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**Maša Plešković, Tihana Kraš, Branka Drljača Margić**

*masapleskovic@yahoo.com, tkras@uniri.hr, bdrljaca@ffri.hr*

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Croatia

## **Changes in the self-reported frequency of use of the Fiuman dialect: Implications for language maintenance**

### **Summary**

This paper reports the results of a study that investigates changes in the self-reported frequency of use of the Fiuman dialect, a regional minority Romance language spoken in the Croatian city of Rijeka and its surroundings, with respect to its hearing, speaking, reading, and writing both in the present and the past. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire containing closed- and open-ended questions administered to 244 Fiuman speakers aged between 14 and 89 years. The results show a decrease in the spoken use of Fiuman today in comparison to the past, but also an increase in its written use, especially among younger speakers. The participants list numerous reasons for the decrease in spoken use, the main ones being related to a reduction in the number of Fiuman speakers and demographic changes in the city. The increase in written use relates primarily to communication in social networks, in text messaging and via e-mail, as well as to communication at work. The results point to the importance of modern technology and the new media for the maintenance of minority languages.

**Key words:** Fiuman dialect, minority language, frequency of use, new media, language maintenance

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Fiuman dialect is a regional minority Romance language spoken in and around the Croatian city of Rijeka. It is a member of the Venetan family of Italian dialects, spoken predominantly in the Italian region of Veneto. It is similar to the dialect spoken in Trieste (It. *il triestino*) and the Italian dialects spoken in the Croatian regions of Istria (It. *l'istrovneto*) and Dalmatia (It. *il veneto dalmata*). Evidence suggests that it has been spoken in Rijeka since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Its origins are not clear: according to one theory, it developed from the vernacular Latin spoken in the city area by the Romanised Illyric tribes (Bató, 1933/1999; A. Depoli, 1913; G. Depoli, 1928/1999; Gigante, 1913), and according to another, it was gradually introduced into the city by Venetian merchants owing to the fact that Venetian was a *lingua franca* in the Adriatic at the time (Bidwell, 1967; Folea, 1968–1970; Rošić, 2002; Spicijarić Paškvan, 2015; Spicijarić Paškvan & Crnić Novosel, 2014). Throughout its history, Fiuman has come into close contact with other languages and dialects spoken in the city area, namely Latin, German, Hungarian, French, Turkish, standard Italian, and standard Croatian as well as the Chakavian dialect of the Croatian language, influences of which are evident in its present form (for their analyses, see e.g. Blečić & Tamaro, 2015; Gottardi, 2007; Lukežić, 1993; Spicijarić Paškvan, 2018). Today, Fiuman is primarily in contact with Italian and Croatian, Italian having the status of a minority and Croatian of the majority and official language in the city of Rijeka. Fiuman and standard Italian differ at almost all levels of linguistic analysis (see Bratulić, Đurđulov, Blečić, & Kraš, 2015, for an overview of these differences), but are genetically related and mutually intelligible. On the other hand, Fiuman and Croatian are structurally and genetically different and mutually unintelligible. Standard Italian, albeit a minority language itself today, has a different relation to Croatian than Fiuman. Being the official language of Italian minority nurseries and schools, as well as other Italian minority institutions in Rijeka, its position is much more stable. The continued use of Fiuman is thus dependant to an extent on sustaining the diglossic relationship with both standard Italian and Croatian.

In this paper, we explore Fiuman speakers' self-reported frequency of use of the dialect in the present and the past with respect to different forms of use – hearing, speaking, reading, and writing. The aim is to tap changes in the frequency of use in order to make tentative predictions about the maintenance of Fiuman. The phenomenon of language maintenance (LM) can be defined as "a situation in which

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a speaker, a group of speakers, and/or a speech community continue to use their language in some or all spheres of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main/sole language in all spheres" (Pauwels, 2004, p. 719). The reverse phenomenon, that LM is often studied in relationship with, is language shift (LS), which is defined as "the change (gradual or not) by a speaker, a group of speakers, and/or a speech community from the dominant use of one language in almost all spheres of life to the dominant use of another language in almost all spheres of life" (Pauwels, 2004, p. 719). In situations of language contact between two (or more) speech communities of unequal status, such as that of Fiuman, Croatian, and Italian in Rijeka, either LM or LS can occur.

The results of previous studies into the maintenance of Fiuman are contradictory (see section 3). Lukežić (1993, 2008) and Rošić (2002) consider Fiuman endangered, while Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan (2014, 2015) and Spicijarić Paškvan & Crnić Novosel (2014) argue that there is a tendency towards its maintenance as evidenced by intergenerational transmission and the existence of proficient young speakers. The aim of the present study is to provide further insight into the maintenance of Fiuman by exploring possible changes in the self-reported frequency of use of Fiuman across the lifespan of its present speakers and possible intergenerational differences in the frequency of the present use of Fiuman. It is part of a larger study on Fiuman maintenance, other aspects of which are reported in Plešković (2019) and Plešković, Drljača Margić, Medved, and Kraš (2019).

