

Slovenian place names in Carinthia

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This paper describes the *namescape* (or ‘onymic landscape’) of the Austrian state of Carinthia, which combines elements of both Slovenian and German (Bavarian) origin. The article comprises three sections. The first recounts the history of the territory of Carinthia. The second analyses the linguistic characteristics of the region, focusing above all on the relationship between the different forms of Slovenian and German place names. Finally, the third, on the basis of the existence in Carinthia of a tradition for common place names, examines the main features of the bilingual place-naming system from a comparative perspective.

Key words: Carinthia, Slovenian minority, German and Slovenian place names.

Es presenten a l'article els trets generals del *paisatge onímic* de la Caríntia austríaca, que consisteix en una barreja d'elements alemanys (Baviera) i d'eslovè. El text està organitzat en tres parts. La primera consisteix en una aproximació als antecedents històrics del territori de la Caríntia. A la segona, l'autor analitza les característiques lingüístiques de la regió, amb una atenció particular a la relació entre les diferents modalitats de eslovè i alemany. Finalment, a la tercera, i sobre la base de l'existència d'una tradició de noms de llocs comuns, es fa una revisió global de les característiques fonamentals del sistema de noms de llocs bilingües de la regió en una perspectiva comparativa.

Paraules clau: Caríntia, minoria eslovena, noms de lloc alemanys i eslovens.

1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The origins of Carinthia can be traced back to the earliest times. In ancient history, the territory of the present-day federal state of Austria formed part of the Celtic kingdom “regnum Noricum”, later becoming the Roman province of “Noricum”. The first capital of the province was the hill-top town of *Magdalensberg*/Štalenska gora, subsequently moved to *Virunum* on the plain of Zollfeld/Gosposvetsko polje, and later to *Teurnia* in the Lurnfeld valley (near Spittal an der Drau). Following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, Slavic tribes (and Avars) settled in the area from the 6th century onwards, thus establishing the Slavic principality

of *Carantania*, which gradually fell under Bavarian and Frankish control. Between 743 and 907, Frankish kings and emperors ruled over the territory and Carinthia became part of the Duchy of Bavaria. Independence was won in 976, following the establishment of the Duchy of Carinthia, though this would eventually be lost when Carinthia became an imperial fief under the Habsburgs, administered together with Austria, Styria and Carniola.

As a consequence of all this, the Slovenes of Carinthia and the small Slovenian minority in Styria form a traditional ethnic group in Austria, concentrated mainly in the regions bordering Slovenia, but also in the Gailtal/Ziljska dolina. The position of these minority groups in the country was put on a clear legal footing thanks to the so-called “Road Sign Compromise” (Ortstafelkompromiss) of 2011.¹

Clearly, the Slovenes of Carinthia boast both a long tradition and history. Indeed, one of the earliest documented political entities in the region was the Alpine Slavonic principality of *Carantania* in the 7th and 8th century AD. Relations with the Bavarian principality were gradually strengthened with the Christianisation of the Slovenian population, which ushered in a period of progressive Germanisation and assimilation, a process that continues to the present day. Interestingly, by the middle of the 19th century, 30% of people in Carinthia spoke Slovenian. Today, this number has fallen to around 3%, but in the bilingual territory it is as high as 13%. In the state’s bilingual schools, more than 40% of pupils participate in Slovenian language education programs (whereas twenty years ago this figure was somewhere between 15 and 20%).

Since the Middle Ages, the territory that forms the modern state of Slovenia, belonged to the *German Kingdom*, first to the *Holy Roman Empire* and then to the *Habsburg Monarchy*. Following the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, it became part of *Cisleithania*, i.e., the “Austrian” part of the Dual Monarchy. When in late 1918, the *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* — what would become *Yugoslavia* — was founded, this new state laid claim to the southern region of Carinthia, as did German-Austria. Following a brief military conflict and the successful “defence” of the German population (the so-called “Kärntner Abwehrkampf” [Carinthian

1 cf. Pohl 2011a and 2011b.

defensive struggle]), a plebiscite was held under the terms of the peace treaty of Saint-Germain. In October 1920, about 60% of the population — including approximately 12,000 Slovenes (40% of them) — in Southern Carinthia opted to remain in the Austrian republic.

