

Bosnian Pronunciation and Phrase Guide

Introduction

The modern Bosnian language is the new name for what used to be called Serbo-Croatian tongue. After secession from Yugoslavia, the Bosnian government declared the official language to be called "Bosnian" rather than "Serbo-Croatian." However, Serbo-Croatian, "Croatian," "Serbian," and "Bosnian" are the same language, with minor structural & idiomatic differences - a little like the differences between American English, Canadian English, Australian English, and British English. However, Serbian is sometimes written in a different alphabet, the Cyrillic Alphabet.

Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian/Serbo-Croatian is a Southern Slavonic tongue in the Slavonic group of languages of the Indo-European family. International linguistic authorities continue to call the language "Serbo-Croatian." It is closely related to Slovenian, Macedonian & Bulgarian. Nouns have gender and cases. The past tense is conjugated by gender, while other tenses are conjugated by person.

The language itself is difficult to pronounce. Grammatical complexities will however present challenges to those not familiar with highly inflected languages, such as Latin or Russian. Inflection is the grammatical process of altering the noun to indicate its position & function in the sentence. The noun is said to have "case." Whereas English nouns are defined in the sentence through the use of **prepositions** - as in the sentence "Mary throws the ball **to** John" (where 'to' is the preposition showing the relationship between Mary, the ball, and John), inflected languages alter the noun itself - so 'John' would become 'Johnu', showing that the ball is thrown 'to John'. This is called the dative case - more about that in the next lesson though! So, the sentence in Bosnian/Serbo Croat would have no preposition "to" (the full sentence would be "Mary baca loptu Johnu"). Inflected languages are therefore more precise since confusion as to the intended meaning rarely occurs, because the meaning is contained within each word. In another similarity with Latin, Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian does not use articles ('the' and 'a').

As we said, there are certain small idiomatic differences between Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian, mostly as a result of words used only in some regions or areas. For example, bread is "Hleb" in Serbian, 'Kruh' in Croatian, and 'Hljeb' in Serbian. There is one major pronunciation and spelling difference between the three variants - where you have the letter combination 'je' in Bosnian and Croatian, you will normally only have 'e' in Serbian, and where you have 'ilje' in Bosnian and Croatian, you normally have only 'le' in Serbian. For example, "Miljeko" (milk) in Croatian/Bosnian is just 'Mleko' in Serbian, while "Hljeb" in Bosnian is just "Hleb" in Serbian. You don't need to worry about learning these differences at this stage - just learn the vocabulary as people teach it to you and everyone will understand. If you do want to find out more about the variations, it might help you to look at the differences between individual words in Croatian, Bosnian & Serbian phrasebooks, if you have access to any.

Pronunciation guide

Bosnian pronunciation is fairly phonetic (i.e. it's said as it's written, and each letter combination is always pronounced the same way) and it's quite straightforward. Each letter represents only one sound, and multiple sounds are produced only when several letters are combined.

The letter "A" represents the sound "ah" in Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian, and it only ever represents that sound. Unlike in English, where the letter "A" stands for numerous sounds - such as "ah, eh, aaa, ehy" & so forth, Bosnian/SerboCroatian letters only represent basic sounds, and they will sound the same in every context. Speakers of Spanish and Italian will find most sounds in Bosnian to be similar to the ones in their

own languages.

Vowels

a - like 'a' in "above"
e - like 'e' in "enemy"
i - like 'i' in "pin"
o - like 'o' in "opera"
u - like 'u' in "put"

Consonants

Bosnian consonants are crisper than their counterparts in the English language. Approximating the corresponding consonants in Italian or Russian is closer to their true pronunciation.

