Old Church Slavonic and the "Slavic Identity"

Katherine Barber
December 6, 2004
Languages and Nationalism

What is Old Church Slavonic?

o Liturgical medium of the Slavic Orthodox Churches (like Latin in the Roman Catholic Church.)
o Oldest written form of a Slavic language
  ● Never spoken, except for a small educated elite.
o Officially used from c.850-1100 A.D.
  ● Oversimplification
    • Spoken for years before codified by Cyril and Methodius and used in some texts after 1100 A.D.

History of Old Church Slavonic

o Created in the 9th century to translate the Bible and other religious works for the people of Greater Moravia by St. Cyril and St. Methodius.
  ● Cyril and Methodius brought to Moravia by Rastislav, to weaken the influence of the Frisian priests.
o Oldest dated extant text: gravestone inscription of Tsar Samuel of Macedonia, from 993 A.D.

History of Old Church Slavonic, cont.

o OCS was prohibited in 886 by Wiching, an East Frankish priest who also persecuted followers of Methodius, after Germans invaded Moravia in 880s.
  ● Some escaped to Bulgaria and received support from Boris I, who wanted to use OCS to support independence of Bulgaria from Byzantine influences.
  ● Spread of language through scholars from Bulgarian universities.

History of Old Church Slavonic, cont.

o Most surviving documents are religious works and a few texts.
o Evolved with little change into today's Church Slavonic (still spoken in the Orthodox Church.)
  ● Difference between the two is not clear-cut, except for time of use.
  ● Church Slavonic existed as literary standard for centuries in some Slavic countries.
    • Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia.

Characteristics of Old Church Slavonic

o Developed from dialect of Common Slavic most familiar to Cyril and Methodius – the dialect spoken by the Slavic community in Thessalonika, part of the Byzantium Empire (which had South Slavic influences.)
  ● Cyril and Methodius did some work in Bulgaria before arriving in Moravia, creating more South Slavic influence.
  ● At that time, however, dialects of Common Slavic were very close and mutually intelligible.

Characteristics of Old Church Slavonic, cont.

o Shares many similarities with South Slavic Dialects.
- Nasal ę has front quality, like South Slavic languages, although East and West has back quality (meso/maso).
- Retains nasal ę in accusative plural of ja-stem nouns

Characteristics of Old Church Slavonic, cont.

o Vocabulary shows evidence of previous missionary work to convert to the Western Church's doctrine in Great Moravia.
- Most likely done by German priests.
- Core words for Church vocabulary then came from German or Latin.
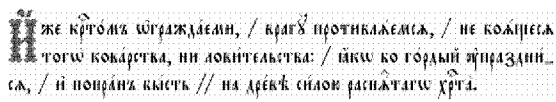- Some literal translations of German counterpart words.

Characteristics of Old Church Slavonic, cont.

o According to M. V. Lomonosov, there were three styles of Old Church Slavonic
- High Style – Church Slavonic, for poetics and religion
- Middle Style – to be used for lyric poetry, prose, and science
  - combined features of East Slavonic and Church Slavonic
  - formed basis
- Low Style – to be used in personal correspondence and low comedy

Old Church Slavonic, cont.

Иже крⷮтомъ ѡграждаеми, / врагъ противляемсѧ, / не болщесѧ того коварства, ни ловительства: / ꙗкѡ во гордый ѿпадши_ сѧ, / и попрⷶнъ бысть // на древѣ силою распѧтагѡ хрⷵта.

Religious passage of Old Church Slavonic written in the Early Cyrillic form. (Note the diacritics.)

The Glagolitic Alphabet

o Invented by St. Cyril and St. Methodius for writing Old Church Slavonic.
o Theorized that 24 of letters based on medieval cursive Greek small alphabet forms.
- Additional letters may possibly have originated from Hebrew *sha, shta,* and *tsi* (common in Slavic languages but not Greek.)
- Also theorized that based on Slavic runes.

The Glagolitic Alphabet, cont.

o Name came from Slavic *glagolu,* meaning word, but because Slavic *glagolati* means "to speak", Glagolitic alphabet can also been known as "the marks that speak."
o Cyril had to defend his alphabet to the Churches, which held that Hebrew, Greek, and Latin the only appropriate languages for worshipping God.

The Glagolitic Alphabet

symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol	symbol
az	buki	vedi	glagol	dobro	jest	zhivete	dzelo	zemlja	izhe	i	dzherv
a	b	v	g	d	e	zh	dz	z	ī	i	d', y

kako	ljudi	mislete	nash	on	pokoj	rtsi	slovo	tverdo	uk	fert	kher
k	l	m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u	f	kh

oht	tsi	cherv	sha	shta	jer	jery	jerj	jat	jo	ju
oh	ts	ch	sh	sht	o, e	u	i	je, ja	jo	ju

jus malij	jus malij jotirovannij	jus bolshoj	jus bolshoj jotirovannij	thita	izhitsa
ę	ję	ǫ	jǫ	th	ü

The Cyrillic Alphabet

- Based on Byzantine Greek forms, with Glagolitic substitutes for Slavic sounds not found in Greek.
- Named after St. Cyril.
- Theorized that created by Clement / Kliment of Ohrid OR Cyril himself.
- Also theorized that developed as result of historical process.
  - Expanding influence of Byzantine Empire increased need to Slavonize the Greek alphabet.
  - Shows some features of gradual adoption of Greek letters.

