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EDITED BY
Bernard Comrie
and
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1 Introduction

Russian is the native language of virtually all of the 137 million (in the 1979 census) ethnic Russians in the former Soviet Union. Of the 125 million people of other ethnic groups, 16 million claimed Russian as their first language, putting the number of people whose first language is Russian at 153 million. An additional 61 million declared themselves to be functional in Russian.

Russian in its modern form, especially its codified written form, results from an extended and by no means linear evolution. What is now the Russian language area began as northern outposts of the Kievan confederation (first Novgorod, Smolensk and Pskov, then Rostov and Suzdal'), dating from before the official Christianization of Rus' in 988. The dissolution of the Kievan confederation by the Mongol period (1240 to the final liberation of Moscow in 1480) indirectly allowed Moscow to develop from a minor *кремль/krémli'* 'fortress' into a medieval imperial power which, by the end of the fifteenth century, had brought the older principalities of the north under its control.

Writing during the Kievan period was predominantly Church Slavonic. In the Muscovite period, use of the secular chancery language, broadly understood, expanded from administrative to other functions; it served eventually as the vehicle for cultural and linguistic borrowing from Poland in the seventeenth century and directly from western Europe starting with the reign of Peter the Great (1696–1725). The Muscovite koine, as some have termed the complex of the written chancery language and the oral Muscovite dialect (a mixed dialect of southern and northern features), was responsible for the development of implicit norms of usage and for their national propagation; these became the norms of Modern Russian (on Muscovite language, see Виноградов/Vinogradov 1949: ch. I, 10–13; II, 1–7; Левин/Levin 1964: 71–112). The development culminates in Puškin (1799–1837), whose 'poetic language was admired as a manifestation of the pentecostal miracle combining the humble speech of the "people of God" with both the prophetic gift of the Biblical fathers and the wisdom of

'whole' > [cĕ], в ътом/v ětom 'in that' > [vĕ]).

When not under stress, vowels are 'reduced'. They are shorter in duration, qualitatively reduced and tend to merge. High vowels /i/ ([i] after hard consonants) and /u/ are lowered slightly to [ɪ (ɯ) u]. After hard consonants, /a/ and /o/ are subject to **аканье/ákan'ĕ**, or merge as a low back unrounded vowel; the result is [ʌ] in first pre-tonic position (сарай/sarāj 'barn' > [sarāj], сорóчка/soróčka 'shirt' > [saróčkə]) and [ə] elsewhere. After soft consonants, all non-high vowels merge and approach /i/ or, in the current norm, merge with /i/ as [ɪ]: часóк/časók 'hour (DIMIN)' > [čɪsók], чеснóк/česnók 'garlic' > [čɪsnók], числó/čisló 'number' > [čɪsló].

Table 15.2 Orthography and transliteration

Cyrillic	Library of Congress transliteration	Linguistic transliteration
а	a	a
б	b	b
в	v	v
г	g	g
д	d	d
е	e	e
(ĕ)	e	ĕ
ж	zh	ž
з	z	z
и	i	i
й	ī	j
к	k	k
л	l	l
м	m	m
н	n	n
о	o	o
п	p	p
р	r	r
с	s	s
т	t	t
у	u	u
ф	f	f
х	kh	x
ц	ts	c
ч	ch	č
ш	sh	š
щ	shch	šč
ъ	"	"
ы	y	y
ь	·	·
э	ĕ	ĕ (~ ě)
ю	iū	ju
я	ia	ja

Two transliteration systems, recorded in table 15.2, map automatically from Russian to a Latin, or modified Latin, alphabet. The 'linguistic' system used here avoids digraphs for consonant letters; ч is č, ц is c, though щ is šč. It renders the soft vowel letters я and ю as ja and ju, both after consonants and in other positions. Cyrillic э is marked with a diacritic, as ĕ or é (continental); Cyrillic й is j. The Library of Congress system, in its traditional form, employs a ligature sign and diacritics, which are sometimes omitted in informal practice and definitively lost in computerized bibliographies. For consonants, this system uses digraphs: ч is ch, ц is shch, and щ is ts (or ts). In general, where the technical system uses j, this system uses i. The letter й is i (or i). The soft vowel letters я and ю are iā and iū (informally without the ligature); pre-revolutionary ъ is ie. Cyrillic э (if not simply e) may be specified as é and thereby distinguished from e; ĕ, normally not written in Russian, is just e. To illustrate, the author Федор Михайлович Достоевский is cited as Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, his daughter Любовь Федоровна Достоевская as Liubov' Fedorovna Dostoevskaia. In neither system is the /j/ that precedes /e/ (after vowels and word-initially) reflected in transliteration. In both systems, ь is rendered as ' and ъ as ".

Russian words are sometimes informally anglicized as a guide to pronunciation. Consonants follow the Library of Congress system, though ь is lost; Гоголь is Gogol in literary studies and гласность is glasnost in journalism. This practice uses y where the other systems use i or j, and this y may be used for the automatic /j/ before /e/; in two recent translations Федор Достоевский is once Fyodor Dostoevsky, once Fyodor Dostoyevsky; y also renders the -[ск]ий of proper names. (See further chapter 2, B2 and B3.)

The contemporary Russian phonological system can be derived transparently from one of the variant Late Proto-Slavonic systems with relatively few changes (see Kiparsky 1963-75, I; Vlasto 1986).

Front nasal *ę denasalized to ä and back nasal *ǫ to u: *žętva > жатва/žatva 'harvest', *pǫtь > путь/pūt' 'road'. At this time (into the eleventh century), one can assume for East Slavonic the following vowel system: high i, y (= [i]) and u; front jer ь and back jer ъ; closed mid vowel ě (possibly diphthongal [ie]); open mid vowels e and o; and low vowels ä (from *ę) and a. The jers, from Proto-Slavonic *i and *ū, were probably open high vowels, approximately /ɨ/ > [ɪ], /ɤ/ > [ʊ].

As elsewhere in Slavonic, the watershed event in the history of Russian is the set of processes known as the fall of the jers (narrowly, from the middle of the twelfth to the middle of the thirteenth centuries). Jers were shortened in duration (that is, became 'weak') and eventually eliminated in most positions – word-finally and internally before a vowel other than a jer. In the bargain they compensated preceding vowels, including preceding (that is, 'strong') jers; strong jers were identified with mid vowels, strong *ь