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The Language of the Eastern Slovakian Landmarks of the Writing System from Modern Perspective

Across many centuries, the linguistic situation in Eastern Slovakia has remained extremely complicated, as it had several idioms of various origins. In order to identify their nature and conclude whether or not any of them can be classified as a microlanguage, or so called Eastern Slovak cultural language, it is essential to analyze their genetic structure, determine the mechanism of their emergence, and establish their correlation with the idioms that functioned within Eastern Slovakia, as well as other regions. As it currently stands, it is a task for the future, as modern Slovak studies does not yet possess all the necessary data to reach an exhaustive solution to this problem. However, certain knowledge has already been acquired; therefore preliminary conclusions can be drawn, which will have to be reviewed and validated via a broader linguistic material.

This paper is dedicated to the analysis of language of various landmarks of Eastern Slovak writing system, which are commonly viewed as proof of existence of a distinct Eastern Slovakian writing tradition. The most prominent are the “Prayers of Spisska Kapitula” from 1480, and the letter written by the bandits to the citizens of Bardejov in 1491. Let’s note that the above texts are attributed to varying genres of writing style, and carry a different linguistic character. The presence of Eastern Slovak elements within them, in itself poses no particular Eastern Slovakian phenomenon, as it is common for local dialectic features to enter the language of the landmarks of medieval writing systems.

We can observe a different situation in the later period represented by a sizeable body of texts, many of which are unique in their linguistic character. Nevertheless, the linguistic analysis demonstrates that many of the particularities of the Eastern Slovak dialect within them are reflected rather inconsecutively, or even absent altogether. The highest level of saturation with dialectic elements can be seen in the transcripts of court proceedings, especially during use of direct speech or dependent clause in place of direct speech. In addition to that, the Eastern Slovak texts reveal an evident connection to the texts from other regions of Slovakia. In this case, they are linked by the genetically Czech and Western Slovak elements. Due to this fact, these texts should be considered as variants of a whole.

However, the reviewed idiom was not the only one functioning within the territory of Eastern Slovakia. It is a widely known fact that the Eastern Slovakian Calvinists used a different idiom. Between 1750 and 1758, five books of a religious content were published in Debrecen, of which two were written in prose, and the other three in rhymes. It is held that these Calvinistic texts were written almost purely in Zemplin dialect and contain only insignificant traces of the Czech language and Central Slovak dialect. At the same time, the texts also contain some non-Slovak language elements, which contradict the thesis about the pure Zemplin character of their language, and would therefore suggest that it requires a more in-depth study. The peculiarity of this idiom was the fact that it remained strictly confessional, reserved exclusively for sermons. Because of this, it cannot claim the status of a literary language.

There were later attempts to codify a specific Eastern Slovak language, which is evident by the “Saris Grammar” of A. Urban in 1875, and “Slovjak Grammar” of E. Dobranski in 1941. The texts were published based on the positions of these grammars. However, these grammars do not have a link between them and carry a different linguistic character, because the mechanism of the creation of their language was different: if A. Urban’s was based on the Slovak literary language and infused with the Eastern Slovak elements, then E. Dobranski based his entirely on the Eastern Slovak dialect.

Consequently, the Eastern Slovak dialect was never successfully implemented into the writing system of Eastern Slovakia.