

## **FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS**



**FRAN RAMOVŠ**  
**(1890-1952)**

“The linguistic atlas is an indispensable means for the study of dialect and language. [...] By this we do not mean a collection of colourful maps displaying the range of this or that dialect; it is not a linguistic atlas but a dialectological map, an approximate projection of a certain number of linguistic phenomena, the range of which almost never completely corresponds to the range projected in this way. [...] A linguistic atlas, however, contains a larger number of maps; each map shows/ demonstrates only one phenomenon, one word, its realization in speech

(almost) simultaneously across the whole Slovene territory; the atlas is thus a sort of dictionary, which is not alphabetized but geographically arranged. [...]

A collector should always be, i.e. in all places one and the same person; this person, who perceives with the same ear the Slovenian sounds in all the different places, will use the same transcription technique also in jotting them down. This person should be well educated in phonetic transcription and should possess a well-trained ear; it is important that such person distinguish qualitative, even ever so tiny differences, in order to hear the intonation of unstressed syllables, and, naturally, also the accentual nature of stressed syllables. Even if I owe it to coincidence, I am fortunate to have such a person" (Ramovš 1934: 1-4).

## 1. Biography

1890 – born in Ljubljana on 14 September.

1910-1940 – studies linguistics first in Vienna, where his teachers were Mayer-Lübke and Kretschmer, then in Graz, where his head teacher was R. Meringer.

1911 – becomes substitute assistant to Prof. Meringer and starts writing his doctoral thesis.

1912 – finishes his doctoral thesis on the development of Proto-Slavic semivowels in Slovene. In the same year he starts preparing his habilitation thesis on modern consonant reduction in Slovene.

1914 – hands in his doctoral thesis and is promoted to Doctor of Philosophy in Graz. In the same year he also completes his habilitation thesis entitled *Slovenische Studien*, and also publishes his first work on Slovene dialects entitled *Zur slovenischen Dialektforschung*.

1914-1936 – publishes works on Slovene dialects.

1915 – mobilized into the army and sent to the Isonzo front. Two years later he is released from active army duty due to impairments.

1918 – obtains a habilitation at the University of Graz; following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy he returns to Ljubljana, where he is elected secretary of the university commission at the University of Ljubljana.

1919 – following the founding of the University of Ljubljana he is one of the first to become Professor of Indo-European and Slavic language studies.

1921 – becomes secretary of the Scientific Society for Humanities, and five years later the dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana.

1934 – becomes rector of the University of Ljubljana; he proposes his plan for the founding of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts and prepares a draft for the Slovene Linguistic Atlas.

1938 – as the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU) is founded he becomes its full-time member.

1945-1950 – is the main secretary of SAZU, and its president from 1950 to the time of his death.

1945-1952 – leads the Institute for the Slovenian language at SAZU and prepares a long-term work plan which the Institute, named after him since 1986, still follows in most points even today.

1952 – dies in Ljubljana.

## **2. Ramovš's main works**

1914 – *Zur slovenischen Dialektforschung*, AslPh,<sup>1</sup> pp. 329-337. This is Ramovš's first paper on Slovene dialects which focuses on the development of individual linguistic phenomena observed both in the dialects and in the standard variety.

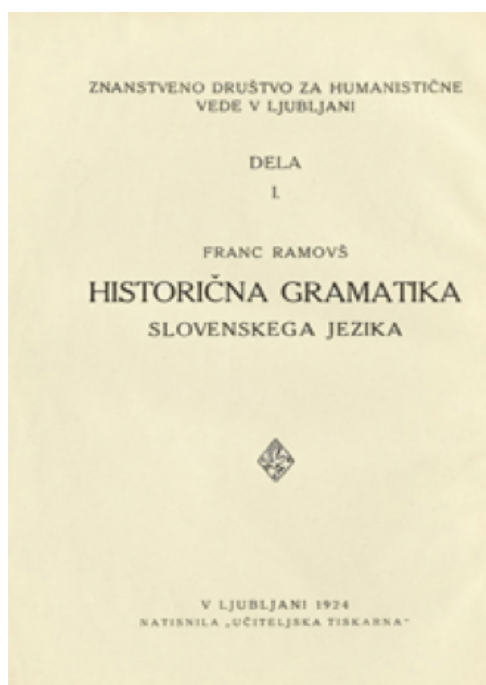
1918, 1920 – *Slovenische Studien*, AslPh 37, pp. 123-174; pp. 289-330. Ramovš's habilitation thesis dealing with the modern vocalic reduction in the Slovene language, printed in two volumes. The materials for his research on modern vocalic reduction are

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<sup>1</sup> AslPh – *Archiv für slawische Philologie*.

his own excerpts from Slovene manuscripts and from the majority of Slovene books dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and materials from Slovene dialects.