## **2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LANGUAGE SHIFT**

The phenomena of LM and LS have been studied in two types of speech communities – migrant communities (e.g. Clyne, 1982; Edwards, 1998; Fishman et al., 1966; Wei, 1994) and regional minority communities (e.g. Dorian, 1981; Gal, 1979). The speech community of the Fiuman dialect is an example of the latter.

According to Pauwels (2016), factors contributing to LM or LS include individual features (e.g. age, gender, education, social class, race/ethnicity, language attitudes), minority group features (e.g. the number of minority language speakers, settlement patterns, linguistic/cultural resemblance to the majority group) and majority group features (e.g. attitudes towards the minority language/culture, the

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existence of laws/policies supporting linguistic variety). These factors interact in complex ways and operate somewhat differently in each speech community. The outcome of such an interaction is not easy to predict, but scholars contend that the use and transmission of a minority language within the family, along with positive attitudes of its speakers towards it and supportive institutional and educational policies, are the main prerequisites for LM.

In fact, intergenerational transmission and the use of the minority language among all generations of speakers are viewed as fundamental factors contributing to LM (e.g. Arriagada, 2005; Fishman, 1991; Lao, 2004; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Park & Sarkar, 2007; Pauwels, 2005; Soehl 2016). Intergenerational transmission is a precondition for language use and language proficiency, both of which are necessary for LM (Fase, Koen, & Kroon, 1992). Without intergenerational transmission, neither positive attitudes nor institutional and educational support are likely to prevent LS.

Communities whose speakers have positive attitudes towards their language as a symbol of group identity are much more likely to maintain it (Pauwels, 2004). Positive attitudes might lead to an increase in language proficiency (e.g. Young & Gardner, 1990). It has been shown that parents' positive attitudes towards the minority language have positive effects on children's minority language proficiency (e.g. Guardado, 2002; Lao, 2004; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). They also reinforce children's ethnic and cultural identity as minority members and strengthen their self-esteem (e.g. Lee, 2002; Sofu, 2009; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

Institutional support includes laws and policies that approve, and activities that encourage, the use of the minority language. Minority communities, sports organisations, cultural institutions, clubs, churches and similar play a crucial role in LM because they enable speakers to see the usefulness of using their language outside the family context (e.g. Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007; Park & Sarkar, 2007). Educational support gives the opportunity for learning the minority language and may promote its use among all community members (e.g. Ehala, 2009; Fishman, 1991; Gorter & Cenoz, 2012; Kroon, 1990; Pauwels, 2005). Nevertheless, without speakers' positive attitudes towards the minority language, institutional support is not very effective (Ehala, 2009; Pauwels, 2005; Yağmur, 2004).

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### 3. THE STATUS, PRESENCE AND MAINTENANCE OF THE FIUMAN DIALECT

Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rijeka belonged to different states, the official languages of which varied; however, the languages of common use in the city were Fiuman and Chakavian. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political, ideological, demographic, economical, and linguistic changes in Rijeka led to a decline in the number of Fiuman speakers (Lukežić, 1993). Most importantly, after World War II, Rijeka became part of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the official language changed from Italian (which was the official language in Rijeka between the two world wars) to Croatian (called *hrvatskosrpski* at the time). This was accompanied by the adoption of the communist and socialist ideology as well as by economic difficulties, which led to the emigration of part of the city's population. It has been estimated that more than 30 thousand speakers of Fiuman left the city after World War II (Giuricin & Scotti, 2006; Žerjavić, 1993), while mainly Slavic speakers immigrated to it (Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan, 2015). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the emigration trend has continued (Lajić & Klempić Bogadi, 2012), and has been accompanied by a negative birth rate (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

There is no official record of the current number of Fiuman speakers. Today's Fiuman speakers are mostly bilingual or multilingual – in addition to Fiuman, they speak Croatian and/or Italian and other languages or dialects. In most cases, they state that Fiuman is their mother tongue (Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan, 2014) and declare themselves as members of the Italian national minority. For this reason, the census data pertaining to the Italian minority members and Italian mother tongue speakers in Croatia and the city of Rijeka are relevant. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2001, 2011), the number of Italian minority members (19,636 or 0.44% vs. 17,807 or 0.42%) and Italian mother tongue speakers (20,521 or 0.46% vs. 18,573 or 0.43%) in Croatia is decreasing as well as the number of Italian minority members (2,763 or 1.92% vs. 2,445 or 1.90%) and Italian mother tongue speakers (2,745 or 1.91% vs. 2,276 or 1.77%) in Rijeka.

