

Select Aspects of the Rusyn Language
Norm in Slovakia

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Since the very establishment of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, the cultural and civic organization representing Rusyn interests in Slovakia, and in particular since 1992, intensive work has been directed toward creating reference books for a Rusyn language norm. As is well known, a group of linguists, historians, writers, journalists, cultural activists, and teachers from nine countries met at a working seminar in November 1992 in Bardejovské Kúpele, Slovakia.¹ The goal of the seminar was to coordinate the present efforts toward creating a normative (standardized) Rusyn literary language. Among the resolutions of the seminar was a recommendation by the participants that a literary language be formed on the basis of the spoken variants in each of the countries where Rusyns live. Initially, a Rusyn literary language would be created for each Rusyn-inhabited region. Later, when conditions in Europe were favorable, a single interregional literary Rusyn language would be created.

The new standard for Slovakia began to be formed in agreement with the views of those linguists who conclude that Carpatho-Rusyn dialects are typical of a linguistic borderland region whose evolution has been determined by their isolation in mountainous areas and by specific historical conditions. In the course of a very long period, a process of dialectal differentiation took place, which at certain times was also characterized by a wide range of contacts with other languages. This was a region where there developed distinct contrasts between the basic Slavic language groups, and where new or atypical linguistic forms arose which can be described as a combination of various characteristics that are at times typical of one or another of the basic language groups.

These specific conditions resulted in the preservation of many unique and often very old language forms and words that had long disappeared from neighboring East Slavic and West Slavic dialects and languages. The preservation of these linguistic phenomena and lexical elements, in

our view, confirms the existence of a distinct Carpathian group of East Slavic dialects called Rusyn, or Carpatho-Rusyn. This means that we agree with the opinion of those linguists: (1) who classify Carpatho-Rusyn speech as an East Slavic dialect with characteristics typical of a linguistic border region and influenced by specific historical conditions; and (2) who conclude that because of those many distinct characteristics it is completely justified to consider Carpatho-Rusyn dialects as a distinct group in the context of East Slavic dialects.

Given the above facts, the staff and other contributors to the work of the Rusyn Renaissance Society's Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture began to create—or more precisely re-create—a Rusyn language norm for the Rusyns of Slovakia. The institute's goal was to make our variant of the Rusyn language the official codified language of Rusyns living in Slovakia. Hence, the most important task until the publication of normative reference works was to begin the process of codifying a Rusyn language. This means it was necessary to create an orthographic system based on general graphological, orthographic, orthoepic, and linguistic norms, while at the same time taking into consideration the specific environment of the language of Rusyns in Slovakia. In other words, we needed to create a phonologically based written language and a system of phonological principles as well as a grammatical system and a means of expressing that system.

The conceptual basis of our three reference works—*Rules of the Rusyn Writing System*, *An Orthographic Dictionary of the Rusyn Language*, and *A Rusyn-Russian-Ukrainian-Slovak-Polish Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology*² was determined by the following two factors.

1. Our work should take into consideration Rusyn tradition and all those grammars created by our predecessors, beginning with Andrij Kocka (1768) and Mychal Lučkaj (1830); the subsequent textbooks of Aleksander Duchnovyč (1853), Kyril Sabov (1865), Jevmenij Sabov (1890); and most especially the grammar of the Rusyn language by Avhustyn Vološyn (1907) approved by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a textbook for Rusyn schools and subsequently published in several editions. We also took into consideration the textbooks of Ivan Pan'kevyč (1922) and Ivan Harajda (1941). The latter was approved by the Subcarpathian section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as the official Rusyn language text for Rusyn schools. Harajda himself described his text in the following words: "Our goal was to

provide a grammar of the living language which, in practice, is spoken by everyone [in Subcarpathian Rus'] and which could serve as means of communication for all members of our nationality without exception."³

2. Our work should also take into consideration the written linguistic systems of all contemporary Slavic languages, in particular Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, and Czech. In other words, in codifying the Rusyn language we tried to keep in mind our specific Rusyn traditions and, in particular, to maintain current linguistic trends and principles that already appear in the linguistic systems of other Slavic languages.

The three newest reference books are among the first attempts at a descriptive norm of the Rusyn language in Slovakia. For that reason there are many aspects that are incomplete and controversial. This means that many conclusions, recommendations, and rules will still require further elaboration, detailed description, and agreement. For that reason we would be very grateful for all constructive criticisms, suggestions, and corrections which will be considered with maximum attention.

The following are a few specific remarks about the language norm.

