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“The First Language in My Head”: Student Attitudes to L2 English and L1 Slovene

ABSTRACT

With the global spread of English, young people are exposed to it while still acquiring their first language. As the impact of English in Slovenia is relatively under-researched, this study investigates how often and in what situations university students in Slovenia use English, and what attitudes they have to it compared to Slovene. The results are based on 365 respondents, all students of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, who filled out an online questionnaire. The results show that Slovene still dominates in everyday communication, but that English has become an essential skill which goes beyond the traditional function of a foreign language. In addition, many respondents already feel it to be an additional first language, with a sizable group reporting a preference for English as their intimate language.

Keywords: English, foreign language, mother tongue, Slovene, sociolinguistics

»Prvi jezik v moji glavi«: stališča študentov do angleščine kot drugega in slovenščine kot prvega jezika

POVZETEK

Angleščina je danes vseprisotna, mladi pa se z njo srečujejo že med usvajanjem prvega jezika. Ker je vpliv angleščine v slovenskem prostoru relativno slabo raziskan, smo želeli pridobiti podatke o tem, kako pogosto in v katerih govornih položajih študenti v Sloveniji uporabljajo angleščino ter kakšen odnos imajo do nje v primerjavi s slovenščino. Rezultati temeljijo na odgovorih 365 študentov Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, ki so rešili spletni vprašalnik. Rezultati kažejo, da slovenščina pri vsakdanji komunikaciji še vedno prevladuje, vendar pa je angleščina nepogrešljiva in v tem oziru že presega funkcijo le tujega jezika v tradicionalnem smislu. Mnogi anketiranci tudi čutijo, da jim je angleščina že nekakšen dodatni prvi jezik, pri čemer pomembno število poroča, da je angleščina celo njihov preferenčni intimni jezik.

Ključne besede: angleščina, tuji jezik, materni jezik, slovenščina, sociolingvistika

1 Introduction

Learning foreign languages has traditionally been popular in Slovenia. This can be attributed to a combination of factors, such as economic interests and the fact that Slovene does not enable successful communication on an international level (Skela 2011, 117). Nevertheless, the situation today is different than at any other time in history as young Slovenes are in constant contact with English through the internet, YouTube, TV, music etc. even while they are still acquiring their first language, which makes their acquisition of English noticeably different from that of previous generations. Thus, it is not only the educational process that influences their English proficiency, but also their environment in the form of the media they consume (cf. Peterson 2020, 3).

The pace of technological and societal change that has resulted in the increased presence of English in Slovenia is astounding, but despite some attempts there is a lack of research on the function English has among young people in Slovenia today and on the division of labour between English and Slovene in their everyday lives, as well as on the attitudes that the omnipresence of English engenders. This paper presents empirical data on the frequency and typical contexts of use for both languages among the student population at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, the extent of code-switching, and the affective factors related to the choice between English and Slovene. Following the literature review and methodology section, the results of a detailed survey are discussed comparing university students of English, university students of Slovene, and a group of university students who do not study either of these two languages as their major. The findings are summarized in the conclusion.

2 English in the World and in Slovenia

In the 1980s, three researchers created similar models for World Englishes at around the same time: McArthur (1987), Görlach (1988) and Kachru (1988). Of these, Kachru's model has remained the most influential in the global context (cf. Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 27–30; McKenzie 2010, 2; Peterson 2020, xxi). His model represents World Englishes within three concentric circles. The Inner Circle refers to native speakers of English in areas where English is the dominant language. It is surrounded by the Outer Circle, which consists mainly of former British colonies where English has the status of a second language and where most speakers are bilingual. The final, Expanding Circle represents populations that are learning English as a foreign language.

Despite its frequent use, Kachru's model has been problematized by many linguists (e.g., McKenzie 2010, 2–5; Pan et al. 2021, 2–3; Peterson 2020, xxiii, 13; Šabec 2014, 397). The main criticism is that it is too simplistic and does not reflect the reality on the ground. The criticism mainly concerns the outer and expanding circles. Apart from the fact that the linguistic situation in post-colonial countries is much more complex than the one depicted, Kachru, in the late 1980s, did not foresee such a rapid increase in the use of English throughout the world as part of the expanding circle.

Related to the different socio-historical backgrounds that have led to the use of English in different parts of the world are the notions of English as a first, second, foreign and additional

language. Within the fields of first and second language acquisition (FLA and SLA, respectively; Meisel (2011)), “first language” refers to what is traditionally termed the native language or mother tongue, and “second language” is equated with a foreign language, i.e., a language acquired later in life. Bilingual children, for instance, may learn two first languages, and become native speakers of both. In the field of World Englishes and post-colonial studies, however, the term second language is used for varieties of English in the Outer Circle (i.e., post-colonial varieties) and the term foreign language is used to refer to English as learned by speakers in the Expanding Circle (e.g., Percillier 2016). Within this framework, speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL; belonging to Kachru’s Outer Circle) are considered bilingual native speakers.

Phillipson (2007) writes about the difficulty of applying the term foreign language to all contexts in the Expanding Circle equally in his aptly titled chapter “English, No Longer a Foreign Language in Europe?”, but the question remains as to what the correct term would be. English as an additional language seems to be a possible candidate, but in the Anglosphere this term is already in use for either English as a language of education for non-native speakers in an English-speaking environment (e.g., Leung 2016) or as an additional language of instruction in schools and universities outside the English-speaking world (e.g., Jessner and Cenoz 2007).

In parallel, English is often referred to as a modern *lingua franca*, whereby it is primarily a means of successful communication between speakers who do not share the same first language; in this tradition, the question of the standard or correct use of English is set aside (Pan et al. 2021, 1; Peterson 2020, 131, 134).¹ The need for a common language of communication has increased with the opening of the global space, and English is often the language of communication in large multinational companies, for instance (van Mulken and Hendriks 2015, 404).

Slovenia is a prime example of the rapid spread of English in the 20th and 21st centuries. The study of English Language and Literature at the University of Ljubljana dates back to 1920 (“Oddelek za anglistiko in amerikanistiko” 2019, 22), but the influence of English only really began to be felt after the Second World War (Šabec 2014, 399–400), with the introduction of English in some upper secondary schools in 1945 (Skela 2019, 13) and more widely in 1958 (Mežek 2009, 28–29). Its popularity grew in the 1960s, especially in the context of a general fascination with technology and the West (Šabec 2014, 399–400). For some, it was also a symbol of economic success and resistance to authority, as reported by Janez Dular, former Head of the Sector for Slovene Language in an interview with Mežek (2009, 29–30). By 1976, twice as many students in Slovenia were learning English as a foreign language compared to German, despite historical and geographical ties to the latter (Mežek 2009, 29–30). At that time, the need to fill lexical gaps also led to the gradual adoption of English expressions that were integrated into Slovene (Šabec 2014, 399–400).

¹ Pisanski Peterlin (2013) found, however, that trainee translators at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, felt “there was little room for deviations from native-speaker standards” in academic discourse even when the target was an international audience composed primarily of non-native speakers.

While children in Slovenia have been exposed to early English instruction in the form of extracurricular activities for several decades, English was officially moved from the fourth to the second year of primary school in 2016, so that children on average now start learning English at the age of 7. In the first year, at the age of 6, a foreign language is taught as an elective subject (Podpečan 2017, 3). English is generally considered the third most important school subject after Slovene and mathematics, and Slovene students are regularly externally assessed in English by the National Examinations Centre (RIC) in Years 6 and 9, with a foreign language (predominantly English)² being a core part of the national secondary school-leaving exams. In addition, many university curricula include courses in English for Specific Purposes in the first two years of the study programme (Kalin Golob et al. 2013, 399).

English also has a strong presence outside the school environment. An interesting factor is the issue of dubbing vs subtitling of non-Slovene films and videos. In Slovenia, only content for very young children is dubbed. Otherwise, subtitles dominate, but even these are not available from all providers. Netflix, a global streaming service, does not offer Slovene subtitles or dubbing, and Apple does not have a Slovene menu option for the operating system on its devices. This means that if Slovenes want to participate in the global technology and entertainment industry, they often have to use English for purely practical reasons.

