

Heritage Voices: Language - Croatian

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My name is Silvia Koščak. On May 22, 2008, in Phoenix, Arizona I, along with 750 other multiethnic immigrants, attended an induction ceremony to become a naturalized United States citizen. I am now an American who was born in Canada to Croatian national parents. Although I am now officially an American, I also consider myself Croatian, since the strong connection with my family and heritage has and will always be a part of my life. My first language was Croatian, and at the age of three my parents and I travelled to Croatia; the first of many visits. My family attended mass at Our Lady Queen of Croatia Catholic church in Ontario, Canada, and for approximately a year, prior to moving to the United States, I attended a community-based Croatian heritage language school. While attending kindergarten in a public Canadian school I realized that the only way I would be able to make friends with the neighborhood children was if I learned how to speak English. My mother told me that I would watch hours of television programs like "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" so that I would learn the English language at a faster pace.

Two months before my seventh birthday my family and I moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where an active Croatian community was practically non-existent. I began to assimilate rapidly into an English-speaking culture due to not having the opportunity to attend an organized Croatian language school or be surrounded by a large community of Croatian speakers. Eventually my parents, along with a few other Croatian families that had moved into the area, reorganized the Croatian-American Club. Due to their efforts, I attended an organized Croatian language class. In addition to learning the language academically, I was also taught a variety of the national folklore dances and songs. As a result, I am still able to sing the Croatian National Anthem, *Lijepa Naša Domovino*, from memory.

Although the Croatian language class I attended only lasted for two years, the Croatian culture continued to play a very large part in my upbringing, which included playing Croatian instruments, dancing traditional dances, and singing Croatian songs virtually accent free. Unfortunately as a child, I was not able to entirely understand what I was singing about, and it was a struggle for my parents to get my sister and me to perform for family guests during holidays. Now a typical holiday at my parent's house will almost always include my sister, mother, and me proudly singing and playing traditional Croatian songs for hours or at least until we run out of songs to play. In addition to the music, my favorite part about being raised Croatian is the food. Thankfully, my mother taught my sister and me how to cook a variety of traditional recipes which include dishes like Zagorske štrukle (a variety of baked rolls),

čušpajs (stew), palačinke (thin pancakes), čevapčići (small grilled skinless sausages), sarma (stuffed cabbage), and mlince (cracker/Indian bread-like disks torn into pieces and baked with pan drippings). Most of the recipes she learned to make while she was growing up in the northern region of Croatia called Zagorje.

As an adult I have decided to strengthen my fluency in Croatian in order to reach a more comprehensive adult speaking level. My sister and I visit our relatives in Croatia regularly, and we have attended a summer language course in Croatia and plan to again in the future. I listen to Croatian radio stations via webcast, watch Croatian Satellite television, and read anything in Croatian when I can. Even though my parents prefer to speak Croatian at home, my sister and I primarily speak English with each other. As a family we typically speak Croatian when we are in a Croatian social setting or out in public, particularly when we do not want anyone around us to listen to our conversation. I am very proud of the fact that I have a strong connection with my ancestry, and I cannot imagine growing up without the knowledge of my Croatian heritage.

About the Croatian Language

“The vigilance and determination which the Croats have shown in retaining their language is typical of the unceasing struggle for the survival of their nation” (1964, p. ix). - Ivan Mestrovic-writer, sculptor, and patriot

