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James Naughton

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Colloquial Slovak: The Complete Course for Beginners has been carefully developed by an experienced teacher to provide a step-by-step course to Slovak as it is written and spoken today.

Combining a clear, practical and accessible style with a methodical and thorough treatment of the language, it equips learners with the essential skills needed to communicate confidently and effectively in Slovak in a broad range of situations. No prior knowledge of the language is required.

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- A clear, user-friendly format designed to help learners progressively build up their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills
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Colloquial Slovak

The Complete Course
for Beginners

James Naughton

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Preface

Over ten years have passed since the first publication of this textbook. The typesetting of a second edition has given me the opportunity to carry out some updating of items such as the currency (the introduction of the euro), to add and adjust a few items in order to respond to altered patterns of life (email, mobile phones, computers), and to endeavour to eliminate some minor errors and infelicities spotted by myself or communicated by others over the intervening years.

The course is designed both for classroom use and for learners working on their own, without much extra help. The number of exercises offered in the book has been slightly increased, and the presentation of the grammar has also been reviewed in places, though not radically altered. Each of the sixteen units is divided, as before, into several smaller sections, allowing learners to proceed at their own pace, according to the level of time, energy and previous linguistic experience at their disposal.

The units aim to take learners up to a level at which they can communicate usefully on a range of everyday topics and begin to read books, magazines and newspapers and follow the media. They combine everyday dialogues and simple narrative texts with explanations of individual language points, aiming to outline the most essential structures. A new set of recordings has been produced to accompany this edition. Fully utilising these recordings is particularly advisable if you are working on your own without any teacher or native speaker to help.

I remain much indebted to Marta Černotová, Heda Šabíková, Libor Janský and others for their improvements to the Slovak texts. I would also like to thank warmly my anonymous editorial readers, my sharp-eyed copy editor Helena Power, the speakers on the recording, and everyone involved in the making of this, and previous editions.

Abbreviations

>	arrow-head pointing forward to the perfective verb
<	arrow-head pointing back to the perfective verb
+	separates 'single' and 'habitual/repeated' verbs of motion; or precedes the case required after a word
	divides male and female variant nouns
<i>acc.</i>	accusative case
<i>adj.</i>	adjective
<i>adv.</i>	adverb
<i>coll.</i>	(a) more colloquial words, (b) less formal grammatical usage
<i>dat.</i>	dative case
<i>dim.</i>	diminutive form
<i>f.</i>	feminine gender
<i>freq.</i>	frequentative verb
<i>gen.</i>	genitive case
<i>impf.</i>	imperfective verb
<i>ins.</i>	instrumental case
<i>lit.</i>	literally
<i>loc.</i>	locative case
<i>m.</i>	masculine gender
<i>ma.</i>	masculine animate
<i>mi.</i>	masculine inanimate
<i>n.</i>	neuter gender
<i>nom.</i>	nominative case
<i>pf.</i>	perfective verb
<i>pl.</i>	plural
<i>sg.</i>	singular
s/he	he or she

Introduction

Slovakia, with its capital Bratislava (not far from Vienna), has been an independent state since Czechoslovakia split up at the end of 1992. This 'Velvet Divorce' had been preceded in 1989 by the 'Velvet Revolution', which saw the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia. As the rather less affluent next-door neighbour of the Czech Republic and Austria, Slovakia found itself grappling with problems of major adjustment to a radically changed economic and political situation. Subsequent years have brought about various changes to Slovak life and to Slovakia's economy and political affairs, including membership of the European Union and the more recent adoption of the euro. Less often visited by English-speaking foreigners than either the Czech Republic or Austria, Slovakia with its mountains, ski-resorts, remote country districts, wine growing, castles and old towns, still merits more attention, along with its energetic literature and life of the arts. Watch out for any translated novels and poetry you can find, as well as films, Slovak theatre, and Slovak musicians and performers, as well as Slovak sporting successes.

Slovakia's current population is about 5.43 million (including a sizeable Hungarian minority). As a result of nineteenth- and twentieth-century emigrations, there are also numerous people of Slovak descent living all over the globe, especially in North America. Many younger Slovaks have also been coming to Britain to work successfully in temporary jobs over recent years.

Up to 1918 Slovakia had been part of the kingdom of Hungary since the tenth century. After the First World War, and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ruled over by the Habsburgs, Slovakia became part of the new-born republic of Czechoslovakia. During the Second World War it was briefly semi-independent under Nazi hegemony, before going back to Czechoslovakia, soon to be under Communist political domination up till 1989.

The Slovak language is very close to Czech, both in vocabulary and in grammar, and Czechs can understand Slovak quite easily. Standard Slovak is rather modern in origin, based on Central Slovak dialects, and shaped into its present form since the 1840s. It had to struggle to make headway under Hungarian educational dominance during the later nineteenth century, but quickly became the main medium of education and public life in Slovakia from 1918.

There are no great conflicts today between educated everyday spoken and written norms, though dialect usage remains quite varied. Occasionally you may observe however that certain words that occur in everyday usage – sometimes these are terms also used in Czech – are deprecated by language institutions, and in Slovak dictionaries and other works of reference, in favour of other preferred equivalents.

