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**WHO ARE THE ЋАЦИ? AN EXERCISE IN COMPILING A SOCIAL MEDIA CORPUS  
TO DESCRIBE A PROTEST NEOLOGISM**

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**Abstract**

During the student protests in Serbia, playful use of language has been at the forefront of slogans/chants, protest posters and online memes and discourse, but few of them are as linguistically interesting and changing as *ћаци/ćaci*. Initially born out of a misspelling of *ћаци/đaci* (Srb. ‘pupils’) on a graffiti that went viral, *ćaci* has taken a grammatical and semantic life of its own. Despite its popularity among speakers, linguists and academics alike, linguistic descriptions of *ćaci* are as of yet on the level of sketches based on manual observation and analyses of social media, protest signage and protest discourse by linguists, such that a corpus linguistic approach to investigating *ćaci*’s grammatical and semantic properties has been missing. The pilot *Ćaci Corpus Alpha* has thus been compiled based on Instagram posts, comments and replies seeking to answer the questions: Who is *ćaci*, and what are its grammatical properties?

**Keywords:** corpus linguistics; social media corpora; Serbian student protests; *ćaci*.

**1. Introduction**

Among the many slogans and inventive neologisms arising from the student protests in Serbia, the word *ћаци/ćaci* stands out for both its accidental origin and its virulent spread through offline and online discourse. It began as a misspelling of *ћаци/đaci* (IPA: /t͡ɕãtsiː/) (Srb. ‘pupils’) on a graffiti, but then took the internet by storm, spawning memes, cultural artifacts, as well as attracting serious intellectual and academic interest.

Yet, despite its cultural prominence and political significance, the linguistic description of *ćaci* is as of yet still on the level of sketches by linguists in online talks, brief essays or as part of analyses of protest discourse and protest signage (e.g. Ajdžanović et al. 2025; Ilić 2025; Krcić and Timić 2025; Lalić-Krstin and Silaški 2025). This article seeks to address that gap by taking a quantitative corpus linguistic approach to describe the usage of *ćaci*, drawing on Instagram data to explore its meanings, declensions, and derived word forms. Given its originator noun *đak* (m sg) / *đaci* (m pl), it is to be discussed if *ćaci* follows the paradigm of its originator, or the paradigm of masculine nouns ending in *-i*? Given the playful nature of online and protest discourse, are new word forms being produced? What does *ćaci* mean and who does, and who can it refer to? Acknowledging the fact that it originates from a noun that is grammatically masculine plural, does *ćaci* undergo change when referring to various referents, e.g. when referring to a man, do speakers rely on the originator noun *đak*'s grammatical gender? Do they form a feminine when referring to a woman?

This article provides a brief analysis of *ćaci* along these lines with the help of a social media-based corpus compiled in June 2025.

## 2 The origin of *ђаџи* – its meanings and word forms since January 2025

Very early on during the blockades of faculties and school strikes, anonymous spraypainted a red graffiti onto the “Jovan Jovanović Zmaj” Grammar School in Novi Sad on 22 January 2025.<sup>1</sup> The author likely meant to write *Ђаџи у школу* (“Pupils [back] to school”) as a reprimand to the protesting students, but misspelled *ђаџи* (Lat. Srb. *đaci*, ‘pupils’) as *ђаџи* (Lat. Srb. *ćaci*), a non-existent Serbian word.

The error quickly gained traction online, inspiring memes and protest signs both in Serbia and abroad. Of course, the memes and protest signs with *ćaci* attracted attention from journalists, academics, and linguists, as it was suddenly featured everywhere and initial observations already showed very interesting findings about its meanings and word forms.

Even though *ćaci* came from *đaci*, ‘pupils’, a plural form (*đak* m sg, *đaci* m pl), it was used as both singular and plural noun, as well as both common and proper

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<sup>1</sup> “Nepismeni autor grafitu poručio učenicima u Jovinoj gimnaziji – Ćaci u školu”, 22.01.2025, retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from <https://www.021.rs/story/Novi-Sad/Vesti/399530/Nepismeni-autor-grafta-porucio-ucenicima-u-Jovinoj-gimnaziji-Caci-u-skolu.html>.

noun (with non-capitalized and capitalized spelling respectively). It furthermore possessed different referents, and initial observations showed deviations from the originator noun's declension paradigm.

### 2.1 *Ćaci's meanings – pre- and post-Ćacilend*

The linguistics podcast *Bliski susreti jezične vrste* ('Close encounters of the linguistic kind') and linguist Vesna Lompar pointed out how *ćaci* was used to refer to four different referents: to the anonymous graffiti author (as *Ćaci*, in the singular, as a proper noun, capitalized), to bad students as such, to regime-loyalists antagonizing the students, as well as to the blockading students in a humorous and ironic tone (all of which as *ćaci*, in the plural, common noun, non-capitalized and as will be shown further below, with various declined forms).<sup>2</sup> For a while, these different meanings and associated sentiments of *ćaci* coexisted, but the meaning and emotional charge seem to have solidified into the negative with the establishment of so-called *Ćacilend*. In order to understand this solidification, an explanation of what *Ćacilend* is, and who resides there, is in order.

