

Resian

(1,697 words)

The Slovene dialect of Resia (Sn *rezijansko*) is spoken in northeastern Italy. An innovative system of centralized vowels and archaic traits such as the preservation of imperfect forms makes it stand out among Slovene dialects. Other specific traits, such as the conjunctive, are language-contact induced. The dialect is increasingly used in writing, but no generally accepted orthography exists.

Geography and demography

Resian (*rezijansko*) is a Slovene dialect that is traditionally spoken in two adjacent valleys in northeastern Italy, on the border with Slovenia. Together, these two valleys make up the municipality of Resia (Comune di Resia in the province of Udine, in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region). The northernmost and largest valley, Val Resia, has its entrance on the west, where the main artery connecting Friuli with Carinthia (Kärnten, Austria) runs, whereas on the east, it is closed off by Mount Canin (2,587 m). It contains the larger part of the population, distributed over several villages. The southernmost and smallest valley, Valle dell'Uccea, has a natural entrance on the east, communicating with Slovenia and eastern Friuli. It is only sparsely populated, with a single hamlet.

The population is in continuous decline with 1,318 inhabitants in 1991, 1,285 in 2001, and 1,091 in 2011. In 2016, the municipality had 1,033 inhabitants, San Giorgio and Oseacco being the most populous villages. The majority of the population speaks and/or understands Resian, with the highest percentages to be found in the eastern villages of Oseacco and Stolvizza.

Language geography and affiliation

Resian is a transitional dialect, sharing older traits with the *koroško* dialect group and a set of younger traits with the *primorsko* dialect group of Slovene (Ramovš 1935: 30–31; Vermeer 1993: 120–123). Internally, four main local varieties exist, each corresponding to one of the four historical *comuni* (until 1805) of San Giorgio, Gniva, Oseacco, and Stolvizza, with a fifth, younger local variety centered on Prato. The varieties of San Giorgio, Gniva, and Prato (Western Resian) share certain traits that set them apart from the varieties of Oseacco and Stolvizza (Eastern Resian; *Steenwijk* 1999: 32–35).

To the east and south, Resian borders on other Slovene dialects, *bovško* and *tersko*. Some shared traits can be observed especially with *tersko* (Ramovš 1935: 35–36). To the immediate west and north, Carnian dialects of Friulian are spoken, and moving farther north, in Val Canale, native speakers of the *ziljsko* dialect of Slovene and of the Carinthian dialect of Bavarian are present. At present, all inhabitants of Resia are fluent in Italian, and knowledge of Friulian is widespread.

Phonology

The accented vowel system consists of *i, e, ε, a, ə, o, u* plus a separate system consisting of the centralized vowels *ï, ë, ö, ü*, the articulatory specifics of which are still not fully understood (all forms cited from Gniva, unless stated otherwise). In the past, impressionistic terms like Ru *těmnyj* 'dark', Ge *luftefüllt* 'breathy', or Sn *zasopel* 'muffled' have been applied to these vowels. Stolvizza adds *ə* (from Sn **-i* and **-r*), Oseacco adds *ä* (from Sn **-à, *ə, and *r*), and San Giorgio adds both *ə* (from Sn **-i, *ə, and *r*) and *ä* (from Sn **-à*). Phonetically, the Stolvizza *ə* is realized as [ə̠], whereas the San Giorgio *ə* is realized as [ə̠]. Also, the realization of San Giorgio *ï, ü* differs sharply from their realization elsewhere. There are no tone or length oppositions.

In the consonant system, the retention of *ć* from CS **tj*, e.g., *nuć* 'night' deserves mention, paired with a secondary *đ* (*dat* 'to put' from **dĕjati*), whereas CS **dj* yielded *j*, e.g., *mĕja* 'border'. Both *ć* and *đ* also occur in loans from Friulian (*ćantun* 'corner', *đujat* 'to play'). Furthermore, *j* may also derive from Sn **lj* (*pöjĕ* 'field'). An opposition between *v* and *w* exists, e.g., *dĕvat* 'nine' and *diwat* 'to put'. The velar voiced stop *g* has been preserved in San Giorgio (*glawa* 'head', *hwalit* 'to praise'), whereas elsewhere it has become a fricative, which eventually merged with *h* (Gniva *hlawa, hwalit*), or was dropped altogether, along with *h* (Stolvizza *lawa, walit*). Word-final and preconsonantal *l* is generally preserved as a lateral, apart from Oseacco, where it became a bilabial glide.

[Article Table of Contents](#)

[Geography and demography](#)

[Language geography and affiliation](#)

[Phonology](#)

[Morphology](#)

[Syntax](#)

[Loan morphology](#)

[Written Resian](#)

[Bibliography](#)

Morphology

The article (definite *te, ta, tö* and indefinite *dan, na, nö*) constitutes a word class in its own right. As to grammatical categories, outside the nominative/accusative cases of nouns, the dual is marked rarely, and the supine is a separate form for only a handful of monosyllabic verbs (INF *jěst*, SUP *jist* ‘to eat’). Also, the indefinite form of the adjective in attributive position, synthetic comparatives or adverbs, and gerund forms are rare. In nouns, plural neuter desinences are being substituted with masculine and feminine desinences, especially in Western Resian, e.g., NOM/ACC.PL *jabalka/jabalke*, GEN.PL *jabalk/jabalkuw*, DAT.PL *jabalkën/jabalkan*, INS.PL *jabalki*, LOC.PL *jabalkëh/jabalkah* ‘apple’. In Gniva, neuter substantives often agree with masculine endings, e.g., *dan zilëni jabulku* ‘a green apple’.