The Austrian “State Treaty” of 1955, which re-established Austria as a sovereign state, granted key minority rights to Croats and Slovenes in Burgenland, Styria and Carinthia. However, once again — as had occurred in 1918/1920 — these rights would not be recognised for many years. In 1972, the Austrian government under Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky took steps to improve the situation of the minorities. However, an attempt to erect bilingual road signs (“Ortstafeln”) led to bitter resistance among the patriotic groups of the Carinthian population. Road signs were torn down, without any (resolute) intervention from the police or politicians, in an episode known as the “Road Sign Storm” (Ortstafelsturm).

It was not until 2001 that the matter was eventually resolved. The Austrian Constitutional Court (Verfassungsgerichtshof) agreed to repeal that section of the 1976 Ethnic Groups Law that ruled that topographic names only had to be signposted bilingually in regions where more than 25% of the population belonged to an ethnic group. The Court held that it was incompatible with Article 7 of the 1955 State Treaty, in which no such limitations were provided for, and it recommended erecting bilingual road signs in regions where the Slovenian population constituted more than 10% of the population. Thus, the “Road Sign Conflict” was eventually resolved by the “Road Sign Compromise” (Ortstafelkompromiss) of 2011,² and Federal Act n°. 46/2011, entitled “Änderung des Volksgruppengesetzes”.

2 LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

Towards the end of the Migration Period, the ancestors of modern Slovenes, the *Alpine Slavs*, settled in the country along with the Turkic language-speaking Avars. Avar relics include, for example, Slovenian *Kazaz* (< **kosez*) ‘landowner’ (and, hence, Slovenian place names such as *Kazaze*, *Kajzaze* etc. = German *Edling*) and *ban*, a noble title, in medieval

2 cf. https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/I/I_01312/imfname_224195.pdf, p. 3–7.

Latin *banus* (found in the village name *Faning/Baniče*, in the municipality Moosburg/Možberk or *Pfannsdorf/Banja vas*, in the municipality of Sittersdorf/Žitara vas).

On its foundation as a duchy in year 976, two languages were spoken: Old High German (Bavarian) and “Carantanian”, the alpine Slavic dialect of Old Slovenian, which can also be found in the “Freising Monuments”, the oldest surviving Latin-script text in the Slavic language. Later monuments have been found to be closer to modern Slovenian than Middle High German texts were to modern standard German — including, for example, “Klagenfurt Handschrift/Celovski ali Rateski rokopis”.³ The Slovenian language was known as “Windisch” in German,⁴ a name that is now obsolete, but which occurs in the descriptions of the duke’s establishment in the *Prince’s Stone/Knežji Kamen* in Karnburg/Koroški grad as well as in the 16th century name “Windisches Herzogtum”, at the time of the Reformation. Not only was the German language reformed by Martin Luther, but the Slovenian language was reformed by Primož Trubar — both of whom were pioneers of “reformed” language and the two languages became European cultural languages. Subsequently, both languages have also become Carinthian regional languages.

This common history is reflected — among other things — in a common toponymic tradition. Thus, from the outset, names of both German and Slavic/Slovenian were employed. The first Carinthians, in the strict sense of the word, referred to the location of their home and settlement as (Slovenian) *Gorje*/(German) *Göriach*, that is ‘on the mountain’ and *Bistrice/Feistritz* located ‘by the torrent’ — these are names of Slovenian origin, but names of German origin also exist: (German) *Bleiburg*/(Slovenian) *Pliberk* (= lead — because of the local mines — castle or from **Bli(de)burg* [because of 993–1000 *Livpidorf*, which consists of Slavic *ljubъ* ‘dear’ + German *Dorf* ‘village’] ‘the castle of courtly love’) or *Finkenstein/Bekštanj* (= finch rock), which have been taken over from the Germans. As such, the place names provide insights into the settlement history, with either the Slovenes or the Germans being active in the naming process. The names were passed orally from one language to another, but often

3 cf. Pohl 2010, p. 166–122.

