

Burgenland-Croatian: First Signs of Language Decay

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O. Sociolinguistic background

Burgenland-Croatian belongs to the family of South Slavic languages. The Burgenland-Croat ethnic group has lived in the former area of the Komitat Sopron since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Several waves of immigration and movements from Croatia to (back then) Hungary are documented, starting with the years around 1515. This part of Hungary today corresponds to areas around Vienna in Austria, in the Slovak Republic, and in Hungary. There are three dialects represented in Burgenland-Croatian, namely Čakavian, Kajkavian, and (Old)-Štokavian. The Burgenland-Croatian standard language was formed on the basis of the Čakavian dialect, because it represents the numerically largest group of speakers. Kajkavian and Old-Štokavian spoken in Burgenland include a number of Čakavian peculiarities, which further justified the choice of Čakavian as the common standard language.

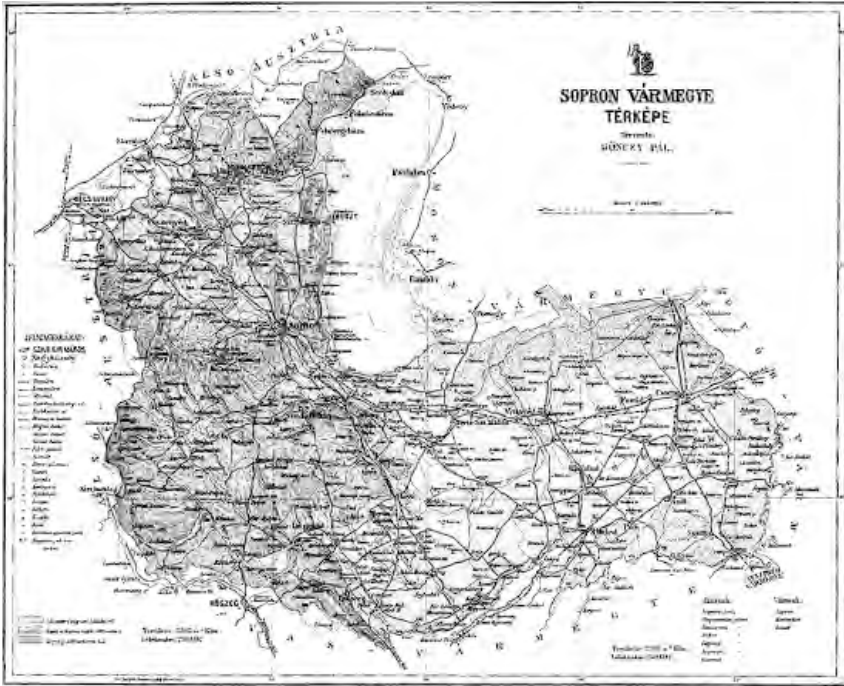


Image: Komitat Sopron (Source: Wikipedia in German: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komitat_%C3%96denburg)(4 April, 2011).

Burgenland-Croatian is the only language in Austria to be on the UNESCO ‘Red List’ of endangered languages and has altogether around 45,000 speakers. If it is doomed to death, then how is it dying? According to de Cillia and Dressler (2006: 2258-2271), language death or language decay is defined by several phases in the use of a language. Before a language dies as a whole system, there is a phase of complete bilingualism, which means that all speakers feel comfortable in both languages – in their mother tongue and in the language spoken by the majority. This is exactly the case with Burgenland-Croatian. All Burgenland-Croats speak both Croatian and either German, Hungarian, or Slovak. One more indicator of language decay is a ‘foreign accent’. In other words, if you hear a younger person speaking Burgenland-Croatian, it may seem to you that he/she is speaking German with Croatian vocabulary. This of

course includes the deterioration of the Croatian accentuation.¹ Another early sign of language decay is the loss of word formation rules and the simple transfer of lexical items from the dominant language. Massive lexical borrowing is a component of language decay. All this is partly the case for Burgenland-Croatian. Additionally, the number of speakers has greatly declined.

In the summer of 2008, I started to record various Burgenland-Croatian native speakers from all over the area of Burgenland and transcribed the interviews. I let the speakers talk about things they like to speak about and collected around 100 hours of actual material. It was not very difficult to find interviewees in the villages, where the Burgenland-Croatian community is still very active, but it was not so easy to record people in the region of Vlahija in the southern part of Burgenland, where the last native speakers are old and ill and do not have anybody to talk to in Burgenland-Croatian. I wanted to focus on the use of the verbal aspect and realized that the verbal system is quite healthy within the oldest generation in all parts of Burgenland and that it is less interesting to compare the use of the verbal aspect in the different dialectal groups; it makes more sense to compare the language of the younger generation with the language of the oldest generation and to write in the end some kind of dictionary of the verbal pairs in use, and to have at the same time a document of language decay within the minority.