These frequent encounters with English in Slovenia generally correspond to relatively high proficiency levels. According to a 2012 survey by the European Union, 92% of Slovenes claimed the ability to speak at least one language in addition to their first language. The languages they claimed they spoke well enough to have a conversation in were Croatian (61%), English (59%) and German (42%) (European Commission 2012a, 5–7, 21, 69, 80). In another EU survey from the same year, Slovenia ranked 5th out of 14 countries (behind Sweden, Malta, the Netherlands, and Estonia), with 25% of second-year secondary school students reporting their English skills to be at CEFR³ level B1 and 29% at CEFR level B2 (European Commission 2012b). Education First also included Slovenia in its 2018 English survey results.⁴ Among the countries that participated, Slovenia performed very well, ranking 9th in the top group of “very high proficiency” (CEFR level B2) together with, in order of achievement, Sweden, the Netherlands, Singapore, Norway, Denmark, South Africa, Luxembourg, Finland, Germany, Belgium and Austria (Education First 2018).

The coexistence of Slovene and English has had a major impact on Slovene, and the ways in which the two languages mix have mainly been researched in an online context. Šabec (2009) writes about the so-called Sloglish in Slovene blogs. She focuses on numerous English lexical

² A handful of schools still teach German as the first foreign language. In 2021, for example, national examinations in Year 6 included 20,750 students tested in English and 506 students tested in German as the first foreign language (Državni izpitni center 2021).

³ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001) is an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale from A1 to C2; levels B1 and B2 holistically describe “independent users”.

⁴ The survey included countries with at least 400 test takers, but 92% of the respondents in this survey were under 40 with an average age of 26, so it can be assumed that the results were skewed in favour of the younger generations, who tend to have better language skills; the generational gap in English skills may be larger in some countries (including Slovenia) than in others.

items, code-switching, and influences of English syntax. Poteko's (2020) analysis of titles of videos by Slovene YouTubers shows a similar pattern, with 24% of the analysed titles being written in a mixture of Slovene and English, and with frequent English lexical items, nominal phrases with English syntax, and intra-sentential code-switching.

3 Attitudes to English

Regardless of whether English is conceptualized as a foreign language or as a *lingua franca*, non-native speakers are supposed to use it as a means of communication. But language is more than that – it is also a way of expressing identity. People form their identities within society, and language is an important element in this process (Sung 2014, 95). Attitudes to a language and to the speakers of a language are also formed in the context of the identity that an individual has within the group or society to which they belong (Pan et al. 2021, 2–3). When we talk to others, we adapt to them.

The motivation to adapt comes from a desire to communicate effectively and efficiently and to be accepted in society (Garrett 2010, 105–107). The fact that English has become an international language has also been influenced by positive attitudes to it and its variants (McKenzie 2010, 37). Baker (1992, 29) recognizes language attitudes as an umbrella term that encompasses at least eight different specific attitudes, including attitude to language variation, dialects and speech style; attitude to language groups, communities and minorities; attitude to the uses of a specific language; and attitude to language preference. A considerable number of studies on attitudes to English, World Englishes, and identity have been conducted in Asia: on attitudes to Chinese English and identity among Chinese university students (Pan et al. 2021); on identity and use of English among university students in Hong Kong (Sung 2014); on perceptions of English as an international language among university students in South Korea (Lee and Lee 2019), etc.

In the Slovene context, Šabec (2009; 2011; 2014) has studied the susceptibility of Slovene and Slovenes to English influences through indirect contact. This is a consequence of globalization processes, increased mobility, and the internet. Šabec questions the role of Slovene today, how it is changing, and whether it is still important in terms of identity. For instance, when she examined the language of Slovene bloggers (Šabec 2009), she found that they used English to express their identity and affiliation with online groups. English is thus not only a means of communication, but also a way of showing belonging, in this case to online communities.

The use of English has sparked controversy in Slovenia. In the past, Slovene has known threats to its very existence, mainly due to the territory being part of several multinational states in which speakers of Slovene were a minority (Kalin Golob 1994, 30). Throughout history, Slovenes have had a strong aspiration for their own identity, and language has been at the heart of the community. However, in today's era of multiculturalism and globalization, identity and how it is shaped and perceived is being transformed, and some people fear for the language (Perkon Kofol 2014, 7–8). Following concerns about the threat posed by German (in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy) and later by Serbo-Croatian (in Yugoslavia), fears arose among Slovene linguists in the early 1990s about the future of the Slovene language,

which was seen as existentially threatened by English (Kalin Golob 1994). Among other things, they were concerned about the multitude of foreign company names and foreign words in advertisements. Kalin Golob (1994) catalogues a list of complaints by both linguists and the general public, about potential dangers, including that Slovene would be threatened if it could not perform all the functions that English could and if it borrowed too many English lexical items. Although Slovene can hardly compete with English today in the production of video content and music, for instance, it is still the official language in the country and the dominant language for the majority of Slovene speakers in most situations, and therefore cannot be labelled endangered.

Gerenčer (2011) conducted a survey as part of her thesis work in 2010 on the attitudes of different age groups of Slovene speakers to English. The survey included a relatively small sample of 80 people from different age groups and with different levels of educational attainment. When asked whether they considered English to be more important than Slovene, Year 8 pupils and university students of English mostly answered yes (14 out of 20 in both groups), university students of other majors overwhelmingly responded no (16 out of 20), and adult learners were somewhere in between (9 yes and 11 no). Generally, all four groups had positive attitudes to English, and all saw advantages to being able to speak it. All four groups identified English as (very) important, especially abroad, and in general they did not see English as a threat to Slovene.

Another survey was conducted in 2015 by a team from the Center for Applied Linguistics (Washington, DC), the Institute for Ethnic Studies (Ljubljana), and the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (Novak Lukanovič and Limon 2015). The survey was distributed to Slovene students with experience learning English. The aim of the survey was to learn about students' experiences learning English in Slovenia and their attitudes to language diversity in Slovenia in general. The results of the survey have never been published and are made public for the first time in this article with the permission of the Slovene project leader, Sonja Novak Lukanovič.⁵

The survey was extensive and contained many open questions. Only the parts most relevant to the present study are included here. The questionnaire was completed by 252 respondents, 206 of whom attended Slovene-language primary and secondary school and 163 of whom were at the time students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. In general, 70.2% started learning English in elementary school and 21.0% in preschool. They self-rated their performance as "very well" (the highest point on the scale) as follows: listening (89.7%), reading (85.3%), speaking (69.4%) and writing (63.9%).

The results of the survey (Table 1) showed that a proportion of students used both Slovene and English when communicating with their peers, while they did not do so when communicating with family members, indicating a generational trend in the use of English.

The questionnaire also asked about the respondents' attitudes to English and Slovene (Table 2).

⁵ The data are available at the INDOC Library of the Institute for Ethnic Studies.

TABLE 1. Language preferences according to interlocutor (%) (Novak Lukanovič and Limon 2015).

	Mostly Slovene	Some Slovene and some English	Slovene and another language	Other/No answer
With your family	77.8	/	6.3	15.9
With friends	43.7	15.5	25.4	15.4
With classmates and friends in college	53.2	15.5	15.9	15.4

TABLE 2. Attitudes to English and Slovene (% of agreement) (Novak Lukanovič and Limon 2015).

