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THE SLOVIO MYTH

Jan van Steenbergen

Ever heard of Slovio? If so, then you may know that Slovio is a constructed language with a Slavic-based word stock and an Esperanto-based grammar, created by the Slovak linguist Mark Hučko in 1999 and first published on the Internet in 2001. You may have been told that Slovio is immediately understood by 400 million people, and that it has a dictionary of some 65,000 words. You may even have seen its slogan: “Ucxijte Slovio tper!” (Learn Slovio now!).

The website slovio.com makes it crystal clear that Slovio is something to be taken seriously. On the very top of this chockfull page it is introduced as “the universal simplified Slavic language Slovio, which is mutually understandable with, compatible with and based on the traditional Slavic and Balto-Slavic languages” – even Latvian and Lithuanian (!). “Slovio”, author Mark Hučko writes, “is as simple as Esperanto but understood by some 400 million people around the world. This makes Slovio one of the most widely understood languages around the world. This international language is gaining, daily, new ground...”¹ On another page he goes even further: “In the time since its conception Slovio has become the standard language of international communication in Central and Eastern Europe, in Central Asia and in the Slavic speaking regions around the World.”²

Slovio’s home page further includes testimonials by grateful Slovio users, more advertising text, dozens of images, videos, banners, links to subpages and other websites run by Hučko. Slovio is depicted as a huge movement, backed by a major international organization and thousands of fans and supporters, with publishers literally rolling over each other for the right to publish books and magazines in it.

The critical reader will not be swayed by all this rhetoric. Nevertheless, Hučko has somehow managed to convince the world that Slovio is indeed, if not a tremendous success, at least one of the major constructed languages of its time. The objective of this article is to find out what Slovio really is: what it is meant for, who is behind it, on what scale it is used, in other words, to separate myth from reality.³

1. Slovio in the media

When Slovio was first published in 2001, the Pan-Slavic language idea had a centuries-long tradition behind it, but in the early days of the Internet the works of Križanić, Herkel’, Majar-Ziljski, Hošek and many others were practically forgotten, gathering dust in libraries instead. Because the digital age witnessed a certain rebirth of Pan-Slavism

¹ <http://www.slovio.com/>

² <http://www.slovio.com/publishers.html>

³ Most of the research for this article was done in the years 2010-2012. In the meantime, many of the links provided in the footnotes have disappeared or become redirects to other pages. Most of them can still be accessed with the Wayback Machine: <http://archive.org/web/>

and along with it a renewed interest in a Pan-Slavic auxiliary language, Slovio was not only the obvious, but also the only easily accessible choice. Soon a complete grammar and a workable dictionary were readily available on the Net, along with a mailing list, a forum and an entire network of websites on which Slovio was used and/or promoted. It was often discussed on the Internet, it gained some attention in the media, it was mentioned in books, and within a few years Slovio had become a fairly known phenomenon in the world of constructed languages. Few people realized that much of this alleged popularity was nothing but a myth.

Wikipedia has been instrumental in spreading this myth. The first Wikipedia article about Slovio appeared in 2002 in Esperanto, followed in 2003 by articles in English and Polish. After that more articles appeared, in one language after another, most of them being translations of other versions. All the information they contained could be traced back to one rather questionable source, namely Slovio.com, but that could not stop it from spreading like a virus, both on Wikipedia and outside. Not that all this happened silently and with everybody's consent: especially on the English language edition the Slovio article has been controversial, resulting in countless discussions, deletions and recreations. In 2007 a Wikipedia editor named Amir E. Aharoni submitted the article for deletion, arguing as follows:

Slovio, on the other hand, seems to be a project which is developed and used only on <http://www.slovio.com> and the related family of websites - <http://www.slavsk.com/> , <http://www.panslavia.com/> , <http://www.zvestia.com/> and a few others, which all look very similar, as if they were designed by the same person. I found it mentioned on a few blogs, but I couldn't find that it is used by anyone for actual communication. I couldn't find any other significant primary sources for it.⁴

Although this discussion caused the deletion of several language versions, there are still articles about Slovio in ca. 30 languages. The sheer number of translations has certainly played a role in sustaining it. Aharoni writes:

There were many interwiki links, because people in many Wikipedias worked hard to copy all the articles about Slavic languages from the English WP to the WP in their language. I have nothing but respect for their hard work, but before translating this article, they should have checked whether they adhere to the criteria of Notability and Verifiability. Instead, what we have now is a ridiculous situation: Articles in many languages about an idea that was made up by one man and is only documented on one website [...].⁵

By now, there are numerous other publications about Slovio, most of which merely echo the most basic pieces of knowledge and draw their information directly from Wikipedia, Slovio.com or both. Paradoxically, they are now quoted as reliable sources that confirm Slovio's notability as well as several of the myths about it.

⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Slovio_\(2nd_nomination\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Slovio_(2nd_nomination))

⁵ <http://wikislownik.blogspot.nl/2007/11/brzydkie-slovio-i-chiszczynna.html>

Interest from the academic world has been scarce, with the notable exception of three authors. In 2004, Prof. Tilman Berger from the University of Tübingen was the first to discuss Slovio in a published scientific resource⁶ and Prof. Cornelia Mannewitz from Greifswald University wrote a thorough analysis of Slovio grammar in 2008.⁷ Whereas the latter takes a somewhat apologetic stance, Berger expresses himself more critically in a second article, titled *Potemkin im Netz. Slovio und die Pseudo-Panslaven* and published in 2009, in which he argues that the entire Slovio movement is probably a hoax. He points out that it is possible, “even probable”, that some of the sources about Slovio outside Hučko’s own pages may have been paid for.⁸

The third author is Anna-Maria Meyer from the University of Bamberg, who wrote her dissertation about the three major Pan-Slavic languages of the digital era, including Slovio, in 2014.⁹ In this book – by far the most extensive work on the subject to date – she provides an elaborate analysis of both Slovio and the Slovio movement. Her conclusions, although formulated carefully, point into the same direction as Berger’s.

2. The author

Most of what is known about Slovio author Mark Hučko can be found in many different Wikipedia editions: that he is a Slovak scientist and linguist who was born in Bratislava on 15 September 1947, emigrated to Canada in 1968 and then to Switzerland in 1984.¹⁰ The assertion that Hučko is a linguist seems to originate from the Slovio page:

*The development of the international language Slovio has been started by scientist and linguist Mark Hucko.*¹¹

According to the Slovak magazine *Život*, however, Hučko was “not educated as a linguist, but has a strong affinity with languages, especially with simplifying them”. The same source continues:

*He studied computer technology, genetics and biology. He worked in a biological laboratory, sold real estate in Canada and the USA, and during the Argentinean-British War taught English to children on the Falkland Islands. [...] Currently he works in Switzerland as a programmer.*¹²

According Meyer, he also studied architecture before he emigrated.¹³ If this is true, however, it is not mentioned on Hučko’s own user page on Wikipedia:

⁶ Berger, “Vom Erfinden Slavischer Sprachen“, in: M. Okuka, U. Schweier eds., *Germano-Slavistische Beiträge. Festschrift für P. Rehder zum 65. Geburtstag*. Munich, 2004, pp. 19–28.

⁷ Cornelia Mannewitz, “Sprachplanung im Internet. Das Projekt Slovio“, in: Sabine Fiedler (ed.): *Esperanto und andere Sprachen im Vergleich*. Beiträge der 18. Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e. V., 21. - 23. Nov. 2008, in Berlin, p. 163.

⁸ Tilman Berger, “Potemkin im Netz. Slovio und die Pseudo-Panslaven“. In: *Osteuropa* 59/12, 2009, pp. 309-316.

⁹ Anna-Maria Meyer, *Wiederbelebung einer Utopie. Probleme und Perspektiven slavischer Plansprachen im Zeitalter des Internets am Beispiel von Slovio, Slovianski und Novosloviensky jezyk*, University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg, 2014.

¹⁰ Meyer also mentions The Netherlands as one of the countries Hučko emigrated to. Meyer, p. 162.

¹¹ <http://www.slovio.com/summary.html>

¹² Jaromír Novak, “Na počiatku bude slovio“. In: *Život*, 2005 no. 2, pp. 40–41.

¹³ Meyer, p. 162.

*I have studied at various universities and colleges, including the University of Toronto, and the Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. I have studied computer programming and computer sciences, natural sciences and genetics. My interest in linguistics comes after my first encounter with Esperanto when I was in my teens.*¹⁴

Another biography, also written by Hučko himself, mentions that he has lived in Switzerland in 1983-1987 and 1993 onwards. During this last period he ran a computer business. He also lists some of his interests, including immortology and cosmology. Furthermore, he mentions his political activity:

*The facts of Swiss-German racism and the brutal oppression of Ethnic minorities in Switzerland had inspired Mark Hucko to get engaged in the Human-Rights movement, and became engaged in the Ombudsman International organization.*¹⁵

In other words, whatever information we have about Hučko is given bit by bit, mostly by himself. Despite certain contradictions, one thing is clear, though: Hučko being a linguist is a myth. Even qualifying him as an amateur linguist would at least require a verifiable interest in linguistic science, but there is no reason at all to believe that his interest in the field reaches any further than creating simplified versions of English and Slavic.

It is also remarkable that none of the sources mention the years in which he attended all these studies, nor whether he actually completed any of them. Given the rather exorbitant nature of Hučko's claims about himself and Slovio, this raises doubts regarding his education as a "genetik-informatik" as well; only one site mentions an unspecified bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto.¹⁶ At last, very little is known about his more recent activities. All we know is that he must have moved back to Bratislava sometime after 2006 and that he is engaged in politics nowadays.¹⁷ Berger concludes:

*When one has spent some time studying this enigmatic personality, who apparently runs an incredibly high number of websites on which he keeps revealing new information about himself, the veracity of which, however, is not verifiable, one cannot escape the impression that all this is just one big mystification, without any real base outside Mark Hučko's closest surroundings.*¹⁸

Aharoni even goes one step further:

*I am not even sure that this person is completely real. The language is non-notable, but it is as real as the website slovio.com; but the person could be made up. There are no verifiable external sources, that the name of the creator of Slovio is Mark Hucko. [...] Mark Hucko are two words and a funny photograph on a website that was published by God-knows-who.*¹⁹

At present there is no reason to doubt Hučko's existence as a person, nor that he is indeed the creator of Slovio. Still, we cannot exclude the possibility that parts of the information about him may just be the product of someone's imagination.

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Blonnik>

¹⁵ <http://www.slovio.com/multi-level-universe/>

¹⁶ <http://www.infodorf.ch/0.edv/index.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.magnificat.sk/2012/11/aktualne-krv-nie-je-voda-alebo-genocida-v-rukavickach/>

¹⁸ Berger (2009), p. 315.