During my fieldwork, I recognized the following phenomena or signs of language decay:

- a) massive lexical borrowing
- b) grammaticalization of adverbs (in preverbs) and their use instead of verb prefixes²
- c) unexpected prepositions with verbs

1 More and more speakers distinguish only the quantity of an accented vowel (long : short), but no longer distinguish the quality (rising : falling : circumflex), which can, for example, mark a different verbal aspect in the oldest generation.

2 Cf. Scholze 2008.

- d) monostyle³ instead of using the verbal aspect or the use of paraphrases
- e) increasingly frequent use of the perfective verbal aspect, even in imperfective contexts (rubric 4)
- f) loss of conjugations and tenses (cf. section 2. f and 6 of this article)

It is clear that the current situation is mainly a result of the conditions within the minority in the last few decades. Burgenland-Croatian was seen as being old-fashioned or outdated, as a language of less value. The attitude towards Burgenland-Croatian has changed only in the last ten years. Minority organizations have recently tried to reclaim the human right of access to education in one's mother tongue. Of course, it is very important not to reduce the minority language just to the field of communication within the family. We should not forget that nowadays TV, the internet, and newspapers are bringing the majority language even into our living rooms.

Apart from that, there are many well-known factors hastening language death. Some of these are pressure from the surrounding languages, school, religion, the media, workplaces far away from home, mixed marriages, etc. It is still an open question whether literacy and education support the existence of a minority language or lead to its death. Semi-lingualism, role conflicts, and an incomplete knowledge of a language lead to its death. But again, literacy, the standardization of a language (which has been in progress in Burgenland-Croatian over the last two or three decades), and language planning might also result in the decay of a language.

3 'This means that the distinctions of register and the many nuances of social meaning ... are considerably blurred, and to a great extent, not available to users.' Bolton/Kachru Bolton (2006: 14).

I. Ways of influence

1. *Lexis and syntax*

There are three groups of dialects spoken in Croatia – Čakavian, Kajkavian, and Štokavian (named after the different forms of the interrogative pronoun *what*). All of them are also represented in the Burgenland-Croatian language islands, but as hybrid forms of two different dialects (mostly as hybrid forms of Čakavian and Štokavian).

a) *Massive lexical borrowing*

Language contact definitely has its biggest influence on the field of lexis. One can find many German loanwords in everyday Burgenland-Croatian communication (e.g., ‘soldier’ German Soldat > Burgenland-Croatian *sojdot*, ‘bin’ Kübel > *kibl*, ‘barbecue’ Griller > *grülr*, ...) as well as words borrowed from Hungarian (‘shop’ Hungarian bolt > *bolta*, ‘marmalade’ Hungarian lekvár > *lekvar*, ‘thousand’ Hungarian ezer > *jezer*, ‘soldier’ Hungarian katana > *katan*) and Slovak (‘also’ Slovak/Czech taky > *takaj*). Some expressions like *rožice* or *kočke* for ‘girl’, *junak* for ‘guy’, and *posrankoš* for ‘baby’ have gone out of fashion and new vocabulary has been established through the standardization of Burgenland-Croatian – now ‘girl’ is *divičica*, ‘boy’, *dičak*, and ‘baby’, *bebi*.

b) *Preverbs*

There are further German influences on the syntax and word formation (e.g., preverbs). I even found many preverb-verb constructions with German adverbs and Croatian verbs.

Syntax Verb-final clause order	<i>Da smo si mogli hartu kupit.</i> ‘That we could buy a ticket.’ <i>Prvo smo, po školi smo popali mužiku, ča j tamburica učit.</i> ‘First we, after school we started to learn music, tamburica.’ (The tamburica is a mandolin-like stringed instrument popular in Croatia.)
Word formation Preverbs – Croatian adverbs	‘going to’ hingehen > <i>tamo pojt</i> , ‘going away from’ weggehen > <i>kraj pojt</i> ...
Word formation Preverbs – German adverbs	<i>auf dujt</i> ‘to come up’, <i>auf ziat</i> ‘to record’, <i>trauf dujt</i> ‘to realize’, <i>nohi dujt</i> ‘to come later’, <i>pujt furt</i> ‘to go away’, ...