1924 – *Historična gramatika II: Konzonantizem* (*Historical Grammar II: Consonantism*). Ljubljana, 335 pages. This was Ramovš's first book from the scheduled series *Historical Grammar of the Slovene Language*. Even today it is a reliable and abundant source for all phenomena concerning Slovene consonantism and its thousand-year historical development as we know it from Slovene written and printed sources and dialects.



*Historična gramatika slovenskega jezika II – Konzonantizem* (*Historical Grammar of the Slovene language II: Consonantism*)

<http://www.fran.si/slovnice-in-pravopisi/38/1924-1952-ramovs>

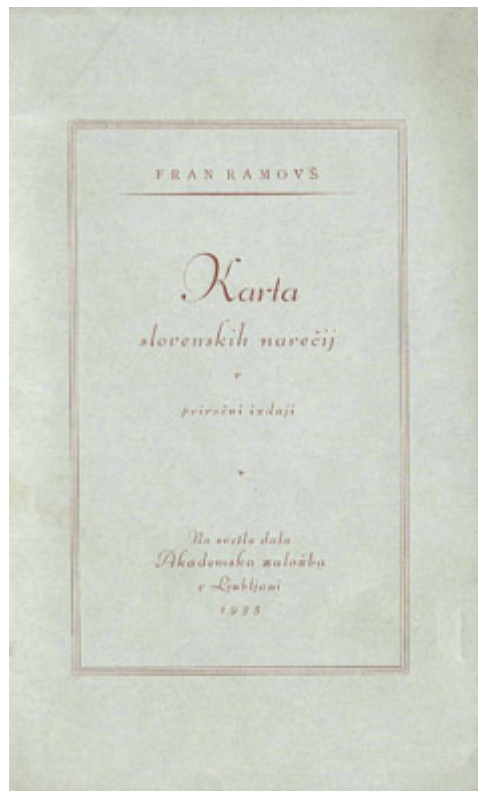
1928 – *Die Charakteristik des slovenischen Dialektes in Resia*, ČJKZ 7,<sup>2</sup> pp. 107-121. Ramovš's first study which offers a reliable insight into the development of a Slovene dialect in its entirety.

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<sup>2</sup> ČJKZ – *Časopis za slovenski jezik, književnost in zgodovino*.

1929 – *Slovenački jezik (Slovene Language)*, Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka, volume 4, pp. 192-208. In this paper Ramovš for the first time gives a more in-depth account of the entire Slovene language dialectal area.

1931 – *Dialektološka karta slovenskega jezika (Dialectological Map of the Slovenian Language)*. Ljubljana, 72 pages + map. In this book Ramovš publishes the first scientifically based map of the Slovene dialects, divided into 7 dialect groups with more than 40 dialects. The map has to date required modifications only in places for which the author lacked research material.



*Dialectological Map of the Slovene Language*

<http://www.narecna-bera.si/koroska-narecja/slovenska-narecja>

1933 – *Kratka karakteristika slovenskega narečja na Dolenjskem (A Short Survey of the Slovenian Dialect in Lower Carniola)*, Sbornik Miletič, pp. 153-163. This paper reflects the final development of his method on dealing with dialects: the description of the borders of the discussed dialect is followed by the general acoustic impression and the development of reflexes of individual Proto-Slavic vowels. There is also an

account of the influence of consonants on individual vowels (positional development). He continues with consonants and morphology, and concludes with the specifics of the dialect or speech in question.

1935 – *Historična gramatika VII: Dialekti (Historical Grammar VII: Dialects)*. Ljubljana, 204 pages + map. Ramovš's second book from the series Historical grammar of the Slovene language which presents the dialectal diversity of the Slovene language and the descriptions of individual dialects is even today the fundamental synthetic work on Slovene dialectology. In it Ramovš makes a synthesis of the entire contemporary knowledge of the Slovene dialects, clearly and conclusively divided into 7 dialect groups with hardly any need for corrections.

1936 – *Kratka zgodovina slovenskega jezika I (A Short History of the Slovenian Language I)*. Ljubljana, 246 pages. In this book Ramovš presents the development of all Slovene vowels originating from Proto-Slavic ones in long and short syllables. It replaced the third book which was scheduled for the series Historical grammar of the Slovene language entitled *Vocalism*. He never wrote the latter due to extensive teaching and scientific-organizational obligations and to poor health. According to experts this is his best book in which he makes an overall account of complex Slovene vocalism.

