

The ethnonymy and linguonymy of Belarusians and Ukrainians in the formation of their identity

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Abstract: The article deals with the formation of the ethnonymy and linguonymy of Belarusians and Ukrainians. Since a diachronic approach is adopted, the necessary historical-geographical and linguistic context is given. The research is based on two ideas: 1) a stable ethnonym testifies to the strong ethno-identity of the people, and changes in the ethnonymy indicate changes in ethnic self-consciousness; 2) The name of the language spoken by the ethnos, as well as the ethnonym, is very significant for ethnic identity, and a stable linguonym and its formation is more important for the mentality of the people than intralinguistic changes. By the beginning of the 20th century, both Belarusians and Ukrainians had a stable triad “ethnotoponym – ethnonym – linguonym”, which means they have seen themselves

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as independent peoples for over a century. Similarities and differences in the formation of Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnonymy and linguonymy will also be noted in this article.

Keywords: Ethnonymy, linguonymy, identity, Belarusians, Ukrainians.

L’Ethnonymie et la linguonymie des Biélorusses et des Ukrainiens dans la formation de leur identité

Résumé : L’article a pour objet la formation de l’ethnonymie et de la linguonymie des Biélorusses et des Ukrainiens. En adoptant une approche diachronique, le contexte historique, géographique et linguistique nécessaire est donné. La recherche est basée sur deux idées suivantes : 1) un ethnonyme stable reflète une forte identité ethnique du peuple et les changements dans l’ethnonymie indiquent les changements dans la conscience de soi ethnique. 2) Le nom de la langue parlée par une ethnie, ainsi que son ethnonyme, sont très significatifs pour l’identité ethnique, et un linguonyme stable et sa formation sont plus importants pour la mentalité du peuple que les modifications intralinguistiques. Vers le début du 20^e siècle, les Biélorusses et les Ukrainiens avaient déjà une triade stable « ethnotope – ethnonyme – linguonyme », ce qui signifie qu’ils se sont perçus comme des peuples indépendants depuis plus d’un siècle. Les points communs et les particularités de la formation de l’ethnonymie et de la linguonymie biélorusses et ukrainiennes seront également abordés dans cet article.

Mots-clés : Ethnonymie, linguonymie, identité, biélorusses, ukrainiens.

Belarussische und ukrainische Ethnonymie und Linguonymie als Faktoren ihrer Identität

Zusammenfassung: Der Artikel befasst sich mit der Bildung von Ethnonymie und Linguonymie im Ukrainischen und Belarussischen. Da ein diachroner Ansatz verfolgt wird, wird der notwendige historisch-geografische und sprachliche Kontext umrissen. Die Forschung basiert auf zwei Postulaten: 1) Ein stabiles Ethnonym zeugt von der starken Ethnoidentität der Menschen; Veränderungen in der Ethnonymie weisen auf Veränderungen im ethnischen Selbstbewusstsein hin. 2) Der Name der von dem Ethnos gesprochenen Sprache sowie das Ethnonym sind für die ethnische Identität von großer Bedeutung; ein stabiles Linguonym und seine Bildung sind für die Mentalität der Menschen wichtiger als innersprachliche Veränderungen. Zu Beginn des 20. Jh.s hatten sowohl Belarussen als auch Ukrainer eine stabile Trias „Ethnotope – Ethnonym – Linguonym“, was bedeutet, dass sie sich über ein Jahrhundert lang als unabhängige Völker empfunden. In diesem Artikel wird ferner auch auf Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede in der Bildung der belarussischen und ukrainischen Ethnonymie und Linguonymie eingegangen.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Ethnonymie, Linguonymie, Identität, Belarussen, Ukrainer.

1. Introduction¹

The purpose of the article is to show the formation of the names of Belarusians and Ukrainians and their languages. This goal cannot be realized without referring to the formation of the ethnic identities of Belarusians and Ukrainians, on the one hand, and their languages, on the other hand. The briefest possible summary is useful, although the scientific literature on these matters is obviously endless. Significant analyses of these ethnic identities have been conducted by [Borys Florya \(1997\)](#), [Serhiy Plokyh \(2006\)](#), [Henadz Sahanovich \(2018\)](#), [Timothy Snyder \(2003\)](#) and many others. Issues concerning Belarusian and Ukrainian identity are only touched upon here in their historical, geographical, and ethnic aspects.