The Italian minority in Rijeka enjoys legal rights to use the language and script in public domains as well as organise and engage in the relevant educational and cultural activities, which are granted to them by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (2014) and the *Statut Grada Rijeke* [Statute of the City of Rijeka] (2016). Standard Italian has

the official status in Italian minority nurseries, schools, and other institutions in Rijeka, including the Italian Community of Rijeka (It. *Comunità degli Italiani di Fiume*), the Italian National Theatre (It. *Dramma Italiano*) and the EDIT publishing house. It is also the official language of the *La Voce del Popolo* daily newspaper and several editions of daily news on the *Radio Rijeka/Radio Fiume* local radio station. As for Fiuman, to our knowledge, it is scarcely present in education and the media. However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, columns and articles in Fiuman were published in *La Voce del Popolo*, while texts in Fiuman appeared in *Panorama*, *La Tore* and *La Batana* (magazines for the Italian national minority in Croatia). In addition, *Radio Rijeka/Radio Fiume* used to broadcast a satirical programme in Fiuman called *Tomaso ficanaso*. An exception to the current general trend are several texts in Fiuman written by Laura Marchig which appeared on the Internet (see <https://www.rijekadanas.com/?s=la+scartaza>) in the column called *La Scartaza* in 2018. Literary works in Fiuman, although existent, are also very scarce. The most important ones are collected in Pužar (1999). There are also books of poetry *Joze Fiumane* by Egidio Milinovich, and *Rime de Fiume* and *I Sfoghi del Cor* by Mario Schittar/Zuande la Marsecia as well as the collection of short satirical and critical texts published in *La Voce del Popolo* and *La Tore* called *Storia e Ciacole de un Fiuman Patoco* by Ettore Mazzieri.

As for the maintenance of Fiuman, Lukežić (1993, 2008) argues that Fiuman is in danger of extinction. She attributes its endangered status to two factors: first, the prestige of standard Italian and its influence on Fiuman between the two world wars, and second, the ideological and political changes in Rijeka after World War II, which caused the marginalisation of Fiuman speakers and their retreat to peripheral city enclaves. According to Lukežić (2008), Fiuman is no longer a dialect, used by the whole city population, but a sociolect, used by a specific social group, within which it is "atrophying and decaying" (Lukežić, 1993, p. 37). Rošić (2002, p. 11) also claims that the loss of Fiuman is inevitable as it is regularly and fluently used only by seventy- and eighty-year-olds, while younger speakers opt for standard Italian. The above studies, however, do not provide any empirical evidence to support the claims of LS.

Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan (2014, 2015) and Spicijarić Paškvan & Crnić Novosel (2014), on the other hand, argue that there are necessary prerequisites for LM despite the fact that Fiuman is used exclusively in private domains and

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informal situations<sup>1</sup>, and primarily in oral communication. Based on empirical evidence obtained via a questionnaire, they claim that there is intergenerational transmission of the dialect and the existence of proficient young speakers in the Fiuman speech community. Crnić Novosel and Spicijarić Paškvan (2014) report that 86% of their respondents aged up to 35 years use Fiuman in everyday communication. The respondents also proved to be aware of the importance of dialect transmission, albeit younger ones less so than the older, and of the need to additionally protect Fiuman in order to preserve it. They also stated that the community members' attitudes towards Fiuman and its maintenance were positive. In addition, the respondents described Fiuman as equally valuable as the other city dialects and characterised it as the main trait of their identity. Nevertheless, Spicijarić Paškvan and Crnić Novosel (2014) state that Fiuman speakers are no longer concentrated within the nucleus of the city, but are scattered across the whole city area, which decreases the possibility of using the dialect in the immediate neighbourhood.

Previous studies on Fiuman did not look into the diachronic perspective of its use, which is of considerable importance for LM, as a decrease in use is an indicator of LS. They also did not seek to determine its frequency of use with respect to hearing, speaking, reading, and writing, which would give a more detailed picture of its use. This study aims to fill this gap.

## 4. THE STUDY

### 4.1. Research questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Has the frequency of hearing Fiuman, speaking in Fiuman, reading in Fiuman, and writing in Fiuman changed over time for different age groups of speakers? If yes, what are the possible reasons for this change?
2. Is there a difference between different age groups of speakers in terms of the frequency of hearing Fiuman, speaking in Fiuman, reading in Fiuman, and writing in Fiuman in the present?

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<sup>1</sup> Drljača Margjić, Kraš, and Smiljanić (2015) state that Fiuman is also used in informal communication at work in the Italian minority institutions.

