within the SHS state. On 1 December 1918, Slovenian was declared the sole official language in Slovenia, and no minority groups – including the German minority – were officially recognized. In the interwar decades, authorities in Lower Styria undertook various efforts to reduce the proportion of the population identifying as German, using a range of measures that varied in their degree of coercion.[25] These efforts were only partially successful prior to the outbreak of the World War II, as complete ethnic and linguistic homogenization of the former Lower Styria was not achieved during this period. However, it is conceivable that the political and cultural pressure of the time – particularly the trauma associated with it in the later 1930s – contributed to the accelerated Nazification of a significant portion of the Lower Styrian German-speaking population.[26]

The language policy of the time thus reflects the national political agenda – it is exclusionary, linguistically biased, and purist. The Slovenian language became an absolute symbol of national belonging, with consequences felt across various levels of society. This policy of linguistic exclusivity did not transcend the pre-1918 situation, when German was the dominant official language; rather, it continued to operate on the same principle established by the national movements of the 19th century. It was essentially the principle of *us versus them*. This attitude is illustrated by a quotation related to the demand for a German *Bürgerschule* in Maribor 'citizen school', published in the magazine *Straža*: " /.../ the mayor was right to refuse their request, because Austria, too, in its time, did not allow Slovenes to have a Slovene school as an equal nation."[27] In this context, as testimonies from Maribor show, some German-speaking families began to conceal their use of German – a phenomenon that can be considered an early form of linguistic mimicry, which became much more pronounced after 1945. At the same time, bilingualism in Maribor persisted: "For instance, we went for a walk and a friend came along with whom my mother spoke German, and another with whom she spoke Slovenian" (Linguistic biog-

[24] Kosi, "Razglednice kot vir", p. 450.

[25] Ibid., p. 463.

[26] cf. Cvirn, "Deutsche und Slowenen in der Untersteiermark", p. 134, or Arnold Suppan, "Zur Lage der Deutschen in Slowenien zwischen 1918 und 1938. Demographie – Recht – Gesellschaft – Politik", in: Helmut Rumpler and Arnold Suppan (eds.), *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Slowenien 1848–1941* (Wien–München, 1988), p. 210.

[27] "Manjšinske šole", *Straža*, 23. 9. 2025, No. 89, p. 3.

raphy of D. N.[28]). This continuity is also evident in numerous job advertisements published in the magazines *Straža* and *Marburger Zeitung* between 1918 and 1941, which often stated that knowledge of both German and Slovene was either a requirement or an advantage for employment.[29]

On the Austrian side of the border, the end of World War I brought violent confrontations between the SHS state and local volunteers, primarily in and around Bad Radkersburg. The SHS forces sought to secure the northern Mur/Mura Valley, including the railway line between Ljutomer/Luttenberg and Spielfeld/Špilje, for the SHS state, while the local volunteers fought to remain part of Austria (see Stadtgemeinde Bad Radkersburg 2018 for a detailed account). The Slovenian-speaking population in the border region found itself in a difficult position, as it had to assimilate to the dominant German language in order to avoid suspicion of being traitors aiming to join Yugoslavia. Slovenian thus became a language spoken only at home, while German was used in public spaces – effectively rendering the Slovenian-speaking population a "hidden" minority.[30] Officially, the existence of a Slovenian-speaking population was denied.[31] Any signs of connection or similarity to Slovenes or the Slovenian language were systematically concealed or reinterpreted as German. As in Slovenia, the prevailing ideology in Austria was one of German linguistic exclusivity. Perhaps the most famous example is the name of the Styrian capital, Graz/Gradec, which originates from the Slavic term *grad* 'fortification'. In a widely circulated legend presented by Gottfried Ritter von Leitner in 1875, the name was reinterpreted as deriving from a hypothetical Old Bavarian *grät's*, meaning "it is created".[32] Another notable case is that of the village of *Studenzen* in south-eastern Styria, whose name comes from the Slavic root *studen-*, referring to a cold water spring. Author Jakob Wiedner once recounted a German reinterpretation of the name given by a member of a German-nationalist high school fraternity. In this version, the name was said to derive from a hypotheti-

[28] Alja Lipavic Oštir, "Marburger Deutsch aus heutiger Perspektive", in: *Linguistic Minorities in Europe online*. (2025) (hereinafter: Lipavic Oštir, "Marburger Deutsch aus heutiger Perspektive").

[29] Alja Lipavic Oštir, Jernej Čelofiga and Dorian Penšek-Rader, "'Prosilec mora biti vešč slovenskega in nemškega jezika' – o nekaterih aspektih jezikovne politike in vsakdanje jezikovne rabe v Mariboru v času med obema svetovnima vojnama", in: Matjaž Grahornik and Kristina Toplak (eds.), *Maribor – mesto in ljudje: znanstveni simpozij: program in povzetki referatov* (Maribor, 2025).

[30] See Andrea Haberl-Zemljič, *Die Sprache im Dorf lassen. Festhalten und Aufgeben der slowenischen Sprache in Radkersburg Umgebung* (Graz, 2004), or Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik, "The Hidden Slovene Minority in Styria", in: Christian Promitzer, Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik and Eduard Staudinger (eds.), *(Hidden) Minorities. Language and Ethnic Identity between Central Europe and the Balkans* (Wien, 2009), pp. 109–128 (hereinafter: Hermanik, "The Hidden Slovene Minority in Styria").

[31] For a detailed account see Christian Stenner (ed.), *Slowenische Steiermark. Verdrängte Minderheit in Österreichs Südosten* (Wien, 1997).

[32] Dienes, "Und immer wieder das deutsche Bollwerk. Graz und die slowenischen SteirerInnen. Ein Überblick", p. 100.

cal Old Bavarian *Do stud Enzen*, meaning "There stood (the village of) Enzen". This links to recurring legends in the region about towns sunk into swamps, such as the legend of Ulrichsbrunn.[33]

In a more recent work, Gabriel Haring[34] (building on earlier research by Christian Promitzer[35]) provides a detailed and illuminating account of the measures that ultimately led to the disappearance of the Slovenian-speaking minority in the south of Austrian Styria, particularly in and around Leutschach/Lučane. He traces how German-nationalist associations – above all the *Alpenländischer Kulturverband Südmark* 'Alpine Cultural Association Südmark' – as well as German-nationalist fraternities, actively pursued the assimilation of local Slovenian speakers into a purely German-speaking Austrian Styria from the time of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire on. These efforts included supporting and financing local schools and spreading German-nationalist propaganda. In pre-World War II Austria, the prevailing ideology was not to expel Slovenian speakers from the country but to convince them of German cultural superiority and thus transform them into Germans. This mindset was deeply rooted in vernacular nationalism, though not yet in biological racism. The latter, more extreme form of nationalism emerged with the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938. That same year, the so-called *Süddeutsches Institut* 'South German Institute' concluded that the Slovenian-speaking population in southern Styria was racially inferior and therefore had to be removed from the territory. The planned ethnic cleansing, however, was not carried out due to the outbreak of the war.[36]

The atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany in Slovenia were answered by the AVNOJ resolution in Yugoslavia, which included the expropriation and expulsion of most of the German-speaking population from Yugoslav territory. This forcible expulsion resulted in a high number of casualties. After 1945, Yugoslav authorities sought to settle scores with German-speaking communities throughout the country, including Slovenia. This response was anticipated, and around 16,000 German speakers left the country at the end of the war, together with

[33] See Stjepan Drvoderić, *'s Marterl. Geschichten und Legenden rund um Bildstöcke, Marterln, Wegkreuze und Kapellen in der Pfarre Markt Hartmannsdorf* (Markt Hartmnannsdorf, 2000).

[34] Gabriel Haring, *Unterdrückt – verdrängt – verschwunden: das Schicksal des Slowenischen in der südlichen Steiermark seit den 1930er Jahre. Diplomarbeit* (Graz: Universität Graz, 2014) (hereinafter: Haring, *Unterdrückt – verdrängt – verschwunden*).

[35] Christian Promitzer, *Verlorene Brüder: Geschichte der zweisprachigen Region Leutschach in der südlichen Steiermark (19.–20. Jahrhundert). Dissertation* (Graz: University of Graz, 1996) (hereinafter: Promitzer, *Verlorene Brüder*).

[36] See Promitzer, *Verlorene Brüder*, p. 265.

retreating German soldiers.[37] At the end of the war[38], members of German organizations such as the *Kulturbund* 'cultural association' were the first to be arrested by OZNA[39] and KNOJ.[40] By June 1945, the remaining German population in Slovenia had been detained and sent to camps established specifically for them (e.g., Sterntal near Ptuj/Pettau, Hrastovec near Lenart/Sankt Leonhard in Slovenske Gorice, Bresternica/Tresternitz near Maribor, Teharje/Tüchern, Kočevje/Gottschee, etc.). The expulsion of Germans occurred in three waves in 1945. The first wave targeted the German-speaking language island of Kočevje, followed by the German populations around the Sava/Save and Sotla/Sottl rivers. In the autumn, those who had been held in camps were expelled to Austria. The final phase of the "cleansing" of Slovenia's German-speaking population lasted until June 1946 and affected nearly all remaining Germans in Slovenia. The expulsions took place across the Austrian border, where Soviet occupation authorities transported many of the displaced further into Austria and, in some cases, to Germany. Several hundred individuals were taken to concentration camps in Vojvodina. It is estimated that around 10% of the German population was executed or died in the camps, while the rest were expelled. In order to confiscate their assets, several dozen individuals were convicted by military courts, many of them in absentia.[41]

This period can be illustrated by the story of Joseph Hutter, a textile industrialist from Maribor. A kind of collective myth has grown around Hutter in Maribor, portraying him as a socially conscious entrepreneur – a respected, successful, and charismatic figure. His legacy is still preserved in the names of his apartment building, a workers' colony, and partly in the name of the factory. Oral histories about him continue to circulate and are passed down to future generations. However, his reputation and the fact that he did not actively cooperate with the German occupiers did not help him after the war. In August 1945, almost all of the Hutter family's property was confiscated by a court martial; Hutter was imprisoned for a time and later sentenced to forced labor. In the early 1950s, the Hutter family ultimately emigrated from Maribor to Austria.[42]

[37] Božo Repe, "'Nemci' na Slovenskem po drugi svetovni vojni", in: Dušan Nećak (ed.), *Nemci na Slovenskem 1941–1955. Izsledki projekta* (Ljubljana, 1998), p. 145.

