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PROBLEMS OF STUDYING LINGUISTIC INFLUENCES IN THE NORTH SLAVIC-BALTIC CONTACT ZONE

Abstract. The immense contribution of the late Professor G. A. Tsykhun to global Slavic studies continues to inspire heuristic research, particularly in the study of linguistic influences within the North Slavic-Baltic contact zone. G. A. Tsykhun emphasized the importance of a comprehensive analysis of the historical contexts that shaped Belarusian-Polish interactions over space and time. This article builds upon G. A. Tsykhun's legacy, focusing on the phenomenon of isoglosses with a unified center of expansion, which are documented in the North Slavic-Baltic contact zone as correlates of Belarusian-Polish interactions. To establish the motivations and nature of these linguistic features, a broad spectrum of associated problems and factors must be considered. This publication offers a selective analysis of these elements.

Keywords: Circum-Baltic Area, contact zone, ethnographic boundary, language influence, stimulus, community.

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ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКОВЫХ ВЛИЯНИЙ В СЕВЕРО-СЛАВЯНО-БАЛТИЙСКОЙ КОНТАКТНОЙ ЗОНЕ

Аннотация. Колоссальный интеллектуальный вклад в развитие мировой славистики недавно ушедшего из жизни профессора Г. А. Цыхуна, чье научное наследие, несомненно, вдохновляет на дальнейшие эвристические разыскания в области исследования языковых влияний в северо-славяно-балтийской контактной зоне, обуславливает выбор темы данной статьи и актуализацию заявленной проблематики. Профессор Г. А. Цыхун обладал непревзойденным лингвистическим чутьем, позволяющим обнаруживать интереснейшие ареальные парадоксы. Выявляемые ученым противоречия закономерно становились объектом полемики в кругу славистов, что стимулировало открытие новых языковых явлений и переосмысление опыта постижения их сущности. В беседах и дискуссиях с учениками Г. А. Цыхун акцентировал особое внимание на необходимости тщательного и глубокого изучения исторических условий, в которых зарождались и развивались белорусско-польские контакты в пространстве и времени. Сегодня, фокусируясь на указанной задаче, мы имеем возможность приблизиться к разгадке феномена изоглосс с единым центром экспансии, зафиксированных в северо-славяно-балтийской контактной зоне в качестве белорусско-польских коррелятов. Для экстраспективного установления мотивации и природы их появления необходимо учитывать целый спектр сопутствующих проблем и факторов, избирательный анализ которых представлен в настоящей публикации.

Ключевые слова: циркумбалтийская зона, контактная зона, этнографический рубеж, языковое влияние, стимул, общность

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*Dedicated to the Memory
of Professor G. A. Tsykhun*

Introduction. The scientific legacy of Professor G. A. Tsykhun, who passed away in 2024, represents a colossal contribution to the development of global Slavic studies and undoubtedly inspires further heuristic inquiries into the study of linguistic influences in the North Slavic-Baltic contact zone, which determines the choice and relevance of the topic of this article.

Professor G. A. Tsykhun possessed an exceptional linguistic intuition, enabling him to uncover intriguing areal paradoxes. The contradictions he identified often became focal points of debate among Slavists, spurring the discovery of new linguistic phenomena and reinterpreting the understanding of their essence. In discussions with his students, G. A. Tsykhun frequently emphasized that the distribution areas of some phenomena in the north-east of Poland, the nature of which is determined by the Polish-Belarusian correlates, go far to the west and can even reach the territory historically belonging to Prussia (including the areas of modern Kaliningrad and Daugavpils). From the point of view of areal linguistics, their presence there seems paradoxical: considering objective absence of the expansion force in the conditions of being among a contrasting linguistic environment, as well as significant distance from the Polish-Belarusian geographical border, these phenomena should not have covered most of the linguistic territory, but would have remained within a certain northeastern segment of Poland. It is also doubtful that they can occupy the periphery of the Polish-speaking areal space itself, since they do not reveal exact genetic and indisputable typological relations with it. If the distribution territory of the mentioned phenomena is considered as the periphery of another ethno-lingual areal formation or as the centre of a certain areal unity, it is necessary to find out whether they are archaisms or innovations, and what origin they have in this case. The localization and typical spatial distribution of such linguistic facts allow us to consider their hypothetical innovative potential, which can be confirmed or refuted only after a comprehensive areal-typological study of linguistic influences in the north Slavic-Baltic contact zone¹.