	Agree/Agree somewhat	Disagree/Disagree somewhat	Other/No answer
Some experts believe that there is too much emphasis on English.	33.7	41.6	24.7
Some experts believe the emphasis on English is harmful to other languages.	31.7	43.7	24.6
Some experts believe that emphasis on English is harmful to Slovene.	26.2	49.2	24.6
Some experts believe English is functioning as a <i>lingua franca</i> .	69.9	5.6	24.5

One third of the students saw English as a threat to other languages to some extent, while a quarter saw it as a threat to Slovene. They discussed their opinions in their responses to open-ended questions, as shown in the following selected examples:⁶

- *Nonetheless, Slovenia is a country with a small population, and our language does not help us communicate internationally, which is why some people are forgetting the importance of knowing their mother tongue as a way of preserving their identity and culture.*
- *We ourselves are endangering Slovene by allowing English to be used in situations where it is not needed. Lectures (except on English) should be in Slovene, if nothing else to develop our vocabulary.*
- *English, as a *lingua franca*, is intruding into academic language and thus hindering the development of Slovene scientific terms. It is also taking over other areas of our lives.*

While there have been some previous attempts at investigating the use of English among university students in Slovenia and their attitudes to the language, these studies have been

⁶ Questionnaire responses to open-ended questions are included for illustrative purposes; if they were submitted in English, they are quoted exactly as recorded in the questionnaire, and translated responses are marked with asterisks: *...* (all translations here and elsewhere in the article are by the authors).

few and far between, and the results have either not been published or were based on a very small sample. At the same time, this is a dynamic area where we can expect change to happen relatively rapidly, further influenced by the fast pace of technological development and the participation of Slovene youth in the global arena of social and other media. The research questions investigated in the present study relate to the extent English and Slovene are used among students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, what attitudes they express to the two languages, and how these features may differ depending on whether the students study English, Slovene or neither of these two languages.

4 Methodology

Following pre-testing and a focus group to pilot the questionnaire and get better insight into how the questions were understood by the respondents, data for the study were collected using an online questionnaire on the 1ka.arnes.si platform⁷ (to facilitate widespread distribution and inclusion of students from different study programmes) that was open in April and May 2022 and distributed primarily⁸ among students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. It contained 27 questions with altogether 72 items, organized into 10 sections. Only the last question (*How would you describe your attitude to English and Slovene?*) was open-ended, while the other questions were multiple choice or used some type of Likert scale (generally a five-point or seven-point one). The questionnaire could be completed in either Slovene or English, and respondents were informed about the purpose as well as the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey.

The target population was students at the Faculty of Arts in the academic year 2021–2022 who were native speakers of Slovene, and in particular three subgroups: students of English; students of Slovene; and students studying neither English nor Slovene as their major, hereafter referred to as “students generally”. A total of 903 clicks were registered, with 468 respondents completing the questionnaire in full and 103 respondents completing it in part. Of these, 409 were students of the Faculty of Arts and L1 speakers of Slovene, which represents approximately 10% of all students enrolled at the Faculty of Arts in this academic year, but 44 students who studied both English and Slovene or studied at the Department of Translation (where they are required to study both English and Slovene as well as a third language) were excluded from the analysis to ensure that there was no overlap between the three groups analysed.

The analysis presented here is therefore based on a sample of 365 respondents and includes responses from individuals belonging to three specific subgroups:

- Students generally (N = 124), of whom 88 (71%) were female students and 34 (27.4%) were male students, while two students (1.6%) chose “other”. They ranged in age between 19 and 36 years, with a mean of 22.89 years of age. Slightly more than

⁷ The questionnaire was developed independently by the authors, who were not, at the time of the study, familiar with the previous unpublished research by Sonja Novak Lukanovič and David Limon (2015) discussed above.

⁸ Since the link to the questionnaire was distributed using various channels, including social media, it was sometimes shared by participants with people outside the target group.

half of the respondents in this group were single subject students following one study programme, and a little less than half were double major students. Students from 18 different departments were represented, with the most coming from the Department of History (44),⁹ from the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Department of Art History (15 each), and from the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory and the Department of Sociology (14 each).

- Students of English (N = 130) comprised 108 (83.1%) female students, 17 (13.1%) male students and five (3.8%) students who identified as “other”. They ranged in age between 19 and 28 years, with a mean of 22.06 years of age. In this group, over 70% of respondents were double major students.
- Students of Slovene (N = 111) included 93 (83.8%) female students and 18 (16.2%) male students. They ranged in age between 19 and 33 years, with a mean of 21.69 years of age. In this group, approximately 80% of the respondents were double major students.

While the groups of students of English and students of Slovene were demographically closely comparable, the group of students generally included more male students and more single subject students. Where there are noticeable differences according to gender, this is reported in the results.¹⁰

The first part of the questionnaire included questions about when and how much students used English and Slovene in their daily lives, while the second part explored their attitudes to the two languages; the last part contained demographic questions (e.g., student status, year of study) that enabled us to determine whether a particular respondent belonged to a particular target group. The results presented in the rest of this paper are based on quantitative analysis of selected questions and on partial coding of responses to the open-ended question. Analysis was performed using Excel (for descriptive statistics and coding of responses) and SPSS (for inferential statistics).

5 Use of English and Slovene

Students in all three groups felt they had a good command of English, but there was considerable variation in the average holistic self-assessment (“How good is your English?”) on a scale of 0 (I do not speak it) to 5 (excellent). All students reported having at least some English skills, with one student of Slovene and one respondent in the group of students generally rating their English proficiency as poor (level 2 on the scale). The group of students of English rated themselves highest with a mean of 4.37, followed by the group of students generally with 4.05 and students of Slovene with 3.57. In response to a related question,

⁹ The figures for the individual departments include both single subject and double major students; a student doing a double major in history and sociology, for instance, counts towards both departments but is only included in the overall number (N = 124) once.

¹⁰ Some departments only offer single subject programmes, some only double major programmes, and some offer both options; aggregate comparisons of single subject and double major students are therefore not informative, because study programme is always a confounding factor and such differences also do not directly pertain to the research question.

students overwhelmingly agreed that their friends had good English skills: On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely true), students generally agreed the most (4.41), followed closely by students of Slovene (4.38), with students of English being the most critical (4.18).

TABLE 3. “In which language do you more often...?” (% of respondents).

		Communi- cate in general	Write	Read	Speak	Listen
Students generally	Slovene	84.7	83.1	41.9	90.3	27.4
	English	1.6	3.2	34.7	0.0	56.5
	Equally	13.7	13.7	23.4	9.7	16.1
Students of English	Slovene	66.9	40.0	10.0	70.8	20.8
	English	8.5	37.7	76.2	5.4	60.0
	Equally	24.6	22.3	13.8	23.8	19.2
Students of Slovene	Slovene	94.6	97.3	79.3	97.3	53.2
	English	2.7	0.9	7.2	0.9	27.0
	Equally	2.7	1.8	13.5	1.8	19.8

Table 3 shows what percentage of respondents in the three groups use which language more often for different types of language use in each group. The numbers in bold show the dominant language for each activity. While Slovene remains the dominant language across the board in all groups of students – all of whom are L1 speakers of Slovene – there is a marked difference in the group of students of English, where one third of the students claim to generally communicate in English at least half of the time. On the other hand, the two receptive modes of language use, listening and reading, are those in which the group of students studying neither English nor Slovene prefer English or use it equally at least half of the time, and even students of Slovene read and especially listen to English for a considerable amount of time. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who use English more often than Slovene for individual types of language use. In some cases, female students (from all three subgroups combined) reported a higher percentage of English dominance: 45 (15.6%) reported more often using English to write compared to seven (10.1%) male students, and 121 (41.9%) female students reported using English more often to read compared to 23 (33.3%) male students.

As for specific activities involving different kinds of text types, Figure 2 shows that all students, regardless of their study programme, almost exclusively watch videos, series, and films in English (88.3% among students of Slovene and 99.2% among the other two groups). Across text types, English is used particularly often for receptive activities relating to general texts (e.g., watching films, listening to music). There is a considerable decline in use when the texts consumed are fairly specific (e.g., study materials, instruction manuals). Once again it can be seen that English is rarely employed in productive language use and personal communication.

