

Endangered Romance Languages in Istria, Croatia: Documentation and Preservation  
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Istria is a multiethnic and multilingual border region located on a peninsula in the northern Adriatic Sea. The largest portion of the Istrian peninsula belongs to Croatia and it is a part of the Istrian Region administrative unit, where Croatian and Italian are now co-official. The region has been multiethnic and multilingual throughout its turbulent history and a place of many out- and in-migrations. Romance languages and populations have coexisted alongside Slavic languages and populations for many centuries. In addition to numerous and diverse Chakavian dialects of Croatian (and Slovenian), Istro-Venitian has been spoken by local populations. In more recent history, standard forms of Croatian (and Slovenian) and Italian have spread through education and public use. Multilingualism is pervasive among Italian Istrians but also widespread among Croatians and other Istrians, especially those who live along the western coast of the peninsula where most Italians reside.

Two more, less well-known, Romance languages are spoken in the area and both are highly endangered. In linguistics, the first one is known as Istriot (also, Istro-Romance) and is spoken by several hundred Italians living in five towns along the western coast of Istria. The other endangered language of the area is Istro-Romanian and it is spoken in six villages in the northeast of the peninsula by a little more than one hundred people who identify as Croatian and/or Istrian. Both languages are called differently by their speakers, usually by names derived from town and/or village names where speakers traditionally reside.

After an introduction to the sociolinguistic situation in Istria, the two enclave Romance languages of Istria and their endangerment status will be briefly discussed. The talk will then focus on the community-centered and collaborative language documentation and preservation/revitalization projects related to each of the two linguistic community. This ongoing work has been done in the scope of both community-based and scientific projects. The work on Istro-Romanian has taken place over more than ten years, in Croatia and, to a smaller degree, in United States. The main documentation activities involved oral history interviewing (ca. 70 hours were collected), the creation of an annotated digital language corpus of contemporary recordings (recently deposited with the ELAR archive, see <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1235747>), annotation of two old text collections, a creation of a dictionary and texts in FLEx, and sociolinguistic and some syntactic analysis. Parallel to this work, a significant number of community-based and community-oriented activities were carried out and publications issued (e.g. involvement and training of community members, annual language and culture festival, language playrooms for children, language website [<http://www.vlaski-zejanski.com>], published learning materials, etc.). The work on Istriot, on the other hand, which started at the invitation of community members, has focused mainly on providing project consultation to the community and organizing and conducting four summer schools in language documentation for community members, which had included data collection (ca. 20 hours of recordings were made). In relation to this, the communities have been also involved with other activities of language preservation/revitalization, such as running language courses, organizing language festivals and publishing materials in the language. In addition to documentation and preservation/revitalization activities, for each linguistic area, a sociolinguistic

questionnaire study was conducted in order to gain insight into the circumstances and extent of language shift in the communities.