*Ćacilend* is the derisive label given to a camp of "students who want to study" which appeared in front of the national assembly roughly ten days ahead of the protest 15 March 2025. However, these were unlikely merely students protesting, since the residents of the camp were well past the age of regular students, wearing dark clothing (hoodies, masks) and behaving thuggishly and aggressively toward journalists and onlookers.<sup>3</sup> While most avoided interactions with journalists, one individual came forth as the spokesperson of the camp – medicine student Miloš Pavlović. These individuals were promptly labeled *ćaci*, and Pavlović as the head

<sup>2</sup> "Epizoda #239 Jezik protesta", 17.02.2025, relevant segment at 1:18:03–1:22:50, retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZPV0NYWo2M>; "MMSJ 2025 – Tribina 'Ćacima ćeš me, đacima ću te'", 19.03.2025, presentation originally held 03.03.2025, relevant segment at 00:02:28–00:07:07. Retrieved October 10<sup>th</sup> 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFKnDoo>.

<sup>3</sup> While it is so that different individuals with different motives have come to reside in the encampment, it is very unlikely a camp of merely protesting students. Observations of the public and the genuine unease locals felt around *Ćacilend* in March 2025 aside, the independent investigative media in Serbia, KRIK, published in November 2025 a report in which they exposed the identities and criminal backgrounds of select *Ćacilend* inhabitants (retrieved January 16<sup>th</sup> 2026 from <https://www.krik.rs/caciji-cuvari-partije/>). Since the initial draft of this article, the Serbian Association of Independent Electronic Media published a chronology of attacks

Ćaci. With this comes a new wave of memes in which Ćacilend features as a zoo and its inhabitants as a novel species (*ćaci vulgaris*), but more elaborate cultural products were created also: two indie games featuring Ćaci (*Ćaci spasava Ćacilend*, ‘Ćaci saves Ćacilend’<sup>4</sup> and *Dojajilo je*, ‘It’s egg-nough’<sup>5</sup>) and a rap-song by the band *Beogradski sindikat* (*Mojne da si Ćaci*, ‘Don’t be a Ćaci’<sup>6</sup>). Unlike the other language games and slogans, Ćaci drew attention of public intellectuals who see in it more than just a meme.<sup>7</sup> Ćaci spread enough across the internet that it found its way into LLMs and Google Translate, which translate it along the lines of ‘jerk’ or ‘cad’.<sup>8</sup>

Ćaci’s negative associations seem to have prompted the regime into action, as the president attempted to re-take and change the meaning of Ćaci already in April 2025. In a video on his Instagram account, the president states how Ćaci

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against media workers in January 2026 which count at least 25 instances of verbal and physical intimidations and attacks (retrieved January 16th 2026 from <https://bezbedni-novinari.mp-anetl.app/storage/files/documents/hronologija-napada-u-pionirskom-parku-2025.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> In *Ćaci spasava Ćacilend*, the player embodies Miloš Pavlović and runs away from Nemanja Šarović, journalist of KTV Televizija, who during the height of the Ćacilend encampment interviewed its residents daily. The goal for the player is to run and collect sandwiches (symbolic for the government buying loyalty with free food), while avoiding tractors (symbolic for the farmers supporting the student revolution) and busses (symbolic for the busses the president allegedly organizes to chauffeur supporters from distant parts of Serbia). Retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from <https://flowlab.io/game/play/2735581>.

<sup>5</sup> In *Dojajilo je*, the player throws eggs on individuals from Serbian political and public life as well as individuals known from the context of the Ćaci, e.g. Pavlović. The game’s custom soundtrack has only one lyric: *Ko ne skače, taj je Ćaci* (‘Who doesn’t jump is a Ćaci’), a protest slogan used to motivate protesters into jumping together. Retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from <https://koneskace.itch.io/dojajilo-je>.

<sup>6</sup> In the song the Ćaci are government-loyalist criminals who are stupid and smell bad, such that ‘What a disaster it is if a mother’s child is a Ćaci’. Retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8GJaT9Ruck&list=RDk8GJaT9Ruck&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8GJaT9Ruck&list=RDk8GJaT9Ruck&start_radio=1).

