Does Mother Tongue vs. Multilingualism in SSH Scientific Research and Evaluation? The Bulgarian (Cyrillic) Case

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction

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Today, in a time of crisis of cultural values, when we are not talking about culture, but about cultural industries, we are not talking about creativity, but about innovations and patents, we are not talking about benefits, but about impact, holding such a discussion on evaluation of social sciences and humanities (SSH) is very important. Especially the problem of mother tongue vs. multilingualism I find quite debatable.

Recently, the evaluation of science and the ways to evaluate its impact to society has become a very pressing issue worldwide. Tensions have intensified since the announcement of the priorities of Horizon 2020 and later Horizon Europe, which both literally put the humanities in a horizontal position.

I will talk about the difficulties of evaluating and promoting the scientific research, written in Cyrillic alphabet (Bulgarian in particular), where transliteration in Latin of bibliography is needed, and some absurd situations around this. I will try to put the problem in a broader context of SSH studies. The poetic subtitle of my talk is: *21st Century Multilingualism in Humanities: Between the Tower of Babel Misunderstanding & Esperanto Dream for Effective Communication*. Here I envisage the polarity between the complete misunderstandings, when we are "lost in translation" and the inherent desire of people somehow to understand each other.

One of the core problems is the opposition *unification* vs. *differentiation*. In this logic the question is: In what language to understand each other in humanities? English? I want to start with one more general problem about the importance of humanities in our contemporary world and how to evaluate the research achievements.

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The impact of the humanities for human life?

I will try to put an accent on finding alternative perspectives for evaluation of the scientific work to improve communication and visibility of humanities in the European Research Area, taking into account the specificities of the various humanities that have the mission of preserving local values in a globalizing world, of studying and promoting national cultural heritage abroad, as well as to multiply the knowledge of the society about the national culture.

I will start with the distinction between hard sciences STEM and soft sciences SSH. First of all the researchers in STEM are named *scientists,* which is derived from the Latin *scientia* – knowledge, expertise, science. The word for SSH researcher is quite different: scholar, from the Greek *skholē*, whose meaning is associated with philosophy, a place for discussion and lectures, school, etc. Already in these two terms there is some initial contradiction between the *physicists* and *lyricists*.

Looks like physics is in honor,

Looks like poetry is not.

It's not dry figures that matter;

Universal law, that's what.

(Slutsky, Boris, 1959)

Recently, taking into account the global challenges such as global climate change, clean water, population growth, convergence of

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information and communications technologies, threat of new and reemerging diseases, growing energy demands, etc. it is logical that the efforts of the scientists are very important to change the world, to find quick solutions and to make it better.

But here I would like to quote Steve Jobs, the pioneer of the microcomputer revolution of the late 20th and early 21st century, the founder of Apple Inc. He is definitely one of those who changed our world. Jobs says, “Things don't have to change the world to be important.” (Steve Jobs Quotes)

I believe that the humanities could be one of those important things, which have no power to change the world quickly, but in a long-term could contribute to the cultural development of the societies.

How to measure the benefits of the humanities for society? Are there alternative evaluation methods that require a better understanding of how the humanities generate knowledge and what are the models for disseminating the results of humanities research, in order to improve the communication and visibility of the humanities in the European Research Area, according to their specifics? As I have already said their mission is to preserve local values in a globalizing world, to study the national cultural heritage and to promote it abroad, as well as to increase society's knowledge of national culture. It is for this reason that, due to their “locality”, the humanities have been neglected by the global European science agenda.

Aware of the marginalization of the social sciences and humanities a wonderful initiative ENRESSH was created under the COST program (Cooperation in Science and Technology) in 2016. I will say few words about this.

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The Achievements of ENRESSH

ENRESSH is an abbreviation of the name of the initiative: European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and Humanities.

This initiative started in 2016 within the COST action No. 15137.

It brought together leading researchers from 35 countries to develop appropriate and transparent methods for evaluation of SSH.

