

# COLING

**April 2019** Field School in **Bova**, Calabria, IT  
*Fantastic Languages and where to find them*

**‘Links between  
scripts, writing systems, orthographies, fonts  
and  
ethnolinguistic identities’**



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*Minority Languages,  
Major Opportunities.  
Collaborative Research,  
Community Engagement  
and Innovative Educational Tools*





# Standardization & Literacy

- Since at least the rise of nationalism, Westerners have in large part judged languages by whether they are written and standardized.
- As the colonial era came to an end across much of the world in the 1960s, this tendency intermingled with the rising developmentist impulse: what would be the place of the local, languages all over the world in educational and political projects of the post-colonial states across the globe?
- This led to a still-flourishing of orthography development for a large number of languages.



- The process has been even strengthened with the worldwide wave of language revival of the 1990s-2010s
- The language revival, however, is often~still directly associated with the **standardization of its written form**

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- Linguists have generally claimed that **script is something that does not belong to language**, it is something **secondary**, rather left to culture scientists or historians.
  - Even those sociolinguists, who deal with interrelations between scripts, writing systems and orthographies from one side and users' societies and speech communities from the other, claim that the former are fundamentally independent of languages.
  - Yet, they absolutely are **not independent of language ideologies**.

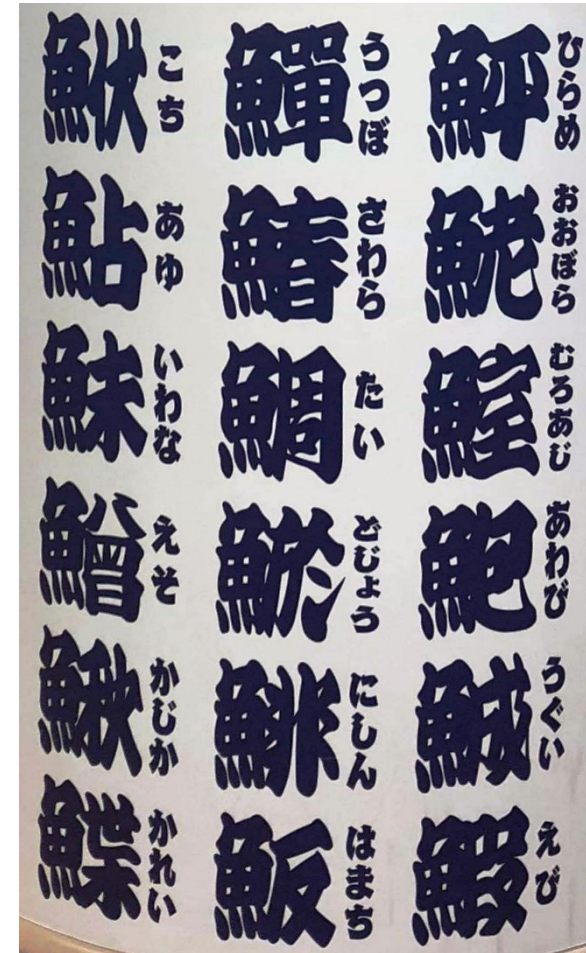
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- On the other hand, scripts are thought by their speakers to be intrinsically related to their languages.
  - That common opinion results from the apparent and deliberate **visibility of writing** and because of the **perceptible symbolic values** thereof.
  - The written form of a language is perceived usually as a symbol of **high(er) prestige** and a **carrier of community values** in space and time.

# ‘language / graphic purity’

- One very frequently encountered statement by language planners is their pursue for ‘**language purity**’.
- With respect to lexicon, orthography and grammar they ostensibly seek to follow a substantive language planning model, which **rejects influence** from outside languages.
- In the most visible - **written, printed, displayed** - form of language, however, it is almost impossible to preserve a ‘**graphic purity**’; otherwise any variety considered a language ought to have an own writing.

# Graphisation

- Developing a written form of a language (variety) involves not only a simple selection of appropriate orthography, but also making decisions concerning cultural, religious, political and historical matters.