<sup>7</sup> Jergović, Miljenko. “Što nam znači riječ Ćaci, i postoje li među nama u Hrvatskoj Ćaciji?”, 29.03.2025, <https://www.jergovic.com/petak-cetrnaesti/sto-nam-znaci-rijec-caci-i-postoje-li-i-medu-nama-u-hrvatskoj-caciji/>; Mladenović, Ivica. “Interpelacija naroda i klasna scena Ćacilenda: ogledi o ideološkoj fantazmi ‘ćaka’”, 31.03.2025, <https://www.noviplamen.net/glavna/interpelacija-naroda-i-klasna-scena-cacilenda-ogledi-o-ideolosfantazmi-ćaka/>, all retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Google Translate aptly and adeptly translates the occurrences of Ćaci in the lyrics to the aforementioned rap song as *cad*, ‘a man who behaves badly or dishonestly, especially to women.’

means ‘freedom’ and it “certainly sounds better than nazi.”<sup>9</sup> He further stated that he too is a ćaci while wearing, and later distributing a t-shirt with the print *I ja sam ćaci* (‘I am also a ćaci’) at a pro-government rally organized in April 2025.<sup>10</sup> A recent song by the previously unknown band *Beogradski kolektiv* (*Bolje da si ćaci*, ‘Better be a ćaci’) seems to be another such attempt at reinterpretation.<sup>11</sup>

When going through memes with ćaci, it seems like in this post-Ćacilend timeline the previous referents have disappeared and are replaced by the inhabitants of the camp and their famous spokesperson Pavlović. This change of meaning was noted also in analyses of protest signage: Krcić and Timić (2025: 52) note how speakers have shifted from the previous meaning of ‘illiterate regime supporter’ to naming the residents of Ćacilend, while Ilić (2025: 527) notes the same and suggests it might be due to the establishment of Ćacilend, but maintains a larger quantitative study would be necessary to confirm. Linguist Pavle Ćosić agrees with this solidified meaning as he provides a to-the-point definition of post-Ćacilend ćaci in his brief essay as follows: 1. members of the so-called pupils and students during the student and people’s protests in Serbia 2024–25; 2. primitive, uncouth; 3. hooligan.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “Dan studenata u Srbiji. Vučić u majici ‘I ja sam Ćaci’ poslao poruku studentima: ‘Želim samo poručiti koliko vam se divim.’”, 04.04.2025, retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from [https://net.hr/danas/svijet/aleksandar-vucic-u-videoporuci-nosio-majicu-i-ja-sam-caci-i-poslao-poruku-studentima-3fd682b8-1138-11f0-8009-5aa096cf6e8e?u\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR76Wr5gvG-MWkCO\\_r-kha6wLfy2ZdaxNcjQR-W32yj1\\_wo\\_Zv\\_JZBZ\\_yDpg\\_aem\\_YjC0DbYVSKAJKik\\_zR2Jcg#Echobox=1743761347](https://net.hr/danas/svijet/aleksandar-vucic-u-videoporuci-nosio-majicu-i-ja-sam-caci-i-poslao-poruku-studentima-3fd682b8-1138-11f0-8009-5aa096cf6e8e?u_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR76Wr5gvG-MWkCO_r-kha6wLfy2ZdaxNcjQR-W32yj1_wo_Zv_JZBZ_yDpg_aem_YjC0DbYVSKAJKik_zR2Jcg#Echobox=1743761347).

<sup>10</sup> In the Live-Stream by Nemanja Šarović it is shown how people at the rally on 12 April 2025 received t-shirts with that slogan. Retrieved January 15<sup>th</sup> 2026 from <https://www.youtube.com/live/WKXRHkiX1WY>.

<sup>11</sup> The AI-generated music video portrays the student protesters as divisors of the Serbian people, while being ćaci is “better than being evil” and ćaci is equated with Serbia (the chorus being “Ćaci, ćaci, ćaci, Serbia”). In the song, it is the ćaci who want to work while the blockading students are “destroying the home” and “creating chaos”. Retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwniek2nfmI&list=RDPwniek2nfmI&\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwniek2nfmI&list=RDPwniek2nfmI&_radio=1).

<sup>12</sup> “Пуна школа ћака, ниоткуда ћаци”, date not provided, retrieved October 10<sup>th</sup> from [https://www.reci.org.rs/2025/07/03/caci-cosic/?fbclid=IwdGRjcANTtC9jbGNrA1O0KQWV4dG-4DYWVtAjExAAEejtTYVrDr0xNSoHAn84OqZJEz\\_QAPdF\\_K5T6eAVEjAeQmxM-27573ijZ93s2w\\_aem\\_RzYzLFh9l2gb1F7d1SCSWA](https://www.reci.org.rs/2025/07/03/caci-cosic/?fbclid=IwdGRjcANTtC9jbGNrA1O0KQWV4dG-4DYWVtAjExAAEejtTYVrDr0xNSoHAn84OqZJEz_QAPdF_K5T6eAVEjAeQmxM-27573ijZ93s2w_aem_RzYzLFh9l2gb1F7d1SCSWA).

