

## ON THE DIALECTAL BASIS OF THE RUTHENIAN LITERARY LANGUAGE

### 1. Introduction

The present paper is a somewhat belated reply to a hypothesis put forward by Andrii Danylenko in “Welt der Slaven” nine years ago (Danylenko 2006a)<sup>1</sup>. It concerns the provenance of the Ruthenian literary language, the common literary norm of the ancestors of the Ukrainians and Belarusians, which was in use from the end of the 14th to the 18th century:

From the viewpoint of its dialect basis, the above vernacular system, realized as the ‘ruskij jazykъ’ and the ‘prostaja mova’, was neither pure Ukrainian nor Belarusian. Nor was it an amalgam of common, Ukrainian and Belarusian, features, consciously sifted out by Ukrainians and Belarusians. The underlying vernacular system showed, in addition to constantly fluctuating Slavonic and rather solid Polish admixtures, a particular configuration of Polissian, viz., southern Belarusian and northern Ukrainian features, which genetically were of the same provenance (Danylenko 2006a, 109; 2006c, 118).

This hypothesis needs a lot of assumptions. It assumes that a) the Polissian dialect area used to extend considerably farther south than it does nowadays, thus encompassing culturally important regions, specifically Volhynia; that b) since the 14th century the ducal chancery in Vilnius was dominated (in numbers and/or rank) by scribes speaking dialects from this enlarged Polissian dialect area; that c) their dialect was emulated even by scribes from other dialect areas, including those nearer the capital; and that d) this rather accidental choice of a dialectal basis for the Vilnius chancery was maintained also for literary texts written as late as the 17th century by eminent writers speaking North Belarusian and South Ukrainian dialects.

This article aims to show that the features of the Ruthenian literary standard can be explained in a much simpler way by two elementary maxims for writers who want to be understood by readers from different dialect areas:

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) in Cambridge in 2008, but for various reasons it was not published at that time. This print version has been significantly expanded and updated.

1. Avoid ‘extreme’ features of your home dialect that are shared by only a relatively small number of people.
2. When in doubt, stick to the traditional spelling you have seen in other texts even if it does not reflect your own pronunciation.

If Ruthenian writers, both in the chancery of Vilnius and during the ‘golden age’ of the Ruthenian *prostaja mova*, stuck to these maxims, there was no need to “consciously sift out” the exact constellation of dialectal features for the Ruthenian literary norm. The features we can observe would have followed from the dialects spoken by the writers and their observation of the maxims automatically.

In order to make this point, I first have to make clear what exactly I mean by ‘Ruthenian literary language’ (2.), and then I need two methodological clarifications (3.) before I can proceed to the actual analysis of some of the key features of the Ruthenian norm (4.).

## 2. What was the ‘Ruthenian literary language’?

The history of the Ukrainian language is usually divided into three periods: Old Ukrainian (Ukr. *давньоукраїнська мова*, literally ‘Ancient Ukrainian’) up to the 14th century, Middle Ukrainian (Ukr. *староукраїнська мова*, literally ‘Old Ukrainian’) from the end of the 14th to the 18th century, and Modern Ukrainian (Ukr. *сучасна українська мова*, literally ‘Contemporary Ukrainian’), which is traditionally determined to begin with the publication of Ivan Kotljarevs’kyj’s “Enejida” in 1798. It has long been agreed upon that during the ‘Old Ukrainian’ period there was a common literary language (or *koinê*)<sup>2</sup> for all the East Slavs, so that the terms *Old Ukrainian*, *Old Belarusian* (Blr. *старажытнабеларуская мова*, lit. ‘Ancient Belarusian’) and *Old Russian* (R. *древнерусский язык*, lit. ‘Ancient Russian’) actually mean the same thing. Consequently, *Old East Slavic* is a more suitable term for this common literary language.

According to the traditional (Soviet) interpretation, in the 14th century the East Slavic language split up into three different languages:

Исторические обстоятельства сложились так, что в XIII—XIV вв. древнерусская народность разделяется на три близкородственные народности – русскую, украинскую и белорусскую, что повлекло за собой возникновение трех близких языков с их самобытными, оригинальными путями развития (Filin 1972, 3).