Further study material

Various handy pocket-size and larger dictionaries are available, but all pretty much designed for Slovak native speakers. Recent larger ones include:

Vel'ký slovník anglicko-slovenský, slovensko-anglický, Bratislava: Lingea, 2008.

Josef Fronek, Pavel Mokráň, *Anglicko-slovenský slovník*, Bratislava: Nová práca, 2006.

For revision and expansion of vocabulary and idiom, especially after you have tackled a significant amount of the material in *Colloquial Slovak*, you might well want to look at one or more course books published recently in Slovakia. These include:

Renáta Kamenárová, Eva Španová, Hana Tichá, Helena Ivoríková, Zuzana Kleschtová, Michaela Mošat'ová, *Krížom-krážom. Slovenčina A1 + A2*, Bratislava: Studia Academica Slovaca UK, 2007–2009 (two volumes).

Angela Zebegneyová, Anna Puzderová, Beáta Baková, and Alica Bortlíková, Eva Maierová, Jana Navrátilová, *Slovenčina ako cudzí jazyk A + B – Hovorme spolu po slovensky*, Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2007–2008 (two volumes).

Other solid courses worth inspecting include:

Peter Baláž, Miloslav Darovec, Heather Trebatická, *Slovak for Slavists*, Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 2nd edition, 1985.

Oscar Swan, Sylvia Gálová-Lorinc, *Beginning Slovak*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1990.

There is also a good descriptive chapter on Slovak by David Short in this large comparative volume designed for linguists:

The Slavonic Languages, edited by Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett, London & New York: Routledge, 1993.

For a very concise introduction to the history of Slovak literature, with some brief translated extracts, see:

Traveller's Literary Companion to Eastern and Central Europe, edited by James Naughton, Brighton: In Print Publishing, 1995.



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Pronunciation guide

Slovak spelling is generally straightforward, and you will probably find the pronunciation of the language one of its less difficult features. The description that follows tries to keep the explanations as simple as possible.

Vowels (Audio 1:3)



Slovak vowel letters **a, e, i/y, o, u** are quite close in pronunciation to the English vowels in 'puck, peck, pick, pock, pook'. (There's no difference in pronunciation between **i** and **y**, it's just a matter of spelling.)

With acute signs added (**á, é, í/ý, ó, ú**) the vowels are pronounced longer: roughly like *ah, eh, ee, aw, oo*.

Word stress is on the first vowel. Practise saying:

a, á	brat, mal, málo, bál sa
e, é	ten, krém, pekné, mesto
i, í and y, ý	pivo, víno; syn, milý
o, ó	bol, gól, ona, bola
u, ú	ruka, ruku, mú, malú

(Audio 1:4)

Ä is today normally pronounced the same as **e**:

ä	mäso, mäkký
----------	--------------------



(Audio 1:5)

There are also several diphthongs which occur in native words (one vowel merging quickly into another). These also count as long vowels.

Three have a brief Slovak **i** sound gliding into **a, e, u**:

ia	piatok, prosia
ie	viem, spievam
iu	tretiu



**(Audio 1:6)**

Another, spelt **ô**, has a brief **u** gliding into **o**:

ô stôl, skôr

The following three sequences are not conventionally analysed as diphthongs. They are pronounced as the first vowel followed by an English 'w' sound (this is also how the Slovak letter **v** is pronounced in some positions – see below).

**(Audio 1:7)**

ou rukou, malou

au auto, august

eu európsky, euro

Otherwise, in words of foreign origin, two adjacent vowels are generally pronounced as two syllables, as in the noun **geografia** 'geography' for example.

Consonants

We needn't really discuss **b, d, f, g** (as in 'good'), **h, k, l, m, n, p, s** (as in 'sun'), **t** (as in 'stop'), **x** and **z**, as they are roughly the same as in English.

**(Audio 1:8)**

K, p, and **t** are also very similar to their English counterparts. With sharp ears you might possibly notice the absence (except at the end of a word) of an English slight puff of air called 'aspiration' following them:

kilo, ruka, pil, kúpil, ten, to, talent

Ch is like 'ch' in the Scottish pronunciation of the word 'loch':

chlap, chyba, ucho

**(Audio 1:10)**

R is briefly flapped, also as in Scottish English:

rád, rieka, hora

**(Audio 1:11)**

Both **r** and **l** can act as vowels, sometimes even lengthened to **ř** and **ĺ**. For example:

prvý, plný, hlboký – hĺbka, vrba

(Audio 1:12)

V is mostly like English 'v', but at the end of a word it sounds like English 'w', also between a vowel and a following consonant:



víno, **V**iera – but: domov, krv, polievka, pravda

(Audio 1:13)

Qu and **w** only turn up in foreign words like **Qu**ido [kvído] and **WC** [vétsé].

**Soft consonants (Audio 1:14)**

All the so-called 'soft consonants' except **c**, **dz** and **j** are written as consonant letters with 'soft signs' over them. In most cases the soft sign is printed and written ˇ (like a tiny v over the letter), but a closely linked apostrophe is regularly used in the printed forms of the letters **d'**, **t'** and **Ľ**, **l'** (details of pronunciation below).

