

## Lesson 1 Printouts

### Culture

#### What's in a Name?

You have probably heard several different names for this language, such as: Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, etc. Here is why.

There are at least three different standard forms of Serbo-Croatian, distinguished ethnically or geographically: 1. Serbian, used by Serbs (8 million), 2. Croatian, spoken by Croats (4.5 million), 3. Bosnian Muslim (also called Bosnian and Bosniac), used by Bosnian Muslims (2 million). The vast majority of Montenegrins (600,000) speak the Serbian standard, but recently there have been attempts to create Montenegrin, as a fourth standard within Serbo-Croatian. These standards are in official use in the countries and territories where their respective ethnic groups constitute the majority. Serbian is thus the official standard of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and of the Republic of Srpska (a part of Bosnia-Herzegovina). Croatian is the official standard of Croatia and the regions of the Muslim-Croat Federation (a part of Bosnia-Herzegovina) with a Croatian majority. And finally Bosnian Muslim is the official standard of the regions of the Muslim-Croat Federation with a Bosnian Muslim majority. (See [map one](#) and [map two](#)). These standards share grammatical structures (with some minor exceptions) while exhibiting vocabulary differences. Because of these national standards, some linguists deny the existence of Serbo-Croatian per se, claiming that each of these standards represents a distinct Slavic language.

The Serbian standard allows two pronunciation variants in some words: the ekavian (which has an e in the stem of these words) and ijekavian (which has ije,je, or i instead of the e in ekavian). For example, the ekavian forms are mleko 'milk', hteti 'want-Infinitive', hteo 'want-Past Participle' and their ijekavian counterparts mlijeko, htjeti, htio. The ekavian and ijekavian pronunciation are not interchangeable in one text. A text should either be entirely ekavian or entirely ijekavian. The Croatian and Bosnian Muslim standards use solely the ijekavian pronunciation.

The division within the colloquial field is an even more intricate one. In addition to being divided into colloquial in its narrower sense (i.e., general colloquial sphere), dialects (i.e., rural vernaculars), and slang (i.e., urban vernaculars), as well as according to the ethnic background, other factors also contribute to diversity in this field.

The factor of ethnicity is often interwoven with that of territory. Some lexemes are thus used exclusively by Serbs (such as buva 'lie', 'false information', 'joke'), others used only by the speakers of Serbo-Croatian in Serbia (for example bioskop 'cinema'). Others are used by inhabitants of Bosnia (like bolan 'intensifier used to address a single male in direct informal communication'), notwithstanding their ethnic background. These territorial boundaries are not always consistent with either dialectal or administrative borders, but more frequently reflect historic and/or cultural circles and influences.

The colloquial lexicon is also divided along the lines of different social and professional groups, such as drug addicts, criminals, students, etc. Each of these groups constitutes a subculture of its own, with its own specific beliefs and values.

There is no one-to-one correspondence between the three ethnic standards and colloquial forms used by Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims. On the one hand, two urban vernaculars within the same ethnic group might be mutually unintelligible (as Croatian vernaculars of Split and Zagreb can be), and on the other hand, one urban vernacular can be shared by people with different ethnic affiliation (as was the case in the pre-1990 Sarajevo). Thus, according to Croatian Playboy (January,

1999) a policeman is drot, pajkan, rijamu, rora in Zagreb and murjak, pandur, tovarić in Split. In contrast, all ethnic groups in Sarajevo use the word drot to refer to a police officer. Furthermore, even if a colloquial lexeme is ethnically marked, it frequently represents a tendency to more frequent usage within one ethnic group rather than an either/or situation.

Two scripts are used in Serbo-Croatian. All Serbo-Croatian speaking ethnic groups use the Latin script. Serbs and Montenigrins additionally use the Cyrillic script.

This course will address only the standard forms of the language. It will be based on the Serbian Ekavian form with items belonging to the other two standard forms (Bosnian Muslim and Croatian) listed in those cases when they differ from the Serbian Ekavian form.