c) *Unexpected prepositions*

We should further mention that some verbs⁴ are, as a result of German influence, combined with unexpected prepositions, e.g., *vjerovati na to* (instead of *vjerovati u to*) – glauben an etwas – ‘to believe in sth.’, *čekati na nekoga* (instead of *čekati koga*) – warten auf jemanden – ‘to wait for somebody’, *van stati od škole* (instead of *iz škole*) – aus der Schule austreten – ‘to leave school’ (because of graduation), and so on. Lastly, due to the close contact with German, reflexive verbs are increasingly turning into transitive verbs, e.g., *študirati* (instead of *študirati se*) – ‘to study’, *igrati* (instead of *igrati se*) – ‘to play’, and *učiti* (instead of *učiti se*) – ‘to learn’, which is again undeniably imitating the German paradigm.

It is interesting that the last two monographs on Burgenland-Croatian are from the year 1978, namely Helene Koschat, *Die čakavische Mundart von Baumgarten im Burgenland* and Gerhard Neweklowsky, *Die kroatischen Dialekte des Burgenlandes und der angrenzenden Gebiete*. Much has changed since then, but a more detailed discussion on these would lead us too far away from our topic. However, even back then, language decay was recognized and briefly described.

4 I have noticed these examples in everyday conversation.

2. Verbs

2.1. Tenses

I am especially interested in verbs, because if a well-functioning, non-endangered language is changing on the one hand in the fields of syntax and lexis, which is some kind of simplification, then, typically, it should on the other hand become more complex or at least stay more conservative in the fields of tense and verbal aspect. Grammatical changes are the last and most complicated ones. What I also wanted to know is how close Burgenland-Croatian is to the Croatian standard of Croatia. What needs to be mentioned is that there is a big difference between the language of the oldest generation and that of the youngest.⁵ Detailed analyses are still missing.

My interviewees belong either a) to the generation over seventy years of age or b) + c) to the generation around thirty years of age. The mother tongue of the seventy-plus generation is definitely Burgenland-Croatian. These people were educated in Burgenland-Croatian, are very religious, pray in Burgenland-Croatian, sing in Burgenland-Croatian, did not leave the house they were born in until they were grown-ups, married Burgenland-Croats, talked to their friends, families, relatives, and children in Burgenland-Croatian, etc. All these people have a very self-confident attitude towards their bilingualism, whereas the younger generation is more insecure in relation to its identity. Just in the last ten to fifteen years, after the war in Croatia, Burgenland-Croatian was and is considered to be something good and worth being proud of. Within the younger generation, it is more complex. I tried to find different groups of speakers – b) some who during their whole childhood spoke only Burgenland-Croatian, but did not use it as teenagers and c) some who learnt Burgenland-Croatian as teenagers or adults.

⁵ For example, younger people use the *tili*-perfect less frequently than the oldest generation. Youngsters tend to use the perfective aspect more often than the imperfective.

The following tenses are in use in the spoken language:

- a) *Present tense* (ipf./pf.) endings: *-m/-n, -š, -Ø, -mo, -te, -ju/du*
(apart from Stinatz and Heugraben: *oni sta*)

*Da znadu ljudi nek puoijt na krčmu.*⁶

‘That people can just go to a restaurant.’

*Kad kut vam velim kako ča gor ne zna ča je to.*⁷

‘Because as I tell you, how some do not even know what it is.’

*Noge me ur bolu, me ostauljadu, križi.*⁸

‘My feet are already hurting, are leaving me, my back.’

At this point, I would like to mention that Burgenland-Croatian, as well as Croatian, does not have concrete rules for the use of the verbal aspect in the present tense (as Russian, Ukrainian, etc. do). I agree with Ebert (2004: 22) when he says

*kako je samo sadašnjost ... u apsolutnom smislu, vezana, već po svom prirodnom značenju, za nesvršeni glagolski vid. ... imperfekt u prvom planu ne izriče vrijeme, nego trajanje radnje’. And second, ‘Zato tzv. ‘prezentski oblici’ tvoreni od svršenih glagola ne izriču sadašnjost, nego ‘bezvremensko’, pa onda i ‘svevremensko’ svršeno vrijeme, koje zapravo nije ni vrijeme, nego samo vid...’*⁹

This means that the native speaker can choose between the imperfective and the perfective aspect in the present tense, dependent on what he/she wants to say or put focus on. Using the perfective aspect of course