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## 4.2. Participants

A total of 244 Fiuman speakers, aged 14 to 89 years, participated in the study. They were divided into six age groups: adolescents (aged 14–18 years), younger adults (aged 19–32 years), pre-middle-aged adults (aged 33–46 years), middle-aged adults (aged 47–60 years), post-middle-aged adults (aged 61–74 years) and older adults (aged 75 years and above). The distribution of the participants according to age is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Distribution of participants according to age

**Tablica 1.** Podjela ispitanika prema dobi

Age group (N) / Dobna skupina (N)						Total (N) / Ukupno (N)
Adolescents / 14 – 18 godina	Younger adults / 19 – 32 godine	Pre-middle- aged adults / 33 – 46 godina	Middle-aged adults / 47 – 60 godina	Post-middle- aged adults / 61 – 74 godine	Older adults / 75+ godina	
37 (15.16%)	42 (17.21%)	35 (14.34%)	55 (22.54%)	46 (18.85%)	29 (11.86%)	244

Participants of both genders took part in the study – 170 (70%) female and 74 (30%) male. A total of 229 participants (94%) were born and lived in Rijeka and its surroundings at the time of their participation in the study. The majority spoke Fiuman, standard Italian, Croatian and one or more additional languages. Some also spoke Chakavian. A total of 219 participants (90%) had been exposed to Fiuman from birth, and 167 participants (68%) considered Fiuman their mother tongue. Some reported having more than one mother tongue.

Due to practical constraints, the participants' knowledge of Fiuman was not formally tested; rather, the participants (who all declared themselves as speakers of Fiuman) self-rated their proficiency in Fiuman according to different language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) on a five-point Likert scale with the following values: 1 ("none"), 2 ("elementary"), 3 ("good"), 4 ("very good"), and 5 ("excellent"). Median values of the participants' self-ratings of their proficiency in Fiuman, according to language skills and age groups, are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Participants' self-ratings of their proficiency in Fiuman according to language skills and age groups

**Tablica 2.** Samoprocjena ispitanika o vlastitom poznavanju fijumanskog prema jezičnim vještinama i dobnim skupinama

Language skill / Jezična vještina	Age group / Dobna skupina											
	Adolescents / 14 – 18 godina		Younger adults / 19 – 32 godine		Pre-middle-aged adults / 33 – 46 godina		Middle-aged adults / 47 – 60 godina		Post-middle-aged adults / 61 – 74 godine		Older adults / 75+ godina	
	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR
Listening / Slušanje	4	1	5	1	5	0	5	0	5	1	5	0
Reading / Čitanje	4	2	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1
Speaking / Govorenje	4	2	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	0
Writing / Pisanje	3	2	4	2	4	2	5	1	4.5	2	5	1

It can be observed that all age groups self-rated their proficiency in Fiuman rather highly. However, a general increase of self-ratings can be observed with age. Also, in most of the age groups (i.e. all apart from middle-aged and older adults), writing is self-rated lower than the other language skills.

### 4.3. Materials and procedure

Part of the *Upitnik o fijumanskom dijalektu* [*Fiuman Dialect Questionnaire*] (Bratulić, Drljača Margić, & Kraš, 2017) was used to collect the data. The questionnaire, which was originally written in Croatian, was translated into Italian, and both language versions were offered to the participants. A closed-ended question required participants to rate their frequency of use of Fiuman on a five-point Likert scale with respect to hearing<sup>2</sup>, speaking, reading, and writing, in the present and the past. "The past" referred to "the childhood" in the version of the questionnaire

<sup>2</sup> Note that "hearing" does not refer to the conscious activity of listening but rather an unconscious act of perceiving sound. The equivalents of the verb "to hear" were used in both language versions of the questionnaire (It. *sentire*, Cro. *čuti*).

administered to adolescents and "the childhood and adolescence" in the version of the questionnaire administered to all other age groups. The values on the scale were 1 ("never"), 2 ("rarely"), 3 ("sometimes"), 4 ("often"), and 5 ("every day"). An open-ended question asked participants to explain why their frequency of use of Fiuman changed, if it did, in the course of time. Information about the participants' language profile and sociodemographic background was also collected. The questionnaire was completed on paper. Only 22 participants chose the Croatian version.

#### 4.4. Results

Median values of the participants' ratings of the frequency of hearing Fiuman, and speaking, reading, and writing in Fiuman in the present, for different age groups, are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Participants' ratings of the frequency of their use of Fiuman in the present according to forms of use and age groups

**Tablica 3.** Procjena ispitanika o učestalosti vlastite uporabe fijumanskog u sadašnjosti prema oblicima uporabe i dobnim skupinama

Form of use / Oblik uporabe	Age group / Dobna skupina											
	Adolescents / 14 – 18 godina		Younger adults / 19 – 32 godine		Pre-middle-aged adults / 33 – 46 godina		Middle-aged adults / 47 – 60 godina		Post-middle-aged adults / 61 – 74 godine		Older adults / 75+ godina	
	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR
Hearing / Slušanje	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2
Speaking / Govorenje	4	3	4	2	4	2	5	1	4	2	5	1
Reading / Čitanje	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	3
Writing / Pisanje	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	3

Similarly, Table 4 shows median values of the participants' ratings of the frequency of hearing Fiuman, and speaking, reading, and writing in Fiuman in the past, for different age groups.

