

**TEACHING THE LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT SLAVIC  
AND EAST EUROPEAN LANGUAGES:  
AATSEEL 2024 CONFERENCE REPORT  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES**



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At the recent conference of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), two panels focused on teaching methodologies and materials for the less commonly taught languages of Central and Eastern Europe. Languages represented included Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and Ukrainian. The following report is based closely on the abstracts submitted by the following panelists.

- Ljiljana Duraskovic, University of Pittsburgh: “Teaching Diversity Topics in Advanced Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian”
- Frane Karabatic, University of Texas at Austin: “Tako lako, New Open Source Online Textbook for Beginner-level L2 Croatian”
- Susan Kresin, University of California Los Angeles: “„Malá pravda, velká lež’: Addressing Media Literacy in Language and Area Studies Courses”
- Ana Petrov, University of Toronto: “Slavic Languages through a Creative Writing Course: Substitute for the Czech Language Course?”
- Varvara Ponomareva, Charles University: “Creation and Application of a System of Grammar Exercises That Combines Classic and Creative Tasks for Czech Courses at Levels A1-B1”
- Holly Raynard, University of Florida: “Content-based Instruction for Higher Performance Outcomes”
- Pavlína Vondráčková, Charles University: “Chinese Students and Their Attitudes towards Czech Culture”
- Edit Nagy, University of Florida: “A Beginner’s Journey into Hungarian Language and Culture: Developing an Interactive Hungarian Textbook”
- Ewa Maria Malachowska-Pasek, University of Michigan: “From Tempter to Savior: How to Use ChatGPT and Other AI Technology to Improve Language Teaching and Learning”
- Lydia Roberts, University of California Los Angeles: Cultural Exploration in a Heritage Classroom: Perspectives of a Non-Native Polish Instructor”
- Adela Lechintan-Siefer, Ohio State University: “Accessibility and Appeal of Open-Source Digital Materials in the Teaching and Learning of Language and Culture” (Romanian)
- Svitlana Melnyk, Indiana University: “Fostering Cultural Understanding: Project-based Learning in the Ukrainian Language Classroom”



- Alla Nedashkivska, University of Alberta: “U2 Ukraine in Warsaw: Ukrainian Study Abroad During the War”
- Oleksandra Wallo, University of Kansas: “Activities for Developing Speaking Proficiency in Beginner Ukrainian In-person and Online Courses”

The presentations on BCMS focused on curricular frameworks and material development at the introductory and advanced levels of instruction: Frane Karabatic presented his online introductory textbook *Tako lako*,<sup>1</sup> part of a series of openly accessible textbooks under development at the University of Texas, Austin. Karabatic’s part of the project aims to provide separate but similarly constructed teaching materials for each of Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian. At this point, the Croatian part of the textbook is fully developed, with audio recordings, interactive tasks, and videos licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (CC-BY-SA), enabling free sharing and adaptation with proper attribution.

Ljiljana Duraskovic’s presentation focused on her incorporation of two diversity topics into her advanced BCMS curriculum: *Diversity as a Value of Our Society* and *Stereotypes and Prejudice in the Balkans*. Diversity and cultural awareness in the Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian classroom is an essential aspect of instruction, since BCMS courses inherently include diverse content and attract students with diverse heritages. She offered models of best practices for developing and implementing materials that enable students to express their opinions on situations relating to daily life and real-world issues, while improving their proficiency level in both speaking and writing.

The Czech presentations addressed alternative teaching formats, content-based instruction, developing grammatical accuracy, media literacy, and the motivations of Chinese students to take Czech. Ana Petrov spoke about a creative writing course that she has developed to teach students of various Slavic languages in a single class, enabling her to continue to offer Czech language instruction at her university despite budget cuts. She has found that creative writing offers students opportunities to improve in a number of key language skills — vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, rhythm and sentence intonation, in addition to learning to communicate more authentically. For a detailed description of an earlier rendition of the course, see the Fall 2021 issue of *Czech Language News*.<sup>2</sup>

Holly Raynard spoke about ways to focus content-based instruction to enable students to make the challenging jump from intermediate to advanced proficiency, extending beyond familiar contexts and discrete sentences to discussing matters of public and community interest in cohesive discourse with specificity and detail (Dupuy 2000). Drawing on her Czech language course on film and cultural production, she showed how thematically linked units can enable students to galvanize vocabulary and key structures used in discipline-based discourse as they learn new content and develop skills that bridge intermediate and higher-level performance.