So far, a number of meetings, conferences, discussions, schools, etc. were hold. Manifestos and documents were prepared. This European Research Evaluation Network main aim was to enable social sciences and humanities to better demonstrate their true place in academia. (*Ibid.*) The ambition was to develop adapted and transparent methods of evaluation, calling in turn to improve our understanding of how SSH fields generate knowledge, what kind of scientific and societal interactions characterize different SSH disciplines, and what are the patterns of dissemination of research results in the SSH. (*Ibid*.) There were a lot of achievements in this direction, but still many things have to be done, as far as the developed for STEM systems of evaluation turned out not to be quite applicable for SSH.

The Nightmare of Scientometrics in SSH

In the last two decades the term scientometrics has become more and more widely used in scientific circles, and to the purely cognitive aspects in its semantics are added applied ones, which resulted in the

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attempts to give a qualitative assessment of scientific product. According to the apologists of modern scientometrics, visibility is determined by several indicators, among which the most important are: where it was published; how many times it was cited. The information and evaluation basis is mainly in the two databases, at least in Bulgaria: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus.

The evaluation potential of scientometric indicators has long been disputed by many scientists. The need for a comprehensive approach in the selection and use of scientometric indicators is formulated in 10 points in the so-called Leiden Manifesto (Hicks et al., 2015), created on the 19th International Conference on Scientific and Technological Indicators in 2014. In view of the subject of this report, it is essential that quantitative evaluation should support qualitative but not replace it (item 1), that the measurement criteria need to be in line with the mission of the relevant scientific fields, because they have a secondary impact on the development of the respective systems (items 2, 9 and 10), to find a balance between the pursuit of simple indicators and the complexity of the research process (item 4), that citations are different in different sciences (items 6 and 7). With regard to the humanities, point 3 deserves special attention, focusing on the specifics of research of regional importance and the difficulty of finding it in English-language journals and databases. (See also Тасева [Taseva], 2019, p. 56)

I will present some problems related to the attempts to put Bulgarian studies in humanities in the context of this modern scientometric English-centered mania.

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According to the official website of WoS, the information base has an international focus, but another indicator discriminates sciences related to regional languages: English is the universal language of science. For this reason their focus is on journals that publish full text in English or, at the very least, bibliographic information in English.

I will focus on one point in the requirements of WoS and Scopus: "Cited references must be in the Roman alphabet." (Web of Science Repository Selection Process)

Here comes the problem with Cyrillic alphabet and the requirement for transliteration.

Few words about Cyrillic

Cyrillic today is the name of a group of similar alphabetic systems used by different languages in Eastern Europe and Asia. ("Cyrillic Alphabets," 2022)

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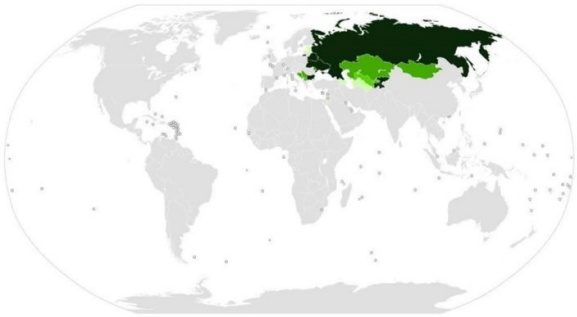
Map of the Cyrillic alphapet regions in the world



Legend

Dark green – countries in the world that use the Cyrillic alphabet. Cyrillic is the sole official script. (Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia)

Green – Cyrillic is co-official with another script. This may be because the official language is biscriptal (Mongolia [pending], Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro), or because two official languages use different scripts (Kazakhstan [pending], North Macedonia, Kosovo, Transnistria).

Lighter green – Cyrillic is being officially replaced with Latin, but is still official (Uzbekistan).

Very light green – Cyrillic has been officially replaced, but remains common as a legacy script for the official language (Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan); or is used by a large minority (Estonia, Latvia, each ca. 30%, Israel ca. 15%)

Grey – Cyrillic is not in widespread use

The Cyrillic alphabet is one of the alphabets used in the writing of the Old Bulgarian literary language. The other one, created earlier in 862 (according to other scholars in 855) by the Thessalonian Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher is the Glagolitic alphabet. His brother Methodius is also important figure for the dissemination of the alphabet (Glagolitza i kirilitza) The Cyrillic alphabet has no established authorship. It is associated with the writers of Preslav from the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century.

