

The Slovak language: a Slavic language at the heart of Europe

1. Overview

Slovak is a **West Slavic** language, spoken mainly in **Slovakia** by around **5.5 million speakers**. It is closely related to **Czech**, with which it shares a common history within the former **Czechoslovakia** (1918–1992). Today, Slovak is the **official language of Slovakia** and a **minority language** in several countries, including mainly **Hungary, Serbia, Romania**, and even **France** (migrant communities).

Did you know? Slovak and Czech are **80% mutually intelligible!** A Czech and a Slovak can understand each other without any problem, even if they each speak their own language.

2. Origins and history

- **Language family:** Slovak belongs to the **West Slavic** branch, like Czech and Polish.
- **Influences:**
 - **Latin** and **German** (e.g. *škola* – school, *cukor* – sugar, *farba* – colour).
 - **Hungarian** (e.g. *palacinka* – pancake).
- **Writing:** Slovak uses the **Latin alphabet** with **diacritics** (e.g. *č, š, ŕ, á*).

Example:

- *Ahoj* = Hello (informal)
- *Ďakujem* = Thank you
- *Prosím* = Please / You're welcome

3. Linguistic features

Pronunciation and alphabet

- **Long vowels:** *á, é, í, ó, ú, ý* (e.g.: *málo* vs. *malo* – ‘little’ with a long vowel vs. ‘it (neuter) had’).
- **Soft consonants, digraphs:**
 - *ľ, ň* (like the French “gn” in ‘agneau’).
 - *ch* (like the Spanish ‘j’ in “juego”) or *dz, dž*.
- **Stress:** always on the **first syllable** (e.g.: ‘*VOda*’ – water).

Grammar

- **6 cases** (as in Russian or Latin) for nouns, adjectives and pronouns.
 - Example: *kniha* (book) → *knihy* (of the book), *knihe* (to the book).
- **No articles** (as in Russian or Polish).
- **Verbs:** complex conjugation with **perfective/imperfective aspects** (e.g.: *písať* – to write [action in progress] / *napísať* – to write [completed action]).

Example sentence: ‘*Píšem novú knihu.*’ = ‘I am writing a new book – ACCUSATIVE.’

4. Why learn Slovak?

Travel: Slovakia is a beautiful country with **mountains (the Tatras), medieval castles** (Bojnice, Spiš), and a **rich folk culture**.

Career opportunities: The EU is looking for translators/interpreters in Slavic languages.

Intellectual challenges: A complex grammar that stimulates the brain!

Cultural discovery: Literature, music, and unique traditions (e.g. *Vianoce* – Christmas with specific customs).

5. Resources for learning

- **Apps:** *Slovake.eu* (free online courses).
- **YouTube channels:** *Slovak with Ivana, Learn Slovak*.
- **Language exchanges:** Tandem, HelloTalk.

6. A Slovak phrase to remember

‘Všade dobre, doma najlepšie.’ (*Everywhere is good, but home is best.*) → Reflects the Slovaks’ attachment to their country and culture!

In summary: Slovak is a **rich, melodious and logical** language, embodying a **little-known European culture**. Whether for travel, work, or simply to take on a challenge, learning it opens the doors to a **fascinating Slavic world!**