¹⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Mark_Hucko_\(2nd_nomination\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Mark_Hucko_(2nd_nomination))

Mark Hučko's many websites provide some insights about the elusive creator. Their exact number is hard to establish, but during the last ten years there must have been well over a hundred of them. Ca. 40 of these websites are related directly to Slovio (see chapter 4b – "The Slovio universe"), the rest is about a variety of other things. Hučko appears to be the father of a kind of virtual town with information, entertainment and web shops, reminiscent of the early days of the Internet and possibly related to Hučko's computer business in Switzerland.²⁰ One of these pages shows pictures of Hučko and his children.²¹ On two other pages products are being advertised that are sold, perhaps even built or invented by Hučko himself: a foldable bicycle and a drinking tube.²²

More interesting, however, are the pages dedicated to Hučko's own fields of interest. One of these fields is language construction. Slovio is not the only language Hučko constructed; there are three other projects as well, each of them having its own website:

- BlitzEnglish (1984), a form of simplified English²³
- Inglisx (2004?), BlitzEnglish with a phonetic ("fɔnetik") orthography²⁴
- Rusanato (2011), simplified Russian with a grammar similar to Esperanto and Slovio²⁵

Hučko's contributions to science are equally diverse as his websites. We find sites about "immortology" (a term coined by himself, referring to the scientific study of eternal life),²⁶ theories about a "Multi-level universe",²⁷ genetic manipulation,²⁸ the advantages of salt in our diet,²⁹ and the greenhouse effect, for which he claims to have found the ultimate solution.³⁰ There is, however, no indication that he has ever published anything outside the Internet, nor that his theories have been taken seriously by anyone outside his inner circle. This could explain why several of these pages contain passages with complaints about the "modern-day inquisition" and the like.

Of particular interest are Hučko's political sites. On one of them, Hučko styles himself as "Ombudsman International". The corresponding page is almost entirely dedicated to the subject of "Switzerland with its systematic genocide and annihilation of the minorities", which he repeatedly compares to Nazi Germany.³¹ There is no proof that this Ombudsman International Movement is an organization of any significance, nor, for that matter, that it is anything but a website. That Hučko's hostile attitude vis-à-vis Switzerland has a personal background, is proven sufficiently by the following text:

²⁰ Townn.com, Roofdir.com, Peakdir.com, Idorf.ch, Igorod.ru, Imesto.sk, Alpinet.com, Media1.ch, Hitpreise.ch, Playcanteen.com, Spielkantine.com, Igralna.com, Kom1.com, Pcbombe.com, Mafiapizza.com, Putzhexe.com, Umzugarmee.ch, Biolles.com, Mariepospilova.com, Erasmusmondus.com, Factstv.com, Univerzit.com

²¹ <http://imesto.sk/a/huckom/>

²² Bagcycle.com, Taschenrad.com, Vivalonga.com

²³ <http://www.blitzenglish.com>

²⁴ <http://www.inglisx.com>

²⁵ <http://www.rusanato.com>

²⁶ <http://www.immortology.com>, <http://www.slovio.com/immortology/index.html>

²⁷ <http://www.slovio.com/multi-level-universe/index.html>, <http://www.galaktia.com/astromonia/index.html>

²⁸ <http://www.gmpeople.com>, <http://www.townn.com/gmpeople/>

²⁹ <http://www.saltydiet.com>, <http://www.slanadieta.com>

³⁰ <http://www.stopgreenhouse.com>

³¹ <http://www.ombudsmaninternational.com>; similar content can also be found on <http://www.fremdenhass.com>

Mr Mark Hucko had suffered enough from discrimination and racism, had his property confiscated, had his children stolen and alienated from him by various criminal mini-magnates; who are everywhere and who abuse, manipulate control and steal the rights of citizens in all countries of the World.³²

Other sites run by Hučko include a page directed against the European Union,³³ an anti-Facebook site,³⁴ two sites directed against Slovak politics,³⁵ a site about nuclear blasts,³⁶ a curious site that links Sudoku with masochism,³⁷ and a short story.³⁸ Also remarkable is the site Multireligion.com, containing a description of some kind of eclectic sect based on different religions, and encouraging people to make financial contributions.³⁹

The abovementioned websites have nothing in common with Slovio and fall outside the scope of this article, but there are two reasons why they are relevant to the current discussion: they are all part of one big family of websites that link directly or indirectly to Slovio.com, and they cast some light on the personality of the man behind the language Slovio. Mannewitz writes in 2008:

Most of all, these theories, no matter their degree of elaboration, and his other activities [...] appear to characterize the author himself. All his willfulness notwithstanding, he seems to have a general humanistic attitude that surely guides him in his language planning activities.⁴⁰

True as this may be, the general picture of all these websites also leaves the impression of a man who attempted to achieve greatness in many different fields, but never succeeded in any of them. To make up for this, he has created a virtual world in which he is everything at once: computer scientist, geneticist, cosmologist, linguist, guru, ombudsman international, and even the first person in 1000 years who stopped the splintering of the Slavic languages.⁴¹ In spite of these epithets, however, we must conclude that all Hučko's projects are one-man actions without any serious backing of others. On several pages, he utters his frustration about the world's lack of appreciation for his work:

The Earth is Flat! The Universe is Flat! Everybody knows that the universe is Flat and One-Level! Burn Mark Hucko at stake!⁴²

One thing one cannot fail to notice are numerous fallacies in his way of arguing. He enforces his point of view by posing as a leading authority, scientist or pioneer whose opinion should be taken for granted. In discussions about Slovio, he often assumes the role of the *vox populi*, too. His writings are characterized by circular reasoning and the frequent use of weasel words: "analysts point out that ...", "it is commonly known

³² <http://www.ombudsmaninternational.com>

³³ <http://www.bananaunion.eu>

³⁴ <http://www.nospybook.com>

³⁵ <http://www.gorilizm.com>, <http://www.protestgorila.com>

³⁶ <http://www.chernoshima.com>

³⁷ <http://www.sudomasochist.com>

³⁸ <http://www.robdustrail.com>

³⁹ <http://multireligion.com>

⁴⁰ Mannewitz, p. 163.

⁴¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2StEgrXSC4>

⁴² <http://web.archive.org/web/20080109220054/http://www.slovio.com/multi-level-universe/>

that ...”, “we have evidence that ...”, etc. He never uses footnotes or references, and rarely provides any actual evidence for his statements. Instead, he tends to repeat them ad nauseam, which is visible very clearly on the Slovio pages. When it comes to defending his point of view, he often resorts to ad hominem attacks against those who disagree with him, and the burden of evidence is shifted to the latter.

Not surprisingly, given the above, many of Hučko’s pages are soaked with negativity. A lot of them are just plainly anti-something, and even in the remaining cases his reasoning is often based on the train of thought: A is wrong and B is wrong; therefore, C must be right. For example, Slovio is good because Esperanto is useless, the natural Slavic languages are too difficult and other constructed Slavic languages are either incomplete, too difficult or were created by the wrong people. It creates the overall picture of a man who can flourish in conflict situations only, and whose self-definition is not based on what he is or what he stands for, but on the things he hates, loathes and/or fights.

Whether Hučko’s highly exaggerated reports about his own importance in various fields are symptoms of megalomania, wishful thinking or mere deception, is difficult to tell. Possibly, money plays a role as well. Visitors are asked for donations on Stopgreenhouse.com “to help save the Earth” and on Ombudsmaninternational.com “to preserve your freedom and the freedom of your children”. Even the Slovio pages are full of “donate” buttons, even though they state explicitly that Slovio needs help but does not need money. He has repeatedly accused people who work on projects other than Slovio of stealing his income. If this is true at all, it remains obscure how he has ever managed to gain any substantial income out of that project.

3. Characteristics

a) Purpose

Undoubtedly, the most elementary questions one can ask about a constructed language are: what is it and what is it for? It is often taken for granted that Slovio is a language for Pan-Slavic use, but there are good reasons to believe that initially it was meant to serve as a world language like Esperanto. On its own website Slovio repeatedly claims to be “universal”, and Esperanto is systematically portrayed as its main rival. The reader is encouraged to start *Slovio klubis* in every city or town, much like Esperanto culture, and project *Putnik*, encouraging Slovio learners to offer hospitality to other Slovio learners, mimics Esperanto’s *Pasporta Servo*.⁴³ The global ambitions of Slovio are perhaps best demonstrated by the first version of the Slovio page in 2001:

*The new international language takes the world by storm! First there was Völapük [sic], Esperanto and Ido. Now there is Slovio!*⁴⁴

⁴³ <http://slovio.com/putnik/index.html>

⁴⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20010418143934/http://www.slovio.com/>

This objective, a language for global use, is still predominant on Slovio's homepage. The Slavs may or may not be the primary target group of the language, but certainly not the only one:

But apart from Slavic speakers we wanted to make Slovio easy to learn and pronounce for speakers of all languages. Be it German, Italian, English, Mandarin, Arabic or Hindi.⁴⁵

On the other hand, early messages on the Slovio mailing list (founded in August 2002) suggest something quite different. Under the pseudonym *posxta* Mark Hučko writes:

Our goal is to open up all possible channels of communication among the Slavic speakers to promote cultural and industrial growth and economic prosperity.⁴⁶

First of all we have to unite our Slavic people culturally, through a common language. [...] Slovio is the first modern all-Slavic language in existence.⁴⁷

The political goals of Slovio are pushed even further by other members of the group. For example:

So before we start any of this, we need a political action in all Slavic countries and if Slovio is already made, then you should promote the political idea as well. There should be a Pan-Slavic party in every country which would run on elections and promote this cooperation with other Slavic countries because that's the only way we could do something about our problems today. Unless there's a strong political activity, Slovio is nothing!⁴⁸

The fact that the Slovio mailing list was populated by people with rather extreme views is exemplified by posts like the following:

We have to be more aggressive with our enemies, and one day we must avenge all the churches and monasteries that were destroyed by dirty, muslim scum down in Kosovo & Metohija.⁴⁹

So what the Hungarians and Germans have in common is their Anti-Slavicism and the fact that they own 100% of their success to de-slavonization, occupation and enslavement of the original Slavonic civilization which they have destroyed.⁵⁰

Texts like these say little about the purpose of Slovio as language, but they do cast some light on the way of thinking of Hučko and the people surrounding him, mostly radical nationalists and Pan-Slavists. It should also be noted that most of the discussions on the Slovio mailing list were neither in nor about Slovio, but about politics – even after a second mailing list (“slovio2”) had been set up specifically for political discussions.

