

Na-našu (Molise Slavic)

With the characteristics of the dialect of *San Felice del Molise*

Part I contains a general overview of Molise Slavic as a micro-language and considers all three of its dialects. Part II is dedicated to the characteristics of the dialect of San Felice del Molise (the former San Felice Slavo). The Molise Slavic denomination of this village is *Filič*. It should be noted that there are three works that describe in a general way the system of presentation of all PANGLOSS texts of the project “EuroSlav 2010”, of which the *Na-Našu* texts are also part: BREU & ADAMOU (2011), ADAMOU & BREU (2013) und BREU (2017a). For an overview of Molise Slavic see also BREU (2020, online 1).

The San Felice corpus consists of 14 texts, recorded in the years 2002 and 2010. One man (born in 1940) and three women (born between 1927 and 1935) were recorded. Like all *Na-Našu* texts in the PANGLOSS collection, these stories have been analysed at the following levels on the following levels: orthography (broad phonological transcription), phonetics, morphological glosses, syntactic glosses, Italian and German translations.

Part I

1. Position, glottonym, immigration

1.1 Geographic position of the Molise Slavic linguistic area

Molise Slavic (MSL) is a minority language on a central Southern-Slavic basis, still spoken in the three villages of Acquaviva Collecroce, Montemitro and San Felice del Molise in the southern Italian Region of Molise, Province of Campobasso. The geographical location of the Molise Slavic language area, which is approximately 35 km from the Adriatic Sea, is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The Molise Slavic language area (Google Earth)

1.2 Internal structure and glottonym

The Molise Slavic micro-language is divided into three clearly differentiated dialects, characterised, for example, by the pronunciation of historically short *-e* and *o*, especially in word-final position: In Acquaviva and San Felice they are pronounced as *-a*, while they are preserved in Montemitro. Other differences can be observed in the pluperfect particle, *bi* in Acquaviva, *ba* in the other two dialects, or in the case forms of the DAT.SG.F, etc. On the spot, there is no real glottonym, as people traditionally speak simply of *naš jezik* ‘our language’, or they use the Italian term *Slavo*, adapted as *Zlav*. The adverbial term *Na-Našu* ‘in our (manner)’, in Montemitro *Na-Našo*, is increasingly used also as a noun, which is why we have adopted this term as the linguistic designation for SLM in the PANGLOSS corpus. At the administrative and scientific level, in addition to “Molise Slavic” (in Italian *Slavomolisano*), terms such as “Molise Croatian”, “Italo-Croatian”, or “Slavisano” are also used, but they have no relevance for the local population.

1.3 Classification and linguistic affiliation, online resources

ISO639-3, Reference Name *Slavomolisano*, Identifier **svm**:

<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/svm>

<https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/western-25>

[Indo-European \(445\)](#)
 [Balto-Slavic \(26\)](#)
 [Slavic \(21\)](#)
 [South \(10\)](#)
 Western (7)
 Bosnian [[bos](#)] (A language of [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#))
 Chakavian [[ckm](#)] (A language of [Croatia](#))
 Croatian [[hrv](#)] (A language of [Croatia](#))
 Montenegrin [[cnr](#)] (A language of [Montenegro](#))
 Serbian [[srp](#)] (A language of [Serbia](#))
 Slavomolisano [[svm](#)] (A language of [Italy](#))
 Slovene [[slv](#)] (A language of [Slovenia](#))

Change Request Documentation:

<https://iso639-3.sil.org/request/2012-068>

Language of the Day:

<https://www.ethnologue.com/language-of-the-day/2015-12-01>

Glottocode slav1254:

<https://glottolog.org/glottolog?iso=svm#12/41.8900/14.7000>

<https://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/slav1254>

OLAC Record:

<http://olac ldc.upenn.edu/item/oai:ethnologue.com:svm>

OLAC Resources (mostly Pangloss/Na-našu Euroslav2010):

<http://www.language-archives.org/language/svm>

1.4 The story of linguistic contacts

Slavic in Molise has been in contact with Romance varieties since the immigration of the ancestors of today's speakers some 500 years ago. In particular, contact was initially restricted to the Molise dialect, but since the unification of Italy (in the second half of the 19th century) standard Italian joined; see REŠETAR (1911/1997) for more detailed information on the history of the three remaining Slavic villages (and also of others, having lost their Slavic vernacular over the centuries) and on the historical situation of Molise Slavic.