b - like 'b' in "bed"
c - like 'ts' at the end of "cats" (never like an "s" or "k")
č - pronounced like "ch" as in "church", but with the tongue up on the roof of the mouth
ć - like "ch" as in "chile", but softer, with tongue behind top front teeth
d - like 'd' in "dog"
dž - very close to "j" as in judge, with tongue up on the roof of the mouth
đ - like "j" as in "judge", but softer, with tongue behind top front teeth
f - like 'ph' in "phone"
g - like 'g' in "go" (never pronounced like the "g" in "large")
h - a little more emphasized than the 'h' in "help". Somewhat close to the Spanish *jota* (j), pronounced in the throat
j - like 'y' in "yellow"
k - like 'k' in "kite"
l - like 'l' in "love"
lj - like the "lya" sound in "million". Combo of the Bosnian "l" and "j" sounds together
m - like 'm' in "mother"
n - like 'n' in "nice"
nj - like "ny" in "Sonya"
p - like 'p' in "pappy"
r - rolled slightly, like the Spanish r in "pero"
s - like 'ss' in "hiss"
š - like "sh" in "sheep", with tongue raised toward roof of mouth
t - like 't' in "top"
v - like 'v' in "victory"
z - like 'z' in "haze"
ž - like the "s" in "measure", with tongue raised toward roof of mouth

Phrase list

Basics

Hello/Good Day - Dobar dan (*DOH-bahr dahn*)

How are you? - Kako ste? (*formal*), (*KAH-koh steh*) Kako si? (*informal*) (*KAH-koh see*)

Fine, thank you - Dobro sam, hvala (*DOH-broh sahm, HVAH-lah*)

What is your name? - Kako se zovete? (*formal*) (*KAH-koh seh ZOH-veh-teh*)

What is your name? - Kako se zoveš? (*informal*) (*KAH-koh seh ZOH-vehsh*)

My name is _____ - Zovem se _____ .(ZOH-vehm seh____.)

I am _____ : Ja sam _____ (yah sahm)

Nice to meet you - Drago mi je (DRAH-goh mee yeh)

Please - Molim (MOH-leem)

Thank you - Hvala (HVAH-lah)

Thank you very much - Hvala lijepo (HVAH-lah LEE-yeh-poh)

You're welcome - Nema na čemu (NEH-mah nah CHEH-moo)

Yes - Da (dah)

No – Ne (neh)

Excuse me (getting attention) - Oprostite (oh-prohs-TEE-teh)

Excuse me (apologising) - Izvinite (EEZ-vee-nee-teh)

I'm sorry (as in an apology) - Oprostite (oh-prohs-TEE-teh)

I'm sorry (as in "I'm sorry to hear that", rather than as an apology; for example when someone tells you they can't come to your party, or they're ill) - Žao mi je (zhao mee yeh)

Goodbye: do viđenja (doh vee-jeh-nyah) or čao (chaoo – the same as in the Italian way of saying hi/bye)

I can't speak your language [well] - Ne govorim [dobro] vaš jezik (neh goh-VOH-reem [DOH-broh] vash yayzik)

Do you speak English? - Da li govorite engleski? (dah lee goh-VOH-ree-teh ehn-GLEHS-kee)

Is there someone here who speaks English? - Da li iko ovdje govori engleski? (dah lee EE-koh ohvd-yeh GOH-voh-ree ehn- GLEES-kee)

Help! - Upomoć! (OOPOH-mohtch)

Look out! - Pazite! (PAH-zee-teh)

Good morning - Dobro jutro (DOH-broh YOO-troh)

Good evening - Dobro večer (DOH-broh VEH-chehr)

Good night (saying goodnight when you're leaving, or when going to bed) - Laku noć. (LAH-koo nohtch)

I don't understand - Ne razumijem (neh RAH-zoo-mee-yehn)

Where is the toilet? - Gdje je WC? (gdye yeh veh-tseh?)