1937 – Together with M. Kos he prepares a new edition of *Brižinski spomeniki (Freising Manuscripts)*, the oldest known and preserved records of the Slovene language and the oldest text in Latin script in any Slavic language. In the phonetic transcript of this text Ramovš defined the entire phonetic image of the Freising Manuscript, which has to date required merely minor adjustments. With the linguistic analysis of this text he proved that it was undoubtedly written in the Slovene language and that the transition between the Proto-Slavic dialect into the Slovene language was complete as early as in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century.

1950 – *Relativna kronologija slovenskih akcentskih pojavov (Relative Chronology of Slovene Accentual Phenomena)*, Slavistična revija III, pp. 16-23. Ramovš did research also in the Slovene development of stress and pitch accents; he defined and explained accent shifts in Slovene, their order and geographic boundaries.

1952 – *Morfologija slovenskega jezika (Morphology of the Slovene Language)*. Ljubljana, 167 pages. Due to poor health Ramovš was unable to prepare this book on the history of Slovene morphology himself. His students had collected notes from his lectures before his death. Ramovš, his health severely deteriorating, approved its being published.

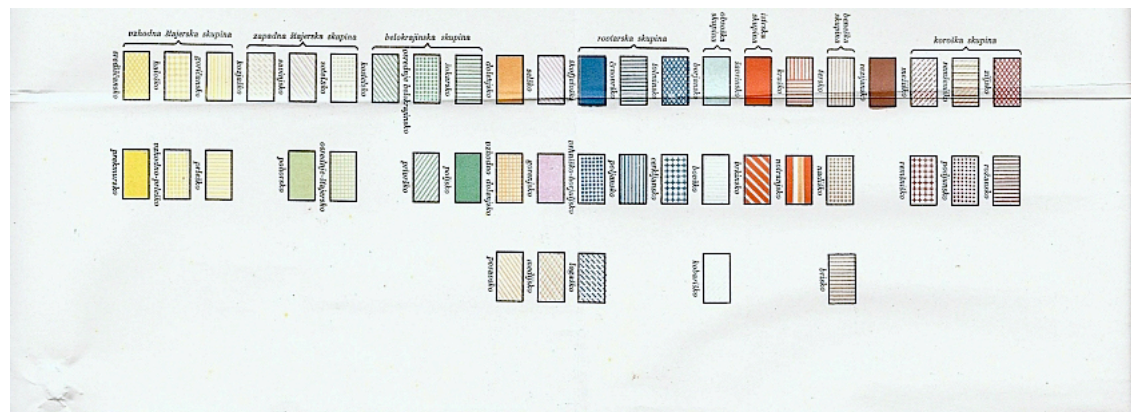
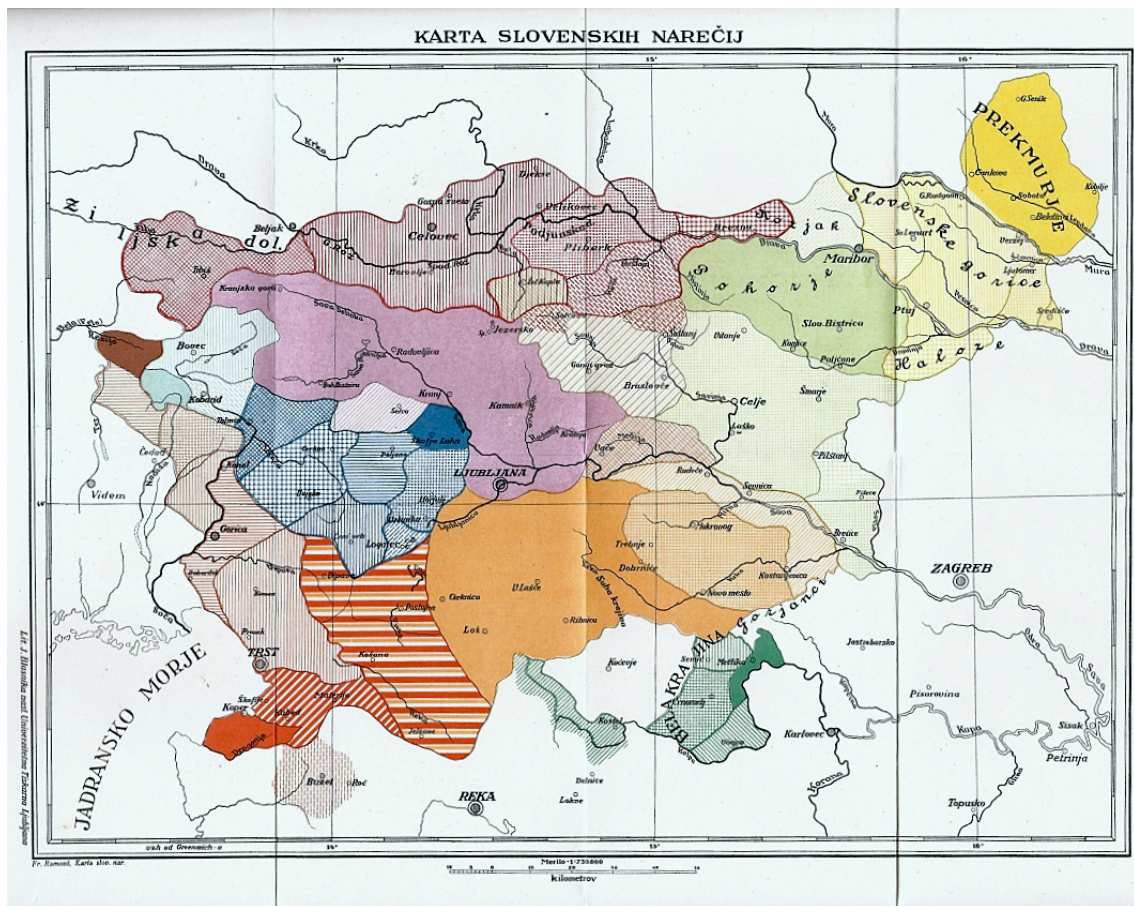
### **3. Ramovš's work**

