

1. The Language and Community

VLASHKI/ZHEYANSKI OR ISTRO-ROMANIAN (ISO639-3: RUO) IS A SEVERELY ENDANGERED EASTERN ROMANCE LANGUAGE SPOKEN ON THE ISTRIAN PENINSULA IN CROATIA



| | Šušnjevia Area | Žejane | Total |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------|
| | VLASHKI | ZHEYANSKI | |
| Total village population (2011) | 276 | 130 | 406 |
| Fluent and active speakers | 75 (27%) | 45 (34%) | 120 |

- The **Vlashki** dialect—in the village of **Šušnjevia** and four more dispersed villages around it; the **Zheyanski** dialect—in the village of **Žejane**
- Villages losing population—and speakers—for more than a hundred years. Population now less than one-fifth of what it was in 1945.
- Most fluent and active speakers **more than 50 years old**.
- There are **no monolingual speakers**.
- A significant number of speakers live in **New York City** and the metro area and outside of the native villages in Croatia.

2. Goals

Omu će ân-r-asâ živiljenje n-av fakut bire, je-j ka ši fântâra, mušâta ši dânboka, ma fâr de âpa.

A person who hasn't done any good in their life is like a well that's beautiful and deep but without any water.

- Comprehensive documentation of a severely endangered language as it is spoken today by middle-aged and elderly speakers; inclusion of some previously collected materials into the corpus
- Creating a record of the community's culture and everyday history by means of oral history
- Making documentation results accessible, useful and interesting to the community members
- Raising awareness about the value of the language and engaging community members in actions toward its documentation and preservation

3. Projects

Text Collection and Digital Archiving of Istro-Romanian

- Funded by the Endangered Language Fund, 2004-2005
- Presentation of the project to the community members in New York City; oral history interviews in New York City

Preservation of the Vlashki and Zheyanski Language

- Funded by government institutions in Croatia: Ministry of Culture, Istrian Region, Primorsko-goranska region, County of Kršan and County of Matulji, 2007-present
- Community oriented and collaborative work (see section 4.2.)

Documentation of the Vlashki/Zheyanski Language,

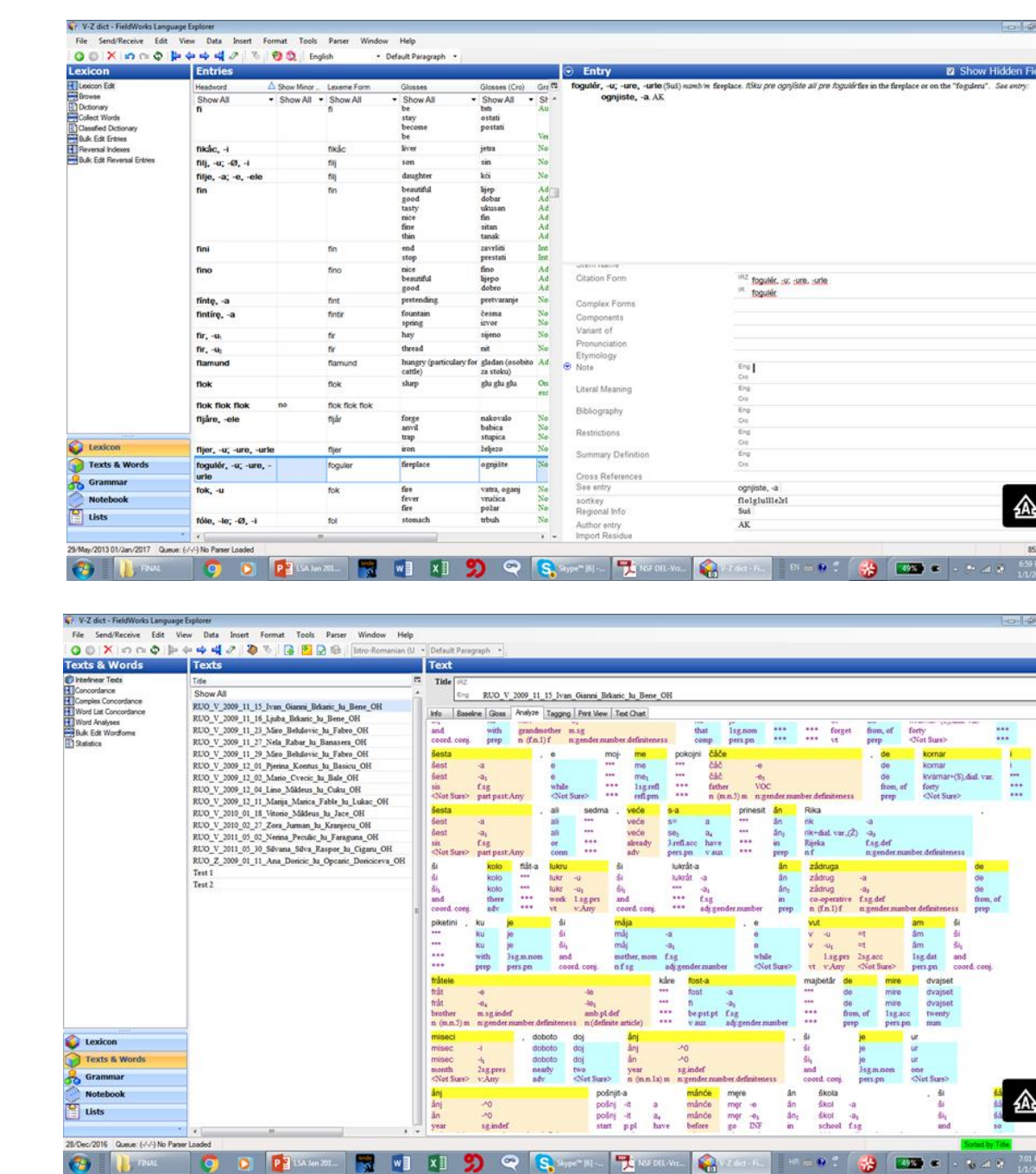
- Funded by the National Science Foundation (#1160696), 2012-2017
- Language documentation work (see section 4.1.)