<sup>2</sup> Since the Prague School definition (cf. Isačenko 1958) of a standard language (Ukr. *літературна мова*), which relies on codification and a school system to enforce the norms, is not applicable to the early modern period, the less strictly defined term *literary language* (Ukr. *писемна мова*, G. *Schriftsprache*) is used here to refer to a language variety whose functions for the language community are similar to the ones a standard variety performs nowadays.

	History of Rusyn	History of Ukrainian	History of Belarusian	History of Russian
10 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Old East Slavic literary language			
15 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> c.	Ruthenian literary language			Russian literary language
19 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> c.	Rusyn standard language	Ukrainian standard language	Belarusian standard language	Russian standard language

Fig. 1: History of the East Slavic literary languages

The historical circumstances were such that in the 13th/14th century the Old Russian ethnos split up into three closely related ethnic groups: the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian one. This led to the emergence of three closely related languages with their own autochthonous, original paths of development.

This view has been contested by scholars from outside the East Slavic countries (e.g. Moser 1995, Pugh 1996, Danylenko 2006b, Bunčić 2006), who argue that during the ‘middle period’ (14th–18th c.) there was still a common literary language for the ancestors of the modern Ukrainians and Belarusians (and the Rusyns), so that, again, *Middle Ukrainian* and *Middle Belarusian* (Blr. *старобеларуская мова*, lit. ‘Old Belarusian’) refer to the same language (though Muscovy already had a distinct literary language). Recently, this view has been adopted even in Ukraine:

[...] цілком виправдано буде називати мову [...] пам’яток, особливо друкованих у кінці XVI–першій половині XVII ст. в Острозі, Заблудові, Вільні, Луцьку, Києві, Несвіжі, – мовою «руською», під якою розуміти спільну для українців та білорусів літературно-писемну мову. (Mojsijenko 2011, 5)

[...] it is completely justified to call the language of [...] monuments, especially those printed in Ostroh, Zabłudów, Vilnius, Luc’k, Kiev or Njasviž at the end of the 16th and during the first half of the 17th century, “Ruthenian”, which is to be understood as a common literary language of Ukrainians and Belarusians.

As the quotation shows, Mojsijenko still retains *Ukrainian* and *Belarusian* as ethnic terms, although Plokhy (2006) has shown convincingly that no specifically Ukrainian or Belarusian identity existed prior to the 18th century, when a sense of Ukrainian distinction from the Belarusians gradually evolved in and around the Hetmanate (ibid. 358f.). This, however, is a question of political history, not of linguistics. Mojsijenko & Nika (2013) also approve of the terms *Old Ukrainian language* and *Old Belarusian language* (alongside *Ruthenian*) for Ruthenian texts showing distinctly Ukrainian or Belarusian dialectal traits. This, however, would be analogous to using the terms *American language*, *British language*, etc. for

all English texts that contain words like *garbage* or *rubbish*, spellings like ⟨center⟩ or ⟨centre⟩, etc.

However, there now seems to be almost general agreement that the history of the East Slavic literary languages can be represented as in figure 1 (except for the evaluation of Rusyn as a separate ‘Ausbausprache’, which is rather controversial; and the dates of course have to be taken with a grain of salt). Consequently, during the ‘middle period’ of East Slavic the ancestors of the modern Ukrainians and Belarusians (and the East Slavs in Hungary, who nowadays call themselves Rusyns) had a common literary language.

Of course in everyday life each village continued to use its own dialect, but written texts obeyed certain norms that were more or less uniform all over the Ruthenian lands. Up to the beginning of the 16th century, these norms existed almost exclusively in the chanceries. However, the Reformation brought about an increase in the production of texts of various genres (e.g. Skaryna’s Bible translations), so that Ruthenian became a truly polyfunctional language. After the Cossack uprising of 1648 and the establishment of the Ukrainian Hetmanate, Ruthenian ceased to be a language of high culture: All the important Bible translations, theological disputes and polemics, dictionaries and grammars of Ruthenian had been written before that. Ruthenian continued to be used in everyday written conversation, but the highest genres of literature had now been conquered by Polish and (a bit later) Russian. The Ruthenian language as such never recovered<sup>3</sup>, but at the turn of the 19th century two national languages, Ukrainian and Belarusian, were formed as successors of Ruthenian, and they proved their recapture of the high genres by two well-known translations of the Aeneid (1798 and ca. 1830).