The closest Slavic standard language from a genealogical point of view, Croatian, has no function in Molise and, except for individual words, remains completely incomprehensible to non-specialists. Literary works from Croatia have found no place in the local culture either. In all three villages, in addition to their Slavic micro-language, a southern variety of standard Italian is used, and in some cases even more dialectal forms.

For a long time language contact has been “absolute”, i.e. all the speakers of *Na-Našu* are bilingual, and in conversations outside the family and close acquaintances Italian dominates at all levels. Concerning Molise Slavic in writing, it must be said that non-specialists can neither read nor write it. In other words, Molise Slavs are illiterate with respect to the written form of their mother tongue.

Even as a living everyday vernacular, this Slavic micro-language is hardly passed on to the next generation. The sharp decline in the number of speakers of the younger generation has made Molise Slavic a language in danger of extinction.

2. Dialectal classification of *Na-Našu* in the Serbo-Croatian continuum

The immigration of the ancestors of the Slavs of Molise into their current areas of settlement began about 500 years ago, in the 16th century. This can be deduced from the absence of Turkicisms on one hand and of later linguistic developments in Croatian on the other. This is especially true for the absence of the ending *-ā* in the GEN.PL, while earlier developments, such as the vocalisation of *-l* at the end of the syllable, are present in SLM, too. On the basis of Serbo-Croatian dialectal peculiarities, it is assumed that the most probable area of emigration was the Dalmatian hinterland in the western valley of the river Neretva (in today's *Republika Bosna i Hercegovina*), see Figure 2. This does not exclude occasional coastal elements (Čacavisms) in the lexicon, such as *crikva* ‘church’ and *tuji* ‘foreigner’.



Figure 2: Map of immigration of the Molise Slavs in the 16th century (Google Earth)

Its affiliation to the ‘Štokavian-Icavian’ dialect, spoken in the area of emigration, is indicated by the Molise Slavic realisation *što* of the Proto-Slavic interrogative pronoun **čbto* ‘what’ and the realisation as an *i* of the Proto-Slavic *ě* (*jat*’, originally a very open *e*), cf. *dvi* ‘two’ F < **dvě*, as opposed to standard Croatian *dvije* and standard Serbian *dve*. In addition, the development of *-l* > *-a* in syllable-final position, as in *nosija* ‘to carry’ PTCP.SG.M < **nosil(ь)*, in contrast to *-o* (*nosio*) of the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian standard languages allows for a more precise localisation.

3. Demographic situation, number of speakers

The percentage of active speakers in 2021 on the spot is well below 1000. The percentage of passive speakers, although higher, is nevertheless much lower than the number of inhabitants indicated in the official statistics at the end of 2019, which still amounts to about 1500 people in the three villages as a whole.

Figure 3 shows the demographic development of the three Molise Slavic villages, based on the values reported by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) since 1861. More precisely, it is based on the censuses that were usually held every 10 years, to which the 2019 data are added. The maximum number of inhabitants was reached in 1951. In the following decades there was a sharp decline, which has weakened somewhat since the 1970s. The reasons for the decline are mainly due to migration to Australia, to the Adriatic coast and to the North, resulting also in fewer offspring on the spot. The steep fall in the demographic curve in the 1950s is particularly evident in the total number of inhabitants.