⁴⁵ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.voprosis/index.html>

⁴⁶ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/17>

⁴⁷ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/21>

⁴⁸ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/18>

⁴⁹ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/136>

⁵⁰ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/73>

In later years, other purposes have been mentioned in passing as well. One of them is that Slovio is meant specifically for members of the Slavic diaspora:

*The main target group of Slovio is the group of Slavs whose everyday language is either a Romance or a Germanic one.*⁵¹

In other words, Slovio should bring people of Slavic descent in the West closer to their own roots. In Hučko's view, the Slavic diaspora constitutes nothing less than a separate Slavic nation:

*Diaspora Slavs, some 60 million Slavs living in the diaspora, and their children and grandchildren are the second largest Slavic nation. [...] Slovio is a common language for all Slavs, regardless where they live, regardless where they have been born, regardless whether or not they speak any traditional Slavic language.*⁵²

On the forum of the Slovak-nationalist SHO he even goes a step further by proposing Slovio as a means to slavify the Hungarian minority in Slovakia:

*Slovio is intended to be a very simple language, so that even the most stupid Hungarian can learn it easily. So that we can slavify the Hungarians, who by descent are magyarized Slavs anyway. If we show them normal Slovak or another Slavic language, it is too complicated for them and they will never learn it. Isn't it better for Hungarians to learn Slovio than for us to learn Hungarian? Or do you want to learn Hungarian?*⁵³

Summarizing, Hučko's own statements are not particularly helpful in determining the true goals of Slovio, because they are different for each target audience. The duality in purpose is perhaps best expressed by the following sentence from one of his pages:

*It is not only a universal Slavic language but also a universal international language.*⁵⁴

The difference may seem trivial, but it is crucial for an evaluation of the language. Well-defined design principles constitute the foundation of any decent constructed language, and these design principles are dictated by its equally well-defined purpose. A language to be learned and used easily by speakers of English, Chinese and Hindi has to meet different criteria than a communication tool for speakers of a group of closely related languages. If Slovio is indeed intended to fulfill both tasks at once, this would indicate a principal weakness. But instead of jumping to conclusions, let's see what Slovio itself can tell us about its own purpose.

b) Orthography

Officially, Slovio can be written in the Latin and the Cyrillic alphabet, but it is clear that the former has been given most thought. Slovio has a very characteristic and, to a certain degree, original orthography that is considerably different from any of the existing Slavic

⁵¹ <http://s8.zetaboards.com/Slovianski/topic/8253240/2/>

⁵² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-xBKB17TLL>, <http://s8.zetaboards.com/Slovianski/topic/8258348/1/>

⁵³ <http://forum.sho.sk/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=1868&hilit=Slovio&sid=2897d5cb97b643e95312686dd06fb497>

⁵⁴ <http://www.panslavia.com/jazika/>

orthographies. Simplicity is the dominant goal, so characters outside the ASCII range are avoided. Instead of the characters **š, č, ž** (representing phonemes that are common in Slavic), Hučko introduces the digraphs **sx, cx, zx**. This is not a novelty in itself, because the same thing has been done before in Esperanto, the so-called *x-sistemo* for writing **ŝ, ĉ** etc.). The reasoning is simple: whatever the value of **x** in any language may be, it is unlikely to occur in these three combinations and therefore won't be easily mistaken for anything but a replacement of the haček. As a result, **sx, cx** and **zx** have become Slovio's trademarks more than anything else. Many people find them ugly and even pick them as a target when criticizing Slovio, but it must be said they do their job reasonably well and contribute greatly to Slovio's specific look-and-feel.

Another remarkable characteristic of Slovio orthography is that it tends to replace the letter **j** with **i**, perhaps in an effort to avoid problems for people who pronounce **j** differently, like the English and the French. Thus, Slovio has **morie** "sea" and **siem** "seven", but also **krai** "edge", **voina** "war", and even **zaiac** "hare" and **usvoenie** "adoption". In other cases it is omitted completely: **proekt** "project", **nastroenie** "mood", **ehat** "to ride". The letter **j** remains only at the beginning of words (**jaico** "egg", **jelen** "deer"), in verb endings and in the omnipresent adjective ending **-ju**. Sometimes this causes inconsistencies, for example **jasnju** "bright" vs. **obiasnit** "to explain", where the etymological connection between both words is obfuscated by the spelling.

Slovio orthography offers a few real curiosa as well. It proposes **q** as an equivalent of the Cyrillic soft sign **ь**, even though the language itself does not use it, and instead of the combination **sxcx** it uses **wx** (for example **Wxecin** "Szczecin"), ideas that are more than slightly reminiscent of the so-called "Volapük encoding".⁵⁵ Even stranger are the combinations **hq** [h], **hx** [x] and the Romanesque **gx** [dʒ].

Although officially Cyrillic is treated equally in Slovio, it is hardly ever used outside a few text samples on the website. Neither the dictionary nor the grammar use Cyrillic, and instructions regarding its use appear to be a mere formality. It is clear that all the work and craftsmanship have been invested in the Latin orthography, while the negative effects of the latter on its Cyrillic counterpart are ignored completely. For example, the numbers **piat** and **siem** become **пиаг** and **сием**, which in Cyrillic can only be pronounced as two syllables. And a word like **jasnju** becoming **йаснйу** is something that hurts the eye of anyone used to reading Cyrillic. The fact that on the main page "Microsoft" is written **Мицрософт** (logically pronounced [mitsrɔsɔft]) raises doubts regarding the author's proficiency in Cyrillic.

c) Vocabulary

Slovio claims to be based on all Slavic languages, but Berger finds himself wondering whether this is a genuine intention or merely a declaration.⁵⁶ Critics often accuse the

⁵⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volapuk_encoding

⁵⁶ Berger (2009), p. 312.

language of being overly dominated by Russian. In an effort to approach this issue methodically, Meyer compares Slovio with the natural Slavic languages applying the ASJP method (*Automated Similarity Judgment Program*), which attempts to quantify the distance between languages by counting the number of phoneme alterations – insertions, substitutions and deletions – needed for transforming a word in one language to the corresponding word in another. The result is of her research positions Slovio closest to Slovene and furthest from Russian, which according to Meyer “refutes the accusation that Slovio is highly tributary to Russian”.⁵⁷ However, this method has its disadvantages. First of all, research is limited to 40 words from the Swadesh list, words that tend to be similar in Slavic. In addition, [i] and [ɪ] are treated as equally different phonemes as for example [k] and [r]. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Slovio’s simplified phonology places it closest to languages with a more limited phoneme inventory, i.e. South Slavic. In other words, any conclusions based on this method are justified as far as phonological similarities are concerned, but it is insufficient for determining the primary vocabulary source.

That Slovio is not exclusively based on Russian is also proven by the presence of words that either cannot be found in Russian at all, like **budovit** “to build” and the conjunction **zxe** “that”, or take a form used in other Slavic languages than Russian, for example **krava** “cow” (Russian *корова*) and **kvit** “flower” (Russian *цветок*). Sometimes Slovio offers multiple options taken from different languages (for example **mehur** and **puzir** “bladder”, or **kolacx**, **pirog** and **tort** “cake”). Cases like these are rather exceptional, though. A quick browse through the lexicon is enough to notice that word roots that cannot be found in Russian one way or another are rare. A more thorough examination also turns up words that exist in Russian *only*, for example **sobak** “dog” (whereas all other Slavic languages and even Russian itself also have *pes*). Another example is **cvet** in the meaning “color”, which exists in Russian and Bulgarian, but is a false friend in all the remaining Slavic languages. The overall impression is that Russian is the dominant input language, with Hučko’s native Slovak playing the role of subdominant language. Traces of Polish, Ukrainian and South Slavic are scarce. Some words, like **glos** “voice” and **glov** “head” resemble Polish *głos* and *głowa*, but Berger argues that these were probably meant as compromises between Russian *голос, голова* and Czecho-Slovak *hlas, hlava*.⁵⁸

Slovio’s close relationship with Russian is illustrated by the fact that Hučko reintroduced it in 2007 as “simplified Russian” under the name *Ruskio*.⁵⁹ This language is identical to Slovio, except for the fact that it uses **s***, **c***, **z***, **g*** and **w*** instead of **sx**, **cx**, etc. To be fair, this does not necessarily make Slovio a simplified Russian of any kind, it rather implies that promoting Slovio appears to be Ruskio’s only purpose.

Slovio also has vocabulary that does not exist in Slavic at all, for example **plus** “more”, **minus** “less”, **megalion** “million” and **gigalion** “milliard, billion”. A special category is

⁵⁷ Meyer, pp. 231-244.

⁵⁸ Berger (2009), p. 310.

⁵⁹ <http://www.ruskio.com/ruskio-m.html>

portmanteau words based on etymologically unrelated material, for example **zxrakula** “shark” from Czech/Slovak *žralok* and Russian *акула*. A few words were created a priori, i.e. as products of the author’s own imagination. This can be said about the universal preposition **om**, the imperative marker **das** and the suffix **-io** for language names.

At last, Slovio vocabulary has a major non-Slavic influence, namely English and German. Very characteristic for Slovio are countless calques from these languages, for example **slovknig** “dictionary”, **gradburia** “hailstorm”, **malgrod** “village” (German: *Kleinstadt*), **mozg-napad** “stroke” (lit. “brain attack”), **zver-ogrod** “zoo” (German: *Tiergarten*) and **otdel intensiv-opekaf** “intensive care”. This way of creating compounds, common in Germanic, is rare in Slavic and looks very odd to the Slavic eye.⁶⁰

If Slovio’s word stock is really based on all Slavic languages, the least that can be said is that it treats them very unequally. Besides, those words that do not come straight from Russian appear to have been picked from other languages rather haphazardly. The overall impression is that little research has been done into the question of how widespread words are in the Slavic world.

Another issue is how Slavic words were transformed into Slovio words. The primary objective of Slovio is simplicity, so it should come as no surprise that it has a rather minimalistic phonology consisting of 20 consonant and 5 vowel phonemes, an inventory smaller than in any of the natural Slavic languages.⁶¹ Distinctions between hard and soft consonants are absent in Slovio.

Particularly puzzling is the fact that many feminine and neuter nouns (which in Slavic usually carry the ending -a resp. -o/-e) are truncated in Slovio: **z xen** “woman”, **knig** “book”, **glov** “head”, **dorog** “way”, **slov** “word”, **drev** “tree”, etc. This actually resembles Volapük, where every noun is required to begin and end in a consonant. But whereas Volapük nouns are the base for countless combinations with various affixes in the format vowel + consonant, Slovio grammar is well-equipped to handle nouns ending in a vowel, so that truncation is not needed at all. Besides, numerous other words preserve their final vowel: **dusxa** “soul”, **muha** “fly”, **broda** “beard”, **pole** “field”, **ozero** “lake”. Especially surprising in this context is the word **jazika** “language”, which has a final -a that it is non-existent in Slavic, presumably to distinguish “language” from “tongue” in an effort to make things easier for native speakers of English.⁶²

Truncation of final vowels is not the only symptom of Slovio’s tendency towards short, preferably monosyllabic words. We can also find examples like **tper** “now” (Russian: *теперь*) and **gvorit** “to speak” (Russian: *говорить*). Particularly instructive are the numbers 1-10: **din**, **dva**, **tri**, **cxtir**, **piat**, **sxes**, **siem**, **vos**, **dev**, **des**. Except for the fact that they are visibly based on Russian, no less than four of them (1, 8-10) were shortened almost beyond recognition. From the very beginning, these numbers have

⁶⁰ Meyer attributes these and similar compounds to Esperanto and not to Germanic influence. Meyer, pp. 195-196.