Results and its discussion. There is no doubt that, against the background of the traditional linguistic landscape of north-eastern Poland, phenomena localized far enough beyond the territory of the traditional impact of east Slavic influences², but in a certain way connected with it, look alien. It should be taken into account that their origin can reveal both the corresponding correlations with the area of distribution of Belarusian dialects, and different degrees of connection with the Baltic-Slavic language zone, the so-called “Circum-Baltic Area” [3]. The linguistic and cultural context of this region, an integral component of which is the so-called mixed speech of the Belarusian-Polish borderland, underscores the uniqueness of the area under study – it is determined by the linguistic and cultural context of the so-called Circum-Baltic zone, an integral component of which is, in turn, the so-called mixed speech of Belarusian-Polish borderland [4, p. 166]. It is known that the Circum-Baltic zone, which covered in a broad sense the Slavic languages of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during its heyday, together with the Baltic ones including the so-called “northern-lyakhitsky” and “ancient-krivitski” dialects [5, p. 249–250]. As specified by V. Ivanov: “In the about-Baltic area, there is a Circum-Baltic chain of Slavic and Baltic archaic cultures, preserving their ancient religion and corresponding lexical and semantic elements, that stretches from the Pomeranian Slavs through Prussia and Lithuania. The continuation of this Circum-Baltic zone can be seen in the areas occupied by the Baltic-Finnish population in the north and the Scandinavians in the north-west and east (Varangians in Russia)” [5, p. 270]. From the common for the entire about-Baltic mythological zone themes V. Ivanov points to “the plot of persecution of his rival by the god of thunderstorms outlined by the Lithuanian folklorist Balis in his pre-war works” [5, p. 270].

Furthermore, the specifics of the research area is also reflected in the modern regional division of north-eastern Poland, which was formed on the basis of historical prerequisites. We are talking about “three Masurian counties of Bialystok Voivodeship, which are currently located in Suwalki Voivodeship and are called the EGO region, or: Elk (ełcki), Goldap (gołdapski) and Olecko (olecki)” [6, p. 111].

¹ The *contact zone* should not be identified with transitional and (or) mixed dialects — it is a zone of contact interaction between two areal arrays, as a result of which in a part of the territory of each language adjacent to the neighboring language territory there is a diffusion of a number of phenomena or innovations stimulated by them [1, p. 65].

² Defined according to the *Atlas gwar wschodniosłowiańskich Białostoczczyzny* [2].

The EGO area unites 11 neighboring gminas (Elk, Olecko, Gołdap, Banie Mazurskie, Dubeninki, Prostki, Stare Juchy, Kalinowo, Wieliczki, Świętajno, Kowale Oleckie). In accordance with K. Szczesniak's research, the problem of multi-layering in the naming of residential and physiographic objects is stated in the mentioned region, where "next to the three Baltic languages (Lithuanian, Old Prussian and Yatvyagian), dialects of German and Polish, as well as the Belarusian language presented at different times with varying degrees of intensity of speech" [6, p. 116].

Therefore, first of all, questions to be answered are:

- How should the phenomena concentrated in the north-east of Poland be objectively qualified?
- Where should the causes of their occurrence and origins be looked for?
- Consequences of what foreign influences may they be?
- How and for what reason could these facts, not typical for the rest of the Polish-speaking territory appear?

Since the raised topic reveals many contradictions, it is advisable to carry out attempts of establishment of motivation and nature of origin of the selected areas, by considering a whole complex of areal, historical (including socio-economic) and ethno-cultural factors that could influence the formation of distinctive features of the northeastern Dialects of Poland.