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1 see <https://www.takolako.org/>

2 see <http://wredhor.pair.com/signatur/iatc/pdf/21fall.pdf>



Varvara Ponomareva described a system that she has developed for her students that combines classic grammar exercises and creative tasks to teach case endings and other grammatical forms. Focusing on the A1–B1 levels, she demonstrated ways to make fill-in exercises both effective and enjoyable, offering students focused, and gradually more difficult, item-based practice. Following these exercises, she gives students assignments in creative writing, such as creating detective stories or fairy tales, which allow for greater student autonomy and individualized mastery of grammatical forms.

Susan Kresin addressed the growing need to help students learn how to filter, decode, decipher, and evaluate sources of information, given the increasing polarization and politicization of the media, as well as students' increasingly independent use of media resources. Using a framework

(Wardle–Derakhshan 2017) of seven types of mis- and dis-information — 1) fabricated content, 2) imposter content, 3) misleading content, 4) satire or parody, 5) false connection, 6) false context, 7) manipulated content — she offered examples of teaching materials from both language and area studies classes.

Pavlna Vondráčková spoke about the motivations of Chinese students of Czech, noting that interest in the Czech Republic and Czech culture and history is often an important incentive (Hlínová 2008, Roubalová 2006). Based on a survey of students studying Czech at various universities in China, she mapped their attitudes toward the Czech Republic and learning Czech. She found that they were especially interested in everyday life in the Czech Republic, Czech identity, social interactions, and Czech food, as well as Czech literature, music, architecture, and famous Czechs. The results also support the idea that teaching Czech culture as a part of language learning is crucial and facilitates language learning.

Turning to Hungarian, Edit Nagy spoke about an open source online textbook that she is currently developing, titled “Read & Learn Hungarian: Interactive Beginner’s Textbook.”<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive resource that covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the textbook includes focused tools to help students develop correct pronunciation and other core components of speaking skills. These materials, unusual in online resources, were the focus of her presentation.

The two Polish-based presentations focused on the use of artificial intelligence technology in language teaching and learning and on addressing the needs of heritage students. Ewa Maria Malachowska-Pasek focused on the use of ChatGPT as a pedagogical tool to positively transform language classroom practices. Her poster showcased ways to enhance conversation prompts, generate differentiated reading comprehension questions for multi-level language classes, and prepare vocabulary notes in both the target and native languages. As she noted, by proactively and inclusively embracing AI technology, particularly ChatGPT, educators can enhance their teaching practices, provide personalized instruction, and empower students to become more confident and proficient language users.

Lydia Roberts discussed the challenge of effectively teaching first-year Polish to heritage students with varying familiarity with the language and culture. Her

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3 see <https://ufl.pb.unizin.org/beginninghungarianreader/>



presentation offered an overview of several pedagogical strategies implemented in a small class setting, grounded in scholarly literature on language pedagogy and the instruction of heritage language speakers (Kagan-Dillon 2009, Miodunka 2020). Her experiences indicate that a deeper engagement with contemporary 'Polishness' or other heritage background can enhance student motivation.

Presenting on Romanian, Adela Lechintan-Siefer spoke about the appeal of open-source digital materials in the teaching and learning of language and culture, especially for less commonly taught languages that have insufficient instructional resources (Kostina 2012). She discussed various examples of open-source web-based learning supplements, including educational websites and online learning modules, designed for beginner and intermediate Romanian language courses.

Lastly, the Ukrainian-based presentations offered insights on adapting Ukrainian language study abroad to current circumstances, project-based learning, and developing speaking proficiency Alla Nedashkivska spoke about shifting her university's study abroad program from L'viv to Warsaw, home to a large percentage of the refugees who have fled Ukraine. She addressed the core question of how a language program can provide immersive exposure to the target language and culture when in-country study is not possible, analyzing the program's strategies, strengths, and weaknesses; and offering insights into how study abroad can be successful without students' traveling to the target country itself.

Oleksandra Wallo addressed the challenge of teaching beginner students to speak, especially in online courses that are mostly asynchronous. She described and illustrated specific activity types and activity sets that she has devised to enable students to make rapid gains in speaking proficiency and offered models for instructors of any of the less commonly taught languages.

Svitlana Melnyk spoke about the advantages of project-based learning (Stoller-Myers 2020), with illustrations of several student projects from her university's Ukrainian language program. She has found that in the process of creating meaningful, publicly-available products, students both develop their Ukrainian language skills and enhance their cultural awareness. These projects also offer opportunities for individuated creativity, and they lead to increased participant motivation,

Poster panels addressing the less commonly taught languages of Central and Eastern Europe take place annually at the AATSEEL conference, which is held alternately in person and virtually. The next conference, February 20–23, 2025, will be a virtual event, and we encourage all instructors of Czech and other languages from the region, regardless of your place of employment, to submit an abstract (contact person: Susan Kresin, [Kresin@ucla.edu](mailto:Kresin@ucla.edu)).

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