[38] See e.g. Mitja Ferenc, "Das Schicksal der deutschen Sprachminderheit in Slowenien", *Linguistica* 60, No. 2 (2020), p. 227–243 (hereinafter: Ferenc, "Das Schicksal der deutschen Sprachminderheit in Slowenien").

[39] OZNA: security intelligence service in Yugoslavia, established 1944 (Serbo-Croatian *Odeljenje za zaštitu Naroda*)

[40] KNOJ: military Formation with security protection tasks in Yugoslavia, established 1944 (Serbo-Croatian *Korpus narodne obrambe Jugoslavije*)

[41] Ferenc, "Das Schicksal der deutschen Sprachminderheit in Slowenien", p. 233.

[42] See Jerneja Ferlež and Alja Lipavic Oštir, "Personenstandsbücher, Zeitungen, Baupläne und mündliche Quellen: Lebensgeschichten aus Marburg/Maribor", in: Florian Kührer-Wielach et al. (eds.), *Archive in Slowenien (I)* 19, No. 2 (2024), pp. 25–42.

Many of the survivors settled in the reestablished Republic of Austria. On the Austrian side of the border, anti-Slovene measures aimed at full linguistic assimilation persisted in the border region, and it must be assumed that knowledge of the local Slovenian dialect in the area will disappear within the coming decades.[43] With regard to ethnic homogenization, it can be said that the nationalist measures in both Austria and Slovenia were successful, as there are now two monolingual populations living next to each other, and schools or other language courses are practically the only means of acquiring knowledge of the neighboring language. In both countries, knowledge of autochthonous varieties of German or Slovenian continues to be concealed, even if the national conflict has lost much of its explosive power in a united Europe. However, the discursive strategy of hiding a minority should not be underestimated. This is most clearly illustrated in cases where the monolingual narrative is challenged — for example, during a 1997 meeting between the Artikel-VII-Verein (an association representing the Slovenian-speaking minority in Austrian Styria, named after Article 7 of the Austrian State Treaty on minority rights) and local politicians from the bilingual area around Leutschach. At this meeting, a local politician reportedly threatened association members, calling them traitors and saying they should be gassed.[44] On the Slovenian side of the border, similar patterns can be seen in the unfavorable language policies toward German not only in Maribor (see above), but also in the villages of Apaško polje/Abstaller Feld[45] and in four border villages in the Goričko region.[46]

To summarize, the history of Styria with regard to multilingualism is marked by centuries of coexistence of different linguistic groups, a coexistence that was (almost) annihilated within the span of roughly one hundred years. The transition from feudalism to capitalism (and later communism), and with it the shift from regional to national identity concepts, led to a situation in which neighbors now have to become acquainted with each other again almost from scratch. The shared past has largely disappeared from collective memory, and the two countries are often imagined within a broader East–West dichotomy, as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out:[47]

43 See Hermanik, "The Hidden Slovene Minority in Styria", pp. 120–121.

44 Haring, *Unterdrückt – verdrängt – verschwunden*, pp. 96–97.

45 Mirko Križman, *Jezikovna razmerja: jezik pragmatike in estetike v obmejnih predelih ob Muri* (Maribor, 1997).

46 Marlene Horvat and Alja Lipavic Oštir, "Vergessene sprachliche Welt im Western von Goričko in Slowenien", *Europa ethnica: Nationalitätenfragen* 74, No. 3–4 (2017), pp. 125–132.

47 Slavoj Žižek, *Liebe deinen Nächsten? Nein, danke! Die Sackgasse des Sozialen in der Postmoderne* (Berlin, 1999).

Wir, die Slowenen, sind der letzte Außenposten eines friedlichen Mitteleuropas; für manche Italiener und Österreicher fängt er [der Balkan] *in Slowenien an, als die Herrschaft der slawischen Horden.*
We, the Slovenes, are the last outpost of a peaceful Central Europe; for some Italians and Austrians it [the Balkans] begins in Slovenia, as the realm of Slavic hordes.

4. Discourse-historical layers

4.1 Vernacular nationalist discursive strands

The prevailing nationalist discourse has unmistakably left its mark on how the two languages, German and Slovenian, are perceived today. This is reflected in interviews, particularly in excerpts where individuals recount their personal experiences from the past. These perceptions are evident in the way Slovenian is described on the Austrian side of the border, and conversely, how German is described on the Slovenian side:

(1) *Fiar de woarn jo miar die Jugo damols ... Slowenisch kaunnst, woarst a Jugo.*[48]
For them we were the Yugo [derogatory term for inhabitants of former Yugoslavia] ... You know Slovenian, you were a Yugo.
(*Interviewee A1*: elder German-Slovenian bilingual man from a village next to Bad Radkersburg)

In this excerpt, Interviewee A1 addresses the equation of the Slovenian language with Slovenian nationality, highlighting its perceived incompatibility with being a (German) Austrian. Bilingualism, in this context, contradicts the prevailing ideology of linguistic exclusivity. Also noteworthy are the pronouns *we* and *they*, which refer to bilinguals and German monolinguals, respectively. This interpretation aligns with the findings of Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik, who notes that the bilingual population does not identify as Slovenes in the nationalist sense, but rather as bilingual Austrians.[49] These individuals thus present an alternative model to the strongly promoted ethno-linguistic concept of nationality – one that, at times, is open to solidarity with Slovenian speakers across the border, especially in response to overt attacks:

[48] We use a transcription convention for dialectal German which is based on Standard German orthography but which indicates dialectal features in order to keep the transcription as close as possible to actual speech.

[49] Hermanik, "The Hidden Slovene Minority in Styria", p. 113.

(2) *Dann hot er mir irgendwie gsogt: "Wos wullts'n ihr Jugo?" Dann hob i gsogt: "Du, pass auf amol: Wenn murgn die Jugo net kumman... " Der hot fuchzehn Leit beschäftigt, ober dreizehn aus Slowenien. "Dann kaunnst scho zaprto!"*
Then he [a person from the city of Bad Radkersburg] told me somehow: "What do you Yugos want?" Then I said: "You, listen: When tomorrow the Yugos won't come..." He has 15 employees but 13 are from Slovenia. "Then you can already closed [in sense of 'shut down your business']!"
(*Interviewee A1*)

Here too, it becomes clear how vernacular nationalist ideology operates: although both individuals in this account are Austrians, the monolingual interlocutor categorizes Interviewee A1 as part of the Yugoslav "other". This prompts Interviewee A1 to express solidarity with the group into which he has been placed. To support his argument, he emphasizes the importance of the economy, intensifying his point by using the Slovenian word *zaprto* 'closed'. In doing so, he contrasts the multilingual everyday reality, driven by economic necessity and his own experience as a bilingual, with an ideology of monolingual homogeneity that appears as an unattainable utopia.

(3) *Also bei mir is es so: Väterlicherseits, die Familien, die hobn olle Slowenisch sprechen können, ah/ ahm hobn aber natürlich im Olltog eher deutsch gsprochen. /.../ Als Kind, wenn ma an der G/ Grenze gaungen is und drüben is wer gaungen, aunderes Kind, hot ma holt amol die Zungen üb/ ummigezagt, is übertrieben, aber es war so wie beim/ wie beim Asterixheft, der große Graben. Es woar scho dieses/ diese Verletzung do/ A von/ Also san ja die Deutschsprachigen vertrieben worden im Krieg von/ von der aundern Seite.*
In my case it was like that: From my father's side, the families, they all could speak Slovenian but of course they spoke more German in everyday life. /.../ As a child, when one went next to the border and somebody walked on the other side, another child, one showed the tongue, it's exaggerated, but it was like in the Asterix comics, the great trench. There was indeed this wound. The German speakers were expelled from the other side.
(*Interviewee A2*: middle aged German-speaking man with German-Slovenian bilingual family background from a village next to Bad Radkersburg)

In this excerpt, Interviewee A2 makes explicit the lasting impact of expulsion – namely, a *Verletzung* 'wound' passed down through generations – which causes the border to appear as a "big trench". This nomination of a bitterly maintained border – reminiscent of the divisions portrayed in the *Asterix* comics, where children display mutual hostility – represents an intensification that is, notably, followed by a mitigation, ultimately signaling a simmering conflict.

As he explains elsewhere in the interview, his family was *zerrissen* 'torn apart' into German-Slovenian bilinguals who were expelled from Yugoslavia despite speaking Slovenian, and those who chose to become "proper" Slovenes by severing contact with the "Austrians", i.e., the bilingual part of the family.

