



# CONCISE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

KEITH BROWN • SARAH OGILVIE



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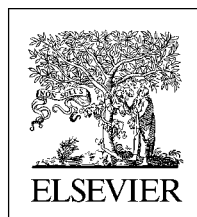
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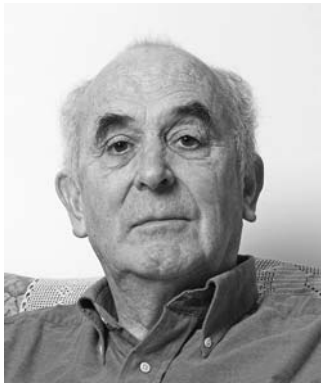
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## Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian Linguistic Complex

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### Bosnian

The official name of the language spoken in Bosnia Herzegovina is Bosnian. The status of the language in reality, however, is more complex, as may be seen in the language law adopted in 1993: "In the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ijekavian standard literary language of the three constitutive nations is officially used, designated by one of the terms: Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian. Both alphabets, Latin and Cyrillic, are equal." The law reflects the fact that the territory is inhabited by three national groups: Bosniaks (South Slav Muslims, the majority population of the Bosnian/Croatian Federation), Croats (Catholics, the majority population of the territory of Herzegovina,

the southwestern area of the Bosnian/Croatian Federation); and Serbs (Orthodox, the majority population of the other Bosnian entity, known as *Republika srpska*). In practice, it is normally only Bosniaks (and those committed to the survival of Bosnia Herzegovina as a unified country), who refer to their language as 'Bosnian.' And it is logical enough that Croats should speak Croatian and Serbs Serbian now that there is no longer an all-inclusive Serbo-Croatian umbrella. The debate as to whether or not a distinct Bosnian language exists continues. At the time of writing, the standard language used by the official authorities in Sarajevo and other parts of the Federation may be described as distinct from the standard languages in Serbia and Croatia, but the process of standardization, through dictionaries, grammars, and scholarly studies, has yet to be completed. For the time being, it cannot be said that Bosnian has quite the same status as Croatian in terms of its recognition as a specific standard.

## Croatian

Croatian is the official name of the language spoken in the territory of Croatia. To a considerable extent, the political tensions that ultimately led to the collapse of Yugoslavia were first reflected in issues related to language. Long before it was possible for ideas of political separation to be contemplated, in 1967, Croatian linguists published a Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language, calling for official recognition of Croatian as a separate language. From the outset, however, it was clear that the Declaration had more to do with cultural and sociopolitical aspirations than linguistics. From 1971, nationalist policies in Croatia became steadily more entrenched, leading eventually to the secession of Croatia (and Slovenia) from the common state of Yugoslavia in 1992. As language and statehood have been inextricably linked since the rise of nation states in Europe, it was understandable that nationalist politics should place particular emphasis on separating the Croatian element of the Serbo-Croatian language as far as possible from its Serbian counterpart. To this end, archaic words were reintroduced, neologisms forged and various ‘differential’ dictionaries published in an effort to raise the consciousness of individual Croats to the special nature of their language and to purify the Croatian language of Serbianisms. Apart from lexical items and favoring two characteristic syntactic differences (the infinitive in Croatian for dependent verbs, as opposed to *da* + present tense in Serbian; verb + interrogative particle *li* for questions as opposed to *da li* + verb in Serbian), particular emphasis has been placed on differences in word formation. At the height of the nationalist era, in the extreme circumstances of war and later, as Croatia consolidated its position as an independent state, linguists were particularly active. Some of the results of this frenzy were inevitably artificial and at times entertaining. This phase of heightened self-consciousness has now passed, with the recognition that Croatian has been widely accepted as a separate standard at an official level. Speakers may now be left to express themselves naturally and the language to develop in a more organic manner.

## Serbian

Serbian is the official name of the language spoken in the territory of Serbia and Montenegro. Unlike the other components of the Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian linguistic complex, Serbian, as the standard language of the Serbs and Montenegrins, has not changed

essentially from its earlier incarnation as Serbo-Croat. It was the Croats who opted to remove their language from the dual name, and set about making their standard as distinct as possible from standard Serbian (see ‘Croatian’), while the Serbs had only to stand still. The process of the disintegration of standard Serbo-Croatian may thus be described as ‘asymmetrical and asynchronous’ (Ljubomir Popovic, ‘From Serbian to Serbo-Croatian to Serbian,’ in Bugarski and Hawkesworth, 2004). In response, a Serbian Language Standardization Committee was set up to describe the current situation and Serbian has now been officially recognized as a separate language within Slavonic studies.

## Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian Linguistic Complex

The language formerly known as Serbo-Croat belongs, with Bulgarian, Slovene, and Macedonian, to the South Slav branch of the Slavonic language family. The first written records are 11th-century inscriptions in stone in both the Glagolitic and related Cyrillic scripts. The cultural division between the two variants reflects their history: the western Latin-script culture of Croatia, in the orbit of the Catholic Church and later the Hapsburg Monarchy; and the eastern, Cyrillic, Byzantine, Orthodox culture of Serbia.

The dia-system linguistic complex is the most heterogeneous Slavonic dia-system, with an exceptionally large variety of dialects, some with six or seven cases, some with four, and a great variety of verbal tenses. At the same time, these dialects have a striking degree of connectedness, containing characteristic features, which distinguish the complex from all other Slavonic languages. One of these is its archaic prosodic system, in which stress position, vocalic quantity (length/shortness) and tone (rising/falling) are marked. The traditional accents are long falling: *noć*; short falling: *kuća*; long rising: *reka*; short rising: *ostati*. There are not many minimal pairs. Examples would be *grad* ‘hail’ and *grad* ‘town’; *pas* ‘dog’ and *pas* ‘belt, waist; pass’; and the sentence *Sam sam* ‘I [masc.] am alone’.

In terms of morphology, the structure has remained complex, although one feature of Old Slavonic – the dual – has disappeared from the declensions and conjugations of all dialects in the complex. Case and verbal endings and accent shifts are the main morphological categories.

Word order is free, with the exception of strict rules governing the position of enclitics. These are verbal and pronominal short forms and the interrogative and reflexive particles.

Orthography has experienced the systematization of the Serbo-Croatian vernacular, which was carried out in the mid-19th century on phonetic principles, with one letter corresponding to one sound, making its orthography one of the most consistent in Europe. There is exact correspondence between the two scripts so that transliteration from one to the other is straightforward. There are three symbols unique to the language: **ć, ħ; đ ħ; dž ħ**. For example:

Ijekavian variant (characterized by the rendering of Old Slavonic *jat* as *je* or *ije*, and spoken in Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro):

Od dviju sjevernih skupina, tj. istočne i zapadne, južna se razlikuje nizom osobina.

Ekavian variant (characterized by the rendering of Old Slavonic *jat* as *e*, and spoken in most of Serbia, which can equally well be written in the Latin script):

Од двеју северних скупина, тј. источне и западне, јужна се разликује низом особина.

‘The Southern (Slavonic) group is distinguished from the two Northern groups, i.e., the Eastern and Western, by a series of features.’

Extensive bibliographies, as well as detailed studies, on the language situation of former Yugoslavia may be found in Bugarski *et al.*, 1992; the current situation is covered in the sequel: *Language in the former Yugoslav lands*, Slavica, 2004.

## Serbo-Croat

The linguistic unity of the majority of the Southern Slav population of the Hapsburg and Ottoman lands that were to become Yugoslavia after the collapse of these empires in the First World War was first acknowledged in the joint Literary Agreement of 1850. The name ‘Serbo-Croat’ was officially adopted with the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (known as Yugoslavia from 1928). It was never a straightforward phenomenon, however, as can be seen in the description adopted by many scholars: a polycentric standard language. The language could be officially termed ‘Serbo-Croat,’ ‘Croato-Serbian,’ ‘Serbian and Croatian,’ ‘Croatian and Serbian,’ ‘Serbian or Croatian,’ ‘Croatian or Serbian.’ In practice, from the end of the 1960s,

most people in Croatia and Serbia referred to their language as ‘Croatian’ or ‘Serbian,’ respectively, simply for convenience, without this label implying any separatist tendencies. This situation lasted until the collapse of Yugoslavia in the wars of 1991–1995. Since the establishment of the independent states of Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro (still officially known as Yugoslavia until 2003), the term ‘Serbo-Croat’ no longer has any official validity in sociopolitical terms. The language spoken in these countries is now officially known as Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, respectively. In linguistic terms, the standard language remains essentially the same, but the sociopolitical reality is that it no longer has a single name. When native speakers wish to refer to the language in its broader sense, beyond the borders of their own homeland, they tend to say ‘*naš jezik*’ or ‘*naški* (our language)’. For the purposes of the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, it is known as BCS. University departments in Europe where it is taught refer to it variously as Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (Austria, Norway); Serbo-Croatian (Denmark); Serbo-Croat (France); South Slavic (Finland); Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian (Sweden); Serbian and Croatian (UK). In the absence of an entirely satisfactory solution, in this volume the term ‘Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian linguistic complex’ has been adopted as a clumsy but accurate description.

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