In connection with ćaci's meanings and meaning shift, stylistic and discourse analyses demonstrate how ćaci seem to stand in clear opposition to the blockading students, each side loaded with meaning: Krcić and Timić (2025: 48–50) show how ćaci (who are uneducated, rough, morally inferior) appear as opposed to đaci/students (who are educated, kind, morally pure or superior) in protest signage, while Ajdžanović et al. (2025: 194) show how the (frequently humorous) substitution of the letter 'đ' with the letter 'ć' in words signals "the absence of learnedness, education and culture" as well as "belonging or association with the regime". In their discourse analysis, Lalić-Krstin and Silaški (2025: 147–148) demonstrated how ćaci is used in protest signage to highlight "the perceived inadequacies of regime supporters" as well as being used as a tool of exclusion.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 Ćaci's word forms – double declension paradigm and derived forms

While writers and linguistic observers of ćaci seem to agree on its meaning, its wordforms (declension and derivative word formations) have so far been only sketched out. Already in March, Lompar gave the observation how ćaci can be a personal noun (capital Ć, referring to the graffiti author). Its pronunciation is different from the originator noun (from *đak* to *Ćak*), and so is its declension paradigm, as it follows the template for animate masculine nouns ending in -I (e.g., *Zoki*, *Gari*, or *naci*, 'nazi'). For ćaci as a common noun she gives no description of declension paradigms.

In post-Ćaciland, only linguist Pavle Ćosić published a longer but still brief analysis of the declension, positing a double declension paradigm of ćaci as a general noun: in singular, it follows animated masculine nouns ending in -i, while in plural, it possesses both the -i template and the pattern of its originator *đak*, each

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<sup>13</sup> Beyond these cited works, a lot of research has been and is being conducted on various aspects of the student protests, e.g. protest signage, social media use and (self-)representation and public discourse. However, these are still in the making so the interested reader is kindly pointed towards the books of abstracts (of 50+ papers) for the conference "Studentski protesti 2024/25: BloKADA, ako ne SADA?" held in Belgrade November 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> 2025 (Backović et al. 2025), as well as select papers in the book of abstracts for the conference „Popularna kultura, folklor, komunikacija“ held in Belgrade December 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> 2025 (Stajić 2025). In the area of researching protest signage, two valuable contributions stand out: the Zenodo-archive of protest signage by Marković et al. (2025) as well as the volunteer-driven project *protestografija*, available at <https://protestografija.cloud/>.

used in different contexts, but he doesn't elaborate on that further. He also notes a Belgrade-specific variant with distinct pronunciation: *ćak*. Ćosić documents nine blends and two verbs derived from *ćaci*, and except for Ćacilend, all of them are occasionalisms. Finally, he notes the immutable use of *ćaci* as a prenominal adjective, but doesn't expand on this observation further.

When reviewing these descriptions of *ćaci*, a quantitative approach seemed like a sensible next step to test these existing observations, as well as to address other open questions: Who does *ćaci* refer to? Did the regime's attempt of re-branding *ćaci* succeed? Does *ćaci* possess two paradigms equally in use or is there a preference? Are there templates in derivatives of *ćaci*? Do feminatives of *ćaci* exist?

The following section outlines the compilation of the thematically specialized Ćaci Corpus Alpha and the evidence it provides.

### 3 Approaching the *ćaci* – compiling the Ćaci Corpus Alpha

Ćaci Corpus Alpha is a specialized corpus containing 300 Instagram posts tagged with *#caci*, totaling 282,600 tokens and 1,732 instances of the lexeme *ćaci*. Posts were collected manually for relevance,<sup>14</sup> with data scraping performed via a custom Python script (coding assistance with Claude AI). Cyrillic content was transliterated to Latin, and linguistic processing used the CLASSLA package, which supports non-standard (Internet) Serbian (for a step-by-step guide on creating specialized social media corpora with South Slavic languages, cf. Bogetić et al. 2022).<sup>15</sup> SketchEngine was used for corpus analysis. The main purpose of the collection of posts was to find as many instances of *ćaci* as possible in order to quantitatively evaluate its declension and derived word forms, but as will be shown, some losses were endured on the level of meaning and discourse analysis due to privacy and copyright law restrictions.

Data collection followed the hashtag-based method, as it best suited the pilot study's focus on thematically unified content (Samofalova 2024). This approach ensured that all selected posts targeted a specific group's communication but as a result, it excluded related content without the hashtag (e.g. related by visual con-

<sup>14</sup> Although *ćaci* is unique, *#caci* isn't, as a cosmetics brand in the US uses this name.

<sup>15</sup> For the full package, see <https://github.com/clarinsi/classla>.

tent or indirect reference in the comments), potentially limiting discursive analysis. The end date of collection was June 12, 2025.