Vernacular nationalist ideology also overlapped with ideologies of social differences and this had a concrete impact on schooling, as following memories from primary school show:

> (4) *Woarn strenge... Zumindest eine sehr strenge Lehrerin, die a volles Programm gfoahrn is und sehr ungerecht war, vor ollm bei Kindern/ also bei sozialen Unterschieden... Es hot jo bei uns a Schülerinnen und Schüler geben, die aus den umliegenden Dörfern kumman san /.../ Die hobn scho manchmol a sehr hoarte Schulzeit ghobt holt. Des woarn die Windischen und des woarn die, die holt a daham diesen slowenischen Dialekt gesprochen hobn.*
> There were strict... At least one very strict teacher who behaved very furiously and who was very unjust, especially with children/ that is, when there were social differences... There were pupils in our class who came from the surrounding villages /.../ They sometimes really had a hard time in school. They were the Windisch [older term for Slovenes] people and they were those who spoke that Slovenian dialect at home.
> (*Interviewee A3*: middle aged German-speaking woman with German-Slovenian bilingual family background from Bad Radkersburg)

Interviewee A3 recalls the unequal treatment of pupils along multiple lines: language, class, and urban-rural differences. This aligns with the general situation in Lower Styria until the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, where urban centers were mainly German-speaking, while Slovenian prevailed in rural areas.[50] Children who, so to speak, represented the counterpart to the German-speaking urban bourgeoisie were punished for what they were – namely, inconsistent with the dominant ideology of a monolingual, non-Slavic Austria. At that time, these children were labeled as *Windische*, an older German term for Slavs in general, and Slovenes in particular. This term is especially interesting because it underwent a German-nationalist ideological reinterpretation, shifting from meaning "Slav" as opposed to German, to implying an internal dichotomy

[50] See e.g. Peter Vodopivec, *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države. Slovenska Zgodovina od konca 18. do konca 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana, 2010), pp. 159–170.

between pro-German Windische and anti-German nationalist Slovenes.[51] In Styria, however, the term also acquired a distinctly pejorative meaning, referring to people imagined as not truly belonging to the country or living on the periphery.[52] Interviewee A3 intensifies her account by explicitly identifying the Windische as those living around Bad Radkersburg who speak "that Slovenian dialect at home". Her report illustrates how the so-called *Windischentheorie* 'theory of the Windisch people' – the idea that some Slovenes voluntarily submitted to the notion of a superior German culture – resulted in intrusive behavior by schoolteachers intent on Germanizing the local Slovenian-speaking agricultural population, employing strict measures and stigmatizing their linguistic background.

Excerpts from interviews conducted on the Slovenian side of the border reveal parallel phenomena. The use of the pronouns *we* and *they*, referring respectively to Slovenes and Austrians, emerges repeatedly, with present-day statements often contextualized through historical experience.

> (5) *Ne, eni ne mislijo, mi smo imeli neko skupno zgodovino. Ni šans. Druga svetovna vojna je tu vmes. Oni* [Avstrijci] *so še vedno sovražniki.*[53]
> No, one doesn't think we have a shared history. No chance. The Second World War is here in between. They [the Austrians] are still enemies.
> (*Interviewee S1*: middle aged Slovenian-speaking woman German teacher from Goričko, Prekmurje)

The *us vs. them* dichotomy is intensified by the emphatic statement *No chance.* Immediately afterward, pronominalization (*Oni…*) occurs – a feature typical of dialects but only acceptable in standard language in certain contexts. At this point, the speaker attempts to use standard language, and the use of the pronoun serves to underscore the perceived divide between *us* and *them.*

We must bear in mind that society – and the school system as a part of it – in Yugoslavia after 1945 was ideologically highly influenced. Communist ideol-

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[51] See e.g. Robert G. Minnich, "Wie man an den Rändern moderner Staaten zu Bürgern wird. Einige Überlegungen zur politischen Implikation der Ethnizität, wie sie von mehrsprachigen Dorfbewohnern im 'Dreiländereck' erlebt wird", in: Christian Stenner (ed.), *Slowenische Steiermark* (Wien, 1997), pp. 281–283, or Mladen Rieger, "Eine toponymische Reise durch Slowenien aus der Sicht eines deutschsprachigen Reiseführers", *Vestnik za tuje jezike* 10, No. 1 (2018), pp. 113–132.

[52] See e.g. Johannes Moser, "Zwischenwelt. Auf der Suche nach Anerkennung und Identität in einem Dorf an der Grenze", in: Christian Stenner (ed.), *Slowenische Steiermark* (Wien, 1997), p. 247, who reports how inhabitants of a "hidden" Slovenian-speaking village in Styria were insulted as "Windische" in the sense of "people living at the border".

[53] The interviews featured a mixture of different linguistic varieties of Slovenian: dialects, the Styrian colloquial language, the Maribor urban dialect, and standard Slovenian. We transcribed the interviews phonologically in accordance with standard Slovenian spelling, while retaining lexical regionalisms.

ogy was based not only on the class struggle, but also to a significant extent on the events of World War II, particularly the partisan liberation struggle and the historical Germanization of Slovenians. Dichotomies such as *us* vs. *them* did not refer solely to workers vs. capitalists or *us* vs. class enemies, but also to *us* (Slovenians, Yugoslavs) vs. *Germans*. Mateja Režek concludes that the political use of history was one of the key instruments for legitimizing communist rule. The main pillars of this legitimization included the national liberation struggle, anti-fascism, social revolution, and the resolution of the national question – particularly through the principle of brotherhood and unity – as is evident in history curricula and textbooks until 1990. Until 1991, textbooks and curricula entirely omitted, for instance, the post-war killings of those who opposed communism in 1945 and afterward. They also failed to mention the post-war killings, imprisonment, and expulsion of the German-speaking population.[54] Even today's history curricula allocate very little space to post-war killings and expulsions. These events are not explicitly mentioned, meaning it is left to individual teachers to decide whether to address them.[55] Excerpt 6 should be interpreted within this context and, of course, within the broader framework of the national struggles of the 19th century, which have been – and to some extent still are – a core part of school education. This ideological framing is also reflected in stereotypes and vocabulary in various language varieties, where pejorative terms for the inhabitants of neighboring countries are still found:

> (6) *Mlajše generacije v enem drugačnem duhu odraščajo, kot so na primer mogoče prej ljudje v Jugoslaviji. Je bilo mogoče čutiti, kako bi rekla sovraštvo, se je reklo Avstrijcem* jodlarji. *Grdo rečeno. A se mi zdi, da tega več ni, da se je to z leti in z vstopom v Evropsko unijo in v bistvu s temi možnosti, ki nam tudi ponuja Avstrija, če jih vidiš, nekako ta odnos spremenil.*
> Younger generations are growing up in a different spirit than, for example, people in Yugoslavia did in the past. You could feel what I would call hatred, the Austrians were called '*jodlarji*'. To put it bluntly. But I think that this is no longer the case, that over the years and with the entry into the European Union and, in fact, with the opportunities that Austria also offers us, if you see them, this attitude has somehow changed.
> (*Interviewee S2*: middle-aged Slovenian-speaking woman from Gornja Radgona/Oberradkersburg and Apače/Abstall)

[54] Mateja Režek, "Sodobna zgodovina v osnovnih in srednjih šolah v socialistični Sloveniji, 1945–1990", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 60, No. 2 (2020), pp. 133–151.

[55] Kaja Ivanetič, *Poučevanje občutljivih učnih vsebin pri pouku zgodovine: Povojni poboji in prikrita grobišča. Magistrsko delo* (Ljubjana: Univerza v Ljubljani, 2017).

The *Slovenian Language Dictionary* lists the derogatory term *jodlarji* for Austrians and, potentially, for other inhabitants of Alpine regions.[56] Although no systematic research has yet been conducted on the extent of the term's usage in reference to the Austrian population, it does appear in online forums and language corpora and undoubtedly carries a pejorative connotation. The intergenerational differences illustrated in Excerpt 6 are further supported by a discourse study conducted by Andreja Mirković. According to this study, the older generation – those who lived in Yugoslavia – tend to align with nationalist discourses marked by numerous negative stereotypes about Austrians, myths surrounding Slovenian history, and a softened form of Eurocentric discourse that maintains a symbolic separation between Slovenia and Europe (see also Section 4.2). In contrast, the younger generation – those raised in a different ideological environment – are more closely associated with a clear Eurocentric discourse that positions Slovenia as inherently European. This narrative frames Slovenia's accession to the European Union not as a radical shift, but as a return to its rightful place. It emphasizes Slovenia's distancing from the Balkans and equates national development with increased cooperation with Austria and other EU member states (see also Section 4.3).[57]

While the derogatory term *jodlar* has Alpine connotations, the derogatory term *švab* (another predication) commonly used in various language varieties, refers to Germans or people with a strong connection to German-speaking regions:

> (7) Kakšni nori jodlarji, ti butasti jodlarji, to je recimo v Mariboru floskula za Avstrijo. Še sama sem nekaj takšnega slišala, samo ne zaradi Avstrije, ampak zaradi Nemčije. Jaz sem bila švabica.
> What crazy jodlarji, those stupid jodlarji, that's a cliché in Maribor about Austria. I've heard something like that myself, not about Austria, but about Germany. I was called švabica.
> (*Interviewee S3*: middle-aged Slovenain-speaking woman from Selnica ob Muri, Slovenske Gorice, who lived in Germany with her parents for several years as a child)

The *Slovenian Language Dictionary* defines the word *švab* as a derogatory term originally referring to a German soldier, but also used more broadly

[56] *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*, available at: https://www.fran.si/iskanje?View=1&Query=jodlar, accessed: 16. 6. 2025.

