FACTS ABOUT
THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES:

An Encyclopedia of the World's Major Languages, Past and Present

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MACEDONIAN

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Language Name: Macedonian. **Alternate:** Modern Macedonian (to distinguish from Ancient Macedonian, a dead, non-Slavic language). **Autonym:** *makedonski.*

Location: The Republic of Macedonia, the Greek province of Makedhonia (Aegean Macedonia), the Blagoevgrad (Gorna Džumaja) district of Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia), and 75 or more villages in eastern Albania. The Slavic dialects of Gora, northeast of the Republic of Macedonia in Kosovo and Albania have also been included with Macedonian. There are numerous Macedonian speakers in the rest of the former Yugoslavia as well as in North America, Australia, countries in western Europe with Balkan migrant workers (Sweden, Germany, etc.), and Macedonians who were sent to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as children during the Greek civil war (1948).

Family: South Slavic group of the Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family.

Related Languages: BULGARIAN, SERBO-CROATIAN; more distantly SLOVENE, then the other Slavic languages.

Dialects: Two major dialect regions, East and West, comprising 21 main dialects. The Kostur-Nestram dialects of western Greece and eastern Albania are now classed as a separate group.

Number of Speakers: 2–3.5 million.

Origin and History

The Slavs are an Indo-European people whose original homeland is the subject of scholarly debate but was probably somewhere in the general region of modern Poland, Belarus, and/or Ukraine. In the sixth and seventh centuries, large groups of Slavs crossed the Carpathian Mountains and settled throughout the Balkan peninsula. These became the South Slavs. The South Slavic tribes living on the territory of Macedonia (the region bounded in ancient times by Epirus, Thessaly, and Thrace on the southwest, south, and east, respectively) became the majority population in most districts, replacing or absorbing most of the earlier inhabitants. Their descendants became known as Macedonians (in Macedonian *makedonci*).

The earliest attested Slavic language, Old Church Slavonic, is very close to Common Slavic and is based on a dialect that was spoken on the territory of what is today Aegean Macedonia, namely Salonika (Macedonian Solun, GREEK Thessaloniki) in the ninth century. The brothers Methodius and Constantine (who took the monastic name Cyril on his deathbed), who were from Salonika, were sent in 863 on a Christianizing mission to Prince Rostislav of Moravia by the Byzantine emperor Michael III at the prince's request. The brothers invented an alphabet called *Glagolitic* (no longer in use except for symbolic purposes) probably based on Greek cursive, and they translated the Gospels and other liturgical works into what we now call Old Church Slavonic. The oldest surviving documents in this language are undated, but are presumed to be copies from the late 10th or early 11th century.

By the end of the 11th century, Slavic literacy had spread to many centers and Slavic dialectal differentiation had increased significantly. The language used by those centers that continued the Old Church Slavonic tradition is referred to as "Church Slavonic". The Church Slavonic produced on the territory of Macedonia can be referred to as Old Macedonian (not to be confused with Ancient Macedonian).

Koneski (1983) divides the history of Macedonian into two periods: Old, from the 12th through 15th centuries, and Modern, from the 15th century onward.

The Ottoman Turkish conquest of the Balkan peninsula in the 14th and 15th centuries caused a disruption of cultural continuity with regard to Slavic literacy in that region. Very few documents survived, and most of those that did continued the Church Slavonic written tradition despite changes in the spoken language.

Around the 15th century, the major structural changes characterizing Macedonian as a Balkan language became dominant, e.g., simplification of declension, loss of the infinitive, object reduplication, and the rise of a variety of analytic constructions. By that time the major phonological and morphophonological changes were also in place.

The history of Modern Literary Macedonian begins in the latter part of the 18th century with the birth of South Slavic nationalism. This history can be divided into five periods:

(1) c. 1794–1840. Ecclesiastical and didactic works using Macedonian dialects were first published during this period. Their authors' concern was with establishing a vernacular-based Slavic literary language in opposition to both the archaizing influence of those who would have based the Slavic literary language on Church Slavonic and the Hellenizing attempts of the Greek Orthodox Church, to which the majority of Macedonians and Bulgarians belonged. The authors of this period in both Macedonia and Bulgaria called their vernacular language "Bulgarian".

(2) c. 1840–1870. Secular works using Macedonian dialects began to appear. The struggle over the dialectal base of the

emerging vernacular literary language became manifest. Two principal literary centers arose on Macedo-Bulgarian territory: one in northeastern Bulgaria and the other in southwestern Macedonia. Some Macedonian intellectuals envisioned a Bulgarian literary language based on Macedonian dialects or a Macedo-Bulgarian dialectal compromise. Bulgarians, however, insisted that their eastern standard be adopted without compromise. It was during this period that increasing sentiment for a separate Macedonian literary language was expressed in private correspondence.