6 Mrs. Wlaschitz (living in Wulkaprodersdorf and belonging to the Poljanci regional subgroup of Burgenland-Croats).

7 Mrs. Gregorits (living in Klungenbach, Poljanci).

8 Mrs. Klikovits (†) (lived in Zagersdorf, Poljanci).

9 Ebert (2004: 19): ‘As the present tense is in its absolute sense and because of its naturally integrated meaning fixed to the imperfective aspect...the imperfective aspect does not express the term of an action, but more the duration of an action. This is why ‘present compositions’ formed with the help of perfective verbs do not express the present tense but much more some kind of timeless or perpetual perfective tense, which is actually not a tense but only an aspect.’

implicates that the mentioned action happens from time to time.

b) *Future I.* (ipf./pf.) – forms: *ću, ćeš, će, ćemo, ćete, ćedu + infinitive*

Ča ću ti ćuda povidat kad nikamor ne duojdem.¹⁰
‘How can I tell you very much, if I do not go anywhere.’

Kako će bit za manum, tuo ne znan.¹¹
‘How it will be after me, this I do not know.’

c) *Future II.* (ipf./pf.) – forms: *budem, budeš,...budu + l-participle* (In some regions, the ending for m. sg. is not *-o*, but *-u*, *-l*, or *-ija*.) This tense is very rare and appears exclusively in a subordinate clause in combination with a perfective verb, which then refers to a possible action going on after the action in the future II tense.

Vako kot sam ja sad povidala, pa neka si lipo van zeme ča juj se bude vidilo, to drugo neka pa štrajha.¹²

‘As I was saying just now, let her take out what she will like, the rest she should erase.’

verbs: se bude vidilo -> van zeti (pf)

Žene su tile pierje čihat za blazine da budu jimali kad se odadu, blazine.¹³
‘Women used to pluck feathers for blankets, so that they would have (them) when they would get married, blankets.’

verbs: da budu jimali -> odat se (pf)

d) *Perfect tense* (ipf./pf.) – forms: *sam/san, si, je, smo, ste su + l-participle*

Nowadays, the perfect tense is the most frequent tense in use. It substitutes the *plusquamperfect*, the *tili-past tense*, the *aorist*, and the *imperfect*.

10 Mrs. Wlaschitz (living in Wulkaprodersdorf, Poljanci).

11 Mrs. Habetler (living in Podgorja and belonging to the Vlahija regional subgroup of Burgenland Croats).

12 Mrs. & Mr. Dobrovits (living in Wulkaprodersdorf, Poljanci).

13 Mrs. Klikovits (†) (lived in Zagersdorf, Poljanci).

*Hat ja san se ovo rodila, sielo, ne.*¹⁴
 ‘Because I was born in this village, you know.’

In this first example, I would have expected a perfective verb (*narodit se*), because the action of being born is definitely finished. But there are some phrases in Burgenland-Croatian in which such unexpected verbs appear. There is even a very popular song with the same example ‘*Prodrštofi, Prodrštofi sam se rodiu, a Šoproni školu hodiū ...*’, which in both cases needs to be interpreted as an iterative or longer ongoing action. Since it is a song, it might be the case that *narodit* was reduced to *rodit* because of the better-fitting rhyme. The other possibility is that the composer unconsciously used the wrong verbal aspect. The reality is that such songs and phrases that are more and more incorrect, but are well-known examples, influence everyday language.

*Pinkovcu su novu školu zidali.*¹⁵
 ‘They built a new school in Güttenbach.’

In this example, the imperfective aspect is possible, because the focus is put on the ongoing action of building a school building and not on the result.

e) *Plusquamperfect* (ipf./pf.) – forms: sam/san, si, je... + 1-participle of biti + 1-participle of the verb (*kad su bili rekli..., sam si bio štao...*)

*A toga mi j naš stariotac finansirao biu.*¹⁶
 ‘And my grandfather had financed that one.’

f) *tili/mogli*¹⁷ - *past tense* (ipf./pf.) – forms: tio/tila/tili/tile/tila + infinitive or mogao/mogla/mogli/mogle/mogla + infinitive

14 Mrs. Habetler (living in Podgorja, Vlahija).

15 Mrs. Habetler (living in Podgorja, Vlahija).

16 Mr. Dobrovits (living in Wulkaprodersdorf, Poljanci).

17 *mogli* is used only in the Vlahija region. Compare Brabec (1966: 29-118).

*San tila va gšefti bit, san tila prodavat kruh tr to.*¹⁸
 ‘I used to be in the shop, I used to sell bread and stuff.’