I more often... in English than in Slovene

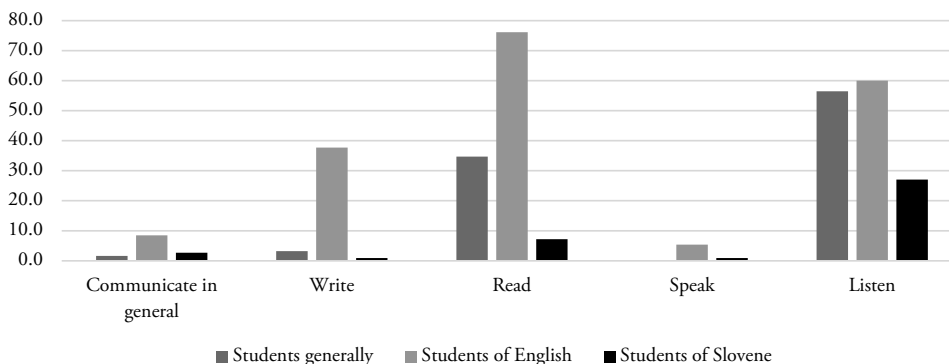


FIGURE 1. English dominance across language use by student category (% of respondents).

In some cases, there were noticeable gender differences: female students used English more often than male students to read subtitles (191 (66.1%) vs. 32 (46.4%)), read books (111 (38.4%) vs. 14 (20.3%)), write literary texts (89 (30.8%) vs. 10 (14.5%)), and read study materials (117 (40.5%) vs. 21 (30.4%)). Male students, on the other hand, used English more often than female students to read instruction manuals (28 (40.6%) vs. 93 (32.2%)).

Apart from watching videos, series, and films, the differences between the groups are fairly pronounced, with the general group of students mostly patterning between students of English and Slovene. The group of students studying neither English nor Slovene also reported

English used more often than Slovene to...

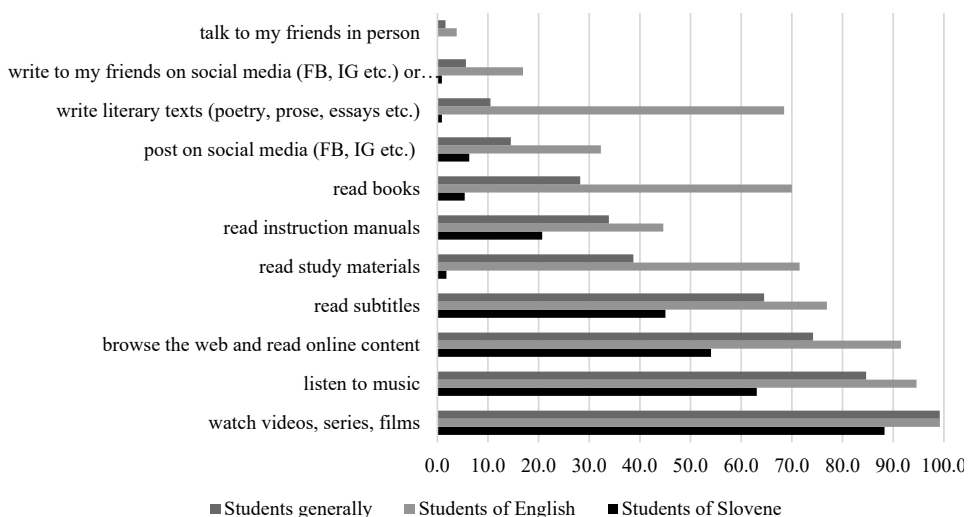


FIGURE 2. English dominance across text types (% of respondents).

predominant use of English (more than half of the time) when listening to music (84.7% vs. 94.6% among students of English and 63.1% among students of Slovene), reading texts on the internet (74.2% vs. 91.5% among students of English and 54.1% among students of Slovene) and when using subtitles (64.5% vs. 76.9% among students of English and 45.0% among students of Slovene). Students of English also frequently use English to read study materials (71.5%), read books (70.0%) and write literary texts (68.5%).

In another part of the survey, the students again indicated their agreement with the statements on a scale of 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true). All three groups agreed that they spent the most time looking at English content online (all three groups with a score above 4). Students of English agreed that they mostly read books in English (4.21) while agreement was lower for the other two groups (2.74 for students generally and 1.67 for students of Slovene). Students of Slovene (4.05) and students in the general group (3.5), but not students of English (1.91), agreed with the statement that they always chose a book written in Slovene if it was available in both languages. However, if the book was originally written in English, students of English (4.71) and students generally (3.48) expressed a stronger preference for the English original compared to students of Slovene (2.67).

Code-switching was investigated separately. In the survey, we asked respondents to estimate how much English they use in various situations of language use in spoken and written communication with other Slovene speakers on a scale of 1 (none) to 7 (all the time). To help correct for the subjective nature of the self-assessment, the prompt in Table 4 was provided.

TABLE 4. Prompt for use of English in code-switching.

<p><i>The next set of questions relates to the linguistic situations in which you communicate with speakers of Slovene. To illustrate, here are some examples of the use of English in these situations.</i></p> <p>How much English do you generally use?</p> <p>None - Življenje je res bedno. Na splošno imam en tak čuden občutek. Večkrat se vprašam, kaj sploh je smisel.</p> <p>Very little (up to 5%) - Življenje je res bedno. Na splošno imam en tak čuden občutek. Večkrat se vprašam, kaj sploh je <i>point</i>.</p> <p>Little (up to 10%) - <i>Life</i> je res bedno. Na splošno imam en tak čuden občutek. Večkrat se vprašam, kaj sploh je <i>point</i>.</p> <p>Medium (10–25%) - <i>Life</i> je res bedno. <i>Overall</i> imam en tak čuden občutek. Večkrat se vprašam, kaj sploh je <i>point</i>.</p> <p>Quite a lot (25–50%) - <i>Life</i> je res bedno. <i>Overall</i> imam en tak čuden <i>feeling</i>. Večkrat se vprašam, <i>what's the point</i>.</p> <p>A lot (50–75%) - <i>Life sucks</i>. <i>Overall</i> imam en tak <i>weird feeling</i>. Večkrat se vprašam, <i>what's the point</i>.</p> <p>All the time - <i>Life sucks</i>. <i>Overall I have this weird feeling. I often ask myself what's the point</i>.</p>

When students who are L1 speakers of Slovene communicate with other L1 speakers of Slovene, they self-estimate that they use English expressions “very little” or “little” (levels 2–3 on the Likert scale). As can be seen in Table 5, differences in the type of language situation tend to be more important than differences between the three groups of students. English is used the most when respondents communicate with their peers and it generally does not matter whether the texts they produce are spoken or written. Students of English use English expressions the most; the results suggest that in their social media messages at least a quarter of the text and possibly as much as half is in English. Students of Slovene use English expressions considerably less, and the general group of students studying neither English nor Slovene consistently pattern between the two groups, but generally closer to students of Slovene.

TABLE 5. Use of English in various situations of language use (on a scale of 1 = none to 7 = all the time).

