

# Introduction

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To introduce this collection of articles on Rusyn linguistic and language issues, let us briefly set the stage.

The inverted-C-shaped range of the Carpathian Mountains may seem to be an out-of-the-way part of Europe. Yet these mountains have much to offer, not least for linguists worldwide. The northern curve of the C, primarily in Ukraine, Poland, and Slovakia, is home to (Carpatho-) Rusyn, classified as the westernmost parts of the East Slavic dialect continuum. Speakers of Rusyn have never inhabited a unified country of Rusynia; rather, borders and countries have come and retreated, as seen in oral legends about people who successively held Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Soviet, and Ukrainian passports, all without ever moving from their home towns of Mukačevo or Užhorod.

Nineteenth-century movements to shape Slavic populations into recognized ethnic groups—into nations in the European sense—succeeded in the cases of Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians and others, and newly standardized or re-standardized Slavic languages came into being as a result. Rusyn movements to seek a recognized status were not successful in the nineteenth century nor even in most of the twentieth, both because of external conditions (claims by more powerful countries) and because of their own differences of opinion about whether to form a group of their own, or to join their Ukrainian neighbors (and adopt the newly-forming Ukrainian standard language), or even to claim Russian identity and use the more distant but better standardized Russian language.

After World War II the new Communist Party authorities all made the choice for them: Rusyns in newly Soviet western Ukraine, in Poland, and in Czechoslovakia were assigned Ukrainian identity. But the consequences differed. In Ukraine this meant mainstreaming: being Ukrainian and learning Ukrainian (and Russian) like everyone else. In Slovakia it meant financial support from the Czechoslovak government for minority schools and institutions—but only for Ukrainian-speaking ones. In southeastern Poland the East Slavs, mostly known as Lemkos rather than the more general term Rusyns, were uprooted: partly deported to Ukraine and partly scattered among Poles repopulating the new western territories taken from Germany: a diaspora within their own country. Some of the latter did return home but only several decades later.

In 1989 the Communist governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia fell, and in 1991 Ukraine became independent of the crumbling Soviet Union. These changes put Rusyns in a much better position to found associations and work on standardizing their language—if they wished. The results so far have been a rather well standardized Rusyn in Slovakia that has seen significant, though variable, government financial support for institutions, media, and publications; a fairly well standardized Lemko in Poland, used in publishing and some schools; and multiple standards proposed by individuals in Ukraine but with hardly any official help or recognition.

With the above background, Slavist and general-linguist readers should now be able to appreciate the papers in this volume. The book is well titled *Approaches to Rusyn 2017* in the plural, since the articles come at their topics from different sides.

Four articles are in the genre of progress reports. Anna Plišková and Olena Duć-Fajfer, two of the most prominent propagators and standardizers in Slovakia and Poland respectively, give general overviews of post-1989 and recent successes and difficulties, while their co-workers Kvetoslava Koporová and Ewa Michna treat the more specialized topics of Rusyn-language publishing in Slovakia and changing language attitudes among Lemko activists themselves. Poland is one of the leading countries in sociolinguistics and specifically in minority-language and minority-identity studies, so it is natural to find many references to Polish

works among the references in the two Lemko scholars' contributions, but they also make extensive use of concepts and results gained by sociolinguists, identity theorists, and writers on language revitalization from other countries and continents.

The same can be said for the chapter by Elena Boudovskaia, who is clearly familiar with North American and even Australian literature on endangered languages. Though the title is "The Rusyn Language in Ukraine and Slovakia: Identity and Language Preservation," it deals primarily with conditions in Ukraine, where she has traveled numerous times as a dialect field worker. As she brings out, both under the Soviet Union and in independent Ukraine, official policies and attitudes toward dialect speech and Rusyn identity claims have been denigratory, even colonialist, and, sadly, some of this feeling has been incorporated by the people themselves.

Standardizers can prescribe forms and choose words for a language, but only creative users can equip it with a range of styles and genres. The Russianist Henryk Fontański's chapter "Креативность и культурная адаптация в переводе сказки *Winnie-the-Pooh* Алана А. Милна на лемковский язык" ('Creativity and cultural adaptation in the Lemko translation of A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*') finds that Petro Krynyckij's version has successfully exploited the resources of modern Lemko to render the difficult genre of humorous books for young children. Some of the characters are referred to with Lemko-style neuter-gender diminutives, producing an additional comic effect when Piglet makes a first-person neuter verb form to express "I'll dig the pit..." The explanation, charming but incoherent in the original, of how a female name *Winnie* can be applied to a boy bear gains new clarity in the Lemko: 'I said *Vin-i Pu*. Don't you know what *vin* means?' *Vin* in fact is the male pronoun 'he' in Lemko.

Two chapters are devoted to dialect studies: Michal Vašíček's "Некоторые изменения в склонении имён существительных в южнолемковском говоре села Хмельёва" ('Some changes in noun declension in the Southern Lemko dialect of the village of Chmeľová'), and "Грамматические особенности говора села Великие Лазы Ужгородского района Закарпатской области: значения предлога 'на'" ('Grammatical peculiarities of the dialect of the village of Velikie Lazy in the Užhorod

raion of the Zakarpattja oblast'') by M. Káprály and E. Boudovskaia. In comparison with the more classical genre of dialect descriptions, which typically sought to ask the oldest speakers for unmixed samples of the pure language in order to better trace its descent from ancestral forms, both of these are modern treatments, taking account of changes that are in progress and showing sensitivity to language-to-language contact effects. Káprály and Boudovskaia in particular cite works by contact linguists from Japan, Australia, and North America as well as Eastern and Western Europe.

Chmel'ová is almost on the border with Poland and is the last Rusyn-speaking village before the Slovak linguistic area begins. Vašíček shows in detail how the rules for adding endings to nouns have partly become simplified, partly undergone the influence of both local Slovak dialects and the standard Slovak language. Since he has informants belonging to three successive generations, he can trace the variations and ongoing processes.

Velikie Lazy is also on a language border: it adjoins a Hungarian-speaking village to the south. But it is also close enough to Užhorod to be influenced by the speech of the city. Looking particularly at phrase patterns containing the preposition *na*, which in Slavic generally means 'on' with the locative case and 'onto' with the accusative case, the authors find some unusual usages: *na* + acc. meaning 'through' (e.g. a window), which may be due to convergence with Hungarian, 'to paint something *na* some color', which is reminiscent of both Hungarian and Slovak, 'a dress *na* some pattern', which may be Slovak in origin (though it is found in other Slavic languages as well, e.g. Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian).

Rusyn is an endangered language in the twenty-first century, despite A. Dukhnovič's proud anthem written in the nineteenth century *Ja Rusyn byl, jsem' i budu* 'A Rusyn I was, I am and will be'. Yet one of the factors aiding respect for and preservation of any language is the existence of a philology: research and publication on it by native and outside scholars. May this book be both a gift to the world of linguistics and language studies and a contribution to the survival of the language.