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# SERBIAN GRAMMAR

BY

DRAGUTIN SUBOTIĆ

PH.D., MUNICH

AND

NEVILL FORBES, M.A.

READER IN RUSSIAN AND THE OTHER SLAVONIC LANGUAGES  
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## PREFACE

THE title of this book has been chosen for the sake of simplicity. The full name of the language is Serbo-Croatian. It must be emphasized that Croatian, except for slight differences of of dialiect and vocabulary, is absolutely the same language as Serbian, only written in the Latin alphabet with diacritic signs. Knowledge of both the Cyrillic and Latin Croatian alphabets is indispensable to any student of Serbo-Croatian, therefore it is recommended to practise as much as possible the transcription of words written in Cyrillic into Latin, and vice versa.

In the *English* excersizes the sentences have sometimes been framed acording to the rules of *Serbian* syntax, in order to accustom the student to its peculiarities.

We wish to thank Mr. Šuvaković for the time and labour he has given us by helping with the accentuation.

D. S.

N. F.



# INTRODUCTION

## 1. THE SERBIAN LANGUAGE

THE Serbian language is one of the Slavonic languages,<sup>1</sup> and therefore also one of the family of Indo-European languages. It is spoken by more than ten millions of Serbs and Croats living in the following countries and territories : the kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Dalmatia and the islands, Croatia and Slavonia, in parts of Istria and in the former 'Serbian Duchy' (*Srpska Voivodina*) in Southern Hungary, which includes the districts of purely Serbian nationality, known as *Baranja*, *Banat*, and *Bačka*. There are also large colonies of Serbs and Croats in the United States and in South America.

The language of both Serbs and Croats is, with the exception of inevitable differences of dialect and vocabulary, one and the same ; thus it is customary to speak of it as the *Serbo-Croatian language*. Very closely allied to the Serbo-Croatian language, of which it may be considered almost a dialect, is the language of the one and a half million Slovenes who inhabit the southern parts of the provinces of Styria and Carinthia, the province of Carinola, and the districts of Trieste and Gorica (Gorizia) in Austria. The Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes are all included in the term *Southern Slavs* or *Jugo-Slavs* (*jug*, pronounce *yug*=*south* in Serbian).

The Serbs, being members of the Eastern or Orthodox Church, use the alphabet known as the Cyrillic, the Croats and Slovenes, being Roman Catholics, use the Latin alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet is also used in Russia and Bulgaria, i.e. by all orthodox Slavs. The Latin alphabet, as used by the Croats and Slovenes, is the same as that used in England except for the fact that a few consonants have been

<sup>1</sup>The Slavonic languages fall into three groups, the Eastern (Russian, i.e. Great Russian and Little Russian), the Southern (Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovene), and the Western (Bohemian or Chekh or Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Lusatian-Wendish or Sorbish).

furnished with diacritic signs to represent certain complex sounds.

The Cyrillic alphabet is so called after St. Cyril, who, with his brother Methodius, converted the Slavs in Moravia in the ninth century, and are known as the 'Slavonic Apostles'. The Slavs of the Balkans were actually converted by their disciples. These two missionaries were Greeks of Salonica, but they knew the language of the Balkan Slavs, who at that time were already settled up to a few miles of Salonica, and St. Cyril is credited with the invention of this alphabet to help the success of his mission, and to enable the Holy Scriptures to be written in the various Slavonic languages. This alphabet is founded on the Greek, but contains a number of letters representing sounds which did not exist in Greek. Some of these letters are supposed to have been borrowed from Semitic sources, others were freshly elaborated.

The foreigner should learn the Cyrillic alphabet, but he must also sooner or later make himself familiar with the language as expressed by the Latin alphabet. A knowledge of both alphabets is essential both from the literary and from the practical points of view.

It may be pointed out that the Cyrillic alphabet as used in Serbia and Montenegro, &c., is purely phonetic in that each single sign by itself represents one and only one sound in the language, which can hardly be said of any other European alphabet. Conversely, there are no sounds in the language other than those expressed by its alphabet. The same hold good of Croatian, except that one or two double letters are still used.

## 2. THE ALPHABET

The Cyrillic alphabet as used in Serbia consists of thirty letters. It originally contained more, but was reformed and simplified in the first half of the nineteenth century by the great Serbian philologist and author Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), who, by this means, brought it to complete accord with the phonetics of the modern spoken language. Being originally founded on the Greek, the order of



the letters is mainly that of the Greek alphabet. The Croatian alphabet naturally follows the order of the Latin, but in the accompanying scheme (pages **12** and **13**) this order has been altered in order to show the correspondence between it and the Serbian Cyrillic.