	Students generally	Students of English	Students of Slovene
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Talking to friends in person***	3.69 (1.33)	4.45 (1.31)	3.23 (1.09)
In text messages to friends***	3.66 (1.50)	4.66 (1.41)	3.14 (1.18)
In messages to friends on social media (FB, IG etc.)***	3.58 (1.52)	4.72 (1.38)	3.22 (1.27)
Talking to young people (15–30)***	3.46 (1.24)	4.05 (1.28)	3.17 (1.15)
In posts on social media (FB, IG etc.)***	3.19 (1.91)	4.47 (1.83)	2.84 (1.35)
Talking to adults (30–65)	2.50 (1.03)	2.74 (1.15)	2.19 (0.90)
Talking to children (up to 15)	2.33 (1.10)	2.50 (1.23)	2.19 (1.08)
Talking to parents in person	2.27 (1.00)	2.39 (1.06)	2.12 (0.87)
In text messages to parents	1.94 (1.03)	2.08 (1.11)	1.66 (0.81)
Talking to grandparents in person	1.43 (0.68)	1.43 (0.66)	1.33 (0.59)
Talking to the elderly (65+)	1.40 (0.61)	1.50 (0.70)	1.29 (0.55)

A one-way ANOVA was performed to establish whether the three groups of students differed significantly in their use of English in various situations of language use. The results revealed that there was a statistically highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$)¹¹ in the mean use of English between at least two groups in five situations of language use, marked in the table with ***.¹² When it comes to talking to friends in person ($F(2, 362) = [29.05]$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$), Tukey’s HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value was highly significantly different between students of English and students of Slovene ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.83, 1.59]) and between students of English and students generally ($p < 0.001$, 95%

¹¹ Abbreviations used in presenting statistical results: CI = confidence interval; d = Cohen’s d with Hedges’ correction; df = degrees of freedom; F = F-value; M = mean; p = significance (2-tailed); SD = standard deviation; t = t-value; η^2 = eta-squared.

¹² The results for talking to adults, text messages to parents and talking to the elderly also exhibit various levels of significance, but the effect sizes are small, which is why the data are not presented here in detail.

CI = [0.39, 1.13]), while the comparison between students of Slovene and students generally was weakly significant ($p = 0.017$, 95% CI = [-0.84, -0.07]). In text messages to friends ($F(2, 362) = [38.31]$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$), the mean value was likewise highly significantly different between students of English and students of Slovene ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [1.10, 1.94]) as well as between students of English and students generally ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.59, 1.41]), and the difference between students of Slovene and students generally was weakly significant ($p = 0.012$, 95% CI = [-0.94, -0.09]).

A similar pattern was found with regard to messages to friends on social media ($F(2, 357) = [38.22]$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$), where both the difference between students of English and students of Slovene ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [1.07, 1.93]), and the difference between students of English and students generally ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.71, 1.57]) are highly significant, but the groups of students of Slovene and students generally do not exhibit statistically significant differences. The situation is paralleled when talking to young people ($F(2, 361) = [16.45]$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$), as only the difference between students of English and students of Slovene ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.51, 1.25]), and the difference between students of English and students generally ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.22, 0.97]) are highly significant. The same is true of posting on social media ($F(2, 324) = [26.90]$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$), with highly significant differences between students of English and students of Slovene ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [1.06, 2.19]), and between students of English and students generally ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.69, 1.85]).

Although not a prevailing pattern, it can be pointed out that among the 130 students of English, three respondents claim to always use English when talking to their friends in person, eight use exclusively English for text messages to friends and nine for messages to friends on social media, and as many as 17 use English all the time when posting on social media. In the group of students generally ($N = 124$), one student uses exclusively English to talk to friends in person, two students use English all the time to send text messages or social media messages to friends, and nine students use exclusively English in their posts on social media. Not all activities were relevant to all respondents, with a significant number reporting they did not post on social media, while some also indicated they did not have relevant experience talking to specific age groups.

Some noticeable gender differences were observed across situations of language use. Although talking to parents in person is something all students rarely do in English, female students ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.00$) still do it significantly more often ($t(116.98) = 2.75$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.98$) than male students ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.86$). Female students also reportedly use more English when talking to young people ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.65$, $SD = 1.30$; $M_{\text{male}} = 3.22$, $SD = 1.08$; $t(119.33) = 2.84$, $p = 0.003$, $d = 1.26$), talking to friends ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.89$, $SD = 1.35$; $M_{\text{male}} = 3.43$, $SD = 1.21$; $t(112.51) = 2.75$, $p = 0.004$, $d = 1.33$), and when sending messages to friends on social media ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.95$, $SD = 1.54$; $M_{\text{male}} = 3.46$, $SD = 1.43$; $t(104.84) = 2.84$, $p = 0.007$, $d = 1.52$). Sending text messages to friends, talking to adults, and posting on social media also exhibit moderately significant gender differences – in all cases, the female students report using more English than their male counterparts.

6 Attitudes to English and Slovene

When students were asked directly which language was closest to them (however they understood this), there were large differences among the three groups. In the general group, 85% chose Slovene, 11% chose English and the rest either could not decide or added another language. Among students of English, 57% chose Slovene and 38% chose English, while among students of Slovene 96% chose Slovene and only 1% chose English. However, when a similar question was asked in the form of a statement (Table 6), the responses were somewhat different: On a more nuanced scale of 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true), respondents chose less extreme values and the overall picture is one in which the two languages share the students' affection to a greater extent.

TABLE 6. Student attitudes to English and Slovene (% of agreement on a scale of 1 = not at all true to 5 = completely true).

	Students generally				Students of English				Students of Slovene			
	1-2	3	4-5	M (SD)	1-2	3	4-5	M (SD)	1-2	3	4-5	M (SD)
I interact with English a lot out of necessity, as there is not enough content available in Slovene.	16.1	16.9	66.9	3.80 (1.17)	17.7	26.9	54.6	3.57 (1.09)	14.4	36.0	49.5	3.48 (1.11)
Slovene is closer to me than English.	13.7	20.2	66.1	3.82 (1.21)	30.8	36.2	33.1	3.08 (1.10)	5.4	9.9	84.7	4.49 (0.97)
I often can't think of a word in Slovene, so I prefer to use the English word.	28.2	22.6	49.2	3.34 (1.26)	8.5	21.5	70.0	3.97 (1.03)	42.3	37.8	18.9	2.65 (1.08)
Some things cannot be said well enough in Slovene, so I prefer to use English.	35.5	22.6	41.9	3.08 (1.36)	20.0	20.8	59.2	3.58 (1.18)	58.6	21.6	19.8	2.41 (1.22)
I find it easier to talk about intimate feelings, emotions and/or unpleasant topics in English.	47.6	16.1	36.3	2.78 (1.51)	21.5	13.8	64.6	3.83 (1.39)	72.1	15.3	12.6	1.94 (1.25)
I find it easier to express myself in English than in Slovene.	44.4	26.6	29.0	2.79 (1.30)	15.4	25.4	59.2	3.71 (1.18)	68.5	18.9	12.6	2.10 (1.14)
English sounds better than Slovene, so I often prefer to use it, even if I know how to say something in Slovene.	64.5	14.5	21.0	2.31 (1.35)	43.1	23.1	33.8	2.89 (1.30)	84.7	6.3	9.0	1.83 (1.02)

We were especially interested in examining students who expressed high agreement (Figure 3), corresponding to levels 4 and 5 on a scale of 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true).

While there is generally a high level of agreement on the practical necessity of using English, one in eight students of Slovene, two in three students of English and one in three students in the general group find it easier to express intimate emotions and/or discuss difficult topics in English than in Slovene, and even among students of Slovene 9% feel that English sounds better than Slovene. In addition to the responses in Figure 3, students also indicated which language they used for introspective activities such as thinking, dreaming and talking to themselves. In all cases, English had an important presence: the lowest figure was 10% among students of Slovene who (also) dream in English, while the highest figures were recorded among students of English, one in four of whom reported talking to themselves exclusively in English and over 70% reported talking to themselves only or also in English (the corresponding figures were 28% for students of Slovene and 40% for the general group). Among students generally, 40% reported thinking also or only in English, while the figure was 23% among students of Slovene and 80% among students of English.

