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Bamberger Beiträge zur Linguistik

Slavic Alphabets in Contact

Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri, Sebastian Kempgen (eds.)



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Introduction

The current volume arose from a panel that Daniel Bunčić and Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri organised for the 11th meeting of German Slavists, hosted from October 3rd to 6th 2012 by the Dresden University of Technology, Germany. The main topic of the conference was the correlation between different cultural and linguistic factors, subsumed under the more general formula “Territory, language and nation” (in German *Region, Sprache und Nation*). In this context, both decided to make a call for papers for a panel devoted to Slavic alphabets in contact situations. The following five papers were delivered at the conference:

Daniel Bunčić, „Schriften, Schriftvarianten und Orthographien in Bosnien“;

Bernhard Brehmer, „Script-Switching und bigraphisches Chaos im Netz? Zu Schriftpräferenzen in der bilingualen slavisch-deutschen Internetkommunikation“;

Roland Marti, „Deutsche Fraktur und ‘polygraphische’ Schreibung vs. ‘slavische’ Antiqua und diakritische Schreibung“;

Sebastian Kempgen, „Entwicklung und Weiterentwicklung der Kyrillica“;

Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri, „Die kyrillische Schrift als Symbol kultureller Zugehörigkeit und Orientierung“.

As can already be inferred from the variety of themes involved, all sharing (as a common denominator) the central question of linguistic and/or script contact, the panel was characterised by a diversity of approaches and proved both highly informative and very inspiring. The idea was born to publish all papers in a special volume.

To round out the volume, the organisers invited other colleagues and friends to join the panelists, in order to offer the reader an extended version of the initial project; we would therefore like to express our gratitude to the “new” authors, who kindly agreed to make their own contribution to the planned volume along the predefined path. The results of our joint efforts are available in the present publication. Unfortunately, because of very pressing academic obligations in his new role at Cologne

University, Daniel Bunčić could neither collaborate in the preparation of the volume nor provide his article. We nevertheless decided to go ahead with the project and to bring to an end, *pro nostra parte*, the pleasant work we started together.

Slavic alphabets in contact

It is not our aim here to discuss the terms that appear in the heading of this section, which picks up the title of the whole volume. The main purpose of our joint work was and still remains to present and analyse different data, related to alphabets or writing systems used by or adapted from Slavic languages as a consequence of linguistic and, in a broader sense, cultural contact.

There is still a very strong tendency to consider the Cyrillic alphabet as the expression of the Slavic cultural heritage *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, whereas the Latin alphabet does not enjoy the status of a native Slavic system. Consequently, an open or implicit confrontation between the two scripts constitutes the leitmotif of many contributions.

After the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, some cultural actors, among them eminent linguists – such as Nikolaj Feofanovič Jakovlev and Evgenij Dmitrievič Polivanov – expressed a strongly negative attitude toward Cyrillic, tainted in their opinion with the religious and ideological beliefs of the former tsarist empire. Aiming to create a totally new society based on the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the Bolsheviks not only directed their wrath and iconoclastic furore against buildings and cultural vestiges of the hated past, but also developed an intensive policy of “missionary” linguistics and a mass literacy campaign. In order to avoid an undesirable association with the repressive power of the former regime, however, they decided to support the creation of Latin-based alphabets for all the languages of the previously neglected nationalities of the former empire. The Latin alphabet became so popular as an ideological instrument of propaganda that it was ahistorically referred to as the alphabet of the revolution, the true herald of Leninism. It was within this cultural and political climate that the plan to Romanise Russian, as well as Ukrainian and Belarusian, was seriously discussed in the ranks of the

Communist Party. One of these projects, proposed by the above mentioned linguist Nikolaj Feofanovič Jakovlev, is examined in the article by **Vladimir Mikhajlovich Alpatov**, *A Latin alphabet for the Russian language*. The author describes advantages and shortcomings of the new (ortho)graphic system, pointing out the causes which led to the failure of this alphabetic enterprise, first of all the fact that the project was launched in the 1930's under quite different ideological conditions, if compared to the time of the Bolshevik revolution.

The events described in **Elena Simonato's** contribution, *De bello alphabetico. Le carélien au XXe siècle*, took place in the same historical period and ideological milieu. The author devotes her attention to the existence of a Karelian language, which is different from Finnish. One of the key preoccupations of the Bolsheviks after the collapse of the Russian Empire was the establishment of secure territorial borders. In many cases the Bolsheviks tackled quite precarious geopolitical situations making political use of cross-border ethnic ties to project influence into neighbouring states. The promotion of minority languages and the consequent support given to the creation of ethnic identities and the standard languages tied to them provoked a sort of schizophrenic discussion about languages and cultures. This was also reflected, obviously not without some evident bias, in the choice of the alphabet for Karelian.

The cut-throat struggle between Latin and Cyrillic, however, was not a prerogative of Soviet language policy. In more recent times we can observe quite interesting contamination phenomena. Alphabet mixture and crossing, to use Marxist terminology, occurs in the everyday life of many Cyrillic-writing countries, in internet communication as well as in road or shop signs (including banks, museums and restaurants) and advertisements. This curious fact is thoroughly discussed by **Sebastian Kempgen**, *Die kyrillische Schrift unter dem Einfluss der lateinischen: aktuelle Beobachtungen*, who relies on very well documented material to demonstrate such a development not only of the Cyrillic alphabet, but also of neighbouring Greek. Comparing data collected in his field work, he uses pictures to identify and illustrate different tendencies in the South and East Slavonic areas.