(3) 1870–1912. The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 marked the definitive victory over Hellenism. (The rank of exarch in Eastern Orthodoxy is above that of metropolitan and below that of patriarch, but in this context the term came to denote the head of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church.) It is from this period that we have the first published statements insisting on Macedonian as a language separate from both Serbian and Bulgarian. In his book *Za makedonckite raboti* (1903) ('On Macedonian matters'), Krste Misirkov outlined the principles of a Macedonian literary language based on the Prilep-Bitola dialect group, precisely the dialects that later served as the basis of the Macedonian standard language. Thus, although most copies of the book were destroyed at the press by pro-Bulgarian activists, its existence belies the claim that literary Macedonian was created ex nihilo by Yugoslav fiat at the end of World War II.

(4) 1912–1944. In 1912 the kingdoms of Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia united against Turkey in the first Balkan War. Less than a year later Macedonia was partitioned among these three allies. This essentially marked the end of the development of Literary Macedonian outside the borders of Yugoslavia, except for the period 1946–1948, during which the Macedonians of Pirin Macedonia were recognized as a national minority in Bulgaria with their own schools and publications in Literary Macedonian. In accordance with Article 9 of the Treaty of Sèvres (August 10, 1920) concerning minority-population language rights in Greece, a Macedonian primer entitled *Abecedar* was printed in Athens in 1925, but the book was never used and most copies were destroyed. In Yugoslavia, Macedonian was treated as a South Serbian dialect, which was consistent with claims that had been advanced since the 19th century, but the Yugoslav government permitted Macedonian literature to develop on a limited basis as a dialect literature. It was during this interwar period that linguists from outside the Balkans published studies in which they emphasized the distinctness of Macedonian from both Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian.

(5) 1944–present. On August 2, 1944, Macedonian was formally declared the official language of the Republic of Macedonia. Literary Macedonian is based on the West Central dialects, whose major population centers are Prilep, Bitola, Kičevo, and Veles. The standardization of Literary Macedonian proceeded rapidly after its official recognition, in part because an interdialectal koine was already functioning. The west central region, which was the largest in both area and population, supplied a dialectal base to which speakers from other areas could adjust their speech most easily. In many respects these dialects are also maximally differentiated from both Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian, but differentiation was not an absolute principle in codification.

Orthography and Basic Phonology

Macedonian is written in a form of the Cyrillic alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet was developed, probably sometime after 885, by the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius on the basis of Greek uncial letters. Macedonian also has a standard form of LATIN transcription that was official when the Republic of Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia. This transcription is still used for international official purposes, except that the sequences *lj* and *nj* have been replaced by *l̂* and *n̂*.

Table 1: The Cyrillic Alphabet

Cyrillic	Transcription	Cyrillic	Transcription
Аа	a	Нн	n
Бб	b	Њњ	nj/ń
Вв	v	Оо	o
Гг	g	Пп-	p
Дд	d	Рр	r
Ѓѓ	ǵ	Сс	s
Ее	e	Тт	t
Жж	ž	Ќќ	ḱ
Зз	z	Уу	u
Ss	dz	Фф	f
Ии	i	Хх	h
Jj	j	Цц	c
Кк	k	Чч	č
Лл	l	Џџ	dž
Љљ	lj/l̂	Шш	š
Мм	m	('	ə)

Table 2: Consonants

	Bilabial	Dental/ Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar
Stops					
Voiceless	p	t		ḱ	k
Voiced	b	d		ǵ	g
Fricatives					
Voiceless	f	s	š		h
Voiced	v	z	ž		
Affricates					
Voiceless		c	č		
Voiced		dz	dž		
Nasals	m	n		nj/ń	
Laterals		l			ł
Trill		r			
Glide				j	

All voiceless stops are unaspirated.

Under the influence of Serbo-Croatian and the Macedonian of Skopje, the capital, the clear alveolar /l/ is often realized as a palatal and [lj] > palatal [l̂].

Final voiced consonants are devoiced, and there is regressive assimilation of voicing, e.g., *zob* [zop] 'oats', *zobta* [zopta] 'the oats', *zobnik* [zobnik] 'oat sack', *sretne* [sretne] 'meet', *sredba* [sredba] 'meeting'.