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Glagolitza and Kirilitza (Cyrillics)

It is important to know that the Cyrillic alphabet, which is used today by millions of people around the world (Serbs, Macedonians, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Romanians until the mid-nineteenth century, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Mongols, etc.), originated in Bulgaria. Although it also contains Greek letters, it follows the Glagolitic pattern and follows to the most perfect principle of writing, according to which each sound corresponds to a separate letter.

After the collapse of the USSR, until 2018, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan abandoned the Cyrillic alphabet in favor of the Latin alphabet. Kazakhstan is also giving up, planning to complete the transition to Latin for the Kazakh language by 2025. (“Cyrillic Alphabets,” 2022)

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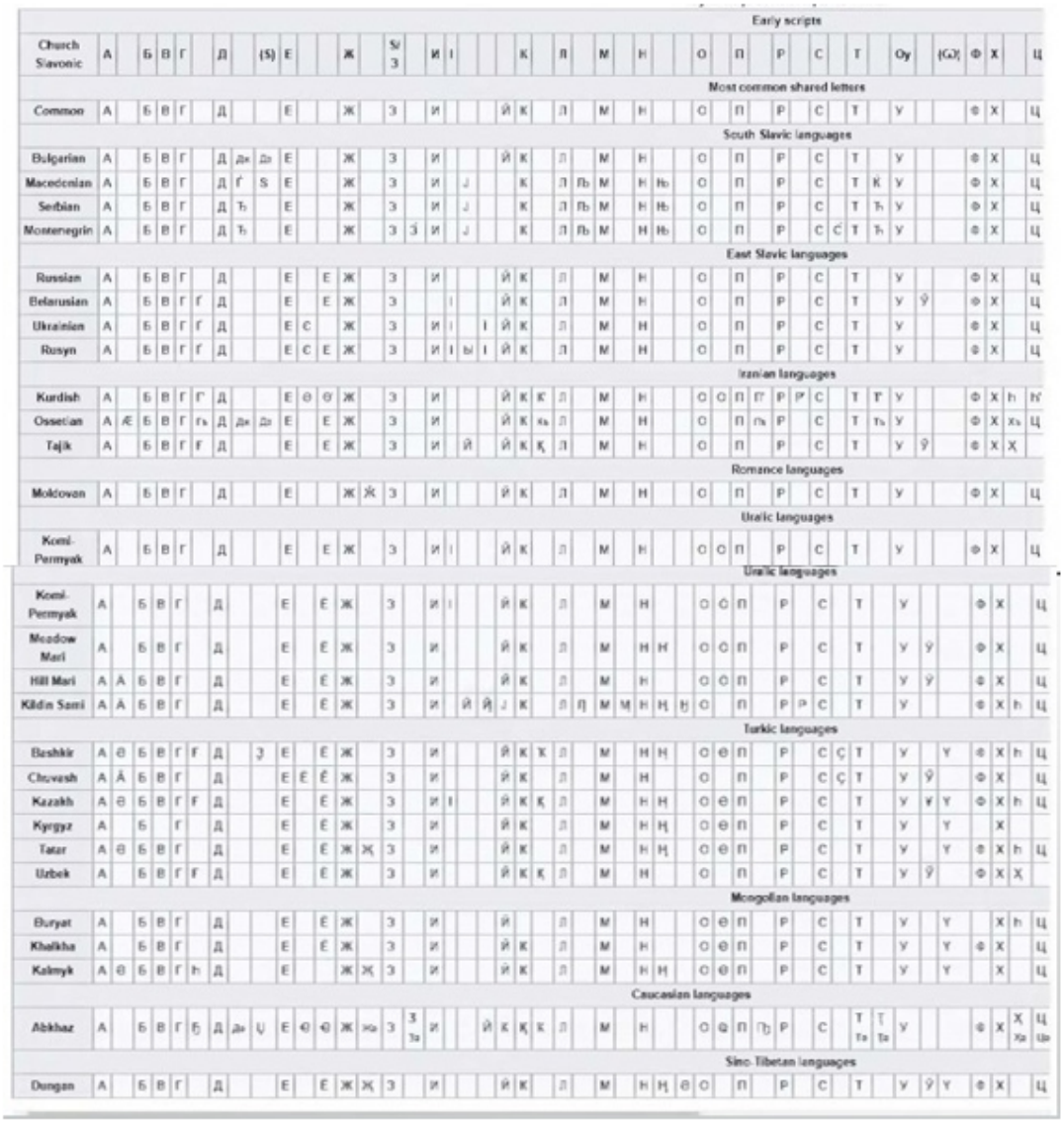