Fran Ramovš is considered one of the most significant Slovene linguistic scientists. He began his scientific career when larger Slavic nations had already started working on major synthetic works, while in Slovenia the interest in language seemed to fade with the oncoming First World War. With the exception of some random dialectological seminar papers and dissertations from the Universities of Graz and Vienna, nothing new was written about the Slovene language. As Ramovš began his working career he found himself in a vast untended field which still lacked even the majority of preparation studies. He had emerged from the school of Neogrammarians firmly anchored in the framework of Indo-European comparative grammar, whose views and methods would soon not be of any use to him. He sought new paths by familiarizing with Schuchard, one of the first linguists to determine the principles of sound substitutions, and with the linguistic views of Meillet, Bartoli, de Saussure, Sievers, Jespersen, etc. He applied all the principles of modern linguistics in his study for a detailed depiction of the Slovene language, and in doing this he also invented the entire necessary Slovene linguistic terminology. Already as a student he systematically and methodically studied all the fundamental Slovene texts up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and at the same time excerpted them for all the chapters of the historical grammar of the Slovene language, especially for phonology and morphology. In addition, he was also profoundly involved in the study of live Slovene speech, and in the course of doing fieldwork (he roamed a significant part of the Slovene language territory) or with the help of interviewees he familiarized with almost all the Slovene dialects. These had up

to then been fairly unknown, and the that time classifications did not provide a realistic picture of the Slovene dialectological complexity and interrelatedness.

Soon after writing his first disquisitions, Fran Ramovš proves himself to be an autonomous connoisseur of linguistic phenomena in the Slovene literary language and dialects, and it does not come as a surprise that already in the introduction to his habilitation thesis entitled *Slovenische Studien*, where based on materials from older Slovene literature and dialects he described the newest general Slovene linguistic phenomenon, namely the modern vocalic reduction, he announced the emergence of his Slovene historical grammar. In his book *Konzonantizem (Consonantism)* (1924), the first book in this series to be prepared for publishing, Ramovš solved almost every single problem relating to Slovene consonantism. Even when it comes to the current situation in Slovene dialectology and historical grammar, this book describes, explains and temporally and spatially determines almost every phenomenon concerning the Slovene consonantal system. The relatively conservative nature of Slovene consonantism did not cause any particular difficulties for Ramovš, which is why he devoted much more effort and time to the complex Slovene vowel system (vocalism). The deeper he reached into the studies of Slovene dialects, the more questions emerged, since he was not satisfied merely with establishing the synchronic state of the Slovene dialects. He wanted more, namely he wanted to connect the dialectological material with its historical development. First he completed his book *Dialektološka karta slovenskega jezika (Dialectological Map of the Slovene Language)* (1931). Based on several external and internal linguistic factors this book represents the first scientifically supported classification of the Slovene dialects with its seven dialect groups. Since it emerged it has needed no significant corrections.