[57] Andreja Mirković, *Javni diskurz o Avstriji v Sloveniji. Diplomsko delo* (Ljubljana: FDV, 2008)

to denote Germans in general.[58] Unfortunately, there is a lack of systematic research on the historical and everyday usage of pejorative terms such as *jodlar* and *švab* among Slovenian-speakers. Nonetheless, these terms clearly function as linguistic expressions of underlying prejudices and stereotypes, which manifest in various forms. The media, particularly since the 19th century, have played a significant role in shaping and perpetuating these stereotypes. In his analysis of caricatures published in Slovenian newspapers, Damir Globočnik observes that Germans – and *nemškutarji* (Slovenians perceived as overly sympathetic to German culture) – are almost invariably portrayed in bourgeois attire, such as tailcoats and top hats, symbols of capital and the bourgeois class. In contrast, Slovenians are typically depicted in traditional rural folk costumes, reinforcing a visual dichotomy between urban German wealth and rural Slovenian simplicity.[59]

4.2 Economy related discursive strands

The topics addressed in the previous section pertain primarily to earlier historical periods, whereas the time from the end of World War II to the late 20th century – marked by the division of Europe into a capitalist West and a communist East, and culminating in the transition to capitalism in the 1990s – is discursively constructed in a different manner throughout the interviews, particularly in relation to language. The ideological imperative to establish monolingualism as a marker of national coherence recedes into the background, as the older local and dialectal bilingualism characteristic of the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had largely disappeared due to processes of forced assimilation and expulsion. In this context, German and Slovenian came to be viewed as the languages of the "other" – foreign state languages that one might or might not choose to learn in school or through formal language courses.

The following excerpt illustratively shows the transition from local bilingualism, its disavowal and, as a result, the *economization* of language:

> (8) *Do muss ma schon amol aufpassen, dass die Generation quasi oberholb von meine Öltern... Also quasi Großölterngeneration, dass die wiederum extrem guat Slowenisch kennan hobn und de hobn si do total a einlossn offensichtlich. Warum auch imma. Ahm das/ das kaunn i wiederum net beurteiln, aber daunn die näch-*

[58] *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika,* available at: https://www.fran.si/iskanje?View=1&Query=%C5%A1vab, accessed: 16. 6. 2025.

[59] Damir Globočnik, "Stereotipi v karikaturi", in: Mitja Ferenc and Branka Petkovšek (eds)., *Mitsko in stereotipno v slovenskem pogledu na zgodovino* (Ljubljana, 2006), pp. 221–230.

ste Generation woar daunn vielleicht eben so a bissl diese Obwehrholtung do... Und daunn a vor ollm eben übertrogn auf, auf mei Generation dann so a bissl a jo: Für wos? Ihr brauchts es eh net, wal ich denke, das hängt a damit zaummen, dass quasi a Öltern a immer mehr versuchen ihre Kinder quasi nach oben zu pushen, jetz bildungsmäßig.

One should take a look at that generation above my parents... That is my grandparents' generation, that they spoke Slovenian extremely well and that they totally engaged in it obviously. Why ever. Ehm that/ that I cannot assess that, but then the next generation was then maybe a bit this stance of resistance there... And then especially transmitted to, to my generation then a bit: For what? You anyway don't need, because I think, this is connected also to that, that parents always try to push their children, now in sense of education.

(*Interviewee A4*: young German-speaking man from Bad Radkersburg)

Excerpt 8 offers revealing predications about language and its speakers. Interviewee A4 contrasts the local German-speaking grandparent generation – described as open-minded and even, in an intensified manner, "extremely" competent in Slovenian – with the parent generation, who are portrayed as defensive and resistant. In this narrative, vernacular nationalism has "done its job" by producing a monolingual population. The depiction of the parent generation as reluctant suggests that for them, the shift to monolingualism was still a conscious process – they had to actively choose or were urged to distance themselves from bilingualism. In contrast, the interviewee himself no longer faces such a choice, as knowledge of Slovenian is no longer available to him. Notably, the rationale for not learning the neighbor's language – although even spoken fluently by his own grandparents – has shifted. It is no longer framed in terms of vernacular nationalist ideology or the need to conceal Slovenian language competence. Rather, the decision is now guided by considerations of linguistic capital: Slovenian is perceived as lacking utility or market value, and other languages are prioritized for maintaining competitiveness in the job market.

In Excerpt 9, the same interviewee gives an account of the concrete effect of ideology on language learning:

(9) *Also i kaunn mi erinnern, mei erste/ mei erster Versuch Slowenisch zu lernen woar in der Vulksschul. Aber des is gscheitert daran, dass die Öltern afoch so a oarge Obneigung ghobt hobn. Dadurch, dass der Krieg no net so laung her woar. Also der woar grod fünf Joahr her. Ehm und die hobn daunn afoch gsogt: "Na, unsere Kinder lernen ka Slowenisch!" Also ma hot wirklich no diese, diese Obneigung, also diesen Obwehrmechanismus sozusogn ghobt und wir, wir wulltn eigentlich in der Schul des lernen.*

So I can remember, my first try to learn Slovenian was in the primary school. But this failed because the parents had such a fierce dislike. Because the war was not long ago yet. It was just five years ago. Ehm and they simply said: "No, our children don't learn Slovenian!" So the people really still had this dislike, this defense mechanism so to say and we, we actually wanted to learn it in school.
(*Interviewee A4*)

As in Excerpt 5, Interviewee A4 predicates the parent generation as reluctant, portraying them as actively preventing their children from learning Slovenian. Here, the reasoning is framed in broader economic and political terms, referencing Slovenia's war of independence in 1991. This suggests that the parents perceived Slovenia as a potentially unstable country, where military conflict remained a possibility, and thus considered it unwise or unfeasible to invest in learning the language. In contrast, the interviewee's own generation is depicted as open-minded and willing to engage with the Slovenian language – mirroring the attitude of the grandparent generation. One might interpret the parents' reaction as a natural response, given their direct experience of the 1991 conflict in Gornja Radgona, which lies just across the Mur/Mura river from Bad Radkersburg. However, the use of the term "defense mechanism" to describe their vehement opposition to Slovenian language instruction suggests a deeper, more entrenched ideological background. Viewing the language as merely "useless" differs significantly from actively resisting its acquisition. The perception of Slovenian as economically unnecessary seems to echo an older discourse of the monolingual nation state – one that limits interaction with neighboring countries to what is deemed strictly necessary, while discouraging "non-essential" contact. This pattern of argumentation, based on perceived necessity and a lack of linguistic capital, recurs frequently in interviews conducted on the Austrian side of the border:

(10) *Viile Slowenen kennan a guat Deutsch.*
Many Slovenes also know German well.
(*Interviewee A2*)

(11) *Wievü san's Einwohner, Slowenen? A Million, zwa Millionen? So in der Richtung. Jo, zwa Millionen Leit reden Slowenisch und Deitsch eh reden daunn jo ehm hundert Millionen.*
How many inhabitants are they, Slovenes? One million, two millions? Around that direction. Yes, two million people speak Slovenian und German eh speak then, yeah, ehm hundred millions.
(*Interviewee A4*)

(12) *Aber i glaub, der Großteil net, dass der interessiert is so am Slowenischen ehrlich gsogt. I glaub fiar den Großteil is es eher irrelevant, weil's eh, eh mit, mit Deutsch auskumman und jo, hauptsächlich fiar, wie gsogt, Leute, die Wurzeln hobn in der, in der Sproch, in der Nationalität, weil's doch, wenn ma so die Namen nocha anschaut, es gibt sehr viele Nachnamen, die jetz österreichisch ausschauen, aber die aus dem Slawischen, zum Beispül, kumman, wos vielleicht viele Leute goar net wissen. Des is so ahm... Oder afoch ka Interesse hobn, des näher zu erforschen.*
But I think, the majority is not so interested in Slovenian, to be honest. I think for the majority it is rather irrelevant because they get by with German anyway and, yeah, mainly for, as said, people who have roots in that, in that language, in that nationality, because it's, if you look at the names, there are many names that look Austrian but that are from Slavic, for instance, what perhaps many people don't know. That's so ahm... Or they simply are not interested to research that more closely.
(*Interviewee A5*: young German-Slovenian bilingual man from Slovenia who grew up in Germany and now lives in Austria and works in Bad Radkersburg)

The discursive construction of Austrians and Slovenes in these three excerpts – representative of all interviews conducted in Austria – reveals a recurring dichotomy. Slovenians are portrayed as linguistically competent, often possessing strong command of German, whereas Austrians are depicted as largely disinterested in language acquisition, implicitly characterized as passive or even lazy. They are seen as choosing the "path of least resistance", relying on their neighbors' proficiency in German (and sometimes English) to navigate cross-border interactions. In Excerpt 12, the perceived economic "irrelevance" of Slovenian is directly linked to the previously discussed ideology of Austrian monolingualism. Furthermore, the Slovenian language is explicitly equated with nationality, reinforcing essentialist notions of language and identity. In contrast, Austrian names are described as merely "looking" Austrian, implying an underlying Slavic origin and thereby subtly questioning their (German) authenticity. This suggests a nationalist undercurrent in which linguistic and ethnic boundaries are rigidly drawn, with "true" Austrian identity implicitly defined in opposition to anything Slavic.