*Onda se j tilo se sčistit, se da je lipo, onda se j tilo speč.*¹⁹
 ‘Then everything used to be cleaned up, everything, so that it is nice, then everybody used to bake (for Christmas).’

The *tili/mogli*-past tense is especially interesting, since it was neither accepted into the Burgenland-Croatian standard grammar and nor does it exist in German or in the Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian standard language, which means that it is a characteristic marker of the spoken language. However, it could earlier also be found in fiction (Ignac Horvath, Petar Jandrišević, etc.). It serves to express events in the past which happened more than once, repeatedly. In most instances, we can talk about habits or iterative situations (cf. English *used to*). Neweklowsky (1978: 246) mentions that the *tili/mogli*-past comes mostly with the perfective aspect. I do not agree with him. I would say that there is no aspect in question, but more the lexical meaning of the verb itself. *Pa se j tilo duama mlatit (ipf)*. *Pa smo ju tili ubraćat (ipf)*. *Pa smo tili počiet ručevat (ipf)*. *A upuadne smo tili počivat (ipf)*.

Pairs of verbs: *mlatit/zmlatit* – ‘to thresh’, *ubraćat/ubrnut* – ‘to turn’, *ručevat/poručevat* – ‘to have breakfast’, *počivat/počinut* – ‘to relax’.

This tense is not combined with the verb *htiti* itself, but rather with *kaniti*²⁰ in order to express the phrase ‘we used to want sth.’ – *smo tili kanit* and it is very rare with stative verbs. More frequently, we find the perfect tense in stative contexts, e.g., *Tr mi se j račilo (ipf) jako* – ‘And I always had an appetite’. *Žene nisu muantlje nosile (ipf)* – ‘Women did not wear coats’.

Sanja Vulić conducted some research on the dialects around the small town of Modruš, Croatia, and found exactly the same tense in use

18 Mr. Dobrovits (living in Wulkaprodersdorf, Poljanci).

19 Mrs. Klikovits (†) (lived in Zagersdorf, Poljanci).

20 *htiti* ‘want’ is not in use anymore in the present tense, but only in the future tense and past tense.

there. People in the area of Modruš are Čakavians,²¹ like the Burgenland-Croats. We finally conclude that the tenses are not endangered within the oldest generation and have developed in a very natural way. It is significant that Burgenland-Croatian lost both the aorist and the imperfect,²² but invented the *tili*-past tense which can be interpreted as a reaction of a healthy language.

Unfortunately, Burgenland's younger people, in contrast to the oldest generation, do not utilize the *tili/mogli*-past tense very frequently any more, which is surely a consequence of its elimination from the standardized Burgenland-Croatian. We have no detailed analysis of this tense yet, but we can interpret the use of *htiti* – 'to want' and *moći* – 'to be able to' as auxiliary verbs analogous to the use of *htiti* in the future tense (*htiti: ću, ćeš...ćedu*). My younger interviewees did not use this tense even once, but more complex research still needs to follow.

2.2. Verbal aspect

c) Monostyle

Verbal aspect is a grammatical category.²³ The native speaker chooses one or the other aspect due to his/her own subjective evaluation of an action. A pair of aspects consists of an imperfective and a perfective verb. These pairs are still in active use in Burgenland-Croatian within the oldest generation. The younger generation tends to use paraphrases, e.g., instead of the perfectives *zaplakati, zajačiti, zakriknuti* 'begin to cry, begin to sing, begin to shout', etc., they would say *začet* 'begin' *plakat, začet jačit, začet kričat*. Other verbs like *pootpirat* (to open all windows in the house a little), *zasukat* (when a wound begins to heal), *raskalat* (to crack nuts with a hammer), and *smoć* (to have enough power to complete sth.) have been lost.

21 Modruš is inland; we should mention that Čakavians on the Croatian coast do not use this tense.

22 These are also very infrequently used in Croatia and are generally found only in fiction.

23 One needs to distinguish between the verbal aspect and aktionsart, which is defined lexically/semantically and describes an action/phase (beginning, middle, or end of an action) or a state. This category is objective.

If we focus on word formation, then aspectual pairs of verbs²⁴ can be formed with the help of prefixes, suffixes, and suppletion (in Slavic languages in general, as well as in Burgenland-Croatian).