Traditionally, a script / scriptal layout has been ideologically interrelated with culture, and even more often – with religion

- Many people spontaneously associate
  - the Cyrillic script with the Christian Eastern Orthodoxy
  - Arabic – with Islamic tradition
  - Hebrew – with Judaism
  - Devanagari – with Hinduism
  - Latin – with Westernness
  - Chinese characters – with the East Asian cultural circle


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- On the other hand, those scripts designed purposely for individual languages, have a more national cultural load – examples being
  - the Georgian scripts დამწერლობა for Georgian
  - the Armenian Հայոց գրեր for Armenian
  - the Korean 한글 for Korean
  - the Japanese syllabaries ひらがな and カタカナ for Japanese



- In any case, however, it is the community concerned, who should have a decisive voice when adopting script, writing system and orthography.

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- Of particular significance are publically displayed elements of a minority language, which symbolically mark the community territory within the area of the dominant language.
  - For the latter, the written language plays simply a communicative role, than ideological and symbolic – as is often the case of minority communities.



- The examples would include primarily the place-names – where the names of settlements, municipalities or other toponyms are displayed in two or more languages, including the local, less-privileged, or in languages, which are considered rival.
- The rivalry is even more remarkable if the names are written differently, i.e. with different scripts, different fonts or using graphemes, which are considered typical for just one of the languages.

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Not infrequent are cases, when the name in one language is either removed or painted over as a visible sign of an ethno-linguistic conflict



2011  
2017



# ‘ethnic’ fonts

- Some minority language communities prefer to use a special font –
- as the Basque *Harri / Vasca* or historical Gaelic script *Seanchló / Cló Gaelach* for the Celtic languages
- In those cases, the scriptal features became a relevant, and symbolically distinctive markers of linguistic landscape.

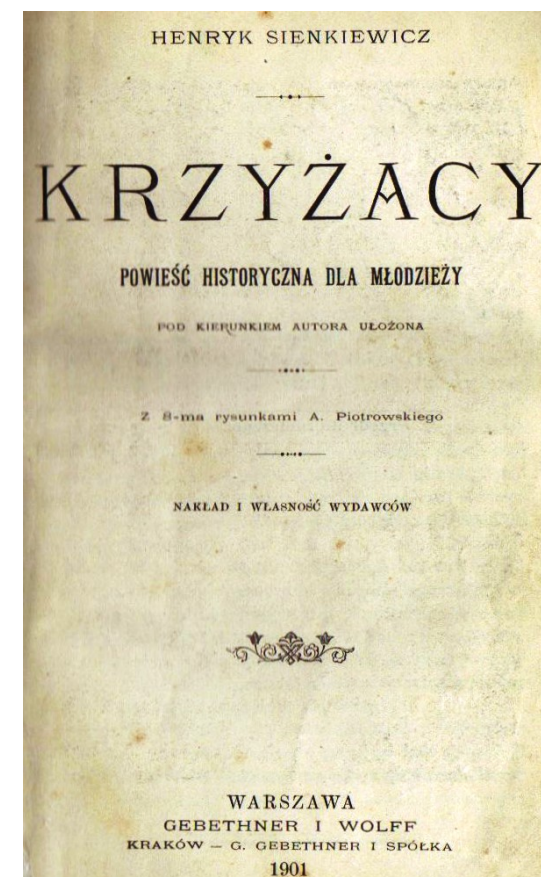
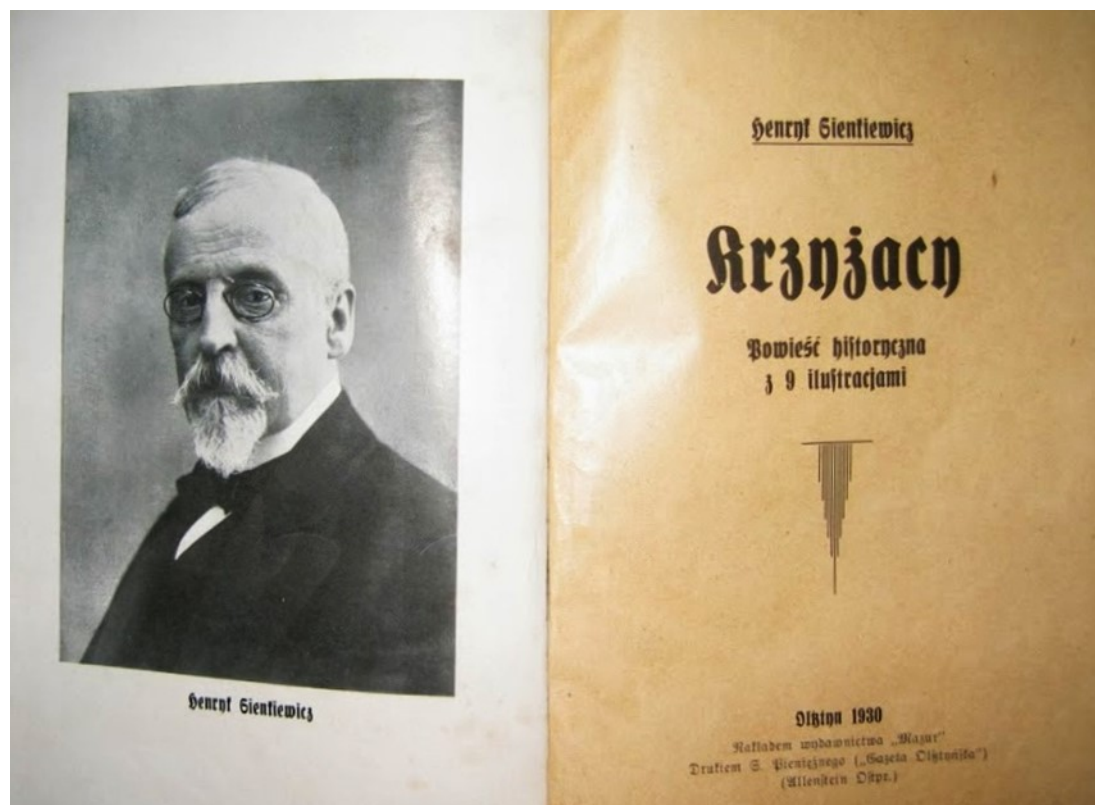