The following is the Croatian alphabet in the order of the Latin letters, with the Cyrillic equivalents :

a A	a A	l L	л Л
b B	б Б	lj Lj	љ Љ
c C	ц Ц	m M	м М
č Č	ч Ч	n N	н Н
ć Ć	ћ Ћ	n Nj	њ Њ
d D	д Д	o O	о О
dž ğ Dž	џ Џ	p P	п П
đ gj <sup>1</sup> Đ Gj	ђ Ђ	r R	р Р
e E	e E	s S	с С
f F	ф Ф	š Š	ш Ш
g G	г Г	t T	т Т
h H	x X	u U	у У
i I	и И	v V	в В
j J	j J	z Z	з З
k K	к К	ž Ž	ж Ж

It will be seen that in several cases the Croatian Latin alphabet employs double letters or letters with diacritic signs over them where the Serbian Cyrillic constantly employs only one letter. It even has alternative signs to represent certain sounds, the reason being that uniformity of spelling in Croatia has not yet been achieved, while in Serbia it has, e.g. Serbian ђ can be represented in Croatian by gj or đ or dj, of which the first two are the most usual. Of the other alternative signs, lj is commoner than l, nj than њ, dž than ğ.

The following is the Serbian alphabet in the order of the Cyrillic letters, with the Latin (Croatian) equivalents, and the cursive script in both alphabets :

<sup>1</sup>Also, less commonly, dj, Dj.

	CYRILLIC		LATIN		
Ord. No.	Printed	Written	Printed	Written	Pronunciation
1	а А	<i>а А</i>	а А	<i>а А</i>	English <i>a</i> as in <i>father</i>
2	б Б	<i>б Б</i>	б Б	<i>б Б</i>	English <i>b</i>
3	в В	<i>в В</i>	в В	<i>в В</i>	English <i>v</i>
4	г Г	<i>г Г</i>	г Г	<i>г Г</i>	English <i>g</i> in <i>go</i>
5	д Д	<i>г Д</i>	д Д	<i>д Д</i>	English <i>d</i>
6	ђ Ђ	<i>ђ Ђ</i>	{ đ (dj), Đ гј Dj	<i>ђј Đђј</i>	{ A sound between the English <i>d</i> in <i>dune</i> and <i>j</i> in <i>John</i>
7	е Е	<i>е Е</i>		<i>е Е</i>	
8	ж Ж	<i>ж Ж</i>	ž Ž	<i>ž Ž</i>	{ English <i>s</i> in <i>pleasure</i> French <i>j</i> in <i>jour</i>
9	з З	<i>з З</i>	z Z	<i>з Z</i>	English <i>z</i>
10	и И	<i>и И</i>	и I	<i>и I</i>	English <i>i</i> in <i>machine</i>
11	ј Ј	<i>ј Ј</i>	ј J	<i>ј Ј</i>	English <i>y</i> in <i>yet</i>
12	к К	<i>к К</i>	k K	<i>к К</i>	English <i>k</i>
13	л Л	<i>л Л</i>	l L	<i>л L</i>	English <i>l</i>
14	љ Љ	<i>љ Љ</i>	lj Lj	<i>љј Lјј</i>	{ English <i>l</i> in <i>million</i> Italian <i>gl</i> in <i>egli</i>
15	м М	<i>м М</i>	m M	<i>м М</i>	English <i>m</i>
16	н Н	<i>н Н</i>	n N	<i>н N</i>	English <i>n</i>
17	њ Њ	<i>њ Њ</i>	nj Nj	<i>њј Nјј</i>	{ English <i>n</i> in <i>new</i> French <i>gn</i> in <i>Boulogne</i>

	CYRILLIC		LATIN		
Ord. No.	Printed	Written	Printed	Written	Pronunciation
18	o O	o O	o O	o O	English <i>o</i> in <i>Olivia</i>
19	п П	п П	p P	п П	English <i>p</i>
20	р Р	р Р	r R	р Р	Scottish <i>r</i> in <i>merry</i>
21	с С	с С	s S	с С	English <i>ss</i> in <i>glass</i>
22	т Т	т Т	t T	т Т	English <i>t</i>
23	ћ Ћ	ћ Ћ	ć Ć	ć Ć	{ A sound between the English <i>t</i> in <i>tune</i> and <i>ch</i> in <i>chalk</i>
24	у У	у У	u U	у У	
25	ф Ф	ф Ф	f F	ф Ф	English <i>f</i>
26	х Х	х Х	h H	х Х	{ Scottish <i>ch</i> in <i>loch</i> English <i>h</i> (cf. p. 15)
27	ц Ц	ц Ц	c C	ц Ц	
28	ч Ч	ч Ч	č Č	ч Ч	English <i>ch</i> in <i>chalk</i>
29	ѣ Ё	ѣ Ё	dž,ǵ,Dž	ѣ,Ђ	English <i>j</i> in <i>John</i>
30	ш Ш	ш Ш	š Š	ш Ш	English <i>sh</i> in <i>she</i>

Foreign proper names when transliterated in Cyrillic are spelt 'phonetically', e.g.