Prefixes: (prefixation always means perfectivization): *klat/zaklat* ‘to slaughter (an animal)’, *kosit/pokosit* ‘to mow’

Suffixes: (imperfectivization): *prodavat/prodat* ‘to sell’, *udavat se/udat se* ‘to marry a man’

Opposition of suffixes (ipf./pf.): *počivat/počinut* ‘to relax’, *doživljavat/doživiti* ‘to experience’, *dohajat/duojt* ‘to come’

Suppletion (ipf.:pf.): *griem/šao* ‘to go’ (cf. *Ja griem školu. // Ja sam šao školu.* ‘I go to school’. // ‘I went to school’.)

Aspect is a grammatical category, but can also be expressed through adverbs (*danas, čer* ‘today, yesterday’), conjunctions (*potom, pred tim* ‘after, before’), or phrasal verbs (*početi, zgotoviti, hierati* ‘to begin, to bring to an end, to stop’).

The trend is toward a more frequent use of the perfective aspect. The older generation interprets this phenomenon as a gap in the younger speakers’ knowledge of the language. Some examples are *Ja dojdem iz Prodrštofa* (cf. Croatian in Croatia: *Dolazim iz ...*, standard Burgenland-Croatian: *Dohajam iz...*) – ‘I come from Wulkaprodersdorf’ and *Pozovem vas na moj rođendan* (instead of *Pozivam vas...*) – ‘I invite you to my birthday party’.

3. Taxis

The best way to find out if the verbal aspect is still in use and works as in other Slavic languages is to have a look at the taxis (interconnection of verbs and time relations). At first sight, it seems that the aspect

24 These are pairs with the same lexical meaning, but different grammatical meaning due to the opposition of the aspects.

in Burgenland-Croatian is working without any deviations, but so far I do not have any results for the younger generation. For this reason, I can only discuss the efficient utilization of the aspects here, although I do not want to weaken the statement above that recently there has been a tendency toward more frequent use of the perfective aspect.

3.1. Concurrency

The same verbal aspect is used in both cases, because the ongoing actions are parallel to each other. I found only examples of the imperfective aspect and again agree with Ebert (2004: p. 23) when he says, '*Nesvršeni vid u zavisnoj surećenici označava istovremenost.*'

Poljanci (perfect-tense ipf.):

A kad sam Führerschein načinjao, pa su bili oš Rusi.
 'And while I did the course for my driving license, there were still the Russians (in Austria).'

Stinatz (perfect-tense ipf.):

Oli ja som si bākla muoj kljait koga su imala kad sam prisigala.
 'But I put on my dress, which I had (on) when I got married.'

3.2. Chronology

The perfective aspect is in use, because chronology is perceived to be a series of finished actions, taking place one after the other.

Dolinci (tili-past tense pf.):

Pa su nan tili²⁵, moja pokuojna majka, su tili četire litare lonac onie vodie ziet, va to su tili mukie umišat, par jaj nutr, tr su nan tili šmorn načinjit.
 'Then my deceased mother, she used to take a pot with four litres of water, mix flour in it, some eggs and used to make us a Kaiserschmarrn (hot dessert).'

²⁵ Elderly speakers of Burgenland-Croatian use the masculine plural polite form when talking about their parents, teachers, priests, or other persons of respect – which means *moja majka su tili* instead of *moja majka je tila* 'my mother wanted'.

Vlahija (perfect-tense pf.):

Kad san pak od škole van stala, onda j doša Hitler. Je buj nasta.
 ‘After I finished school, then Hitler came. Then the war began.’

3.3. *Incidence*

This expresses when an action falls into another action. The longer action is represented by the imperfective aspect, and the new, momentaneous action is represented by the perfective aspect.

Poljanci:

Duoma smo tile muorat bit divuojke ur kad je tila Zdrava Marija zvonit.
 ‘We girls used to have to be at home already when the Angelus bell would ring (=18h).’

Dolinci:

Aš kad se ribje, onda se muora ribat aš da štrafa ne načinjim.
 ‘Because, when you are scrubbing (the floor), then you (really) have to scrub, so that I don’t make streaks.’

4. Perfective present tense

Die südslavischen Sprachen haben auch für die perfektiven Verba ein periphrastisches Futur ausgebildet. Ihr perfektives Präsens blieb jedoch erhalten. Es bedeutet zwar keine eigentliche Gegenwart im Sinne der Miklosichschen Frage: was tust du?, hat aber auch keine Futurfunktion wie in den ost- und westslavischen Sprachen. (Mihailović 1962: 3)²⁶

According to Mihailović, it is possible to use perfective verbs in Serbo-Croatian even in the present tense without a future meaning. The

²⁶ The South Slavic languages developed also for the perfective verbs a periphrastic future tense. Their perfective present tense though still exists. This kind of present tense does neither describe the absolute present in the sense of Miklošić’s question: what are you doing in the moment? nor does it have some kind of future-tense function as it has in the East and West Slavic languages.

same can be said for Burgenland-Croatian, which has kept its South Slavic features in this respect.