Historians of the East Slavic languages often make a point about the importance of distinguishing between two different varieties, stages or even languages (Miakiszew 2000): “Руський языкъ’ (Rus’ian)” (mainly from the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 16th century) and “prostaja mova’ (Ruthenian)” (mainly during the ‘golden age’ of Ruthenian literacy in the 16th and 17th centuries; Danylenko 2006a, 85; 2006c, 94 with further literature). While acknowledging the fact that both the functions (mainly a chancery language at the early stage vs. full polyfunctionality at the later stage) and the linguistic features of the literary lan-

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<sup>3</sup> One might, however, regard the Rusyn language of the Hungarian East Slavs as a direct continuation of Ruthenian. The relatively high number of both Church Slavonic and Polish elements in the Carpathian varieties of Rusyn seem to suggest that in contrast to the modern Ukrainian and Belarusian standard language the Rusyn usage of today – notwithstanding the clearly visible influences from the local dialects, the surrounding languages, Russian and Standard Ukrainian – developed rather organically from the Ruthenian literary language.

guage (many local features and ample variation vs. a uniform norm with relatively little variation) changed at the beginning of the 16th century and that the administrative language continued to be stylistically different from the language of literature, I do not consider it appropriate to use different glottonyms for these varieties. (Compare the Polish literary language, which at different periods had different dialectal bases – Great Polish, Little Polish, Mazovian – but is uniformly known as *Polish*.) I therefore use the glottonym *Ruthenian* for the whole time from the separation of Old East Slavic into a Lithuanian and a Muscovite chancery language to the establishment of a new Ukrainian standard language at the end of the 18th century. Different functional varieties can be much better addressed by using functional denominations (e.g. *chancery language*, *language of folk literature*, *language of religious polemics*, etc.). And if a more fine-grained periodization is deemed necessary, one might distinguish *Early Ruthenian* (up to the early 16th century), *High Ruthenian* (from Skaryna to Uževyč) and *Late Ruthenian* (after 1648). In this sense, the present article deals with High Ruthenian.

### 3. Methodological prerequisites

#### 3.1. Representation vs. norm

There already are a number of linguistic descriptions of Ruthenian texts and idiolects available, so that it is not necessary to analyse every single word form of the original texts once more. The present analysis will therefore concentrate on the language of five outstanding Ruthenian authors: Francysk Skaryna († 1551; Bulyka 1990), Vasil' Cjapinski († ca. 1600; Klimaš 2012), Ivan Vyšens'kyj († 1620; Gröschel 1972), Meletij Smotryč'kyj († 1633; Pugh 1996) and Ivan Uževyč († after 1645; Bunčić 2006).

So far Ruthenian texts have been examined mainly to determine the 'native dialect' of the author (or scribe or printer) and thus to prove their 'Ukrainianness' or 'Belarusianness'. To achieve this aim, one has to determine the 'mistakes' the authors made, their violations of commonly accepted orthographic and morphological norms, but until recently virtually nobody seems to have cared to describe these norms themselves. It has been almost completely overlooked how remarkable it is that there existed a uniform norm from Vilnius to Braclav despite the considerable dialect variation in this vast area.

The extraction of these norms from the existing descriptions of deviations is sometimes complicated by the absence of any quantitative data in the linguistic descriptions, since for the location of the author's dialect qualitative data are often sufficient: Is there any evidence of a certain sound change in a text or is there not? However, from the phrasing of

such statements it can usually be inferred whether one has to actively search for a certain variant to find a couple of examples in a sea of counter-examples or whether these variants abound wherever one looks. This is exactly what we need for our question: If a variant is used in the overwhelming majority of cases, we can assume that the author considered this variant to be normative. And if a variant is used as an exception rather than the rule, it may be due to various influences, among them the author's home dialect, the dialects used by people in the author's surroundings, foreign languages the author knows, etc., but it is probably not part of the norm we are interested in.