After soft consonants the 'i' vowel is regularly spelt with 'soft i' (**mäkké i**), rather than 'hard y' (**tvrdé y**).

C is like 'ts' in 'bats'. **Dz** is like 'ds' in 'rods'. **J** is like 'y' in 'yes'.

c	noc, práca, cena, Slováci
dz	medzi, cudzí, prichádza
j	ja, Ján, moje, ahoj

(Audio 1:15)

Č, **š**, **ž** and **dž** are like English 'chin', 'shin', 'vision' and 'juice':



č	čaká, reč, Angličan
š	široký, špinavý, píšeš
ž	žena, môžeš, žiletka
dž	džús, džem, hádže

(Audio 1:16)

Ď/d', **Ť/t'** and **Ň/ň** are fairly close in pronunciation to British English 'duty', 'tune', 'new' (as pronounced roughly 'dyooty', 'tyoon', 'nyoo'):



Ď, d'	d'akujem, mad'arský
Ť, t'	byt', mat', t'ava, t'ahat'
Ň, ň	ňou, spáľňa, kaviareň

Ľ/l' is fairly close to the 'el' sound in English 'value', as pronounced 'valyoo', but more subtly or gently pronounced, without the English 'y' sound following the 'l':

Ľ, Ľ' Ľ'ud, vel'a, kl'úč, žial'

Practise these Slovak names for the signs used over the letters:

dĺžeň 'long sign' (as in **á**)

mäkčeň 'soft sign' (as in **Č/č, Ď/d'**)

vokáň 'circumflex' (as in **ô**)

dve bodky 'two dots' (as in **ä** = **široké e** 'broad e')



Soft spelling rule (Audio 1:18)

Before **e, i** and **í** you usually pronounce **d, t, n** as soft **d', t', ň**. In other words the soft sign is omitted in the spelling:

d' **dedina** [d'ed'ina], **sedem** [sed'em], **vidím** [vid'ím]

t' **otec** [ot'ec], **deti** [d'et'i], **tisíc** [t'isíc]

ň **nemá** [ňemá], **nič** [nič]

Standard pronunciation also prescribes a 'soft l' in these environments, in words like **pole** and **leto**, but in practice you may perceive it as pretty much like an ordinary 'el'.

In foreign loanwords like **politika**, **idea** the rule above fails to apply. A few native words, and the forms of standard adjectives (but not adverbs), are also exempt. Note especially that the following very common words are pronounced with a hard **d, t** or **n**:

ten 'that', **teraz** 'now', **teda** 'then', **vtedy** 'then, at that time', **temer** 'almost', **jeden** 'one', **to je pekné** 'that is pretty', **to je krásne** 'that is beautiful'

However, **krásne** is pronounced [krásne] when it is the adverb 'beautifully', used also in the idiomatic phrase **je krásne** 'it's lovely (weather)'.



Voiced and voiceless sounds (Audio 1:19)

(This section involves some rather more subtle details. Skip it and come back to it later, if you prefer.)

In each of these pairs the first consonant letter is normally 'voiced' in pronunciation (with humming vocal chords), the second is its nearest 'voiceless' equivalent:

b – p, d – t, d' – t', g – k, h – ch, v – f, z – s, ž – š, dz – c, dž – č

The voiced consonant letters are normally pronounced *voicelessly* at the end of a word (before a pause):

dub [dup], **hrad** [hrat], **sneh** [sňech], **muž** [muš]

The same happens to these consonants when followed by one of the voiceless consonants in this list:

včera [fčera], **vták** [fták], **l'ahký** [l'achkí], **t'ahký** [t'aškí]

The reverse occurs in certain words, where the first consonant becomes voiced to match the second:

kde [gd'e], **prosba** [prozba], but *not* before **v**: **svoj** [svoj] 'one's own'

(Audio 1:20)

Single-consonant prepositions like **v** 'in' are normally pronounced as if they were part of the following word:



v meste [vmest'e] 'in town', **v kine** [fkiňe] 'in the cinema'

s Petrom [spetrom] 'with Peter', **s matkou** [zmatkou] 'with mother'

The alphabet

Alphabetical order is much the same as in English, but note:

ch comes after **h** in the dictionary

č, š, ž and **ä, ô** also count separately (after **c, s, z** and after **a, o**)

Other letters (**d', á** etc.) are *not* treated distinctly.