*Shakespeare* = Шёкспир ; *Glasgow* = Глазгоу or Глазгов ; *William* = Вильем ; *John* = Їѡн.

Foreign words as a rule have to conform to the Serbo-Croatian rules of phonetics and orthography, e.g.

*professor* = прѡфесор ; *engineer* = инжйнёр

### 3. THE PRONUNCIATION

The pronunciation of Serbo-Croatian is infinitely easier for English-speaking people than is that of any of the other Slavonic languages. The rule in Serbo-Croatian is 'to write as you speak and to speak as you write' (Vuk, cf. p. 10). The pronunciation of each individual letter is in all cases the same, therefore the only difficulty is to learn the value of each letter.

The vowels и, е, а, о, у are all pronounced 'openly' as in Italian, cf. p. 12f.

The great majority of the consonants also present no difficulty whatever. The only consonants which call for special remark are the following: ш and ж, ч and џ, х and ѣ.

ш is a *voiceless*<sup>1</sup> consonant exactly like English *sh* ; ж is the corresponding *voiced* consonant pronounced like *s* in the English word *pleasure*, or like *j* in the French word *jour*.

ч is a *voiceless* consonant exactly like English *ch* in *chalk* ; џ is the corresponding *voiced* consonant pronounced like *j* in the English word *John*.

The only difficulty is with the two consonants х and ѣ, though it is by no means insurmountable. To pronounce these two consonants the teeth must be brought close together and the lips slightly opened. The blade<sup>2</sup> of the tongue must cleave to the inside of the gums of the upper teeth and be slightly drawn back at the moment when the stream

<sup>1</sup>The difference between a *voiceless* and a *voiced* consonant is that a *voiceless* consonant is pronounced with breath from the mouth *only*, while to pronounce a *voiced* consonant a stream of breath from the chest is necessary.

<sup>2</sup>The blade is the part of the tongue immediately behind the point and including it.

of breath comes out of the chest through the mouth. The important point is that *ħ* is a *voiceless* and *ḥ* the corresponding *voiced* consonant. Thus *ħ* and *ḥ* correspond to *ч* and *џ* and are very similar to them in sound, only they are palatal consonants,<sup>3</sup> which *ч* and *џ* are not.

The consonant *x* before a consonant, as in *хвала* = *thanks*, is pronounced like *ch* in Scottish *loch*, but before a vowel like an ordinary English *h*, as in *хàтрија* = *paper*.

It is important to notice the difference between *л* and *љ*, and between *н* and *њ*; *љ* and *њ* are the *softened* or *palatal* forms of *л* and *н*, just as *ħ* and *ḥ* are the *softened* or *palatal* forms of *т* and *д*. Their pronunciation is perfectly easy and natural for English-speaking people except at the end of words, a position in which for that matter these letters in Serbo-Croatian seldom occur; in the middle of words they sound like *l* and *n* in the English words *million* and *new*.

#### 4. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOUNDS

##### 1. Vowels

Besides the five normal vowels—*a*, *e*, *и*, *o*, *y*—*p* can also rank as a vowel when it is (1) between two consonants, or (2) at the beginning of a word before a consonant; in these cases it is strongly rolled as in Scotland, e.g.

1. Срѣин=*a Serb (masc.)*; трговац=*merchant*; чврѣст=*firm*.<sup>1</sup>

2. рђа=*rust*; рвати се=*to wrestle*; рђав=*bad*.

*p* very seldom occurs as a vowel-sound before or after a vowel; when it does it is indicated by two dots, e.g.

<sup>3</sup>*ħ* and *ḥ*, besides being the result respectively of *т*+*j* and *д*+*j* (cf. p. 18), are also the result, in words of comparatively modern formation, of *к*+*j* and *к*+*e*, *г*+*j*, *г*+*e*, e.g. *ћошак* = *corner* (from Turkish *kiushk*, cf. *kiosque*, *a pavilion*), *Маћедонија* = *Macedonia* (*к*+*e*), *Мађар* (also *Маџар*) = *Magyar*, *Ђорђе* = *George*, *ђенерал* = *general*, though there is now no *к* or *г* audible in these words.

