Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Language Group: Serbian
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Српски / Srpski
Serbian

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~11 million speakers
Spoken in Serbia, Montenegro, eastern parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Three major dialects
  - Ekavian (main dialect, spoken in the capital Belgrade, basis of standard Serbian)
  - Ijekavian (spoken in western Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)
  - Ikavian (spoken in Croatia)
South-slavic sub-branch of the Slavic branch of Indo-European
Related to Bulgarian, Macedonian and Slovene

UCLA Language Materials Project: Serbian
Most academics and scholars agree that one language is spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Egon Fekete, a linguist in Belgrade, says...“the issue is more about politics than it is about language.” (Cvetkovic & Vezic, 2009)

Main differences between Serbian and Croatian languages are lexical.

Both Croatia and Serbia have language policies that include creation of nation-specific new lexical items (Krebs-Lazendic, 2008).
Exposure to English

- Television programs and movies are shown in the original language, subtitled.
- Provides exposure to English for learners while still in country (usually American English).
- American music, video games, and sports (basketball) are popular and provide exposure to American English and culture.


Serbian has two distinct writing systems, Cyrillic and Latin – very rare in modern languages.

Synchronic digraphia (White, 2006)
- 1:1 correspondence between sounds and letters
- 1:1 correspondence between Latin and Cyrillic alphabets
- User’s preference
- Official government documents are in Cyrillic (2006 Constitution)

Learners who prefer Cyrillic may have handwriting that is more difficult to read in English [I. Stojanović, (personal communication, April 3, 2010).]
Serbian
25 consonants
5 vowels
3 genders
2 numbers
(singular/plural)
Case, grammatical
gender, number
marked on noun
SVO (subject – verb – object word order)

English
24 consonants
12 vowels (+/-)
0 genders
2 numbers
Verbs agree in person, number
SVO

St. Sava Temple, Beograd
(http://www.flickr.com, 2011)
Non-Serbian Post-Alveolar Consonant Clusters

Čubrović (2007)

- English [tr] and [dr] will cause pronunciation issues
- Serbian speakers treat as a series of two consonants, neither of which have the same articulation as the English near equivalents
- /t/ and /d/ are
  - dentals in Serbian – alveolars in English
- Even highly fluent Serbian speakers have difficulty articulating initial [t] and [d] before [r]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serbian Consonants</th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Postalveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
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<tbody>
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1. Table 1. Serbian consonants

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These two vowels present significant difficulty for learners.
English /ɛ/ - /æ/ vowels will be difficult for late learners (head – had)

- Contrast between /ɛ/ - /æ/ is difficult for late learners to hear
- Early learners distinguish both sounds and achieve native speaker production
- Native speakers assimilate both vowels to one Serbian vowel (/e/ as in bait)

Novi Sad
“...of course ‘a’ and ‘the’ is still a problem and I think that I am never going to pick up that; I got better but I still forget to say it or write it.”

I. Stojanovič, (personal communication, April 3, 2010)
Definite/Indefinite Articles

- Serbian has no articles (a/the)
- Serbian uses ‘topic prominence’ to show definiteness
- Serbian speakers need to learn that “any NP [noun phrase] can be definite or indefinite, regardless of its position in a sentence” (Avery, 2007).

- Definite article is easier to learn than indefinite
- Learners will often use some or one for indefinite
- Learners are more likely to drop definite article
  - at the beginning of a sentence (*Cat drinks milk.)
    [Topic prominence]
  - in predicate nominals (*There is cat.)
    [All predicate nominals are definite in Serbian]
  - conjoined nouns (*The cat and bird are in the kitchen.)
When first meeting, shaking hands and introducing yourself is the accepted greeting for men and women in professional settings.

Serbs greet family and friends by kissing three times on the cheeks.

Serbs may kiss colleagues when meeting or continue to shake hands, depending on the relationship.

A younger person stands when greeting an older person.

Men stand when greeting women.

Use of first names is reserved for family and very close friends.

- Serbs may be initially uncomfortable with the lack of formality in American interactions.
Serbs are very direct in their communication style

Eye contact is highly valued

Very little hand gesturing

- This cultural trait may cause discomfort when interacting with some Americans

But...Serbs touch and have little regard for personal space

- This cultural trait may make interactions with Americans awkward

During a conversation it is rude to

- Point at the other person
- Stretch
- Yawn
- Crack your knuckles

(http://www.flickr.com, 2008)
Books


Internet Sites & Images


http://www.rferl.org/content/Serbian_Croatian_Bosnian_or_Montenegrin_Many_In_Balkans_Just_Call_It_Our_Language_/1497105.html?page=2&x=1

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