Compiling the corpus was no easy task as it required in addition to the technical skills necessary also a careful consideration of privacy, copyright, and platform terms of service. Instagram was chosen due to its popularity in Serbia,<sup>16</sup> but it is also one of the more difficult platforms to scrape. Although Meta provides data access via the Instagram Graph API, these tools are limited to business and creator accounts, whereas most #ćaci content comes from private users, influencers, or blockaded faculty profiles. Alternative tools like the service Apify and the open-source software Instaloader were considered; however, Apify produced insufficient results (only 80 instances of ćaci across 5,000 collected posts from relevant Facebook profiles), and the use of Instaloader risked account termination. Hence, a custom scraper was written in Python with the coding assistance of Claude AI. In designing the script, two important legal ramifications were considered: copyright and privacy protection laws (cf. discussion in Di Cristofaro 2023 on ethics and web scraping).

The Instagram Terms of Service (TOS) prohibit scraping as it can violate data protection and copyright laws. The German Copyright Act (§60d (1) UrhG, 1 March 2018) permits scraping for research, provided privacy is protected and only essential data is collected. Scraping, if done mindfully, does not hinge on or constitute a contractual agreement with the website provider (for an overview of what is legally viable within the German legal framework, see Watteler and Schneider 2023). Thus, only post descriptions, comments, and replies were gathered; visuals (images and reels), metadata, and other personal information were excluded. This limits the ability to reconstruct reply chains and in part the analysis of the meaning of ćaci in some cases, but it does not hinder word form analysis.

## 4 Looking for ćaci in the corpus

### 4.1 *Ćaci's grammatical properties in the corpus*

#### 4.1.1 *Ćaci as a noun*

Ćosić notes that ćaci uses an unusual paradigm: the singular aligns with animate masculine nouns ending in -i (like *Zoki* and *Gari*), while the plural alternates

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<sup>16</sup> See the country media report by Larisa Rankovic on MediaLandscapes, retrieved October 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 from <https://medialandscapes.org/country//media/social-networks>.

between the originator noun's plural and the -i template. Table 1 summarizes both singular and plural templates, showing attested forms from the Ćaci Corpus Alpha. In each comparison, the more frequent form is bolded; when frequencies are equal, nouns appear in italics.

**Table 1. Paradigms of Ćaci with nr. of occurrences (in parentheses)**

	Originator noun		Originator Template		-i Template	
	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
N	đak	đaci	ćak (17)	<b>ćaci (221)</b>	<b>ćaci (359)</b>	ćaciji (36)
G	đaka	đaka	ćaka (1)	ćaka (7)	<b>ćacija (45)</b>	<b>ćacija (49)</b>
D	đaku	đacima	ćaku (0)	ćacima (6)	<b>ćaciju (10)</b>	<b>ćacijima (10)</b>
A	đaka	đake	ćaka (0)	ćake (5)	<b>ćacija (53)</b>	<b>ćacije (45)</b>
V	đaće	đaci	ćaće (0)	<b>ćaci (9)</b>	<b>ćaci (111)</b>	ćaciji (0)
L	đaku	đacima	ćaku (0)	<b>ćacima (2)</b>	<b>ćaciju (1)</b>	ćacijima (0)
I	đakom	đacima	ćakom (0)	<i>ćacima (3)</i>	<b>ćacijem (6)</b>	<i>ćacijima (4)</i>

There is a very clear preference for the -i template, with the exception of the originator template 'ćaci' in the Nominative Plural. Posts with the hashtag #caci typically featured in the image or reel someone speaking or acting in a notable, 'ćaci' way, prompting most comments to directly address that person, which led to many Vocative examples. A larger corpus might be needed to investigate a possible preference in Locative and Instrumental.

There seem to be some contexts where *ćak* truly is the preferred form: it appears in phrases that include the originator noun *đak/đaci*: *ćak do ćaka* as in *đak do đaka* ('pupil next to pupil', one occurrence), *puna škola ćaka* as in *puna škola đaka* ('a school full of pupils', one occurrence), *ćak generacije* as in *đak generacije* ('best pupil of his/her generation', one occurrence), or in school-related jokes, e.g. *ćak specijalnog odeljenja* (a student needing special classes due to lower intelligence and academic skill, one occurrence). With the exception of *ćaci do ćacija* ('ćaci next to ćaci', one occurrence), there are no other examples of *ćaci* used in phrases originally containing *đak*, but *ćaci* does appear in jokes relating to the school/university context as such. This shows how *ćaci* is the more preferred form overall.

Additionally to these, further forms were found, but these appear as unique examples/occasionalisms: *puna škola ćaca* ('a school full of ćaci' G.PL, one occur-

rence), *ćacijevci* (N.Pl, four occurrences), *ćacijevaca* (G.Pl, one occurrence), and two times in diminutive forms (*pušipatkiću ćaciću, ćacko*).