The following two maps show the countries and territories where the standard varieties of Serbo-Croatian are used.

Map 1: Former Yugoslavia



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## Map 2: Bosnia

white=Bosnian Muslim, green=Croatian, blue=Serbian



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## Serbo-Croatian Sounds

Characters the pronunciation of which poses a problem to the speakers of English are marked in red and discussed [below the table](#).

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### [BACK TO GRAMMAR MAIN MENU](#)

| Character | Example       | Explanation  | Pronounced |
|-----------|---------------|--|------------|
| A a       | <i>dar</i>    | a: as in: arm, harm  |            |
| B b       | <i>baba</i>   | b as in: bad, body   |            |
| C c       | <i>cipela</i> | ts combination   |            |
| Č č       | <i>čar</i>    | ch or tch as in: church, fetch, pronounced harder than the English sound |            |
| Ć ć       | <i>ćar</i>    | ch or tch as in: church, fetch, pronounced softer than the English sound |            |
| D d       | <i>dati</i>   | d as in: do, hard  |            |

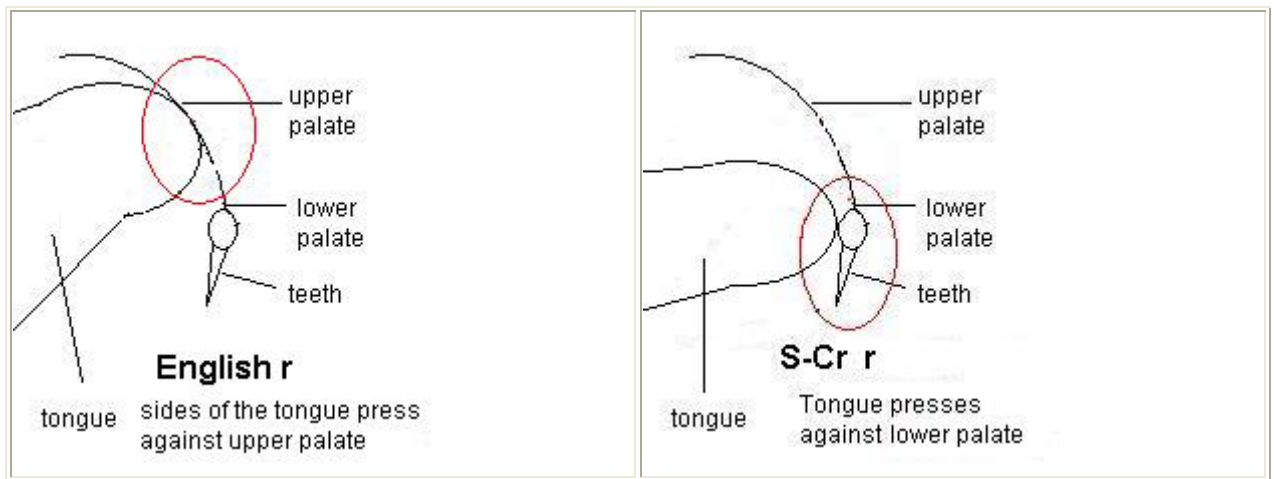
|       |               |   |  |
|-------|---------------|---|--|
| Dž dž | <i>džak</i>   | j as in: jeep, jungle, pronounced harder than the English sound |  |
| Đ đ   | <i>đak</i>    | j as in: jeep, jungle, pronounced softer than the English sound |  |
| E e   | <i>pet</i>    | e as in: red, bet   |  |
| F f   | <i>film</i>   | f as in: fine, golf   |  |
| G g   | <i>gar</i>    | g as in: go, long   |  |
| H h   | <i>hit</i>    | h as in: head, hate   |  |
| I i   | <i>vir</i>    | i or ee as in: if, peel   |  |
| J j   | <i>jaje</i>   | y or i, as in: yes, Indian                                      |  |
| K k   | <i>kola</i>   | c or k as in: car, silk   |  |
| L l   | <i>lula</i>   | l as in: long, still  |  |
| Lj lj | <i>ljubav</i> | ly combination  |  |
| M m   | <i>mama</i>   | m as in: mill, ham  |  |
| N n   | <i>noga</i>   | n as in: no, news   |  |
| Nj nj | <i>njuška</i> | ny combination  |  |
| O o   | <i>vož</i>    | o as in: long, strong   |  |
| P p   | <i>pastir</i> | p as in: paper, post  |  |
| R r   | <i>rad</i>    | R as in: rare, rob  |  |
| S s   | <i>soba</i>   | s as in: seldom, yes  |  |
| Š š   | <i>šaka</i>   | sh as in: shine, pronounced harder than the English sound       |  |
| T t   | <i>torba</i>  | t as in: top, hat   |  |
| U u   | <i>kup</i>    | u or oo as in: put, book  |  |
| V v   | <i>voda</i>   | v as in: very, lively   |  |
| Z z   | <i>zima</i>   | s or z as in: these, crazy                                      |  |
| Ž ž   | <i>život</i>  | s as in: pleasure, pronounced harder than the English sound     |  |