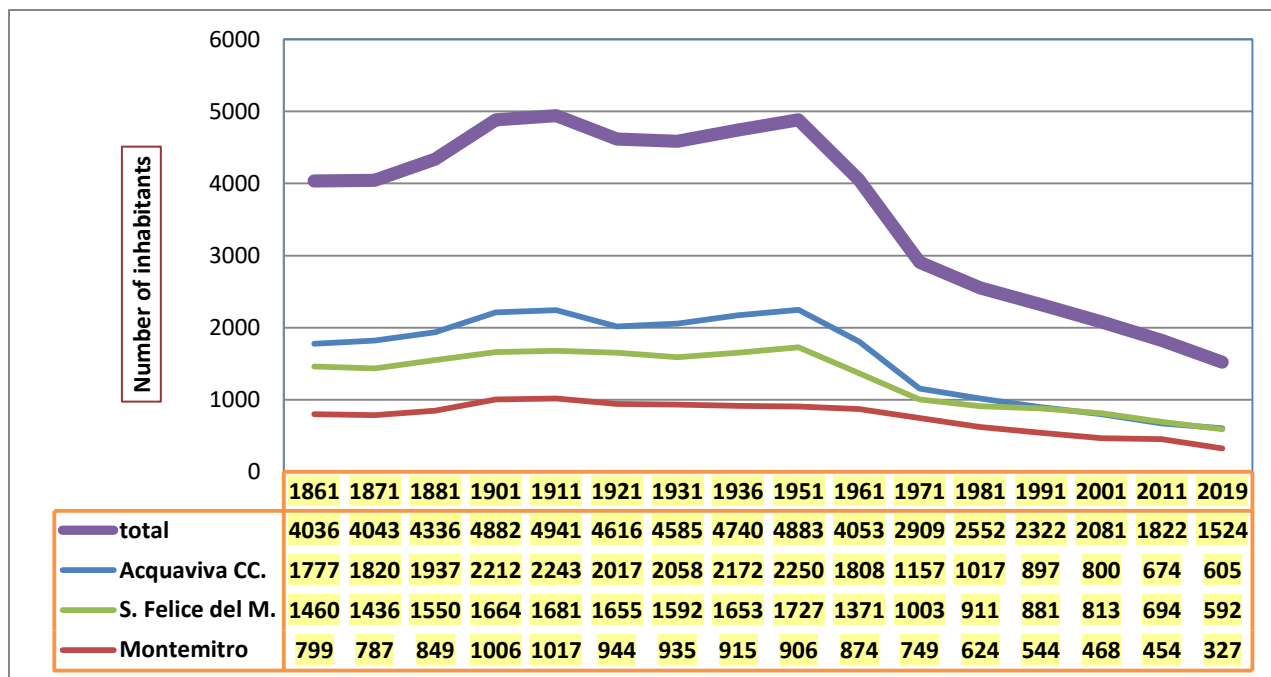


Figure 3: Demographic development according to censuses (ISTAT)

In San Felice, in particular, only a few elderly people still speak *na-našu*. Although in Montemitro, the smallest village, most of the speakers still use Molise Slavic, here too the knowledge of the language is in sharp decline among the young. Acquaviva, the traditional central village of the Slavs of Molise, occupies an intermediate position in terms of the linguistic fidelity of its speakers. Since censuses have not usually collected linguistic data, these can only be estimated. Figure 4 provides such an estimate, based on longer time intervals than the previous one and on the assumed or interpolated linguistic fidelity of the speakers.

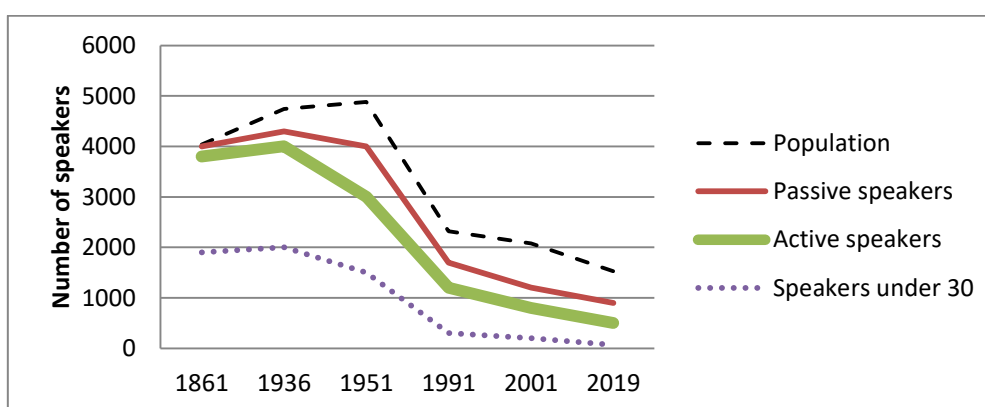


Figure 4: Estimated decline of the number of speakers 1861-2019

Based on the total number of inhabitants, we can assume a decrease of passive speakers from 95% to 40% of the total and of active speakers from 90% to 30%. The data in the diagram refer to the estimated maximum number of speakers in

the year in question. There are very few persons under 30 years of age who still have a fairly complete linguistic competence in Molise Slavic.

4. Lexical borrowings and their percentage in the Molise Slavic lexicon

The strong influence of contacts with Italian varieties after the immigration led to the replacement of many Slavic words by Romance ones, including almost all abstract concepts and many conjunctions and prepositions. Above all, nouns are affected, as shown by the statistical analysis of the *Na-Našu* texts published in PANGLOSS. Molise Slavic as a whole has 24.8% of foreign words (tokens), whereas within the nouns, the foreign share is 45.7%, i.e. almost half of the vocabulary used (BREU 2017a: 71); for a comparison on the percentage of borrowings compared to the other micro-varieties in the PANGLOSS corpus, see ADAMO et al. (2016), which shows that in SLM it is much higher than in the other micro-languages considered there.

