

# Development of the Ruthenian Language and its Orthography Standards in Serbia

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**Abstract** Main objective of the paper is to provide an overview of the development of the Ruthenian language in Serbia. After presenting the historical background the author points out that the most influential book at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the first Ruthenian grammar (*Grammar of Bachka-Ruthenian Speech*, 1923) by Havriil Kostel'nik. The first and the only *Orthographic Rule-Book of the Ruthenian Language* by Mikola M. Kochish was published in 1971. The orthography achieved its main goal – to establish the basic orthographic principles. Although some of the secondary problems were not treated in the first Ruthenian orthography it was very useful and influential. In the last part of the paper the author explains the characteristics of the *Orthographic Dictionary of the Ruthenian Language*, the second one in the history of the Ruthenian national minority, which is to be published by the Department of Ruthenian Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad.

**Keywords** Ruthenian / Rusyn Language, Standardization, Orthography, Ruthenians in Serbia

## 1. Introduction

For centuries the Ruthenians / Rusyns lived within the borders of Hungarian Kingdom. They lived in the northeast Hungarian counties, namely, in Zemplén, Saros, Abauj-Torna, Borsod, Szabolcs, Ung, Ugocsa, Maramaros and Gemér. Most of these counties are today in eastern Slovakia, and others in Hungary, Ukraine and Romania. Some 260 years ago, groups of Ruthenians began migrating south from their homeland in the Carpathian mountains to the Srem and Bachka regions of what is now Vojvodina in Serbia and eastern Slavonia in Croatia[1].

After the defeat and retreat of the Ottoman Empire from Bachka, Srem and Banat in 1699, the Austro-Hungarian authorities needed more population in the south of their state and supported colonization of Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks and others, among them Ruthenians as well[2]. That is why the ancestors of the Vojvodina Ruthenians, citizens of free status under Habsburg Monarchy («Ruthenus Libertinus», as they were called) and of Greek-Catholic (Uniate) faith, in total number of around 2.000 were allowed to settle under the contract with the state authorities in the »desolata possessio Keresztur« and nearby locality of Kucura in the central Bachka region in the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century[3].

The year 1745 – is the year that has been taken as the year of Ruthenian settlement in Bachka. The 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1751

is a special date. On that day Franz Joseph de Redl, counsellor of emperess Maria Theresa and administrator of the Bachka Royal-State District in Sombor signed the first official document – the contract concerning settlement of 200 Rusyn Greek-Catholic families on the heath named Big Krstur. The contract concerning settlement of the Rusyns in Kucura was signed in 1763[4]. In the new world, the newcomers built houses, economic establishments, churches, schools and other public institutions.

As the Ruthenian population increased in time, in pursuit of jobs and better life, many of them migrated beginning from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century from Ruski Krstur and Kucura to Kula, Vrbas, Novi Sad and Djurdjevo in Bachka, Shid and Sremska Mitrovica in Srem (in present Serbia), Slavonia and the localities around Vukovar and the Sava river (in present Croatia) and across the Atlantic Ocean to the USA and Canada.

## 2. Progress in Cultural Life

Ever since the first Ruthenians settled in Bachka and up to the First World War, they were predominantly farmers. Their craftsmen were organized in a guild, while there were very few priests and teachers. In time, the Ruthenians even made progress in their economic, national and cultural life. They succeeded in preserving their identity. They formed their language and raised it to the level that they could use it to print books. The first book in the Ruthenian language is the poetic wreath *Z Mojoho Valala / From My Village* by Havriil Kostel'nik published in 1904 (as in[1]).

At the end of the First World War the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. All branches of the Ruthenian people had,

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until the year 1918, lived and developed within the framework of a single state, the Habsburg Monarchy. Now for the first time several branches of the Ruthenian people were somehow cut off. The Ruthenians in Bachka had to find their own way.

Within Serbia (or the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, or, later, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), the Ruthenians were permitted to form national and cultural institutions by virtue of the collective rights of all national minorities, which was not the case in their homeland. They were granted the status of national minority of Slavic origin in 1919, first and for many years to come the only one among their kinsmen in the Carpathian area. This was an event of utmost importance which opened the way of their national and cultural development.

Under such circumstances the Ruthenians felt that the founding of the Ruthenian Popular Educational Society, the so-called Prosvita / Education, was the first step in which they manifested their striving for an independent national cultural life. At the founding meeting, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1919 in Novi Sad, the Ruthenian national community decided to elevate its colloquial language (not the Russian or Ukrainian languages) to the level of a literary language. The first cultural-educational organization adopted resolution to use its everyday speech in the education, cultural life and the press. This decision was based on the fact that books of religious and literary character had already been published in this language[5].

The first Ruthenian cultural organization published several books of great significance. The most influential book of the time was the first Ruthenian grammar *Hramatika Bachvansko-Ruskei Beshedi / Grammar of Bachka-Ruthenian Speech*, (1923) by Havriil Kostel'nik[6]. The Ruthenian Popular Educational Society published calendars (1921-1941), journals *Ruski Novini / Ruthenian Newspaper*, 1924; *Nasha Zahradka / Our Garden*, 1937) and other publications (*Bukvar / Primer*, textbooks, *Yeftaiova Dzivka / Yeftai's Daughter* by Havriil Kostel'nik – the first Ruthenian non-one-act play, 1924, *Pupche / Field Poppy* by Ianko Feisa – the first Ruthenian collection of children poems, 1929). One of the most important things the RPES did was the foundation of the first Ruthenian printing house in 1936 in Ruski Krstur.

