

Re: So it is true...

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-12/msg00177.html>

- *From:* "Seán O'Leathlóbhair" <jwlawler@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 3 Dec 2005 02:42:57 -0800
-

Thanks very much for that. It has improved my knowledge of the languages of the area considerably. I have been to Prague but I have not yet been to Slovakia. It is good that I learnt this first.

Paul J Kriha wrote:

> Seán O'Leathlóbhair <jwlawler@xxxxxxxx> wrote in message
> news:1133517371.229965.4140@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
>> Paul J Kriha wrote:
>>> Seán O'Leathlóbhair <jwlawler@xxxxxxxx> wrote in message
>>> news:1133447738.383049.56040@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
>>>
>>><snip>
>>>
>>>>Is that only since Czechoslovakia split or was it common before?
>>>>
>>>> In the times of the old federal republic the languages were
>>>> often used interchangeably. For example, half the banknote
>>>> denominations were printed in Czech and half in Slovak.
>>>> The radio and TV newscasts were usually given in both
>>>> languages by two presenters alternating between items.
>>>>
>>>>Were they regarded as different languages rather than merely dialects
>>>>before the split?
>>>>
>>>> They were (always) regarded as separate languages.

I think that few here in the UK are aware of that but that may improve since the countries have split. There is a very common naive view of a one to one relationship between country and language. You can even stump many people with questions such as: what language is spoken in Belgium or Switzerland? I would bet a fair amount that if you asked what was spoken in Czechoslovakia, you would get the single answer Czech. But I would also think it likely that if you asked about Slovakia, you may now get the answer Slovakian.

I must confess that although I knew the answers for Belgium and Switzerland, I have been guilty of this mistake in this case.

> For about 1000 years until 1918 the Czech and Slovak speaking

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- > nations were living in more-or-less separately administered
- > territories. At the beginning they were presumably speaking
- > the same language. The Slovak language based on the central
- > Slovak dialect was formalized around 1840. So by then it
- > was definitely regarded as a separate language.
- >
- >>I know that there is no good linguistic distinction
- >>but nonetheless people usually have opinions on the matter. Are the
- >>differences much greater than UK to US English?
- >
- > Yes, definitely.
- >
- >> How does the level of
- >>difference compare to the Scandinavian languages?
- >
- > Sorry, I don't know Scandinavian languages that well.

The Scandinavian languages are a convenient yardstick. They are commonly regarded as different languages (because of the one to one assumption I just mentioned) yet the differences between them are less than some others which are regarded only as dialects of a single language.

- > The Czechoslovak people since their childhood were every day
- > passively exposed to each other's language. They don't often
- > realize the extent of the foreign vocabulary/syntax/morphology
- > they actually are familiar with.
- >
- > I can converse in Czech with Slovaks who speak Slovak in a mixed
- > group without too many problems, occasionally I have to query
- > a more unusual word. When I read a Slovak book I don't have the
- > immediate help from somebody in the group and I find it significantly
- > more difficult and tiring.
- >
- > To understand the spoken conversation is only possible because
- > the languages are similar but also because passively I know
- > Slovak quite well. We are both familiar with each others' common
- > words, such as "listen" (CZ "poslys" or "poslouchej" SK "poc^u'vaj"),
- > if we talk about football, we know that CZ "mi'c^" is the same
- > thing as SK "lopta".
- > However, unless I parrot exactly what I heard I am unable to
- > come up with even a simple correct Slovak sentence.
- > I cannot write Slovak, I've never learned the Slovak orthography
- > and the morphology is often a double Dutch to me.
- > On average the Slovaks are more likely to be truly bilingual,
- > they are quite likely to have read Czech books, while I have
- > read hardly any. Those of them who studied at Czech
- > universities are likely to speak Czech like natives.
- >
- >
- >>> That resulted in, apart from active knowledge of one language,

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- >>> people having at least good passive knowledge of the other one.
- >>> This is not the case any more. Czech children growing up since
- >>> the eighties don't understand Slovak and vice versa.
- >>
- >>Are the two languages really that different? I didn't realise. Here
- >>in the UK, a good bookshop will have several books on Czech. I
- >>struggle to recall whether I have seen a book on Slovak.
- >>
- >>> Re your eau de toilette...
- >>> Separate inscriptions in both languages even when the words
- >>> happen to be almost identical are probably de norm these days.
- >>> If nothing else they are a sign of respect for the other state/nation.
- >>
- >>But, as we have seen, the Scandinavians do not seem so concerned about
- >>this respect.
- >>
- >>I deal with IBM a lot and sometimes I am slightly irritated that they
- >>produce numerous translated versions of material, often distinguishing
- >>even European and Brazilian Portuguese, yet they never bother with UK
- >>or any other non-US English. However, if they did then I may be
- >>offended that they considered me unable to understand a different
- >>variety of English. So, to be fair, they can't win.
- >
- > Petty politics?

Possibly. It could also be simple ignorance. Or it may be just business. How many extra sales would they get in the UK if they produced British English documentation? Would it cover the cost? My guess is that it would not. If this is the explanation then it would suggest that using the wrong Portuguese is more upsetting than the wrong English.

- > I have seen products with inscriptions in strange collections of
- > languages, presumably the languages of countries they were
- > being exported to. At least that was my guess.
- > Couple months ago I bought some electronic doohdaah
- > with inscriptions in Hungarian, Arabic, Chinese, and Serbian
- > (it may have been Bulgarian). Fair enough, I thought,
- > but it was exported to New Zealand.
- > And it didn't bother to say where exactly it was made. :-)

I have seen that as well. I have also noticed it with DVD sound tracks. Sometimes the selection of languages is very strange.

- >>> >Does anyone speak Serbo-Croatian any more?
- >>>
- >>> A few university professors of Slavic studies around the world? :-)
- >>
- >>Within the former Yugoslavia, has pretty much everyone taken a side?
- >
- > You cannot deal with THAT problem without taking a side.

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>
>
>>Are there no unionists left?
>
> You mean people who talk about Great Serbia or Great Croatia?

I was just wondering if anyone felt that all or most of the former Yugoslavia should still be one on an equal basis. The names Great Serbia or Great Croatia would suggest wanting one part to dominate the other which is not what I had in mind. I should probably cease this speculation, I guess that it is a potential minefield.

> pjk
>
>>> pjk
>>>>Or do we have only separate
>>>>Serbian and Croatian speakers?
>>>>Seán O'Leathlóbhair
>>Seán O'Leathlóbhair

—
Seán O'Leathlóbhair

• *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Paul J Kriha
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Christian Weisgerber
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Peter T. Daniels

• *References:*

- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Thomas Widmann
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Wiktor S.
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Seán O'Leathlóbhair
- ◆ **Re: So it is true...**
 ◇ *From:* Paul J Kriha
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 ◇ *From:* Paul J Kriha

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- Next by Date: **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**

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