Despite the fact that the insular areas of many linguistic phenomena recorded in this zone are considered by D. K. Rembiszewska, J. Siatkowski [7], I. Maryniakowa [8] and some other researchers mainly as the results of the Mazovian-Masurian-Warmian expansion, it is possible that these phenomena occupy the periphery of another old territories that have a non-Polish background. T. Zdancewicz attempted to develop this hypothesis in Polish linguistics, but his ideas did not find support among followers of official concepts and traditional views on the development of the dialect system of north-eastern Poland.

At the same time, as B. Falińska notes, there are two historical borders are distinguished by a large number of isolexes in all linguistic and geographical sources; T. Zdancewicz drew his attention to these borders in the article *Litewskie i ruskie zasięgi słownikowe na Białostocczyźnie* [Lithuanian and Russian dictionary coverage in the Białystok region] [9], namely the political border of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) after annexation of Podlachia to the Crown of Poland in 1569, or the eastern border of Podlachia and the former historical border between Mazovia region and Podlachia prior to the Union of Lublin [10, p. 98]. As per the conclusions by B. Falińska, based on the comparison of materials from Polish linguistic and geographical sources and other maps from individual monographs, a distinctive territorial complex, specified also by T. Zdancewicz, is formed by the Suwalki-August dialects, which can be aggregated into a single dialect array with both the eastern part of Masuria (the territory of ethnic yatvyaz), with the rest of the territory of Masuria and Warmia, and, finally, with the entire territory of north Polish dialects [10, p. 98–99]. B. Falińska states: "The north-eastern boundary, western border of which passes through the center of Mazovia, is characterized by a significant predominance of indigenous vocabulary typical for various spheres of traditional culture. As a result there is closer relationship of north-eastern Mazovia and Podlachia (northern region especially) with the territory of Belarus, and to a large extent with Russian dialects than the relationship of Mazovia and South-Eastern part of Lesser Poland [...]. This border can be clearly traced on many maps of the *Atlas gwar mazowieckich* [...] and undoubtedly forms one of the most typical complexes of isolexes, common for Polish and Belarusian dialects" [10, p. 99–100].

Isoglosses registered by competent linguistic and geographical sources, primarily in the Mazovian-Podlach dialects, and oriented to the Belarusian language territory (i. e. isoglosses adjacent to north-western Belarus) indicate the possibility of forming a common Belarusian-Polish area. Back in the first half of the XX century, K. Nitsch finds evidence confirming the validity of this hypothesis: "It is noteworthy that three Mazovian names, "*podwalina*", "*strop*" and "*zasiek*", reveal a close connection with Russian¹ names, despite the fact that Mazovia originally did not border with Belarus, from which it was separated by the Yatvyags. There are none even in the east of ancient Lesser Poland. Do these words really come from the period of direct collision of Mazovia with Belarus, maybe only from the XIV century?" [11, p. 83].

¹ i.e. East Slavic.

The examples provided by K. Nitsch are not the only exceptions [12, p. 221]. T. Zdancewicz [13], Cz. Kudzinowski [12], K. Deina [14], B. Falińska [10], A. Kowalska [15] and other Polish scientists also noted the so-called Belarusian traces in Polish dialects of north-eastern Poland and mapped phenomena that had analogues on both sides of the Polish-Belarusian border. Some Kushub-Belarusian and Greater Poland-Belarusian similarities, the nature of which, as a rule, is characterized by lexical-word-formation-semantic archaisms typical of peripheral regions, have been the subject of sporadic attention of both Polish and Belarusian scientists [10; 16; 17]. In relation to some non-contiguous (in other words, remote from the contact border) areas, it is also possible to assume the probability of their formation under Belarusian influence: the stimulus for their occurrence or the center of irradiation may be located in Belarus. It should be emphasized that we are not talking about the infiltration of a certain phenomenon into a neighboring linguistic territory, but about “such an impact of a neighboring language on the system of another language that brings to life a phenomenon, which may differ significantly from the stimulus phenomenon” [1, p. 65], including by structure and meaning. The interpretation of Belarusian-Polish similarities is complicated by the need to distinguish typological similarities and the results of areal interaction: contact between language systems, as G. A. Tsykhun emphasizes, can be “only a stimulus for changes, the result of which is a phenomenon that is not at all similar to what stimulated its occurrence” [18, p. 205].