#### 4.1.2 *Blends and (semi-)compounds with ćaci*

Most word creations based on *ćaci* were instances of *Ćacilend* in various cases (a total of 179 occurrences, in two dominant orthographic realizations *Ćacilend* or *Ćaciland*, and only once as *Ćacyland*), including the demonym *Ćacilender*, ‘a person from *Ćacilend*’ (one occurrence). However, the material shows how *ćaci* is very productive in blends and (semi-)compounds, and with the exception of *ćaciteka* (two occurrences), and *ćacibot* (14 occurrences), the remaining are occasionalisms which fit the context of the surrounding comments:

**Blends:** *Ćacilend* > *ćaci* + (Disney)land, ‘camp of government-placed goons in Pionirski park, Belgrade’; *Ćacicević* > *ćaci* + controversial tabloid editor Dragan Vučićević, meaning unclear; *Ćacistan* > *ćaci* + -stan as in Turkmenistan, Pakistan, etc., ‘a country of *ćaci*’; *Ćaciblox* > *ćaci* + the popular game Roblox, unclear meaning; *ćacivil* > *ćaci* + vil, ‘ville, city’, ‘city of *ćaci*’; (*glavni*) *ćacipite* > *ćaci* + unclear, ‘head *ćaci*’; *ćacilajac* > *ćaci* + policajac, ‘policeman’, ‘a policeman protecting a *ćaci* or behaving like one’; *ćacijada* > *ćaci* + *olimpijada*, ‘olympic games’ but in the meaning of ‘games, festivity’, ‘a festive gathering of *ćaci*; pro-governmental rally’; *ćacizam* > *ćaci* + *nacizam*, ‘nazism’, ‘oppression of *ćaci* (values)’; *ćacoteka* > *ćaci* + *diskoteka*, ‘dancing club’, ‘*ćaci* dancing club’, concretely appearing twice as *u ćacoteci / u ćacoteki*; *ćacijaklija* > *ćaci* + the popular online dictionary of spoken Serbian *vujaklija* (equivalent to the English Urban Dictionary), ‘a new dictionary of *ćaci*’; *ćacijanstvo* > *ćaci* + *hrišćanstvo*, ‘Christianity’, ‘*ćaci* Christianity’, *ćacivolucija* > *ćaci* + *devolucija*, ‘devolution’, ‘backwards evolution of *ćaci*’; *ćaciskurzija* > *ćaci* + *ekskurzija*, ‘field trip’, reference to how the president sends supporters by bus to areas to gain a majority vote; *kapućaci* > *kapuljača*, ‘hoodie’ + *ćaci*, ‘a *ćaci* wearing a hoodie’;

**Compounds and semi-compounds:** *ćacilider* > *ćaci* + *lider*, ‘leader’, ‘a leader of *ćaci*’; *ćacivrt* > *ćaci* + *vrt*, ‘garden’, lit. ‘*ćaci* garden’, referring to *Ćacilend*; *ćacistar* > *ćaci* + *star*, ‘a star’, ‘famous *ćaci*’; *ćacibagra* > *ćaci* + *bagra*, ‘scum; worst part of society’, ‘*ćaci*-scum’; *ćacivrsta* > *ćaci* + *vrsta*, ‘kind (taxonomy)’, ‘*ćaci*-kind, *ćacipiens*’; *ćacibot / pl. ćacibotovi* > *ćaci* +

*bot*, ‘bot’, ‘a person commenting or speaking in favor of the government’;  
*ćaci-krvnik* > *ćaci* + *krvnik*, ‘executioner’, unclear meaning; *ćaci-gubavci*  
 > *ćaci* + *gubavac*, ‘leper’, unclear meaning; *Ćacilend-geto* > *Ćacilend* + *geto*,  
 ‘ghetto’, ‘Ćacilend as a bad part of town’.

None of the blends found by Čosić were found in the corpus, further confirming their status as occasionalisms. The corpus’s lack of metadata, due to strict anonymity, made it impossible to always trace the creation of all blends or compounds, resulting in unclear meanings for some examples.

#### 4.1.3 *Ćaci’s feminatives*

The total occurrences where women were designated as *ćaci* is very few (a total of ten occurrences). When women were designated as *ćaci*, these have mostly been simply labeled *ćaci* (e.g. *ona je ćaci*, ‘she is a *ćaci*’; six occurrences). The remaining are *ćacike* (two occurrences), *ćacolina* (one occurrence) and *Ćirica* (one occurrence).

#### 4.1.4 *Ćaci as a verb*

Apparently *ćaci*’s high productivity remains in the realm of nouns, as only two verbs and one verbal noun were found: *ćacutirati* (> *ćaci* + *nokaut*, ‘knock out’), to knock out a *ćaci* (*Ali ovaj što ga juri da ga gađa biciklom / Ćacutiro ga*, ‘But this [guy] chasing him to throw a bike on him / he *ćacutiro* him’ referring to a video where a boxer knocked out a man considered *ćaci*) and *ćackati*, which has an unclear meaning. In the relevant string of comments, one commenter says how ‘may the *ćaci* continue bothering / digging’ (*Samo neka nastave da ćackaju*), so that *ćackati* may be a play on that.