I. Graphical norms

A phonological graphic system is based on the principle of direct correspondence between a specific letter of the alphabet (grapheme) and a specific sound (phoneme). Rusyn employs such a system, although there is not always a direct correlation between its graphemes and its phonemes. This is because sometimes one phoneme may be represented by two (and in rare cases more than two) graphemes or, vice-versa, one grapheme can depict two phonemes. In Rusyn, as well as in many languages, the graphic system is to a certain degree independent of pronunciation.

This means that in Rusyn the principle of direct correspondence between a specific grapheme (letter) and a specific phoneme (sound) is not always maintained. Hence, the distinct features of a given grapheme only rarely correspond to the distinct features of a given phoneme. Nevertheless, both systems together form a certain unit, since in fact they represent two variants of a single system.

The basic graphic medium of the Rusyn language is the Cyrillic

alphabet. The Rusyn variant of the Cyrillic alphabet, that is, the fixed sequence of graphemes, is presented in all three reference books under consideration. The following are a few of the basic characteristics.

1. Vowel sounds in Rusyn are depicted by seven non-palatalized graphemes— **а, е, и, і, ы, о, у**; and five palatalized graphemes— **я, ю, е, ё, ї**.

2. Consonant sounds in Rusyn are depicted by the following graphemes— **б, в, г, ґ, д, ж, з, й, к, л, м, н, п, р, с, т, ф, х, ц, ш, щ**.

3. The softening of consonants and palatalization in certain places is indicated by the letter **ь** (soft sign), which in and of itself does not reflect any sound.

In Rusyn graphology the phonetic principle, at times in combination with the positional and syllabic principle, is dominant. For instance, the positional system functions when indicating paired hard and soft consonant phonemes.

Considering the following: (a) that in Rusyn graphology phonemes are represented by graphemes; (b) that the Rusyn language has 38 phonemes (6 vowels and 32 consonants); and (c) that to represent these phonemes we use 35 graphemes, we can state that paired hard and soft consonant phonemes (of which there are 9 in Rusyn) are represented in writing by the same grapheme. Hence, hard and soft consonant phonemes are in written form indicated by an additional grapheme which we explain further in the rule book.⁴

To represent the phoneme [j] we use the distinct grapheme **й**. Before a vowel and at the beginning of words, however, this phoneme is represented by the palatalized letters: **я, ю, е, ё, ї**. A special case occurs when the phoneme [j] before a vowel comes after a preceding vowel. Such instances, depending on whether the consonant is hard or soft, are represented by the graphical unit: **ь** plus a palatalized vowel grapheme; for example, **курьєр, адьютант, зьявити ся, розьяснити ся, одьїсти**, etc. As for the remaining consonant phonemes which are not differentiated by hardness or softness and which are immediately followed by a palatalized grapheme, in such cases these are represented by the unit: **j** plus vowel; for example **пе, бе, вяже**, etc.

A few other comments about the meaning of certain graphemes are in order.

1. The graphemes **я, ю, е, ё, ї** represent the joint phonemes [j+a, j+u,

j+e, j+o, j+i] at the beginning of a word, after vowels, after un-paired hard or soft consonants, and at the boundaries between syllables. After paired hard and soft consonants the graphemes **я, ю, е, and ё** represent the vowel phonemes [a, y, e, and o] and indicate a softening of the preceding consonant.

2. The grapheme **ї** after consonants represents the phoneme [i] and nothing more; for example, **їта, віра, сіно, дїм**, etc. This means that a softening of the preceding consonant is either not indicated (**їто, дїти**), or is not a differentiated characteristic of a given form (**очі, гирькьїй, меджі**, etc.).

3. The letter **ь** (soft sign) has two basic meanings: (a) it represents a softening of the preceding consonant phonemes (**варь, возьму, редьков**, etc.); and (b) it functions as a syllabic boundary; for example, **зьявити ся, карьєра, адьютанта**, etc.

II. Writing System (Orthographic) Norms

The Rusyn writing system is based on two principles of which the phonological principle is the most important. The three aspects of Rusyn orthography dealing with vowels, voiced and unvoiced consonants, and hard and soft consonants can be joined into one system. And if we do not know which letter to use to represent a sound, then it is necessary to find a position where the sounds are legibly distinct in the context of a given morpheme. The Rusyn writing system, then, is basically a phonological-morphological system. The essence of this system derives from the principle that one and the same grapheme represents a specific phoneme whether in a strong or weak position within a single morpheme.

The phonological-morphological principle as applied to a writing system refers to all the morphological components of a word: prefixes, suffixes, roots, and inflectional morphemes. This fact guarantees that there is a single written form for similar morphemes whether in various declensions of a given word or in different words.