**Table 4.** Participants' ratings of the frequency of their use of Fiuman in the past according to forms of use and age groups

**Tablica 4.** Procjena ispitanika o učestalosti vlastite uporabe fijumanskog u prošlosti prema oblicima uporabe i dobnim skupinama

Form of use / Oblik uporabe	Age group (Mdn) / Dobna skupina (Mdn)											
	Adolescents / 14 – 18 godina		Younger adults / 19 – 32 godine		Pre-middle-aged adults / 33 – 46 godina		Middle-aged adults / 47 – 60 godina		Post-middle-aged adults / 61 – 74 godine		Older adults / 75+ godina	
	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR
Hearing / Slušanje	4	2	4	1	5	1	5	0	5	0	5	0
Speaking / Govorenje	4	3	5	2	5	1	5	0	5	0	5	0
Reading / Čitanje	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3
Writing / Pisanje	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3

A comparison of Tables 3 and 4 shows that, overall, (a) the frequency of hearing Fiuman and speaking in it is higher than the frequency of reading and writing in Fiuman, both in the present and the past, for all age groups, (b) the frequency of use of Fiuman is higher in the past than in the present, for all age groups except the adolescents, and (c) the frequency of use of Fiuman increases with the age of the participants, both in the present and the past, the exception to this being post-middle-aged adults compared to middle-aged adults. The significance of these trends was explored by means of inferential statistics. We used non-parametric tests because the data we had obtained using the Likert scale is ordinal and, as such, does not permit the use of parametric tests (see e.g. Field, 2009, for the position that Likert scale data is ordinal and the assumptions of parametric tests).

To answer the first research question (Has the frequency of hearing Fiuman, speaking in Fiuman, reading in Fiuman, and writing in Fiuman changed over time for different age groups of speakers?), we compared the participants' ratings of the frequency of hearing Fiuman in the present and the past, speaking in it in the present and the past, reading in it in the present and the past, and writing in it in the present

and the past by means of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, for each age group separately. The tests revealed that adolescents write in Fiuman more often now than they did in the past ( $z = -2.154, p < .05, r = -0.25$ ), that younger adults heard Fiuman more often in the past than they do now ( $z = -2.006, p < .05, r = -0.22$ ), that pre-middle-aged adults heard Fiuman ( $z = -3.171, p < .01, r = -0.38$ ) and, to some extent, spoke in it ( $z = -1.960, p = .055, r = -0.23$ ) more often in the past than they do now, but that, similar to adolescents, they write in it more often now than they did in the past ( $z = -2.728, p < .01, r = -0.33$ ). Middle-aged adults heard Fiuman ( $z = -4.566, p < .001, r = -0.44$ ) and spoke in it ( $z = -2.822, p < .01, r = -0.27$ ) more often in the past than they do now, the same being true for post-middle-aged adults (hearing:  $z = -4.559, p < .001, r = -0.48$ ; speaking:  $z = -3.280, p < .001, r = -0.34$ ). Finally, older adults heard Fiuman more often in the past than they do now ( $z = -2.641, p < .01, r = -0.35$ ). Overall, the results suggest that the frequency of hearing Fiuman has decreased over time, followed by the frequency of speaking in it. In contrast, the frequency of writing in Fiuman has increased over time, especially among adolescents and pre-middle-aged adults.

When asked about the reasons for the possible change in the frequency of use of Fiuman, around a third of the participants (36%) did not answer this question. Of the remaining two thirds (64%), 70% reported a decrease in the use of Fiuman, listing the following reasons (illustrated with the participants' statements in brackets): mortality rate and speaker age (20%) ("Unfortunately, my parents and neighbours to whom I spoke in Fiuman are dead", "I am 71, and my parents and most of the other family members to whom I spoke Fiuman are dead", "I have fewer opportunities to meet my schoolmates and thus fewer opportunities to speak Fiuman"), a decline in the number of speakers (18%) ("We live in a city where the number of Fiuman speakers is steadily decreasing", "Fewer and fewer people speak the Fiuman dialect, particularly the youngest ones"), the impact of the dominant language (17%) ("Although I always speak Fiuman at home, as I started attending university and working later, Croatian has been the language I have most frequently used", "Recently I haven't spoken Fiuman because I am always in the company of people the majority of whom speak Croatian"), a move out of the city or quarter (13%) ("The change, although small, took place after I finished grammar school and moved to Italy and started being exposed to other dialects as a result"), intermarriages (8%) ("After I got married, because my husband does not speak it", "The use of Fiuman decreased when I married. My wife does not speak it"), emigration after World War II (6%) ("In