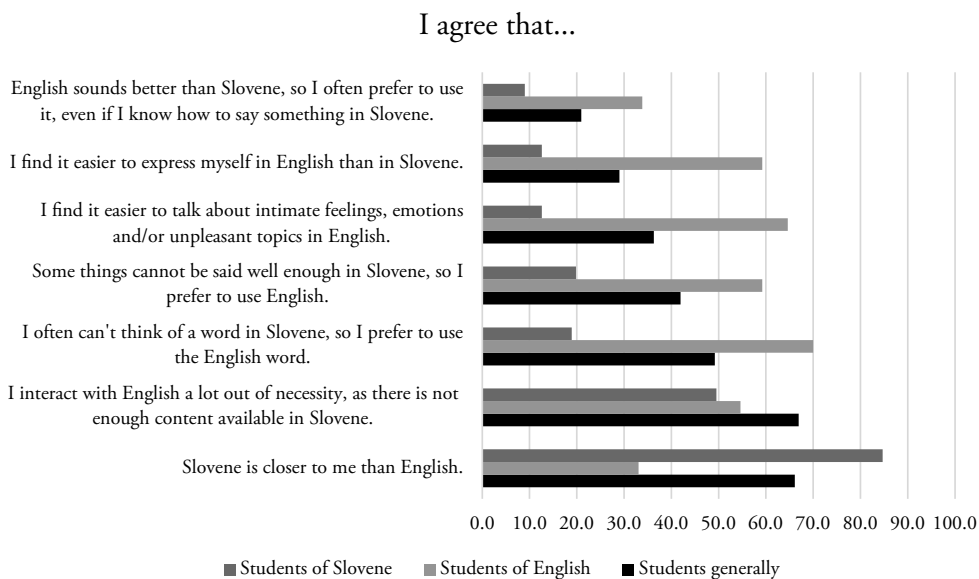


FIGURE 3. Agreement with attitudinal statements (% true or completely true).

A one-way ANOVA was performed using Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons to establish whether the three groups of students differed significantly in their attitudes. With the exception of the statement "I interact with English a lot out of necessity", all other statements yield significant differences between the three groups, as shown in Table 7.¹³

When negative attitudes were explored, students of Slovene expressed their disapproval more strongly when it came to the Slovene proficiency of potential friends and partners, while both students of English and students in general would be more bothered if their friends or partners could not speak English. The use of English words in Slovene and devices that do

¹³ * = weak significance ($p < 0.05$); ** = moderate significance ($p < 0.01$); *** = high significance ($p < 0.001$)

TABLE 7. Statistically significant differences in attitudes to English across groups (one-way ANOVA, Tukey's HSD).

	F	df	η^2	Group	p	CI
I often can't think of a word in Slovene, so I prefer to use the English word.	40.57	2, 361	0.18	Students of English vs. students generally***	< 0.001	0.30 0.96
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	0.97 1.66
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	-1.03 -0.34
English sounds better than Slovene, so I often prefer to use it, even if I know how to say something in Slovene.	22.21	2, 362	0.1	Students of English vs. students generally**	0.001	0.21 0.94
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	0.69 1.44
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally**	0.008	-0.87 -0.10
Some things cannot be said well enough in Slovene, so I prefer to use English.	25.74	2, 362	0.13	Students of English vs. students generally**	0.005	0.13 0.87
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	0.78 1.54
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	-1.05 -0.28
Slovene is closer to me than English.	49.13	2, 362	0.21	Students of English vs. students generally***	< 0.001	-1.07 -0.42
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	-1.75 -1.07
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	0.32 1.00
I find it easier to express myself in English than in Slovene.	53.65	2, 362	0.23	Students of English vs. students generally***	< 0.001	0.56 1.28
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	1.24 1.98
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	-1.06 -0.32
I find it easier to talk about intimate feelings, emotions and/or unpleasant topics in English.	55.87	2, 362	0.24	Students of English vs. students generally***	< 0.001	0.64 1.46
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	1.47 2.32
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	-1.27 -0.42

not offer menus in Slovene are seen as less of a problem by students of English compared to the general group and especially students of Slovene, as shown in Table 8. Here, gender was found to be significant in one case as female students ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.33$) would be significantly more bothered if their partner did not speak English ($t(103.07) = 2.69$, $p = 0.008$, $d = 1.33$) than male students ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.32$).

TABLE 8. Negative attitudes (mean agreement on a scale of 1 = not at all true to 5 = completely true).

	Students generally	Students of English	Students of Slovene
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
It would bother me if my partner didn't speak English.	2.86 (1.38)	3.21 (1.31)	2.73 (1.29)
It would bother me if my partner didn't speak Slovene.	2.71 (1.34)	2.47 (1.36)	3.44 (1.40)
It bothers me when others use English words instead of Slovene ones.	2.62 (1.29)	2.26 (1.20)	2.99 (1.10)
It bothers me if a device does not have the menu available in Slovene.	2.42 (1.46)	1.83 (1.12)	2.96 (1.46)
It would bother me if a friend of mine didn't speak English.	2.15 (1.23)	2.05 (1.03)	2.00 (1.10)
It would bother me if a friend of mine didn't speak Slovene.	1.89 (1.14)	1.71 (0.90)	2.32 (1.23)

Generally, the attitudes expressed were not strongly negative, with only two responses exceeding a mean score of 3 (partly true) on a scale of 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true). More than half of the students in the general group and among students of English would not mind if a friend did not speak Slovene (35% among students of Slovene), and approximately 40% in all groups would not mind (a score of 1 = not at all true) if a friend did not speak English. It is also interesting to see how many students in each group expressed a strong (4) or very strong (5) negative attitude. As shown in Figure 4, a lack of Slovene skills was particularly irritating for students of Slovene. Students of English were more likely than the other two groups to see their partner's lack of English skills as a problem, but not to a particularly great extent, and the general group would actually be more bothered than students of English if their friends could not speak English.

I (strongly) agree that...

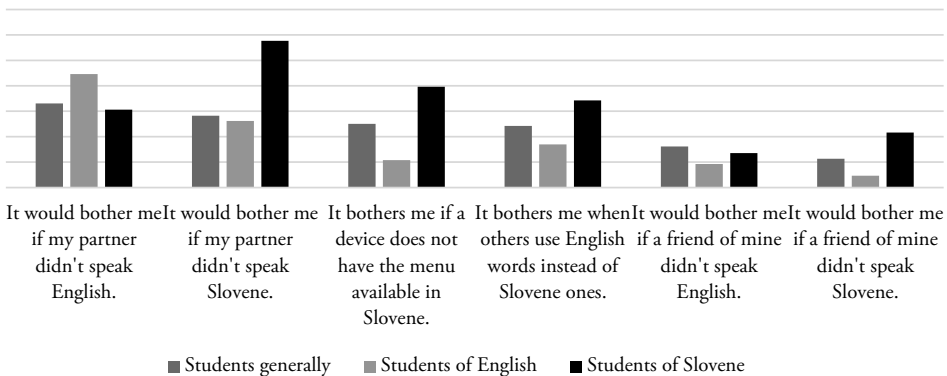


FIGURE 4. Strong negative attitudes (% that chose 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 = not at all true to 5 = completely true).

Once again, a one-way ANOVA using Tukey’s HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed the three groups of students differed significantly in their attitudes. Overall, the respondents in different groups care statistically uniformly about whether their friends or partners can speak English. All other statements yielded significant differences between the three groups, as shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9. Statistically significant differences in negative attitudes across groups (one-way ANOVA, Tukey’s HSD).

	F	df	η^2	Group	p	CI	
It bothers me when others use English words instead of Slovene ones.	11.04	2, 362	0.06	Students of English vs. students generally*	0.047	-0.71	0.00
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	-1.10	-0.36
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally	0.050	0.00	0.74
It bothers me if a device does not have the menu available in Slovene.	21.24	2, 362	0.11	Students of English vs. students generally**	0.002	-0.99	-0.19
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	-1.54	-0.72
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally**	0.006	0.13	0.96
It would bother me if my partner didn't speak Slovene.	16.16	2, 362	0.08	Students of English vs. students generally	0.340	-0.64	0.16
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	-1.39	-0.56
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally***	< 0.001	0.31	1.15
It would bother me if a friend of mine didn't speak Slovene.	9.62	2, 362	0.05	Students of English vs. students generally	0.391	-0.50	0.14
				Students of English vs. students of Slovene***	< 0.001	-0.94	-0.28
				Students of Slovene vs. students generally**	0.008	0.09	0.76

Finally, there were 236 responses to the open-ended question, “How would you describe your attitude towards English and Slovene?” The following categories were coded: positive attitude to Slovene, positive attitude to English, neutral attitude, and English as a useful tool for communication. Each answer could belong to more than one category. Among the 75 students in the general group who answered the open-ended question, 63 (84%) expressed positive attitudes to Slovene, and 42 (56%) to English. In this group, 29 students (39%) indicated that they perceived English primarily in terms of its practical role. Among students of Slovene, the vast majority of those who answered the open-ended question (56 out of 63; 89%) expressed a positive attitude to Slovene, approximately half (30; 48%) also expressed a positive attitude to English, and the same number saw English as a means of communication.