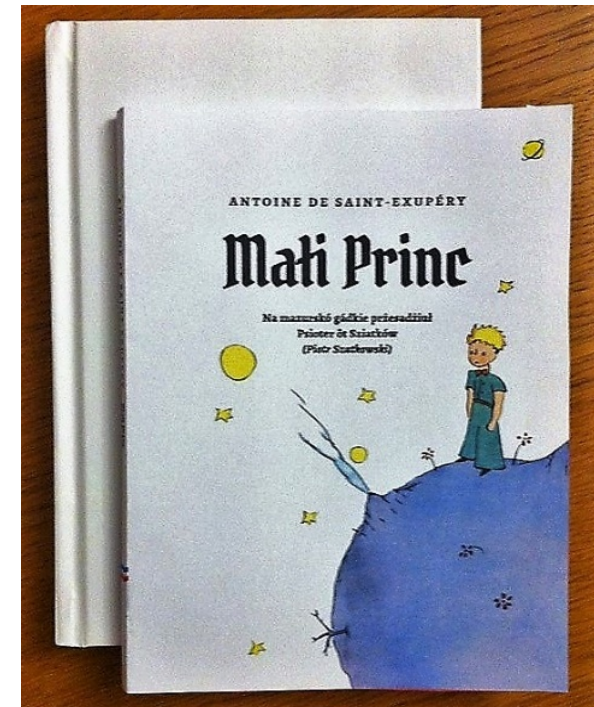
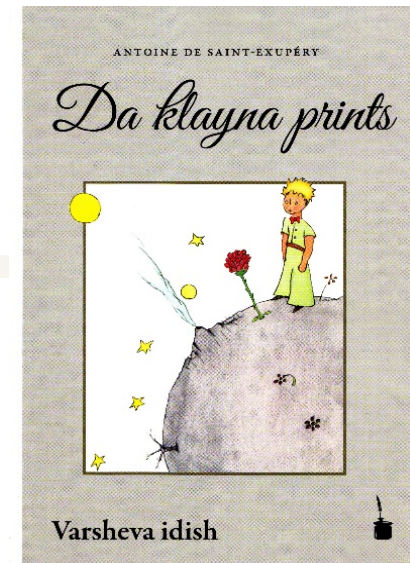
# [Bunčić, Lippert & Rabus 2016]

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- *In situations of digraphia, biscriptality or of competing standards and orthographies, the choice of writing system, or the choice to combine elements of available writing systems, simultaneously acknowledges parallel symbolic systems as sets of graphemes that can represent the linguistic segment in question, and highlights the ideological layering of meaning*