<sup>1</sup>Even in words of foreign origin, e.g. *трпезарија* = *dining-room*, from the Greek *τραπέζιον*.

грѣце (3 syllables) = *throat* (diminutive).

запѣати (4 syllables) = *to become rusty*.

All vowels, including *p*, may be either short or long.

### ‘Movable A’

Particular mention must be made of what is known as the ‘movable a’. In Serbian only the following four groups of consonants are possible at the end of words : *ст, шт, зд, жд*; when a word would end in any other group than these, an *a* is inserted in the *nom, sing.*, but disappears in the other cases where the word naturally ends in a vowel; but in the *gen. plur.* the *a* reappears in these words, a phenomenon caused by the fact that the invariable long *final a* of this case is of comparatively modern origin. E.g.

*Nom. sing.* ко̀нац= *cotton, cotton, thread*

*Gen. sing.* ко̀нца.

*Gen. plur.* ко̀наца̃

It is very frequent in the *nom, sing. masc.* of adjectives, e.g. же́дан (*masc*)= *thirsty*, but же́дна (*fem.*).

In the case of foreign words practice varies ; thus one finds both ф̣а̀кт and ф̣а̀кат.

### Final л and о

Final *л* of a syllable, and especially of a word, very frequently becomes *о*. In words which originally ended in *-ол* in the *nom. sing.* the two *о*’s then combine into one long vowel, but the *л* reappears in the other cases, e.g.

во̀ (*m.*)= *ox*, *gen. sing.* во̀ла.

сто̀ (*m.*)= *Table*, *gen. sing.* сто̀ла.

со̀= *salt*, *gen. sing.* со̀ли, the *nom. sing.* of which was originally вол, стол, and сол.

In other cases the *л* appears as *о* after another vowel when final, reappearing in other cases, e.g.

бѐо= *white* (*nom. sing, masc.*), but бѐла= *white* (*nom. sing, fem.*), бѐли= *white* (*nom. plur. masc.*). This phenomenon occurs most frequently in the past participle of the verbs, e.g.

ѣмао= (*he*) *had* (*masc. sing.*), but ѣмала= (*she*) *had* (*fem. sing.*).

It may also occur in the middle of words when *n.* is at the end of a syllable, e.g.

сеòба=*migration* (originally селба).

влàдоца, gen. sing. of влàдалац=*ruler* (e.g, *king*).

Cf. also Беòград=*Belgrade* (lit. *the white city*, originally Белград).

## 2. Consonants

The consonants, according to the manner of their articulation, fall into the two groups :

1. Voiced : б, в, г, д, ђ, ж, з, ц.

2. Voiceless : п, ф, к, т, ћ, ш, с, ч, ц, х.

### *Rule of the assimilation of Consonants*

When a voiced and a voiceless consonant come together, assimilation takes place, i.e. both must be either voiced or voiceless : (1) a voiceless consonant becomes voiced before a voiced consonant, and (2) vice versa, e.g.

(1) свàдба (*f.*)=*wedding* is derived from сват+ба (свàт (*m.*)  
=*wedding guest*)

òтацбина (*f.*) = *fatherland* „ „ отач+бина (òтац (*m.*)  
=*father*)

(2) српски (*adj.*) = *Serbian* „ „ срб+ски (србин (*m.*)  
=*Serbian* (*m.*)

вràпци (*nom. pl.*) = *sparrows* „ враб + ци (вràбац  
(*m.*) = *sparrow*)

Exceptions: д remains before с and ш, e.g.

прéдседник (*m.*) = *president*.

одшкринути = *to open slightly*.

в never changes into ф and does not change preceding voiceless consonants, e.g.

кòлèвка (*f.*) (not колефка) = *cradle*.

клéтва (*f.*) (not кледва) = *curse*.

### MOST IMPORTANT PHONETIC RULES

I. The gutturals к, г, х are 'softened' when followed (1) by е and (2) by и, as follows :

1. (a.) Before е, к changes into ч, г into ж, х into ш, in voc. sing. of masculine nouns, e.g.

Nom. sing., вѣк (*m.*), *wolf*, voc. sing. вѣче.

„ „ бѣг (*m.*), *god*, „ „ бѣже.

„ „ дѣх (*m.*), *spirit*, „ „ дѣше.

