

Slavic-Eurasian Research Center 2024 Winter International Symposium, December 18–19, 2024

**Languages, Nations and Standardization in Slavia: So Similar and Yet So Different**

Hokkaido University, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center (SRC), Room 403

# Pluricentricity and Script

Tomasz Kamusella

University of St Andrews

# Talk's Outline

- Methodological considerations
- Politics of script theorized and exemplified
- Polycentric / Polyscriptal Polish

# Writing, Language, LanguageS

- **Language** is the biological (evolutionary) **capacity for Speech**
- **Writing is NOT Language**, it is a graphic method of recording Speech (=Language)
- **LanguageS (Einzelsprachen)** are **actualizations** of the biological capacity for Speech (Language) within a given human group
- **Western concept of Einzelsprache** is steeped in the normative (Judeo-Graeco-Roman-Islamic) opposition between ‘**written languageS**’ and ‘**unwritten, spoken dialects**’ (vernaculars)

# Politics of Script (1)

- In the West's politics of language, writing is a par excellence tool of making and delineating languages (Einzelsprachen)
- In the (East) Roman Empire, **each recognized new Einzelsprache** into which the Bible was translated was **endowed with a new & distinctive script** (eg Syriac lg – Syriac script, Gothic lg – Gothic spt, Armenian lg – Armenian spt, Georgian lg – Georgian spt, Slavic lg – Glagolitic spt)
- After 1000, **scriptal homogeneity** in the West: the script of the 'holy tongue' of Latin accepted for writing WC Europe's vernaculars
- Hence, an illusion that script is of no importance for language making and differentiation

# Politics of Script (2)

- Although gradually limited, **multiscriptality** remains an important factor of language making and differentiation in the **Balkans (SE Europe) and Eastern Europe**
- By comparison, in **South and SE Asia** a ‘proper’ **Einzelssprache** = its own distinctive **script** (Bengali lg – Bengali spt, Khmer lg – Khmer spt, Lao lg – Lao spt, Marathi lg – Marathi spt, Thai lg – Thai spt)
- Under the British Raj in the NW provinces administration used the **Hindustani lg** written in **Arabic letters**
- On Hinduists’ request, in 1900, the **Devanagari script** was recognized as official,
- Giving rise the **Hinduist** lg of **Hindi** in **Devanagari** हिन्दी
- And the **Muslim** lg of **Urdu** in **Arabic letters** اُردُو

ہندوستانی

# Politics of Script in SE Europe

- Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c > **monocentric** lgs: **Croatian = Latin** letters vs **Serbian = Cyrillic**
- 1918/21-41/45-1991 > **pluricentric** lgs: **Serbocroatoslovenian = Cyrillic, Latin** and (de facto) **Arabic** scripts; **Serbo-Croatian = Cyrillic and Latin** scripts
- After 1991 > **monocentric** lgs: **Croatian = Latin** letters (+ **Glagolitic** heritage script) vs **Serbian = Cyrillic** vs **Bosnian = Latin** letters (+ **Arabic** heritage script) vs **Montenegrin = Latin & Cyrillic** scripts
- 2017 Declaration on the **polycentric** & polynomic & non-ethnic '**Common Language**' = all the **post-Serbo-Croatian lgs** and **their scripts**
- 2022 Declaration ('Borders of the Serbian Language') > **polycentric** & polyscriptal **Serbian lg** (of the 'Serbian world') = **all the Štokavian-based post-Serbo-Croatian lgs**

# Is Polish a polyscriptal lg?

- **NO!** Because it is a **monocentric** lg, official only in a **single state**, is written in a **single script** (Latin alphabet) and enjoys a **single standard** (after 1936/45)
- But in **1918/24-1938/41** Polish was a **pluricentric** lg, namely, the official language in interwar **Poland** and an official language in interwar **Soviet Belarus**
- **Latin script** for **Polish** in interwar Poland and Soviet Belarus
- Yet, a **separate standardization** in **Soviet Belarus**, including
- **1932 authoritative Polish-Belarusian dictionary**
- Spelling, syntactical, morphological and lexical **differences**
- **Cyrillic-based Russian** employed as the **meta-language for Soviet Polish**
- Hence, **Churchill** in Poland's Polish but **Czerczyl** (< Russ *Черчилль*) in Soviet Polish
- Or **Ententa** (< Eng / Fr *Entente*) in Poland's Polish but **Antanta** (< Russ *Антанта*) in Soviet Polish

# Polyscriptal / Policentric Polish Nowadays

- Lack of Latin script typewriters in the SU, hence, in the 1970s/80s religious **Polish-language samizdat prayerbooks** typed and copied in **Russian-style Cyrillic**
- In **post-Soviet Belarus Poles = Catholics**, who speak Belarusian but mostly are literate in Russian
- In Belarus **Polish** remains the main **language of Catholic** liturgy and pastoral services
- In authoritarian Belarus it is allowed to publish **Polish-language religious books**, but exclusively in the **Russian-style Cyrillic**
- NB: These **Cyrillic-based Polish-language books** are *not* collected in libraries in Poland or anywhere else outside Belarus



# Polyscriptalism = Polycentrism?

Cyrillic Example: **Кланиам сень Тобе Божэ**

Polish in Latin letters: **Kłaniam się Tobie Boże**

Russian romanization: *Klaniam sien' Tobe Bozhé*

Translation: 'I bow to You, O God'

**Abstract:** The concept of pluricentric languages, introduced at the turn of the 1990s, became quite widespread during the past two decades, especially in Slavic Studies. This development is connected to the split of Serbo-Croatian in the wake of the breakup of Yugoslavia. The most popular kind of pluricentricity analyzed is that of a (purportedly) single languages employed and (differently) standardized in separate sovereign nation-states. Yet, pluricentricity can be defined and probed into also from the perspective of different scripts deployed for writing the (purportedly) same language. Script, like statehood, is another extralinguistic factor, which shapes and defines languages as products of politics.

**Tomasz Kamusella** is Reader in Modern Central and Eastern European History at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. His recent monographs include *Ethnic Cleansing during the Cold War* (Routledge 2018), *Politics and Slavic Languages* (Routledge 2021) and *Eurasian Empires as Blueprints for Ethiopia* (Routledge 2021). Kamusella's reference *Words in Space and Time: A Historical Atlas of Language Politics in Modern Central Europe* (CEU Press 2021) is available as an open access publication. A collection of his essays on matters Albanian appeared in the Albanian translation as *Politika gjuhësore dhe gjeopolitika* (Language politics and geopolitics, Littera, Prishtina 2023). Kamusella's latest coedited volumes include *Languages and Nationalism Instead of Empires* (Routledge 2023) and *Papusza / Bronisława Wajs: Tears of Blood A Poet's Witness Account of the Nazi Genocide of Roma* (Brill 2024). Of interest for slavacists, his short stories were published as a bilingual volume *Limits / Styknie* (Silesia Progress 2019) in which they are paired with their translations into the Slavic microlanguage of Silesian.