Very good evidence of the existence of a norm is also provided by hypercorrect forms. If a writer spells ⟨дванадцетъ⟩ with an ⟨o⟩ (Danylenko 2006c, 115) where in accordance with etymology everybody pronounces an unstressed /a/, this points not only to the fact that the writer pronounces unstressed /o/ and /a/ alike (akanne), but also that he knows that unstressed /a/ should sometimes be spelled ⟨o⟩ – which proves the existence of a norm.

### 3.2. Phonetics vs. orthography

Another preliminary remark about methods concerns the question what can and cannot be inferred from written texts. First of all, orthography is connected only to phonology, not to phonetics. For example, the change of the pronunciation of Proto-Slavic \*g to [f] in Ruthenian did not entail any change in orthography, i.e. the grapheme ⟨r⟩ continued to be used for this phoneme, because the phoneme inventory had not changed. Consequently, whenever we notice that two graphemes, ⟨x⟩ and ⟨y⟩, which traditionally represented two different phonemes /x/ and /y/, are confused in a text, we can conclude that this is a reflection of the merger of these two phonemes (in the native dialect of the writer, in the norm, or in some other contact variety). However, we do not know how the result of this merger is pronounced, i.e. whether /x/ has come to be pronounced as [y] or vice versa or whether they have, as it were, met in the middle or have changed to a third sound value [z]. The only clues to phonetics are the spellings of foreign words because they can be compared with the pronunciation in the source language.

Apart from that it has to be kept in mind that Ruthenian orthography continued the Old East Slavic and Church Slavonic traditions by being much 'deeper' than the 'flat' orthographies of Modern Belarusian and Modern Ukrainian and more comparable to Modern Russian or Modern German orthography.

Most Ukrainian and Belarusian analyses so far ignored these problems. For example, Žovtobrjux (1980, 33) deduces from Uževyč's spelling of

⟨a⟩ after ⟨u⟩ that \*c' was depalatalized after back vowels. However, ⟨цa⟩ is nothing more than the simplest possible spelling: If no non-palatalized phoneme /ts/ exists, then ⟨ц⟩ represents /tsʲ/ unequivocally, and the default<sup>4</sup> spelling of /a/ is ⟨a⟩, so that the most straightforward way to spell /tsʲa/ is ⟨цa⟩. For exactly the same reasons, ⟨a⟩ rather than ⟨я⟩ is written after ⟨ч⟩ in Russian, although /tʃ/ is not depalatalized there. These spellings are even more natural since the depalatalization of these unpaired consonant phonemes did not change the phoneme inventory. This is also the reason why cekanje and dzekanje are virtually never expressed in Ruthenian texts (cf. Dingley 1972, 374, Bulyka 1990, 18): The pronunciation of /dʲ/ and /tʲ/ as [dʒʲ] and [tʃʲ] or even [dʒ] and [tʃ] is purely phonetic, leaving the phoneme inventory untouched.<sup>5</sup>

So what can be deduced from the texts are a descriptive notion of an existing spelling norm and the phonological facts it is probably based on. What cannot be deduced are the phonetic norm (if it existed at all) and the actual pronunciation of the author.

#### 4. Some dialect variables and the Ruthenian literary standard

The limitation of space does not permit me to examine all the variables making up the Ruthenian literary norm. I therefore restrict myself to the

<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the 'flat' orthographies of Modern Ukrainian and Modern Belarusian, in Russian and Ruthenian the vowel letters should not be classified as 'hard' or 'soft', as they often are in textbooks of Russian. Russian spellings like ⟨час⟩ for /'tʃas/, ⟨тендер⟩ for /'tɛndɛr/, ⟨жемчуг⟩ for /'ʒɛmtʃuk/, ⟨цирк⟩ for /'tsirk/, ⟨шёл⟩ for /'ʃɔl/ or ⟨щюка⟩ for /'ʃʲ:uka/ (rather than \*⟨чяс⟩, \*⟨тэндэр⟩, \*⟨жэмчюг⟩, \*⟨цырк⟩, \*⟨шол⟩, \*⟨щюка⟩) demonstrate that the 'hard' vowels ⟨a o y⟩ are perfectly regular after palatalized consonants, just as the 'soft' vowels ⟨e и⟩ are perfectly regular after non-palatalized consonants. In a more appropriate description of Russian graphematics ⟨a e и o y⟩ would therefore be classified as *unmarked* vowel graphemes and ⟨я э ы ё ю⟩ as their *marked* counterparts. Ruthenian graphematics is similar: It has the unmarked vowels ⟨a e и o y ъ⟩ and the marked vowels ⟨я ê ы ю⟩. For historical reasons, the vowel graphemes ⟨o⟩ and ⟨ѣ⟩ do not have marked counterparts, and the letters ⟨и~ї⟩, ⟨o~ω⟩ and ⟨a~я~я⟩ function as allographs.