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1947, after the exodus of the Fiumans", "The change occurred after the war because the Fiumans left for Italy. There are few of us left. You can hear the Italian language less and less. It's a shame"), the influence of standard Italian (4%) ("Now I use Fiuman less frequently because I have to speak standard Italian at university (in Italy)", "Because at school and university, I speak only Italian"), immigration of Slavic population (3%) ("The arrival of new populations", "Speaking in the Fiuman dialect has become less frequent nowadays because the people – the citizens – that surround us do not have our roots, so we, the Fiumans, are being treated as strangers, second-rate persons. All of this has happened in the course of the years because the number of Fiumans is diminishing") and several other reasons, such as lack of intergenerational transmission ("It occurs when parents do not transmit the dialect to their offspring, grandparents to their grandchildren etc.") and media content in Fiuman ("Changed as a result of the suppression of the columns in Fiuman [*Voce – Pepi Fritola, Soto la Tore, Radio Babe*] and radio transmissions [*Tomaso Ficanaso*]", "The impossibility of reading/hearing").

A total of 15% of the participants who answered the question reported an increase in the use of Fiuman, attributing this to the communication in Fiuman at work (50%) ("When I was a child, I spoke Fiuman only within the family [I attended Croatian-medium schools]. Now I speak it within the family and at work") and the use of modern technology and the new media (50%) ("When I contact my colleagues by e-mail, we often communicate in Fiuman", "Nowadays I use it more frequently [in reading and writing] thanks to the media", "In the new millenium, Facebook replaced the great majority of daily contacts. So you speak more often online than in person", "The change happened only within the written domain. In childhood and adolescence, I didn't use to write it because communication was exclusively oral. Now with e-mail and mobile phones, I sometimes write it"). They also mention a stronger feeling of belonging to the language/national minority (16%) ("Having reached a certain age, I felt a sense of belonging to the Fiumans more deeply, so I started using the Fiuman dialect more") and a change in their life environment (12%) ("I learned Fiuman when I married", "After adolescence, having lived in Rijeka since the age of 18, I have always spoken Fiuman with my co-nationals"). The remaining 15% of the participants who answered the question did not report a change in the frequency of use of Fiuman.

As for the second question (Is there a difference between different age groups of speakers in terms of the frequency of hearing Fiuman, speaking in Fiuman, reading in

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Fiuman, and writing in Fiuman in the present?), we compared the age groups' ratings of the frequency of hearing Fiuman, and speaking, reading, and writing in it in the present by means of the Kruskal-Wallis test. We obtained a statistically significant difference between the age groups for all forms of use, apart from hearing Fiuman. More precisely, the differences were obtained for speaking ( $H(5) = 15.450, p < .001$ ), reading ( $H(5) = 23.884, p < .001$ ) and writing ( $H(5) = 14.482, p < .05$ ) in Fiuman. We used Mann-Whitney tests to discover which age groups differed from each other. All effects are reported at an  $\alpha$  of .003 due to the application of a Bonferroni correction. Adolescents were found to speak ( $U = 656.000, z = -3.123, p < .01, r = -0.20$ ), read ( $U = 655.000, z = -3.021, p < .01, r = -0.19$ ) and write ( $U = 589.000, z = -3.547, p < .001, r = -0.23$ ) in Fiuman less often than middle-aged-adults and to read in it less often than older adults ( $U = 232.000, z = -4.060, p < .001, r = -0.26$ ). Younger adults were also found to read in Fiuman less often than older adults ( $U = 342.500, z = -3.211, p < .01, r = -0.21$ ). Therefore, when it comes to the present use of Fiuman, younger speakers were found to use Fiuman less often than the older ones, in the spoken, but especially in the written form.

## 5. DISCUSSION

If we consider the differences between the use of Fiuman in the present and the past, addressed by the first research question, two opposing tendencies can be observed. On the one hand, speakers of all age groups, except adolescents, speak in Fiuman and/or hear it less frequently now than they did in the past. These results can be explained by a decrease in the number of Fiuman speakers, reported by Lukežić (1993) and the participants. Besides, according to the participants, older speakers outnumber younger ones in the Fiuman speech community, but their mobility and participation in the social life of the city are limited. An increase in the number of Slavic speakers in Rijeka and in mixed marriages also contribute to this. Only very rarely have mixed marriages led to an increase in the use of Fiuman, in the cases when Fiuman was acquired by the partner who had not spoken it previously. The participants also mention a more widespread use of Croatian and standard Italian in the present than in the past. Furthermore, the participants report that nowadays, Fiuman is primarily used in the private domain or in informal communication in the public domain (as also reported by Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan, 2014, 2015; Drljača Margić et al., 2015; Lukežić, 1993, 2008; Spicijarić Paškvan & Crnić Novosel, 2014), whereas in the past,

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it was also used in the public domain (e.g. in shops, schools and playgrounds) and in the media. Besides, Fiuman speakers no longer live close to each other in the core city area and have fewer opportunities to interact, as noted also by Spicijarić Paškvan and Crnić Novosel (2014).