Historians have different theories about where Croatia’s predecessors originated. Those places include ancient Persia (Iran), Ukraine, and the Carpathian mountains. Although it is difficult to prove where the Croatian’s geographical starting point was, historians agree that by the middle of the seventh century, Croats had settled in the Balkan region close to the Adriatic Sea (Bellamy, 2003). Approximately two centuries later the use of Slavic liturgy and the Glagolitic script were introduced by two Byzantine brothers, St. Cyril and St. Methodius. They chose a language similar to the Croatian vernacular (Old Church Slavonic) in order to propagate Christianity among the Croats, which fostered the beginning of Croatian literacy (Moguš, 1995). Now located at the Croatian Academy of Arts and Science in Zagreb, Croatia, the 11th century Baška Tablet (a Glagolitic source), written in the Čakavian dialect, is credited as being the oldest print of work showing proof of Croatian literacy (Stipčević, 1995-1996). Furthermore, in Croatia many medieval texts were written in three separate languages; Church Slavonic, Croatian, and Latin as well as three separate scripts: Glagolitic Script, Croatian Cyrillic Script, and Latin Script with the Latin script eventually prevailing.

Throughout Croatia’s history, the Croatian language has been regarded as a distinguishing feature because “in the Balkans, linguistic and religious identification are the primary sources of nationality” (Bellamy, 2003, p.137). With three principal dialects (Štokavian, Kajkavian, and Čakavian), each with a developed literary tradition, the formalization of a standard language within a unique linguistic situation in Croatia took centuries to complete (Moguš, 1995). After achieving independence in the 1990’s, Croatia’s education system supported and put into practice a belief strongly vocalized by linguist Christopher Spalatin. In the 1970’s, Spalatin “insisted that the Croatian schools must encourage the new generations to accept and nurture

the Croatian standard language with the same love, patriotism and pride as our ancestors built it for us and bequeathed it to us” (Bellamy, 2003, p.142).

Dialects

Croatian is the official national standard language spoken by approximately 4,486,881 inhabitants in Croatia (*CIA World Fact Book*, 2010). Croatian is also the official standard language in a part of Bosnia-Hrcegovina, where there is a Croatian majority. Not only is the Croatian language spoken by Croats in Croatia and in Bosnia-Hrcegovina, it is also spoken by Croats in the neighboring countries and those who have emigrated to other continents. Croatian, a part of the Old Church Slavonic tradition, is a member of the South-Slavic language family and is very similar to the other South Slavic languages. Figure 1 further shows the Croatian family language tree.

Proto-Indo-European	Balto-Slavic	Baltic	Old Prussian	
			Lithuanian	
			Latvian	
		Slavic	West Slavic	Sorbian
				Polish
				Slovak
				Czech
				Slovene
			South Slavic	Bosnian
				Croatian
				Serbian
				Macedonian
				Bulgarian
		East Slavic	Old Church Slavonic	
			Ukrainian	
Belarusian				
Russian				

Figure 1: Proto-Indo-European Chart

Adapted from Gray & Atkinson (2003) and *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition (2000).

Hrvatski /xrvatski/, otherwise known in English as “Croatian,” is a language that is represented by three historically different dialects. These three principle dialects are each labeled according to the question word for “what.” They are *ča*, *kaj*, and *što*, and are consequently referred to as Čakavian, Kajkavian, and Štokavian. In addition, these dialects also differ in “sounds, accent patterns, endings, the case and tense system, and vocabulary” (Brown & Alt, 2004, p. 9). The most widely spoken dialect of Croatia is the western variant of Štokavian, which is considered to be standard Croatian.

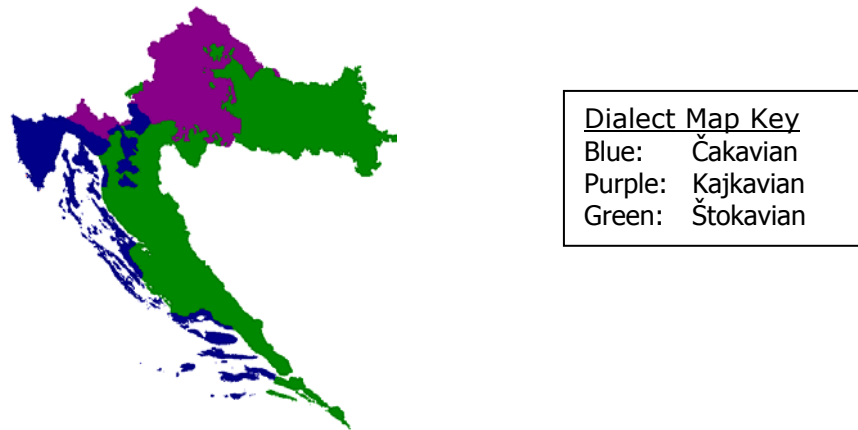


Figure 2: Croatian Map of Dialects
(source: Wikimedia)