However, the set of clitic personal pronouns also includes a nominative form (e.g., 3.SG *an, na, tö*; 3.PL *ni, ne*). Its development and use in clitic doubling, e.g., *jüdi ni niso ha mëli wüm* ‘people were not mad at him’, are probably modeled on Friulian (Benacchio 2002: 27–30). Among the verbal forms, a conjunctive, expressed by imperative forms (*bašta, da sa pleši* ‘it is sufficient that one dance’), stands out. The imperfect forms are frequently used to express a conditional, e.g., *ba an bëšë bil jo dušal, jo wbuwaše* ‘if he would have caught up with her, he would have killed her’. The 2nd-person singular desinences distinguish between singular (-š), plural/dual (-ta), and a courtesy form (-të).

Because of regressive assimilation to the accented vowel, to which mid vowels in Western Resian are subject, inflected and derived forms show a large array of alternations, e.g., for NOM.SG *wotrök* ‘child’ the forms with desinential stress GEN.SG *wotrokä*, INS.SG *wotrokon*, ACC.PL *wotroke*, but DAT/LOC.SG *wutrukü*, NOM.PL *wutrucə*; and the diminutive *wutručəc* (all forms San Giorgio). These alternations are a part of the phenomenon that is traditionally called “Resian vowel harmony,” which served as the basis for Baudouin the Courtenay’s (Boduën-de-Kurtené 1875: 118–121) “Turanian theory” on the partially non-Slavic origin of Resian, a theory convincingly refuted by Ramovš (1935: 31–32).

Syntax

Among the syntactic peculiarities, models influenced by language contact stand out. The prepositions *za* and *čenča* regularly combine with the infinitive, e.g., *somö bili pa hulöws za vïdit televižjun* ‘we were even eager to watch television’, cf. It *eravamo anche ghiotti per guardare la TV* and *čenča mët volontat an šal tu-w cirkuw* ‘without wanting to, he went to church’, cf. It *senz’aver voglia è andato in chiesa*. The infinitive can also be used as a substantive, e.g., *kaki dan lipi pučet tu bil* ‘what a nice rest that was’, cf. It *che bel riposare che era*. The negated imperative can be formed by *ni stuj*, followed by the infinitive, e.g., *ni stujtë se fidat tet dö po ti poti* ‘don’t you dare go down that road’, cf. It *non fidarti andare per quella strada*. In main clauses, the construction *da* plus a conjunctive conveys an optative meaning, e.g., *da buh wan daj paš* ‘may God give you peace’, cf. It *che Dio vi dia pace*. In contexts that allow for a choice between perfective and imperfective present forms, the perfective is in Resian clearly less frequent if compared to standard Slovene (Pila 2017).

Loan morphology

As can be expected, the lexicon is rich in loans from Friulian and Italian. Whereas adjectives remain indeclined (*na nobil hiša* ‘a noble house’), borrowed nouns and verbs are integrated in the morphological system. Thus, feminine nouns ending in a consonant in Friulian belong to the Slavic *i*-declination, e.g., NOM/ACC.SG *racjun*, GEN/DAT/LOC.SG *racjuni*, INS.SG *racjuno* from Friulian *razion* ‘prayer’, and now make up the majority of nouns belonging to this class. Sometimes, infixes are used to adapt loans, e.g., NOM/ACC.SG *libri*, GEN.SG *librina* (Stolvizza) from Friulian *libri* ‘book’, *albergo*, LOC.SG *alberginu* from It *albergo* ‘hotel’ and *difindinat* from Friulian *difindi* ‘to protect’.

Written Resian

Written Resian is known from the 18th century onward. Until well into the 20th century, its use was confined to religious texts, produced in manuscripts by clerics either of local origin (*Rez’janskij katichizis I*, 18th c., *Rez’janskij katichizis II*, 1797) or, more frequently, native to the *tersko* and *nadiško* dialect areas (*Passio domini ec.*, second quarter of the 19th c.; *Christjanske uzhilo*, 1845–1846, 1850; *To kristjanske učilo po rozoankeh*, 1927). Except for the latter, which was the first printed book in Resian, these texts are linguistically all in one way or another based on the Gniva dialect (*Steenwijk* 2003). From the 1970s on, a proliferation of nonreligious texts can be observed, each written in the native local dialect and individual orthography of the author. Starting from the 1990s, standardization efforts are supported by the municipality of Resia and have resulted in two competing orthographies, one based on a so-called Slovene solution and one based on a so-called Italian solution. The main difference between the two is the representation of the voiced dental sibilant and the unvoiced dental affricate, <z> and <c> as in *zec* ‘hare’ in the former and <ś> and <z> as in *sez* ‘hare’ in the latter. The function of present-day written Resian is mainly symbolic, affirmative of a Resian identity as distinct but, at the same time, concomitant with other identities. This explains the persistence of competing orthographies. As a means of practical written communication, standard Italian is the natural choice, whereas standard Slovene is completely absent.

List of abbreviations:

SUP – supine

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Cite this page

Steenwijk, Han, "Resian", in: *Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online*, Editor-in-Chief Marc L. Greenberg. Consulted online on 14 January 2021 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-6229_ESLO_COM_032136>
First published online: 2020