Four years later Ramovš presented the final definition of his dialectological views in the book *Historična gramatika VII: Dialekti* (Historical Grammar VII: Dialects) (1935). In *Dialekti* (Dialects), which Logar (1991: 15) labelled the golden book of Slovene studies, Ramovš presents the description of all the dialects and provides their classification. In this classification he accounts for over a thousand linguistic data alongside that regarding population, geography, colonization, society, state

administration and church administration. Due to the latter factors, the Proto-Slovenian (or Alpine Slavic) language, which had been until the 12<sup>th</sup> century relatively unified, developed into today's extremely variegated dialectological mosaic. Ramovš divided the Slovene dialects into 7 dialect groups with more than 40 dialects and speeches. Since this division, only few corrections have been made and supplements added on the basis of new findings (e.g. those regarding dialect boundaries). In *Kratka zgodovina slovenskega jezika (Short History of the Slovene Language)* (1936), which was published soon after *Dialects* and by Logar (1991: 16) described as a true masterpiece in Ramovš's scientific opus, Ramovš concisely and systematically describes the autonomous development of the Slovene language from its earliest times till today. Logar notes (ibid) that by accounting for substitutional, phonetic, phonological, psychological, historical, geographical, sociological and other factors Ramovš was able to successfully connect dialectological reflexes with the historical development of sounds. He developed a genealogy of reflexes in all long vowels in the Slovene dialects which clearly shows their development from the Proto-Slavic language onwards. He also illustrated it with sketches of the Slovene linguistic territory, in which individual reflexes and their geographical distribution are demonstrated for each vowel separately. Ramovš was aware of the fact that this book does not solve all the problems of Slovene vocalism, since the latter is extremely complicated due to the close association between accent and vowel quality and due to the large number of dialects. Just how complicated Slovene vocalism is can be seen in his studies *Relativna kronologija slovenskih akcentskih pojavov (Relative Chronology of Slovene Accentual Phenomena)* (SR III, 1950) and *Osnovna črta v oblikovanju slovenskega vokalizma (A Survey on the Formation of Slovene Vocalism)* (SR IV, 1951), in which he clearly fixes the dependency principles of vowel quality on vowel quantity, this being one of the fundamental principles in the development of Slovene vocalism. In the course of developing the dialectological map, Fran Ramovš also came up with the idea of a Slovene linguistic atlas (SLA), and through meticulous study of dialects saw to its development. This fundamental work of modern Slovene dialectology and geolinguistics, for which he had prepared a questionnaire with a designated network of 312 places – net points, was designed in 1934. The preparations for the SLA at the

Institute for Slovene Language at the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU) began after the Second World War, and the first volume of the SLA entitled *Človek (Man)* with questions and sub-questions relating to *body, diseases, family*, came out in Slovenia as late as in 2011.

Ramovš did not particularly fancy the standard variety of Slovene, however, he did tackle this issue for the first time before the war and together with A. Breznik published a Slovene normative guide (1935). The second time was after the war when the Institute for Slovene Language with the SAZU took over the task to publish a new Slovene normative guide. Despite his illness he supervised the making of the guide to its end in 1950. In 1942 he presented the draft for an etymological dictionary of the Slovene language, and in 1946 also the layout for the collection of materials for the extended standard Slovene dictionary. The latter was the basis for the later published *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika I–V (Standard Slovene Dictionary I–V)* (1970–91). He was the editor and co-editor of numerous scientific publications (e.g. ČJKZ, Južnoslovanski filolog, Razprave SAZU, LSAZU, Slavistična revija), while his scientific achievements won him the election of corresponding member of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (1925), corresponding member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb (1926), of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade (1929), the Slovenian Institute in Prague (1929), the Polish Academy of Science in Krakow (1935) and the Modern Linguistic Association in America (1948).

Ramovš dedicated his entire life to the Slovene language. He embraced his mother tongue to such an extent and depth that no later fundamental work in Slavic studies could avoid considering his findings. With in-depth studies with “innovative, convincing and fluent solutions based on masses of meticulously analysed and inventively connected documentary material” (Logar 1996: 78). Ramovš is deservedly appreciated as one of the most important Slovene linguists. Let me conclude with a thought by the most renowned Slovene etymologist Prof. Dr. F. Bezlaj who said, “For Slovenes, Ramovš is the beginning and end of everything we know about our language. There has been no one to date who would be so deeply devoted to the subject of

language development, save for Ramovš who even developed an entire synthesis for us literally out of nothing.” (Bezljaj 1950: 225)

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