Phonology and Orthography

The Croatian alphabet has 30 Latin letters including five diacritics (*č, ć, đ, š, ž*), 3 digraphs (*dž, lj, nj*), and only one letter that is both a diacritic and a digraph (*dž*). The vowel system is made up of five vowels (*e, i, a, o, u*) and all are monophthongs (learn-croatian.com/abeceda). This language is a language that follows the rule that words are spelled how they are spoken and every letter represents one sound. Figure 3 represents each character in the Croatian alphabet with their International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) pronunciation.

Aa	Bb	Cc	Čč	Ćć	Dd	Dždž	Đđ	Ee	Ff
[a]	[b]	[ts]	[tʃ]	[tɕ]	[d]	[dʒ]	[dʒ]	[e]	[f]
Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Ljlj	Mm	Nn	Njnj
[g]	[x]	[i]	[j]	[k]	[l]	[ʎ]	[m]	[n]	[ɲ]
Oo	Pp	Rr	Ss	Šš	Tt	Uu	Vv	Zz	Žž
[o]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[ʃ]	[t]	[u]	[v]	[z]	[ʒ]

Figure 3: Croatian Alphabet
Adapted from Matijašević & Venturin (1994)

The Croatian language uses a pitch accent system. There is no rule for the position of the stressed syllable in a word, although generally it is the first syllable and never the final syllable. All of the vowels can be pronounced with a long or short accent and when stressed they carry either a rising tone or a falling tone. In addition, the consonant system features a series of affricate and palatal consonants. In consonant clusters all are either voiced or voiceless.

Two letters that are very similar in their pronunciation are the letters Č and Ć. The difference between Č and Ć is the difference between saying the “ch” in the two words “check” and “nature.” The pronunciation of the letter R can be pronounced like the initial syllable of *Hrvat-Croat* which sounds roughly like ‘her’ in English and pronounced with a trilled /r/. Furthermore, the letter R can also function like a vowel for example, *prst* - finger. The following is a common tongue twister practicing the repetition of the letter R as well as providing an example of the letter R functioning like a vowel in a consonant cluster:

Na vrh brda vrba mrda - On the top of the hill the willow sways.

Grammar

Croatian nouns are divided into three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter and they never follow *articles (a, an, and the)* because articles are not a feature of this language. Gender is generally determined by the noun’s ending and genders always retain their gender in plural. It is important to know a noun's gender because it affects all the words that are linked to the noun. For example, when adjectives are included in a sentence, nouns must agree in case and number. Hence, nouns change depending on the composition of the sentence, which is referred to as a declension.

In addition to almost all nouns declining, all pronouns, most adjectives, and some numerals decline depending on their number, case, gender, and animacy. The following is an example of a declension of three nouns utilizing the seven Croatian grammatical cases (Haweksworth & Jović, 2006).

prozor= window *žena*=woman *selo*=village

Cases	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	Prozor	Žena	Selo
Genitive	Prozora	Žene	Sela
Dative	Prozoru	Ženi	Selu
Accusative	Prozor	Ženu	Selo
Vocative	Prozore	Ženo	Selo
Locative	Prozoru	Ženi	Selu
Instrumental	Prozorom	Ženom	Selom

Figure 4: Noun Declension
(Hawkesworth & Jović, 2006)

In addition to the seven different cases, there are seven grammatical tenses. "The simple (one-word) tenses are present, aorist, and imperfect" (Alt & Brown, 2004, p. 44), and the compound tenses consist of future, perfect, pluperfect, and second future. Most verbs are either perfective (identifying a complete action) or imperfective (signifying an incomplete or repetitive action). However, many verbs are bi-aspectual including some of the most common verbs like to go - *ići*, to be - *biti*, and to say - *kazati* (Alt & Brown, 2004).