Problems

Leave me alone - Pusti me na miru (POOS-tee meh nah MEE-roo)

Don't touch me! - Ne diraj me! (*neh DEE-rah-yuh meh!*)

Police! - Policija! (*poh-LEE-tsee-yah!*)

Stop! Thief! - Stanite! Lopov! (*STAH-nee-teh! LOH-pohv!*)

I need your help - Treba mi vaša pomoć (*TREH-bah mee VAH-shah POH-mohch*)

It's an emergency - Hitno je (*HEET-noh yeh*)

I'm lost – [for men] Izgubio sam se (*EEZ-goo-bio sahm seh*); [for women] izgubila sam se (*EEZ-goo-bee-lah sahm seh*)

I lost my bag - [for men] Izgubio sam torbu (*EEZ-goo-bio sahm TOHR-boo*); [for women] izgubila sam torbu (*EEZ-goo-bee-lah sahm TOHR-boo*)

I lost my wallet - [for men] Izgubio sam novčanik (*EEZ-goo-bio sahm NOHV-chah-neek*); [for women] Izgubila sam novčanik (*EEZ-goo-bee-lah sahm NOHV-chah-neek*)

I'm sick – [for men] Bolestan sam (*BOH-lehs-tahn sahm*) / [for women] bolesna sam (*BOH-lehs-nah sahm*)

I've been injured - [for men] Povrijedio sam (*pohv-REE-yeh-dio sahm seh*) / [for women] povrijedila sam (*pohv-REE-yeh-dee-lah sahm seh*)

I need a doctor - Treba mi doktor (*TREH-bah mee DOHK-tohr*)

Can I use your phone? - Mogu li se poslužiti telefonom? (*MOH-goo lee seh POHS-loo-zhee-tee teh-LEH-foh-nohm?*)

Numbers – numbers are adjectives, they describe and define the noun to follow (e.g. 2 tigers, 3 tigers – the numbers describe the tigers as much as if you said ‘yellow tiger, red tigers’). So, in Bosnian, some of the numbers also have endings like adjectives, which depends on what gender the noun is, and on other factors. The numbers two – five have more complicated rules (they make the noun take the genitive case) but you don’t need to learn that now! Just be aware that the endings won’t always be what you expect.

1 – jedan (masculine), jedna (feminine), jedno (neuter)

2 – dva (masculine or neuter) / dvije (feminine)

3 - tri

4 - četiri

5 - pet

6 - šest

7 - sedam

8 - osam (...)

9 - devet

10 - deset

11 - jedanaest

12 - dvanaest

13 - trinaest

14 - četrnaest

15 - petnaest

16 - šesnaest
17 - sedamnaest
18 - osamnaest
19 - devetnaest
20 - dvadeset
21 - dvadeset jedan/jedna/jedno
22 - dvadeset dva/dvije
23 - dvadeset tri
30 - trideset
40 - četrdeset
50 - pedeset
60 - šezdeset
70 - sedamdeset
80 - osamdeset
90 - devedeset
100 - sto
200 - dvjesta
300 - trista
400 - četiristo
500 - petsto
600 - šeststo
700 - sedamsto
800 - osamsto
900 - devetsto
1000 - hiljada
2000 - dvije hiljade
1,000,000 - milion
1,000,000,000 one thousand million in UK, one billion in USA: bilion/milijarda
1,000,000,000,000 one billion in UK, one trillion in USA: trilion
number – broj
half - pola
less - manje
more - više

Time

now - sad(a)
later - kasnije
before - prije
after - poslije
morning - jutro
afternoon - popodne
evening - večer
night - noć

Clock time

one o'clock AM - jedan sat ujutro
two o'clock AM - dva sata ujutro
noon - podne
one o'clock PM - jedan sat poslije podne
two o'clock PM - dva sata poslije podne
six o'clock PM - šest sati uvečer
midnight - ponoć

Duration

minute(s) - minuta
hour(s) - sat(i)
day(s) - dan(a)
week(s) - sedmica(-)
month(s) - mjesec(i)
year(s) - godina(-)

Days

today - danas
yesterday - juče
tomorrow - sutra
this week - ove sedmice
last week - prošle sedmice
next week - sljedeće sedmice

Days cont.