Facts and hypotheses about the development of the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages are also presented in this article rather briefly. Among the works devoted to the development of the Ukrainian language, one needs to mention those of [George Shevelov \(1979, 1989\)](#), [Vitaliy Rusanivsky \(2001\)](#), [Andriy Danylenko \(2008, 2013, 2015\)](#). Both the ethno- and glottogenesis of Ukrainians are considered in the works of [Fyodar Klimchuk \(2013, 2015\)](#).

The history of the Belarusian language is primarily considered through academic and university publications, as well as in the works of individual authors such as the articles by [Uladzimir Svyazhynsky \(2001\)](#), while many other serious studies must remain unmentioned.

The article is based on the following premises:

- the presence of a stable ethnonym² testifies to the mature identity of the ethnos, and changes in the ethnonymy of the people indicate changes in ethnic self-understanding;
- the name of the language spoken by an ethnic group (linguonym), as well as the ethnonym, is very significant for ethnic identity, and a stable linguonym and its formation are more important than the changing linguistic features themselves.

This study used the method of modeling the history of the names of peoples and their languages. The academic literature on the subject, as well as the original texts, have been used for step-by-step modeling of how the Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnonyms and linguonyms were formed. The synthesis and final interpretation have also been carried out through an extralinguistic (first of all, historical) perspective.

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² Ethnonymy is a set of ethnonyms that are the names of tribes or nationalities inhabiting any part of the Earth ([Krysin 1998: 841](#)). Linguonymy is a collection of linguonyms that are the names of a language ([Dulichenko 2020: 16](#)).

2. Historical and geographical context

In the 7th–8th centuries Eastern Slavs occupied a vast area in eastern Europe between the Black and Baltic Seas. As is commonly known, the geography of the settlement of the East Slavic tribes is described in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*.³

In short, Kyivan Rus' was formed in the 9th century. Novgorod was its first capital, later it was Kyiv. Kyivan Rus' was the earliest state of the East Slavs. In the 12th century, the huge state began to disintegrate into rival regional principalities.

At the same time, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania appeared on the political map of Eastern Slavia. It arose on the territory of modern Belarusian Paniaamon'nie (so-called *Lithuania Proper*, Latin *Lithuania Propria*). In the 1230s and 1240s Novogorodskoe principality (Novogorodok is the modern Belarusian town of Novogrudok), under its first prince Mindaugas, began to grow rapidly, annexing the lands of the surrounding Baltic and Slavic principalities. According to [Alyaxander Kraŭcevič \(2013: 7\)](#), the name *the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus' and Zhamoit'* reflects three main territorial components of the state, and the order of their listing is the chronological order of their being part of, or annexation to, Lithuania – Rus' in the 13th–14th centuries, and Zhamoit' – in the 15th century. *Rus'* also included Ukrainian lands annexed in the 14th century.

By the fourteenth century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) had become the largest East Slavic state. The Galicia-Volhynian Chronicle contains one of the first references to the Lithuanian princes ([Galicko-Volynskaya letopis' 1215](#)).

Both Muscovite (Great) Rus' and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus' and Zhamoit' claimed "to collect Russian lands". However, the similarity did not mean a shared identity – there were important differences (see [Florya 1997](#)); for example, the GDL had a greater orientation towards Western Europe. At the same time, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania itself, there were different ethnic groups and different historical regions. Without touching on the vast and complex problem of the ethnic composition of the GDL, we should dwell on the ancestors of the Belarusians and Ukrainians.

If almost the entire territory of modern Belarus belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then the situation with the Ukrainian territories was different. After the collapse of Kyivan Rus' (882–1240) and the ruin of Kyiv by Batu (1240), the status of a political and cultural center passed from the Kyiv principality to the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia (1199–1392). As a

³ *The Russian Primary Chronicle* is also known in English as "The tale of Bygone Years", "The Rus' Primary Chronicle", or simply "The Primary Chronicle", as well as also, after the author it has traditionally been ascribed to, "Nestor's Chronicle" (see [Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953](#); *Povest' vremennykh let* n.d.).

result of a long, 52-year war, the lands of the Kingdom of Galicia–Volhynia were divided between its neighbors – Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Vitaliy Rusanivsky (2001: 47) writes:

At the end of the 14th century, Ukrainian lands were part of several states. Most of the territory of Ukraine [...] was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Galicia and southwestern Podilia were captured by Poland, part of the Podolian and Galician lands (Bukovina) were in the Moldavian principality, Zakarpattia⁴ was under the rule of the Hungarian kings.⁵

As a result, Belarusians fully identify their history with that of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), while Ukrainians do so only in a small part. The political, cultural, and linguistic relations between the western lands of the GDL, where the Grand Duke’s Chancellery was located, and the southeastern ones (Kyiv region, Volhynia), where the cultural and social traditions of Kyivan Rus were strong, have been described many times (see, for example, the monograph by Dmytro Vashchuk 2009 and the article by Andriy Danylenko 2017).