Here are some examples of general statements in the perfective present tense:

<p><i>Sad jur spidu dvi tri lieta skupa, pa se užienidu, se skupa zamedu, poruču.</i>²⁷ ‘Now they sleep together already for two or three years and then they get married, get engaged, get betrothed.’</p>

<p><i>Žene gor ne maridu čuda van puojt, kad to se muži zis traktorom udieladu.</i> ‘Women do not even need to go out a lot, because men do everything with the tractor.’</p>
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Neweklowsky mentions that in Burgenland-Croatian in most cases of the present tense the perfective aspect is in use (Neweklowsky 1978: 212). Native speakers utilize the imperfective aspect only for real, actual present situations (which do not appear very often in interview situations), in combinations with phrasal verbs or due to their lexical meaning.²⁸

We can summarize as follows: the perfective aspect occurs in constantly repeated actions (1), as well as in potential actions (2), in the general present tense (3), and in the historical present tense. Neither imperfective nor perfective verbs²⁹ used in main clauses in the present tense have future meaning (4), whereas in Serbo-Croatian the imperfectives do, e.g., *on dolazi sutra* – ‘he is going to come tomorrow’.

27 Mrs. Klikovits Maria (†) (lived in Zagersdorf, Poljanci).

28 *Denas jutro počivadu (ipf), kad se ne da kosit (ipf) ka je mokro. Denas gredu (ipf) zis medrešarom kad je jako suho, ka je najjače vruče.* ‘These days people take a rest during the morning, if it is wet. Today „they go with the (take the) combine when it is very dzy, when it is hottest.’

29 Koschat (1978: 112) says that perfective verbs in the present tense do have future meaning.

Examples (from the above-mentioned interviewees):

(1)

Pa kroz dan si kupimo (pf) ča nas je vuolja.

kupovat/kupit

‘And during the day we buy everything we want.’

(2)

A sad si saki zasluži (pf), ko ne paše pruojdu (pf) ausanond.

zasluživat si/zaslužit si

‘And now everybody earns (enough money) so that they get devided, if something is not perfect.’

(3)

Nigdor ne puozna (pf) tuliko vrganjov.

poznavat/poznat*

‘Nobody knows that much mushrooms.’

Ka je človik mlad, nako znaš, ko već poji (pf) onda, ne.

jist/pojist

‘When somebody is young, you know anyway, he eats more.’

(4)

Pak ki su Bieči duojdu (pf) morebit nek na Wochnende, vikend, ne.

dohajat/dojt

‘And everybody who is in Vienna is maybe coming only for the weekends.’

5. Perfect versus tili-perfect

– An attempt to define the difference

For actions in the background, the perfect tense is usually in use, while actions in the foreground are expressed through the *tili*-past tense. Furthermore, the perfect tense introduces new situations, and the progress of the action is described using the *tili*-past tense. Parallel to this, we should add that for singular actions exclusively the perfect tense is utilized and contrariwise, for iterative actions, the *tili*-past tense is used.

Poljanci:

Onda nij bilo krčmi se jis pujt, duoma se tilo kuhat.

‘Back then nobody went to eat at a restaurant, one would cook at home.’

Vlahija:

Onda smo mogli, ko je kaj kakov kiritof ko je bija ali što onda smo mogli puojti.

‘Then we used to, if there was somewhere a kiritof (church feast), if there was something like that, then we used to go (there).’

Stinatz:

Ča su si mliko tāli³⁰ saki dan u stan ić puo nje. Mr ki su tili hić saki drugi dan, nda je takovi bilo ki su išli saki dan.

‘Some used to go for milk in the house every day. Although some went every second day, then there were those who went every day.’

6. Decay of conjugations of verbs

Within the younger generation, I recorded the following sentences.

Ja ti neču pobrat, kat ti nako senek se pobram.

‘I will not pick it up for you, because I always pick up everything for you.’

pobрати: (corr.) poberem <-> pobram

Prvo ručevam, pak si zubi upucam,...