Cyrillic alphabet worldwide

Few years ago Bulgarian prof. Lora Tasseva, who was the President of the Council for Foreign Bulgarian Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, especially for a forum in the frame of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, has made an experiment in which she included ten fellow Palaeo-Slavists: five with Bulgarian as their mother tongue, three with German, one with Czech

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and one with Macedonian. They had to transliterate 8 cites, including the names of the authors and the titles. The results were shocking with their differences. (Тасева [Taseva], 2019, pp.61-62)

I have done myself via the most adaptable Latin to Cyrillic online text convertor (Latin to Cyrillic online text convertor) a transliteration of the title of Taseva's cite and it looks like this:

In Bulgarian: *Тасева, Лора**.** Наукометрия и българистика. Българистиката в Европа: настояще и бъдеще. Сборник от научна конференция, проведена на 11-12 май 2018 в София*

Transliteration: *Naukometriya i balgaristika. Balgaristikata v Evropa: nastoyashte i badeshte. Sbornik ot nauchna konferentsiya, provedena na 11-12 may 2018 v Sofiya.*

One more example of my text from the same proceedings:

In Bulgarian: *Спасова-Дикова, Йоана. За ползата от хуманитаристиката. Българистиката в Европа: настояще и бъдеще. Сборник от научна конференция, проведена на 11-12 май 2018 в София.*

Transliteration: Za polzata ot humanitaristikata. Balgaristikata v Evropa: nastoyashte i badeshte. Sbornik ot nauchna konferentsiya, provedena na 11-12 may 2018 v Sofiya.

I think that this two examples are explicit enough as far as just a few words in their Latin transliteration are obtained from the title. I will outline that for example Google search engine successfully handles various graphics systems – Cyrillic, Greek, Georgian and others and its translator makes quick translation in every language, which could be

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more or less comprehensible for the reader. So transliteration requirements of WoS seem anachronistic.

The benefits of transliteration for scientists in the field are highly questionable. If they do not speak the language, it is unlikely to help them. Obviously, transliteration does not make a title more accessible or understandable to the scientific audience, which they would not understand in the original, but only increases the volume of the bibliographic apparatus. This is often at the expense of the main scientific text, because a number of journals have limits on the volume of articles published.

The Consequences

There is nothing wrong with stimulating publications visible to world science, but different areas should be differentiated and indicators should be adopted according to their nature. For a field such as Bulgarian studies, the visibility and significance of a scientific text is not adequately reflected in world databases due to the philosophy of their construction.

What are the consequences for Bulgarian humanitarian studies? The first consequence is the stimulation of the desire to publish in journals with a high impact factor, usually English-language ones. It will force authors to focus more and more on comparative interdisciplinary research, because they suggest a wider audience. Without denying the usefulness of such research studies, I believe that purely Bulgarian topics should not be neglected and that they have potential. Another consequence is the orientation towards publishing in English. Placed in

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the considered scientometric paradigm, Bulgarian studies will be gradually modeled by this, and the Bulgarian language will be used less and less as a scientific language. As a result, the scientific style of the Bulgarian language will not develop, and through the years will vanish as inappropriate for scientific use.

If the tendency towards monolingualism, imposed by WoS and Scopus, is maintained, not only Bulgarian, but also most small and medium-sized European languages will disappear from scientific circulation. And then for what kind of European pluralism of languages and cultures are we talking about?

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