In the 15th century, the Cossacks appeared on the lands of modern Ukraine. The first written mention (from 1492) of a fortified Cossack camp (*Sich*) is found in “Kronika Swiata” (“Universal Chronicle”, 1550–1564) of Martin Belsky. Subsequently, a network of Cossack camps developed throughout the Right-Bank Dnieper region – the Zaporizhian Sich, which will play a significant role in the history of several states, as well as in the formation of the name *Ukraine* and the ethnonym *Ukrainians*.

The 16th century is considered the apogee of the cultural and political flourishing of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; however, constant wars with the Grand Duchy of Moscow led to the Union of Lublin in 1569 with the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. The further history of the lands that today belong to Belarus and Ukraine was also the history of wars and armed conflicts. In particular, the identity of Belarusians was especially affected by constant hostilities in Belarusian lands.

It was also precisely at this time that written references to the ethnonyms *belorus* ‘Belarusian’ and *ukrainec* ‘Ukrainian’ and the corresponding names of modern Belarusian and Ukrainian lands spread. The development of the ethnonyms can now be discussed in this light.

3. Formation of the ethnonymy of Belarusians

The formative names include *Belaya Rus* ‘White Rus’, *belorus* ‘Belarusian’ (noun), *belorussky* ‘Belarusian’ (adj.). There is a large literature

⁴ Zakarpattia is also called *Transcarpathia*.

⁵ Translation of all quotes below is mine (A.R.).

on the name of *Belaya Rus'*, including, for example, the book by [Ales' Bely](#), “[The Chronicle of White Rus'”](#) (2000). This book contains a complete bibliography on the topic, so there is no need to repeat it here. However, it is necessary to add to the list the monograph by [Alexander Rogalyov](#) (1994) and the book “[Your name is Belaya Rus'”](#) ([Sahanovich](#) 1991), which contains fragments of manuscripts and articles by historians of past centuries.

[Ales' Bely](#) (2000) shows that the name *Belaya Rus'* referred to different territories: Novgorod land, Muscovite Rus', etc. Only in the 2nd half of the 16th century did [Maciej Strykowski](#) use *Bielorussacy Litewcy* in his “Chronicle”, and in 1627 *Belaya Rus'* was mentioned as part of the Commonwealth.

If we talk about the Slavic ethnic groups and ethnonyms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then names pertaining to local identity such as *mozyrjane* ‘residents of Mozyr’, *polochane* ‘residents of Polotsk’ were used in the GDL; the polytonym *Litvin* was common to all inhabitants of the country, and the ethnonym *Rusyn* ‘Ruthenian’ was used for the Orthodox population of areas that were previously part of Kievan Rus'. “In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, I think, it was possible to be both *Litvin* and *Rusyn* at the same time – this did not cause conflict in the minds of that time”, – writes [Henadz' Sahanovich](#) (2003: 294). [Leszek Bednarczuk](#) (2010: 135–143) names such ethnonyms for the Slavs who were residents of the GDL as (*belo*)*rusyn* ‘(Belo)Ruthenian’, *ljah* ‘Pole’, *poljak* ‘Pole’, *podljasjak* ‘resident of Podlasie’, *poleshuk* ‘resident of Polesia’, *litvin*.

We may summarize the main ideas of scholars about Belarusian ethnonymy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Commonwealth (i.e., of those mentioned above and of others such as [Bednarchuk](#) 2014; [Halenchanka](#) 2008; [Dzyarnovich](#) 2017, etc.) as follows:

- local self-identifications almost completely replace common ethnic ones (according to the written texts);
- multiple self-identifications of the inhabitants of the eastern lands of the GDL appear;
- *Litvin* is a polytonym, as ‘a resident of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’;
- *Rus*, *Rusyn* is the most frequent identification for the majority of the population of Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, i.e., “Russian” lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and – later – the Commonwealth;
- a single ethnonym was not firmly established also because there was no confessional unity of these lands; the name of the eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania *Rus'* emphasized the Orthodox character of its inhabitants; nevertheless, it was perceived as “another Rus'”. Some of today’s researchers distinguish between *Great Rus'* and *rus' of the GDL* (the latter one is written with a small letter);
- the names *belorus*, *belorusec* ‘Belarusian’ began to be used in relation to the Eastern Slavs of the GDL in the second half of the 16th century; *Belaya Rus'* in relation to the eastern lands of the Commonwealth – from the 17th century; until the end of the 19th century they were used

sporadically, but with increasing frequency.