During an interview with a high school class in Bad Radkersburg, the pervasive dominance of the German language was highlighted through a student's sarcastic response to the question of whether one might use dialectal Slovenian outside their home region in a more formal context:

(13)
Ich glaub, da sollte man eigentlich normal Slowenisch reden, nich im Dialekt.
I think, one should in that case speak normal Slovenian, not dialect.
(*Interviewee A6*: male high school student from Slovenia)

[Oder] *ma redet Deutsch in Slowenien.* [laughter] *Des geht a.*
[Or] one speaks German in Slovenia. [laughter] That works too.
(*Interviewee A7*: male high school student from Austria)

The joke made by Interviewee A7 (who maintains a close relationship with Interviewee A6) functions effectively because it plays on the stark asymmetry between the two languages in terms of linguistic capital. By hyperbolically suggesting that even dialectal Slovenian speakers have no need for Standard Slovenian, since German suffices as a lingua franca, the remark ironically underscores the persistence of older German nationalist discourses and the notion of German linguistic and cultural superiority. The humor of the statement relies precisely on the endurance of these discursive structures, which continue to operate subtly in the background – otherwise, the joke would lose its punch. Shortly after, another student uttered the following:

(14) *Mir kummt scho vor, dass vor ollm holt do in der Region vüle Deitsch kennan. Wos i a schod find, dass wir holt... Also, der Großteil* [der Österreicher und Österreicherinnen] *kaunn fost goar net Slowenisch. Ähm aber vielleicht dann, wenn ma weiter noch Slowenien foahrt, außerholb von der Region jetzt, dass ma dann scho mit Englisch vielleicht besser dran is.*
It seems to me that especially in this region many know German. What I find a pity, that we... I mean, the majority [of Austrians] almost doesn't know anything in Slovenian. But maybe when one goes further into Slovenia, outside of this region now, that one better gets by with English.
(*Interviewee A8*: female high school student from Austria)

Excerpt 14 reveals a particularly noteworthy nomination that challenges earlier discourses rooted in a strict separation between German Austrians and Slavic Slovenes – namely, the invocation of "this region". Interviewee A8 conceptually unites both Bad Radkersburg and its surrounding areas with the adjacent Slovenian territory, framing them as a single, shared region characterized by the use of German for cross-border communication. In contrast, Slovenia beyond the immediate border is positioned as "the other", where English functions as the dominant language of international exchange. Notably, Interviewee A8 explicitly identifies the linguistic asymmetry – where German holds greater communicative capital – as a "pity", indicating a critical stance toward the current imbalance. Her reflection evokes a historical parallel to the Austro-Hungarian period, when Slovenes struggled for cultural and linguistic emancipation from perceived German dominance.

The following excerpt, recounted by a German teacher, presents a discursive mirror image of Excerpt 9, but situated on the Slovenian side of the border.

It includes similar nominations and predications to those observed in Excerpt 5, thereby highlighting the persistence of parallel discursive structures on both sides:

> (15) *Imam pa občutek, da je recimo v Šentilju, vsaj pri starejših tisti odpor. Avstrija, nemško, to je slabi zgodovinski spomin in takšno. Ampak tega je vedno manj. Ko sem pa začela v Šentilju z nemščino* [konec 80tih let], *da sem poučevala, tam sem jaz bila pravzaprav tista prva, ki je fakultativni pouk nemščine izvajala. Takrat so se marsikateri starši ali pa stari starši bali, zakaj bi se učili nemščino.*
> But I have the feeling that in Šentilj, at least among older people, there is still some resistance. Austria, German, that's bad historical memory and stuff like that. But it's getting less and less. When I started teaching German in Šentilj [in the late 1980s], I was actually the first one to offer optional German classes. At that time, many parents or grandparents were afraid of why they should learn German.
> (*Interviewee S3*)

The burden of historical memory is particularly evident in Šentilj, the largest border crossing between Slovenia and Austria in eastern Slovenia. Since the 1960s, this village has witnessed a constant flow of German-speaking tourists as well as migrant workers from Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia, making it a key locus of interlingual and intercultural contact. The excerpt under consideration refers to the time prior to the global rise of English as a *lingua franca*, when local Slovenian (Yugoslav) language policy along the Austrian border was largely intolerant of German language instruction.[60] The strongly articulated predications of fear expressed by parents and grandparents in the late 1980s can be traced back to ideological roots – specifically, the pressure of communist rule and its instrumental use of the Slovene–German dichotomy as a tool of language policy. After 1918, and increasingly after 1945, the notion of a monolingual Slovenian national identity became dominant. While functional bilingualism with Serbo-Croatian was tolerated – framed as practically necessary – multilingualism beyond this was either marginalized or actively discouraged. Slovenia, as part of Yugoslavia, thus developed as a relatively closed linguistic space, with multilingualism officially acknowledged only in areas with Italian and Hungarian minorities. Other linguistic communities, particularly German and Romani-speakers, were systematically excluded or stigmatized. Following World War II, a form of non-specific, pragmatic multilingualism expanded, particularly through the inclusion of Serbo-Croatian, which became the language of the Yugoslav army, interstate communication, and internal migration.[61]

[60] See also Tibaut and Lipavic Oštir, "Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Slowenien", pp. 15–40.

[61] cf. Tatjana Bulc Balažic and Vesna Hadži Požgaj, "Novi statusi jezikov v spremenjenih družbeno-političnih okoliščinah: primer srbohrvaščine in njenih naslednic v Sloveniji", *Teorija in Praksa* 57, No. 1 (2020), pp. 10–20.

The ideological nature of language policy in Yugoslavia is also illustrated in the following excerpt, which includes a predication in the form of the rhetorical figure *politična zaščita meje* ('political protection of the border'):

(16) *Jaz sicer ni vidim nobene logike v tem, zakaj na Dravskem polju so imeli nemščino kot tuji jezik, ob meji pa angleščino. Angleščina je bila kot neka politična zaščita meje.*
I don't see any logic in why German was taught as a foreign language in the Drava region, while English was taught along the border. English served as a kind of political protection of the border.
(*Interviewee S3*)

The language policy directed against German began to change in the 1990s. In eastern Slovenia in particular, German became the second most commonly taught foreign language[62], a shift that in many places resulted from parental pressure and municipal decisions to provide additional funding for early German language instruction in schools.

(17) *Se spomnim glede nemščine zopet, da smo jo nekako probali izsiliti in sem jaz šla v šolo in učiteljici rekla, ker je šlo za izbirne predmete in otroci so sami lahko izbirali. In sem vse starše poklicala, pa sem ji rekla, pa dajte, samo dve sta se na nemščino prijavili, pa tu smo, pa dajte vsi, oni bodo sigurno rabili nemščino, dajte nemščino, ne. In potem so še otroci bili jezni na mene, so rekli moji hčerki, kaj je tvoja mama hotela nemščino, meni ni za hodit k nemščini. Ampak so bili pa potem vsi hvaležni, ker danes nekaj znajo nemško.*
I remember with regard to German that we tried to force it somehow, and I went to school and told the teacher, because it was an elective subject and the children could choose for themselves. And I called all the parents and told them, come on, only two have signed up for German, here we are, come on everyone, they will definitely need German, sign them up for German. And then the children were angry with me, they told my daughter, why did your mother want German, I don't want to go to German. But later they were all grateful because today they know some German.
(*Interviewee S4*: middle-aged woman from Jakobski dol in the Slovenske Gorice region)

The interviewee perspectivizes her point of view through the use of direct speech, thereby expressing her deep involvement in the events. The content

[62] See Tibaut and Lipavic Oštir, "Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Slowenien", p. 22.

of the excerpt reflects the position of German in independent Slovenia, particularly along the border with Austria. Today, German represents an important form of linguistic capital for the Slovenian population living near the border. Daily commuting, cross-border cooperation, shopping tourism, and other types of tourism contribute to the relatively high status of German. Schooling and studying in Austria can also be added to this list. The mother's efforts in the excerpt contradict the (linguistic) policy postulates she grew up with. It is characteristic that such efforts exceed established boundaries, for example by influencing the selection of elective subjects in schools.

This linguistic and cultural capital developed gradually, partly due to the opening of national borders in the 1960s, increased media consumption, and the various roles played by the so-called Gastarbeiter in Germany and Austria. The gap created by language policy since 1918 – and intensified after 1945 – was difficult to bridge and took a long time to overcome. The role of the Gastarbeiter is illustrated by the following excerpt:

> (18) *Moj oče je takrat tudi sorodnikom pomagal, da so prišli do neke blaginje ali pa do nekih zadev, ki so jih potrebovali, pa se jih ni dalo dobit v takrat v Jugoslaviji.*
> At that time, my father also helped relatives to achieve a certain level of prosperity or to obtain things they needed but could not get in Yugoslavia at the time.
> (*Interviewee S2*)

The predication in this excerpt suggests a positive progression presented in reverse order – prosperity and access to goods that were unavailable in Yugoslavia. At the national level, migrants at the time represented a steady inflow of Western currency, as they focused on building homes, establishing businesses, and investing in other domestic ventures. At the individual level, they symbolized support, material goods, and cultural transfer. The word *blaginja* 'prosperity' carries extremely positive connotations in Slovenian and is firmly rooted in the standard language, though it is used less frequently in colloquial speech. Its use conveys an impression of seriousness, responsibility, and exceptional prestige.

German, as linguistic capital in the area covered by our research, has today transcended its role as merely a foreign language for educational purposes. It can be aptly described as *Ergänzungssprache in der Gesellschaft* (the concept of *Ergänzungssprache*, i.e., "additional language of society", according to Heiko F. Marten[63]). Owing primarily to economic factors and the border situation –

[63] Heiko F. Marten, "Deutsch in seinem 'äußeren Kreis': Das Konzept Ergänzungssprache der Gesellschaft", *Schnittstelle Germanistik* 1, No. 1–2 (2021), pp. 195–215.

as well as linguistic and historical circumstances – German is not comparable to other foreign languages in eastern Slovenia, with the obvious exception of English, which occupies a distinct category. It is therefore not on the same level as French, Spanish, or other foreign languages. This creates a paradoxical situation, driven largely by the dominant position of English as the global lingua franca. Statistical data show that interest in learning German declines in the years leading up to high school graduation but increases sharply among young adults, as the pragmatic advantages of German become more evident. This results in a kind of reconstitution of linguistic capital – an attempt to reclaim opportunities that may have been missed earlier.[64]

4.3 English as a bridge – local varieties as anchor

Researchers of discourse are inevitably both analysts and participants. As such, the authors – all from Austrian and Slovenian Styria – are well aware of the metalinguistic discourses shaped by vernacular nationalism and linguistic capital. We expected the former to surface distinctly in the interviews – and so it did – while the latter rather "popped up" during data analysis. But, as said, it was easy for us to retrace it, since it is well known to us. During our consultations with students and teachers, a third discursive strand emerged repeatedly in the data: a new understanding among students of their linguistic resources in a more global context. There appears to be an ongoing paradigm shift in the perception of linguistic capital, in which standard languages – i.e., Standard German and Standard Slovenian – are gradually losing their status as default means of communication to English. At the same time, for some, national identity recedes into the background, while local dialects regain significance as expressions of personal identity in a regional context (cf. also "this region" in Excerpt 14).