### Problem Areas in Pronunciation

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Principal rule of reading is one-to-one correspondence between characters and sounds.</b> | This means that every character is always pronounced in the same manner and that every sound is represented with one character only. For example, g is pronounced [g] as in English 'go' in all following words grad 'city', gen 'gene', gimnazija 'high school'. At the same time, there is no other character which represents the same sound. |
| <b>B, b</b>  | Serbo-Croatian B is pronounced in a less tense manner than its English counterpart. <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a>  |
| <b>C, c</b>  | Although the c sound exists in the English language (e.g. blitz [blic]), it is never used at the beginning of a word. <a href="#">Click here to hear it in the initial position</a>  |
| <b>Č č and Ć ć</b>   | In the English language there is only one sound  |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
|               | <p>between these two Serbo-Croatian (ch as in chery). The č sound is harder than its English counterpart while the ć sound is softer. Harder means that your tongue has to be stiffer and it has to press against the palate with a limited surface. Softer means that your tongue has to be sloppier and press against the palate with a wider surface. <a href="#">Click here to see the position of the tongue.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear č.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear ć.</a></p>   |
| D, d          | <p>Serbo-Croatian D is pronounced in a less tense manner than its English counterpart. In addition, Serbo-Croatian is a dental sound whereas its English counterpart is pronounced by pressing the tongue against the lower palate. In order to pronounce the Serbo-Croatian D correctly, one has to lower the tongue and press it against the upper teeth. <a href="#">Click here to see the position of the tongue.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a></p>  |
| Dž dž and Đ đ | <p>In the English language there is only one sound between these two Serbo-Croatian (j as in jeep). The dž sound is harder than its English counterpart while the đ sound is softer. Harder means that your tongue has to be stiffer and it has to press against the palate with a limited surface. Softer means that your tongue has to be sloppier and press against the palate with a wider surface. <a href="#">Click here to see the position of the tongue.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear dž.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear đ.</a></p> |
| G, g          | <p>Serbo-Croatian G is always pronounced as [g] as in English 'go' and never as [j] as in English 'gist'. <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a></p>  |
| J j           | <p>Serbo-Croatian J is always pronounced as [y] as in English 'yet' and never as [j] as in English 'jet'. <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a></p>  |
| Lj lj         | <p>Serbo-Croatian LJ is pronounced as a combination of l and y. It does not have an English counterpart. If you have previously learned Spanish, it is just like continental Spanish 'll' (but not Latin American Spanish 'll'). <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a></p>   |
| Lj lj         | <p>Serbo-Croatian NJ is pronounced as a combination of n and y. It does not have an English counterpart. If you have previously learned Spanish, it is just like Spanish 'n~' <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a></p>  |
| R r           | <p>In the English language the r sound is pronounced by pressing the sides of the tongue against the upper palate. In Serbo-Croatian, in contrast, it is pronounced by pressing the tip of the tongue against the lower palate. <a href="#">Click here to</a></p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | see the position of the tongue. <a href="#">Click here to hear Serbo-Croatian r.</a>   |
| Š š   | The š sound is harder than its English counterpart [sh]. Harder means that your tongue has to be stiffer and it has to press against the palate with a limited surface. <a href="#">Click here to hear it.</a>   |
| ʦ, ʦ  | Serbo-Croatian ʦ is pronounced in a less tense manner than its English counterpart. In addition, Serbo-Croatian ʦ is a dental sound whereas its English counterpart is pronounced by pressing the tongue against the lower palate. In order to pronounce the Serbo-Croatian ʦ correctly, one has to lower the tongue and press it against the upper teeth. <a href="#">Click here to see the position of the tongue.</a> <a href="#">Click here to hear it</a> |
| Ž ž   | The ž sound is harder than its English counterpart [zh]. Harder means that your tongue has to be stiffer and it has to press against the palate with a limited surface. <a href="#">Click here to hear it.</a>   |
| NOTE: The only difference between ʦ and ʣ is that the vocal cords are loose when pronouncing ʣ and tense when pronouncing ʣ. The position of the tongue in the mouth cavity is identical. |  |
| Same is true about Č and Dž on the one hand versus Č and Đ on the other.  |  |
|   |  |
|   |  |