The second cultural-educational organization, the Cultural-Education Union of Yugoslav Ruthenians, the so-called Zarja / Beam, was founded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1933 in Vrbas. The members of the CEUYR were dissatisfied with the Ukrainophile tendencies of the RPES. They promoted the idea that the Vojvodinian Rusyns, like all Rusyns, were a branch of the Russian nationality[7]. The organization published calendars (1935-1941), newspapers and other publications. The most influential book of the CEUYR was the first Ruthenian history *Istoriya Russkoho Naroda / History of the Russian People* (1935) by Nikolai D. Oleyarov.

The enlightening role of the two organizations was interrupted by the Second World War.

After the Second World War, in 1945, several important cultural events took place. First, the first high school in the Ruthenian language was established in Ruski Krstur. Second, a new Ruthenian organization was established for all Ruthenians in Yugoslavia – Ruska Matka / Ruthenian Home. Third, the Newspaper-Publishing Institution *Ruske slovo* was established (published: *Ruske Slovo / Ruthenian Word*, 1945; *Ruski Kalendar / Ruthenian Calendar*, 1946; *Zahradka / Garden*, 1947; *Švetlosć / Light*, 1952).

In the following two decades with liberal funding from the Yugoslav government, elementary and secondary school system, and radio programming (1948) came into being.

The Institute for Publishing Textbooks was established in 1965. The Institute started to publish textbooks for primary and secondary school regularly. It has published around 1,000 titles[8].

### 3. The First Orthographic Rule-Book of Ruthenian

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina gained extensive rights of self-rule under the 1974 Constitution, which defined Vojvodina as one of the subjects of the Yugoslav federation. Five of the Vojvodina's peoples were given the status of official nationalities – Serbs, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Ruthenians. The Ruthenian language became one of the five official languages of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. For the first time it was possible to use the Ruthenian language in court, in offices, on public signs etc. Ruthenian translators were employed in municipalities where there was a significant number of the members of the Ruthenian national community.

The Society for the Ruthenian Language and Literature started to publish its herald the *Tvorchość / Creativity* (1975), later the *Studia Ruthenica* (1988). A series of school grammars and *Gramatika Ruskoho Yazika / Grammar of the Ruthenian Language*[9] (1977) were prepared by Mikola Kochish, that is by the Institute for Publishing Textbooks. Mikola Kochish is also the author of the first *Pravopis Ruskoho Yazika / Orthographic Rule-Book of the Ruthenian Language* (1971)[10].

Generally speaking *Orthographic Rule-Book of the Ruthenian Language* achieved its main goal - to establish the basic orthography rules. Although some secondary issues were not covered in the first Ruthenian orthographical publication, it was without any doubt a very useful and very influential one.

During the last two decades a need for a new orthography of the Ruthenian language appeared.

### 4. Towards the Second Orthographic Rule-Book

A series of articles have been published and a few orthographical problems have been solved by the members of the Linguistic Section of the Society for the Ruthenian

Language, Literature and Culture, but the Department of Ruthenian Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, at the University of Novi Sad, namely associate professor of the Ruthenian language, prof. Dr. Mikhailo Feisa has made the first serious step towards a new Ruthenian orthography. He organized a scientific conference called Actual Orthography Problems in the Ruthenian Language. The conference was supported by the Provincial Secretariat for Science and Technological Development and held at the Faculty of Philosophy in 2006. The basic directions towards the improvement of the Kochish's rules were specified and even some orthographic problems noticed in the Kochish's orthography published more than four decades ago were solved. It was agreed that in the first phase of this project an orthographic dictionary of the Ruthenian language was going to be published, and, in the second phase, a text of rules together with a new, supplemented edition of the orthographic dictionary. On the other hand, four students of the Department – Tamara Homa, Zlatka Chizmar, Aleksandra Grbich and Monika Siladji, with technical assistance of Miroslav Siladji – were given a specific task to create the first version of the orthographic dictionary which they did during the academic 2007/2008 year. This work was treated as obligatory language seminar paper, useful both to the students but also to the entire Ruthenian national community. The project manager, meanwhile, through public competition for budgetary resources provided two-thirds of the necessary financial resources for printing the Ruthenian orthographic dictionary. The project was funded by the Ministry of Culture of Serbia and by the Provincial Secretariat for Education and Culture. The reviewers were professor Dr. Yulian Ramach, MA Helena Medjeshi and Ruthenian language teacher Snezhana Shanta.

The summer school of the Ruthenian language organized by the Cultural-Educational Society DOC from Kucura in 2009 presented another opportunity for deeper insight into the orthographic issues. Two round tables devoted to orthographic problems were organized and a set of them was solved. The result was the creation of the second version.