On the other hand, there is an increase in the written use of Fiuman, especially among younger speakers (adolescents and pre-middle-aged adults), who use modern technology and the new media more than older speakers. The increase in writing pertains to communication in social networks, in text messaging and via e-mail, as well as to communication at work in the Italian minority institutions. Numerous studies have shown that the new media and modern technology have a great potential in LM, especially among adolescents and young adults. Jany (2017) states that the use of endangered minority languages in social media and on the Internet enables new generations to learn and use language, and therefore contribute to the success of reversing LS. She explains that the world modernises and adapts to new ways of communication, and new conditions for social and communicative exchanges emerge. In her words, "in a time when oral and written communication are converging, when written communication is assuming the communicative roles of traditionally oral communication, and when linguistic features of oral and written language are becoming more similar, it seems unavoidable to develop written representations of the otherwise oral languages" (Jany, 2017, p. 74). In the study on Low German, Reershemius (2017) finds the Internet potentially useful in making a minority language more visible and accessible. It provides effective methods of archiving language data and promoting teaching materials, can support standardisation efforts and helps diaspora speakers create online communities. In the case of Low German, speakers who were previously reluctant to write in their minority language have started using it on Facebook. Similarly, Fiuman has been promoted via several Facebook groups, as our participants report. Reershemius (2017, p. 45) states that "users get together in a linguistically and ideologically less regulated space for the purposes of entertainment, humour and the celebration of linguistic heritage and regional identity, and develop their own voice by transferring their bilingual practices from spoken language into a new form of writing in the Facebook group". Cru (2015) also reports that Yucatec Maya use Facebook as a non-institutional domain, characterised by non-standard language use, written language reflecting oral communication, language mixing, and borrowing. According to Pauwels (2005), content intended for children (e.g. picture books, audio and video materials, games) and adolescents (e.g.

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computer games, virtual playrooms, mobile phones and the Internet content) can make the use of the minority language interesting and attractive and is not necessarily linked to the family environment.

The results have also revealed some differences between the age groups, tackled by the second research question. Despite an increase in writing in Fiuman, adolescents tend to speak, read and write in it less frequently than older speakers, similar to younger adults, who tend to read in it less often than the oldest speakers. Several reasons could be advanced for this. Firstly, younger speakers opt for other varieties, Croatian or standard Italian. For younger generations, especially adolescents, the language of the broader community is often more important than the family language (e.g. Soehl, 2016), and they abandon their mother tongue in an attempt to be accepted in society. The issue of language preference can also be related to the formation of identity, a process which may not be completed in younger speakers, due to which the minority language loses ground to the majority one. According to Crnić Novosel and Spicijarić Paškvan (2014), Fiuman speakers gradually integrate in the other language communities in Rijeka and assume their identities. Furthermore, younger Fiuman speakers often attend Italian minority schools in Rijeka, where standard Italian is used in the classroom. In contrast to Fiuman, standard Italian creates opportunities for further education and moving to another environment, and improves job prospects.

The issue of language choice/preference and identity formation is a natural consequence of maturation and conscious decisions (cf. Lee, 2002). The older participants state that, with an aroused feeling of belonging to the minority community, they started using Fiuman more often. Older generations are often seen as guardians of minority languages (Pauwels, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; Sofu, 2009). The results of our study corroborate this as in many families Fiuman went out of use with the death of the oldest speakers. Previous studies also state that Fiuman is more frequently used among older speakers. In Crnić Novosel & Spicijarić Paškvan (2014) and Spicijarić Paškvan & Crnić Novosel (2015), the speakers of Fiuman aged 76 years or above, followed by those aged 36 to 75 years, reported using Fiuman more often than the speakers aged 17 to 35 years.