From the first partition of the Commonwealth in 1772 until 1796, there were Belarusian governorships in Russia that included Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces. In the rest of the Commonwealth, the Lithuanian and Belarusian departments were formed. In 1796, the Belarusian province united Vitebsk and Mogilev districts.

The name *Belorussia* in relation to the entire territory of modern Belarus and the ethnonym *Belorus* ‘Belorussian’ were finally fixed by the 1890s; this is how these names are used in the fundamental three-volume work by Yefim Karsky *Belarusians* (see, for example, Karsky 1903, I). At the same time, the name *белорусский язык* (Rus.), *беларуская мова* (Bel.) ‘the Belarusian language’ was also fixed (see below).

The authorities of the Russian Empire supported the names of *Belaya Rus*’ (*Belorussia*) as this helped to strengthen the idea of a united Great Russia and a united Russian people in three guises: *velikorossy* ‘Great Russians’, *malorossy* ‘Little Russians’, and *belorossy/belorusy* ‘Belarusians’, as well as a single Russian language with Little Russian and Belarusian dialects.

The ethnotoponym *Belorus*’ was used only in the Belarusian language; its earliest known use is in the slogan of Kastus Kalinowski’s insurgents (1863–1964): “*Kago ljubish? – Belorus’*. – *To ŭzaemna*” ‘Whom do you like? – Belarus – It is mutual’. As is known, this ethnotoponym was legally fixed as the official name of the state – *the Republic of Belarus/Belarus* – in 1992. The change in the official ethnotoponym (*Belorusskaja SSR* ‘Belarusian SSR’, *Belorussia* → *Belarus*) in this case accompanied serious social changes and the growth of national morale (Latyshonak 2009, etc.).

The formation of the linguonymy will be discussed below.

4. Formation of the ethnonymy of Ukrainians

We may now turn to the names *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’, *ukrainskij* ‘Ukrainian’ (adj.), about which there is also an extensive literature. According to the main etymological theory, the name *Ukraina* comes from Old East Slavic *ukraina*, *vkraina* ‘border region, land near the edge of the principality’ (Fasmer 1987, IV: 156–157). Another view is that in the self-name *Ukraina*, the root word *kraj* ‘edge’ is actualized in the meaning of ‘country’, ‘(native) land’ (Pivtorak 2001: 117).

The word *ukraina* has existed since the time of Kyjivan Rus, at least since the 12th century. In the “Dictionary of the Old Russian Language” by Ismail Sreznevsky (1912, III: 1184–1185), it is fixed in the following meanings:

- ‘border area’: *и приѣхавио же емоу ко оукраинѣ Галичькои, и взѣ два города Галичькѣи*. Ип. л. 6697 г.⁶ ‘and he came to the Galich Ukraina, and took two Galich cities’;

⁶ It is in this sense that the word was first mentioned under 1187 in the Kyiv Chronicle of the Ipatyev Svod, known from the copies of the 15th–16th centuries.

- ‘foreign lands, foreign country’: *По украинамъ* ‘on the outskirts’;
- ‘a piece of land, a plot’: *Начаша отымати лузи и оукраины землю оу Петровыхъ дѣтеи* ‘They began to take away the meadows and the outskirts of the lands from Peter’s children’.

From that time until almost the 18th century, the word *ukraina* was used in texts in the sense of ‘border lands’, without reference to any particular region with clear boundaries, including far beyond the territory of modern Ukraine, for example, *псковская украинна* (*pskovskaja ukraina*) ‘border lands of Pskov’, *окская украинна* (*okskaja ukraina*) ‘border lands of Oka’ (see the example above from [Sreznevsky’s dictionary](#): *ко оукраинъ Галичькою* ‘to the Galich Ukraina’).

