

# LINGUISTIC ODDITIES

*By George Plohn, a linguist and a translator*

Let's start with a frontal attack: ***Strč prst skrz krk*** is a Czech and Slovak tongue-twister, literally meaning "stick your finger through your throat".

The sentence is well known for being a semantically and syntactically sound clause without a single vowel, the nucleus of each syllable being a syllabic 'r', a common feature amongst many Slavic languages. It is often used as an example of such a phrase when learning Czech or Slovak as a foreign language.

There are plenty of such words without vowels in these two languages. Other examples of words of this type are ***scvrnkls***, ***čtvrthrst***, and ***čtvrtsmrš***.

Or if you want to be hit with a longer narrative, why not this Czech vowelless sentence "***Škrt plch z mlh Brd pln skvrn z mrv prv hrd scvrnkl z brzd skrz trs chrp v krs vrb mls mrch srn čtvrthrst zrn***". Just don't ask me what it means...

To ease your predicament, here is a little help:

pronounce 'č' as 'ch' like in the word chat, and 'š' as 'sh' like in the word ship.

As the saying goes, "try it, you'll like it..."

Well..., I tried it, but I didn't like it. That's why I was never meant to be a Czech...nor a Slovak for that matter.

To listen how it really sounds, insert this tongue-twister on the Internet, and click on 'listen'. But after that, run away to avoid a headache...

As for myself, I better go back to my own trusted languages, one of which is French, and let's read very fast this tongue-twister: "*un chasseur sachant chasser sans son chien!*", which translates as: 'a hunter who knows how to hunt knows how to hunt without his dog.'

Or this one: "*si six saucisses sont six sous, six cent saucisses sont six-cent sous*", which translates as: 'if six sausages cost six pennies, six hundred will cost six hundred pennies.'

You want a Hungarian one? Here is a stupid one (if you understand Hungarian): "*Láttam szőrös hörcsögöt, éppen szörpöt szörcsögött, ha a hörcsög szörpöt szörcsög rátörnek a hörcsög görcsök.*"

Translation: 'I saw a hairy hamster, right now was slurping juice; if the hamster slurps juice, the other hamsters will gang up on him.'

Now one in my native Romanian (this is a weird one!): "*Şase sute şaizeci şi şase de saşi în şase sute şaizeci şi şase de saci.*"

Translation: 'Six hundred sixty-six Saxons in six hundred sixty-six sacks.'

And one in German: "*Fischers Fritz fischt frische Fische.*"

Translation: 'The Fischer's son Fritz is fishing for fresh fish.'

For Hebrew I chose a short one, but equally tongue twisting when you reading it very fast: "*Bakbuk bli p'kak.*"

Translation: 'Bottle without stopper.'

And why not one in Latin (by now I am quite exhausted...):

*"In mari meri miri mori muri necesse est."*

Translation: 'In a sea of delightful wine a mouse may only die.'

Finally, to close this vicious circle, let's go back to our good old English language and let's say very fast this sentence: "*the seething sea ceaseth and thus the seething sea sufficeth us.*"

Or one even more intricate:

*"She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore.*

*The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure.*

*For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore*

*Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.*

No translation needed here, just do it!!!" Faster...faster...

And then old-timers like you may remember that Danny Kaye recorded in 1951 a Sylvia Fine song titled "*Tongue Twisters*".

Those who have a computer, may log in to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG-yweOWNBY> to listen to the unforgettable Danny Kaye singing "Tongue Twisters".

And in the 1952 film *Singin' in the Rain* Gene Kelly uses tongue-twisters while learning proper diction so he can make the transition from silent films to "talkies" turning one of them ("*Moses Supposes His Toeses Are Roses*") into a song and dance number along with Donald O'Connor.

Having said all this, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for enduring this horrendous linguistic torture...Just blame it on *George*, he sits at table 7, but he has six female body guards, so be careful.