Work on the third version is coming to its end these days. The first half of the text of the orthographical dictionary of the Ruthenian language is available online [11]. The website was created by Miroslav Siladji in April 2010. In this way the result of the team's previous work is available to all those who are interested in Ruthenian orthography to make comments or to give suggestions. The text was improved at the Andrevlje seminar for Ruthenian language teachers organized by the Department of Ruthenian Studies in September 2012. It is planned that the second half of the text will be placed on the site at the beginning of the next year.

For the purposes of the Orthographic Dictionary, professor Feisa, as the editor in chief, followed the following two guidelines: first, if a particular form is alive, general and integrated in the Ruthenian system it should be accepted; second, if there are several variants of a foreign word, with and without awareness of the original form, the standardization rules should be directed towards the

pronunciation of a given word in a given foreign language.

A linguist-normativist, aware of the complexity of the problem, should take into account all relevant factors and judge or "cut". He or she must also consider the time of arrival of a borrowing, the way of its entering a certain field of use, as well as its frequency.

If the form *haiziban* (зайзібан) has been established in Ruthenian there is no need to recall German word *Eisenbahn* pronounced as /ajzenban/.

There is no reason to implant the form *kovboi* (ковбой) since, on the one hand, the generally accepted form is *kauboi* (каубой), and on the other hand, it is closer to the pronunciation of the English word *cowboy* /kauboi/.

The variants of the English words *hooligan* and *baseball*, because of the increasing familiarization with the original words, should be "resolved" as *beizbol* and *huligan* (бейзбол and гуліган) at the expense of the older *bezbol* and *chuligan* (безбол and чуліган).

Adaptation of the international diphthongs /au/ and /eu/ should not be unified due to the fact that the words which include the diphthongs did not enter at the same time in Ruthenian and were not adapted by the same groups of users, so we propose *avto*, *evharistiia*, *Evropa* (авто, евхаристія, Європа) etc. but *trauma*, *astronaut*, *reumatizm*, *eureka* (траума, космонаут, реума, еureka) etc.

In cases when we have met three or four variants of a word, we have tried to reduce the number at least to two of them. For example, there is no need for the following four variants: *shljidujuci*, *shljidujushchi*, *sljidujushci*, and *sljidujuci* (шлідоуюци, шлідоуючи, слідоуюци, слідоуюци). After considering the variants carefully we have decided that *shljidujuci* (шлідоуюци) is quite enough, but there is a justification for using *sljidujushchi* (шлідоуючи, слідоуюци) in the spiritual sphere.

In addition to this, there is no need for *Italiyanka*, *Taliyanka*, and *Italiyka* (as Nikola N. Kochish proposed in his Dictionary) since *Italiyanka* (Італіянка) is derived from *Italiya*, but *Taliyanka* (Таліянка) can be used in everyday speech for the purposes of style.

While the adaptation of foreign words is directed towards the phonetic principle, the standardization of the changes that occur at the place where stems and suffixes get in touch is directed towards the morphological principle (for example *bezzakonni*, *sohvizdie*, *otche*; *hagski*, *etnologiiini*, *trenirac* // беззаконни, согвизд'є, отче; гатски, етнологийни, тренирац).

Nikola Kochish used asterisk for so called Kucura variants, but, provided that a variant has been detected in the Carpathian Area, we have treated both so called Krstur and Kucura variants as equal. Indeed it would be quite illogical to stick to the label of ungrammaticality at the beginning of the 3rd millennium, or at the beginning of the 21st century, when the Vojvodinian Ruthenians have opportunities to consult the linguistic data at the source, in the Carpathians. In accordance with it we have accepted both Krstur and Kucura variants, such as: *kotri* / *htori*, *eshchi* / *ishche*, *zhovti* / *zholti*, *stredn'i* / *shtredn'i* (котри / хтору, еуци / уще, жовти /

жолти, стредні / штредні).

Apart from the World Congress of Rusyns / Rusnaks / Lemkoes (as in [7]) there is another congress – the Rusyn Language Congress. The first one took place in 1992 in Bardejovske kupelji (Slovakia), the second one was in 1999 in Preshov (Slovakia), the third one in 2007 in Krakow (Poland), and the fourth one in Serbia in 2012 in Andrevlje in Serbia. The representative of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians as a member of the Interregional Committee for Codification of the Rusyn Language is the author of this paper. Thanks to the Rusyn Language Congress diverse cooperation between educational institutions of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians and corresponding educational institutions in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Croatia and Canada have been largely established in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The prospect of further cooperation has generated a wave of optimism (as in [1]).

The wave of optimism may be even larger if we are aware that even the last country in the world that has not officially recognized the Rusyns / Ruthenians changes its policy towards them slowly. The Ruthenian language was recognized by the Parliament of the Republic of Ukraine in August 2012.

## 5. Conclusions

Since the work on the third version of the text of the orthographical dictionary of the Ruthenian language is coming to its end these days it is expected that the dictionary as a book will be published in spring 2013.

The case of the Ruthenian language which has been in official use for several decades, both in the provincial organs and on the territory of six municipalities in which the Ruthenians live in a significant number, is by all means a prominent example for many developed European societies and states.

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