The Cyrillic Alphabet, cont.

- Modernized by Peter the Great, in 1708, inspired by the Latin Antiqua.
  - Removed forms appropriate only to the Greek.
- One additional spelling reform in 1918 removed 4 unnecessary letters.
- Has been used or adapted to write over 50 languages.
- Used in the following Slavic countries: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Serbia, Macedonia.
- Theorized that Cyrillic replaced Glagolitic due to squared, rather than rounded, standard forms.

The Cyrillic Alphabet, cont.

10th century version

А Б В Г Д Є Ж Ѕ Ꙁ И І К Л М Н Ѻ П Р С
Т ОУ Ф Х Ѡ Ч Ѵ Ш Щ Ъ ꙑ ь ѣ Ю Ꙗ Ѥ Ѧ Ѫ Ѭ
Ꙙ Ѯ Ѱ Ѳ Ѵ

1708 version

А Б В Г Д Є Ж Ѕ Ꙁ И І К Л М Н Ѻ П
Р С Т ОУ Ф Х Ч Ѵ Ш Щ Ъ ꙑ ь ѣ Ю Ѳ Ѵ

1918 version

Аа Бб Вв Гг Дд Ее Ёё Жж Зз Ии Йй
Кк Лл Мм Нн Оо Пп Рр Сс Тт Уу Фф
Хх Цц Чч Шш Щш Ъъ Ыы Ьь Ээ Юю Яя

The Slavic Orthodox Churches

- Eastern Orthodoxy tends to refer to Russian and other autocephalous or autonomous Slavic Orthodox churches.
  - Despite differences in names (ie. Serbian Orthodox Church, Rumanian Orthodox Church) and styles, theology extremely similar between the churches.
  - "Walled off" – Macedonian Orthodox Church.
- Since the fall of Constantinople, Russia has been the Protector of the Orthodox Faith (except for 70 years of persecution by Communist government.)

The Slavic Orthodox Churches

- Churches' origins tied closely to governments.
  - Original inhabitants mostly Orthodox.
  - Jurisdiction of church falls within nation-state boundary lines.
- All Slavic Orthodox Churches use Church Slavonic to worship.

Who are the Slavs?

o Is "Slav" an identity group? An ethnicity? A nation?
o It would seem that there are several Slavic characteristics (Orthodox religion, speaking a Slavic language) but many Slavs are still Slavs without sharing these commonalities.
o Or, many people classified as Slavs identify more strongly with nationalist identity than with a common Slavic identity. (Largely the case since the 19th century rise of nationalism.)

Where did the Slavs live?

o Original group difficult to define or pinpoint on a map.
  ● Roughly bordered by Bug River on West, Pripjat on North, Don on East, Dnieper on South.
  ● Boundaries shift depending on group or language being discussed.
  ● Linguistic information often used to defend geographic estimates.

Where did the Slavs come from?

o Two theories:
  ● Autochthonic: Slavs lived north of Carpathian Mountains since 1000 B.C.
  ● Allochthonic: Slavs arrived in Eastern Europe in 5th or 6th century A.D.
o Some Slavs a result of complete assimilation of non-Slavic peoples (Bulgaria → Bulgars with Slavonic language.)

History of the Slavic Languages (from ethnologue.com)

- Indo-European (443)
- Slavic (18)
  - East (4)
    - RUSYN (Ukraine)
    - RUSSIAN (Russia (Europe))
    - BELARUSAN (Belarus)
    - UKRAINIAN (Ukraine)
  - South (6)
  - Eastern (3)
    - BULGARIAN (Bulgaria)
    - MACEDONIAN (Macedonia)
    - SLAVONIC, OLD CHURCH (Russia (Europe))
  - Western (3)
    - ROMANO-SERBIAN (Yugoslavia)
    - SLOVENIAN (Slovenia)
    - SERBO-CROATIAN (Yugoslavia)
  - West (8)
  - Czech-Slovak (3)
    - CZECH (Czech Republic)
    - KNAANIC (Czech Republic)
    - SLOVAK (Slovakia)
  - Lechitic (3)
    - KASHUBIAN] (Poland)
    - POLABIAN (Germany)
    - POLISH (Poland)
  - Sorbian (2)
    - SORBIAN, LOWER (Germany)
    - SORBIAN, UPPER (Germany)

Slavic languages by area
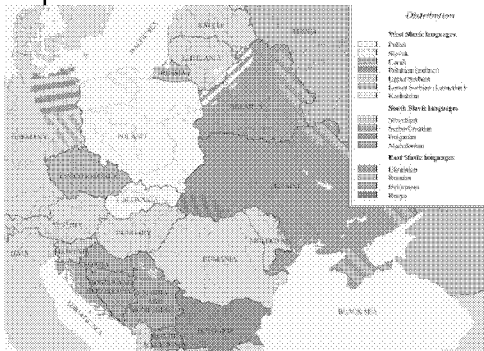
An outside, 18th century opinion on Slavic languages...

