Belarusian or Ukrainian? Slovak or Czech? Serbian or Croatian?

Introduction to Slavic Languages and Cultures

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Abstract

The paper offers some reflections on the course on Slavic languages and nations offered by the Jyväskylä University Language Centre. The course provides basic information about all Slavic languages including some microlanguages, for example, Kashubian, Carpatho Rusyn or Upper and Lower Sorbian. One of the course learning outcomes is to get familiar with Slavic languages through searching for the similarities and differences of closely related languages (South, East and West Slavic languages) and to acquire basic knowledge about the history and culture of Slavic nations. After the completion of the course, students can recognize and differentiate between various languages and have basic knowledge about the linguistic structure of Slavic languages. The course is implemented in a multicultural learning environment, where the information about common features of individual languages is provided by the members of different Slavic language groups. Moreover, students have a unique opportunity to get familiar with the history and culture of different Slavic nations from the presenters’ viewpoint. The concept of mutual intelligibility of Slavic languages, a relationship between Slavic languages in which speakers of different Slavic languages can understand each other without special effort, is tested in practice. Students’ active participation in the multilingual and multicultural communication aimed at sharing information across different Slavic cultures, in addition to the discussions on various issues related to the concept of cultural identity - sensitivity and appreciation of the history, values, experiences, and lifestyles of Slavic people, has significant impact on the increase of students’ multicultural awareness and critical thinking.

Keywords: Slavic languages, Slavic nations, multicultural awareness and communication, cultural identity, critical thinking