Traditional Slavic principles of word formation have largely fallen into disuse. For example, the nominalisation suffix *-ost*, usually very productive in Slavic – cf. Croatian *mladost* ‘youth’ from *mladi* ‘young’ – has completely disappeared in Molise Slavic. Terms for new concepts are usually not derived, but expressed through lexical borrowings, e.g. *džuvindu* ← Ital. *gioventù* ‘youth’. However, substantivized adjectives still exist, such as *one mlade* ‘the young’. On the other hand, traditional Slavic words have often extended their meaning along the lines of their polysemous equivalents in Italian, e.g. *jimat* ‘to have’ now also means ‘must, to have to’, which corresponds to the polysemy of Southern Italian *avé* ‘to have, must’.

The three Molise Slavic dialects differ both in terms of inherited vocabulary and borrowings, which makes any attempt to establish norms for a standard Molise Slavic language very difficult. Here are some examples, containing a word in the Acquaviva dialect and its equivalent in Montemitro: *pivac* vs. *galo* ‘cock’, *perja* vs. *pena* ‘feather’, *kobasca* vs. *salziča* ‘sausage’, *krela* vs. *lete* ‘wing’, *skoknit* vs. *cumbat* ‘to jump’, *usta* vs. *guandže* ‘mouth’, *hartina* vs. *tupanara* ‘mole’, *sakata* vs. *vriča* ‘sack’, *pickanara* vs. *tocmarin* ‘rosemary’, *čič* vs. *grah* ‘chickpea’, *tata* vs. *otac* ‘father’, *nòna* or *mamma* vs. *marèla* ‘grandmother’, etc. Sometimes the ‘deviant’ terms are even unknown in the other village; for these and the following examples see BREU (2017b: 202).

San Felice, which is geographically located between Acquaviva and Montemitro, sometimes has one form and sometimes the other, albeit with its own pronunciation, such as *kobasica*, *justa* but *otac*, *marèla*, *grah*. However, the San Felice dialect also has formations of its own such as *mamuča*, a secondary term for grandmother, *zvaterit* ‘to close’ as opposed to *zatvorit* in the other two dialects, or *fináč* ‘fennel’ vs. *kromač* (Acquaviva), *pajiz* ‘field’ vs. *largo* (Montemitro) and *njiva* (Acquaviva). In some cases, corresponding words have different meanings, such as *bak* ‘bull’ in Acquaviva, which in Montemitro additionally means ‘pig’ and ‘winter tomato’. A systematic study of the dialectal differentiation of the Molise Slavic vocabulary is still in progress.

With regard to inflected parts of speech, the integration of lexical borrowings normally follows fixed rules, which in the case of nouns are based on the gender of the source word and its final sound, e.g. *ospite* M ‘guest’ → *ospit* M, *intenzione* F ‘intention’ → *ndendzijuna* F, *mariuolo* M ‘thief’ → *marijo* M, GEN *marijola*. In the case of verbs, the integration of the four Italian conjugation classes affects only two Molise Slavic classes, with *-are* → class *-a*, but *-ire*, *-ére*, *-ěre* → class *-i*. Romance verbs are completely integrated into the Slavic aspectual system, to the extent that terminative (telic) verbs are without exception integrated as perfective verbs and then internally form imperfective partner verbs with the help of an imperfectivizing suffix, e.g. *decidere* → *decidit* (perfective) ⇒ *decidivat* (imperfective); on the principles of the integration of borrowings see BREU (2017a: 63–67).

Of particular interest is the triple number system, consisting of traditional Slavic numbers (1-4; optionally: 5-10, 100), integrated local Romance numbers and Italian ones. The use of these parallel number groups is only partly free. The choice often depends on well-defined noun classes (BREU 2015).

5. Phonetics and phonology

As far as the segmental phonology of Molise Slavic is concerned, the traditional consonant system is completely preserved. The coincidence of *ć* [tɕ] < *tj* with *č* [tʃ], observed in this micro-language, is probably already due to the area of origin, just like the separate treatment of **jt*, which, in contrast to Serbo-Croatian standards, is realised in SLM not as *ć* (or *č*) but as *kj* [c], e.g. Croatian *poći* < **pojti* vs. MSL *pokj* ‘to go’ INF.