‘First I have breakfast, then I clean my teeth.’

ručevати: (corr.) ručujem <-> ručevam

According to ‘Gramatika’, *brati* is a verb of ‘*Peta vrst, 3. razred*’ (*brati: berem, bereš, ... beru*) and *ručevati* is a verb of ‘*Šesta vrst*’

30 ä= [ə].

(*ručevati: ručujem, ručuješ, ... ručuju*) (Benčić, Nikola/Csenar-Schuster 2003: 224-225). My interviewee was not aware of the existence of so many different classes of verbs and uses all verbs with the suffix *-ati* analogous to the verbs in *-ati* from the fifth class, which are verbs like *kuhati, čuvati, igrati,...* (Benčić, Nikola/Csenar-Schuster 2003: 220) This last group of verbs, the fifth class, is the most productive, because of its calques (*ajnkafati, špacierati, onrufati, šikati se, tancati, ...*). This is at the same time the explanation for the ‘confusion’ of the younger native speaker K. R. (born in 1978); the most productive class seems to stay the most successful one. K. R. was raised using Burgenland-Croatian and learnt it at primary school, but no longer used it after the age of ten. She speaks Burgenland-Croatian with her grandparents, her mother, and child almost every day. The problem is that there are no people of her own age to whom she could talk in Burgenland-Croatian. Dressler’s article (1997: 109-143) is very helpful in order to understand changes in languages better. On page 126, he says in other words the same as I would like to say, namely that *‘the passage from a paradigm from a less stable into a more stable inflectional class. ...Adolescents as the most mobile and innovating group of many societies are the most likely innovators of analogical change’*. The phenomenon of language decay is a very complex one and I cannot predict where these tendencies might lead the language. The verbal aspect is acquired much earlier than the tenses, and people are still aware of some differences in very frequently used phrases, but at the moment it seems as if the whole verbal system is becoming more and more unstable within the younger generation.

7. Conclusion

As I mentioned before, Burgenland-Croatian has recently been standardized more or less in parallel with the system of the standard language of Croatia, without reflecting all the changes described above. I consciously put my focus on the spoken language, because it significantly differs from the Burgenland-Croatian standard. We could even say that we find some kind of diglossia in Burgenland. TV, radio, and newspapers are in the standard language, whereas nobody really speaks like that. The standard language tries to conserve some archaic features of Burgenland-

Croatian,³¹ tries to be comprehensible to all speakers of Burgenland-Croatian, although we have three different dialects, and is becoming increasingly closer to the Croatian standard in order to escape the strong German influence (Dressler 2006: 2258-2271). The question is whether this makes sense, even though we know how important it is for a national minority to have its own standard language. Unfortunately, we already find many signs indicative of language decay in Burgenland-Croatian, apart from the shrinking number of speakers.

I am especially interested in the verbal pattern of Burgenland-Croatian, which seems to be still quite stable, though I do not have sufficient concrete data for younger speakers, people who learnt Burgenland-Croatian as a foreign language, people who live in cities and do not have anybody they can talk to in Burgenland-Croatian, gender-specific data, etc. What remains to be said is that now is the moment to describe the changes in Burgenland-Croatian and to document a dying, shrinking language. The oldest generation is dwindling as well; they are the only ones who learnt first Burgenland-Croatian and then German and who communicated exclusively in their mother tongue independent of the surroundings, school, friends, going out, or job.

There is a doctoral thesis on verbs in Burgenland-Croatian (Dihanich 1954), where language decay is one of the topics; Neweklowsky (1978) listed more very detailed examples of the slow death of the minority language in various fields. As a first attempt of actual analysis, I tried to explain the difference between the perfect tense and the *tili*-past tense, because the last-mentioned was not included in the 'Gramatika', which means that it does not belong to the Burgenland-Croatian standard and is therefore becoming less important within the younger generation. Secondly, I placed my focus on the relatively frequent use of the perfect aspect and, last but not least, on the analogy processes in the field of verbs and the loss of conjugations within the group of younger speakers. A lot of work still remains to be done.

This topic is not only interesting for linguists, but also for sociologists, historians, language planners, etc. Since I am a part of the

31 The aorist and imperfect are explained in the 'Grammar', but not the *tili*-past tense.

assimilated generation, the only thing I can do is to publish something in order to keep the generations before me alive.

Appendix

Ill. 1: Population of Burgenland-Croats according to census figures

Year of census	Croatian-speaking, incl. multiple languages
1910	43633
1920	44753
1923	41761
1934	40151
1939	35482
1951	34427
1961	28126
1971	24332
1981	18648
1991	19109
2001	17730

Source: www.zigh.at.

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