Overall, the results of our study suggest that in the case of Fiuman, there is a risk of LS, as the frequency of hearing Fiuman and speaking in it seems to have decreased across the lifespan of its present speakers and given that younger speakers tend to use it less often than older ones. However, there is also room for LM, primarily in relation

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to modern technology and the new media, due to which Fiuman is increasingly used in writing, especially among younger speakers. However, the writing trend, which could potentially create a means of LM, should be complemented by other forms and different domains of use. At the moment, the use of Fiuman in the public domain is primarily related to informal communication among Fiuman speakers at work in the Italian minority institutions. For the maintenance of a minority language, the use in a broad range of different domains and involving a broad range of speakers is crucial. It is also important that the minority language receives coverage in the media, in the form of use in the broadcasting of radio and television programmes and in publishing newspapers and magazines. Although a minority language, especially a dialect as Fiuman is, can never function in a range of domains as wide as that in which the dominant language is employed, it can still find niches in which its usage is natural and necessary. The Fiuman community in Rijeka should take the opportunities offered by modern technology to increase the presence and visibility of Fiuman in the media and in different language domains. Complemented by the transmission and use of the dialect in the family as the primary prerequisites, these communication opportunities can increase the chance of its maintenance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This questionnaire-based study discovered changes in the self-reported frequency of use of the Fiuman dialect in the present compared with the past: on the one hand, there appears to be a decrease in the spoken use of Fiuman, while on the other, the written use of Fiuman, primarily in social networks, in text messaging and via e-mail, seems to be on the rise. Some intergenerational differences in the current frequency of use of Fiuman were also revealed: younger speakers seem to be using Fiuman in both oral and written form less often than older ones. Such results suggest that LS, which might have already started among younger Fiuman speakers, can be reversed if additional efforts are invested in LM, for example if the potential of modern technology and the new media is exploited. However, given that the results of the study are based on self-reported rather than actual use of Fiuman, the predominantly subjective data presented here should be complemented by data obtained by more objective methods, such as corpus analyses. Also, to gain a more detailed insight into the reasons underlying the possible changes in the use of Fiuman among different generations of its speakers, the use of qualitative methods, primarily interviews, would

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be useful. Finally, given the complexity of the LM and LS phenomena, exploring other aspects of the use of Fiuman, primarily its domains of use, and other factors, such as intergenerational transmission, language attitudes, speaker motivation and institutional and educational support, is important for obtaining a deeper insight into the present status of Fiuman and making firmer predictions about its maintenance. The studies that are complementary to this one (Plešković, 2019; Plešković et al., 2019) aim at achieving this goal.

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**Maša Plešković, Tihana Kraš, Branka Drljača Margić**

*masapleskovic@yahoo.com, tkras@uniri.hr, bdrljaca@ffri.hr*

Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet

Hrvatska

## **Promjene u samoiskazanoj učestalosti uporabe fijumanskog dijalekta: implikacije za očuvanje jezika**

### **Sažetak**

U radu se iznose rezultati istraživanja kojim se proučavaju promjene u učestalosti samoiskazane uporabe fijumanskog dijalekta, autohtonoga manjinskog romanskog idioma grada Rijeke i njegove okolice, u govoru, slušanju, čitanju i pisanju u sadašnjosti u odnosu na prošlost. Iako mu je podrijetlo nejasno, fijumanskim se dijalektom govori u Rijeci barem od 15. stoljeća te se danas rabi prvenstveno u govoru, u privatnoj i neformalnoj komunikaciji. Službeni je jezik talijanskih manjinskih institucija u Rijeci standardni talijanski. Podaci su u istraživanju prikupljeni uz pomoć upitnika s pitanjima zatvorenog i otvorenog tipa, provedenog na uzorku od 244 govornika fijumanskog dijalekta u dobi od 14 do 89 godina podijeljenih u šest dobnih skupina. Rezultati pokazuju općenitu tendenciju smanjenja govorne uporabe fijumanskog u sadašnjosti u odnosu na prošlost, ali istovremeno i povećanje učestalosti pisanja na fijumanskom, osobito među mlađim dobnim skupinama. Govornici navode različite razloge smanjenja uporabe, a kao najčešći ističu se: smanjenje broja govornika, demografske promjene u gradu i dominacija većinskog jezika. Učestalija uporaba fijumanskog uočena je u komunikaciji na radnom mjestu, s kolegama, na društvenim mrežama, u SMS-porukama i e-pošti, a povezana je i s jačanjem osjećaja pripadnosti nacionalnoj i jezičnoj manjini u starijoj dobi. Rezultati također pokazuju da mlađi govornici fijumanskog rabe taj dijalekt u govoru i pismu rjeđe od starijih govornika. Taj rezultat, kao i onaj koji se odnosi na općenito smanjenje fijumanskog u govoru, upućuje na to da postoji opasnost od napuštanja tog dijalekta; s druge strane, porast pisane uporabe fijumanskog te korištenje novih tehnologija i medija pružaju mogućnosti za njegovo očuvanje.

**Ključne riječi:** fijumanski dijalekt, manjinski jezik, učestalost uporabe, novi mediji, očuvanje jezika

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