In the following excerpt, Interviewee A4 makes a predication of English as a connecting element than facilitates the mutual approach of German and Slovenian-speakers:

> (19) *Wos i ober grod in meiner Klass a immer gmerkt hob, is eigentlich, dass si die beiden Sprochn eben über des Englische aunnähern.*
> But what also always noticed in my class, is actually that both languages [German and Slovenian] come closer to one another via English.
> (*Interviewee A4*)

[64] Tibaut and Lipavic Oštir, "Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Slowenien", pp. 23–26.

At another point in the interview, he also reports a substantial change in social contacts across the border between his own peer group as a teenager and today's students:

(20) *In meiner Freundschaftsgruppe woar ma tatsächlich ahm keine/ ham'ma tatsächlich keine slowenischen Kollegen, Kolleginnen dabei ghobt, ja, also wir san nicht rübergfoahrn, um durt Freunde zu treffen, sondern eher um die gaunze Freundesgruppe afoch in an anderen Ort zu verschaffen und durt neue Sochn zu erleben ähm und dementsprechend hot die Sprache eigentlich kaum a Rolle gspült, muss ma ehrlicherweise sogn.*
In my circle of friends we really ahm weren't/ we really didn't have Slovenian buddies with us, yeah, we didn't go across [the border] to meet friends but rather to get the entire circle of friends to another place and to experience new stuff ehm and accordingly the language actually didn't play a role, to be honest.
(*Interviewee A4*)

(21) *Also die Vermischung zwischen Österreich Sloweni/ eh slowenischen Freundschaften is extrem hoch gegeben, also die san wirklich sehr, sehr, sehr close und ahm ah ahm ah treffen si a durchaus. /.../ Und die treffen sich ja wirklich privat sehr, sehr oft gemeinsam, um, um daunn entweder auf slowenischer Seite oder auf österreichischer Seite gemeinsam irgendwos zu mochn.*
The mixing between Austria Sloveni/ eh Slovenian friendships is given extremely high, I mean, they are very, very, very close and ahm ah ahm ah definitely meet. /.../ And they privately meet very, very often together, in order to, to do something together either on the Slovenian side or on the Austrian side.
(*Interviewee A4*)

The report of Interviewee A9 sheds light on how German-speaking and Slovenian-speaking students come into contact with each other in concrete terms:

(22) *Wenn's männliche Slowenen san und auch männliche Österreicher in der Klasse oft die Situation, dass sie si sofort über die Schimpfwörter austauschen und do gegenseitig wo, wo dann die Österreicher hauptsächlich slowenische Schimpfwörter verwenden, wal des finden sie absolut super... Ahm und a mir gegenüber, wal sie glauben, die versteh i net, ah also Lehrern gegenüber. Des finden's halt unfassbar lustig, des, des is stoark wenn die ahm... Wenn die, die Mädchen, auch slowenische Mädchen ahm tendieren dazu miteinander Englisch zu sprechen und die, jo, afoch die gesamte Konversation auf Englisch zu verlegen. Auch tuan do die deitschn/ also die österreichischen Mädchen a oft mit.*
If they are male Slovenes and also male Austrians in the class often the situation that they immediately exchange swear words and there mutually where the Aus-

trians mainly use Slovenian swear words, because they find it absolutely super... Ahm and also towards me because they think I don't understand them, ah that is towards the teachers. They find it incredibly funny, that, that is strong when they ahm... When the, the girls, also Slovenian girls tend to speak English with each other and they, yeah, simply change the whole conversation to English. Also the German/ I mean the Austrian girls often join in.
(*Interviewee A9*: female middle-aged high school teacher from Austria)

Here, Interviewee A9 refers to gender-specific ways of approaching one another across linguistic boundaries. While she predicates boys to be imps who acquire terms of abuse in order to form a bystander-oriented German-Slovenian slang that allows them to speak secretly, she depicts the girls as seeking a non-discriminatory mode of communication by relying on the language that is most accessible to both Austrians and Slovenians. What both approaches have in common is that they aim to actively dismantle linguistic boundaries and that, in contrast to vernacular nationalist ideology, they do not rely on the standard language, but instead on either colloquial or dialectal expressions – such as swearwords – or, so to speak, a neutral third language: English. As Interviewee A9 mentions at another point during the interview, Austrian students sometimes feel excluded when their Slovenian classmates speak Slovenian. However, there is no discernible interest among Austrian students in learning Slovenian at a more substantial level. This again points to a new approach to language among young people, characterized by a dichotomy between one's own local variety and a global language that can be used universally. In the following excerpt from an interview with one of the two school classes in Austria, this "post-nationalist" point of view is made explicit. In response to the interviewer's question about how they perceive the change in language use and knowledge in the region, one student stated the following:

(23) *I glaub, wal (afoch) Englisch viil wichtiger worn is oder viil mehr in den Vordergrund gerückt is und dass ma da/ do a/ eher Englisch glernt hot und Slowenisch net mehr so.*
I think, because (simply) English has become much more important or has much more come into the foreground and that one also/ rather learns English and Slovenian not any longer that much.
(*Interviewee A10*: female high school student from Austria)

English is here predicated as a language that has gained increasing importance and now stands in the foreground, while Slovenian is implicitly depicted as receding into the background. The argument later expressed by Interviewee A10 is, once again, based on linguistic capital:

(24) *Slowenisch kann ma holt in Slowenien sprechen, auf Englisch kannst halt, ja, in Englisch kannst halt fost überoll sprechen und weil's bissl wichtiger dann vielleicht is und weil's vielleicht bissl anfocher is. Also i waß jetz net, wie leicht ma Slowenisch lernt, ober Englisch is doch eher afoch zum lernen.*
One can speak Slovenian in Slovenia, in English you can, yeah, in English you can speak almost everywhere and because it is then maybe a bit more important and because it's a bit easier. I mean, I don't know how easily one learns Slovenian but English is rather easy to learn.
(*Interviewee A10*)

In addition to the obvious argument concerning range of use, Interviewee A10 adds an interesting assumption – namely, that English is easier to access than Slovenian, although she admits she does not know this for certain. Interviewee A11 immediately reinforces this by referring to phonetics:

(25) *I glaub, dass die/ vor ollm die Laute in Englisch ähnlicher san als in Slowenisch.*
I think that especially the sounds in English are more similar [to German] than those in Slovenian.
(*Interviewee A11*: female high school student from Austria)

Here again, Interviewee A11 makes it explicit that she is not entirely sure, yet nevertheless predicates Slovenian as more distant from German. Interestingly, the last two excerpts are mitigated ("I don't know", "I think"), indicating that the students distance themselves from the status quo – characterized by a lack of knowledge about their neighbor's language, which appears foreign and difficult to approach. English is thus depicted as a valuable resource that helps to overcome this lack of knowledge. A certain duality was noticeable in the interviews on the Slovenian side of the border with regard to the benefits of using English and the efforts toward linguistic integration (and, to some extent, linguistic adaptation) aimed at achieving a high level of proficiency in German (see especially Excerpt 32).

Language skills, practicality, and media presence are key factors contributing to the high ranking of English among students at Ljutomer High School. It should be emphasized that this secondary school is one of the best and most popular in Northern Slovenian Styria and is therefore attended by students from Prlekija, Slovenske Gorice, and Prekmurje. The following excerpts containing argumentations are comparable to those from Austria presented above:

(26) *V socialnih medijih uporabljamo predvsem angleščino. Nemščino in slovenščino uporabljamo le redko. Raje se učimo angleščino.*

We mainly use English on social media. We rarely use German and Slovenian. We prefer to learn English.
(*Interviewee S5*: male high school student from Ljutomer)

(27) *Opazil sem, da se angleščina pri nas, predvsem med mladimi, uporablja veliko bolj kot nemščina.*
I have noticed that English is used much more than German in our country, especially among young people.
(*Interviewee S6*: female high school student from Ljutomer)

(28) *Na internetu je vedno več delovnih mest, večina pa je v angleščini. Tudi v slovenskem jeziku angleščina vdira v sleng. Prisiljeni smo se učiti ta jezik.*
There are more and more jobs on the internet, most of which are in English. English is also creeping into Slovenian slang. We are forced to learn this language.
(*Interviewee S7*: female high school student from Ljutomer)

On the one hand, there are clear preferences and motivations for learning English; on the other hand, students are also compelled to learn it due to its current role as a lingua franca. The excerpts reveal a complex situation: English dominates social media, youth communication, and the employment context. In contrast, German and Slovenian are less commonly used among young people. These observations are supported by a statement from a physics teacher, who explained that he occasionally presents certain content in English, as it helps students understand it more easily. It should be noted that the secondary school in Ljutomer is monolingual (except for foreign language classes), and that CLIL[65] is not permitted in Slovenian schools due to purist language policy – except in international schools and bilingual Slovenian-Hungarian schools.

Students attribute the lack of Slovenian language skills among Austrians primarily to the small number of Slovenian speakers, thus resembling the perceptions expressed by our Austrian interviewees:

(29) *Mislim, da smo Slovenci vseeno nekoliko bolj prilagodljivi kot drugi, saj na primer še nikoli nisem srečal Avstrijca, ki bi me nagovoril v slovenščini.*
I think that Slovenians are somewhat more adaptable than others, as I have never met an Austrian who would speak to me in Slovenian, for example.
(*Interviewee S8:* female high school student from Ljutomer)

[65] CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning (didactic approach).