<sup>5</sup> Actually it can be seen as a manifestation of Russian (and Polish) influence that cekanne, dzekanne, akanne and jakanne are represented in Belarusian spelling. From an intralinguistic point of view, it does not make any difference whether the grapheme ⟨ц⟩ is used to represent two phonemes (/ts/ and /tsʲ/) while ⟨т⟩ represents only /t/ or whether ⟨ц⟩ exclusively represents /ts/ while ⟨т⟩ stands for both /t/ and /tsʲ/. The latter solution, with the spellings ⟨тя те ти тѣ тю ть⟩ for /tsʲa tsʲɛ tsʲi tsʲɔ tsʲu tsʲj/, would even have the advantage of supporting the morphological principle, e.g. ⟨свет⟩ – ⟨на свете⟩ have the same stem representation, whereas the spelling ⟨на свеце⟩ obscures the stem ⟨свет⟩. However, on the one hand the spelling ⟨на свете⟩ looks too much like Russian and on the other hand to a Russian native speaker the Belarusian sound chain [na 'sʲvʲɛtsʲɛ] sounds similar to Russian \*/na 'sʲvʲɛtsʲi/, which would have to be represented as ⟨на свеце⟩.

most important features of the Ruthenian vowel system and the dis-palatalization of *\*r*, thus covering the “core features” (i) through (iv) of Danylenko’s (2006, 107f.) “Polissian vernacular standard” plus a few regional features *not* represented in the norm.

#### 4.1. Merger of *\*i* and *\*y*

Before the merger of *\*i* and *\*y*, which is usually viewed as typically Ukrainian, can be analysed, it has to be properly defined. Phonologists in the framework of Moscow Phonological School claim that these two phonemes have merged in Russian as well, so that they analyse a minimal pair like *бил* vs. *был* as /b’il/ vs. /bil/. In Ukrainian, however, the merger results in the complete neutralization of the opposition between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants before *\*i* and *\*y*. Ukrainian scholars so far found this feature in any texts they consider ‘Old Ukrainian’, citing as evidence such spellings as ⟨тры⟩, ⟨жыти⟩, ⟨чынишь⟩, etc. (e.g. Žovto-brjuh 1978, 194f., Bilodid 1979, 35f., Petehyryč 1998, 79), where the palatalization contrast in the sibilants and *r* is neutralized due to other factors – and in the whole Ruthenian area (and even in Polish). Other cases that look like examples of the vowel merger are case endings like ⟨зимный⟩ or ⟨Вилни⟩, where a class change of the adjective between the soft and the hard paradigm has taken place (cf. Russian *зимний* ‘winterly’ vs. Belarusian *зімны* (coll.) ‘cold’, Russian †*Вильна* vs. Belarusian *Вільня*). Nominative plural endings of hard *o*-stems in ⟨и⟩ rather than ⟨ы⟩ might just reflect the etymologically correct ending, and even in the accusative plural they can be the result of morphological rather than phonological confusion.

An examination of the treatment of *\*i* and *\*y* in other positions by Skaryna, Сјарински (Klimaŭ 2012, 74-84), Uževyč (cf. Bunčić 2006, 179-185), Vyšens’kyj (cf. Gröschel 1972, 57) and Smotryc’kyj (cf. Pugh 1996, 39f.) shows that they all use the graphemes ⟨и⟩ and ⟨ы⟩ according to etymology – in the case of Uževyč and Smotryc’kyj without a single deviation and in the case of Vyšens’kyj with a negligible number of mistakes (like ⟨синь⟩ or ⟨непостыжимый⟩). Uževyč even makes this norm explicit in his grammar by contrasting ⟨вію⟩ ‘to wind’ with ⟨выю⟩ ‘to scream’.