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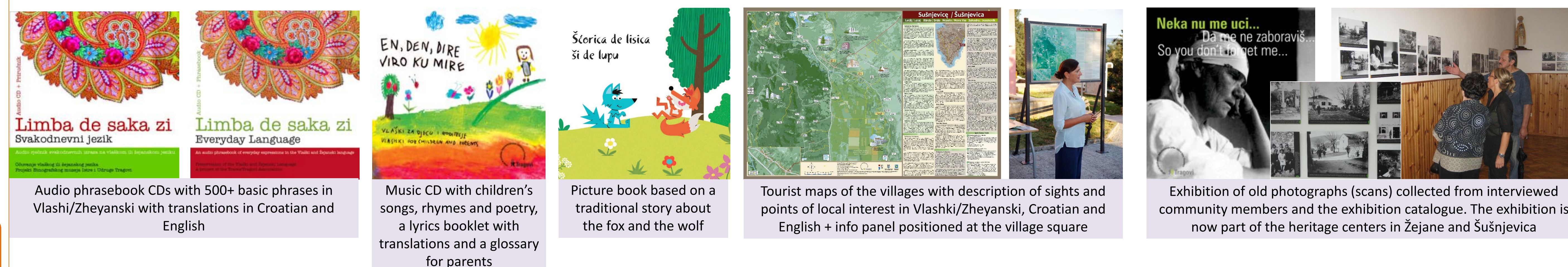
4. Results and materials

4.1. DOCUMENTATION: LANGUAGE CORPUS, DICTIONARY, DESCRIPTION

- AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDINGS:** Oral histories and some skill demonstrations (ca. 75 hrs)
- TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION OF THE RECORDINGS:** Orthographic transcription, translation into Croatian and English
- OLD TEXTS DIGITIZATION AND TRANSLATION:** Two untranslated text collections from 1920s and 1930s keyed in and translated into Croatian and English; to be imported and annotated in FLEx and added to the corpus of modern texts
- ANNOTATION OF TEXTS IN FLEx:** Morphosyntactic annotation of the transcribed/translated texts; building the parser alongside the dictionary; in progress
- DICTIONARY IN FLEx:** Conversion and import into FLEx of an existing Vlashki/Zheyanski-Croatian dictionary, based on texts collected in the 1960s, and its expansion with new headwords, senses and examples based on modern texts; translation into English; creation of a bidirectional trilingual dictionary; in progress
- SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE SHIFT:** Sociolinguistic questionnaire study of language use patterns and attitudes in Croatia and the New York City
- LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION:** Syntactic description based on texts and elicitation; in progress



4.2. PRESERVATION: COMMUNITY ORIENTED ACTIVITIES, LEARNING MATERIALS, PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS



5. Some Lessons and Conclusions

- Community-oriented and collaborative documentation is a large and complex project. You will need to motivate, engage and/or manage many different people--community members or others. Your work requires a variety of academic and social skills beyond linguistics. It also requires a very considerable amount of time.
- Fieldwork can be invasive and minority communities are particularly sensitive. Establish trust through commitment, generosity, modesty and patience, and by keeping your promises. Community-oriented and collaborative language documentation requires long-term commitment.
- Be mindful not to impose your own values and beliefs on the community members. Respect speakers choices about their language use and their identities. Work on sharing knowledge, increasing awareness by doing it and thereby providing individuals and communities with more choices to make on their own. Promote bilingualism.
- Many products of language documentation and community-oriented and collaborative work are still not appropriately valued by the institutions that academic linguists work for. This is at odds with the skills, effort and a very substantial time-commitment required to produce them. This significant problem is currently discussed in the academic community but has not been resolved.