The probability of existence of a certain Belarusian-Polish areal unity often provokes discussions, since it contradicts the well-known provision that there cannot be significant areal communities in the research territory for historical reasons. From an ethno-cultural point of view, northern part of Belarusian-Polish borderland is of considerable interest as a zone of so-called ethnographic boundary [19, p. 239]. It is known that the border of one of the most expressive ethnographic boundaries in Europe passes through the territory of north-eastern Poland: the north-eastern one (following J. Czekanowski) or Masurian-Volynian one (as specified by K. Moszyński), determined on the basis of mapped cultural and ethnographic phenomena, the areas of which extend or have their center of irradiation outside Poland – in Polesie, the Ukraine and Belarus, Lithuania [20, p. 167].

According to A. Trubachiov, this the most important ethnographic boundary that exists in the north-east from the middle course of the Vistula, has analogues in the areas of prehistoric cultures: namely, in about 1000 BC, the Lusatian culture reached this boundary from the west [21, p. 174]. The time of origin of this boundary, J. Czekanowski and A. Trubachiov, “define as 1000 BC and associate it with physic and geographic conditions – water resources and thick forests” [22, p. 81; 19, p. 239]. Based on K. Moszyński’s work the Masurian-Volynian boundary, which can indeed be explained by geographical factors, cuts off “part of north-eastern Poland from its other much larger territory” [19, p. 239–240]. There was nothing mystical about this boundary: the natural obstacle to the east of it was a thick solid forest, the Puscha. In different periods, waves of cultures moving from west to east were forced to stop at the edge of a huge primeval forest.

Thus, following of the conclusions of G. A. Tsykhun, northern part of Belarusian-Polish borderland is clearly delineated as a specific ethno-cultural zone in linguistic terms [19, p. 240]. It should be emphasized that this zone stands out not only in onomastic terms, forming an areal resemblance with some Belarusian territories: the named part is also interesting in historical terms, since it is connected with the territory of the Western Balts, primarily the Yatvyags. As J. Tyszkewicz denotes, this modern Belarusian-Polish borderland is historically a secondary Baltic territory, since only in the 900s A. D. the Yatving tribes from Suwalki and Augustow counties began to expand upstream of the Neman, mainly along its western bank [23, p. 11].

The Yatvyagian question remains one of the most debated in the history of Belarus and Poland. Well-known is the thesis that the land between the Neman and the Narev (today’s Suwałki Region, part of Western Belarus, Southern Lithuania) formed in the X–XIII centuries the core of the tribal territory of the Baltic Yatvyags and formally separated the Eastern and Western Slavs [24, p. 5]. L. Bednarczuk believed that although the “western Russian languages” are connected with the Polish language for a long time (starting from the Proto-Slavic time) by means of areal contacts, direct Belarusian-Polish relations can be discussed only after settlement of the “post-Yatvyagian wasteland” in Podlachia [25]. P. Wexler also stressed that the Slavic-speaking groups of the ancestors of the Poles

and Belarusians were probably separated from each other by the territory of the Baltic tribes, who were usually called the Yatvyags, whose language is difficult to reconstruct: “as a result of this rather late contact, the border between Belarusian and Polish dialects is, in fact, very clear, with a small number of transitional dialects” [26, p. 89].

Isolated geographical location of people, undoubtedly, prevents the borrowing of vocabulary [27, p. 124]. However, it should be taken into account that since the X century already, most of Yatvyaz was conquered and annexed to Kievan Rus, subsequently, in the XII century – to the Galicia-Volyn Principality and Mazovia, in the XIII century – to the GDL [28, p. 7]. It can be assumed that these events, activated the Baltic-Slavic language contacts. The Yatvyaz language was located on the border of cultures and states, so it is quite natural that there were a large number of borrowings and infiltrations in it – primarily from the Prussian, Polish and Belarusian languages. Thus, even in ancient times Belarusian and Polish ethnic groups could experience mutual influences through the mediation of the Yatvyags and their language.