# [ Gallicianò / Γαλλικιανό 2019 ]

TO MAKEΔNON TON EΛΛHNΩN ΓENOS  
TOIS AΔEΛΦOIS ITANHTAIS XAIETISMON STEΛEI  
~~TO GHENO TO MACEDONICO TON GRECO~~  
~~'S TA LEDDIDIA GRE TANICA HERETAMATA STEDDHI~~  
LA STIRPE MACEDONICA DEI ELLENI  
AI FRATELI ITALIOTI S LUTO MANDA



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- One of the most salient cases of attributing a symbolic role to ethnic languages are memorials dedicated to individual letters, which are considered unique and characteristic – e.g. monuments to the Ukrainian І in Rivne/Рівне or Belarusian Ў in Polatsk/Полацк.
- The two landmarks were certainly to strengthen the linguistic self-confidence of both Eastern-Slavic speech communities vis-à-vis the historically, demographically and politically dominant Russian alphabet/language (also based on the Cyrillic script).



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- The users of the latter, however, reacted quite similarly – by erecting a monument to the letter ё in Ulyanovsk/Ульяновск.
- Even if the Russian language or alphabet is not endangered at all, the latter letter is considered ‘endangered’, as the writers of Russian tend to ignore increasingly the diacritic which includes two dots (diaeresis).
- Komi ö



# [Արտաշավան]

- The Armenians, in turn, erected a whole monument site to all letters of their unique alphabet in Artashavan.



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A decorative graphic at the top of the slide. It features a horizontal line with a color gradient from olive green on the left to light yellow on the right. A large black left square bracket is positioned on the left side of the line, and a large yellow right square bracket is on the right side.

[

]

- If a language community uses the same script as the surrounding dominant language(s), it is individual graphemes=letters, or even individual diacritic signs, i.e. additional graphic marks of letters, that might become ideological carriers and visible indices of identity.



[**ë è à** **q~d**]



- these letters – considered
  - the most Kashubian,
  - most Lithuanian,
  - the most Wymysiöryś respectively
- the letter **q** – which grammatically and visually marks plural in Võro (or Southern Estonian – an unrecognized regional language in Estonia), while Standard Estonian uses **d** in that function



[ Ō ō ]

- used in some orthographies of Latgalian, but officially outlawed by the Latvian language authorities, as not-corresponding with the general Latvian graphic tradition;



A decorative header element consisting of a horizontal line with a gradient from olive green to light yellow. Above the line, there is a large black left square bracket on the left, a blue right square bracket in the middle-left, a yellow right square bracket in the middle-right, and a large yellow right square bracket on the far right.

[

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]

]

- used traditionally in Ukrainian orthography, but forbidden by the Soviet orthographic reforms in the 1930s, as ‘too much Western and too little Soviet’.

[

Ė ė

]

(...) most of the diacritic letters of the Lithuanian alphabet are borrowed from other nations (...) the thirty-two letters of the Lithuanian alphabet reveal the history of the country perfectly, only one letter is exclusively ours and has no 'analogue' in the world.