4 cf. Pohl 2010, p. 18–32.

localities were named differently such as the German *Hart* 'forest' ~ the Slovenian *Breg* 'bank, slope', or quite simply they were translated, for example, German *Aich* = Slovenian *Dob* 'oak'. Even today, in some solely German-speaking regions we find such name-couples: for example, in the municipalities of Großkirchheim and Bad Kleinkirchheim, we find villages called *Zirknitz* and *Zirkitzen*, which is the Slovenian word for 'church' (*cirkev*, standard Slovenian *cerkev*, in German *Kirche* as in the municipality names). Some names that today are only used in German were first documented in Slovenian, e.g., *Podinauuiz* which dates back to the year 993 (equivalent to the modern term *Spodnja vas*) is equivalent to today's *Niederdorf* (district of St. Veit an der Glan). Or *Mösel* 'little moor' was documented in 1124–38 *Grazinic* (from Slavic *gręzъ* 'bog, moor'). Additionally, some Carinthian words have the same meaning in the dialects of both languages, e.g., *gora* / *Berg* 'mountain + wood or forest' and *peč* / *Ofen* 'stove + rock'.

The present-day German forms of names of Slovenian origin often retain old phonetic features, e.g., *Lang* from Slovenian *loka* (< *lōka* 'damp meadow' with a nasal vowel sound), *Pöckau* (dialectal *Peckach*, 1238–61 *Pecc(h)ach*, Slovenian *Peče* from *peč* 'stove, rock') and *Radweg* / *Radoviče* (both have /k/ for Proto-Slavic *tj, according to the Freising Monuments). Equally, original Slovenian name forms have been converted phonetically by German sound changes, including, for example, the Slovenian *Suha*, *Bistrica* > German *Zauchen*, *Feistritz* (diphthongization). On occasion, we find mixed forms, as in *Suetschach* / *Sveče* (1168 *Zwakach* with /k/ like 1258 *Zwenkach*, with a nasal vowel (also according to the Freising Monuments from Old Slovenian **Svęk'e* from a personal name with *svętъ* 'holy').⁵

In short, place names constitute a common heritage; German and Slovenian names provide evidence of an old, common heritage and form part of our history. Both German and Slovenian names, as we have seen, are closely related to each other, and their common history is indivisible. In mixed-language areas each geographical object receives two names, and they are equally common in their respective languages. For them to fall into oblivion would be a severe loss.

5 cf. Pohl 2011c.

3 ONOMASTIC FEATURES

In the case of onomastics, several source materials are available: a new bilingual gazetteer (Kattinig, Kulnik & Zerzer 2004/2005), historical documentation (Zdovc 1993 and 2010) and this author's own work, a linguistic description (Pohl 2010). This last book focuses on the bilingual nature of the Carinthian namescape. This is, I contend, a more significant marker of Carinthian identity than the state's Roman excavations, medieval castles and other monuments. My list of Carinthian place names does not seek to substitute the standard reference works of Kattinig, Kulnik & Zerzer and Zdovc, but should be of special interest to linguists, since it assigns place names to five categories, namely

- (1) names of obvious German origin;
- (2) names of obvious Slavic/Slovenian origin;
- (3) names that might have originated in either language and have been translated to the other;
- (4) features with different names in both languages; and
- (5) names originating from the Celtic or Romance substratum.