(30) *Noben se ne uči slovensko, ker nas je samo dva milijona. Če želiš govoriti z nekom iz Avstrije, moraš govoriti nemško ali angleško.*
No one learns Slovenian because there are only two million of us. If you want to talk to someone from Austria, you have to speak German or English.
(*Interviewee S9*: female high school student from Ljutomer)

The argumentation for the linguistic adaptation of Slovenians is identical to the aforementioned rationale for learning Slovenian. Students accept this as a fact and do not seem to regret it, as their identification with English is quite strong. They are aware of the function of English as a lingua franca and evaluate the usefulness of other foreign languages from this perspective (*Nemščina je za mene skoraj neuporabna.* 'German is almost useless for me.' Interviewee S10: male high school student from Ljutomer), while some emphasize the positive regional status of German:

(31) *Nemščina mi je zelo všeč. Navajeni smo nanjo. Sosednja država je blizu in mislim, da je bolje znati nemščino – to je praktično, ko greš na počitnice.*
I really like German. We are used to it. The neighboring country is close by, and I think it's better to know German – it's practical when you go on vacation.
(*Interviewee S10*: male student from the nine-year primary school in Bakovci in Prekmurje)

This raises the question of whether, and to what extent, local and national language policy builds on the border population's awareness of the importance of mastering the language of their neighbors. Statistical data on learning German – as by far the most common second foreign language, and in some places along the border even the first foreign language – suggest that more attention is paid on the Slovenian side of the border to developing skills in the language of the neighbors. However, this cannot be attributed to a positive language policy; rather, it is simply a consequence of the ratio between smaller and larger languages in terms of the number of speakers and the benefits in various economic sectors, or, in other words, the attribution of greater linguistic capital to German (cf. Excerpt 17 on parents' involvement in school).

We mentioned a duality regarding the benefits of using English and the efforts to achieve a high level of proficiency in German. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

(32) *Zato dostikrat, ko jim omenim, da sem iz Slovenije, me vprašajo, kako pa to, kako je to možno, da tako dobro nemško znaš, je to običajno? Še prejšnji teden sem dobila eno tako vprašanje.*
That's why, when I mention that I'm from Slovenia, they often ask me how it's

possible that I speak German so well, and whether that's normal. I was asked that question just last week.
(*Interviewee S11*: young Slovenian-speaking woman from Goričko who graduated in Bad Radkersburg and studies in Graz)

This statement relates to linguistic adaptation and the function of German in both Slovenian Styria and Prekmurje, but it also conveys a clearly expressed emotional connotation. This is evident in words and phrases such as *dostikrat* 'often', *kako je to mogoče* 'how is that possible', and *je to običajno?* 'is it normal?'. The interviewee does not hide her pride in her linguistic skills.

Regarding the importance of local varieties as the counterpart to international English, the topic of *dialect* was discussed among students in one of the two high school classes in Bad Radkersburg. There was consensus that dialect is strongly linked to one's own culture and everyday life, while speaking Standard German in such situations was described by one student as *anstrengend* ('strenuous'), pointing to the fact that the standard variety is usually not used in everyday conversation. When the interviewer asked whether dialect use was similar in Slovenia, one of the two Slovenian students responded that there are situations, such as at school, where one is expected to speak "normally", referring to Standard Slovenian (cf. also Excerpt 13). The interviewer then asked the students what they mean by "talking normally". One student speculated that people might refer to standard varieties as “normal” because of their supraregional range of use, but this was contested by her classmates:

(33) *Dialekt is normal. /.../ I hob's holt von klan auf so glernt, darum is es für mi normal.*
Dialect is normal. /.../ I learned it that way from childhood, therefore it's normal for me.
(*Interviewee A7*)

(34*) Aber i würd jetz, a wenn jemand zu mir sogt so: "Red normal!", dass i dann eher im Dialekt reden würd als in Hochdeutsch.*
But I would now, also if somebody tells me: "Speak normally!", that I would in that case rather speak [the local] dialect than Standard German.
(*Interviewee A12*: female high school student from Austria)

In these two excerpts, the previously mentioned idea of standard languages as the "normal" form of communication is rejected and reversed. What is considered *normal* is what is transmitted from childhood and typically spoken within the local community. Dialectal speech is presented here as the unmarked, natural way of speaking.

The functions and significance of dialects in Austria are comparable to those in Slovenia. Research such as Simona Pulko & Melita Zemljak Jontes shows that dialects remain the linguistic variety in which primary socialization occurs; they also continue to be the first and most important linguistic variety throughout a person's life. This is especially evident in dialect groups like the Pannonian and Styrian, which differ significantly from the standard language based on central Slovene dialects, as people in these regions often learn the standard language almost as a second language.[66] This internal multilingualism also shapes identification with language varieties, which is much stronger in the country's peripheral regions (Styria, Prekmurje, Northern Primorska[67]). This finding is further illustrated by a statement from a secondary school student in Ljutomer:

(35) *Naš dialekt se mi zdi zelo lep. Ampak dialekt iz Ljubljane in tisti drugi mi pa niso všeč.*
Our dialect seems very beautiful to me. But I don't like the dialect from Ljubljana and those other ones.
(*Interviewee S13*: female high school student from Ljutomer)

5. Conclusion

The concept of nation-states in Europe has predominantly postulated monolingualism as the normal and natural state, based on the assumption that members of a nation – particularly those residing in a defined area – are typically monolingual.[68] Monolingualism was regarded as the norm, and there was a lack of scientific evidence demonstrating that multilingualism is not disadvantageous until the second half of the 20th century. Consequently, any form of multilingualism became "suspicious", and an individual's national identity was – and often still is – equated with language use. The negative consequences of such ethno-linguistic nationalism, particularly in the form of so-called vernacular nationalism, were not only evident at the beginning of the 20th century but persist to this day. These consequences have manifested in various phenomena, such as linguistic boundaries, linguistic mimicry, and, above all, language policy postulates.

[66] Simona Pulko and Melita Zemljak Jontes, "Raba zemljepisnih različkov slovenskega jezika glede na stopnjo izobraževanja in različne govorne položaje", *Obdobja* 26 (2009), pp. 353–369.

[67] See Alja Lipavic Oštir and Milina Muzikářová, *Über Sprachen aus der Perspektive von Gymnasiast*innen aus Slowenien und aus der Slowakei* (Maribor, 2021) on students' language maps.

[68] Ingrid Gogolin, *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule* (Münster–New York, 2008).

While it may seem today that the concept of linguistic boundaries is no longer central to linguistic discourse and activism, and that the linguistic mimicry observed in the decades following 1945 – such as German and Slovenian in Styria and Prekmurje – is no longer a necessary strategy for individuals and families, language policy continues to serve as the primary guardian of vernacular nationalism. Its most extreme form, linguistic purism, still dominates Slovenian language policy today.

Such language policy, including attitudes toward German, creates a paradox in the context of German as an *Ergänzungssprache* in contemporary Slovenian society, as is evident from economy-related discursive strands in our interviews. All of the above has had a significant impact on Styria on the Slovenian side of today's border and, in most respects, is comparable to Austrian Styria – though with a notable difference in linguistic purism. Languages with high linguistic capital, such as English, are regarded in Austrian Styria as valuable for international communication, even if there are voices lamenting the frequent use of English vocabulary in German among young people, as well as the displacement of local dialects by Standard German. Our research on the Austrian side of the border, along with earlier studies, shows that there has been a noticeable trend of anti-Slovene linguistic purism – i.e., everything Slovenian was marginalized, with focus directed toward Western languages, while contact with Eastern "Slavic" communist societies was actively avoided. Although anti-Slovene discourse no longer plays a noticeable role today, education and everyday linguistic practice remain predominantly monolingual in German, with a relatively stable diglossia between spoken dialects and written Standard German.

In terms of meta-linguistic discourse, it is important to recognize that Slovenian, as a smaller language, has long occupied a precarious position, whereas German, with its large number of speakers, is well established across all domains. Nevertheless, both countries exhibit a "discourse of threat", in which a smaller language variety is imagined to be in constant competition – either with a larger national language or with the languages of immigrants. This includes German or Slovenian versus English, dialects versus standard languages, and German or Slovenian versus immigrant languages, among others. This discourse of threat reinforces the idea that a language must be preserved in a fixed state, thereby discouraging the view of other languages as valuable resources and instead positioning them as threats. In this regard, both countries are similar – though Slovenians perceive a stronger pressure from German than vice versa.

Regardless of whether we are discussing linguistic mimicry or hidden minorities – and taking into account the differing linguistic capital of German and Slovenian – the underlying premise of linguistic exclusivity, which frames both parts of Styria as well as Prekmurje as monolingual communities, remains intact. This

premise explains the concealment (or mimicry) previously discussed: originally Slavic settlements that are now predominantly German-speaking are incompatible with such an ideology. Likewise, the existence of a German-speaking community on the Slovenian side of the border also challenges this narrative. In the analysis of our interviews, this is reflected through various discursive strategies, with nomination and predication being the most prominent. These linguistic dynamics are partially preserved in family memory and are echoed in other studies. One such illustration can be found in the case of Maribor:

> My grandmother once went to the school her son attended in the 1930s and explicitly said that her son should be treated like the others because he was no less worthy if they were a German family.
> (Interviewee 5, Maribor) [69]

The linguistic capital of German and Slovenian still differs today and may play a distinct role in the border region compared to other parts of both countries – particularly in light of daily cross-border contacts and migration. However, for today's young people in Styria on both sides of the border, this linguistic capital is significantly complemented by the current dominance of English. In this context, two elements are especially important: a strong local identification with one's own dialect (whether German or Slovenian), and a sense of belonging to the European Union, accompanied by the perception of English as a means of participating in global, supranational communication.