[

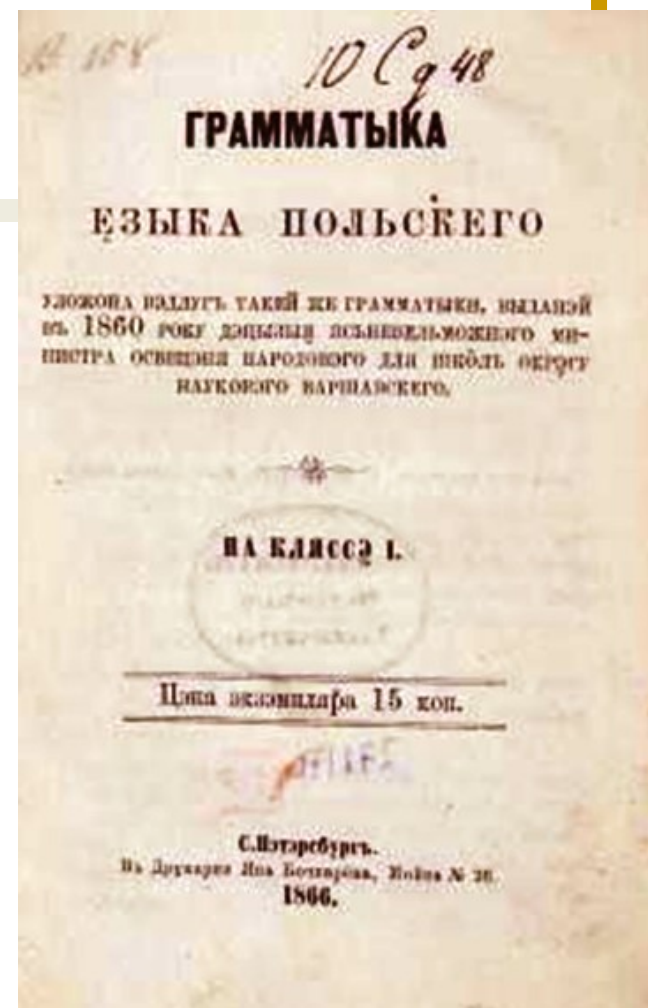
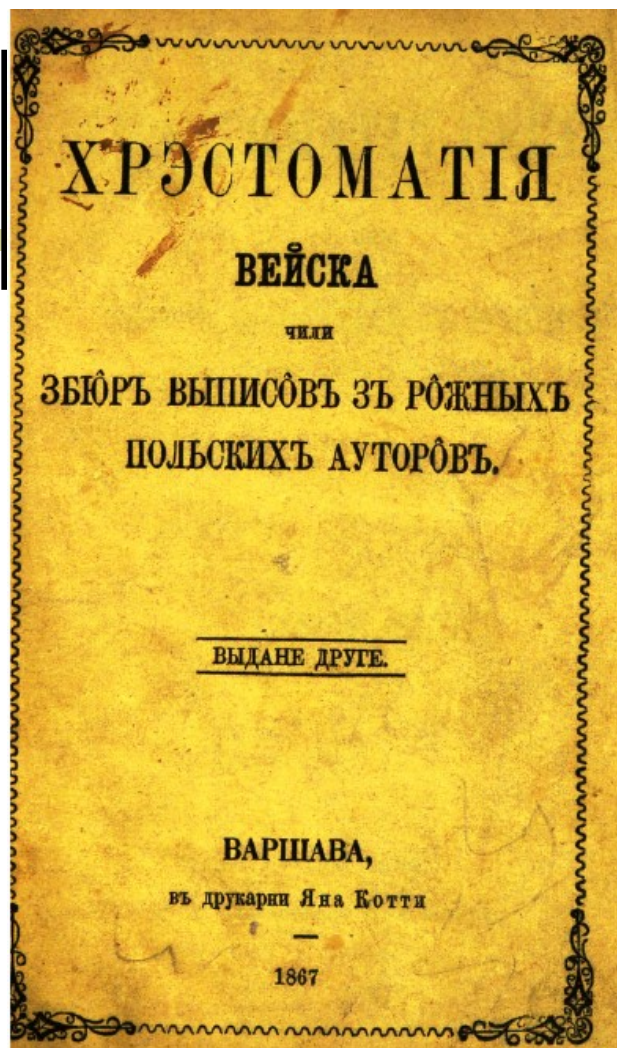
]

e.g.

- accents            < é > < ò >
- diaeresis        < ö > < ü >
- tilde             < ñ > < ã >
- caron/háček    < ž > < č >
- These often become iconic of particular orthographies due to their distinctiveness, as in the case of the German umlaut

[ h ]

- A letter may happen to be a carrier not so much of group ideologies, but individual language attitudes,
- e.g. the case of the letter **h**, allegedly hated by a prominent Polish politician, as a marker of ‘Ukrainianness’.
- As a result of that ‘letter-hatred’, in 1977, numerous names of villages in south-eastern Poland were changed – into what seemed to be more Polish toponyms.