The basic word order in Croatian is SVO (subject, verb, object), yet many word orders are permissible depending on the intentions of the speaker. Croatian is a "pro-drop" language, which means that pronouns are not required to be placed in the subject position because the verb ending clearly indicates who is performing the action. A pronoun is typically used when emphasis is desired. For instance,

Raditi – to work

Ja radim – I work (I am putting emphasis on myself)

Radim – (I) work

As in English, clitics are frequently used in everyday Croatian speech. A clitic is "a word that is treated in pronunciation as forming a part of a neighboring word and that is often unaccented or contracted" (Merriam-Webster, 2010). There are two forms of clitics, "enclitics and proclitics." In English, both forms of clitics are frequently used in everyday conversations, although enclitics can be written as well. The contraction "s" in "what's" is referred to as an enclitic and a proclitic is heard in speech when pronouncing the "to" abbreviated to a "t". The following sentence provides an example of an enclitic and a proclitic used in speech:

I'll (enclitic) let you know if I can go to (proclitic) the movies when I get a chance to (proclitic) look at my schedule.

The Croatian language makes use of many "enclitics," which are short unaccented words that operate in the second position of a simple sentence (containing one subject and one predicate). Unlike in English, Croatian enclitics may be used in both spoken and written styles, conversational and formal. When present in Croatian, enclitics (certain particles, pronouns, and verb forms) have a specific sequence they must follow, as there could potentially be up to four enclitics in one sentence (Alt & Brown, 2004). For example,

Vlado će nas vidjeti. – Vlado will us see.

(Croatian)

(Literal English translation)

Vlado će nas vidjeti. – Vlado will see us.

(Croatian)

(English translation)

Croatians in the United States

Over the centuries many Croatians emigrated to outlying countries with the intention of escaping either political and economic suppression or war, and escape meant a better way of life. In the case of a Croatian Roman Catholic missionary by the name of Jesuit Ferdinand Konščak (born in Varaždin, Croatia, 1703-1759), religion was the reason for his move to America. He was also known among the Spanish as Padre Consago and is remembered for creating the first draft of the map of Lower California as well as recognizing that Baja California was not an island but a peninsula (Thernstrom, Orlov & Handlin, 1980).

In the early 1900s two men by the names of Peter Dragnich and Martin J. Bogdanovich began a fishing company in San Pedro, California, which eventually developed into Star Kist Tuna Company. As a result of the efforts of J. Bogdanovich's ingenious idea of putting ice on a boat to keep fish fresh, he revolutionized and dominated the fishing industry along the Pacific coast in the first part of the 20th century (Albin, 1976).

Mike Grgich, born Miljenko Grgić, is a world-class wine maker who brought his wine making skills from Croatia to the United States and now owns vineyards in Napa Valley and Croatia. A historical blind tasting of wines, the 'Judgement of Paris', took place in Paris, France in 1976 and a bottle of 1973 Chardonnay that Mike Grgich crafted for Chateau Montelena was chosen as the finest white wine in the world. An original bottle commemorating the event is now preserved at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. This event became known as the "Tasting Heard 'Round the World" (Business Wire, 2006). He has also, along with a professor at the University of California, Davis, traced the mysterious roots of California Zinfandel back to Croatia (Grgich, n.d.).

Other notable influences that have made their mark in the United States include Nikola Tesla, scientist-inventor; Dennis Kucinich, politician; and Franjo Vlasić, founder and maker of Vlasic pickles (Croatian American, 2009). These interesting people are only a small part of a very long list of Croatians who have given a greater voice to the Croatian heritage and legacy in the United States.

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