o "The language of the Croatians is the Sclavonick somewhat corrupted, but there is very little difference between them. The great extent of this language is something surprising. For it is talked not only here but likewise in Bosnia, Servia, Albania, Dalmatia, Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, in great parts of Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, Russia and (if one may believe travellers) in Tartary, and almost as far as China: and all these different countries have only so many different idioms of the original language." (From Jeremiah Milles's Letter to the Bishop of Waterford, 1737)

History of the Slavic nations

o First mention in recorded history by Ptolemy and Jordanes as "Venedes".

o Later, as "Sclavenes" and "Antes".

o Traditionally, "Venedes" has been assumed to indicate Western Slavs, "Sclavenes" indicates Southern Slavs, and "Antes" indicates Eastern Slavs.

o Possible that Byzantine Empire simply didn't know what kind of group formation was going on north of the Danube.
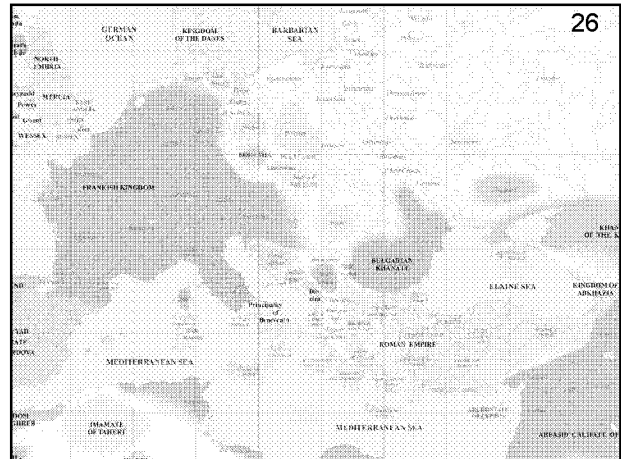
History of the Slavs, cont.

o Assumed by historians that came from a region in India (Indo-Aryan word roots indicate some kind of genesis there) and settled in areas of Eastern Europe, either in the Polesie or along the Dnieper River.

o Great Migration of the Slavs forced by onslaught of peoples from the East (Huns, Magyars, Avars and Bulgars).
  • Westward in the Germans' wake, southward into the Balkan Peninsula, and northward along the Dnieper River.

History of the Slavs, cont.

o Rudimentary Slavic states formed following the Great Migration (Karantania, Nitra, Great Moravia, Kievan Rus)

o Expansion of Magyars in Hungary and Germanization of Austria forced the Eastern and Western Slavs apart.

o Very little Slavic unity expressed in this time period, although some cooperation.

Pan-Slavism and Anti-Slavism

o A Megali idea: some intellectuals in the 19th century and preceding WWI believed that the Slavic people should unite and claim territory as one nation.
  • Partially, reaction against inequalities between Eastern and Western Europe.

o Anti-Slavism: grouping Slavic peoples together used as a propaganda tool by Hitler in Mein Kampf, which explained his plan to use the Slavic peoples as permanent slaves for the Third Reich.
  • Ironic?

Slovio!

o A planned language by linguist Mark Hucko.
  • International auxiliariy language.
  • Designed to facilitate communication between speakers of Slavic languages.
  • Uses grammatical structure of Esperanto, but vocabulary from common Slavic words.
  • Can be understood by speakers of Slavic languages without prior study.
  • Name comes from pre-Slavic *slovo*, meaning "word."

Conclusions

- From a strict definition, the Slavs are neither an ethnic group, nor a nation.
  - Common history, culture, and religion in some cases.
  - Bonds too weak since advent of nationalism to form a "Slavic nation."
  - Although many common bonds, people who were historically "Slavic" have identities today that are so closely tied to their nationalism that would be difficult to unite.
    - Republic of Yugoslavia as bad example of this struggle between common and nationalist identities.

Conclusions, cont.

- When considering early records, one must recognize the Byzantium Empire's distance from the group identification going on to the north of them.
  - Common roots of Slavic peoples may not be as common as presupposed by Ptolemy and Jordanes.
  - Supported by lack of unity among Slavic nations and uncertainty as to what was common territory.
  - Some archeologists theorize that "Slavic" is simply a Byzantine invention.
  - Can an imposed identity be accepted and internalized by a group of people?

Conclusions, cont.

- However the grouping was invented, the group known as "Slavs" do share enough history, culture, language similarities, and religion across borders to have an identity group.
- In modern times, "Slav" is usually not a sufficient source of identity in itself, but may be a part of identity → self-identification most important in determining someone's ethnic group.)
- Many instances of propaganda designed to appeal to or bias against "the Slavs" or a "Slavic race", pointing to the identity more as outside creation.
- However, incidences of similar themes in culture: birth, death, marriage, which may stem from common identity at some point in history.
- Additional splits over religions (Orthodox or Catholic?), alphabets (Cyrillic or Latin?), and nationalist movements (Yugoslavia? Serbia? Croatia? Bosnia? Macedonia?) make it difficult to appeal to a "Slavic identity" in modern times.

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