Most students of English who answered the open-ended question (85 out of 98; 87%) expressed a positive attitude to English, two thirds (68; 69%) also to Slovene, while only 13 (13%) emphasized the pragmatic value of English. Negative attitudes were rarely explicitly expressed, but were sometimes implied.

7 Competitive or Complementary?

The results show that students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, believe themselves to have a very good command of English, which is in line with other research findings mentioned in the theoretical discussion above. The students' high self-assessment in English is very similar to Gerenčer's (2011) results, while students pursuing majors other than Slovene or English generally rated themselves slightly higher in our survey compared to hers (4.05 vs. 3.35). Since our study was conducted 12 years after Gerenčer's, this may be due to the increasing prevalence of English since, and perceived proficiency levels may be expected to continue to rise further in the future.¹⁴ In the survey conducted by Novak Lukanovič and Limon in 2015, students also predominantly chose "very well" (the highest possible ranking) when rating their English proficiency. It needs to be pointed out, however, that self-assessment does not necessarily correlate with the actual language level, and authors such as Šabec (2016) express doubts about students' claims of English mastery.

The responses to the final open question, which are included here for illustrative purposes, comprised both claims of equal proficiency in Slovene and English (**I speak both languages fluently and use them frequently in my daily life**_{GEN}; **I cannot recall a time when I could not express myself in English**_{ENG})¹⁵ and, more commonly, of English skills, while good, still being inferior to Slovene ones (**I feel at home in English, because I've been learning it since Year 2, but after a whole day of expressing myself in this language I get tired to some degree and I wish I could switch to my mother tongue**_{GEN}). Occasionally the experience of two languages can be frustrating: **I switch between the two languages, I mix them, sometimes I feel like I am not 100% proficient in either**_{ENG}.

Good English skills go hand in hand with the symbiosis of the two languages, English and Slovene, which in some cases approaches bilingualism in the sense of having two first languages. For the most part, there is a reported functional division of labour between Slovene and English, and not too much tension as to which of the two languages should be used. In general, Slovene is the predominant language of communication for all three groups of students, but the results vary for different types of language use. All three groups selected Slovene as the most frequently spoken language, and their choice is affirmed when asked which language they use more often to talk to friends. The results show that they mostly do not speak exclusively in English, but when they speak to friends or other young people, Slovene is mixed with English or English is embedded in Slovene. While previous research

¹⁴ It would be very interesting to compare self-reported proficiency levels with proficiency testing for the same population, as the two instruments may well yield different results; if that were the case, this would be an important indicator of changes in the social environment.

¹⁵ The abbreviation at the end of the quote relates to the target group: _{GEN} = students generally; _{SLO} = students of Slovene; _{ENG} = students of English.

(Poteko 2020; Šabec 2009, 2014) has taken note of this phenomenon in written language on the internet, our findings suggest the same is true of speech.

When it comes to the extent to which the students use English expressions in communication with friends which otherwise takes place in Slovene (i.e., code-switching), all three groups gave relatively high scores, which, according to the prompts given, correspond to values between 5% and 25% of English use. A number of students indicated the importance of the register: **I appreciate both languages, I tend to avoid English words in more formal conversations, but I use them in conversations with friends mostly without hesitation**_{SLO}. This coincides with the findings of Novak Lukanovič and Limon (2015), who also noted in their survey that students used Slovene mixed with English when talking to friends and classmates. The same as with speech, Slovene is the dominant language for all three groups when it comes to writing, although to a lesser extent for students of English. This is at least partly because they are required to submit their written coursework in English.

Both speaking and writing are forms of language production, meaning that they require a more active use of English, as well as a greater proficiency. This can be an obstacle for some: **I understand English perfectly, but my ability to express myself in it is somewhat limited, and I find it easiest and most natural to express myself in Slovene**_{GEN}. There are also fewer situations in which students can produce texts or speech in English compared to listening and reading. Thus it is not surprising that at the production level, Slovene is the predominant language.

When it comes to reading and listening, there are major differences between the three groups. Students of Slovene mostly read texts in Slovene, especially books and study materials. They are also the only one of the three groups that are more likely to read books which are originally written in English in the Slovene translation. Students of English tend to read more in English. Students in the general group more often read books and study materials in Slovene, unless the book is originally written in English. The latter might suggest that there is a functional distinction between English and other L2s, where students feel they are missing something important by losing the original English wording. Students also more often read English subtitles than Slovene ones, which can be attributed to the fact that many providers of video content in Slovenia do not offer Slovene subtitles (e.g., Netflix, Disney Plus).

Many of the students' responses mentioned the utilitarian nature of English and the opportunities it opens for them: **English has a communicative function for me, it is a bridge to people who can't speak Slovene, and to knowledge contained in articles**_{GEN}; **I am grateful that we learned English already in primary school as it offers many opportunities every day that I would not be able to access otherwise (study abroad, more literature (for my studies and other kinds), keeping up to date with world matters, meeting people from other countries)**_{GEN}. Again, the situation is not the same for everyone, and occasionally students emphasized they were not as efficient in English as in Slovene: **I prefer to read study materials in Slovene, because I can easily skim through the text and find relevant information for myself. I cannot do that in English**_{SLO}.

The biggest shift is noticeable with listening. Students of English and students generally listen to more English, and among students of Slovene this is also the category where the percentage of Slovene drops drastically to 53.3%. This is likely due to the fact that music, videos, films

and series are mainly consumed in English by all three groups: **English is the most useful foreign language, many films and other types of content are available in English**_{SLO}.

What we see is that Slovene is the dominant language at the level of production, especially in interactions with other Slovenes in person or via text messages, although there are exceptions: **I prefer to talk with some of my friends in English rather than Slovene, which is a matter of habit and of the environment in which we socialize**_{GEN}. When it comes to receptive activities, both Slovene and English are used, with English dominant when listening. What are the main reasons for this widespread use of English in listening and reading? On the one hand, this can be attributed to a lack of content in Slovene, which is confirmed by the students' general agreement that they interact with English in great part out of necessity, as there is not enough content available in Slovene. Several students also indicated this in their open-ended answers: **Slovene is my intimate choice, while I utilize English for its usefulness**_{SLO}; **I feel that we should tackle the internet presence of Slovene resources in a planned and systematic way**_{SLO}.

The statistical analysis showed that the three groups of respondents generally represent a continuum, with students of English at one end as the most open to English and students of Slovene at the other as the least enthusiastic users. When it comes to use, statistically significant differences can be observed between these two groups, whereas students who do not study these two languages, the group of "students generally" in this study, find themselves in the middle. It is interesting to see that the general group is mostly not significantly different from either of the other two when it comes to their reported use of English, but definitely constitutes a separate middle group when attitudes are considered. Interestingly, the general group sometimes leans closer to the group of students of Slovene and sometimes closer to students of English.