The chauvinistic nationalist discourses of the past still linger beneath the surface, as illustrated by the sarcastic remark in Excerpt 13 suggesting that Slovenian dialect speakers can simply use German as a supraregional language. Nevertheless, interviews with teachers and students in both countries reveal an ongoing shift in cross-border relations. As is often the case, younger generations tend to rebel against the ideologies of their parents: nationalism once challenged feudalism; those seeking to rebuild cross-border ties challenged monolingual policies; and now, young people – who are fundamentally connected to the world through the internet – are challenging the ideology of national standard languages as all-encompassing and authoritative. From a socio-political perspective, it could be said that the formation of the European Union has begun to bear fruit in this regard. The Austrian–Slovene mixed classes at the Bad Radkersburg high school, for example, engage with one another as equals. Linguistically, they appear highly pragmatic: English is used as a neutral medium for communication and mutual approach.

[69] Lipavic Oštir, "Marburger Deutsch aus heutiger Perspektive".

In the 19th century, nationalists doggedly sought to divide the local population along linguistic lines. It took at least a generation for this separation to take hold – resulting in atrocities and widespread suffering. After World War II, more thoughtful individuals recognized the opportunity to reestablish dialogue between former ideological enemies, and once again, it took at least a generation to lay the groundwork for European integration. Like a flower, such efforts require care and nurturing before they can truly blossom.

Transcription conventions	
A[number]	Person recorded in Austria
S[number]	Person recorded in Slovenia
...	unfinished or interrupted utterance
/	self repair
/.../	omission
[text]	extralinguistic phenomena, additional explanation or clarification
(oder)	unclear or reconstructed

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PREOBLIKOVANJE JEZIKOVNIH IDEOLOGIJ NA ŠTAJERSKEM IN V PREKMURJU

POVZETEK

Prispevek raziskuje metajezikovne diskurzivne prakse v avstrijsko-slovenskem obmejnem prostoru na ozemlju nekdanjega vojvodstva Štajerske ter v sosednjem Prekmurju. Ugotavlja, kako so zgodovinski diskurzi oblikovali sodobne predstave o jezikih sosedov in kakšne posledice imajo te predstave za današnjo rabo jezika v tej regiji. Z analizo metajezikovnih diskurzov iz poznega 19. in zgodnjega 20. stoletja ter s primerjavo s sodobnimi pogledi, pridobljenimi z intervjuji, želimo osvetliti kontinuiteto in preoblikovanje jezikovnih ideologij skozi čas. Naš glavni cilj je pokazati, kako so zgodovinske pripovedi in jezikovne predstave vplivale na današnje razumevanje jezikov, ki se govorijo v tej regiji, kako so se te predstave razvijale in kako še naprej oblikujejo aktualne jezikovna stališča in diskurzivne prakse. V ta namen smo izvedli intervjuje s širokim naborom sogovornikov, med njimi z učitelji, dijaki, študenti ter drugimi odraslimi osebami na obeh straneh avstrijsko-slovenske meje. Etno-jezikovni oziroma vernakularni nacionalizem je bil ob koncu 19. in na začetku 20. stol. močna družbena sila, katere učinki so še danes vidni v regiji. Čeprav sodobni javni diskurzi nakazujejo, da stroge jezikovne meje niso več osrednji del politične ali kulturne identitete, in da je jezikovna mimikrija – nekoč uporabljena kot strategija preživetja med in po drugi svetovni vojni – postala odveč, je jezikovna politika še vedno pomemben nosilec ljudskega nacionalizma. V Sloveniji se to najbolj izrazito kaže v jezikovnem purizmu, ki še vedno pomembno vpliva na uradno jezikovno načrtovanje in javni diskurz. To pa je še posebej paradoksalno glede na vlogo nemščine kot *Ergänzungssprache* – dopolnilnega oziroma pomožnega jezika – v slovenski družbi, zlasti na področju gospodarstva in čezmejne komunikacije. Kot razkrivajo naši intervjuji, napetost med gospodarskim pragmatizmom in nacionalno jezikovno ideologijo ostaja nerazrešena. Ti procesi močno vplivajo na jezikovno krajino slovenske Štajerske in Prekmurja ter v veliki meri odražajo tudi dogajanje v avstrijski Štajerski. Vendar pa obstajajo pomembne razlike. V avstrijski Štajerski so jeziki z visokim jezikovnim kapitalom, kot je angleščina, široko sprejeti kot orodje za mednarodno komunikacijo. Hkrati pa je avstrijska Štajerska doživela poseben razvoj, zaznamovan z anti-slovenskim jezikovnim purizmom, ki izhaja iz zahodno usmerjene svetovne nazorske drže, ki je zavračala povezave z vzhodnimi "slovanskimi" komunističnimi družbami. Čeprav je

odkrito anti-slovensko razpoloženje večinoma izzvenelo, izobraževalni sistem in vsakdanja raba jezika ostajata skoraj izključno nemško jezična. V regiji še naprej obstaja razmeroma stabilna diglosija, pri kateri se v neformalnih kontekstih uporablja narečje, v formalnih in pisnih pa standardna nemščina. Z metajezikovnega vidika je pomembno razumeti, da slovenščina kot manjši jezik že dolgo zavzema ranljiv prostor, medtem ko je nemščina zaradi števila govorcev in geopolitične moči trdno zasidrana v skoraj vseh družbenih domenah. Kljub temu pa sta v obeh državah prisotna prevladujoča "diskurza ogroženosti", v katerih se manjši ali manj dominantni jezikovni izrazi dojemajo kot nenehno ogroženi. Takšne pripovedi krepijo prepričanje, da je jezike treba ohraniti v statičnih, idealiziranih oblikah, s čimer se utrjujejo ideologije jezikovne čistosti in kulturne izključnosti, hkrati pa se spodkopava pogled na večjezičnost kot dragocen družbeni vir. Vztrajanje pri jezikovni izključnosti še naprej vpliva na oblikovanje regionalne identitete. Tako v razpravah o jezikovnem posnemanju kot tudi o statusu jezikovnih manjšin se v naracijah iz Slovenije in Avstrije Štajerska in Prekmurje pogosto predstavljata kot enojezična prostora, kljub njuni kompleksni jezikovni zgodovini. To predstavo pa spodbijajo zgodovinsko slovanske skupnosti, ki so prešle v večinsko nemško govoreče, in obratno. Podobno tudi obstoj nemško govoreče manjšine v Sloveniji neposredno izziva prevladujočo enojezično pripoved. Te napetosti se odražajo v diskurzivnih strategijah naših sogovornikov. Relativni jezikovni kapital nemščine in slovenščine ostaja neenakomeren in ima pomembno vlogo pri oblikovanju jezikovnih praks v obmejni regiji, zlasti ob naraščajočem čezmejnem gibanju, gospodarskem sodelovanju in vsakodnevnih stikih. Vendar pa se jezikovna ekonomija regije spreminja. Med mlajšimi generacijami na slovenski in avstrijski Štajerski angleščina vse pogosteje dopolnjuje ali celo izpodriva simbolni in praktični kapital nemščine in slovenščine. Temu premiku sledita dva pomembna pojava: močna čustvena in kulturna navezanost na lastno narečje – bodisi nemško bodisi slovensko – ter naraščajoč občutek evropske pripadnosti, pri čemer angleščina deluje kot *lingua franca* nadnacionalne komunikacije in identifikacije. Čeprav šovinistični nacionalistični diskurzi iz preteklosti niso povsem izginili, v javnem prostoru nimajo več enake prevlade kot nekoč. Naši intervjuji kažejo na počasen, a opazen premik v čezmejnih odnosih in praksah, zlasti med mladimi. Kot se je pogosto dogajalo v zgodovini, mlajše generacije aktivno izzivajo prevladujoče ideologije svojih predhodnikov. Tako kot so nekoč nacionalistična gibanja izzivala fevdalne strukture in kot so povojna prizadevanja za spravo nasprotovala enojezični politiki nacionalne države, mladi danes vse bolj postavljajo pod vprašaj hegemonijo nacionalnih knjižnih jezikov in ideološko avtoriteto, ki so jo ti dolgo uživali. Z družbeno-političnega vidika ta generacijski premik morda odraža dolgoročne učinke evropskega povezovanja. Ustvarjanje možnosti za nadnacionalno mobilnost je odprlo nove prostore za bolj vključujočo in prila-

godljivo jezikovno resničnost, ki jo oblikuje preplet lokalne tradicije, čezmejnega sodelovanja in globalne povezanosti.

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Naslov: **PREOBLIKOVANJE JEZIKOVNIH IDEOLOGIJ NA ŠTAJERSKEM IN V PREKMURJU**

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Jezik: angleški (izvleček angleški in slovenski, povzetek slovenski)

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Izvleček: Članek na osnovi kvalitativne analize intervjujev preučuje, kako monolingvalne ideologije oblikujejo jezikovne politike in identitete v slovensko-avstrijskem obmejnem prostoru. Te ideologije, ukoreninjene v etnojezikovnem nacionalizmu, imajo še vedno vpliv na jezikovne politike, zlasti preko jezikovnega purizma in "diskurza grožnje". Enojezične naracije se deloma še ohranjajo in ne upoštevajo zgodovinsko večjezične realnosti in čezmejne skupnosti. Obenem se mlajše generacije usmerjajo k jezikovnemu pragmatizmu ter sprejemajo lokalne narečne oblike, angleščino in evropsko identiteto. Kljub še vedno prisotnim nacionalističnim diskurzom pa generacijske spremembe in integracija v EU spodbujajo bolj vključujoče razumevanje jezikov in identitet v regiji.