Some examples for each of these categories include:

- (6) Names of obvious German origin: *Aich, Bleiburg, Feldkirchen, Finkenstein, Hart, Ludmannsdorf, Maria Elend, Neuhaus an der Gail, Rain*;
- (7) Names of obvious Slovenian origin: *Achomitz, Feistritz, Ferlach, Frög, Globasnitz, Goritschach, Göriach, Görtschach, Gösselsdorf, Wellersdorf*;
- (8) Names originating from translation: *Aich ~ Dob* 'oak', *Moos ~ Blato* 'marsh', *Müllnern ~ Mlinare/Mlinče* 'miller' | *-dorf ~ vas/-vs* 'village';
- (9) Features with different names in both languages: *Feldkirchen ~ Trg, Hart ~ Breg, Maria Elend ~ Podgorje, Maria Rain ~ Žihpolje, Neuhaus a.d. G. ~ Pod Turjo*;
- (10) Pre-Slavic/Pre-German names: *Villach, Jaun-tal, Drau, Lavant*.

As for the linguistic context in which a name is used, two categories can be identified:

- (I) Place names used in the German context: *Feldkirchen, Bleiburg, Aich, Ferlach, Friesach, Villach, Globasnitz*;

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(II) Place names used in the Slovenian context: *Trg, Pliberk, Dob, Borovlje, Breže, Beljak, Globasnica*.

In principle, the Carinthian place-names system is bilingual (official bilingual names in **bold**):

I (German)	II (Slovenian)
<i>Achomitz</i> (2)	Zahomec (2) 'behind the hill'
<i>Aich</i> (1/3)	Dob (2/3) 'oak'
<i>Bleiburg</i> (1)	Pliberk (1) 'lead castle'
<i>Drau</i> (5)	<i>Drava</i> (5) 'course of the river'
<i>Feistritz</i> (2)	Bistrica (2) 'raging stream'
<i>Feldkirchen</i> (1/4)	<i>Trg</i> (2/4) 'church on the fields'/'market'
<i>Ferlach</i> (2)	<i>Borovlje</i> (2) 'at the pines'
<i>Finkenstein</i> (1)	<i>Bekštanj</i> (1) 'finch rock'
<i>Frög</i> (2)	<i>Breg</i> (2) 'slope or bank'
Globasnitz (2)	Globasnica (2) 'winding stream (similar in shape to a sausage)'
<i>Göriach</i> (2)	<i>Gorje</i> (2) 'on the mountain'
Goritschach (2)	Goriče (2) 'on the hill'
<i>Görtschach</i> (2)	<i>Goriče</i> (2) 'on the hill'
Gösselsdorf (2/3)	Goselna vas (2/3) 'Gosl's village'
Hart (1/4)	Breg (2/4) 'slope or bank', Ločilo (2/3) 'damp place' <i>Dobrava</i> (2/3) 'oak wood'
<i>Jauntal</i> (5)	<i>Podjuna</i> (5) from Indo-European * <i>yuwen-</i> 'water mixed with sand and gravel'
<i>Lavant</i> (5)	<i>Labotnica</i> (5) 'white river'
Ludmannsdorf (1/3)	Bilčovs (2/3) 'Ludmann's/nobleman's village'
Maria Elend (1/4)	Podgorje (2/4) 'Maria in the wilderness'/'under the mountains'
<i>Maria Rain</i> (1/4)	<i>Žihpolje</i> (1/4) 'Maria at the slope'/'damp hill'
Moos (1/3)	Blato (2/3) 'marsh'
Müllnern (1/3)	<i>Mlinare</i> , Mlinče (2/3) 'at the millers or mills'
<i>Neuhaus</i> (1/4) a.d.G.	<i>Pod Turjo</i> (2/4) 'new court'/'under the slope'

I (German)	II (Slovenian)
Rain (1/3)	Breg (2/3) 'slope or bank'
Sittersdorf (2/3)	Žitara vas (2/3) 'Žitar's village'
Villach (5)	Beljak (5) 'estate' (derived from Latin <i>villa</i>)
Wellersdorf (2/3)	Velinja vas (2/3) 'Velen's or Velan's village'

Many names of Slovenian origin have a long tradition and are documented from a very early date, e.g.:

Bela	Vellach	975	Velach 'white river'
Ostrovica	(Hoch-) Osterwitz	860	Astaruuiza 'top of the rock'
Ribnica	Reifnitz	977	Ribniza 'fish river'
Trebinje	Treffen	860	Trebina 'new ground by forest clearing'
Zvirče	Wirtschach	965	Vuirzsosah 'Zverko's village'

Some names that today are used only in German were first documented in Slovenian, e.g., *Niederdorf* 'lower village' (Hörzendorf), 993 *Podinauuiz*, which today would be *Podnja* (or *Spodnja*) *ves* or *vas*. From the examples of Slovenian *Pliberk* 'lead castle or castle of courtly love' or *Suha* 'dry stream' for German *Bleiburg* (1228 *Pliburch*) or *Zauchen*, we can see that names were borrowed from one language into another at an early date — before the German diphthongization, i.e., before the 13th century.

There continues to be some controversy concerning the Slovenian spelling of several place names, for instance, the choice that has to be made between ... *vas*~*ves* (e.g., *Dobrla ves* and *Dobrla vas* 'Dobrla's village' for *Eberndorf*) and between writing *Tulce* or *Tuce* '*Тълчанъ's village' for *Tutzach*. Indeed, it is difficult to clarify the situation: the traditional spellings reflect developments in Carinthian phonology and the spellings preferred by minority leaders and scholars are either standard Slovenian variants (*Dobrla vas*) or misunderstandings (*Tuce*), given that *Tulce* (or more accurately *Tulce*) reflects the phonological /*tuwce*/ which arose from the old **Tvlčiče* (cf. the old form *Tučē*).

Identifying the correct spelling of place names is never a straightforward task — for example, in German, we find *Bruck* vs. *Brücke* ('bridge'),

a similar problem to *ves* or *vas* in Slovenian. The name of the Styrian town *Bruck an der Mur* has the dialect form, but *Möllbrücke* in Carinthia the standard German form, although it is pronounced [melprúkn] in the local dialect.⁶

The Common Slavic word *vbsb* ‘village’ has two forms in the Slovenian dialects: *ves* or *vas*. In Carinthia, only a small area to the east of Völkermarkt/Velikovec uses *vas*; the rest of the territory uses *ves*. The latter spelling is the general form found in old Austrian gazetteers, and today it is the officially preferred form. Yet, only *vas* is used in Slovenian literature. The problem, if it is a problem, is merely anecdotal as both forms are originally Slovenian, as are the composed names, e.g. *Bilčovs* ‘Ludmannsdorf’ (< **Bylbčŏ vbsb*, the old accusative).

A similar, albeit an orthographic, problem is provided by *Slovenji Plajberg~Plajberk*: here, the inhabitants are known as *Plajberžani* (in Slovenian there only exists the morphophonemic alternation *g~ž* or *k~č*, e.g., in *Pliberk* : *Pliberčani*), therefore, *Plajberg* with *-g* is phonologically correct.⁷

Place names form a part of the linguistic and cultural heritage; moreover, they serve to connect people in bilingual areas, as each place is named in both languages. A few miles from Villach/ Beljak there is a mountain called *Dreiländereck* ‘the corner of three countries’. Its old Slovenian name is *Peč*, which in German is written as *Petsch* or translated to *Ofen*. This word means ‘stove’, but also ‘rock’ — in both Slovenian and German. There are many occurrences of *Ofen/Peč* in Carinthia and in the Styrian area. This one example is highly indicative of the similarity of semantic conceptions in the two Carinthian languages. In 1918, the Italian border was shifted to this place — the Italian name *Monte Forno* was created, a translation of both *Peč* and *Ofen*. The new name *Dreiländereck* reveals a new way of thinking: it does not identify a frontier in the traditional sense, rather it marks the point that connects three countries.

6 *Bruck* ist the old dialect form, today only *Bruckn*.

7 cf. also Pohl 2010, p. 32–39.

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