⁶¹ Meyer, p. 184.

⁶² <http://s8.zetaboards.com/Slovianski/topic/8253240/2/>

been criticized heavily and Roman Dushkin even made an elaborate proposal for an alternative system,⁶³ although none of his suggestions have ever been adopted.

Slovio vocabulary does not relate in any regular way to the etymological differences between languages. For example, every Slavic language has its own default way of dealing with Proto-Slavic TorT/TolT sequences (words with *-or-* or *-ol-* between consonants), but in Slovio they appear to have been chosen totally randomly. Thus we find:

- *-oro-/-olo-* (East Slavic): **dorog** “way”, **korol** “king”, **holod** “chill”, **bolot** “mud”
- *-ro-/-lo-* (Polish, Sorbian): **grod** “town”, **broda** “beard”, **glos** “voice”, **glod** “hunger”
- *-ra-/-la-* (Czecho-Slovak, South-Slavic): **krava** “cow”, **dragoju** “expensive”, **zlato** “gold”, **dlan** “hand”.

The same goes for hard and soft consonants. Normally Slovio does not distinguish them, yet it has **liudis** “people” and **lubovit** “to love”, both from initial **ľu-** in Slavic. An extreme example is the aforementioned number **siem** “7”, where the inserted **i** is merely the result of the Russian tendency to soften any consonant before **e**.

Sometimes different reflexes of the same root are used for different meanings: **glov** “head” vs. **glavju** “main”, **dolgju** “long” vs. **dlug** “debt”, **cvet** “color” vs. **kvit** “flower”, etc. As a result, Slovio words tend to be totally unpredictable for Slavic speakers, because there is no way of telling whether the word for “cow” should be **brova**, **krava**, **krov** or **korov** without checking the dictionary first. For non-Slavs this may be irrelevant, but for Slavs it makes writing in Slovio a tiresome undertaking.

How can these oddities and inconsistencies be explained, except for the obvious fact that the author’s knowledge about comparative linguistics is limited? The answer is probably that different methods were applied in different phases of Slovio’s development. Usually, conlangers start their projects with some basic words like “woman”, “good”, “to do” and the numbers 1-10, which more than anything reflect what their creators originally had in mind. In this case everything points in the direction of short roots in combination with affixes, as in Volapük. During later stages of the project, Hučko may have been influenced by people with more knowledge about Slavistics, or simply adopted their suggestions blindly. A conscientious language creator would have updated all previously existing material in the process, but Hučko’s online behavior from 2001 onwards indicates that he has always been more focused on the quick expansion and promotion of Slovio than on quality.

d) Grammar

Grammatically, Slovio is a typical example of a *schematic* language, which means that

grammar and morphology have been deliberately simplified and regularized, with idiosyncrasies from source languages (if any) removed, in order to be simpler and

⁶³ http://roman-dushkin.narod.ru/v_paper_06_eng.html

*more streamlined than those of the ethnic languages, even if this should make the language's vocabulary relatively unrecognizable to newcomers to the language.*⁶⁴

Schematic languages typically avoid gender distinctions and have one conjugation and one declension only. Vocabulary derivation is governed by internal rules and not by whatever their natural source languages do. As a result, languages of this type tend to provide a whole battery of prefixes and suffixes that can be added freely to any root to modify its meaning. The overall purpose is that a schematic language should be easy to learn, because all one needs to know is a limited set of roots, a set of modifiers and a minimal number of grammatical rules. Not surprisingly, schematicism is a feature typical for global auxiliary languages. However, since many features of natural languages are sacrificed on the altar of simplicity and regularity, it is rarely used in zonal languages.

Hučko has repeated many times that Slovio's main feature is simplicity, and indeed, it has a regularized table of correlatives like Esperanto⁶⁵ and a grammar that is essentially a list of affixes.⁶⁶ Most of these affixes were taken from Slavic, but not necessarily in the same meaning. For example, the suffix **-nik** denotes a person, but unlike the Slavic languages Slovio also uses it in words like **agentnik**, **zoknik** ("jockey") and **Bulgarnik** (yet, Slovio has **prezident** and not ***prezidentnik**). Moreover, the suffix is gender-neutral; when the subject is explicitly male, **-nic** is used instead (not found in Slavic, but clearly based on the feminine ending **-nica**). Some affixes are based on words that in Slavic are never used as such: **vidimozxju** "visible", **vidinuzxju** "which needs to be seen". Likewise, the noun **zem** ("country", from *земля*) is used as a suffix, too: **Ruszem** "Russia". Some affixes were borrowed from non-Slavic languages, like **-tor** for motorized mechanical devices, giving interesting hybrids like **pracxtor** "washing machine". A few were created a priori, like the aforementioned **-io** (**Rusio** "Russian language").

The plural is formed with the ending **-is** (**-s** after a vowel) and there is one synthetic case to denote object or direction, sometimes used as a genitive as well: **-uf** (**-f** after a vowel). Combined they have the ending **-ifs** (**-fs** after a vowel), giving a two-case system that is practically identical to Esperanto, which uses **-j**, **-n** and **-jn** in the same manner. Adjectives always have the ending **-ju**. None of these endings are based on Slavic. The ending **-uf** reveals a certain similarity with **-ov**, but was chosen because the sound **f** is rare in Slavic and therefore "leads to the least confusion and misunderstanding".⁶⁷

Among the many striking similarities between Slovio and Esperanto Meyer also lists the definite article **ta**, used in the same way as Esperanto "la" and English "the": **ta zxen** "the woman".⁶⁸ Definiteness is usually unmarked in all Slavic languages except Bulgarian and Macedonian, the latter using definite articles in the form of suffixes. There is, however, a clear discrepancy between theory as proscribed by the grammar and the available Slovio texts, in which the article is usually omitted.

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Schematic_planned_language&oldid=7588389

⁶⁵ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.slovio/osnov.html>

⁶⁶ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.slovio/index.html>

⁶⁷ *ibidem*.

⁶⁸ Meyer, p. 205.

As might be expected in a schematic language, verbal aspect (one of the most typical features in Slavic) is practically absent in Slovio. It does provide the suffix **-va-** (expressing durativity or repetition) and the prefix **zu-** (expressing completion), but this does not cause the formation of aspect pairs like in Slavic, and they are rarely used in any of the written Slovio texts.

When it comes to inflection of verbs, minimalism is abandoned and no less than three different models are proposed, each of them loosely based on Slavic. The writer is free in his choice, although for each tense the grammar mentions a preferred solution:

- a “long form” based on an auxiliary particle (**es** in the present tense, **bil** for the past tense, **bu** for the future tense, **bi** for the conditional), followed by the infinitive;
- a “short form” in the form of root + ending (**-t** for the infinitive and the present tense, **-l** for the past tense, **-b** for the future tense, **-lbi** for the conditional and **-j** for the imperative);
- a form inflected for person and number, with the endings **-jm**, **-jsx**, **-jt**, **-me**, **-te**, **-jut**.⁶⁹

The unexpected forms in the singular are meant to be “a compromise between the West and South Slavic dialects on one side and Russian on the other side”, with the somewhat enigmatic explanation that “these a bit unusual endings make to the reader immediately clear what they are.”⁷⁰ Whereas these inflected forms are definitely a naturalistic trait in Slovio, participles (including a set of future participles!) on the other hand are formed fully schematically: **delabsuo** “going to do”, **delalju** “done”, etc. In Meyer’s view, a number of six different participles is unexpected in a minimalist language,⁷¹ but it might as well be argued that such superfluous forms are the logical outcome of the schematic character of the language.

Returning to the question of what information Slovio grammar and vocabulary give about its purpose: elements of both global and zonal auxiliary languages can be distinguished, but the former are clearly in the majority. It may seem absurd for a global language to be based on Slavic only, but the idea is not so strange if we consider that most prominent languages of this type are predominantly (Esperanto, Ido) or almost exclusively (Interlingua, Lingua Franca Nova) based on the Romance languages; Ogden’s Basic English and Peano’s Latino Sine Flexione prove that a global auxiliary language can even be based on a single language. The advantage of such a language is that communication is not restricted to those who have learned it, whereas a heterogeneous language made up of several unrelated languages is understandable only to those who know either the language itself or all its individual input languages. This argument is mentioned explicitly on the Slovio page.⁷²

⁶⁹ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.slovio/ident.html>

⁷⁰ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.voprosis/index.html>

⁷¹ Meyer, p. 219.

⁷² <http://www.slovio.com/>

Typically, in languages for global use simplicity takes priority, while in zonal languages the main focus point is understandability for the speakers of a group of related languages. It is nowhere said that a zonal language cannot be simple, but this simplicity will always depend on the speakers of this particular group. Since we may assume that the easiest grammar for a native speaker of English is English grammar, we may also assume that the same goes for Slavs. But even though Slovio grammar is based on Slavic material, its entire structure is almost identical to Esperanto and completely different from Slavic. The claim that it is 99% Slavic and that any similarities to Esperanto are explained by the fact that “Esperanto was created by a Polish and Russian speaker, who had taken a lot of his inspiration from Slavic languages”⁷³ cannot be taken seriously.

At last, Slovio contains numerous elements that cannot possibly be justified in a Pan-Slavic language, because they have no meaning whatsoever to a person who hasn't learned them (for example the participles, the preposition **om** and omnipresent endings like **-ju**, **-is** and **-uf**). Even if they do not render the entire word or sentence incomprehensible, the result is understandable *in spite* and not *because* of them, and therefore learning them bears no value in communication with or among Slavs at all. Likewise, the unpredictable character of the vocabulary makes the language not only harder to read for Slavs, but also very inconvenient to write or speak. It should be added that Slovio's schematic grammar, its Germanic way of compounding and its tendency towards very short and often truncated words result in an “armed concrete style” that many Slavs perceive as ugly and artificial. In short, if Slovio's primary objective is to serve as a Pan-Slavic language, it must be qualified as a rather poor effort.

4. Slovio propaganda

Over the years, Slovio has become known for the vigorous way it is being propagated. A language creator whose ambition it is to gather a large user community for his project cannot be expected to understate its qualities and successes, but Slovio propaganda is extreme by any standard. Berger writes:

*Given the so obviously unserious character of the entire enterprise, and given the amount of fantastic, exaggerated, unverifiable and clearly false information, it is indeed difficult to assess how widespread Slovio really is.*⁷⁴

The scale of these exaggerations is pretty much unheard of in the history of constructed languages, which is perhaps why many people, even though they are aware of this to some degree, still believe that at least part of it has to be true. As can be seen in various discussions about Slovio, some of the myths about it are taken for granted. Let us therefore take a look at the various claims that have been uttered about Slovio at various occasions.

