

Henryk Fontański, Mirosława Chomiak, *Gramatyka języka lemковского = Gramatýka lemkiowskoho iazyka*. Katowice: Śląsk. 2000. pp. 188.

Reviewed by *Bogdan Horbal*

The Lemko people are a numerically small population of East Slavic highlanders who for centuries dwelled on the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in what is today the Polish-Slovak borderland. For centuries divided by political borders and differing linguistic influences, the Lemko dialects found on both sides of the Carpathians developed along sufficiently different lines to warrant their separate codification at the end of the twentieth century.

This process was first successfully concluded in Slovakia, where the norms for what is called the Rusyn literary standard were set in publications by Vasyl' Iabur, *Pravyla rusyn'skoho pravopysu* (1994), and Anna Plishkova, ed., *Orfografičnyi slovnyk rusyn'skoho iazyka* (1994). This new Slavic micro-language was introduced in schools and publications, and has already become the subject of scholarly studies, including those by Juraj Vaňko (*The Language of Slovakia's Rusyns*, 2000) and Alexander Teutsch (*Das Rusinische der Ostslowakei im Kontext seiner Nachbarsprachen*, 2001).

For Lemkos living on the northern slopes of the Carpathians and elsewhere within the borders of Poland, it is their second attempt at codification. The first took place in the 1930s, when a primer and a reader in Lemko vernacular were introduced in the schools of the region. In the case of Lemkos—as it often is with other small, stateless minorities—Lemko cultural growth was determined largely by the official stance taken toward them by the country in which they reside.

The agenda set by the Polish authorities of the 1930-ties left no room for the Lemko community to realize its full potential. After a brief flirtation with the codification process—which was more of an anti-Ukrainian program than genuine support of a micro-minority population desperately in a need of such a support—the Polish authorities withdrew financial support. Not surprisingly, the Lemko cultural movement faltered.

Forces greater than themselves fortunately not always frustrated Lemko endeavors at self-expression. Indeed, the use of the local vernacular in writings and education goes back to the sixteenth century. From that time and throughout the eighteenth century the Sanok and Nowy Sącz

Regions (respectively the eastern and western parts of the Lemko Region), as well as Rusyn populated northern Spiš, were centers of educational activity in which the Lemko vernacular was used.

It was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Lemko scribes rewrote a number of liturgical texts, along with explanatory notes, with the ever-growing use of the local vernacular. In the mid eighteenth century the Rev. Ivan Pryslopskii translated into Lemko vernacular the Psalms of David (*Psaltýr Davyda*) and, according to some scholars, the entire Gospel (*Evangelie*), both of which included his own commentary.

Lemko vernacular was also used in non-ecclesiastical works, including: *Kosmografiia, opysanie vseho svta* (late sixteenth century), which is a translation of Marcin Bielski's *Kronika, opisanie catego sviata* (1551), as well as a translation of *Gesta Romanorum*, rendered by Stefan Samboryna between 1742 and 1766.

In the nineteenth century, literary works as well as articles in Lemko vernacular started appearing more frequently. The believe in the value and capability of the Lemko vernacular grew even stronger after a native of the region, Matvii Astriab, suggested (1871) that the Lemko vernacular forms a separate language, different from both the Ukrainian and Russian with which it was frequently affiliated. It was thus not a surprise that the first ever newspaper dedicated to serving the Lemko community was published in their vernacular (*Lemko*, 1911–1913). With the appearance of various publications in Lemko, both in the homeland and among immigrant circles in America, it was soon realized that codification was a must.

Codification was needed not only because the Lemko vernacular was differentiated, but also because the many individuals engaged in writing and publishing were trying to “improve” Lemko by adding loan words or even transplanting grammatical rules from other Slavic languages.

The first attempts at codification took place in the USA, where Dymytrii Vyslotskii led the way with the publication of *Karpatorusskyi bukvar Vania Huniankŷ* (1931). The then powerful Lemko Association of the United States and Canada promoted the use of the Lemko vernacular, but since the organization could never decide between pro-Russian or pro-Rusyn orientations, its endorsement was not as significant as it could have been.

Given this failed Diaspora attempt at codification, coupled with the aforementioned attempt that took place in the Lemkos' European homeland, the future prospects for development of the Lemko vernacular appeared bleak. The outbreak of World War II and the post war introduction of communist rule in the Eastern Europe appeared to drive the final nails into the coffin of Lemko linguistic aspirations.

The first wartime blow came in the form of the Nazi decision to grant Ukrainians “exclusive rights” in the Lemko Region. This meant in practice that all of the schooling and publishing was done in Ukrainian. The Polish communists continued this linguistic hard line after the war with Warsaw’s imperious decree that all Lemkos were to “be” Ukrainian.

It was only in the tumultuous 1980-ties that Poland’s growing democratization allowed the political space necessary for the rebirth of Lemko indigenous aspirations. Not coincidentally, the first public, organizational manifestation of the Lemkos’ cultural revival took form almost simultaneously with the fall of communism: The Lemko Association was created in 1989. One of the major goals of this organization has been the codification of Lemko vernacular and its introduction in schools.

The first steps towards achieving this goal were taken in the early 1990-ties when the co-author of this publication—teacher, philologist and native speaker Mirosława Chomiak—prepared several Lemko school textbooks and begun to teach the subject in her native town. She eventually joined forces with a Slavic linguist from the Silesian University in Katowice, Henryk Fontański, a linguist familiar with Lemko who had previously published several articles on its grammar. With his cooperation Chomiak prepared the first, working version of the Lemko grammar (1992). As the interest in teaching and learning Lemko grew rapidly, it became obvious that its grammatical rules should be set as soon as possible.

This has now been achieved with the publication of this book. It consists of eight chapters (written exclusively in Lemko, using Cyrillic letters), including those on: phonetics, alphabet, orthography, lexicology, morphology, syntaxes, and punctuation. There is also a Lemko–Polish dictionary of grammatical terminology, as well as a selected bibliography. Although the Lemko vernacular has had a long lasting tradition of use in writings and education, it is only now that it may officially be welcomed as a new Slavic micro language spoken in Poland by some 60,000 people, as well as by an undetermined but significant number of people in Diaspora settlements, chiefly in Ukraine, United States, and Canada.

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