Review of: "“Reversible transliteration of the historical Ukrainian alphabets in the context of heritage preservation and linguistic technologies development”"

Katarzyna Konczewska[1]

1 Polish Academy of Sciences

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The reviewed article addresses the important issue of the codification of the Ukrainian language by using the Latin alphabet. A discourse on this subject appeared in the Ukrainian cultural space as early as the 19th century (Lozinski 1834, 228–230). The fact that the issue of transliteration of Cyrillic into Latin was extremely topical throughout the Slavic world is evidenced by the fact that the topic was to be taken up at the Third International Congress of Slavists (Предлог 1939), which, however, did not take place due to the unleashed Second World War.

The issue of adequate Latin transliteration of Slavic languages is still topical, as transliteration according to the PN-ISO 9-2000 standard often distorts the sound of the original name to such an extent that non-linguists may have problems recognising it correctly. This transliteration reflects the phonetic properties of Russian rather than Ukrainian or Belarusian (Цыхун 2015, 53–60), which is also objected to by many Polish Slavists. The Council for the Polish Language, in its statement "The issue of the PN-ISO 9:2000 standard", wrote: "At the 17th plenary meeting of the Council of the Polish Language, Professor Walery Pisarek expressed his conviction that the Council should recommend that library catalogues use transcription, not transliteration" (https://rjp.pan.pl/dziaalno-rady-w-zwizku-z-ustaw-o-jzyku polish?view=article&id=789:sprawa-normy-pn-iso-92000&catid=46). I will note that the issue of the choice between transcription and transliteration of Ukrainian, especially in the field of anthroponymy, has been topical in the Polish cultural space for a long time (Sojka-Masztalerz 2015, 295-301) and especially intensified with the beginning of the war in 2022 when Poland took in war refugees from Ukraine.

The author of this article presents a system of Latinisation of historical Ukrainian alphabets, using both letters with diacritical marks and those with ASCII codes 33-127, on which the Ukrainian transliteration standard 'Cyrillic-Latin transliteration and Latin-Cyrillic retransliteration of Ukrainian texts is based: Principles of writing" (DSTU 9112:2021). He draws attention to the value of isomorphic (bijective) transliteration to prevent loss of information. He emphasises, following Alexander Reformatsky, that scientific transliteration is not designed to be the most 'convenient' or 'easy' reading of a converted text in another language, but it takes into account the principles of original grapheme pronunciation. It seems to me that it would also be worthwhile to draw attention at this point to the considerations of Lev Shcherba (Щерба

1958, 171–181), who presented a comparative table of five variants of Latin transliteration for Russian and described in detail the problems of codification of individual phonemes.

The author proposes tables (there are 13 in total) of isomorphic transliteration and retransliteration for the Ukrainian alphabet from different periods of the language's development: 10th century - second half of the 14th century; 2nd half of the 14th century – 1798 (as for the language of literary monuments of the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, I would draw attention to the following publications: Martel 1938; Miakiszew 2000, 165–172; Мякишев 2013, 141–152; Stang 1935) and since 1798, suggesting the use of diacritics and combinations of basic Latin letters with ASCII codes 33–127, and justifies the choice of a non-inline approach to the phonemic transcription of modern Ukrainian letters with IPA symbols. He proposes a phonemic transcription table for modern Ukrainian, which is essential for machine translation and speech generation tasks. He lists the shortcomings of the existing Latinisation systems and pays special attention to those letters and their corresponding phonemes that cause the most controversy in their Latinisation, presenting the opinions of various researchers on this subject.

The author emphasises that the approach he presents offers a more comprehensive Latinisation procedure than that proposed in the standardised tables of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO 9:1995) and the Library of Congress (ALA-LC 2011).

The author bases his considerations and arguments on a substantial literature on the subject. In my view, Piotr Rybka's International Phonetic Alphabet in Slavonic Studies (Rybka 2015) is also worthy of inclusion; although there is no separate subsection dealing with Ukrainian, it discusses in detail problems of phonetics of Slavonic languages, principles of transcription and transliteration of the most 'troublesome' consonants – coronal and palatalized – and presents a discussion of the ordering of the various transcriptions found in the literature.

The author aptly notes that the results of his research presented in the reviewed article can be widely applied to historical linguistics research, written heritage preservation projects, library science, international databases, and language processing tools. In my view, the issues he addresses are also important in the context of making the international community aware of the uniqueness of Ukrainian and Belarusian and the need to take into account their specific characteristics when adopting transliteration, i.e. the importance of looking for approaches different from those currently proposed by ISO 9:1995 and ALA-LC 2011.

Łoziński, J. (1834). *O wprowadzeniu abecadła polskiego do pismiennictwa ruskiego*, „Rozmaitości", nr 29, s. 228-230.

Martel A., 1938, *La langue polonaise dans les pays ruthènes: Ukraine et Russie Blanches* 1569–1667, Lille.

Miakiszew W., 2000, *«Мовы» Великогокняжест ваЛит овскоговединст весвоихпрот ивоположност ей*, Studia Russica XVIII, Budapest, s. 165–172.

Rybka, P. (2015). *Międzynarodowy alfabet fonetyczny w slawistyce*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Sojka-Masztalerz, H. (2015). *Transkrypcja czy transliteracja nazwisk ukraińskich w polszczyźnie?: z dziejów ortografii*, Studia Ukrainica Posnaniensia 3, 295-301.

Stang Chr. S., 1935, *Die westrussishe Kanzleisprache des Grossfürstentums Litauen*, Oslo.

Мякишев В., 2013, *Стоит ли искать диалектные корни официального языка Великого княжества Литовского?* «Волинь – Житомирщина» 24, с. 141–152.

Предлог (1939). *Предлог Комисије Словенског института у Прагу о транслитерацији ћирилице у латиницу*, III Међународни конгрес слависта (словенских филолога), Збирка одговора на питања, Београд: Издања Извршног одбора №1, s. 95–99

Цыхун, Г. (2015). *Праблематыка транслітарацыі арабскаграфічных тэкстаў татараў Вялікага княства Літоўскага ў кантэксце аналагічнай славянскай праблематыкі* In: Joanna Kulwicka-Kamińska Czesław Łapicz (eds), The Tafsir of the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Theory and Research, Toruń: Wydział Filologiczny UMK, s. 53–60.

Щерба, Л.В. (1958). *Транслитерация латинскими буквами русских фамилий и географических названий*, In: Избранные работы по языкознанию и фонетике. Ленинград: Издательство Ленинградского университета, t.1. С. 171-181.