Sunday - nedjelja
Monday - ponedjeljak
Tuesday - utorak
Wednesday - srijeda
Thursday - četvrtak
Friday - petak
Saturday - subota

Months

January - Januar / Siječanj
February - Februar / Veljača
March - Mart / Ožujak
April - April / Travanj
May - Maj / Svibanj
June - Juni / Lipanj
July - Juli / Srpanj
August - August / Kolovoz
September - Septembar / Rujan
October - Oktobar / Listopad
November - Novembar / Studeni
December - Decembar / Prosinac

Colors

black - crna
white - bijela
gray - siva
red - crvena
blue - plava
yellow - žuta
green - zelena
orange - narandžasta
purple - ljubičasta
brown - smeđa

Money

Do you accept American/Australian/Canadian dollars? - Prihvatate li američke/australijske/kanadske dolare?

Do you accept credit cards? - Pripadate li kreditne kartice?

Can you change money for me? - Možete li mi razmijeniti novac??

Where can I get money changed? - Gdje mogu razmijeniti novac?

Can you change a traveler's check for me? - Možete li mi razmijeniti putnički ček?

Where can I get a traveler's check changed? - Gdje mogu zamijeniti putnički ček?

What is the exchange rate? - Koliki je kurs?

Where is an ATM (automatic teller machine / cashpoint)? - Gdje je bankomat?

Eating

A table for one person/ two people, please - Molim Vas, sto za jednu/
dvije osobu/osobe

Can I look at the menu, please? - Mogu li pogledati meni/jelovnik?

Is there a house specialty? - Imate li specijalitet kuće?

Is there a local specialty? - Imate li lokalni specijalitet?

I'm a vegetarian - Ja sam vegetarijanac.

I want _____ - Želim _____

I want a dish/meal with _____ - Želim jelo sa _____

chicken - piletinom

beef - govedinom

fish - ribom

ham - šunkom

sausage - kobasicom

cheese - sirom

eggs - jajima

salad - salatom

(fresh) vegetables - (svježe) povrće

(fresh) fruit - (svježe) voće

noodles - rezancima

rice - rižom

beans – grahom

(the above 13 food words are all in the dative case – meaning 'with...', and so they have the ending 'om'. They're written like that because that's how they'd be in the sentence

beginning 'Želim jelo sa _____ / I'd like a meal with _____'. However when you use/learn them in other contexts, remember that they'll have different endings).

bread - hljeb / kruh

toast - tost

May I have a glass of _____? - Mogu li dobiti čašu _____?

May I have a cup of _____? - Mogu li dobiti šolju _____?

May I have a bottle of _____? - Mogu li dobiti flašu _____?

coffee - kafe

tea (*drink*) - čaja

juice - soka

(fizzy/sparkling) water - kisele vode

water - vode

(again – the above 5 drinks are in the genitive case – meaning ‘of...’, and they’re like that because they’re there to be used in the sentence beginning ‘May I have a glass of _____?’ / ‘Mogu li dobiti čašu _____?’ etc. Again, they consequently have different endings here than the ones you’ll hear elsewhere).

May I have some _____? - Mogu li dobiti _____?

coffee - kafu

tea (*drink*) - čaj

juice - sok

(fizzy/sparkling) water - kiselu vodu

water – vodu

salt - sol

black pepper - crni biber

(these words all end in the accusative case – meaning they are the object of the sentence)

Excuse me, waiter? (*getting attention of server*) - Oprostite, konobar?

I'm finished - Završio sam (for men) / Završila sam (for women).

It was delicious - Bilo je ukusno

The check, please - Račun, molim

The following download (Bosnian lesson 2) is mainly about Bosnian grammar. It will develop some of the knowledge you’ve already built up when learning the sentences in this document. Don’t expect to understand it all, especially if you haven’t learnt languages with declining nouns and verbs before; but if you can, just read through it and try to see if you can spot any patterns and matches between the formal grammar it will show you, and the phrases you learnt in this lesson. All this will be made clearer for you in the face-to-face language lessons in Brcko.