Table 3: Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	(ə)	o
Low			a

The five vowels are simple, not diphthongs. Schwa is phonemic in some dialects but marginal in the literary language. Stress in Macedonian usually falls on the antepenultimate syllable: *vodéničar* 'miller', *vodeníčari* 'millers', *vodeníčárite* 'the millers'. Exceptions are lexical, usually unadapted loanwords or suffixes; if a phrase acts as a single accentual unit, stress will be on the antepenultimate syllable in this unit, e.g., *štó sakaš* 'what do you want?' Stress is never earlier in the word than the antepenultimate syllable.

Basic Morphology

Macedonian has lost case except in the pronoun (accusative and dative, e.g., *toj* 'he', accusative *nego*, dative *nemu*) and, in the west, a few masculine personal names and nouns (e.g., *Ivan* 'John', *od Ivan-a* 'from John'). There is also a vocative case form for some nouns, but it is always optional (e.g., *Ivan-e!* 'O John' *ženo!* 'O woman/wife!').

There are two numbers (singular and plural) and three genders: masculine·(usually ending in a consonant but sometimes in -*a* or another vowel, but only to denote a human being), feminine (usually in -*a* but in a few old nouns in a consonant), and neuter (usually in -*o* or -*e* but sometimes in another vowel as in recent loanwords).

There are three definite articles that are postposed to the first inflected element of the noun phrase and agree in gender/number or form, depending on the grammatical category of the item: masc. -*ot* (neutral), -*ov* (proximate), -*on* (distal), feminine singular and neuter plural -*ta*, -*va*, -*na*, neuter -*to*, -*vo*, -*no*, other plural -*te*, -*ve*, -*ne*, e.g., *volk-ot* 'the wolf', *volci-te* 'the wolves', *vladika-ta* 'the bishop' (masculine), *žena-ta* 'the woman', *ženi-te* 'the women', *ljubov-ta* 'the love' (feminine), *selo-to* 'the village', *sela-ta* 'the villages'. Articles in -*v*- and -*n*- have a nuance like ENGLISH "this" and "that" respectively.

Verbs agree with their subjects. The aspectual opposition perfective/imperfective is inherent in the verb stem. Verbs can switch aspect by means of derivation. The accusative reflexive pronoun *se* is used to mark passives, reflexives, reciprocals, and plain intransitives.

Macedonian has three simple tenses and seven compound tenses. The simple tenses are the present, the aorist, and the imperfect. Of the compound forms, the old perfect (*sum* 'be' + l-participle) can carry a nuance of not vouching for the truth of the statement (inference, disbelief, surprise), and the new form using the old perfect of *ima* 'have' as an auxiliary with the neuter verbal adjective always carries this nuance: *moliš* 'you are asking', *zamoli* '(I am certain) you asked', *si zamolil* '(apparently/supposedly/to my surprise) you asked' or 'you have asked', *si imal zamoleno* '(apparently/supposedly/to my surprise) you have/had asked'. Sentence 2 gives a third-person example of the old perfect (the auxiliary is never used in the third person). The old pluperfect (imperfect of *sum* + l-participle, *beše zamolil*

'you had asked') and the new perfect (present of *ima* 'have' + neuter verbal adjective, *imaš zamoleno* 'you have asked') do not participate nuances of vouching or not vouching.

Basic Syntax

The basic word order in Macedonian sentences is SVO. However, this order can be modified in order to focus on or topicalize a particular element in the sentence.

kuče-to   ja   kasa   mačka-ta
dog-the.NEUT 3SG.F.ACC bite.3SG.PRES cat-the.FEM
'The dog bites the cat.' (neutral)

mačka-ta   ja   kasa   kuče-to
cat-the.FEM 3SG.F.ACC bite.3SG.PRES dog-the.NEUT
'The dog bites the cat.' (*mačka-ta* is topic)

kuče-to   mačka-ta   ja   kasa
dog-the.NEUT cat-the.FEM 3SG.F.ACC bite-3SG.PRES
'The dog bites the cat.' (*mačka-ta* is topic and focus)

Case relations are only obligatorily marked in pronouns. If there is a definite (accusative) direct or indirect (dative) object, a clitic pronoun referring to that object will occur with the verb:

Jas ne mu   ja   dad-o-v   kniga-ta
I   NEG 3SG.M.DAT 3SG.F.ACC give-AORIST-1SG book-the

na momče-to.
to boy-the
'I did not give the book to the boy.'

As illustrated in the preceding example, sentence negation is expressed by placing *ne* before the verb complex (including any clitics). Constituents can also be negated by *ne*.

Nina dojde   ne včera   tuku
Nina come.3SG.AORIST NEG yesterday but

zavčera
day.before.yesterday
'Nina came not yesterday but the day before.'