Bernhard Brehmer, too, reflects on the interplay between Cyrillic and Latin in his paper, which, as the title indicates (*Script-Switching und bi-*

graphisches Chaos im Netz? Zu Schriftpräferenzen in der bilingualen slavisch-deutschen Internetkommunikation), focuses on script-switching behaviour, related to bilingual communities in Germany with Slavic as a mother tongue. The statistical results, based on data collected from the social network StudiVZ, reveal interesting, nonrandom correspondences between the use of the Latin or Cyrillic script and the status of the involved language (Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian) as a matrix or embedded language.

A language or, rather, a territory where Latin and Cyrillic systems co-existed for a very long time, is represented by the Belarusian linguistic area. **Elena Sourkova** (*Азбўка u/ули Abeceda: об истории графических систем в Беларуси*) presents the reader with a careful historical excursus into the production of manuscripts and printed books, taking as her starting point the activity of the famous Suprasl Monastery (today in Eastern Poland). The quantitative analysis provides a deeper understanding of the twofold character of today's Belarusian writing culture in a diachronic perspective.

A special kind of contact, this time between Glagolitic and Cyrillic, is discussed in the contribution by **Thomas Daiber** (*Bemerkungen zum Alphabet auf Ikonen von Konstantin-Kyrill*), who examines the question of the alphabet as a symbol of national identity in the Slavic world. The direct association of the Glagolitic alphabet with the Western (Catholic) tradition seems to have been a decisive factor in the tendency, especially in the non-scientific discourse, to consider St Cyril the inventor of Cyrillic, downplaying at the same time the historical role of the Glagolitic alphabet. This gives a cultural and ideological explanation of why the Slavonic alphabet represented on icons of Cyril is almost exclusively Cyrillic.

The "battle" of alphabets has always been, as a rule, a matter of religion and/or cultural orientation. In some cases, we observe different choices within the same script domain. After a very useful and detailed presentation of the graphic solutions adopted by the Latin- and Cyrillic-writing Slavic languages, **Roland Marti** (*Ein „Kulturkampf“ in der Slavia romana: „Deutsch“ vs. „Slavisch“ in Schrift und Schreibung*) goes into a careful analysis of the situation among the Lower und Upper Sorbians,

whose use of *Fraktur* or *Antiqua* generally depended on their confessional adherence and linguistic models.

A similar problem, this time within the Cyrillic area, concerning the Slavic “microlanguage” used by the Rusyns living in former Jugoslavia, is discussed by **Oleg Rumjancev** («Боротьба за правопис» серед бачвансько-сремських русинів): the question of the ethnic identity and self-determination of this linguistic community has given rise to contrasting orthographic rules, which clearly mirrored the political and cultural ambitions and orientations of their proponents.

As is well known, the use of the Cyrillic alphabet was extended during the gradual expansion of the Russian Empire and then of the Soviet Union. Its adaptation to the graphic rendering of “exotic” phonological systems was not always easy and completely satisfying, but, in general, quite successful. **Paolo Ognibene** (*Сложное равновесие алфавитов: кириллица и латиница в контактных зонах*) offers some concrete examples of Cyrillic-based alphabets taken from languages belonging to various families (Iranian, East Caucasian and Paleosiberian); he clearly shows how suitable and adaptable Cyrillic can be, its main property consisting in the effort of avoiding combinations of letters, as far as possible.

The spread of Cyrillic among non-Slavic peoples has quite a long history, going far back to the first practical attempts to introduce it in the Caucasus area. **Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri** (*Die kyrillische Schrift als Symbol kultureller Zugehörigkeit und Orientierung*) discusses how the Cyrillic alphabet was implemented in this linguistically very rich territory. By a curious circumstance, the Cyrillisation process of North Caucasian languages dates back to the first scientific description of Ossetic by the Academician Anders Johan Sjögren (1844), whose ideas and graphic principles were put forth by Pëtr Karlovič Uslar in the second half of the XIXth century.

The last two articles, finally, pertain to very particular cases of contact situation and alphabet use. **Michail Tarelka** (*Адаптацыя арабскага пісьма для перадачы славянскіх (беларускіх і польскіх) тэкстаў*) presents the problem of rendering Belarusian (and then also Polish) phonemes using Arabic letters with some necessary adjustments within the Tatar communities of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. **Alla Kožinova**

Vittorio S. Tomelleri, Sebastian Kempgen

(*Ранние восточнославянские криптографические системы в контексте языковых контактов*) gives a stimulating interpretation of Old East Slavic cryptographic devices, functioning as an unusual means of communication between writer and reader, in which the normal rules of communication are violated for different purposes.

Conclusions and acknowledgments

As the reader can probably guess from this brief summary of the contents, which does not do justice to any of the contributions presented above, the volume contains different papers, written from different points of view in different languages, alphabets and orthographies. We really hope that (s)he will find interesting material in them, as well as useful information and the necessary stimulus for further investigations in this fascinating field of research.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude first of all to the organisers of the Dresden conference, Holger Kuße and Ludger Udolph, for having made the panel possible. Many thanks to Anna Lukianowicz (Macerata) and Anna-Maria Meyer (Bamberg) for carefully checking the English texts. The editors of the “Bamberger Beiträge zur Linguistik” also deserve a special mention for enthusiastically agreeing to host this volume in their series.

Vittorio Springfield Tomelleri, Sebastian Kempgen