A certain portion of the Rusyn writing system is based on the phonetic principle. According to that principle, for example: (a) the prefix for **z** is rendered: **розпустити—розбити**; (b) equivalent inflectional morphemes are written differently depending on pronunciation: **звїрєм—колачом**; and (c) final root graphemes are

written differently depending on pronunciation: **валал—валальскый, Снина—сниньскый**, etc.

The following are a few comments on the writing system of vowels and consonants.

1. With regard to vowels, we need to look a bit closer at the phoneme [ы] represented by the distinct grapheme **ы**. In another context we described the distinct characteristics of Rusyn dialects and emphasized how they preserved the distinction between the old sounds **ы** and **и**. In other words, Rusyn dialects preserved the Old Rus' sound **ы**, as in **бык, звык, мыти, пыск, рык**, etc. That vowel, corresponding to Old Slavic **ы**, is in Rusyn dialects different from the Russian **ы**.

The Rusyn sound has a somewhat lower articulation and a weaker rounding, and it is farther back than the Russian **ы**. This is very clear when the **ы** sound appears on the stress between hard consonants and is most evident when it follows the velars *k, g, h*, and *ch*, bringing it closer to a guttural sound. In such a place of articulation, the difference between the Russian and Rusyn **ы** is most evident; for example, in the words: **кый, кыснути, рокы, гынуги, загыбель, ногы, мухы, глухий, быкы, кывати, кыла, тыкати, кыдати, хыжа**, etc. In other locations, that is, before soft consonants, its pronunciation moves more forward, although even then it is not equivalent to the Russian **ы** and is never so far forward to suggest an **и** or **и**, which is characteristic of the Russian **ы**, as for instance in: **быля, дыня, гыря, мыхыря**, etc. The phoneme [ы] is quite typical of Rusyn dialects and is found in various positions:

(a) in place of the Old Rus' **ы**; for example, **бык, кышка, рык, сын, тыти, хыжа**, etc.;

(b) in place of **ъ, ь** (*jery*) in the proto-Slavic cluster **-трыт-/-трыт-, тлыт-, тлыт-** in a weak position where **ы** might appear before or after a liquid consonant; for example, **блыха, гырмаги, лыгати, дрыва, кырпиги, кыртиця, слызы, тырвати, стырчати, фыркати**, etc.;

(c) in place of **ъ** (*jer*) when it functions as a *j* in masculine adjectives; for example, **быйый, молодой, вовгый мокрый, чорный**, etc.;

(d) in place of **ъ** (*jer*) at the end of a prefix before *j*; for example, **выйти, зыйти, обыйти, надыйти**, etc.;

(e) in place of the attenuated Old Rus' **ы**, deriving from **ъ** (*jer*) before *j* in a strong position; for example, **мыите, выите, рыите**, etc.;

(f) in place of **и** after **ж** and **ш**; for example, **жыйый, жыла, жыти**,

пыти, пырокый, мышы, душы, хыжы, etc.;

(g) in place of other vowels in a certain number of words; for example; **вывирха, гыря, мыхырь, нырати, одты, одкы, пырпень**, etc.; and

(h) in place of various vowels in borrowings; for example, **апатыка, гынлявий, дылі, дыпель, жыван, шпыталь, пына, мапына**, etc. Such a situation obviously must be reflected in the course of creating an orthographic norm, in which the problem of rendering **ы** in writing is discussed in rather great detail in the *Rules of the Rusyn Writing System*.⁵

2. With regard to consonants, let us take as an example the grapheme **щ**. This grapheme is not used to represent a distinct phoneme, but rather the phoneme cluster [с+ч]. In Rusyn dialects it is pronounced in two ways: from west to east as far as the Vyravka River it is pronounced as **-šč-**; farther east as a soft **š'**; or as a long soft **š'**; for example, **jaščurka—jaš'urka**, etc. Pronunciation of the particle **щі, іщі** as a soft **š'** is widespread throughout most Rusyn dialectal territory. This results in the possibility of two or even three means of graphic representation. In the end, we decided that the phoneme cluster [с+ч] would be depicted by the grapheme **щ**, regardless of its pronunciation; for example **ящурка, пищалка, щастливый, хрущ, наще**, etc. This includes the particles **щі, іщі** and not **ші, іші**, as they are often pronounced. We should also mention that we suggest writing the pronominal adverbs as **што, дашто**, and not **що** or **по**.

III. Morphological Norms

In the area of morphology, the following are a few examples of substantive (noun) and verb forms. With regard to substantives, what follows is only a fragment of what could be introduced as characteristic forms of nominatives.