A spot of geography (Audio 1:21)



Revise your **výslovnost'** 'pronunciation' with some basic place names:

Slovensko 'Slovakia', **Slovenska republika** 'the Slovak Republic',
západné Slovensko 'Western Slovakia', **stredné Slovensko**
 'Central Slovakia', **východné Slovensko** 'Eastern Slovakia'

Rieky 'rivers' – **Dunaj** 'the Danube', **Hron, Váh, Ipel', Hornád, Morava**



Map by Kristoffer Blegvad

Hory 'mountains' – **Vysoké Tatry** 'the High Tatras', **Vel'ká a Malá Fatra** 'the Great and Little Fatra', **Beskydy** 'the Beskids', **Malé Karpaty** 'the Little/Lesser Carpathians', **Biele Karpaty** 'the White Carpathians'

Hlavné mesto 'capital city' – **Bratislava** (city population about 431 000), **Petržalka** (its large modern suburb), **Devín** (nearby ancient rock fortress)

Iné mestá 'other towns' – **Košice** (city population about 240 000), **Nitra**, **Trenčín**, **Žilina**, **Martin**, **Komárno**, **Banská Bystrica**, **Prešov**, **Poprad**, **Trnava**, **Prievidza**, **Piešť'aný**



Basic numerals (Audio 1:22)

Learn and say numbers one to twelve:

1 **jeden**, 2 **dva**, 3 **tri**, 4 **štyri**, 5 **päť**,
6 **šest'**, 7 **sedem**, 8 **osem**, 9 **deväť**, 10 **desať**,
11 **jedenásť**, 12 **dvanásť**

Ešte raz!

Again! Once more!

A do videnia!

And goodbye for now!

Unit One

Ako sa máte?

How are you?

In this unit you will learn about:

- greetings, 'please' and 'thank you'
- 'I', 'you', 'he/she/it' etc.
- 'be' and 'have'
- asking questions
- using adjectives
- forming the present tense of some verbs
- saying 'yes', 'no' and 'not'



Dialogue 1



(Audio 1:23)

Meeting up and introducing yourself: Neil Parker arrives in Bratislava. He's met at the airport, **letisko**, by Viera.



- NEIL Dobrý deň. Vy ste Viera Ondrušová?
- VIERA Áno. To som ja.
- NEIL Teší ma. Ja som Neil Parker.
- VIERA Víтам vás v Bratislave! Vy ste Američan?
- NEIL Nie! Ja som Angličan. Moja manželka je Američanka.
- VIERA Ale hovoríte dobre po slovensky!
- NEIL Učím sa len rok. Trochu rozumiem, ale hovorím zle.
- VIERA Ale nie! Hovoríte pekne! Máte kufor?
- NEIL Áno, mám. Samozrejme. Tu je.
- VIERA Tak dobre. Pod'me. Auto čaká vonku.

- NEIL *Hello (lit. 'Good day'). You are Viera Ondrušová?*
- VIERA *Yes. That is me.*
- NEIL *Pleased to meet you. I am Neil Parker.*
- VIERA *Welcome to Bratislava! Are you (an) American?*
- NEIL *No. I am English. My wife is American.*
- VIERA *But you speak Slovak well!*
- NEIL *I've been learning for only a year. I understand a bit, but I speak badly.*
- VIERA *But no! You speak nicely! Do you have a suitcase?*
- NEIL *Yes, I do. Of course. Here it is.*
- VIERA *So good. Let's go. The car's waiting outside.*

ACB

Vocabulary

dobrý deň	hello (<i>lit.</i> 'good day')
(vy) ste	you are
(ja) som	I am
teší ma	pleased to meet you (<i>lit.</i> 'it pleases me')
vítam vás	welcome! (<i>lit.</i> 'I welcome you')
Bratislava, v Bratislave	Bratislava, in Bratislava
áno	yes
nie	no
samozrejme	of course
Viera	= first name Vera
Ondrušová	= surname (the masculine form is Ondruš , without -ová)
Američan	(an) American (man)
Američanka	(an) American (woman) (adds -ka)
Angličan	(an) Englishman
Angličanka	(an) Englishwoman
Slovák	(a) Slovak (man)
Slovenka	(a) Slovak (woman)
môj manžel	my husband
moja manželka	my wife

mám, máte	I have, you have
hovorím, hovoríte	I speak, you speak
rozumiem, rozumiete	I understand, you understand
učím sa, učíte sa	I am learning, you are learning (<i>lit.</i> 'teaching (your)self')
dobre, pekne	well, nicely
zle	badly
tu je	here it is
pod'me	let's go
auto	car
čaká	waits, is waiting
kufor	suitcase
len	only
letisko	airport
tak	so
trochu	a little
vonku	outside

Language points



No articles

Notice how Slovak does not have any word corresponding to English 'a' or 'the':

Mám kufor.	I have a suitcase.
Tu je kufor.	Here is the suitcase.

Pronouns

Learn these basic pronouns (words like 'I', 'you', 'she'):

ja	I	my	we
ty	you	vy	you
on, ona, ono	he, she, it	oni/ony	they
to	that/this/it		

Note the two different words for you. **Ty** is used to address one person, someone you know well and are familiar friends with (and also used for a child).

Vy is used to address (a) more than one person, (b) one person who is a stranger, older than you, or with whom you are not on familiar terms.

On 'he' and **ona** 'she' usually refer to persons. The nouns **dievča** 'girl', **diet'a** 'child' and other terms for the young of animals count as neuter 'it' in Slovak, so can be referred to as **ono** 'it'. For a simple non-specific 'it' meaning 'this, that (thing)' use the demonstrative pronoun **to** instead, if any word is required.