The verbal noun *ćacijanje* has an unclear meaning – it appears in a series of words related to dancing (*Đuskanje Ćuskanje Ćacijanje*).

#### 4.1.5 *Ćaci as an adjective*

In the realm of adjectives, we find very few forms overall (50 occurrences), but we find three descriptive and one possessive form: *ćacijski* (descriptive, ‘possessing the qualities of *ćaci*’, one occurrence), *ćacijevski* (descriptive, same as previous, six occurrences), *ćaci* (descriptive, same as previous, 42 occurrences), and *ćacijev* (possessive adjective, ‘belonging to an individual who is a *ćaci*’, one occurrence). All four adjectival forms follow existing formation templates: *ćacijev* follows the

suffixation for possessive adjectives based on animate masculine nouns ending in -i, e.g., *Zokijev*, *Garijev*, while *ćacijski* or *ćacijevski* are both suffixations with -sk-.

The immutable use of *ćaci* also follows a pattern existing in Serbian with a variety of adjectives of mostly foreign origin, such as *onlajn* ('online'), *braon* ('brown'), *simpa* ('pleasant'), *strava* ('cool') etc. *Ćaci* is placed either alone in front of the noun, or between the determiner and/or another adjective: *ćaci akademija* ('ćaci academy'), *ovom ćaci momku nije dobro* ('this ćaci guy is unwell'), or *na nivou prosječnog ćaci zombija* ('on the level of an average ćaci zombie').

#### 4.2 *Ćaci's meanings – Who are the ćaci and what are they like?*

So, who does *ćaci* refer to? In the corpus, in cases when it is a concrete person or a concrete group of people, *ćaci* designates the residents of *Ćaciland* (43 occurrences) as well as medicine student Miloš Pavlović (35 occurrences), who is frequently called *glavni Ćaci*, *Ćaci* (mostly with capital *Ć*), as *ćaci Miloš*, *Miloš ćaci*, *ćaci Pavlović*, *Miloš Pavlović Ćaci*. In the remaining examples it isn't possible to accurately determine the referent, as it could be the person in the post (image or video) who is saying or doing something worthy of being called a *ćaci*, or the instances might speak about *ćaci* in general (e.g. in discussions about the meaning of *ćaci*), or the referents might be the commenters themselves who are insulting each other with the label. Interestingly, the author of the graffiti has not been labeled *ćaci* in the corpus, and is referred to with other, older terms like *SNS bot* ('bot of the Serbian Progressive Party') or *nepismeni plaćenik* ('illiterate mercenary').

From the examples gathered in the corpus, we can see that the qualities associated with *ćaci* are highly negative. The list of *ćaci's* collocations (KWIC +/- 3) includes adjectives like *glup* ('stupid'), *agresivan* ('aggressive'), *nepismen* ('illiterate'), nouns like *debil* ('retard'), *govno* ('shit'), *bagra* ('scum'), *sramota* ('shame'), *budala* ('idiot'), *mater / mama* ('mother', mostly in insults to the interlocutor, *mater ti ćaci*, 'your mother is a ćaci'), *gmaz* ('reptile', 'creeper'), variants of *kriminalac* ('criminal'), *jaja* ('eggs', 'balls'), *muda* ('scrotum', 'balls'), and *faća* (colloq. 'face', the latter three belonging to the lyrics of the rap song *Mojne da si ćaci*, lyrics being *Ćaci jaja mu na faci*, 'Ćaci, balls on his face'), the expletive *marš/mrš* ('fuck off'), and the verbs *jebati* ('fuck', often in sentences like *jebote te ćaci*, *jebem ti ćaci*, 'fuck ćaci') and *skakati* ('jump', from the popular slogan *Ko ne skače taj je ćaci*, 'Who doesn't jump is a ćaci', a slogan used for motivation in protests). The only frequent collocation that might be consid-

ered somewhat less negative than the ones shown above is *ćao* ('ciao!') found in the phrase *Ćao ćaci!*, but it is far from neutral as it is intended ironically or dismissively.