The reduction of short vowels at the end of words to whispered (voiceless) vowels with a tendency to total loss can be attributed to language contact, since local Romance dialects also show a reduction of final vowels. Long vowels were subsequently reduced to short ones (internal development). Despite the existence of double consonants in the contact varieties, they do not attain phonemic status in SLM, not even in borrowings. In cases where they occur phonetically, they are optional, e.g. *tun(n)a* ‘all’ ← *tunno* ‘round’ (Ital. *tondo*). On the other hand, the two vowel phonemes *è* [ɛ] and *ò* [ɔ] were transferred into Molise Slavic via loanwords such as *kafè* ‘coffee’ ← *caffè*, *dòp* ‘after’ ← *dopo*.

Unlike the conservative dialect of Montemitro, Acquaviva and San Felice show the phenomenon of *Akanje*, i.e. the above-mentioned development of unstressed short *-o* and *-e* in *-a*, probably also due to language contact (BREU 1999).

In Molise Slavic a distinctive tone system has been preserved. In the texts published here, in contrast to the normal descending tone (’), the rising tone is marked in the phonetic transcription by an acute accent sign. It is usually realised as a double accent that is distributed over the acute-marked vowel and the following one, e.g. *kupit* [’kupit] ‘to accumulate’ INF vs. [kúpit] ‘to buy’ INF. Vowel length is also a distinctive property of the suprasegmental phonological system, e.g. *kupim* [’kupim] ‘accumulate’ PRS.1SG vs. [’ku:pim] ‘buy’ PRS.1SG.

Unlike in the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian standard languages, rising accent is found also on the (lengthened) vowels of final syllables, even in the case of monosyllabic words. This is due to the optional loss of original short final vowels, having become voiceless, and especially the loss of final short *-i*; see, for example, the minimal pair *nos* ['no:s] 'nose' NOM.SG : [nó:s] 'to carry' IMP.2SG < *[nósi]. On the orthographic and the phonological system of Molise Slavic see BREU (2017a: 16–21).

6. Contact-induced change in Molise Slavic grammar

The influence of its contact varieties is so evident in Molise Slavic grammar that one could speak of a 'Romance structure in Slavic form'. A grammatical description based on the PANGLOSS texts published here (EuroSlav 2010) can be found in BREU (2017a: 22–67), with further comments directly in the appendix to each text and particular emphasis put on contact phenomena. The most important cases in this area are summarized in the following referenced topics (BREU 2017a: 71–72):

Nominal System (Gender, declination, case, definiteness, comparison)

- Loss of the neuter of nouns and development of an impersonal neuter, alongside the preservation of the neuter in pronouns and adjectives agreeing with them? (BREU 2013: 86–90).
- Restructuring of the gender of ex-feminines of the *i*-declination by adapting to the gender of their Italian equivalents (BREU 2004: 37–39; 2013: 94–99)
- Loss of the opposition of “place” and “motion to place” as a consequence of the coincidence of the ex-locative with other cases (BREU 2008; 2018a; 2018b)
- Optional extension of the genitive with the preposition *do* ‘of’ as well as an obligatory preposition *s* ‘with’ in the instrumental of action (BREU 1996: 26–28).
- Development of an article system by means of the grammaticalisation of an indefinite article as opposed to the zero article as the means of expression of definiteness (BREU 2008b; 2012)
- Conversion of the synthetic comparative into an analytical one of the Romance “*more* + positive” type, with the adoption of the possibility of expressing adjectival comparatives adverbially, and the reduction of the suppletives to the Italian level (BREU 2009a)

Verbal system (tense, mood, aspect, voice)

- Formation of a de-obligative future with *jimat* ‘to have, must’ as auxiliary, in modal opposition to the future of probability with *tit* ‘to want’ as auxiliary (MARRA 2005; BREU 2011: 154, 156–158; BREU & PILA 2018; 2020)