A sentence can have more than one negative element:

Ni-ko-j   ni-ko-mu   ni-što   ne
NEG-who-NOM.MASC NEG-who-DAT NEG-what NEG

reč-e
say-3SG.AORIST
'No one said anything to anyone.'

Absence is signaled by the impersonal *nema* 'it is not' (literally: 'it does not have'):

Nema   ni-kakv-i   direktor-i tuka
not.have.3SG NEG-what.kind.of- PL director-PL here
'There aren't any directors here at all.'

If the entity is definite, the verb takes an accusative clitic pronoun:

Direktor-ot   go   nema
director-the.SG 3SG.M.ACC not.have.3SG
'The director isn't here.'

Macedonian adjectives generally precede the nouns they modify.

Contact with Other Languages

A major problem now for Literary Macedonian is the fact that Skopje—the capital and principal cultural and population center—is outside the West Central dialect area, whose dialects form the basis of the literary language, and the republic as a whole has been subject to considerable Serbo-Croatian influence. While the Republic of Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia, Macedonian was in a subordinate position to Serbo-Croatian. Now that the Republic of Macedonia is independent, the language is threatened only by the territorial and political pretensions of Macedonia's neighbors.

Macedonian has a very large component of borrowings from TURKISH dating from 500 years of Ottoman rule. It shares many of these words with other Balkan languages, and since many of these words are actually of Arabo-Persian origin, they occur in languages spoken throughout the Muslim world. There are also loanwords from Balkan Romance, Greek, and ALBANIAN. More recently, Macedonian has borrowed from English, FRENCH and GERMAN.

From Turkish: *džep* 'pocket', *tavan* 'ceiling' (in a house)
From Greek: *oti* 'that' (relativizer)
From Balkan Latin: *klisura* 'gorge'
From Albanian: *čupa* 'girl' (dialectal)
From Italian: *mandža* 'main-course meal'
From German: *šteker* 'electric plug'
From French: *plafon* 'ceiling' (e.g., price ceiling)
From English: *super* 'terrific', *lider* 'political leader'

Macedonian is the source for many words in the dialects of other languages that are in contact with it (Albanian, Turkish, Arumanian, ROMANI, etc.), e.g., Albanian *dërzhava* 'state', Turkish *odmor* 'vacation', Romani *vozinav* 'drive', Arumanian *ciudosi* 'be surprised'. These are strictly local-dialect phenomena, however, and not part of the respective literary languages, although insofar as Romani and Arumanian are still in the process of codification, the status of Macedonian borrowings in them is not settled. There are numerous South Slavic borrowings in Albanian and Greek, but these are often difficult to date and can go as far back as the period when the South Slavs settled in the Balkans.

Common Words

man:	maž	long:	dolg
woman:	žena	small:	mal
water:	voda	yes:	da
sun:	sonce	no:	ne

three:	tri	good:	dobar
fish:	riba	bird:	ptica
big:	golem	dog:	kuče
tree:	drvo		

Example Sentences

(1) mu   rek-ov   na brat   mi   deka
3SG.DAT say-1SG.AORIST to brother 1SG.DAT that

[molba-ta   bil-a   potpišan-a   od   tatko-to
request-the was-FEM signed-FEM from father-the

na učenik-ot so   moliv].
to pupil-the with pencil
'I said to my brother that [the request had been signed by the father of the pupil with a pencil].'

(2) toj   rabote-l   papudžija.
3SG.M work-3SG.PERF slipper.maker
'(Apparently) he worked/He has worked as a slipper-maker.'

(3) dali be-vte   vo soba-ta?
INT be-2PL.IMPERFECT in room-the
'Were you in the room?'

Efforts to Preserve, Protect, and Promote the Language

The Republic of Macedonia has a Linguistics and Literature section of its Academy of Sciences, the Krste P. Misirkov Institute for the Macedonian Language, and the Macedonian Department of the Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, which are responsible not only for linguistic research but also for developing and defining literary norms and for publishing grammars, dictionaries, and other authoritative works. The institute has a yearly journal, *Makedonski jazik*, the academy section has a biannual publication, *Prilozi*, and the humanities faculty to which the Macedonian department belongs has a yearbook (*Godišnik*), in which both theoretical and practical linguistic questions are addressed. These are not the only sources of language cultivation, however. There are also teachers' unions and other language organizations that publish linguistic or language-oriented journals on a more popular level, e.g., *Literaturen zbor* 'Literary Word.' Similar linguistic topics are also discussed in the daily press, and there are many popular books on "language culture," i.e., normative usage. As a result, the codification of the literary language has developed in part through dialogue between codifiers and users.

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