⁷³ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.voprosis/index.html>

⁷⁴ Berger (2009), pp. 315-316.

a) 400 million people

Slovio's main page states no less than 19 times (!) that Slovio is understood by 400 million people. The entire population of the former Soviet Union, the Slavic-speaking countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Slavic diaspora might be just enough to reach such a figure, but not every citizen of these nations speaks a Slavic language – not even to mention the fact that part of these citizens are young children. More importantly, how much an individual can understand from a language that is not his own, differs greatly from one person to another. Slovio is certainly understandable for a large number of Poles, but since many Poles even have trouble understanding Kashubian or Silesian (considered Polish dialects by many), it is hard to imagine that the same people can easily understand a language that is predominantly a mix of Russian and Esperanto. Without any actual research, estimates about the number of people who can really understand it are nothing but guesswork. At present, all we have are reactions on the Internet, often in response to the following text sample:

Sxto es Slovio? Slovio es novju mezxunardju jazika ktor razumijut cxtirsto milion ludis na celoju zemla. Slovio mozxete upotrebit dla gvorenie so cxtirsto milion slavju Ludis ot Praga do Vladivostok; ot Sankt Peterburg cxerez Varsxava do Varna; ot Sredzemju Morie i ot Severju Morie do Tihju Okean. Slovio imajt prostju, logikju gramatia i Slovio es idealju jazika dla dnesju ludis. Ucxijte Slovio tper!⁷⁵

This text is often met with positive reactions, but that is not surprising given its simplicity and repetitiveness: it would have been understandable in any other Slavic language as well. It does not contain grammatical oddities like **-uf** and practically all words come from Russian. Experiments conducted with more complicated texts are non-existent.

b) The Slovio universe

Being understood by a certain amount of people and actually being used are two very different things. The Slovio page contains bold statements with respect to the allegedly wide scale on which Slovio is used. As early as October 2004, Hučko said:

In this short period of time Slovio has become a language that is being discussed in many encyclopedias worldwide and in which leading works have been written by professional linguists.⁷⁶

It may be assumed that the “many encyclopedias worldwide” refer to Wikipedia, but it is unclear what he means by “leading works by professional linguists”. Except for Hučko's own writings on his many websites, there is no evidence that Slovio has ever been used for any scientific or non-scientific publication at all. Although the site has special subpages for potential publishing houses and translators and promises numerous books

⁷⁵ “What is Slovio? Slovio is a new, international language that is understood by millions of people around the world. You can use Slovio to talk to four hundred millions of Slavic people from Prague to Vladivostok, from St. Petersburg via Warsaw to Varna; from the Mediterranean and the North Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Slovio has a simple, logical grammar and Slovio is the ideal language for the people of today. Learn Slovio now!”

⁷⁶ Ludovít Števkó, “Esperanto Slovanov”. In: *Extra Plus*, nr. 10/2004, pp. 26-27.

and other publications in Slovio, the only verifiable reference to publications in Slovio are four small E-books with learning materials for children.⁷⁷

Bold claims are also made regarding its use in commerce. At the very top of the Slovio page we are informed that one company after another switches to Slovio, because there is money to be made with it. An example is a certain Rudolf F. from Germany:

*Until I have learned Slovio I had great difficulties in competing with other businessmen in this area. However with Slovio I can talk with anybody without translators, and discuss anything, any business I want. Slovio had doubled my business with the region.*⁷⁸

In reality, there is not the slightest proof that Slovio has ever been used by companies, except for one American firm that did a brief experiment with Slovio and switched to another language shortly afterwards.⁷⁹ While it cannot be excluded that Rudolf F. really exists, one may wonder how much more probable it is that Hučko wrote this text himself. Given the abundance of unreliable or outright false information throughout the site, it should be considered that the written testimonials of Rudolf F. and other happy Slovio users on the same page might be fabrications, too.

In view of the above, presenting Slovio as “the standard language for communication in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Slavic-speaking regions all over the world” is a grotesque exaggeration. Yet, even more remarkable is that Slovio is repeatedly called “official”.⁸⁰ This would imply sanctioning by some state, region or institution, which raises the question what sort of body this may be. One possibility is **Slavopedia**, a project initiated in 2005 to coordinate cooperation between the various Slavic Wikipedia editions and closed in 2008 for a lack of interest.⁸¹ Most of its pages were in Slovio, although it is doubtful whether this was the result of any community decision. Only one participant actually used it – the same person who was also responsible for a *Polish-Slovio dictionary*.⁸²

A more likely candidate is the **World Slavic Congress**. Its website *Panslavia.com* (in English and Slovio) gives the impression of a real international organization with a presidential council, a secretariat and even a moderate and a radical wing.⁸³ However, except for a few articles in which Pan-Slavic views are exposed, the only purpose of the site appears to be promoting Slovio. The style of the site is very similar to that of the Slovio page, which “raises the suspicion that the *Panslavia* pages are run by the same people who are also responsible for Slovio”.⁸⁴ In any case, there is not the slightest piece

⁷⁷ <http://www.bluejellyfish.com.au/downloads/slovio.html>

⁷⁸ <http://www.slovio.com>

⁷⁹ An American law firm with offices in several Central European countries. Unfortunately, few details have been revealed about it on the Internet. See f.ex. <http://s8.zetaboards.com/Slovianski/topic/8244886/1/#post8013787>

⁸⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcRSVxWDyCM>, <http://interslavic.org/>

⁸¹ <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Slavopedia>

⁸² http://pl.wiktionary.org/wiki/S%C5%82ownik_slovio

⁸³ <http://www.panslavia.com/>

⁸⁴ Berger (2009), pp. 314-315.

of evidence that the World Slavic Congress exists anywhere else than on this particular website, which has not been updated for years.

Slovio.com and Panslavia.com are not the only websites about Slovio. Hučko's large network of interlinked websites contains ca. 40 other sites on which Slovio is used or otherwise plays an important role, including:

- Blognik.com: the Slovio forum
- Cxat.com: a chat box
- Europnik.com: contains only a few maps of Europe, the text "European Media Organization" in English and Slovio, and a phone number
- Galaktia.com: a site titled "Multilevel cosmology" with several subpages about philosophy, history, art, biology, astronomy, etc.
- Genetnik.com: invites Slavic geneticists to cooperate with an unnamed firm
- Iskat.com: a collection of links
- Mlodica.com: refers to a "Miss Panslavia" beauty contest
- Piratnik.com: a site for downloading MP3s, movies, etc.
- Pirogis.com: Slavic recipes
- Posxta.com and Posxt.com: a site that offers free "Slavsk email"
- Posxto.com: a site with Esperanto links, on which Slovio is propagated
- Prirod.com: about the reproduction of mammals and why dinosaurs died out
- Protivirus.com: links to downloadable anti-virus programs
- Quicklanguage.com: a site with links to Hučko's constructed languages
- Registrit.com and Registrina.com: for domain registration
- Slavarabia.com: a "Slavic-Arabic chamber of commerce"
- Slavianstvo.com: "an international cultural, linguistic, non-political and non-religious organization of Slavic speaking and friendly nations, states and cultures"
- Slavsk.com: another Slovio page, where it is presented under the name "Slavsk"
- Slonux.com: "a robust industrial Linux for professionals"
- Zvestia.com: a news site that claims to be international, objective and neutral
- A number of porn sites in Slovio.⁸⁵

Impressive as this collection may seem, most of these sites have little content: a few sentences, images and/or videos, lots of banners and links. Some of them are empty shells that contain other sites in a frame. All these pages look very similar and are visibly the work of the same person. They were written in a somewhat primitive HTML code reminiscent of the 1990s and can be found on the same server, and their domains are or were owned by Hučko. Most of these pages – with the exception of Slovio.com and Zvestia.com – have never or hardly ever been updated since their initial version. Some of them are still online, others have in the meantime been replaced by redirects to Slovio pages or disappeared altogether.

⁸⁵ dirka.com, ficktoria.com, gigapenis.com, inseminary.com, kurva.com, loch.li, microscrew.com, pedofilnik.com, pizd.com, puff.ch, puff.li, roofsex.com, seksnik.com, sexarmee.com, yebat.com

One might wonder: why such a large and undoubtedly expensive network of websites with different domain names, if their collective content would easily fit on a few subpages of Slovio.com as well? It looks like the whole thing is meant to create the impression that Slovio is being used on a large scale. On the other hand, it is not impossible that these sites were merely intended to serve as a demonstration of what Slovio is capable of, or perhaps also as a basic framework for a virtual “Slovio Universe” to be used and expanded in the future.

c) *The Slovio community*

One of the recurring myths about Slovio is that it is spoken by a large community. Again, Slovio.com makes bold claims:

*We already know about thousands of people around the world who are learning Slovio. [...] We also know about hundreds of Hungarian citizens who are learning Slovio in order to communicate with their 400 million Slavic neighbors, Slovaks included.*⁸⁶

A user of the Slovio forum, presumably Hučko himself, goes even further, stating that “tens of thousands of Non-Slavs are learning Slovio now.”⁸⁷ High numbers have also appeared elsewhere. In the years 2006-2010, the French Wikipedia listed a number of over 100 speakers,⁸⁸ while until February 2008 the English Wikipedia listed it as one of the ten major spoken auxiliary languages.⁸⁹ In both cases, no source was given.

In the case of constructed languages numbers of speakers are always a difficult issue, because there is no way of collecting and verifying this kind of information: there are no censuses to rely on, and not every speaker is necessarily a member of a club or Internet group. Besides, what level of fluency is required, and how can this be measured? Anyone can scribble down a few reasonably decent sentences with the help of a grammar and a dictionary, but does that make him a speaker? To get at least a rough impression of the size of the Slovio community, we must refer to its two main gathering places, a mailing list and a forum. Both have repeatedly been used as indicators for Slovio activity. Let us assume that any person who has proven capable of using Slovio and has done so with a certain regularity for a certain period, can be considered a speaker or user.