However, there are some lexicalized exceptions: Due to various foreign and dialectal influences (cf. Bulyka 1970, 120) the words ⟨тисяча⟩ ‘a thousand’ and ⟨досить⟩ ‘enough’ are predominantly spelled with ⟨и⟩ even in the farthest north of the Ruthenian lands, and the proper name ⟨Давыдъ⟩ is most often spelled with ⟨ы⟩ all over the territory (cf. Klimaŭ 2012, 84).



## 4.2. Jat'

The representation of \*ǰ is often viewed as the most important difference between so-called 'Old Ukrainian' and 'Old Belarusian' texts, and very often the confusion of ⟨ѣ⟩ with ⟨и⟩ or ⟨е⟩ is cited as evidence even in cases where other factors like vowel reduction and morphological analogy are responsible for this. To get all these factors straight, what has to be considered first of all are instances of \*ǰ in stressed position inside a root morpheme. Here it can be seen that apart from Cjapinski – whose typesetter seems to have treated ⟨ѣ⟩ and ⟨е⟩ as allographs and used them in free variation (cf. Klimař 2012, 62-64) – in the overwhelming majority of cases \*ǰ is represented as ⟨ѣ⟩ by such authors as Skaryna (cf. Bulyka 1990, 12), Smotryc'kyj (cf. Pugh 1996, 38) or Vyšens'kyj (cf. Gröschel 1972, 52). Sometimes it is represented as ⟨е⟩ by Skaryna (cf. Bulyka 1990, 12) and Uževyč (cf. Buncić 2006, 174-176), but virtually never as ⟨и⟩. Why is this so? The explanation for this cannot be found in the phonetic data ([ɛ] in the north, [i] in the south) but must be sought in the phonology: Only in a relatively small region in the far north of the Ruthenian dialect area has the phoneme \*ǰ been lost. In the rest of the Ruthenian dialects it has been retained as a distinct phoneme, in the form of the monophthong /i/ in the south and of the diphthong /iɛ/ in the centre.

So the norm seems to have been to write ⟨ѣ⟩ according to etymology, with ⟨е⟩ occurring as a relatively frequent secondary variant (which was more frequent in chancery texts than in the literary style).

In the locative (and *a*-stem dative) singular case ending, ⟨-ѣ⟩ alternated both with ⟨-и⟩ and with ⟨-е⟩, and all these three forms were almost equally frequent. Even Uževyč mentions both ⟨-и⟩ and ⟨-е⟩ without any preference in his grammar:

Et hi Vagabundi Casus plerumque Singulariter per и vel е efferuntur ut в желези vel в железе (Bilodid, Kudryc'kyj (eds.) 1970, 33<sub>2</sub>).

And these straying cases [i.e. locatives] in the singular usually end in *i* or *e*, as in *v železi* or *v železe* ['in iron'].

Additionally, in practice Uževyč often uses the traditional ⟨-ѣ⟩ spelling, too. However, this has nothing to do with northern or southern reflexes of *jat'* but with a mixture of the endings of hard stems (\*-ǰ) and soft stems (\*-i), with ⟨-е⟩ occurring as an alternative to ⟨-ѣ⟩. The high frequency of ⟨-е⟩ in the locative (and dative) ending, counting all the occurrences, has to do with the fact that the ending is very often unstressed, and the unstressed position has to be viewed in a broader context of vowel reduction.

### 4.3. Vowel reduction

There are several systems of vowel reduction in the various Ruthenian dialects, some of which were adopted in the standard and some of which were not.

**Akanne:** This feature is extremely rare in all the texts, even in those written by authors we know to stem from the area with *akanne*:

У пераважнай жа большасці старабеларускіх пісьмовых крыніц такія выпадкі адсутнічаюць зусім (Bulyka 1970, 69).

But in the overwhelming majority of Old Belarusian written sources such cases are completely absent.