## Lesson One, Gender

Serbo-Croatian *gender* has the same three categories as in English, i.e., masculine, feminine, and neuter, as can be observed with personal pronouns in Singular:

| gender    | English | Serbo-Croatian |
|-----------|---------|----------------|
| Masculine | he      | on             |
| Feminine  | she     | ona            |
| Neuter    | it      | ono            |

There are however two fundamental differences between the Serbo-Croatian and the English gender.

First, Serbo-Croatian gender is associated with the ending of the word rather than with sex as it is the case in English. Thus, for example, the English word *man* is *he*, i.e., masculine, because it refers to a male being, *woman* is *she*, i.e., feminine, because it refers to a female being, and the words *chair* and *wall* are *it*, i.e., neuter, because they refer to sexless entities. In contrast to that, the Serbo-Croatian noun *stolica* 'chair' is *she*, i.e., feminine because it ends in an '-a' and the noun *zid* is *he*, i.e., masculine, because it ends in a consonant.

Serbo-Croatian nouns have which is closely related to the ending of the word. The gender can be determined using the following heuristics:

- noun ends in a consonant, i or u -> noun is masculine
  - noun ends in a -> noun is feminine
  - noun ends in o or e -> noun is neuter

In addition to these rules of thumb, one should remember the following exceptions:

- feminine nouns ending in a consonant
- masculine nouns ending in an a
- masculine nouns ending in an o or e
- feminine nouns ending in an e, i, o, u

As for now, one should remember the heuristics and the exceptions will be covered later in the course.

Second, Serbo-Croatian gender paradigm spreads across a wide systemic range, while in English it remains non-present, for example:

| gender    | Serbo-Croatian    | English     |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------|
| Masculine | Visok<br>muškarac | tall male   |
| Feminine  | visoka žena       | tall female |
| Neuter    | visoko dete       | tall child  |

Serbo-Croatian nouns have gender as their feature, but they do not change according to the gender paradigm. A noun is thus either masculine, feminine or neuter in all its forms unlike, for example, adjectives which are masculine in some of their forms and feminine or neuter in others.

The wider presence of the Serbo-Croatian gender is visible even in the plural of the personal pronouns, where English *they* is either *oni* (group of masculine items or mixed group), *one* (group of female items), or *ona* (group of neuter items), as it can be seen in the [pronouns section](#) of this lesson.