The form **oni** 'they' is regularly masculine *animate* in meaning, while **ony** is to be used for feminine, neuter, and masculine inanimate senses (but in practice this form is also used mostly for persons).

Verb 'to have'

Verbs are listed under the infinitive form, which ends in **t'**. This is the same as an English verb with 'to' attached, e.g. **mat'** 'to have'.

To say 'I have', 'you have' etc. (and form the present tense) you replace the **-at'** ending of **mat'** by a series of personal forms. These forms are conventionally referred to as 'first person' (= *sg.* 'I', *pl.* 'we'), 'second person' (= *sg./pl.* 'you'), and 'third person' (= *sg.* 'he, she, it', *pl.* 'they').

(ja) mám	I have	(my) máme	we have
(ty) máš	you have	(vy) máte	you have
(on, ona, to) má	he, she, this/it has	(oni) majú	they have

The subject pronouns **ja**, **ty** etc. are added to the verbs only for emphasis or clarity. **On** and **ona** can distinguish if necessary whether the subject is 'he' or 'she':

Ona má kufor, ale on nemá.

She has a suitcase, but he doesn't.

Mostly however the subject pronouns can simply be omitted, as the form of the verb is sufficient to give this information:

Mám kufor.	I have a suitcase.
Má kufor.	S/he has a suitcase.
Majú kufor.	They have a suitcase.

Verb 'to be'

The present tense of **byť** 'to be' is irregular. It goes like this:

(ja) som	I am	(my) sme	we are (pronounce [zme])
(ty) si	you are	(vy) ste	you are
(on, ona, to) je	he, she, it is	(oni) sú	they are
(Ja) som Viera.	I am Viera.		
Ty si Ján.	You are Ján.		
Tu som.	Here I am.		
Sme tu.	We are here.		
To je kufor.	That/this is a suitcase.		

Questions

Simple questions may be asked merely by a change of intonation:

Máš kufor?	Do you have a suitcase?
Ty si Jana?	You are Jana? Are you Jana?
Si Angličanka?	Are you English (<i>lit.</i> 'an Englishwoman')?
Ste tam?	Are you there?
Sú doma?	Are they at home?

Sometimes however the order of words (subject and verb) may be reversed, to make a question, like this:

Je Viera Slovenka?	Is Viera (a) Slovak?
Je to hrad?	Is it a castle?

Exercise 1

Write or say the following in Slovak:

- 1 Hello. I am Jozef.
- 2 Pleased to meet you.



- 3 Are you (a) Slovak man/woman?
- 4 No. I am an Englishman/woman.
- 5 Viera is waiting outside.



Exercise 2

Work out the questions (English and Slovak) to which these are the answers.

- 1 Áno. Ja som Američanka.
- 2 Áno. Viera je Slovenka.
- 3 Samozrejme. Máme kufor. Tu je.
- 4 Áno. Som vonku.
- 5 Áno. Ja som Jana.



Dialogue 2



(Audio 1:28)

Neil and Viera drive into Bratislava, which Neil has never visited before. He seems to be going on a course. Do we agree with Viera about whether the Danube is clean or not?

-
- NEIL Čo je to?
 VIERA Vi'avo? To je Bratislavský hrad.
 NEIL To je pekný hrad. Je aj Bratislava pekná?
 VIERA Áno. Najmä staré mesto je veľmi pekné.
 NEIL Kde je rieka?
 VIERA Dunaj? Dunaj je tam. Vpravo.
 NEIL Dunaj? Nie je modrý?
 VIERA Nie. Bohužiaľ. Rieka nie je veľmi špinavá, je dosť čistá, ale voda je hnedá.
 NEIL Kto je náš učiteľ'? Ako sa volá?
 VIERA Volá sa Štefan Horák.
- NEIL *What's that?*
 VIERA *On the left? That's Bratislava Castle.*
 NEIL *That's a lovely/fine/pretty castle. Is Bratislava also lovely?*
 VIERA *Yes. Especially the old town is very lovely.*
 NEIL *Where is the river?*

- VIERA *The Danube? The Danube's there. On the right.*
 NEIL *The Danube? Isn't it blue?*
 VIERA *No. Unfortunately. The river isn't very dirty, it's fairly clean, but the water is brown.*
 NEIL *Who is our teacher? What is his name?*
 VIERA *His name is Štefan Horák.*

Vocabulary



Čo je to?	What is that?
Kde je ... ?	Where is ... ?
Kto je ... ?	Who is ... ?
Ako sa volá?	What's his/her name? (<i>lit.</i> 'How him/herself s/he calls?')
Volá sa ...	His/her name is ... (<i>lit.</i> 'He calls him/herself ...')
aj	also (= in addition)
bohužiaľ	unfortunately, regrettably
Bratislavský hrad	Bratislava Castle
čistý, -á, -é	clean, pure
dost'	fairly, quite, rather; enough
Dunaj	the Danube
hnedý, -á, -é	brown
mesto	town
modrý, -á, -é	blue
najmä	especially
náš	our
nie je	is not
pekný, -á, -é	nice, pretty, lovely
rieka	river
starý, -á, -é	old
špinavý, -á, -é	dirty
tam	there
učiteľ	male teacher
učiteľ'ka	female teacher

veľmi	very
viľavo	on the left
voda	water
vpravo	on the right



Language points

Gender

When describing a noun with an adjective (e.g. ‘a lovely town’) you need to know the so-called gender of the noun: masculine, feminine or neuter. This is because the ending of the adjective changes accordingly.