- Formation of a “future in the past” and copying of the Romance tense agreement (BREU 2011: 155–156; BREU & PILA 2018; 2020)
- Development of a counterfactual imperfect as a competitor to the traditional *bi*-conditional (BREU 2014: 340–343)
- Development of a morphosyntactic aspect opposition “imperfect : perfect” as a consequence of the loss of the aorist, according to a Romance diachronic constant that contradicts the overall Slavic development in the domain of these aspecto-temporal grammemes; dominance of the morphosyntactic opposition over the (traditionally Slavic) derivative aspectual opposition of “perfective : imperfective”; e.g. the imperfective perfect can never replace the imperfect, neither in its processive function, nor in its iterative and counterfactual functions (BREU 2003b; 2006; 2014)
- Emergence of the processive and imminentive aspectual periphrases, syntactically calqued on Romance patterns (BREU 2011: 171–172; BREU, BERGHAUS & SCHOLZE 2016: 108–109)
- Preservation and high productivity of the pluperfect; typologically interesting is the mode of expression through a particle of participial origin embedded in the auxiliary of the perfect (BREU 2011: 161–162; 2017: 56)
- Restructuring of the participial and reflexive passive and contact-induced development of a venitive passive (BREU & MAKAROVA 2019; BREU 2020a)

Syntactic adaptation (clitics, word order, doubling, etc.).

- Replacement of the *Wackernagel* position of the clitics (as the second word in the sentence) with the circumverbal position (BREU 2019a: 415–420)
- Postposition of attributes as opposed to pre-position, resulting in an opposition of contrastive vs. decorative function (Breu 2019a: 416–417)
- Doubling of stressed pronouns with the help of clitics, according to the Southern Italian model (BREU 2019a: 423–425)
- Optional adaptation of double negation to the norms of standard Italian (BREU 2019a: 420–423)
- Transformation of local relative clauses into prepositional phrases with the secondary preposition *di* ‘where’ + NOM according to local patterns (BREU 1996: 36–37)
- Complementation by the conjunction *ke ~ ka* borrowed from Italian *che* ‘that’ (PICCOLI 2005; BREU forthcoming)
- Relative clauses with the relative particle *ke ~ ka* borrowed from Italian *che* ‘that’ (BREU 2019b)
- Use of particles and pronouns to express partitivity, among other things, due to the alleged (but contestable) borrowing of the Italian partitive particle *ne* (BREU 2020b)

In principle, grammatical influence occurs only at the functional level, i.e. without the borrowing of grammatical morphemes. Only in the case of conjunctions and particles, which could also be attributed to the grammatical domain, is material borrowing observed. The basis of these developments are “the adaptation of the semantic structure” (contact-induced meaning extension, semantic calque) and “syntactic calque”. In some cases, even the preservation of an otherwise unproductive form in Slavic can be seen as a result of language contact (pluperfect, imperfect).¹

Despite its undoubtedly conservative elements, such as the preservation of a (reduced) case system, of the imperfect and pluperfect, of the paucal (BREU 2020, online 2) as well as of a volitional future, today’s Molise Slavic is in many points structurally closer to Italian than to standard Croatian. However, it is not simply a mixture with a greater or lesser degree of accordance with the one side or the other. Instead, a properly Molise Slavic grammatical system with independent and consolidated structures has established itself.

7. Literary documentation in Molise Slavic

As mentioned above, Molise Slavic is still used almost exclusively as an oral language. Exceptions to this are the occasional bilingual texts of local administrations (signposts and official forms) and attempts by individuals to form a literary language.



Photo 1: Bilingual signpost in the dialect of Acquaviva Collecroce (W. Breu)

¹ On the question of the evaluation of conservation, non-introduction, loss and addition of grammatical differentiations against the background of conservativeness and progressiveness in situations of language contact, see BREU (1994: 58–62). The Molise Slavic imperfect is affected by language contact in two ways, namely by means of its preservation in itself and through its relation to the aorist in the aforementioned substitution of the Slavic diachronic constant in this field by the Romance one.

They are basically limited to the respective dialect, without any tendency to establish a common standard, which poses problems of general acceptance, especially because of the different attitude to *Akanje* and some morphological and lexical peculiarities. Apart from this, general “illiteracy” in the minority language hinders the existence of a large number of readers already within the individual villages. Recent literary production is treated separately in Part II of this article, which refers to the specific dialect concerned; for a comprehensive presentation see BREU (2017b).

Molise Slavic (*молизско-славянский*) has been counted among the so-called “literary micro-languages” since DULIČENKO (1981) included it in his overview of Slavic micro-languages. In BREU (2018c) some examples from the early period of the written documentation of Molise Slavic in the 19th century were analysed, in particular passages from the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* and the Molise Slavic translation of a novella from Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Nominally, the Acquaviva dialect was used as a basis, but Dalmatian Slavisms, as well as free inventions ultimately led to artificial products in a language that had little to do with the current linguistic structure of the minority language. For today’s speakers of all three villages, these documents are completely incomprehensible, just as they probably were for the Slavs of Molise in the 19th century. A few literary attempts by foreigners (mostly Croats) did not improve the situation during that period.