When looking at series of examples where people themselves provide a definition or explanation of who a *ćaci* is, it becomes clear that *ćaci* is unintelligent, primitive and acts against the interests of his compatriots. They are aggressive and violent, bearing crude and dangerous weapons (like hammers, bottles or guns and knives). Mostly male, *ćaci* are also (petty) criminals and ready to sell-out for a bit of money:

1. *Ćaci ostaje u rečniku kao reč za neuke, primitivne i antipatriote.*  
'*Ćaci stays in the dictionary as a word for the illiterate, primitive and anti-patriotic.*'
2. *Ko god danas da lomi, pravi nered i bahato se ponaša – taj je ćaci.*  
'*Whoever nowadays breaks things, makes a ruckus and behaves arrogantly – he's a ćaci.*'
3. *Svi ćaciji došli / U toru da stoje / Uz sendvič i vodu / Dnevniciu da broje.*  
'*All ćaci came / To stand penned in the fold / With a sandwich and some water / Counting out their daily pay*'
4. *Ćaci su dobili taj epitet jer su nepismena bagra koja je sklona nasilju i sad još glume studente. 'Ćaci got that epithet because they are illiterate scum with a propensity for violence and now they are also pretending to be students.'*
5. *A u terminu ćaci nema ništa zlonamerno, samo novi termin koji je bio nepohodan da opiše termin antonim za đak koji istovremeno opisuje poltrona koji svoje dostojanstvo za novac ili sitan interes, dok glumi žrtvu, glumi elokventnost i glumi spontanost, neposедуje nacionalnost, no svoju naciју poistovećuje samo sa nacionalnim simbolima i himnom (koju ne znaju). 'In the term ćaci there is nothing mean-spirited, it is just a new term which was necessary to describe the antonym of pupil, at the same time it describes a poltroon who sells his dignity for little money or narrow interests, while pretending to be victim, he pretends to be eloquent and acts as if he was spontaneous, he doesn't have a nationality, but it associates its nation only with national symbols and the hymn (which they do not how to sing).'*<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> One viral video of *Ćacilend* included the campers – standing together behind a big Serbian flag – attempting to sing the national anthem, but most of the participants only knew the ends of verses and the chorus.

In one example *ćaci* is used as part of the predicate but not referring to a person per se:

1. Država je *ćaci* zato nam je tako jadno i bedno  
'Our country is *ćaci*, so that is why we are so pathetic and miserable.'

The multitude of referents as observed by linguists before the establishment of *Ćacilend* is not present in the corpus anymore and these align with the observations by the linguists mentioned above. The regime's tries of appropriating *ćaci* and changing its meaning to a positive seem to have remained completely unfruitful, as there is no evidence in the corpus of positive uses of *ćaci* – in fact, when users were confronted with these attempts, they laughed them out, repeating the president's 'I too am a *ćaci*' with insults or irony.

## 5 Conclusion

The *Ćaci* Corpus Alpha provides quantitative insight into trends regarding *ćaci*'s meaning and generated word forms. *Ćaci* went its own way grammatically, almost fully discarding the declension paradigm of its original noun and adopting a paradigm in alignment with the -i template of animate masculine nouns, with exceptions of some cases which require further research and more corpora. *Ćaci* is highly productive in blends and (semi-)compounds, but with the exception of *Ćacilend*, most of the novel wordforms constitute occasionalisms. Adjectival uses of *ćaci* are mostly using the immutable option, while the ones following other formation templates are in a distinct minority. Not many women are labeled as *ćaci*, and when they are, feminatives are used only in a few cases.

Regarding meaning, in this post-*Ćacilend* timeline, the referents of *ćaci* are clearly state-sponsored goons, be they in or outside of *Ćacilend*, who embody the character of an uneducated, but nevertheless arrogant, criminal and violent poltroon doing the regime's bidding against the common people. The regime's attempts of reframing *ćaci* have been unsuccessful.

In conclusion, *ćaci* has long since left the school playground and seems to have hit a nerve or a need (or both) with the speakers, as it is fertile ground for productions of multitudes of memes and cultural artifacts, including serious academic consideration, making it unlikely that it will disappear any time soon.

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## A tko su ćaci(ji)? Vježba sastavljanja korpusa na osnovi materijala s društvenih mreža u svrhu opisa protestnog neologizma

### Sažetak

Tijekom studentskih prosvjeda u Srbiji igra riječi bila je ključni dio protestnih slogana i uzvika, kao i memova i diskursa na društvenim mrežama, no rijetki su toliko lingvistički zanimljivi i promjenjivi kao *ħayy/ćaci*. Nastao je kao pogreška u pisanju grafitu *ħayy/đaci* koji je postao vrlo popularan, a zatim je *ćaci* nastavio vlastitim gramatičkim i semantičkim putem. Unatoč njegovoj popularnosti među govornicima, lingvistima i akademskom zajednicom, dosadašnji gramatički opisi *ćacija* temeljili su se na opservacijama i analizama diskursa na društvenim mrežama te transparenata na prosvjedima, bez sustavne korpusnolingvističke analize. Pilot-korpus Ćaci Corpus Alpha sastavljen je na temelju objava, komentara i odgovora na Instagramu, s ciljem pronalaženja odgovora na pitanje: Tko je ćaci i koje su mu gramatičke odlike?

**Ključne riječi:** korpusna lingvistika; korpusi s društvenih mreža; studentski prosvjedi u Srbiji; ćaci.