Students of English and students of other programmes thus mostly agreed with the statements that they often cannot think of a word in Slovene, and that some things cannot be said well enough in Slovene, so they prefer to use English (*I prefer using English because it has a more developed vocabulary and some things in Slovene just sound disgusting*_{GEN}). These are two of the reasons for the frequent use of English expressions when speaking in Slovene. However, students of Slovene overwhelmingly disagreed with these statements, even though by their own estimation there is a fair amount of English in their speech. This suggests that the frequent use of English words is probably mostly or also due to the widespread use and presence of English in young people's everyday lives, so that there may be less awareness of a different code: **In general I feel like I don't discriminate, using both languages seems natural and I don't think too much about when I am using which language and why, it just happens as a matter of course**_{GEN}. Interestingly, some students of English expressed a negative attitude to their own language behaviour: **Of course I myself also use an English expression now and then [...] but I am trying to shake this habit**_{ENG}.

However, for many, especially students of English, the use of English goes beyond the pragmatic aspect and they relate intimately to it or can express themselves more successfully in English. This is evident in the high percentage of students who reported having a close relationship with the language, and also in the open-ended responses:

- *At this point after studying English for so long, both [languages] feel like my mother tongues.* ENG
- **Slovene is my mother tongue, so it is close to my heart and I feel a special bond with it. However, in certain situations I feel as if English is also my mother tongue to a certain extent, mainly because it covers most of my daily life and it is also easier for me to express my thoughts and feelings in English.** ENG
- *Love 'em *both** ENG [code-switching in the answer: *Love 'em oba*]

Some students of English even expressed a dislike of Slovene, which is not the case for the other two groups:

- *As long as I study English as a major, the more I despise the Slovene language and its use.* ENG
- *I love English and prefer it in most contexts. I am not so keen on Slovene and feel somewhat disconnected from it.* ENG

Gerenčer (2011) found that students in other programmes did not consider English to be more important than Slovene, while students of English did. However, her survey only offered the respondents a yes-no answer. Our survey shows that all groups see both English and Slovene as languages that are important to them, even though Slovene is the predominant language at least in terms of speaking and writing. This was also confirmed when they were asked in which language(s) they thought, dreamed, and talked to themselves, as many of them mentioned Slovene as well as English.

As indicated in the results, one third of the students in the general group, two thirds of students of English and over 10% of students of Slovene find it easier to express intimate emotions and/or discuss difficult topics in English than in Slovene. This would warrant a closer look and possibly a follow-up study to find out what the underlying reasons might be. Two factors that come to mind are the influence of all types of media in which children and young adults typically see and hear intimate conversations modelled primarily through the medium of English, and a certain psychological distancing that a language that is comfortable but not quite the first language may afford. The answers to the open question explicitly mentioned both of these aspects:

- **It is easier for me to express my feelings in English because most of the examples are in English (social media).** SLO
- **I prefer to express my feelings in English (probably because I listen to a lot of English songs and movies).** ENG
- **I find it easier to express myself in English since Slovene seems too "raw", it feels like words in Slovene are more weighty than in English, maybe because it is always more difficult to express your feelings in your mother tongue as they are directly related to you, while there always remains a certain distance with a foreign language.** ENG
- **I also prefer to use English or a combination of languages to express my feelings and to have serious conversations, as I find Slovene too intimate,* if that makes any sense? *Maybe Slovene is somehow a stronger language for me with more weight to it, which is why I find it harder to talk about personal things in it, maybe Slovene makes them more real and difficult.** GEN [code-switching in the answer: *Prav tako za izražanje custev in resne pogovore raje uporabljam angleščino oz. kombinacijo jezika saj se mi zdi slovenscina prevec*]

intimna, if that makes any sense? Morda je slovenscina zame nekako mocnejši jezik z vec teze in zato o osebnih stvarih v njem tezje komuniciram, morda jih slovenscina naredi bolj realne in tezje.]

Another feature of English that may contribute to the same phenomenon is the fact that it is predominantly gender-neutral, or at least more easily used in a gender-neutral way. This aspect was explicitly mentioned in three students' responses (all from students of English), for instance: **As a person who does not identify with the gender that was assigned to me at birth, I also appreciate English for the presence of gender-neutral pronouns and its greater general ability to use gender-neutral language**_{ENG}.

The long history of Slovene struggling to take its place as an official, public and administrative language and the established public discourse about the threats to and preservation of the language are reflected in the respondents' concerns about the state of their Slovene-language skills and the Slovene language in general: **I am occasionally worried that my Slovene is deteriorating**_{GEN}; **Because I am so surrounded by English, I notice that I have more and more problems finding the right Slovene word I want to use**_{GEN}; **Slovene is my mother tongue and I feel that people unfortunately often neglect and underestimate it**_{ENG}; **I find it sad that teenagers today use such a tremendous amount of English words and whole sentences in English**_{GEN}. Some students also reported that, despite the fact that their major was not English, they would be unable to complete their education without knowing this language, and lamented this fact: **English is a must, at least for a student, unfortunately nowadays one cannot complete their studies without it**_{GEN}.

Perhaps partly because they are in the humanities, many of the respondents showed a keen awareness of language issues and included several linguistic terms in the descriptions of the varieties they used. In addition to mother tongue/native language and foreign language, they also spoke of first language (**Slovene is my first language, English is a necessary evil**_{SLO}; *I like Slovene as a language because it is quite complex and I do like to know all the little details that make it this 'difficuli' but I still prefer English as it is the language that I mostly express myself in and is my first language "in my head"*_{ENG}), and even *lingua franca* (**English is a lingua franca and you need to speak it in today's world, but Slovene, as a mother tongue, provides an intimacy abroad, something that is uniquely yours**_{GEN}).

8 Conclusion

The results of this study that compared three different groups of students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, show that English is ubiquitous in students' lives, even among students of Slovene, who as a group showed the least preference for using English. It may well be that this reflects the particular context of university studies, as much of the time students spend each day reading, writing, speaking and listening would be in response to their class and homework obligations, as well as interacting with their peers and professors. It remains to be seen whether similar patterns of English and Slovene language use are attested among other social groups. However, given that in 2021–2022, 49.1% of all Slovenes between the

ages of 19 and 24 were enrolled in some form of higher education,¹⁶ and thus are in a similar context to the group under investigation here, it can nevertheless be argued that a large part of the younger generation in Slovenia is effectively bilingual in Slovene and English. Both languages are present in communication, both as separate codes and in the form of code-switching, and English is particularly important as a vehicle for receiving information. This is a generational phenomenon, however, and young Slovenes largely limit their use of English to communicating with their peers. The findings also suggest there may be some gender differences, and that it may possibly be female students that are leading the shift, but this would have to be investigated further, for instance by using a mixed effects model and expanding the sample to include more male students.

At a societal level, Slovene is not threatened and remains dominant, but English has definitely carved out a place for itself in the lives of young Slovenes that goes far beyond the role of a foreign language. English seems to be taking on the role of an additional, second language that is no longer an added value but a necessity. It will be interesting to see what happens in the future as the younger generations mature, especially whether English will become more acceptable in active use across age groups and whether it will transcend the register and domain boundaries to which it is now restricted. The Slovene situation, no doubt mirrored in at least some other European countries, thus challenges the Kachruvian distinctions between first, second, and foreign language as they are experienced and construed by speakers, and highlights the need to revisit theoretical assumptions about “critical age” and the type(s) of social environment in which language identity is formed.

What needs to be kept in mind is that, although the sample in this study is fairly large, the results only apply to university students and specifically to students in the humanities. Some obvious extensions of the current research would be to conduct a similar survey among other university students, young people in the same age group who are not attending university, and secondary school students, as well as similar cohorts in other countries to gain an international perspective. Some findings of this study, such as the use of English to discuss intimate feelings and/or unpleasant topics, suggest more in-depth research is needed in this area. In light of the fact that Slovenia is also a multilingual society with a significant presence of Italian and Hungarian (as official languages in some regions) as well as a number of other languages, especially due to immigration from other parts of the former Yugoslavia, it would also be interesting to expand the research to Slovene citizens and residents or international students whose L1 is a language other than Slovene to get a better picture of the ways in which different languages interact in people’s daily lives in the same socio-political space.

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¹⁶ <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/Field/Index/9/111> (accessed November 12, 2022).

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