You will not be surprised to hear that nouns for males are normally masculine, while nouns for females are normally feminine!

A good rule of thumb for any other noun is:

Ending in a consonant – masculine:

hrad castle **kufor** suitcase **Dunaj** Danube

Ending in **-a** (or **-ost’**) – feminine:

rieka river **voda** water **radost’** joy

Ending in **-o** (or **-e**) – neuter:

mesto town **auto** car **srdce** heart **námestie** (town) square

The same patterns mostly apply to animate nouns as well. Thus, the noun **žena** ‘woman’ ends in **-a** and is, as expected, feminine, while **muž** ‘man’ ends in a consonant and is masculine. Similarly, **býk** ‘bull’ is masculine, **krava** ‘cow’ is feminine, and so on.

With words for animals one noun of a particular gender can be applied to the species in general, e.g. **mačka** ‘cat’ (grammatically feminine). But if you want to refer specifically to a ‘tomcat’ the word is **kocúr** (masculine animate).

Words for the young of animals are normally neuter, often ending in **-a**, e.g. **mača** ‘kitten’, **tel’a** ‘calf’. The basic nouns **diet’a** ‘child’ and **dievča** ‘girl’ also fall into this category.

Exceptions will be noted in the vocabularies. For example, a number of feminine nouns end in soft consonants, e.g. **kaviareň** ‘café’ and some other words like it with the suffix **-eň**.

Adjectives

Adjectives (e.g. **pekný** ‘nice, lovely, fine’) vary in the way they end, depending on the gender of the noun to which they refer. So does the very basic demonstrative **ten, tá, to** meaning ‘that’ or ‘this’:

ten pekný hrad	(masculine)	that lovely/fine castle
tá pekná rieka	(feminine)	that lovely/fine river
to pekné mesto	(neuter)	that lovely/fine town

Learn some pairs of common adjectives now:

veľký big	malý small
starý old	nový new, mladý young
dobrý good	zlý bad
krásny beautiful	škarredý ugly

Note carefully that **krásny** has a short **-y**, because the previous vowel **á** is long. Similarly, the feminine form is **krásna**, and the neuter is **krásne**. This tendency to avoid having two long vowels in adjacent syllables in Slovak is termed the **rytmický zákon** ‘rhythmic law’ or **rytmické krátenie** ‘rhythmic shortening’.

When we attach a place name like Bratislava to a following noun in English, in Slovak you need to use a derived adjective, often with the suffix **-ský**: **Bratislavský hrad** ‘Bratislava Castle’.

A-type verbs

Most verbs with infinitives ending in **-at’** have a present tense just like **mat’** ‘to have’, e.g. **čakať** ‘to wait’. We’ll call these verbs ‘a-types’. Note how the Slovak present tense can be translated into English in more than one way:

čakám	I am waiting, I wait
čakáš	you are waiting, you wait
čaká	he/she/it is waiting, waits
čakáme	we are waiting, we wait
čakáte	you are waiting, you wait
čakajú	they are waiting, they wait

When the previous vowel in the verb is long, the **á** is shortened to **a**. This is the 'rhythmic law' at work again, as seen in adjectives above.

Look at **bývat** 'to live' (= 'reside'), and interpret the forms yourself!

bývam **bývame**

bývaš **bývate**

býva **bývajú**

Bývate tu?

Do you live here?

Nie. Ja tu nebyvam.

No. I don't live here.

Saying 'not'

To make a verb negative (as you can see from the example just above) just add **ne-** to it, e.g. **nečakám** 'I am not waiting', **nemajú** 'they don't have'.

The only exception to this is the present tense of **byť** 'to be', where you attach **nie** as a separate word, e.g. **nie som** 'I am not', **nie sú** 'they are not'.

Before other parts of speech **nie** is also used, as a separate word:

Nie dnes, ale zajtra.

Not today, but tomorrow.

'My name is ...'

The verb **volat'** 'to call' combines with the so-called reflexive pronoun **sa** 'self, oneself' to form a reflexive verb 'call oneself'. This pronoun is called 'reflexive' because it refers back to any person or subject:

volám sa I call 'self' = myself

voláš sa you call 'self' = yourself

volá sa s/he calls 'self' = him/herself

voláme sa we call 'self' = ourselves

voláte sa you call 'self' = yourselves

volajú sa they call 'self' = themselves

'I call myself' corresponds to English 'I am called ...' or 'My name is ...':

Volám sa Jana. My name is Jana.

Similarly:

Volá sa Jozef. His name is Jozef.

Volajú sa Mária a Jozef.

They are called Mária and Jozef (= Mary and Joseph).

'How are you?'

Mat' 'to have' combined with **sa** '(one)self' has the idiomatic sense 'to be feeling', hence the standard phrase:

Ako sa máte?