(b) In the 2nd and 3rd person singular of the aorist tense (cd. p. 187f.) e.g. рѣхи = *to tell*, трѣнути = *to pull*.

1st p. рѣкох, *I told*, 2nd and 3rd p. рѣче.

„ трѣох, *I pulled*, „ „ трѣже.

(c) In certain words derived from those ending in these consonants, e.g.

друг (*m.*), *companion* ; дружити се, *to keep company*.

кѣнак (*m.*), *a hostel* ; кѣначити, *to spend the night*.

сѣх (*adj.*), *dry* ; сѣшити, *to dry* (transitive).

2. Before и, г changes into з, к into ц, х into с, in the nom. dat. voc. inst. loc. pl. of most nouns whose stems end in these consonants, e.g.

бѣбрег (*m.*), *kidney*, nom. voc. pl. бѣбрези, dat. inst. loc. бѣбрезѣма.

вѣк (*m.*), *wolf*, nom. voc. pl. вѣци, dat. inst. loc. вѣцима.

сирѣмах (*m.*), *poor man*, nom. voc. pl. сирѣмасѣ, dat. inst. loc. сирѣмасѣма.

II. If ц and з are followed by е or и, they become ч and ж, e.g.

зѣц (*m.*), *hare (masc)*, voc. sing. зѣче, зѣчица (*f.*), *hare (fem.)*.

кнѣз (*m.*), *price*, „ „ кнѣже.

ѣтац (*m.*), *father*, „ „ ѣче.

III. In the case of verbs whose roots end in г, к, and х, these consonants coalesce with т of the infinitive ending -ти and form ѣ, cf. p. 102.

IV. The palatal consonant j, in such syllables as -ja-, -je-, -ji-, -jy-, affects most of the non-palatal consonants if they immediately precede it. Such consonants coalesce with j into one sound, as follows :

д+j=ѣ, e.g. млѣѣй (*adj.*) = *younger*, derived from млад + ji<sup>2</sup>

т+j=ѣ, e.g. лѣѣй (*adj.*) = *more angry* „ „ лѣт + ji

<sup>2</sup>-ji s the sign of the comparative.



з+j=ж, e.g. брѣжѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>quicker</i> ,	derived from	брз	+ ји
с+j=ш, e.g. кѣша ( <i>f.</i> ) = <i>rain</i>	„ „	кис	+ ја
ц+j=ч, e.g. ѣжичанин ( <i>m.</i> ) = <i>a native</i>			
	of <i>ѣжуце</i> ,	„	ѣжѣц + јанин
и+j=ѣ, e.g. тѣѣѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>thinner</i>	„ „	тан	+ ји
л+j=љ, e.g. весѣље ( <i>n.</i> ) = <i>joy</i>	„ „	весѣл	+ је
г+j=ж, e.g. дрѣжѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>dearer</i>	„ „	драг	+ ји
к+j=ч, e.g. јѣчѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>stronger</i>	„ „	јак	+ ји
х+j=ш, e.g. тѣѣѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>quieter</i>	„ „	тих	+ ји

Further, if such consonants are in their turn preceded by з or с, these become respectively ж and ш, e.g.

грѣзд (*m.*) = *bunch of grapes*, but грѣжѣ (*n.*) *grapes* (collective noun), from грѣжѣ = грѣзд-је.

лѣѣ (*m.*) = *leaf, sheet (of paper)*, but лѣѣѣ (*n.*) = *leaves* (collective noun), from лѣѣѣ = лѣѣ-је.

Бѣѣ (*f.*) = *Bosnia*, but Бѣѣѣ (*m.*) = *a Bosnian (m.)*, from Бѣѣѣ = Бѣѣ-јак.

Further, when the syllables beginning with j are immediately preceded by the consonants б, п, в, м, the letter л is inserted and coalesces with j, forming the consonant љ, e.g.

грѣѣѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>coarser, ruder</i> ,	derived from	грѣѣ	+ ји
скѣѣѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>more expensive, dearer</i>	„ „	скѣѣ	+ ји
жѣѣѣ ( <i>adj.</i> ) = <i>livelier</i>	„ „	живѣ	+ ји
бѣѣѣѣ ( <i>n.</i> ) = <i>madness</i>	„ „	бѣѣѣѣ	+ је

V. Sometimes д and т dissapear before ц, ч, and ѣ, e.g.

Nom. sing. ѣѣѣ (*m.*), *father*, gen. sing. ѣѣѣ, voc. sing. ѣѣѣ

„ „ѣѣѣ,