1. We have preserved the vocative case, not only in its full form but in many cases its abbreviated form as well; for instance, **мамо/мам, няньку/няньк, стрыку/стрык, Марё/Марь, Юрку/Юрк**, etc.

2. There occurs very often in the genitive masculine singular various endings (**-а/-я, -у/-ю**), and the choice of these various inflections often fluctuates and is even free. One can state with certainty that material nouns have the inflection **-у/-ю** (**гороху, дугану, меду**, etc.), but

there is a problem among other substantives, since the lexical importance of these endings is of limited significance even though they may appear relatively frequently.

3. The masculine nominative plural has the following endings:

(a) **-ы**: in the names of animals, when the root ends in a hard consonant; and **-і**: when the root ends in a soft consonant; for example, **бараны, быкы, боцаны, левы, гады, когуты, овабы, and вороблі, заці, коні**, etc.

(b) **-ове/-ёве**: in names of family relatives; for instance, **братове, сынове, дідове, зятёве, кумове**, etc.

(c) **-ы**: in names for professions, posts of functionaries, nationalities, etc., when the root ends in a hard consonant; and **-і**: when it ends in a soft consonant; for instance, **демократы, дісіденты, директоры, доценты, професоры, штуденты, Русины, Чехы, and малярі, гандлярі, учітелі, кошылці, Німці**, etc.

(d) **-и**: in nouns with roots whose endings alternate in the consonants **к** and **ц**; for example, **жобраці, златвиці, Словаці, Руснаці, участниці**, etc.

(e) **-е**: in nouns constructed with **-ан-**; for example, **Белгічане, Америчане, Братіславчане, Кошичане, Сабіновчане**, etc.

(f) **-ы**: in inanimate nouns with roots ending in a hard consonant; and **-і**: when the root ends in a soft consonant; for example, **дары, гріхы, законы, порошкы, and горці, клинці, ключі, обручі**, etc.

(g) animate and inanimate nouns constructed with **-j** (when not inflected) have in their nominative plural the inflection **-і** (rendered by the grapheme **ї**); for example, **злодії, краї, гаї, обычаї**, etc.

4. The antiquated **-ent** root (in the **теля, гуся** category) has in the singular basically preserved its original Old Rus' paradigm.

5. The antiquated **-и-** root (in the category **церьков**) in the nominative and instrumental singular and in all plural cases has also preserved the original Old Rus' paradigm; for example, the instrumental singular **церьковлѣв**.

With regard to verb forms, the following phenomena are worth noting:

1. Infinitives usually end in **-ти**; for example, **чітати, купувати, сидіти, вести**, etc. A certain number of verbs, however, end in **-чі**; for example, **печі, волочі, течі, мочі**, etc.

2. As in other Slavic languages conjugational categories are

differentiated according to person, singular or plural, tense, and mode.

3. Verb forms are generally constructed from the present or infinitive root (in rare cases from the preterite root).

4. In Rusyn we distinguish two conjugational types: the first, or the so-called **-е-** conjugation; and the second, or the so-called **-и/-і-** conjugation.

5. The form of the present tense is created by adding on to the present root of an imperfective verb a system of distinct inflections. These fall into two conjugational categories, the first of which has two sub-categories:

I. First conjugation:

(a) -у/-ю	-еме/еме	(b) -м	-ме
-еш/-еш	-ете/-ете	-ш	-те
-е/-е	-уть/ють	-ть	-уть/-ють

II. Second conjugation:

-у/-ю	-име/-іме
-ип/-іп	-ите/-іте
-ить/-іть	-ать/-ять

6. The future tense is created in two ways depending on aspect: the compound and simple form (which is similar to other East Slavic languages).

7. The past tense has its own distinctiveness and is created in two ways:

(a) simple form; for example, **чітав, читала, читало, читали**, or at times without any indication of gender in the masculine: **віз, віс, пік**, etc.

(b) compound form, which is formed by the appropriate gender in the simple past or by the first and second person present and the helping verb **быти**, which can have an abbreviated form in the feminine and neuter gender; for example, first person: **чітав ем, читала ем/читала-м, читало ем/читало-м, читали сьме**; second person: **чітав есь/читала-сь, читало есь/читало-сь, читали сьте**; third person: **чітав, читала, читало, читали**.