How are you? How are you feeling? How are things?

That is to use the **vy**, or formal mode of address, of course. With someone to whom you say **ty**, you need to say:

Ako sa máš? How are you?

This question in Slovak is not a mere formality. It normally expects a response. A conventional answer might be:

Ďakujem. Mám sa dobre. Thank you. I am (feeling) well.

Or simply: **Ďakujem, dobre.** Thank you, well.

If feeling notably unwell, you could conceivably say:

Zle! Badly!

Neutral, but unenthusiastic, is:

Ujde to. Not too bad. Okay. It'll do.

Note how **sa** 'one(self)' is *not* always placed after the verb! In fact, as a rule, it comes in the second possible slot in a clause or sentence:

Ako sa máte? – Mám sa dobre. How are you? I am well.

Ivan sa má dobre. Ivan is well.

Igor a Peter sa majú dobre. Igor and Peter are well.

'Please' and 'thank you'

Prosím is 'Please' (*lit.* 'I ask (for)'). For 'Please may I have ...' you can say **Prosím si** ...

Prosím si čaj. Please may I have some tea.

Čaj, prosím! Tea, please!

Prosím? means 'What do you want?' or 'What did you say?'

Ďakujem is 'Thank you'. **Vďaka** is informal 'Thanks'. **Ďakujem** in response to some thing or service provided conventionally elicits the reply **Nech sa páči**, *lit.* 'May it please':

Ďakujem pekne. Thank you very much (*lit.* 'nicely')

Nech sa páči. You're welcome.



Exercise 3

Fill in the blanks with appropriate adjectives in the right form.

- 1 Náš hrad je _____. (pretty)
- 2 Dunaj nie je _____. (blue)
- 3 Mám _____ auto. (new)
- 4 Voda je _____. (clean)
- 5 _____ mesto je _____. (old _____ beautiful)



Exercise 4

Revise your words and find opposites for the following:

čistý, malý, vpravo, áno, škaredý, mladý



Exercise 5

Translate these sentences, then make them negative.

- 1 Viera je Slovenka.
- 2 Čakajú vonku.
- 3 Bývam tu.
- 4 Som Angličan.

Exercise 6



Answer these questions in an appropriate way.

- 1 Ako sa máte?
- 2 Ste Slovák/Slovenka?
- 3 Ako sa voláte?
- 4 Je Bratislava pekné mesto?
- 5 Je Dunaj čistý?
- 6 Kto je náš učiteľ? Ako sa volá?
- 7 Je Štefan starý?

Exercise 7



Fill in the blanks in this simple dialogue.

-?
- Ďakujem. Dobre.
-?
- Nie. Nemám auto.
- ...?
- Áno. Samozrejme. Štefan je tu. Čaká vonku.
- Tak dobre. ...
- Do videnia.

Dialogue 3



(Audio 1:31)



Mr Krajčovič delivers a parcel by hand to Mrs Horáková. They address each other formally, as **vy**.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| PÁN KRAJČOVIČ | Dobrý deň. Ako sa máte? |
| PANÍ HORÁKOVÁ | Ďakujem. Dobre. Čakáte dlho? |
| PÁN KRAJČOVIČ | Nie. Krátko. |
| PANÍ HORÁKOVÁ | Tu máte ten balík. Nech sa páči. |
| PÁN KRAJČOVIČ | Ďakujem. Do videnia. |
| PANÍ HORÁKOVÁ | Do videnia. |

- MR KRAJČOVIČ *Good day. How are you?*
 MRS HORÁKOVÁ *Thank you. Well. Are you waiting (have you been waiting) long?*
 MR KRAJČOVIČ *No. For a short time.*
 MRS HORÁKOVÁ *Here is (lit. 'you have') that parcel. Please.*
 MR KRAJČOVIČ *Thank you. Goodbye.*
 MRS HORÁKOVÁ *Goodbye.*



Vocabulary

balík	packet, parcel
dlho	for a long time
do videnia	goodbye
krátko	for a short time
Nech sa páči.	Please, here you are. (lit. 'may it please')
ten, tá, to	that



Dialogue 4



(Audio 1:33)

Adam and Eve have a heavy case to deal with. They address each other familiarly, as **ty**.

- ADAM *Ahoj, Eva.*
 EVA *Servus, Adam.*
 ADAM *Čakáš dlho?*
 EVA *Áno. Veľmi dlho.*
 ADAM *Ako sa máš, Eva?*
 EVA *Dobre. Tu máš kufor. Kde máš auto? Ty nemáš auto?*
 ADAM *Nie. Nemám auto. A ty máš?*
 EVA *Nie. Tiež nemám. Bohužiaľ.*
 ADAM *Ale kufor je veľký! A aj t'ažký.*
 EVA *Ale ty si silný chlap. Nie?*
 ADAM *Nie. Nie som veľmi silný. Ale máme št'astie! Vonku čaká taxík.*

ADAM *Hi, Eva.*

EVA *Hi (lit. 'Servant'), Adam.*

ADAM *Have you been waiting (lit. 'Are you waiting') long?*

EVA *Yes. Very long.*

ADAM *How are you, Eva?*

EVA *Fine. Here is (lit. 'you have') the suitcase. Where do you have the car? You don't have a car?*

ADAM *No. I don't have a car. And you do (lit. 'you have')?*

EVA *No. I also don't (lit. 'don't have'). Unfortunately.*

ADAM *But the suitcase is big! And also heavy.*

EVA *But you are a strong guy. Aren't you? (lit. 'No'?)*

ADAM *No. I am not very strong. But we are lucky (lit. 'have luck')! A taxi is waiting outside.*

Vocabulary



Ahoj. Hi. Hello (informal), also = Bye.

