**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Why study Slovak?**

**It is a modern Slavonic language. Its knowledge is a good solid base for understanding structure and vocabulary of the other 11 Slavonic languages.**

The present standard language was introduced by the Štúr generation. The leader of this group professor Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856) decided to establish the Slovak language based on Central-Slovak (the language as spoken in the central part of Slovakia). The official codification occurred in 1843.

The Slovaks inhabit the Slovak Republic, one of the newest sovereign states in Europe, which emerged in 1993 as a consequence of the amicable splitting of Czechoslovakia and co-operation, especially in sport, culture and trade, continues.

Slovak and Czech are mutually intelligible languages; however, they are two different modern languages of the Indo-European branch.

They belong to the western Slavonic group of languages together with Polish and Sorbian or Lusatian. (Language spoken in Germany around Bautzen and Cottbus).

They all use the Roman alphabet.

In the 9th century, Slavic tribes, including the Slovaks, formed their first political organization, the Great Moravian Empire, encompassing Moravia, Bohemia, Slovakia, Silesia, Lusatia and Pannonia (the future Hungary).

In the year 863 Constantine, known as Cyril, and Methodius, two missionaries from Salonika in the Byzantine Empire, came to Great Moravia. They brought with them Christianity and religious and liturgical books and translated them into Macedonian cultural language of Salonika.

After a short interregnum following the fall of the empire in 906, the Slovaks were conquered by the Hungarians. The Hungarian political and economic domination lasted until 1918, when Slovaks and Czechs formed a common sovereign state – Czechoslovakia.

Close cultural relations existed between Bohemia and Slovakia and these became intensified after the foundation of Prague University in the year 1348. Many Slovaks studied at this university. Vavrinec Benedikt (1555-1615), from Nedožery in Slovakia, was dean of Prague University and wrote the first Czech Grammar, Prague 1603. In the 16th century Czech-Slovak relations were revived by Czech Protestants coming to Slovakia. They brought with them a Czech translation of the Bible. “ Kralická bible”. It is the Czech translation of the Bible which was published in 6 volumes in the years 1579-1593 in Kralice in Moravia. This biblical Czech language replaced Latin and became the language of the Slovak protestant liturgy.

Latinwas used as the language of liturgy, of culture and the administrative language since the beginning of the Hungarian Empire till the middle of the 19th century.

Under the long Hungarian dominion, the position of Slovakia, called ”Upper Hungary”, varied.

While Turks occupied most of Hungary, Bratislava, (the present Slovak capital) became, in effect, the capital of Hungary from 1541 to 1784. Eleven kings were crowned in St. Martin Dom in Bratislava. When the Turkish threat receded, the Hungarian aristocracy returned to Buda, and Bratislava became a city inhabited mainly by German speaking traders.

Although the Slovak language was neither the official nor literary nor the religious language, yet it was the language of the Slovak national culture. In spite of long efforts by Hungarian governments to “magyarize” the population, the Slovak language survived.

In the second half of the18th century, centralism was introduced by Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and her son Joseph II. The favourable political and cultural environment inspired many Slovak intellectuals. Anton Bernolák (1762-1813) was the first Slovak literary language codifier.

In 1843 Ľudovít Štúr, Jozef Miloslav Hurban and Michal Miloslav Hodža decided to establish the Slovak language on the basis of the Central-Slovak dialect. It happened in Hlboké in Slovakia.

Slovak became the official language in Slovakia in the Czechoslovak Republic after 1918.

At present the Slovak language is a modern standard language, new words are being constantly added but its grammatical system has been standardized.

There are no conflicts today between educated spoken and written norms, though dialect usage is still strong and varied.

**Slovak dialects** have been divided into three basic groups: Central-Slovak, West-Slovak and East-Slovak. There are fewer differences in word formation and in syntax, but there are differences in vocabulary. All three Slovak dialects are also spoken by Slovaks living in Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

**West-Slovak dialects** as a whole have several characteristic properties.

* There is not the soft *ľ* : *(lavý instead of ľavý, lutujem instead of ľutujem )*
* Instead of soft consonants *ť, d´* the consonants *c, dz are pronounced: ( dzeci instead of deti, dzedzina instead of dedina )*
* Therhythmical rule does not apply **:** ( bílý instead of biely, krásná instead of krásna )
* The Old –Slavonic diphthongs have been changed into long  *á,é,ó: ( mój or múj instead môj, mlíko or mléko instead of mlieko )*

**East -Slovak dialects** have a quite a number of properties different from standard Slovak.

* A complete lack of quantity: (*mam, dam, volam instead of mám, dám, volám*)
* Instead of soft consonants *ť, d´* the consonants *c, dz are pronounced: ( dzeci instead of deti, dzedzina instead of dedina )*
* The soft sibilant ś,ź; (śedzim instead of sedím, źima instead of zima )

**Central-Slovak dialects** as whole are very close to standard Slovak.

* The final -*l* in the participle is replaced by bilabial *v;* (*robev or robov* instead *of robil )*
* The form *sa* occurs in the 3rd person plural instead of *sú : (moje deti sa doma instead of moje deti sú doma )*
* The nominative singular of the neuter forms are ending in *ia, ňja* instead of *ie : (to je veľkuo šťastia* instea*d* of *to je veľké šťastie )*