8. The imperative form for the second person singular and for the

first and second person plural is formed from the present tense root in the following ways:

(a) verbs with the root-ending *-j* have an imperative form without any inflexion; for example, **чітай, співай, танцюй, знай**, etc.;

(b) verbs with roots ending on a soft or hard paired consonant have an imperative form without any inflexion and with a softened final consonant; for instance, **говорь, ударь, встань, принесь, запаль**, etc.;

(c) verbs with roots ending in unpaired soft or hard consonants have an imperative form without any inflexion; for instance, **ріж, пиш, куп, роб, задав**, etc.;

(d) verbs with roots ending in a present tense consonant cluster have an inflected imperative form using the morpheme *-и*; for example, **впни, верни, бухни, йди**, etc.;

(e) the first person plural is formed by adding the suffix *-ме* to the second person singular; for example, **співайме, встаньме, пишме, вернимо**, etc.;

(f) the second person plural is formed by adding the suffix *-те* to the second person singular; for example, **пиште, ріжте, співайте, встаньте, верните**, etc.; while the third person singular and plural are formed by adding **най** to the third person singular and plural of the present tense; for example, **най пише, най стоять**, etc.

9. The formation of the conditional mood in Rusyn is rather distinct. In contrast to other East Slavic languages, the Rusyn conditional may as in Slovak have two variants, present and past, which is formed in the following way:

(a) the present conditional is formed by adding the particle **бы** either before or after both forms of the past tense; for example, **я бы написав, -ла, -ло; мы бы написали** and **написав, -ла, -ло бы ем/бы-м; написали бы сьме**;

(b) the past conditional is formed by adding the appropriate gender of the helping verb **быти** to both forms of the present conditional; for example, **я бы був (была, было) написав (написала, написало), мы бы были написали** and **бы (была, было) бы ем/бы-м написав (написала, написало), были бы сьме написали**.

10. Verbal aspect is formed in a manner similar to other Slavic languages and, therefore, will not be elaborated upon here.

11. Rusyn has two forms of verbal adverbs, present verbal adverbs

and past verbal adverbs:

(a) the present verbal adverb is formed with a variant of the suffix **-учі/-ючі/-ачі/-ячі**, depending on the verb's conjugational category; for example, **ріжучі, читаючі, клячачі, сидячі**;

(b) the past verbal adverb is formed by the suffix **-єши** (in rare cases **-ши**); for example, **упавши, написавши, увидівши, прочитавши**, etc.

12. Rusyn has three productive forms of verbal adjectives; a fourth form is very rare and not productive:

(a) the present active verbal adjective is formed from the present tense root and the suffix **-уч-/-юч-/-ач-/-яч-** onto which is added the appropriate gender adjectival inflexional morpheme; for example, **читаючий, говорячий, пишучий, сидячий**, etc.

(b) the past active verbal adjective is formed from the infinite root and the suffix **-вш-** (in rare cases **-ш-**); for example, **читавший, несший, писавший, укравший, вівший, напікший**, etc.

(c) the past passive verbal adjective is formed from the infinitive root and the suffix **-н-, -ен-, -т-**; for example, **прочитаний, договорений, закрытый, піднятый, битый, запалений, засвічений**, etc.;

(d) the present passive verbal adjective is a very rare and unproductive form preserved only in written texts of a religious character; for example, **видимый, любимый, носимый, читаемый**, etc.

It would certainly be possible to discuss the normative features of other aspects of the language, but that is a subject for a much larger descriptive study.

Translated from Slovak by Paul Robert Magocsi

Notes

1. Paul Robert Magocsi, "Scholarly Seminar on the Codification of the Rusyn Language," *Österreichische Osthefte*, XXXV, 1 (Vienna, 1993), pp. 182-185—a report which also appeared in the *Scottish Slavonic Review* (Glasgow), *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (Berlin and New York), *Europa Ethnica* (Vienna), *Revue d'études slaves* (Paris), *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* (Charlottetown, P.E.I.), *Slovanský přehled* (Prague), *Slavica Slovaca* (Bratislava), *Slavia* (Prague), *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* (Berlin).
2. Yvan Harajda, *Hramatyka rus' koho jazyka* (Užhorod, 1941), p. 7.
3. Vasyl' Jabur and Jurij Pan'ko, *Pravyla rusyn' skoho pravopysu* (Prešov, 1994); Jurij Pan'ko et al., *Orfografičnyj slovnyk rusyn' skoho jazyka* (Prešov, 1994); Jurij Pan'ko, *Rusyn' sko-rus' ko-ukrajin' sko-sloven' sko-pol' skyj slovnyk lingvistyčnych terminiv* (Prešov, 1994).
4. Jabur and Pan'ko, *Pravyla*, p. 20-23.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Appendices