In Skaryna's printed editions there are only "singular spellings" ("адзінкавыя напісанні") reflecting *akanne* (Bulyka 1990, 18), and in Cjapinski's gospel translation *Klimaŭ* (2012, 74) found exactly one such spelling. *Smotryc'kyj*, *Vyšens'kyj* and *Uževyč* do not write *akanne* at all, and there also are only very few spellings possibly reflecting sporadic assimilation of pre-tonic /o/ to /a/ as in Modern Ukrainian *багатий*, *гарячий*, etc. (cf. Pugh 1996, 43f., Gröschel 1972, 61f., Bunčić 2006, 197-199).

So the norm was obviously to disregard *akanne*, and this norm was all the easier to obey in writing for writers who knew Polish (which increasingly applied to all literate Ruthenians) and thus had no problem to determine where to write ⟨o⟩ and where ⟨a⟩ with the aid of Polish cognates.

**Jekanne.** Unstressed \**ɛ* could be represented as ⟨e⟩ or ⟨я⟩, and both spellings were common in the whole Ruthenian area (cf. Gröschel 1972, 59f. on *Vyšens'kyj*, Horbatsch 1974, VII on *Smotryc'kyj*), but especially in the north (cf. Bulyka 1990, 17 on Skaryna and others, *Klimaŭ* 2012, 75-80 on Cjapinski) and in the centre (cf. Žovtobrjux 1979, 32 on *Uževyč*). At first glance this orthographic practice seems to represent an astonishing success of those relatively few central Ruthenian (Polissian) dialects where unstressed \**ɛ* is indeed pronounced [ɛ]. However, if we look at phonology rather than phonetics, the area where unstressed /iɛ/ and /ja/ have merged is vast, as it includes the whole northern half of Ruthenia, i.e. all dialects with vowel reduction after palatalized consonants (so-called *jekanne*). Consequently, all the scribes from the north, including those from Vilnius, would have had problems to differentiate between ⟨e⟩ and ⟨я⟩ in unstressed positions, so free variation was a rather reasonable element of the norm. Wherever a writer pronouncing unstressed \**ɛ* as /a/ chose ⟨e⟩ rather than traditional ⟨я⟩, this might be interpreted as a hyperism. However, especially in the case of ⟨ce⟩, an influence of Polish orthography seems likely (cf. ⟨sie⟩ and ⟨sie⟩; Bulyka 1990, 17).

**Ikanne.** *Ikanne*, i.e. the pronunciation of unstressed /e/ as a kind of [i] and consequently its approximation to or even merger with /ě/ or /i/

is very widespread in the East Slavic languages and occurs in the southwest of modern Belarus (Vajtovič 1968, 95, 192; Dingley 1972, 374) as well as virtually all over modern Ukraine with the exception of central and eastern Polissia (Shevelov 1979, 519 = § 40.3). Consequently, speakers of these Ruthenian dialects (most of which had an [i]-type reflex of *\*ě* in stressed syllables) sometimes confused ⟨e⟩, ⟨ѣ⟩ and ⟨и⟩ in unstressed syllables. Since a part of the other dialects in the far north had a merger of *\*ě* and *\*e* anyway (regardless of stress), the spelling of unstressed *\*ě* as ⟨e⟩ was so widespread that it seems to have become a variant admitted by the norm. However, the etymological representation of *\*ě* as ⟨ѣ⟩ still prevailed in most texts (cf. Horbatsch 1974, VII; Gröschel 1972, 57f.; Bulyka 1990, 12).

Ukanne: The confusion of unstressed ⟨o⟩ and ⟨y⟩, which would be a result of the merger of these two unstressed vowels in Southwest-Ukrainian dialects, is hard to trace in most texts, since those few examples that do exist can often be explained as Polish influence as well (but cf. Stern 2000, 68). However, Shevelov (1979, 522 = §40.4) considers ukanne as “the ‘best’ pronunciation” over the whole southern Ruthenian area of that time, so that it might well have been part of the orthoepic norm, but it definitely was not part of the orthographic norm.

#### 4.4. Dispalatalization of *\*r'*

Historical *\*r'* was dispalatalized almost all over the Ruthenian area, though not everywhere at the same time or with exactly the same results (while *\*r'* merged with *\*r* in most cases, in some dialects it could turn into *\*rj*; cf. Shevelov 1979, 636-641). The orthographic norm of the Ruthenian literary language seems to have been free variation between ⟨ря⟩ and ⟨ра⟩, ⟨ри⟩ and ⟨ры⟩, ⟨рю⟩ and ⟨ру⟩, etc. None of the authors examined uses one of the spellings exclusively (cf. Gröschel 1972, 72f.; Pugh 1996, 37; Bunčić 2006, 190-192; Klimař 2012, 85-87), although the relative frequency of the variants changed over time. Skaryna still seemed to consider the etymologically correct representation of *\*r'* as the norm, as hyperisms like ⟨риба⟩ ‘fish’ indicate (Bulyka 1990, 19).

#### 5. Conclusion: Where did the Ruthenian literary norm come from?

If we look at all these variables, we see that it is exactly those variants that reflect the majority of the Ruthenian dialects which are accepted as normative by all Ruthenian writers. The question whether these variants stem from the north, from the south or from the centre seems to play no role whatsoever. Consequently, the norm of Ruthenian obviously was a kind of negative norm: The overall rule that guided writers of Ruthenian

literary texts seems to have been more or less like this: 'Use the traditional Church Slavonic spelling system to write as you speak but do not use the most exclusive features of your dialect'.

According to the scope of this paper this applies primarily to orthography, whereas on other linguistic levels positive norms (e.g. syntactic norms inspired by Polish ideals) probably had a more important stance.

All these data clearly disprove all the hypotheses about a distinctly 'Ukrainian' or 'Belarusian' origin of the Ruthenian literary language. However, the picture we see in the texts would fit in equally well with Danylenko's hypothesis of a Polissian origin of the Ruthenian literary language and with the idea of a conscious amalgam of 'Ukrainian' or 'Belarusian' dialect features. How can any one of these hypotheses be proved or disproved? There probably is no hard proof, since there are no extant metalinguistic utterances reflecting on the origin of Ruthenian norms, and the linguistic data just leaves all three possibilities open. So we have to use Ockham's razor and conclude that the most probable hypothesis is the one that needs the fewest premises.

I have shortly summarized the assumptions needed for Danylenko's thesis of a Polissian dialectal basis in the introduction. The incorporation of at least northern Volhynia into the Polissian dialect group (Danylenko 2006a, 102f.) does not seem altogether implausible but would have to be substantiated with evidence for the concrete individual features attested in the Ruthenian literary standard. For the second assumption, that scribes from the Polissian dialect area (especially Volhynia) constituted a dominant group at the ducal chancery of Vilnius in the 14th/15th century, there does not seem to be any evidence (and maybe there cannot be any, as we know too little about the scribes at that time). The third assumption, that the dialect of the Polissian scribes was emulated even by scribes from other dialect areas, including those nearer the capital, is connected to the second. We would have to know more about the situation in the ducal chancery (and in other chanceries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) to understand how probable this is. The fourth assumption, that the Polissian dialectal basis was maintained even by influential writers of literature and religious polemics in the 16th and 17th century, becomes less improbable if "rusьkij jazykъ" and "prostaja mova" were merely different styles of the same Ruthenian language and not loosely connected linguistic entities or even different languages.

For my hypothesis of a 'negative' norm no such assumptions are needed. All that is necessary are the two elementary maxims already mentioned in the introduction:

1. Avoid 'extreme' features of your home dialect that are shared by only a relatively small number of people.

It is rather common for people who want to be understood in different parts of their country to avoid those features of their dialect they feel to be most ‘extreme’ or most ‘incomprehensible’ to others. This behaviour can ultimately be explained by Grice’s (1975, 45) “cooperative principle”.

2. When in doubt, stick to the traditional spelling you have seen in other texts even if it does not reflect your own pronunciation.

This maxim is responsible for the fact that English words like /'kɒf/ or /'naɪt/ are still spelled ⟨cough⟩ and ⟨knight⟩ rather than ⟨coff⟩ and ⟨nite⟩ or that Russian /tʃisa'vova/ is still spelled ⟨часового⟩ rather than ⟨чисаво-ва⟩.

Both maxims are therefore known to be relevant for linguistic behaviour. They are enough to explain all the literary variants examined here that formed part of the Ruthenian literary language. So there is no need to assume either a conscious creation of a compromise norm or a creation of the literary language on the exclusive basis of the Polissian dialects.

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