Slovio has a Yahoo! Group with nearly 1,000 members (945 in December 2012),⁹⁰ an extraordinarily high number for a constructed language. However, the relatively low number of messages posted to the group evokes some serious doubts: 1446 in twelve years (of which 336 were written during the four months after the group had been founded in 2002, only 68 in the years 2010-2012 and not a single message after 2012). It is not uncommon that most members of such groups never post a single message, but for a group of this size this number is remarkably low by any standard. For comparison: the

⁸⁶ <http://www.slovio.com/sk.jazika/index.html>

⁸⁷ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1225570924/Slavic+Interlingua>

⁸⁸ http://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Liste_de_langues_construites&oldid=12628014

⁸⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_constructed_languages&oldid=192475507

⁹⁰ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/slovio/>

Yahoo! Group of the Inter-Germanic language Folkspraak has only half its amount of members, but more than ten times its number of messages.⁹¹

Part of the explanation is that group members have been added without their knowledge and consent, which is something only a group owner (in this case Mark Hučko) can do. Skimming through the archives, we can find dozens of messages, in which people demand to be unsubscribed. Particularly revealing is the following sample:

Dear pseudolinguists with quasipolitical ambitions, somebody, most likely this spamming list's (as opposed to mailing list) moderator, has subscribed me to this weird forum. I can set my mailer to selectively delete the Slovio postings while still on the server, I do, however, wish to be removed from the member database in the same way I was put in since the regular [sic] way of unsubscribing for Yahoo Groups simply does not work here. I would like to point out that, besides this method of 'recruitment' being against good manners, good taste, and 'netiquette', it is also violation of several Yahoo Groups rules and as such it might lead to taking a legal action against the perpetrators.⁹²

Furthermore, the majority of the active participants appear to be interested in politics only, and never participate in discussions about the language. As a result, most posts to the group are completely unrelated to Slovio, while most of the remaining posts discuss it on a very abstract level, in terms of how simple it should be, how it should be promoted and what role it should fulfill. Every once in a while, a new subscriber expresses his interest in Slovio and then disappears. Posts about linguistic details and posts written in Slovio are extremely rare. All in all, it appears that the group has no more than 5-6 members with a genuine interest in Slovio and one or two dozens of interested bystanders.

Berger also uses this mailing list as a source of information about the “demographics” of the Slovio community:

Even though it is unclear how large the group of Slovio users and of “World Slavic Congress” supporters really is, an analysis of those names that contribute to the mailing list demonstrates that we are basically dealing with Slavs who are scattered across the world as emigrants, rarely with inhabitants of Slavic countries and only in exceptional cases with non-Slavs who “sympathize” with the Slavic cause. This would also explain that the primary language of communication is English.⁹³

Whereas the mailing list has clearly been manipulated with to bump up the statistics, the same cannot be said about the “Blognik” forum, which was founded in February 2002.⁹⁴ Until March 2006 it was practically silent, but after that the forum became a very active place, much more so than the mailing list. Berger describes it as a place

⁹¹ <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/folkspraak/>

⁹² <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLOVIO/message/123>

⁹³ Berger (2009), p. 318

⁹⁴ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/page-30>

[...] which is constantly joined by new people who, mostly in English, less in Slovio and in Slavic languages, participate in the debate. In this context it should be noted that Hučko himself rarely makes his appearance, although it is hard to tell if he really does not participate in the debates or possibly under a pseudonym.⁹⁵

[...] where both political and linguistic subjects are discussed to the same degree. There is a recognizable effort to write in Slovio as much as possible, but English inquiries and contributions in Slavic languages (especially Slovak and Polish) can be found as well.⁹⁶

What Berger must have overlooked is that the Blognik forum does not have a list of members or subscribers, and that everyone – registered or not – can post messages anonymously or under any nickname. This makes it extremely hard to tell how populated the forum really is or was. It is true that Hučko rarely participates under his own name, but in terms of style and content a lot of messages written under a variety of pseudonyms⁹⁷ are undeniably Hučko's work. Virtually all threads after 2009 are attacks against projects like Slovianski and Slovioski, in periods when he did the same thing elsewhere, too. As soon as Hučko became inactive, all forum activity died out instantly. There has not been a single post after 2011.

For the rest, what goes for the mailing list goes for the forum as well: most contributions are not related to Slovio at all, and whenever they are, they deal with it in the same abstract way. Posts in Slovio occur more frequently, but can still be traced back to four, five people at most.

Smaller Slovio groups exist as well, but they are even less helpful in establishing the number of Slovio users. A second mailing list, called *Dievju Slovio*, has only 8 members and 24 posts spread over the years 2009-2011.⁹⁸ A new Slovio forum was created in 2010, but except for a few cross posts that can be found on Blognik as well, it never took off.⁹⁹ At last, there are no less than three Google Groups¹⁰⁰ and two Facebook Groups,¹⁰¹ all of them practically inactive.

A last source of potential Slovio users could be the aforementioned *Slovio klubis* that people are encouraged to start, but there is no evidence that any such club has ever existed. Their presence on the Slovio page is either an expression of wishful thinking on the part of its author or part of the illusion he is trying to build.

All in all, we can safely conclude that reports about Slovio having a large speaker community are gravely exaggerated. At its peak (around 2004-2006) there may have been 10 to 15 users, perhaps even 20, but nothing even remotely close to the thousands

⁹⁵ Berger (2009), p. 316

⁹⁶ *ibidem*, p. 314

⁹⁷ "Slovio.com", "Zvestia.com", "Teacher", "Dusxan", "Slovio user", "100% Slavian", "K.", "Babusxka", "Slavo", "Peter" and many others

⁹⁸ http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/dievju_slovio/

⁹⁹ <http://slovio.maxforum.org>

¹⁰⁰ <http://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/slovio>, <http://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/slovio-jazika>, <http://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/teachers-of-slovio>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.facebook.com/pages/SLOVIO-Universal-Simplified-Slavic-Language/111365465570614>, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Slovio/129167057121366>

Hučko has tried to make us believe. Meyer comes to a similar conclusion, estimating the number of speakers at “a handful”.¹⁰² In more recent years the number has dwindled, and during the last four years there has hardly been any Slovio activity at all.

d) Dictionary size

Numbers play an important role in Slovio propaganda, and the size of its dictionary is no exception. Most Wikipedia articles mention something about the number of words contained in the Slovio dictionary, an Excel file with currently ca. 65,000 entries. “More than some of the ‘natural’ languages”, says the main page. However, thorough analysis of the file yields the following results:

- thousands of (English) words are not translated into Slovio at all
- thousands of entries refer to internet domains, languages, geographic entities, inhabitants of countries (male, female and gender-neutral), corresponding adjectives, etc.
- the plural of practically every noun is given as a separate entry, even though plurals are always formed regularly
- likewise, many verb forms (for example, past tenses) are given as separate entries
- it contains lots of doublets and endless numbers of synonyms: when six English words can be used to translate one Slovio word, it is listed six times
- a lot of nouns are also given as adjectives (just by adding **-ju**), which often results in very strange words
- it contains numerous sentences, expressions and nonsense words like **Europju banan-soiuz**.

In other words, the dictionary is stuffed with redundant entries that no “real” dictionary would ever include. If we remove these, we can conclude that Slovio’s actual word stock is somewhere in the range between 10,000 and 15,000. Still a respectable number, and definitely enough for a functional language – but not quite as impressive.

5. Slovio and politics

Apart from the questions of where Slovio is used and by whom, there is yet another question to be answered: namely, what is it used for? Slovio has been used surprisingly little in direct, human interaction on its various meeting places. The only person who has written messages about everyday matters in Slovio with some frequency is a user who goes under the pseudonym “Eugeniusx” and whose real identity appears to be Eugeniusz Słowik, a Polish-born citizen of Germany. Even Hučko himself does not use Slovio much for small-talk. Therefore the primary places where Slovio is used are Hučko’s many websites.

Analyzing the Slovio pages, Berger notices a clear difference between the way Slovio and English are used:

¹⁰² Meyer, p. 291.

Programmatic texts on the website can also be found in English. They are different from those in Slovio. The English texts are geared rather towards the utilitarian. They argue about the use of a commonly understood language, delimit Slovio from Esperanto [...] and are supplemented with fan mail from all around the world. The Slovio texts, on the other hand, tend to be more ideological in nature.¹⁰³

The latter reflect Hučko's dissatisfaction about the splintering of the Slavic languages and the disadvantages of the digital age for Slavic communication. He blames Microsoft for leaving the Slavs with no other option than to learn non-Slavic languages, thus forcing "modern Slavs to create a new, simple and universal Slavic language".¹⁰⁴ Among the sample texts, most of which are typical textbook material, short poems and jokes, Berger points to a text (in Slovio only) about a new Pan-Slavic flag.¹⁰⁵ These ideas are not particularly radical, but they do give a hint at Hučko's affiliations. Suggesting that these fragments in Slovio act like hidden messages would go too far, but it is undeniably true that Westerners are addressed differently than Slavs. For English texts about Hučko's ideas we have to look elsewhere, for example on Galaktia.com:

It's an undisputed historical fact that the current day Europeans (sometimes called Indo-Europeans) are all descendants of the Danubian Slavs (sometimes called the Danubian Forest People). Equally, it is an undisputed fact that all European Languages originate from the same common language, the language of the Danubian Slavs.¹⁰⁶

Berger is right in his assessment that the most radical expressions are well-hidden and often in Slovio only. The best example of this is Zvestia.com, a news site in Slovio that has been online since 2003, and one of the very few sites that Hučko has been updating on a regular basis for years. The site promises *obiektivju i neutralju raportenie*, but many items represent a clearly Slavic-nationalistic point of view:

2008-07-30, sredok. Poskroz masaju protestis, proslju nocx Serbju marionetju guverie transportil Radovan Karagxix v Haaguf. V Haag jeg ocxekajt sudenie ot rasistju proti-Slaviansk tribunal ktor svobodil Albanju zlocxinitelis i ktor otvergil lecxarju pomoc dla Slobodan Milosxevicx. Sleditelis ocxekajut zxe skorue ili pozduo tozx Karagxix bu umirat v Haag.¹⁰⁷

Sometimes this point of view also has an anti-Semitic undercurrent:

2007-02-06. Poskroz masaju protestis i protistanie Cxehju populaciaf bilju Cxehju prezident i zagrancju marionetnik, Vaclav Havel, podporijt mestovenie USA-ju proti-raketju radar-stanciaf v Cxehia. Havelvoi religia es judaistju.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Berger (2009), pp. 312-313.

¹⁰⁴ Slovio.com

¹⁰⁵ Berger (2009), p. 313.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.galaktia.com/historia/index.html?>

¹⁰⁷ "2008/07/30, Wednesday. In spite of mass protests, Serbia's puppet government has transported Radovan Karadžić to The Hague last night. What awaits him in The Hague is a sentence by the racist, anti-Slavic tribunal that sets Albanian criminals free and refused Slobodan Milošević medical assistance. Observers expect that sooner or later Karadžić will die in The Hague."