Part II

Characteristics of the *Na-Našu* dialect of San Felice

The differences between the Molise Slavic dialects in the lexicon have already been dealt with in Part I of this presentation. Here we will limit ourselves to some grammatical peculiarities, namely the morphology of the DAT.SG.F, the distribution of the two modal futures and the imperfectivizing suffix. In addition, we will deal with the very few attempts at using this dialect in writing, which in contrast to the other two has not yet been codified in an extended dictionary.

The percentage of foreign words in the PANGLOSS corpus, which for San Felice amounts to 24.9% in total and 43.1% for nouns, differs little from the average indicated above for the Molise Slavic texts as a whole (BREU 2017a: 70). It should be remembered that in San Felice the relatively few remaining speakers are very old, as are the authors of the texts from this village in the PANGLOSS corpus. Thus, even this demographic peculiarity did not have perceptible consequences with regard to the Romance influence on the lexicon.

In contrast to the other two villages, there are no systematic bilingual signposts in the streets and squares of San Felice.

Extracts from the grammar of the San Felice dialect

In the dialect of San Felice the traditional ending *-i* of the DAT.SG.F has, in principle, been preserved, as it is lost only in very fast pronunciation. In this way, this dialect differs from that of Montemitro, where the complete loss of the traditional ending is observed, and also from the dialect of Acquaviva, presenting analogical substitution of the historical *-i* by the accusative ending *-u*. Examples for San Felice are: *ženi* ‘woman’, *materi* ‘mother’ DAT.SG.F from *žena* ‘woman’, *mat* ‘mother’. Just like in Acquaviva and unlike Montemitro, the formally merged functions of “place” and “motion in place” are both expressed by the accusative even in the *a*-declension. Unlike the dialect of Montemitro, in San Felice *Akanje* is applied to the short unstressed vowels *-o* and *-e*, although apparently less consistently than in Acquaviva.

In San Felice, the modal opposition between the de-obligative (necessitive) future and the future of probability has not yet been studied in depth. However, both forms are found here, too. On the basis of the PANGLOSS corpus it seems justified to assume that in San Felice we are faced with an intermediate situation between the other two dialects, namely a fairly clear opposition between the simple future of probability, formed with the clitic present of the auxiliary *tit* ‘to want’, and the de-obligative simple future, formed with the clitic present of the auxiliary *jimat* ‘to have, must’. While this situation corresponds to the modal simple futures of Acquaviva, the construction with the clitic imperfect of the auxiliary *jimat* is the only option for the future in the past. Consequently, like in Montemitro, the past lacks the modal opposition. In all, we get the following schematic examples: *ču pokj* ‘to go’ FUT.PROB.1SG and *mam pokj* FUT.NEC.1SG for the simple future, whereas for the future in the past only the construction *mahu pokj* FUT.PST.1SG is used, corresponding to the de-obligative future in the past of the Acquaviva dialect.

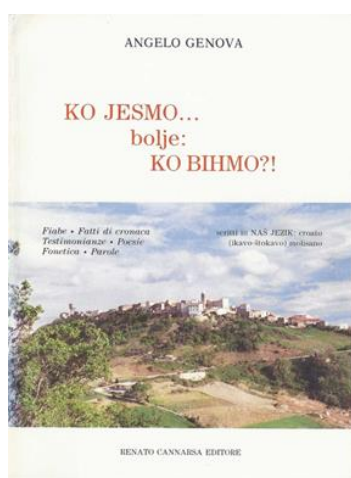
In addition to the traditional suffix *-iva*, the neologism *-ilja* is used as a productive imperfectivizing suffix in San Felice, e.g. *busat* ‘to push’ PFV => *busivat* IPFV, but *rivat* ‘arrive’ PFV => *riviljat* IPFV, just like in Montemitro but unlike Acquaviva, which has only *-iva*. But note that the use of *-ilja* is more restricted than in Montemitro, where we find, for example, *kupiljat* IPF, derived from *kupit* ‘to buy’ PFV, whereas in San Felice there is only *kupivat* like in Acquaviva.