## Lesson One, Personal Pronouns

Serbo-Croatian *personal pronouns* have the following forms:

| Singular       |         | Plural         |                           |
|----------------|---------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Serbo-Croatian | English | Serbo-Croatian | English                   |
| 1 ja           | 'I'     | mi             | 'we'                      |
| 2 ti           | 'you'   | vi/Vi          | 'yall/You sir'            |
| 3 on           | 'he'    | oni            | 'they (masculine gender)' |
| 3 ona          | 'she'   | one            | 'they (feminine gender)'  |
| 3 ono          | 'it'    | ona            | 'they (neuter gender)'    |

There are two differences between Serbo-Croatian and English which need to be noted here. First, in Serbo-Croatian there are three equivalents of the English 'you' -- informal for one person (*ti* 'you'), informal for two or more persons (*vi* 'yall, you guys') and finally formal for both one and more persons (*Vi* 'you sir/madam/ladies/gentlemen'). **Formal** means that people address each other in a manner similar to the English use of Mr./Ms. + last name. **Informal**, on the other hand, is similar to English addressing other people by their given names. This distinction is more rigid than in English. For example, students would never address their professors by their given name (i.e., informally).

The distinction between formal and informal form of address will be discussed throughout this course.

Second, in the third person plural, Serbo-Croatian uses three different pronouns in the third person plural as opposed to only one in English. The English *they* is thus either *oni*, *one*, or *ona*. Take a look at the [gender](#) section for more information.

## Lesson One, Verb BITI

The verb *biti* 'to be' is inflected in the following manner:

| Singular |                | Plural    |                |                               |
|----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|
|          | Serbo-Croatian | English   | Serbo-Croatian | English                       |
| 1        | ja <b>sam</b>  | 'I am'    | mi <b>smo</b>  | 'we are'                      |
| 2        | ti <b>si</b>   | 'you are' | vi <b>ste</b>  | 'y'all are'                   |
| 3        | on <b>je</b>   | 'he is'   | oni <b>su</b>  | 'they (masculine gender) are' |
| 3        | ona <b>je</b>  | 'she is'  | one <b>su</b>  | 'they (feminine gender) are'  |
| 3        | ono <b>je</b>  | 'it is'   | ona <b>su</b>  | 'they (neuter gender) are'    |

There are two differences between Serbo-Croatian and English which need to be noted here.

First, in Serbo-Croatian each person in both numbers has its own form. In English, on the other hand, one form expresses several different persons. The English form *are* is thus either *si*, *smo*, *ste*, or *su*.

Second, in the third person plural, Serbo-Croatian uses three different pronouns in the third person plural as opposed to only one in English. The English *they* is thus either *oni*, *one*, or *ona*. This Serbo-Croatian feature will be discussed in the sections devoted to the [gender](#) and [pronouns](#).

## Lesson One, Vocabulary

The vocabulary for this lesson includes the following:

- **personal pronouns:**  
ja 'I', ti 'you', on 'he', ona 'she', ono 'it', oni 'they (masculine)', one 'they (feminine)', ona 'they (neuter)'
- **interrogative pronouns:**  
ko 'who (asks about living beings)', šta 'what (asks about things)'
- **common objects:**  
krevet 'bed', lampa 'lamp', slika 'picture', stolica 'chair', soba 'room'
- **professions:**  
student 'student (male)', studentkinja 'student (female)', profesor 'professor (male)', profesorica 'professor (female)'
- **spatial designations:**  
ovo 'this (close to the speaker)', to 'that (close to the listener)', ono 'that (distant from both)'

interlocutors)', *ovde* 'here (close to the speaker)', *tu* 'there (close to the listener)', *onde* 'there (distant from both interlocutors)'

- **verb to be:**

*biti* 'to be', *sam* '(I) am', *si* '(you) are', *je* '(he/she/it) is', *smo* '(we) are', *ste* '(yall) are', *su* '(they) are'

- **pragmatic operators:**

*aha* 'oh (when capturing the import of conversation)', *zdravo* 'hi!', *doviđenja* 'bye', *dobar dan* 'good day'

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Please note that in the structure of the Serbo-Croatian vocabulary there is a system linking masculine and feminine profession names. In the English language professions are only seldom marked by gender as in *actor* (male) vs. *actress* (female). This gender division is much more common in Serbo-Croatian. This means that more vocabulary items should be learned. There are however two facilitating issues with this regard. First, in many cases the masculine form is neutral. You can thus say *On je profesor*. 'He is a professor (masculine form of the word)' and *Ona je profesor*. 'She is a professor (masculine form of the word)' while the feminine form remains reserved for females. This means that one should first learn the masculine form and be able to function with that form alone. Learning the feminine form should come thereafter. Secondly, the feminine form is derived from the masculine using a limited set of suffixes. The two suffixes found above *-ica*: *profesorica* 'female professor', and *-kinja*: *studentkinja* 'female student' are among the most productive ones. One should learn them as devices to derive a feminine profession from masculine one.