¹⁰⁸ "2007/02/06. In spite of mass protests and the protests of the Czech population, the former Czech president and foreign puppet Vaclav Havel supports the placement of an American anti-missile radar station in the Czech Republic. Havel's religion is Jewish."
<http://www.zvestia.com/index2007.html>

The last item ever added to Zvestia.com to date is not only a clear expression of anti-Semitism, it also demonstrates Hučko's preference for conspiracy theories:

2010-09-11, subotek. Tut den vset pomnijt dev-rocxis ot razborenje om Nov-Jorkju Vsetju-Torgju-Centr. Kto sposobil VTC-masakr? Judaistju torgnik Larry Silverstein zakupil VTC tolk neskolk den pred toi razborenje i podpisal svezxju strahovka proti 'terorizm'. Soglosuo s cxisloju analiznikis VTC ne bil razborilju ot musulmnikju teroristis no ot Silverstein, posred razbor-bombis. Usled razborenje om VTC i jegoi svezxju strahovkas Larry Silverstein profitil okol piat gicalion dolaris. Razborenje om VTC bil upotrebitju ot jegoi koleg Gxorgx Busx takak vimolvka dla napadenie Irakuf i Afganzemuf. Nektor analiznikis utverdijut zxe mezxu bolsx cxem tri tisicx zxertvas ktor umirali vo VTC bili nikai zxidis.¹⁰⁹

Even more extreme is the Blognik forum, where most discussions are soaked with Slavic nationalism, anti-Semitism and racial hatred. The most extreme posts here are not in Slovio and it is hard to prove that Hučko wrote any of them himself, but he has never used his authority as a group owner to put a halt to it either – which is all the more remarkable, since messages criticizing Slovio or defending other projects were often deleted almost instantly and their authors blocked.

6. Slovio and other projects

Under the header “Plagiarism and copyright violations” at the very bottom of Slovio's main page, we find a fragment that is oddly out of tune with the rest of the page, namely a threat that addresses “several Slovio-clones which clearly plagiarize and violate the copyrights of Slovio creator Mr. Mark Hucko”. Their authors are informed that “financial compensation and criminal charges will be sought without exception!” because:

An efficient inter-Slavic communication needs one language and not the confusion created by numerous plagiarized clones!¹¹⁰

It is not difficult to guess that there is a long and complicated story behind this. Hučko's relationship with other Interslavic projects is troublesome, and this fragment is just the tip of the iceberg.

Various elements of Slovio propaganda have already been discussed, but one epithet has not been mentioned yet: Slovio is “the first Pan-Slavic language”. In reality, the first Pan-Slavic language was described in 1666 by Juraj Križanić, and many others had followed his example long before Slovio was conceived.¹¹¹ Hučko must have been aware of this, since his links page contains a section titled “Historical attempts to create a simplified

¹⁰⁹ “2010/09/11, Saturday. Today the world commemorates the ninth anniversary of the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. Who caused the WTC-massacre? The Jewish businessman Larry Silverstein bought the WTC only a few days before this destruction, and signed a fresh insurance policy against 'terrorism'. According to numerous analysts, the WTC was not destroyed by Muslim terrorists, but by Silverstein by means of destruction bombs. As a result of the destruction of the WTC and his fresh insurance policy, Larry Silverstein gained a profit of some five billion dollars. The destruction of the WTC was needed by his friend George Bush as a pretext for attacking Iraq and Afghanistan. Several analysts confirm that among the more than three thousand victims who died in the WTC, there were no Jews at all.”

¹¹⁰ <http://www.slovio.com/>

¹¹¹ http://steen.free.fr/interslavic/constructed_slavic_languages.html

Slavic language” with bibliographical data about projects by Jan Herkel’, Ignác Hošek and Edmund Kolkop.¹¹² His opinion about these projects is not very positive:

Some of you want to pretend that there have been other interslavic languages before or after slovio. Show me one, that had complete grammar and at least a 10-thousand word vocabulary. NOTHING. Because all those "other languages" you talk about and pretend have been before (or after) slovio have only a NAME, a grammar, sometimes not even that, and a few hundred word vocabulary. That does not qualify as a language, it qualifies only as an "ATTEMPT". Nothing more. The long list of "languages" Jan put on his website are nothing - they are just to distort facts and confuse history. To minimize the importance of Slovio in Slavic linguistics and history. To pretend that there have been other VIABLE inter-slavic languages...¹¹³

It is unlikely that Hučko has ever studied any of the historical attempts at a Pan-Slavic language. One thing he neglects completely is that their authors did not consider their projects artificial languages at all, but merely proposals for formalizing an already existing language. Their (sometimes very elaborate) grammars did not include dictionaries, but they did provide tools for deriving words from Slavic languages. And the absence of a dictionary certainly did not stop them from publishing entire books or magazines in their form of Interslavic.

On the other hand, Hučko is surprisingly mild about three projects that appeared in the same period when Slovio was published: **Slovo** by Stefan Vitezslav Pilát, **Glagolica** by Richard Ruibar, and **Proslava** by Juraj Doudi. Comparing Slovo with Slovio, he writes:

On the other hand, Slovo follows another philosophy. It's [sic] aim is the creation of a universal Slavic language with all the usual complexities of grammar, accents, spelling and pronunciation. Slovo emphasizes its origin from and its similarity to the original pan-slavic language. Its main goal is the simplification of the communication between Slavic speakers and to a lesser extent between the speakers of other languages. Proslava is somewhere between Slovio and Slovo. The basic vocabularies of Slovio, Slovo and Proslava, just like those of the other Slavic languages, are very similar, and these 3 variants of the pan-slavic language are mutually intelligible.¹¹⁴

Hučko’s friendly relationship with these projects is also demonstrated by the fact that both Ruibar and the three people who worked on Slovo are credited as co-developers of Slovio.¹¹⁵ Even when the Slovo project had disappeared from the net, he wrote about it (this time referring to it as “Slovjensxcxina”):

The last we have seen the project his work was very rudimentary and had a long way to a complete language. However we wish him and others success.¹¹⁶

Hučko’s attitude is very different towards projects that were initiated after 2002/2003. The authors of Slovo, Glagolica and Proslava had apparently given up on their projects, and thus Slovio had become the only active Pan-Slavic language project on the Internet.

¹¹² <http://www.slovio.com/links.html>

¹¹³ <http://s8.zetaboards.com/Slovianski/topic/8264425/1/>

¹¹⁴ <http://www.panslavia.com/jazika/>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.slovio.com/summary.html>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.slovio.com/1/0.voprois/index.html>

Slovio was being discussed on many mailing lists and blogs, and especially after 2004 it spawned some genuine interest from outsiders, including the media. Whereas the “Slovio movement” had previously consisted of Pan-Slavists in émigré circles, people with a rather limited interest in linguistics, Slovio also started attracting the interest of linguists and people in the Slavic countries themselves. It must have been in this period that Hučko came to believe that “Slovio” and “Pan-Slavic language” were synonyms.

Along with this growing interest in Slovio, there was an increasing dissatisfaction about some of the choices Hučko had made. People disliked its artificiality, and various issues, like **sx zx cx**, truncated nouns, plurals on **-is** and the Russian character of the word stock, were brought up again and again. Revisions were suggested, reforms were proposed, and in December 2005 a new Slavic-based project was launched under the name **Slavido** (later renamed **Sloviensk**). Hučko must have felt threatened by all the criticism, but instead of complying with any of the demands, he categorically refused to take them into consideration and started attacking those who disagreed with him instead:

Problem that you guys have is that you don't want to accept the only all-slavic language SLOVIO, the only such common language since our languages have separated into various Slavic dialects. And that is a problem we Slavs have: we cannot accept unity, we cannot work together, we must work against each other. This kind of discussions and speculations [sic] that you have nove [sic] have been discussed over the past 6 years, but you don't know about it, because you never thought of a common Slavic language until someone else has done it.¹¹⁷

Against such background, several participants of the Blognik forum started pondering the possibility of a new, less artificial Pan-Slavic project that would be based on Slavic material only. One of them, Gabriel Svoboda, wrote:

I am glad that I am not the only one to find Slovio too artificial and unnatural. The -(i)s and -(u)f endings don't contribute [to] its beauty and euphony (and Slavicity) at all ... In fact, I am going to construct my own pan-Slavic language (with plurals in -i as a matter of course). I have many times suggested some improvements for Slovio but none of them was accepted.¹¹⁸

Subsequently he and a few other members of the forum started sharing thoughts about an alternative type of language, which would soon be known as **Slovianski**.¹¹⁹ On 25 March 2006, a separate forum was created, which by October of the same year had 234 registered users and a total of 2649 messages.¹²⁰ Unlike Slovio, Slovianski has been a collaborative project from the beginning, and initially it was developed in three versions, a naturalistic, a pidgin-like and a schematic form. The purpose was the creation of a simple language with a Slavic grammar without artificial elements, in which all branches of Slavic would be represented equally.

¹¹⁷ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1143089247/slavianska+gramatika>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1142488118/Serbs%2C+Slavs+and+Slovio>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1143189201/Slovianski+Jazik>

¹²⁰ <http://web.archive.org/web/20061027112119/http://slovianski.com/forum/index.php?sid=aa128279ca9ce87453c853c4d8a1928d>

In the following years, several attempts have been made to reconcile Slovio and Slovianski. The first was **Rozumio**, proposed in November 2008 by a Russian student with the username Hellerick, who had previously proposed reforms in Slovio:

*Rozumio is not a language, but rather an attempt to bring together two Slavic auxiliary conlangs Slovio and Slovianski. The language is based on Slovio, and yet can be considered a kind of Slovianski in its primitive form.*¹²¹

In February 2009, one of the most active Slovio users, Steeven Radzikowski, launched a new collaborative project for bringing together Slovio and Slovianski, first under the name **Slavju Slovio** ("Slavic Slovio") but shortly after under the name **Slovioski**. Much like Rozumio, Slovioski was an "expansion and amplification of the universal simplified Slavonic oriented constructed language called Slovio", meant to provide "a more 'Slavic' sounding and acting language than Slovio".¹²² Unlike Rozumio, however, it gradually developed into a separate language project, taking more and more distance from Slovio proper. In January 2010, it officially abandoned the Slovio dictionary.¹²³ During the course of 2010 and 2011, the naturalistic element in both Slovianski and Slovioski prevailed, and ultimately both projects merged into **Medžuslovjanski** ("InterSlavic"). In 2010, this project was expanded with a simplified form of Slovianski, called **Slovianto**.¹²⁴

At last, also in 2010, a Czech computer scientist, Vojtěch Merunka, published a modernized form of Old Church Slavonic under the name **Novoslovienskij** ("Neoslavonic"). Since 2011, this language has been part of the InterSlavic project as well, sharing one community, a common dictionary,¹²⁵ a news portal¹²⁶ and a wiki.¹²⁷

Hučko's attitude towards Slovianski and Slovioski has been extremely hostile from the beginning, accusing their authors of plagiarism and ridiculing their naturalistic features:

*How many words [sic] does have the "Slovianski" vocabulary? two hundred? three hundred? Where are they? does it use purely ASCII spelling? How many genders does it have? Male, Female, Transvestite, Homosexual, Lesbian ... genders? Does it have a regular grammar or thousands of exceptions? I think I will learn either SLOVIO or RUSSIAN but not a miscarriage like your copy-cat language.*¹²⁸