Despite the fact that Yatvyaz had a very significant natural protection in the form of forests and swamps, the Yatvyaz tribes are known to have been destroyed and partially assimilated. After that the desolate territory formed a natural barrier to Polish-Belarusian relations for a long time. That is why the beginning of formation of these ethnic relations is often dated back to the late XIV century (along with the beginning of the settlement of empty lands). As stated by T. Ler-Splavinsky, “the Mazovians apparently came into a direct contact with the East Slavic element not earlier than the XIV century” [29, p. 49]. Therefore, to a certain extent, the presence of facts common to the Belarusian and Polish languages outside the narrow border zone can be considered an areal paradox.

However, as specified by results of a special study, not only archaisms and proper Polish or Polish-East Slavic innovations are noted in the dialects of north-eastern Poland, but also joint Polish-Belarusian new formations, as well as borrowings from the Belarusian dialect language. Joint phenomena spread to the territories of Belarus and Poland despite the facts that:

- on the border of modern Bialystok and Grodno regions for many centuries there was an ethnographic boundary dividing Eastern Europe vertically, from north to south [30, p. 262];
- until the XIV century Belarusian and Polish dialects of modern Grodno and Bialystok regions were divided by the territory inhabited by the Yatvyags, and later for a long time – by the so-called “post-Yatvyagian wasteland” [31, p. 34], when contacts were hindered by a foreign ethnic group, natural barriers.

According to Z. Stieber, in the XVI century the whole area between northern Podlachia and the Neman with a densely populated area near Grodno was a thick forest (the Pushcha), almost uninhabited. It is clear that the surroundings of Grodno were Belarusian, and therefore the few settlers who came to the Pushcha were most likely of Belarusian origin and partly Lithuanian [32, p. 435]. The lands of the entire present-day Bialystok Voivodeship were located within the GDL, which had a decisive influence on the settlement process and the ethnic character of the new settlement [33, p. 15]. From the history of the settlement of Bialystok region, it is known that in the XV century for the sake of strengthening the power in the GDL, the new Belarusian-Lithuanian settlers were allowed to transfer ownership not only of significant parts of the Pushcha, but also of old villages, which even caused migration of the Mazovian population [33, p. 17]. Thus, the Belarusian-Yatvyag traces in the dialects near Tykocin can be explained by the influence of these sociolinguistic factors. The undoubted predominance of the Belarusian population created prerequisites for the spread of their language and culture. And even the military events of the XVII century did not completely stop the further movement of the Belarusians to the west. More intensive colonization of the Pushcha probably occurred in the XVIII–XIX centuries. The Masurians were advancing from the west, the Belarusians were advancing from the Neman side. Both waves collided near the territory of modern the Augustovsky Canal, near the village of Mikaszowka [32, p. 435]. Naturally, a certain number of the Belarusian population could penetrate further to the west and mix with the Masurian colonists, giving them elements of their speech. The entry of Bialystok region into Grodno province in the XIX century strengthened Belarusian influences and weakened Polish ones throughout the present territory of north-eastern Poland.

In the XX century, after the Second World War, several tens of percent of the Bialystok population moved to eastern Masuria [33, p. 26]. Immigrants from Belarus and Lithuania joined them. The Bela-

rusians who remained on the territory of Poland moved inland or to the east, thanks to which the ethnic Belarusian massif was preserved in eastern Bialystok region; it is known that by 1947 469000 of Belarusians and 1200000 Poles left the USSR for permanent residence in Poland (many Belarusians, especially from the territory of Vilna and Grodno regions, who were Catholics, registered as Poles in order to leave the country as soon as possible) [34, p. 95]. Despite the fact that the majority of Belarusians were settled in the so-called returned lands, in the territory where German population previously prevailed [35, p. 110–114], the colonists, left in Masuria, had the opportunity to exert a certain influence on the origin and expansion of innovations caused by the influence of the Belarusian language in north-eastern Poland. Correspondingly, many areas of new linguistic phenomena could become open to the east and continuous.