## Lesson One, Communicative Skills

The communicative skills for this lesson includes the following:

- **Greeting/taking leave of somebody:**

*Zdravo!* 'hi' and 'bye', *Dobar dan!* 'good day (only a greeting)', *Doviđenja!* 'Good bye'

- **Introducing oneself and others:**

*Ja sam...* 'I am...', *On/ona/ono je...* 'He/she/it is...'

- **Asking questions:**

*Ko* [verb to be] [personal pronoun], e.g., *Ko si ti?* 'Who are you?', *Ko* [verb to be] [to/ovo/ono], e.g., *Ko je ovo?* 'Who is this?', *Šta* [verb to be] [to/ovo/ono], e.g., *Šta je ovo?* 'What is this?'

- **Stating the presence of entities:**

*Ovo/to/ono je* [noun], e.g., *Ovo je zid.* 'This is a wall.'

Please note that, unlike in English, *Dobar dan!* 'Good day!' can be only be used as a greetig and never when taking leave of somebody.

## Lesson One, Norms

The most fundamental rule of Serbo-Croatian spelling is a 1:1 correspondence between the characters (or character sequences in the case of the Latin *lj*, *nj* and *dž*). One character is thus read in the same manner regardless of its position, and there is only one character (or character sequence) representing each sound. This is formulated by the following rule state by the 19th century Serbian linguist Vuk Karadžić:

Read as it is written, write as you hear it.

This is quite different than the English situation, where characters become different pronunciation depending on their context and even concrete lexical item. Compare the following examples where the same character has different sound values in English while it remains stable in its pronunciation in Serbo-Croatian:

| English    | Serbo-Croatian     |
|------------|--------------------|
| car c=[k]  | car 'tsar' c=[ts]  |
| cent c=[s] | cent 'cent' c=[ts] |

More information about Serbo-Croatian sounds as well as their sound clips are available in the section about the [\[SOUNDS\]](#)

In addition to this general difference, there are numerous other minor differences, in particular in with regard to the spelling. Two of such differences are present in this lesson:

- The pronoun **ja** 'I' is never capitalized unless it is at the beginning of the sentence
- The pronoun **Vi** is capitalized when it means 'you madam/sir/ladies/gentlemen', i.e., when it is a formal form of address for one or more persons. If it is informal way to address two or more persons (somewhat of an equivalent of the English substandard 'yall', 'you guys', or 'yous'), one should not capitalize it, and the form of the pronoun is **vi**

### Lesson One, Text One

[\[Click here to hear this text\]](#) [\[Click here for the English translation\]](#) **Zdravo!**



**Milan:** Zdravo! Ja sam student.

**Jelena:** Zdravo! Ja sam profesorica.

**Nada:** Ona je profesorica a on je student.



**ti**

= you  
one person  
informal

**Jelena:** Dobar dan! Ko ste Vi?

**Nada:** Dobar dan! Ja sam **Nada**.

**Jelena:** Aha! A šta ste Vi?

**Nada:** Ja sam studentkinja.

**Milan:** I ja sam student.

**vi**

= y'all  
group of people  
informal

**Vi**

= you (sir/madam)  
one person or  
group of people  
formal

**Jelena:** Doviđenja! **Nada:** Doviđenja! **Milan (to Nada):** Zdravo!

**Soba** Ovo je soba. To je krevet. Ono je prozor. Tu je stolica. Tamo je slika. Onamo je lampa.