In addition, the creators of Slovianski were accused of being "jealous balkanizers", whose sole purpose was undermining Slavic unity:

It has become obvious to me that on this website there is a very vocal "plagiatnik" who rejects and hates the simplicity and easy understanding of Slovio, and even hates Slovio, just because it wasn't his idea. [...] Furthermore, he will do everything in his power to divide Slavs even further, into West, East, South, into Diaspornikis and ne-

¹²¹ <http://conlang.wikia.com/wiki/Rozumio>

¹²² <http://slovioski.wikia.com/wiki/INTERSLAVIC?oldid=4208>

¹²³ <http://slovioski.wikia.com/wiki/INTERSLAVIC?oldid=4662>

¹²⁴ <http://steen.free.fr/interSlavic/slovianto.html>

¹²⁵ <http://dict.interSlavic.com/>

¹²⁶ <http://izviestija.info/>

¹²⁷ <http://isv.wikinet.org>

¹²⁸ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1225570924/Slavic+Interlingua>

*Diasporkis, and divide, divide, divide... Just like happened [sic] in the Balkans. In short: plagiatnik, zavistnik, balkaniznik. His stupid and complicated copy-cat pseudo-"language" makes absolutely no sense to me, and I believe to nobody else except himself.*¹²⁹

After a wave of media attention for Slovianski in February 2010, these attacks turned into a true hate campaign against the people who worked on Slovianski, Slovioski and Novoslovienskij, which included personal threats, insults and conspiracy theories about their true identity or nationality, often with a blatantly anti-Semitic undercurrent.¹³⁰ Later that year, Hučko opened YouTube channels and purchased Internet domains under names like **Slovianski**, **Interslavic**, **Slovianto**, **Neoslavonic** and **Novoslovianski**, all with the obvious purpose of discrediting these projects, promoting Slovio under their names and winning the "Google war".¹³¹ In response, a *Memorandum of the Interslavic community about Slovio, Slovianski and Neoslavonic* was issued in September 2011:

*These pages are completely unrelated to our projects, and what they contain is either a mix of plagiarism, parody and hatred, or modifications of Slovio presented under new names similar to ours. Obviously, the purpose is to confuse potentially interested people. Mr. Hučko's writings make it more than clear that he considers himself to be the exclusive owner of the entire concept of Interslavic, and that he holds us personally responsible for the failure of his own project. Other projects are consistently referred to as "plagiarized Slovio clones" or "useless copy-cat languages". We want to stress that the information contained on the aforementioned and other pages is patently and deliberately false. Our projects do not use Slovio material. Any coincidences are the logical result of both projects being based on the same Slavic source material.*¹³²

Paradoxically, Hučko also claims the credits for Slovianski's success, stating that

*Slovianski was created on SLOVIO websites, from SLOVIO, with the support of Mr Mark Hucko, and with the help and guidance of Mr Mark Hucko.*¹³³

In reality, Hučko never provided any support, nor did he ever produce any actual evidence for his assertion that other Interslavic projects are Slovio dialects or clones, except for the argument that Slovianski and Slovioski were initiated on "Slovio-sponsored forums".¹³⁴

All the more remarkable is the fact that Hučko's list of Slovio clones mentions only one project that is really based on Slovio, namely **Inter-Slavju Pidzzin** (Inter-Slavic Pidgin, ISP), a project by the aforementioned Eugeniusz Słowik, who always made it clear that

¹²⁹ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1176007935/Diaspora>

¹³⁰ <http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1288176711/Is+Steeven+Radzikowski+a+fake->,

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1266825306/STEENBERGEN+thinks+Slavs+are+idiots>,

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1267896964/Slovianski+es+mertvju>,

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1265140532/ON+BEZSTIDJU+PRODALA+ONAI+TELO+KO+INUOZEMNIKU%21>,

<http://www.network54.com/Forum/183880/thread/1265231191/ANNA+RENATA+NOWAK+ARHIV+FOTO>

¹³¹ Interslav.com, Interslavic.org, Interslavonic.com, Neoslavonic.com, Novoslovianski.com, Slovianski.eu, Slovianto.com

¹³² <http://izviestija.info/memorandum-ix-2011.html>

¹³³ http://how-to-learn-any-language.com/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=22010&PN=38&TPN=5

¹³⁴ <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diskuse:Slovianski>

his version is merely a more naturalistic adaptation of Slovio.¹³⁵ Not mentioned at all are **Rozumio** and two other projects that were openly based on Slovio:

- **Ruslavsk**, created in 2003 by the Italian-Greek psychologist Lorenzo Manasci, an attempt to make Slovio more similar to Russian. It was later renamed **Medzxuslavske** and its goal redefined as “to complement Slovio with a literary and poetic tool”.¹³⁶ It does not use the ending **-uf**, but instead it introduces a genitive with the ending **-ga** in the singular (for all genders) and **-jev** in the plural. Adjectives end in **-e** or **-ne**.¹³⁷
- **Interslovio**, launched in September 2011 by long-time Slovio user Dorothea Winkelhofer. It replaces **cx sx zx** with **cz sz zh** and forms the plural with **-i**, but for the rest it stays very close to Slovio.¹³⁸

7. The end of Slovio

Nowadays both Interslavic projects (Slovianski and Neoslavonic) have a flourishing community with hundreds of users, which demonstrates that the potential for a successful Pan-Slavic language is huge. Slovio never even came close to realizing this potential, even before it had any competitors. Neither the propaganda on Slovio.com, nor Slovio’s well-established presence on resources like Wikipedia, nor the confusion Hučko has attempted to create with other projects has caused a significant growth of the Slovio community. On the contrary, after Slovio lost its monopoly position, the number of Slovio users and supporters has been steadily decreasing, to the point that it has not been used at all since the beginning of 2011. Slovio’s most ardent supporters have either fallen silent or started their own projects, and at last, even Hučko himself seems to have lost interest in Slovio. Slovio.com and several other Slovio sites are still online but haven’t been updated for a long time now.¹³⁹ One might wonder how this failure can be explained.

The principle weakness of Slovio is that, instead of consistently adhering to one clearly defined concept, it tries to be a global auxiliary language and a Pan-Slavic language in one. The result is a language that contains elements of both directions, but effectively fails on both accounts. Slovio never managed to appeal to auxlang enthusiasts for the simple reason that it is too Slavic, whereas Slavs could not accept it because of its artificial character and the abundance of non-Slavic elements in it.

The true nature of Interslavic, or Pan-Slavic, is that it is not a system of rigid rules, but a set of features that define its relationship with any of the living Slavic languages. This requires an entirely different type of learning than what Slovio requires, namely

¹³⁵ <http://www.novoslovianski.com/index.html#ISP>

¹³⁶ <http://web.archive.org/web/20040323053715/http://www.slovio.com/ruslavsk/>

¹³⁷ Berger (2004), p. 23.

¹³⁸ <http://interslovio.wordpress.com/>

¹³⁹ According to Meyer, the last time when Slovio.com was updated was in October 2010. Meyer, p. 328.

learning to recognize these relationships and use them, which more than anything is a matter of reading. A member of the Slavic Unity form writes:

The simplicity of Slovio has not increased its popularity with the public. Why? Because learning something is a lot harder than learning nothing. Learning by naturally listening and figuring out the vocabulary of other Slavic languages is also easier than studying deliberately. [...] More so, for there to be an interest in something, there has to be a demand. Since very few materials are out there in Slovio, or any other Inter-Slavic language, there is nothing to really read.¹⁴⁰

While it is not true that there is nothing to read in Slovio at all, there is clearly a lack of reading materials that are attractive for newcomers. Most Slovio texts can be found among the news messages on Zvestia.com, which are old news by now. Apart from those, all we have are Hučko's bilingual pages on fringe science and the text samples on the Slovio pages, which indeed are just text samples. For the rest, Slovio has rarely been used for anything else but for promoting Slovio.

On a related note, the Slovio website is particularly unfavorable to potential learners. As Meyer points out, information is scattered over many different places, the main page is chockfull and chaotic, and links are not easy to find; it requires quite some discipline and motivation on the part of the reader to work his way through it. In addition, except for a number of tutorial videos about basic vocabulary, didactic materials (with exercises and the like) are unavailable.¹⁴¹

What definitely plays a role is that there has never been a place where people willing to learn Slovio could practice. The most logical place for that would undoubtedly have been the Blognik forum, but before 2006 there was hardly any activity there (less than 150 messages in four years). After that, discussions were mostly about Slovianski and other projects in an atmosphere dominated by flame wars, personal attacks and racial hatred. Not surprisingly, newcomers usually disappeared after their first post, never to return.

At last, an important factor has undoubtedly been the personality of Slovio creator Mark Hučko himself, who failed to understand that once a constructed language starts being used by others, its original creator ceases to be its exclusive owner. When Slovio had a small community of users and supporters, it would have been no more than natural for Slovio to develop; in fact, such development would have been proof of its vitality. Hučko, however, perceived all criticism as attacks against the Slavs and efforts to undermine his authority. He never adopted a single suggestion, never even worked on a compromise, and more than once chose to attack the persons who had made them instead, calling them "traitors" or "anti-Slavic perpetrators". In 2010 he finally launched a page called *Open Slovio*, inviting people to write Slovio any way they want to, as well as to submit ideas for improvement.¹⁴² That invitation clearly came too late though, because Slovio was already a dying project by then. One might also wonder how genuine it was, since

¹⁴⁰ <http://slavic-unity.com/discussion/3709/why-an-inter-slavic-language-must-be-simple/p1>

¹⁴¹ Meyer, p. 251, 279-280.

¹⁴² <http://www.slovio.com/open-slovio/index.html>

similar statements made in the past had never had any effect at all. Besides, the concept of “flexible grammar” had already been introduced in 2006, although it was little more than offering the possibility of replacing artificial elements with other, equally artificial options.¹⁴³

Thus, at critical moments in Slovio’s history, Hučko isolated himself from his potential user community by treating Slovio as his private property. From this point of view there is a striking similarity with Johann Martin Schleyer, the creator of the aforementioned Volapük, whose autocratic behavior and proprietary attitude ultimately caused the demise of this once-successful language. If Hučko had listened to the wishes of his users, Slovianski and Slovioski would probably never have been created, and Slovio might still have been a major player in the field. In fact, years later he could still have saved Slovio by seeking cooperation instead of blaming others for his own failure. But his firm belief in his own genius and his inability to build a community always prevailed, inevitably leading to the failure of the project. The fact that all this happened in spite of the numerous myths about Slovio that have been discussed in this article only shows that any true, sustainable success can never be built on a foundation of lies and deception.

¹⁴³ <http://web.archive.org/web/20061017095557/http://www.slovio.com/1/0.slovio/index.html>