Among the particularly important factors that influenced the formation of the communicative space of the contact zone of Belarus and Poland one should note the mobility of the state borders that passed through the territory of the analyzed area. Socio-political instability caused the fact that the state borders of Belarus and Poland of that time were often moving in western and eastern directions. The movement of state coordinates contributed to the activation of ethno-linguistic diffusion in the Belarusian-Polish contact zone and caused inevitable changes in the areal organization of the Slavic language landscape. This was also facilitated by the fact that in ancient times trade and military routes passed through the research area: the trade route from Prussia and Mazovia to Volyn and Grodno and the military road from Grodno region to Mazovia and Prussia. Movements along these routes, contacts during travel, had to leave their mark on the language of people who lived or were in the study region for a certain time.

Thus, the complexity and ambiguity of the sociolinguistic situation in the communicative area of the contact zone of Belarus and Poland is determined primarily by the specifics of localization of the object of study, the history of development of the Belarusian-Polish-Baltic interlingual interaction, language policy of the states and a long-term instability of socio-political conditions in the study region, significant colonization and migration movements of the population, as well as distinctive areal processes. A significant influence on formation of the sociolinguistic situation on the Polish-Belarusian borderland can also be exerted by such a linguistic and cultural phenomenon as peripheral, so-called northern and southern kress, “polszczyzna” (similar to Polish) [36].

According to D. K. Rembiszewska and J. Siatkowski, the peculiarity of the Polish-East Slavic borderland in the context of the territory under consideration, as well as the reasons for its formation, is a long-standing community, distinguished on the basis of the community of material culture [7, p. 51]. Researchers do not consider it possible to recognize Belarusian origin of many words common in the north-eastern dialects of Poland, but interpret them as secondary phenomena formed on the Polish language grounds. However, as K. Moszyński emphasized, the works of culture, which are conventionally divided into material, social and spiritual, had their exact starting points in space and time and diverged from the places of their origin as so-called cultural waves, that in different phases of their development covered areas that rarely coincided or overlapped with each other [37, p. 15–19].

Conclusion. At the current stage of Slavic studies, many aspects concerning the spatial and temporal distribution of linguistic phenomena have been comprehensively explored, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the overall areal dynamics within the Slavic linguistic landscape. However, the investigation of linguistic influences within the North Slavic-Baltic contact zone remains highly pertinent. In this region, isoglosses have been documented, the nature of which is shaped by Belarusian-Polish correlations. These studies examine the historical conditions under which Belarusian-Polish interactions emerged and evolved across time and space, providing critical insights into isoglosses whose interpretation is intrinsically linked to resolving a range of fundamental issues in Slavistics.

In north-eastern Poland the collision of language systems reveals a significant number of innovative phenomena and the commonality of many features inherent even in Polish and Belarusian dialects that are not directly in contact with each other. Therefore, the study of Polish-Belarusian borderland as part of an areal formation, the components of which have a number of common areally determined features, can be especially fruitful. An indisputable heuristic value for the development of Slavic studies is the search for a rational explanation of phenomena that are formally completely outside the natural possibility of being associated with the Belarusian language, but can be attributed to the impulse given

by the development of the corresponding features in Belarusian dialects, or to the substrate-the Baltic grounds, on which Slavic features were subsequently superimposed. Despite how such phenomena will be interpreted, in any case, an indication of the correlation of facts of the Polish language with the facts of the Belarusian and Baltic languages, and sometimes other languages will remain an important achievement.

The analysis of linguistic influences on formation of the communicative area of the North Slavic-Baltic contact zone seems promising in determining the mechanisms of formation within the Belarusian-Polish interlingual zonal community of innovative multi-level convergences with a single center of expansion and, subsequently, the reasons that influenced the modern areal division of Slavic linguistic territories.

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