

Southeast European Language Training Program  
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My interest in the Serbian language, and in the entire Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian-speaking region, began during my first year of graduate study at Indiana University. I began studying BCS immediately upon entering IU and have spent an increasing amount of time in that region over the past four years. During that time, it has become my primary Slavic language, as well as the main area of focus within my formal linguistics research. My primary linguistic field is phonology and I have devoted much research to several different phonological issues within BCS, including both historical and synchronic phenomena, and there are still others I wish to explore in the near future. In addition to phonology, I have also undertaken several other research projects relating to the Serbian language in such linguistic branches as phonetics, syntax, and socio-linguistics. My participation in the Southeast European Language Training Program was not linked directly to a specific research project, but rather involved general and more comprehensive language training so that I will be able to more competently conduct precisely these types of research projects within the target language. I am currently finishing the design phase of a phonetics research project in which I will need to work directly with native speakers of BCS, ideally those who have not had significant exposure to foreign languages including English, and the language skills I was able to continue to develop over the course of this summer will be invaluable to the completion of this project. Specifically regarding the remainder of my graduate study, my dissertation topic will center on the phonological phenomenon of jotation, both as a historical phonological process and as a synchronic morphological process, within which BCS will be the primary linguistic focus. As an additional, and unexpected, benefit of my study of Serbian, I have found that it has built a solid base for the study of other languages in contact with the former Yugoslav region. More specifically, I began studying the modern Turkish language during this academic year, and my background in Serbian has proved incredibly useful. Not only is there an immense number of Turkish borrowings in Serbian, with which I was already intimately familiar as a result of my language study, but it has been endlessly fascinating to examine the way these borrowed words and structures were adapted, which in turn provides insight into the underlying linguistic processes at work within

the Serbian language, and how changes in these processes are reflected in the way particular words and similar phonemic units were adapted differently at different points in history. This is also an area I wish to further explore.

Intensive immersion in the host country is the most effective way to acquire and maintain language competence, and particularly now that I am nearing the end of my graduate study, I wished to make as much progress in the language as possible in a shorter amount of time. In my career as a linguist I have studied several languages, but I am of the opinion that it is pointless to study a language without achieving a certain degree of proficiency so that one can function comfortably among native speakers. The Southeast European Language Training Program proved to be the ideal means to do this, for reasons both obvious and less obvious. American Councils located the teachers with whom I would work during the semester, after which it was up to us, as student and teacher, to arrange our class times and locations. I was the sole student during the initial and final weeks of the program, and there was one additional student during the weeks in between. This situation gave me ample opportunity to practice speaking, writing, and to address my own specific issues and questions regarding both the language and the culture. For the first two months of study, there were two instructors between whom we alternated sessions, and both were outstanding instructors as well as genuinely enjoyable people. During these classes we focused primarily on grammar and stylistics, working from both textbook and additional materials the instructors would provide. There were frequent focused writing assignments, and both instructors always provided clear and constructive feedback. During the final three weeks of my stay in Belgrade, for logistical reasons my initial instructors were unavailable, and American Councils located a third instructor with whom I worked for the remainder of the program, who also turned out to be fantastic. My work with the third instructor was approached from a completely different angle, focusing primarily on translation both from Serbian to English, as well as from English to Serbian, a much more difficult task. Between these three instructors I was had the opportunity to learn the language through a variety of sources and experiences, both in terms of the teaching materials and methodology as well as the instructors specific personalities. Additionally, each of my professors was perfectly open to the discussion of regional/dialectal differences (as between Croatian and Serbian, for example), a situation which is not always the case in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language classes, given some of socio-linguistic peculiarities which have developed in the region during the years following

the war. The less obvious opportunities for linguistic and cultural growth came about during the process of settling myself in to the city itself. It was my responsibility to arrange my accommodations, and I felt a great sense of accomplishment when I had located an apartment, negotiated the contract with the owner, and settled in to my new apartment - acquiring the necessary appliances, setting up the internet, etc. - all on my own and in the target language. This is precisely the kind of experience that cannot be gained studying a language domestically, and when there are words or concepts that are unfamiliar, you learn them quickly and never forget.

The only aspect I would have possibly changed is the fact that for much of the summer I was the only student. Certainly private or near-private instruction has its advantages, but in group-based language immersion programs, one also has colleagues with whom to practice the language and explore the city and local culture outside of the classroom. When among fellow advanced learners, students can share ideas, learn from each others' mistakes, and ideally create an atmosphere in which they can take chances with expressing their thoughts in the target language, without anxiety or the fear of embarrassment. But as I stated above, the courses themselves and the instructors were fantastic and I have no complaints whatsoever in that regard.

The language skills I gained during my participation in the Southeast European language Training Program will be a huge advantage in my future career, whether it be in academia or in the United States government. If I remain in academia at the conclusion of my graduate study, I will continue to explore and expand upon the research topics discussed above. My study of the language will also allow me to teach BCS at a university level, which is especially important as it is one of the many languages that I believe are understudied in the United States. The greater the number of competent speakers of Serbian (and/or Croatian and Bosnian) that the United States can produce, the better equipped we will be to maneuver within the region as the shape of the European (and particularly Southeastern European) landscape continues to evolve. I am equally interested in pursuing a career in the United States Government. I am open to any of several government branches, and will seek out the career in which I have the greatest opportunity to put my language skills to use. Linguistic competence in BCS will only become more valuable as the Balkan region continues to become a more prominent player on the European stage. The likelihood of accession of the Yugoslav successor states to the European Union make the knowledge of BCS as important as that of other Western European languages, if not more so.

Though we are nearly two decades removed from wars in the former Yugoslavia, tensions in many areas and among many populations still run high, and the United States' dealings with this region will require people who can not only function smoothly in the language, but who are also well-acquainted with and respectful of the local histories and cultures, and the current political and cultural entities which have arisen as a result. My study in Belgrade through the Southeast European Language Training has given me precisely this type of experience, experience which I am currently putting to use in my linguistic research and will continue to put to use throughout the remainder of my career.