Servus. alternative to **Ahoj** (lit. 'Servant'); also: **Čau!** Hi!

ale but

chlap bloke, guy, man

silný strong

šťastie luck, happiness

taxík taxi

t'ažký heavy

tiež also (= likewise)

tiež ne- also not, not . . . either

Unit Two

Čo robíte?

What are you doing?



In this unit you will learn about:

- more verbs in the present tense
- 'my', 'your' etc.
- saying 'like' and 'must'
- money and numbers 11–100
- saying 'know' and 'understand'
- languages, countries and nationalities
- some plurals



Dialogue 1



(Audio 1:34–35)

Little Evička talks to Mr Kováč.

EVIČKA	Dobrý deň, pán Kováč. Ako sa máte?
KOVÁČ	Ďakujem, dobre. Čo robíš, Evička? Máš pekný mobil!
EVIČKA	Hrám sa. A posielam esemesku. A vy čo robíte, pán Kováč?
KOVÁČ	Fajčím a čakám na obed. Je tu pekne, však?
EVIČKA	Kde je pani Kováčová?
KOVÁČ	Je doma. Varí obed, vieš. A čo robí tvoja sestra?
EVIČKA	Viera? Učí sa.
KOVÁČ	A čo robí brat? Ako sa volá?
EVIČKA	Igor. Neviem, čo robí. Asi sedí doma, číta alebo počúva rádio. Alebo hádam spí.

- EVIČKA *Good day, Mr Kováč. How are you?*
- MR KOVÁČ *Thank you. Fine. What are you doing, Evička? You've got a nice mobile!*
- EVIČKA *I'm playing. And sending a text message. And what are you doing, Mr Kováč?*
- MR KOVÁČ *I'm smoking and waiting for lunch. It's nice here, isn't it?*
- EVIČKA *Where is Mrs Kováčová?*
- MR KOVÁČ *She's at home. She's cooking lunch, you know. And what is your sister doing?*
- EVIČKA *Viera? She's studying.*
- MR KOVÁČ *And what's (your) brother doing? What's his name?*
- EVIČKA *Igor. I don't know what he's doing. Probably he's sitting at home, reading or listening to the radio. Or maybe sleeping.*

Vocabulary



a	and
alebo	or
asi	probably
brat	brother
čakat', čakám na	to wait, I'm waiting for
čítať, číta	to read, s/he's reading
čo robíš, čo robíte?	what are you doing?
doma	at home
esemeska, object form -u	a text message, SMS
Evička	familiar form of Eva
fajčiť', fajčím	to smoke, I'm smoking
hádam	probably, I guess
hrať', hrám (sa)	to play, I'm playing
je tu pekne	it is nice here
mobil	mobile phone, cell phone
obed	lunch (midday meal)
pán Kováč	Mr Kováč
pani Kováčová	Mrs Kováčová

počúvať', počúva	to listen to, s/he's listening to
posielat', posielam	to send, I'm sending
rádio	radio
robiť', robí	to do/make, s/he's doing/making
sedieť', sedí	to sit, s/he's sitting
sestra	sister
spat', spí	to sleep, s/he's sleeping
tvoja f. of tvoj	your
učiť' sa, učí sa	to study (<i>lit.</i> 'teach oneself'), s/he's studying
variť', varí	to cook, s/he's cooking
vedieť', vieš	to know, you know
však	however; <i>here</i> = isn't it? (invites agreement)



Exercise 1

Answer these questions about Dialogue 1.

- 1 Čo robí Evička? (*two answers*)
- 2 Čo robí pán Kováč? (*two answers*)
- 3 Kde je pani Kováčová?
- 4 Čo robí pani Kováčová?
- 5 Čo robí Viera?
- 6 A čo asi robí Igor? (*four answers*)



Language points

More verbs in the present tense

The dialogue above used some more **a-type** verbs in **-at'**: **hrat'/hrám** 'to play', **čítať'/čítam** 'to read', **počúvať'/počúvam** 'to listen to', **posielat'/posielam** 'to send'.

This dialogue also contains verbs of another common type, the **i-type**. They mostly have infinitives ending in **-it'**, but sometimes also **-iet'**. Compare below the forms of **hrať** 'to play' with those of **robiť** 'to do/make', and **sedieť** 'to sit'. The vowel in the present-tense endings of the **i-type** is **í**, instead of **á**, while the third person plural ending is **-ia**, instead of **-ajú**: