The Rusyn language question revisited

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Abstract

For nearly three centuries the East Slavic population living in the Carpathian Mountains, known as Rusyns, has been faced with trying to resolve the so-called language question. In other words, which language should be used for literary purposes — the local Rusyn dialect, the Church Slavonic liturgical language, or the literary language of a related Slavic people such as Russian or Ukrainian? The debate over this issue has since the second half of the nineteenth century been closely linked to the question of national identity, that is, were the indigenous East Slavs in the Carpathians Russians, Ukrainians, or a distinct nationality known as Rusyn or Carpatho-Rusyn? After World War II, the Soviet-influenced Communist regimes in all countries where Rusyns lived (with the exception of Yugoslavia) "resolved" the language question by declaring that only Ukrainian was acceptable. Since the political changes that started in 1989, a Rusyn national revival is underway and concrete efforts are being made to create a distinct Rusyn literary language.

In 1929, a Rusyn satirist named Marko Barabolja wrote "a one-act dramatical work" that poked fun at the idea of an autonomous territory called Subcarpathian Rus'. This political entity was supposed to exist in the far eastern region of the former Czechoslovakia. One of the play's characters recalled that only recently had writers in Subcarpathian Rus' begun to create a literature. That, in turn, led to the question of what language should be used for this new literature.

"Those were the days," quipped Barabolja's character, "when the language question [*jazykovyj vopros*] was the dominant issue, a time moreover that was the most romantic in the history of Subcarpathia. Just imagine, everywhere in cities and villages, in reading rooms, theaters, government offices, and cafés, no matter where people were, everywhere

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they talked continually about the language question" (Barabolja 1991: 28–29).

Six decades later, when the Revolution of 1989 unfolded throughout east central Europe and the Soviet Union, it seemed as though nothing had changed. Once again, wherever Rusyns lived, they were talking about the language question. And they are still doing so today! This is because the Rusyn language question, like language questions past and present among all peoples, is intimately related to the issue of national identity. As Rusyns continue to wrestle with the problem of who they are, so too has the language question become a problem that once again has to be addressed and hopefully resolved.

Before turning specifically to the language question, a few general comments about Rusyns would seem to be in order. Rusyns, or Carpatho-Rusyns, have described themselves and have been described by others with those two terms as well as with many others, including Carpatho-Russian, Carpatho-Ukrainian, Lemko, Ruthene, Ruthenian, and Uhro-Rusyn. This one people with many names lives in the very heart of Europe along the southern and northern slopes of the north-central ranges of the Carpathian Mountains. The homeland they call Carpathian Rus′ straddles the borders of three countries: Ukraine (the Transcarpathian oblast), Slovakia (the Prešov Region), and Poland (the Lemko Region). There are also a few Rusyn-inhabited villages in northern Romania (Maramureş Region), in northeastern Hungary, and, since the eighteenth century, in the Vojvodina (Bačka) and Srem regions of Yugoslavia and far eastern Slavonia in Croatia. Because most of those countries did not recognize Rusyns as a distinct people or national minority during the four decades following World War II, accurate statistical data is still impossible to obtain.

Reasonable estimates place the number of Rusyns today at between 800,000 and one million persons. The vast majority live in the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine (600,000–800,000); the remainder in Slovakia (100,000), Poland (60,000), Yugoslavia (30,000), Romania (20,000), and Hungary (3,000). Traditionally, Rusyns have inhabited rural villages where for centuries small-scale agriculture, grazing, and forestry had been the primary occupations. Only since World War II has industrialization come to the area, a process that has drawn a certain number of Rusyns to nearby towns and cities.

This study will focus on the language question among the Rusyns. The first part will survey briefly the language question before 1945. The second part will discuss how the question was supposedly resolved after 1945, and then why it has returned since the Revolution of 1989.

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As mentioned above, the Rusyn language question was closely allied to the problem of national identity. Ever since the second half of the nineteenth century, Rusyn intellectual and political life has addressed and tried to resolve the following dilemma: are Rusyns part of the Russian nationality, or the Ukrainian nationality, or do they comprise a distinct Slavic nationality known as Rusyn or Carpatho-Rusyn (Magocsi 1978)? Not surprisingly, the supporters of these orientations have argued that the appropriate literary language should be Russian, Ukrainian, or a distinct Rusyn language. This ongoing and still unresolved debate is what constitutes the Rusyn language question.

There is a substantial literature dealing with the language question, or more precisely the development of a literary language among Rusyns before 1945 (Gerovskij 1934; Tichý 1938; Štec′ 1969; Magocsi 1984a). Considering the existence of such studies and the space limitations allotted to this essay, only the main developments before 1945 will be touched on here. The era before 1945 may be subdivided into four stages or periods, each of which differed in terms of the kind of language or languages that were favored. Those periods are (1) the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; (2) the late eighteenth century to 1848; (3) 1848 to 1918; and (4) 1919 to 1944.

One theme has prevailed throughout all the above periods as well as the era from 1945 to the present. That theme concerns *dignitas* or prestige. All linguists agree that Rusyns living on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains speak a series of dialects that, based on their phonetic, morphological, and lexical characteristics, belong to the family of East Slavic languages. There is also agreement that Rusyn dialects are distinguishable from other East Slavic dialects by the high number of loanwords and other borrowings from neighboring Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, and to a lesser degree Romanian.

There is disagreement, however, as to the relationship of Rusyn dialects to other East Slavic languages. Most linguists classify them with Ukrainian (Pan′kevyč 1938; Dzendzelivs′kyj 1968), while a few consider them part of a common-Russian (*obščerusskij*) linguistic areal that comprises modern Russian, Belarusan, and Ukrainian (Gerovskij 1934, 1948). But regardless of what classification scheme is adopted, there still remains what might be called a basic psycholinguistic problem. In essence, do or can Rusyn dialects have a sufficient degree of *dignitas* to serve as the basis of a distinct literary language? Or do they intrinsically lack prestige, leading to a situation where the linguistic medium for Rusyns has to be taken from an already existing norm, whether Russian, Ukrainian, or some other language? The question of *dignitas*, then, has historically

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pervaded, and is still present in, any debate regarding the language question among the Rusyns.

The Rusyn language question before 1945

The earliest texts written by Rusyns that came into relatively widespread use date from the seventeenth century. This was a time when the Protestant Reformation was making its strongest impact in northeastern Hungary and neighboring Transylvania. Although conversion to Lutheranism or Calvinism did not have any serious impact among Rusyns, their own clerical leaders were influenced by the Reformation's emphasis on living languages as the best way to communicate with the masses. Thus, the first printed books for Rusyns, a *Cathechism* (1698) and *Primer* (1699) prepared under the auspices of the Greek Catholic Bishop Joseph de Camillis (1641–1706), were written in "a simple dialect in order to be understood by the people" (de Camillis 1698: ii). Despite criticism in certain quarters for not using the traditional liturgical language, Church Slavonic, most of the religious polemics and other writings from this earliest period were in Rusyn vernacular.

The next period, which begins in the second half of the eighteenth century, witnessed a reaction against the "vulgarization of the church language" that supposedly characterized the earliest writings in Rusyn (Pan'kevyč 1958: 181). This meant that Church Slavonic, which because of its association with the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern rite had the appropriate *dignitas*, became the preferred language in publications destined for Rusyns. Although it was a literary language used in sacred books and in other communication among clerics throughout the Eastern Christian (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) world, Church Slavonic never had a single standard. Its form depended on the skill of individual authors who, when they lacked knowledge of a given word, would often borrow from the immediate linguistic environment in which they lived. The resultant variants of Church Slavonic were known as recensions, and the recension of Church Slavonic that developed among the Rusyns came to be known as Slaveno-Rusyn (*slaveno-ruskyj*).

When under the impact of the Theresan and Josephine enlightenment church-run elementary and secondary schools began in the 1770s to be established throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, several teachers prepared grammars and other textbooks for instructional use. The first of these was a grammar by Arsenij Kocak, completed in the 1770s but only recently published (Dzendzelivs'kyj and Hanudel' 1990), followed in the first half of the nineteenth century by grammars by Mychal Lučkaj

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(Lutskay 1830) and Ivan Fogorašij (Fogorossi 1833). Both authors reflected well the era in which they lived, one in which the ideas of Pan-Slavism emphasized the cultural unity among all the Slavic peoples as the most desirable goal. Lučkaj, in particular, regretted the trend among many Slavic peoples to create "their own languages." He feared this proliferation of languages would lead to their being "swallowed up by other [larger] languages" (Lutskay 1830: vii). Church Slavonic, therefore, should be promoted, because it was already understood by the educated elite among all the East Slavs and South Slavs. In this regard, Rusyns had a special role to play, since they were the living preservers of the "one language ... Rusyn or Carpatho-Rusyn" [*unica Dialectus ... Ruthenica, aut Karpato-ruskaja*], which had not yet been "corrupted" and was closest to Church Slavonic (Lutskay 1830: viii). Lučkaj's grammar, then, which recorded Rusyn vernacular and pointed out how it differed only slightly from Church Slavonic, was to be the model for the Slavic world.

There were other Pan-Slavic sympathizers, however, such as L'udovít Štúr, who did not shirk from codifying distinct languages, in his case Slovak. When some of his countrymen urged Rusyns to use Slovak as their literary language, Štúr responded to them with a rhetorical formulation: "Who asks here that Rusyns should accept the Slovak language as their own? Why, they have their own beautiful Rusyn [*rusínsky*] language" (*Slovenskje národňje novini*, 6 March 1846).

It was the call of Štúr and a few other Slovak activists that prompted a change of attitude toward language among Rusyn cultural activists, in particular Aleksander Duchnovyč, the most influential figure during the third period that began in 1848. Duchnovyč came to be known as the "national awakener of the Carpatho-Rusyns" (*narodnyj budytel' karpato-rossov*), and he is still revered today as the most important of all Rusyn cultural figures past and present. Already on the eve of the revolution of 1848, Duchnovyč published a primer based entirely on the Rusyn dialects of his native Prešov Region in northeastern Slovakia (A.D. 1847 [in Duchnovyč 1967]). He also wrote a wide body of poetry and edited the first literary almanacs, all in Rusyn vernacular.

But even Duchnovyč was unable to sustain full confidence in the Rusyn vernacular as an instrument of literary endeavor. As early as 1852, he asked, "Which German, Frenchman, or Englishman writes as the average person speaks? None! ... We must liberate ourselves from the mistakes of peasant vulgarisms and not fall into the mire of peasant phraseology ..." (Duchnovyč 1989: 284–285). To escape from the Rusyn "mire," Duchnovyč, like his predecessors, turned to Church Slavonic and then allowed the publisher of his grammar to incorporate many Russianisms

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(Duchnovič 1853). The pro-Russian or Russophile trend was even more pronounced in the writings of Duchnovyč's contemporaries and successors: whether in polemical tracts by the dynamic Adol'f Dobrjans'kyj (A. Iv...tsch 1885; Dobrianskii 1905), or in several grammars of the Russian language by Kyrylo Sabov (1865), Ivan Rakovs'kyj (Rakovszky 1867), and Evmenij Sabov (1890), and in dictionaries by Aleksander Mitrak (1881) and Emeljan Kubek (1906). These works set the Russian-language standard used in Rusyn schools, newspapers, and cultural life in general until nearly the end of the nineteenth century.

Rusyn cultural and language developments were not, of course, taking place in a vacuum. Late nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary, in particular its Hungarian authorities, were uneasy about the foreign policy goals of their neighbor to the east, the Russian Empire. Among Russia's goals was to support what tsarist officials and propagandists argued were the best interests of the Slavic peoples in Austria-Hungary. Promoting the Russian language (and the Orthodox religion) among the Rusyns was, therefore, favored by tsarist Russia but not by Hungary.

In response, the Hungarian government sponsored translations by Vasyl' Čopej and Avhustyn Vološyn into the Rusyn vernacular of several textbooks for use in its state-run elementary schools (Gence 1881, 1913 [1898]). The new Rusyn standard was formulated by Čopej, who in 1883 published the first dictionary using the Rusyn vernacular, specifically the lowland dialects of today's Transcarpathian region. For him, the "Rusyn or Little Rusyn language" (*rus'kyj abo malorus'kyj jazŷk*) meant both Ukrainian and Belarusan, as well as the various East Slavic dialects south of the Carpathians (Čopej 1883: xxiii). Čopej stressed that the "Rusyn language is independent and in no way can be considered a dialect of Russian" (Čopej 1883: x). The trend toward use of the Rusyn vernacular for instruction in schools was continued during the first decade of the twentieth century in widely used primers and grammars by Mychal Vrabel' (M.V. 1914 [1898]) and Avhustyn Vološyn (Vološyn 1901, 1920 [1907]).

The fourth stage in the evolution of the Rusyn language question began in 1919 under profoundly new political circumstances. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had fallen and Rusyns were living in several new countries. The vast majority (about 80%) that had lived in the far eastern portion of northeastern Hungary found themselves in Czechoslovakia (three-quarters in the province of Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia and one-quarter in the Prešov Region of Slovakia). Rusyns living north of the mountains in the Lemko Region of former Austrian Galicia were incorporated into Poland. As for the small group (about 20,000) who lived in the Bačka and Srem regions of southern Hungary, they were

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joined to the province of Vojvodina in Yugoslavia. The language question among the Rusyns during this fourth period, 1919–1944, evolved differently in each of the three countries where they lived.

Within Czechoslovakia, the legal status of Rusyns and, therefore, the status of their language also varied. In Subcarpathian Rus', which was in theory a province with international guarantees for Rusyn autonomy, the "local language" was alongside Czech one of the two official "state" languages. In Slovakia, on the other hand, Rusyns were a national minority, whose language was guaranteed for use in schools only in those areas where they composed more than 20 percent of the population.

In practice, the democratic nature of the new Czechoslovak republic provided an important incentive for instruction and publications in the "local language." The government did not for the most part interfere in the language debates, although it did consult with Czech academicians, who made several somewhat inconclusive recommendations. They were opposed to creating a new literary language for Rusyns, and they recognized Rusyn dialects as part of the Ukrainian language, yet at the same time argued that since Ukrainians "were part of the Great Russian people," Russian should be taught as well (Magocsi 1978: 136–138). As a result, the 1920s and 1930s were, as the satirist Barabolja pointed out, the decades when people everywhere "talked continually about the language question." While everyone agreed that the "local language" should be adopted for official and educational purposes, there was little agreement as to what that language should be. As in the past, the issue of *dignitas* played a large part in determining which language should be used. Some felt that the local dialects should form the basis of a distinct Rusyn literary language that would evolve from the late nineteenth-century dictionary of Čopej and the primers and grammars of Vološyn (Vološyn 1924, 1928), one of which (Vološyn 1901, 1919, 1930) evolved from a strongly Russian-influenced text to one that was largely in the local Rusyn vernacular. All of Vološyn's grammars were widely used in Subcarpathian schools during the interwar years.

Other cultural activists, including newly arrived émigrés from Polish-ruled eastern Galicia, felt that Rusyn was simply a dialect of Ukrainian, which should serve as the literary language. To introduce Ukrainian to the region in a gradual manner, a linguist from Galicia, Ivan Pan'kevyč, prepared a grammar of the Rusyn language (Pan'kevyč 1936 [1922]). Although written in the traditional etymological alphabet, using special symbols to depict vowel sounds unique to the Subcarpathian region, Pan'kevyč's grammar was based on the dialects of the high mountainous area (the Verkhovyna), which were closest to the Ukrainian speech in Galicia. By the late 1930s, other emigrés from Galicia in cooperation

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with local Subcarpathian pro-Ukrainian activists produced school texts that were in standard Ukrainian using the modern phonetic alphabet (Štefan and Vaško 1931; Nevrli 1937; Ahij 1938).

The third trend was represented by the Russophiles. These included local activists who carried on the tradition of the nineteenth-century national awakener Duchnovyč, together with Russophile émigrés from Galicia who helped the "locals" write in correct Russian. The standard text for this orientation was a grammar published in 1924, which was described as under the editorship of a local priest, Evmenij Sabov, but was actually written by a Galician Russophile, Aleksander Grigor′jev. The "Sabov grammar" did not even pretend to reflect local Rusyn speech, since it contained "the Russian literary language in its written and not its spoken form" (Sabov 1924: 1). The goal of this grammar was to help its users read local "Carpatho-Russian" authors (who until then had written in a Russian language corrupted by local dialectisms) and, in particular, to enjoy "Puškin, Gogol′, Lermontov, and other classics of Russian literature" (Sabov 1924: 5). Like the Ukrainian orientation, the Russian orientation also had other primers and grammars (Vasilenko et al. 1925; Doboš and Fedor 1930 [1925]).

Each of the three orientations had its own cultural organizations, newspapers, journals, writers of poetry, prose, and drama, and of course polemicists to defend the various language orientations. The school system in Subcarpathian Rus′ used all three languages — Rusyn, Ukrainian, Russian — as symbolized by the grammars of Vološyn, Pan′kevyč, and Sabov.

In neighboring Slovakia during the interwar years, the situation was somewhat simpler. For all intents and purposes, a Ukrainian orientation did not exist. Most secular and religious activists spoke of the desirability of maintaining their local "Carpatho-Rusyn traditions," which included use of their language. In practice, that language was not Rusyn vernacular; it was Russian with a varying number of local dialectisms. The Greek Catholic school system published a primer and a heavily dialectal reader by Ivan Kizak (1920, 1921) and a grammar of Russian by Aleksander Sedlak (1920).

In Poland as in Czechoslovakia, the language question among the Lemkos (the local name for Rusyns) was closely linked to the policy adopted by the central government in Warsaw for minority schools. For most of the 1920s, the textbooks used in the Lemko Region were either in Ukrainian or in Russian, which reflected the language dichotomy that prevailed in Galicia while it had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Magocsi 1984b). In the early 1930s, however, the Polish government and the local Greek Catholic Church administration (the Lemko

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Apostolic Administration) favored instruction in Lemko-Rusyn vernacular. A primer and reader attributed to a local teacher, Meletij Trochanovs'kyj, were published, and by the end of the 1930s these texts were used in most Rusyn schools in the Lemko Region, which eventually became Polish schools with some instruction in Lemko Rusyn (*Bukvar* 1935).

The situation among the small Rusyn minority in the Bačka that after World War I became part of Yugoslavia was yet again different. There the local intelligentsia adopted the vernacular principle and developed a literary standard based on the local speech of the inhabitants. That speech was substantially different from Rusyn as spoken in the Carpathian homeland and, instead, was a transitional dialect very close to eastern Slovak dialects, in particular those of the central and southern Zemplín region. While scholars argued about whether the Bačka-Rusyn speech should be classified with a West Slavic (Slovak) or East Slavic (Rusyn/Ukrainian) language (Hnatjuk 1900; Pastnek 1906), the speakers themselves called their language Rusyn (*ruskij jazik*) and identified themselves as Rusnaks (*rusnaci*).

The formation of a Bačka-Rusyn standard is intimately tied to the work of one person, Gabor Kostel'nik, who published his first book of poetry in 1904 and then a grammar in 1923. Kostel'nik was of the pro-Ukrainian orientation, and he actually wrote his grammar in the local vernacular as only the first step that would eventually "open the road to a Rusyn-Ukrainian literary language" (Kostel'nik 1923: 2). Despite his hopes, there were to be no publications or school instruction in Ukrainian, but only in Vojvodinian (Bačka-)Rusyn.

The fourth stage came to a close during World War II, when the Rusyn language question took a new turn, most especially in Subcarpathian Rus'. In March 1939, Hungary drove out the short-lived autonomous Carpatho-Ukrainian government (which had ruled since November 1938) and annexed the former Czechoslovak province, which it renamed simply Carpathia (Kárpátalja). Although it allowed the Russian orientation to function, the Hungarian authorities forbade the use of Ukrainian. Instead, it returned to the so-called Uhro-Rusyn orientation, which a short-lived Hungarian democratic regime had introduced into Subcarpathian Rus' in early 1919. At that time, the Hungarian authorities quickly published a reader and anthology of literature in the Rusyn vernacular (Jador 1919; Rachivs'kyj 1919), and they set up a Department of Rusyn Language and Literature at the University of Budapest, which began to function in 1919–1920. With the return of Hungarian rule in 1939, Uhro-Rusynism meant, as well, a return to local traditions that would be neither Russian nor Ukrainian.

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The first step in that direction was the publication of a grammar for secondary schools by a local Greek Catholic priest and official in the Hungarian Ministry of Education, Julij Maryna. The language of his grammar was quite similar to that used in the late nineteenth century, that is, Russian with a heavy influence of local Rusyn dialectisms (Marina 1940). Even more influential was the language adopted by the newly founded Subcarpathian Academy of Sciences in its publications, including a Rusyn grammar by Ivan Harajda (1941). Harajda hoped to find a "true compromise" that would reflect Rusyn vernacular speech as well as incorporate certain words that had supposedly become accepted — and expected — to be part of the traditional "Carpatho-Rusyn language." Many, however, were simply direct borrowings from Russian (*dovol'no*, *tol'ko*, *prosviščatysja*, etc).

Thus, the era before 1945 ended without any solution to the language question. Wherever Rusyns lived, they used Russian, Ukrainian, or the local Rusyn vernacular in their schools and publications. Moreover, polemics between defenders of the Russian orientation (Gus'naj 1921; Sabov 1925; Zorkij 1926; Gerovskij and Krajnjanica 1941), the Rusyn orientation (Strypskij 1924; Bonkalo 1941), and the Ukrainian orientation (Vološyn 1921; *Za ridne slovo!* 1937) reached a new intensity in the first half of the twentieth century, so that no consensus seemed in sight. All was to change, however, with the establishment after 1945 of a new political order throughout the Rusyn homeland.

Ukrainianization and the "end" of the language question

In late 1944, the Soviet Army "liberated" Subcarpathian Rus' from Hungarian control. Although the Soviets initially agreed with the other Allied Powers to restore the province to postwar Czechoslovakia, Stalin changed his mind. Consequently, the political wing of the Soviet Army was ordered to give support to local Subcarpathian Communists, who in turn arranged in November, 1944, for the populace to request unification with the "Ukrainian motherland." In June, 1945, Czechoslovakia formally ceded to the Soviet Union the province of Subcarpathian Rus', which became the Transcarpathian oblast of the Soviet Ukraine.

As early as 1924, the Fifth Congress of the Comintern had addressed the identity question in western Ukrainian lands. Regardless of which "foreign occupier" might still be ruling those lands and regardless of what the people themselves may have thought, the Rusyns were declared to be a branch of the Ukrainian nationality. The Fifth Comintern's decision was reiterated one year later by the Communist Party (Bolshevik)

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of Ukraine and accepted by the Subcarpathian Communist party in 1926 with a resolution that in part read, "It is obvious that we are part of the Ukrainian people ... and finally we will end ... all 'language questions' [and dispense] with the names 'Rusyn,' '*rus'kyj*,' or '*russkij*'" (*Karpats'ka pravda*, 5 December 1926).

It took nearly two more decades before the 1924–1926 decisions could be implemented by the new Soviet authorities in Transcarpathia. By late 1944, all schools for the indigenous East Slavic population taught in literary Ukrainian according to Soviet norms, and Ukrainian was in theory considered the titular or republic language to be used in the local administration. In actual practice, however, the Russian language was taught as a subject in all schools; it became the dominant language at the newly founded Užhorod State University; and it served as the operative language in most official and public transactions. This meant that both the Ukrainian- and Russian-language orientations from the pre-1945 era were in large measure satisfied — or equally dissatisfied — with Soviet policy.

Only the Rusyn orientation was banned. The very name *Rusyn* was associated with the "unenlightened" pre-Soviet past and was linked in Soviet propaganda with the bourgeois Czechoslovak and fascist Hungarian regimes that had occupied the province, as well as with the "reactionary" Greek Catholic Church, which in 1949 was abolished entirely. From 1945 until nearly the very end of Soviet rule in 1991, not a single publication in Rusyn vernacular appeared in Transcarpathia. Even the language of published local folk songs and tales was ukrainianized, as were the few reprints of pre-Soviet Transcarpathian literature.

Soviet policy regarding the national and linguistic identity of the Rusyns was also implemented in neighboring countries that came under Communist rule, first Poland and then Czechoslovakia. The language situation among the Lemko Rusyns was in a sense simplified by the fact that they were all deported from their Carpathian homeland — first "voluntarily" in 1945, then the remainder forcibly in 1947. Two-thirds were resettled in the Soviet Ukraine, those who remained behind (40,000–50,000) were forcibly resettled in Poland's "recovered" western (formerly German) territories, most especially Silesia. The Lemkos who were resettled in Poland's "West" were considered by the government to be part of the country's Ukrainian minority.

When, after 1956, Poland allowed the creation of organizations and publications for some of its national minorities, Lemkos also hoped to have their own organizations. This was not permitted, however, although a Lemko branch of the government-funded Ukrainian cultural society existed for awhile and a Lemko dialect page ("*lemkivska storona*")

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appeared in that organization's weekly newspaper. Since the Lemkos scattered throughout the country were living in a Polish environment, many enroled their children in Polish-language schools. As for Lemkos who attended minority language schools or classes, they were given instruction in Ukrainian.

In Czechoslovakia, specifically the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia, the situation was even more complex. The Communists did not come to power until 1948, and it was to be another four years until the language question was "resolved." From 1945 until 1952, the situation was truly paradoxical. All of the group's cultural and political organizations were called *Ukrainian*, yet in actual fact the language of their publications, theatrical performances, and instruction in schools was Russian. This approach responded to the interwar tradition in eastern Slovakia that was continued during World War II, whereby instruction at the very elementary levels was in Rusyn vernacular but at the higher and *gymnasium* levels in Russian. New Russian-language textbooks were published (Ljubimov 1944; Vanca 1945; Lichvar 1947), and some teachers were imported from the Soviet Union for instruction throughout the 275 elementary and nearly 50 higher-level schools (1948/1949) throughout the Prešov Region.

In 1950, the Czechoslovak Communist government, following the Soviet model, abolished the Greek Catholic Church in eastern Slovakia and took over control of the school system. Then, in June, 1952, the nationality and language policy was abruptly changed. Russian-language instruction in all schools was replaced with Ukrainian, and a new "cultural organization of Ukrainian workers" was established to promote publications and other cultural activity that followed Soviet Ukrainian linguistic and ideological models.

Initially, language guidelines were provided by a brief guide to Ukrainian orthography (*Korotki pravyla* 1952) ostensibly prepared by the "research staff" of the recently established Cultural Union of Ukrainian Workers. In fact, the guide was compiled by the knowledgeable linguist Ivan Pan'kevyč, who was particularly sensitive to the need for a gradual transition in Prešov Region schools, where until then Russian had been the language of instruction. But this gradualist approach was almost immediately replaced by the importation of textbooks from the Soviet Ukraine and the adoption of literary Ukrainian, without any consideration for local conditions. This policy was also adopted by the Department (Katedra) of Ukrainian Language and Literature, which was established in September 1953, at Šafárik University in Prešov to train teachers for service in the new Ukrainian-language school system.

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As a result of such short-sighted linguistic practices and the abrupt and administrative manner in which Ukrainian was introduced — all carried out during the height of Stalinist repression — the Rusyn populace reacted by sending their children to Slovak schools in neighboring towns or by demanding Slovak instead of Ukrainian schools in their villages. This process of voluntary Slovakization spread rapidly during the 1960s. If in 1948, when the Communists came to power, there were 322 Rusyn (actually Russian-language) schools with over 23,000 pupils, in late 1989, when Communist rule disappeared, there were only 900 pupils in 15 schools in which a few subjects were taught in Ukrainian (Vanat et al. 1992: 11–13). Thus, the Rusyn language question in Slovakia was "resolved" as in Soviet Transcarpathia by the adoption of Ukrainian. The cost, however, was national assimilation and a decline by more than two-thirds the number of Rusyns willing to identify as Slovaks.

The situation among the Rusyn minority in Yugoslavia's Vojvodina was entirely different. There the Rusyn nationality and the Rusyn language were officially recognized. In fact, by 1974, Rusyn became one of the five official languages of the autonomous province of the Vojvodina. With liberal funding from the Communist (but non–Soviet-dominated) Yugoslav government, a Rusyn-language publishing house, press, elementary and secondary school system, and radio and television programming came into being. A series of school grammars (Kočiš 1965–1968, 1974–1977), a codification of grammatical norms (Kočiš 1974), and a terminological dictionary (Kočiš 1972) were prepared by Mikola Kočiš. In order to enhance further knowledge and use of the Bačka-Srem, or Vojvodinian variant of Rusyn, in 1973 a professorship and by 1981 a Department (*Katedra*) of Rusyn Language and Literature were established at the University of Novi Sad, and in the early 1970s the Society for Rusyn Language and Literature came into being. Despite the official acceptance and promotion of a distinct Vojvodinian-Rusyn literary language, a few cultural activists in Yugoslavia believed that their people were part of the Ukrainian nationality. Nevertheless, they never switched to the Ukrainian language but continued to publish, teach, and develop what scholars in other parts of the world (Henrik Birnbaum, Aleksander Duličenko, Sven Gustavsson, Horace Lunt, Jiří Marvan) were, by the 1980s, describing as a sociologically complete distinct "Slavic microlanguage" (Duličenko 1981).

The return of the Rusyn language question

The political changes that began in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s and that culminated in the Revolution of 1989 had a profound

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impact on all countries where Rusyns lived. The Communist regimes that for four decades had determined nationality and language policies collapsed, as did most of the countries where Rusyns lived. In December, 1991, those living in Soviet Transcarpathia found themselves in an independent Ukraine. By mid-1992, the Rusyn community in Yugoslavia was divided between two countries, with the Vojvodina remaining in a reduced Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro) and the Srem becoming a war-torn zone that was theoretically part of an independent Croatia. Finally, in January, 1993, Rusyns in the Prešov Region were living in an independent Slovakia.

The profound changes in state structures and political systems that took place between 1989 and 1992 underscored what many had for some time suspected. Despite its propandistic statements, the Communist regimes repressed but did not resolve certain social problems. Among those problems was the question of national identity and language among Rusyns. On the eve of 1989, several cultural activists began to express their dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian-language orientation and argued the case for publications in Rusyn vernacular. In Poland, a few collections of poetry were published in the Lemko variant of Rusyn, and at the outset of 1989 a Rusyn-language magazine (*Besida*) began to appear. Meanwhile, in the Prešov Region of what was still Communist Czechoslovakia, a small circle of Greek Catholic activists led by Father František Krajnjak, prepared for publication several church manuals in the local Rusyn dialect from the area around the town of Medzilaborce, one of which was eventually published (Krajnjak 1992). The goal was to propagate the faith, especially to young people, in a language that they could most easily understand.

These tentative first steps to publish in the Rusyn vernacular were transformed by the political changes that took place in late 1989 and 1990. In all countries where Rusyns lived, new Rusyn cultural organizations were established, and each one was based on the principle that Rusyns comprise a distinct nationality and should have their own literary language. Several of the organizations also began to publish a newspaper or magazine in the Rusyn vernacular. These included in Ukraine *Otčij chram* (Užhorod, 1990–1991) and *Podkarpats'ka Rus'* (Užhorod, since 1992) of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Tovarystvo/Obščestvo Karpats'kych Rusynov); in Slovakia *Rusyn* (Medzilaborce and Prešov, since 1990) and *Narodný novynký* (Prešov, since 1991) of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyns'ka Obroda); and in Poland *Besida* (Krynica, since 1989) of the Society of Lemkos (Stovaryšŷnja Lemkiv). Also, the professional Ukrainian National Theater in Prešov, Slovakia, which since the early 1950s had performed in Ukrainian, changed its

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name in late 1990 to the Aleksander Duchnovyč Theater and since then has been presenting most of its plays in Rusyn.

The rebirth of a Rusyn national and language orientation came as a surprise to the Ukrainian cultural, educational, and publishing institutions. Their spokespersons — many of whom were, before 1952, advocates of a Russian orientation — thought that the nationality and language question had been resolved, whether by Communist-inspired administrative decree or as a result of the "natural" evolution of history. The first reaction of the Ukrainianists (Mušynka 1992) was to poke fun at the initial efforts of the pro-Rusyn activists and their amateurish proclamations that large-scale dictionaries and a codified Rusyn literary standard were about to appear imminently (Fedynyšynec' 1992). When, however, the rhetoric was replaced by concrete publications and linguistic work, and it became evident the Rusyn orientation was not about to disappear, Ukrainians argued that Rusynism was little more than a politically inspired "antihistorical" and "antischolarly" aberration inspired by elements who wished to undermine Ukraine and to further assimilate "Rusyn-Ukrainians" living abroad in Slovakia and Poland (Baleha and Sirka 1991; Hostynjak 1992; Mušynka 1991; Myšanyč 1992; Vanat 1993).

Thus, by the early 1990s there was a full-fledged return to the polemics about language and national identity that had characterized the interwar years (Magocsi 1992). There were attacks, for instance, about the very idea of a magazine called *Rusyn* before it even appeared. Ukrainian polemicists and scholars were convinced that "from the standpoint of philology, there is simply no reason to create a so-called Rusyn literary language" (Štec' 1991: 22).

Aside from polemics, the Ukrainian orientation faced its own problems, especially in Poland and Slovakia, where Ukrainian has had at best the status of a minority language. In Slovakia, for instance, Ukrainian spokespersons agreed with their Rusyn critics that the manner in which the Ukrainian language was administratively implemented in the early 1950s had a negative impact on its reception. In an attempt to reverse the perception among many local Rusyns that Ukrainian was a foreign language, there were calls after 1989 to bring Ukrainian closer to its potential users by adding more local dialectal words. Also, to emphasize the Ukrainian argument that the name *Rusyn* is just an older form for *Ukrainian*, a new hybrid term, *Rusyn-Ukrainian*, was adopted to describe the East Slavs in the Carpathians (Štec' 1992). As recently as 1994, Viktor Koval', the head of the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians in Slovakia, proclaimed that "our organization has used and will continue to use the contemporary Ukrainian literary language with a highly democratic [sic]

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infusion of regional dialects" (*Nove žyttja*, 3 January 1994). In actual fact, however, Ukrainian publications and radio broadcasts in Slovakia and Ukraine, and for the most part in Poland, avoid any local dialectisms.

Meanwhile, the Rusyn orientation has argued that the Ukrainian language and nationality policy during the four decades of Communist rule has led to large-scale assimilation in Poland and Slovakia and to the degradation (some even speak of "genocide") of traditional Rusyn life and culture in Ukraine. In an attempt to reverse this process and to restore a sense of Rusyn identity, one of their primary goals is the codification of a standard Rusyn literary language. Aside from the newspapers and magazines mentioned above and a few Rusyn books that have appeared in Slovakia, Poland, and even Hungary, there have been several attempts at creating a Rusyn literary standard. These include, in Ukraine — a grammar by Ihor Kerča and Vasyl' Sočka-Boržavyn (1992) and a poetic guide to dialectal words by Ivan Petrovcij (1993); in Slovakia — a primer and reader by Jan Hryb (1994a, 1994b); and in Poland — two grammars by Myroslava Chomjak (1992a, 1992b) and a 9,000-word Lemko-Polish dictionary by Jaroslav Horoščak (1993).

These burgeoning efforts on behalf of a Rusyn literary language, which have occurred in three different countries, began as the relatively isolated creative acts of individual authors. The result was the development of almost as many different standards as there were authors, compilers, and editors. In an attempt to put some order and coordination into these efforts, a working seminar on the Rusyn language was convened in Bardejovské Kúpele, Slovakia, on November 6–7, 1992. Rusyn writers and editors from Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary joined with scholars from those countries and from the United States, Sweden, Switzerland, and Monaco to discuss (1) theoretical issues concerning language-building, especially among "small" peoples; and (2) practical ways in which the Rusyn codifiers from different countries can coordinate their efforts.

The results of the November, 1992, seminar, which has come to be known as the First Congress of the Rusyn Language, were as follows. The participants accepted the "Romansch model," that is, to allow the development of four Rusyn standards based on dialects in the countries where they live: Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia. One standard, Vojvodinian Rusyn in Yugoslavia, already exists; the three others for Transcarpathia, the Lemko Region, and the Prešov Region need to be codified. The participants also agreed to meet periodically to exchange views on their own codifying work as well as to agree on as many principles as possible that will form the basis of an eventual "fifth" Rusyn literary standard or *koiné* that would be common to all regions.

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Regardless of which standard is formed, it was decided that Rusyn should appear in the Cyrillic alphabet and be based on the "spoken vernacular in each of the regions where Rusyns live: Subcarpathia, the Lemko Region, the Prešov Region, and the Vojvodina" (Magocsi 1993).

The First Congress of the Rusyn Language also proposed the creation of "a theoretical and practical language institute," which two months later actually came into being in Prešov, Slovakia. The newly formed Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture has, since its establishment in January 1993, served as a coordinating center for the work of Rusyn language codifiers in all countries where they live. Its first director, Jurij Pan'ko, published a preliminary set of rules for orthography and morphology (Pan'ko 1992) and completed with input from codifiers in other countries a terminological (1,100 entries) and an orthographic (42,000 words) dictionary (Pan'ko 1994a, 1994b). Under its present director, Vasyl' Jabur, the institute has edited a revised version of the orthographic norm (Jabur et al. 1994) and is completing work on a dictionary and revised versions of Jan Hryb's primer and reader for elementary schools. Finally, the institute is expecting to be transformed into a Department (*Katedra*) of Rusyn Language and Literature at the School of Education (Pedagogical Faculty) of Šafárik University in Prešov.

Conclusion

Thus, the language question that has been part of Rusyn cultural and political life ever since the seventeenth century is still alive and well on the threshold of the twenty-first century. That there are and will continue to be polemics about the issue is not at all surprising, because as the distinguished sociolinguist Joshua Fishman commented after returning from the first Rusyn language congress in 1992,

> The replacement of one literary elite by another is never an easy or pleasant affair and the old-guard self-defined Ukrainian elite can be expected to campaign vigorously against the "Young Turks," Rusyn self-defining elites who [themselves] are self-declared candidates for the "perks" that have until now supported the Old Guard's Ukrainian ethnic and linguistic orientation (Magocsi 1993: 124).

Nonetheless, the struggle between the Rusyn and Ukrainian elites is only one, and ultimately not the most important, aspect of the problem. For a language to succeed it must have users and therefore be accepted by the people for whom the literary standard has ostensibly been created. And this brings us back to the issue of *dignitas*, which has been a constant

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theme from the very outset of the Rusyn language question over three centuries ago. In the past, several linguistic forms were at one time or another proposed as worthy of use as literary languages: the Rusyn vernacular, Church Slavonic, Russian, Ukrainian, and even Hungarian, Slovak, or Polish. Today, the field has been narrowed down to two alternatives: Rusyn and Ukrainian. And when the emotion-laden polemics and scholarly arguments are stripped away, the issue is once again *dignitas*. Are the local dialects — as pro-Rusyn activists argue — able to be codified, and will they be perceived as worthy to represent the needs of a people at all levels of their cultural, administrative, and educational life? Or, as the pro-Ukrainian activists argue, are such language-building efforts unnecessary, because "Rusyn-Ukrainians" already have a literary language, in the form of Ukrainian, that is capable of satisfying all their needs?

The Rusyn language question has, indeed, been revisited. It seems certain that in all countries where Rusyns live there will continue to be writers who will produce publications and school textbooks in both Rusyn and Ukrainian. Less certain is the degree to which one or both of these languages — and national orientations — will be accepted as their own by the indigenous East Slavic populace of Carpathian Rus'.

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