Грамматыка ѣзыка  
польскаго

[https://books.google.by/books?id=i6FeAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ru&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.by/books?id=i6FeAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ru&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[https://www.liveinternet.ru/community/moja\\_polska/post181547041/](https://www.liveinternet.ru/community/moja_polska/post181547041/)





## Press ban - 1864-1904.

imposed by the Russian authorities on Lithuanian publications in the Latin alphabet

publication or import from abroad - only Cyrillic permitted



terrific national response  
successful *Knygnešiai*  
movement



# [ ы

- The Rusyn-Lemko language community keep discussing the usage of letter **Ы** in their Cyrillic-based writing system. The objectors see the letter as ‘too Russian’ and too far distancing Lemko from Ukrainian, the argument being an inherent element of longer and deeper debate on the ethno-linguistic origins and identity of the Lemko.



Rich Custer udostępnił zdjęcie Молода Лемківщина w grupie Lemko Rusyns and Friends (Лемкы-Русины з приятелями).

30 lipca · €

Lemko proverbs -- anybody want to translate a few?

(Unfortunately, without the letter **ы** a lot of these words are misspelled, but it is what it is.)



[

**Ѣ** (*yat'*)

]

- Individual letters can be considered sacred in certain communities; this has been the case of the old Cyrillic letter **Ѣ** (called *Yat'*) which allegedly contains a holy sign of cross. The letter still survives in liturgical and church texts written in the Russian Church Slavonic. It has recently found some favor in advertising or reference to religious matters in the Eastern Christian Orthodoxy.



- „This letter Ъ is the most beautiful among Slavic letters; it is a cross, so the text looks beautiful and sacral.

It is Christ's enemies, who rose their hand against the letter. After the anti-Christian revolution in Russia, the first thing the communists, Bolsheviks and freemasons did, was to throw away the Ъ (...)

For the Rusyns' sake, the Ъ has survived in our Orthodoxy. As long as the Rusyns exist, the Ъ shall exist in Old Church Slavonic...”





Два роки тому,  
перед витаньон ярі -  
весны, на переднівку  
- як бы повіли наші  
вітцьове - долетіла до

Подумати бы ніг да-  
хто же нам замір фор-  
сувати сугестію яка  
нала бы переконувати  
што толоку не старали  
мы ся орати перше, або

еднаны в Світовія Раді  
Русинів нают хьбаль ко-  
рьскіяшы обставини до  
так великого предпри-  
нятя.  
Чи не перечислили мы

A letter sent by a little boy, who asked for publishing Rusyn texts in the Polish alphabet, so he could read (Rusyn) with more ease...

■ Answer by Петро Трохановский:  
*Our script can be learned in a few days, dear Павло.*

*Language constitutes a nation's soul, while their writing – is a little box, where the soul resides. In another's box the soul would die.*

*Wouldn't you feel sorry, Павло ?*


Michna (2004: 273-277)



In the communist times, Cyrillics had been used for teaching Russian, nowadays it is discardable and forgotten



- Obviously, not all languages of the world have been recorded in writing.
- Also, there are much less scripts and writing systems than language varieties in the world.
- If a language community want their language to get a writing system, the decisions they face concern selection of a script, writing system, and orthography.
- On each of these levels, many extralinguistic factors (actually probably more than intralinguistic) are (to be) taken into account.

- 
- The problem of devising an acceptable spelling system, which initially might have appeared purely, or at least primarily, a linguistic matter, upon closer inspection thus turned out to be a language and culture problem par excellence.
  - Sebba, Mark 2012. *Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power*

- ‘there are many factors involved in devising or adapting an orthography. Linguistic factors are basic, but many other issues make conflicting demands as well. All these must be considered and balanced for an orthography to be effective. The whole process is more complex than is commonly realized.
- Cahill, Michael & Elke Karan 2008. *Factors in designing effective orthographies for unwritten languages*
- Without literacy, our language was in the process of being exterminated... But now, even if I die today, I will die happy, because my children have a language which will endure and that they can call their own.
- (Josué Koné, Miniyanka speaker, Mali)



- Numerous cases in the sociolinguistic history of mankind show that any language (variety) can be written with any writing system or script, not to mention changes in orthography or individual graphemes that most written language communities have gone through.
- Most of scriptal reforms, however, have only occasionally followed the diachronic changes of/within the language systems; many reforms have taken place because of ideological, political, cultural reasons.
- If planned by the authorities, such a change of a script may aim at depriving the next generations of readers (users) access to the centuries-old written heritage.
- This was the case of Mongolia's shift from the Uyghur-derived, through Latin to Cyrillic Монгол script.