Literary works in the dialect of San Felice

Very few *Na-Našu* texts have been published in writing in the San Felice dialect. However, this village has the merit of having opened the new era of Molise Slavic literature with a volume of short stories in the San Felice dialect published by Angelo GENOVA: *Ko jesmo... bolje: Ko bihmo?* ‘Who are we... or rather, who were we?’ (Vasto: Renato Cannarsa Editore 1990). Unlike the literary works published in Acquaviva and Montemitro, the texts in this collection do not have an Italian parallel text. Thus, the reader unfamiliar with the dialect of San Felice has to manage with the added short glossary. All linking metatexts,

including the grammatical introduction and some of the titles, are written exclusively in Italian.

Despite some Serbo-Croatisms, the author's intention to write in his own language, or rather his own dialect, is evident. The content consists of fables, historical accounts, anecdotes and traditional poems, stylistically arranged or written from scratch by the author himself. The spelling used in the text as a whole does not always follow fixed rules. The introduction entitled *Impariamo a leggere* 'Let's learn to read', written in Italian, is an attempt at spelling and pronunciation directed at the inhabitants of the village and shows Croatian inspiration, but the greater part of it is the work of the author's imagination. For a more detailed analysis of the written form used in this volume, see BREU (2017b: 206-208). However, a short passage of text might provide some insight (p. 89):

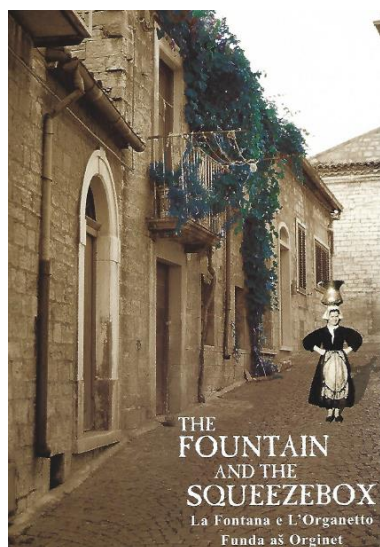


QUEI TRE E...

Biša nu votu na ljud velik velik e feram ke se uhitaša na kandun ga razbaša samo s rukami e, se tijaša, a ćinasa kana 'na prah. Za ova su ga uhitili zvat Spaccapietre.

Na dan je si reka: – Prohodam dane ude e ne poznajam nišče što je mala naduga iz oda. Mam si ga po' po svitom.

This collection could not, of course, contribute to a written standard of the Molise Slavic micro-language; on the one hand it remained isolated, and on the other the chosen orthography was too idiosyncratic, due in particular to the lack of differentiation between *i* and *j* and the phonetically unjustified differentiation between *ć* and *č*, to name but two problematic features. Nevertheless, it is to the author's credit that he broke new ground in the use of the San Felice dialect.



On the other hand, the author makes no effort to treat his dialect as part of a complex Molise Slavic community, but simply equates it with the other two, without considering any differences. This absolutisation of his own dialect is also symptomatic for the other villages and indicates a very weak interest in the formation of a common written standard.

John Felix CLISSA, an author of San Felice origin, has published a relatively large collection of texts entitled: *The Fountain and the Squeezebox -- La Fontana e L'Organetto - Funda aš Orginet* (West Perth: Picton Press 2001). This volume, in keeping with the author's intentions, is not a literary work as such. Ra-

ther, it consists of transcribed texts compiled from records of Molise Slavic emigrants to Western Australia. Note that around 2000 Slavs from Molise and their descendants live in this area, which means that it has more speakers than there are today in the three Molise Slavic villages in Italy. Emigration to Australia was one of the main reasons for the sharp demographic bend in the early 1950s.

However, the type of presentation, the selection and even the linking texts reveal a literary approach that goes beyond a purely documentary compilation. In any case, this publication, made accessible through parallel texts in English, has the merit of allowing the last witnesses of the dying dialect of San Felice to leave a trace of it in written form. But it should be added that not all the texts

come from speakers of the San Felice dialect, since other stories, especially from Acquaviva, are also strongly represented.



The cultural association *Comunità Croata del Molise “Luigi Zara”*, located in San Felice, edits an annual *Kalendarij* ‘calendar’ with texts in Molise Slavic. However, it contains little of the dialect of this village, since the texts published there consist mostly of republications extracted from literary or documentary works from Acquaviva Collecroce and only rarely from the other two villages. This is nevertheless an important initiative to bring the Molise Slavic micro-

language in written form into the homes and families of the few remaining speakers, thus increasing, as it were, the prestige of *Na-Nasu* as a whole.



Photo 2: Panorama of San Felice del Molise, seen from Acquaviva Collecroce (W. Breu)

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