ᠮᠣᠩᠭᠣᠯ

ᠮᠣᠩᠭᠣᠯ



# Factors influencing the choice of a script

- Unseth, Peter 2005. *Sociolinguistic parallels between choosing scripts and languages\**

# Motivations in choosing a national language

1. To identify themselves with another group
2. To distance themselves from another group
3. Participation in developments on a broader scale

This criterion often conflicts with the other two. It wins out if technology and the desire for external relations outweigh cultural self-expression.



- These three motivations apply quite well to choosing a script, as well as a language.
- [in applying these criteria to the selection of scripts, this includes printing capabilities].
- In addition to these three types of motivations for choosing a language, for scripts a fourth motivation can be added:

## [ 4. Linguistic considerations. ]

Just as a sentimentally disfavored language may be chosen for practical motives (more suited for discussing commerce, technology), a preferred script can be overtaken by linguistic considerations.

# [ To identify themselves with a group ]

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- Many language communities choose a script to identify with another group.
- This may alternatively be viewed as identifying themselves with others of the same group; the perspective is often dependent on whether one is an outsider or is a member of the group that is asserting its membership as part of a broader grouping.



- In choosing to identify themselves with a larger group, a speech community may choose to identify themselves with the national culture or may choose to identify with others of the same ethno-linguistic community even though they live outside of the country.



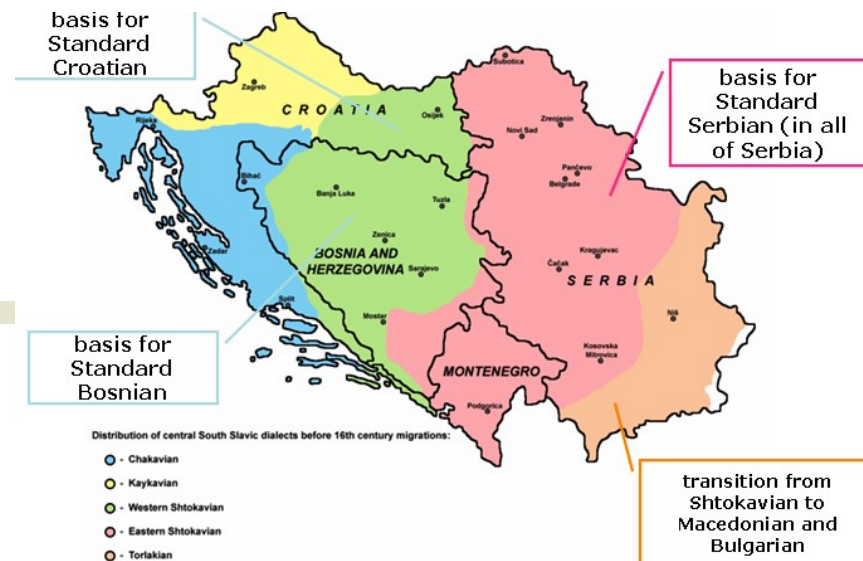
- When forces outside of a language group (usually governments) try to dictate which script to use, it is almost inevitably the same script as used by the more powerful outside group.
- This can be illustrated by the Soviet Union's policies, where Stalin imposed Cyrillic on many groups that used other scripts, including Azeri, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tatar + many other

# [ To distance themselves from a group ]

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- There are many cases of language communities choosing a script to distance themselves from another speech community.
- Seen from the opposite perspective and stated in a positive way, it is sometimes more helpful to see such efforts as strong assertion of ethnic pride.
- The desire for distance in their identity can be motivated by a number of factors, including ethnic pride, desire for political autonomy, religion, though these categories are not mutually exclusive.






- Two better known examples of using a script to create/emphasize distance between two speech communities involve religious differences, the use of Cyrillic by the Serbs (Orthodox) and Roman script by Croats (Catholic), also the use of Arabic-derived nastaliq by the Urdu (Muslim) and Devanagari by Hindi (Hindu) communities.



- In both cases, the spoken forms of the pairs of languages were very similar, but each faction chose a script that distances them from their very close linguistic neighbors who do not share their religion.



- In distancing themselves from another group, communities can do so to varying degrees.
- E.g., all of Korea has eventually changed from writing with Chinese characters to using Hangul, but the North has eliminated them much more completely than the South

- 
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