Part of the territory of Southern Rus’, stretching from Podolia in the west to the mouth of the Dnieper in the south, became informally called *Ukraina* after joining the Commonwealth.⁷ This was due to the fact that these territories of South Rus’ in the steppe were the border for the Commonwealth. [Samuel Grondsky de Grondi](#), a Polish historian of the Khmelnytsky uprising, wrote around 1660:

[those who inhabit the lands] [...] to Alba Russia/Belaya Rus’ (which part touches Borisfenem, and other part extends to Muscovy) and to *Polesia* (it comes from Belaya Rus’ and reaches *Volhynia*), and on the other hand to Lithuania itself, *Ukraincy* ‘the Ukrainians’ are called: they are called so, because they live in those provinces that are located on the outskirts of the Kingdom of Poland in relation to other kingdoms, such as Wallachia, separating *Tiras*, and Tatar lands on the desert plains. *Margo* in Polish is *kraj* ‘the edge’: hence *Ukraina* is the province, which is located on the outskirts of the kingdom ([Grondsky de Grondi 1789: 19](#)).

Thus, during the 16th–17th centuries *Ukraina* became the unofficial name of a specific region that was part of the Commonwealth, along with the names of other southern Russian historical and ethnographic regions (Volhynia, Podilia, Pokuttya, Severshchina, Chervonaya Rus’). It was assigned to the territory controlled by the Cossacks. The inhabitants of this territory began to be called *ukraincy*, meaning ‘Ukrainians’ or *ukrainny ludy* or *ukrainniki*, meaning ‘Ukrainian people’. This concept was geographical, not ethnic, which is confirmed by the fact that the Polish gentry serving in these territories were also called *ukraincy* in Polish documents.

During the Khmelnytsky uprising (1648–1657), the name *Ukraina* began to be used in written sources and in folklore; Bogdan Khmelnytsky himself and his successors used it. It did not, however, spread to all the lands of Southern Rus’. In official correspondence, Khmelnytsky called himself the hetman of the

According to [Hryhory Pivtorak \(2001: 67\)](#), who adheres to another version of the origin of the toponym *Ukraina*, “already at the end of the 12th century, the Ukrainian ethnos [...] was basically formed and had two branches: the Galician-Volhynian (it retained the traditional name *Rus*’) and the Dnieper, for which from the end of the 12th century the name *Ukraina* appears”. Unfortunately, the author does not illustrate his opinion with texts from written sources.

Zaporizhian Host, and called the lands *malorossijskye* ‘Little Russian’ or *ukrainnye* ‘Ukrainian’. All of these names are found in the manuscripts of that time, for example, in Samiilo Velychko’s “Chronicle”: “We tell you, Little Russian Ukrainians, residents of cities and towns on both sides of the Dnieper river, the clergy and the secular people [...]” (Shevchuk 2006: 242).

During the Russian-Polish war of 1654–1667 and the Ruin (1657–1687) the former common noun *ukraina* became fixed here as a well-established name. In the 17th–18th centuries the names *Ukraina* ‘Ukraine’ and *Getmanshchyna* ‘the Hetmanate’ become colloquial synonyms for the official terms *Zaporizhian Host* and *Little Russia*.

The slow spread of the name *Ukraina* was largely due to the fact that there was a strong competitor – *Malorossiia*, *Malaya Rossiya* ‘Little Russia’. *Malaya Rus* ‘Little Rus’, or *Malorossiia* ‘Little Russia’ is the historical name of a number of lands of modern Ukraine. The name appeared at the beginning of the 14th century. Since the 16th century, *Malaya Rus*, or *Malaya Rossiya*, has been the Orthodox literary name for all “Russian” lands (i.e., Grand Duchy of Lithuania) of the Commonwealth. From these lands, *Belaya Rus* later stood out.

According to historians, *Malorossiia* ‘Little Russia’ or *Juzhnaya Rus* ‘Southern Rus’ were ethnotoponyms during the struggle between the Tsardom of Russia and the Commonwealth for the “Little Russian/South Russian” people, and *Ukraina* was used as a toponym denoting the borderlands of both states. The exoethnonym *malorossy* ‘Little Russians’ and the ethnotoponym *Malorossiia* ‘Little Russia’ were actively supported by Russia in connection with the introduction of the idea of the brotherhood of the East Slavic peoples, headed by their elder brother, Great Russia. The toponyms *Rus*, *Russia*, *Great Russia*, *Little Russia* were discussed by scholars in detail (see the monograph by Pivtorak 2001: 79–96).

Throughout the period when the territory of modern Ukraine became part of the Russian Empire, the term *Malorossiia* ‘Little Russia’ in a broad sense was used as a synonym for *Ukraina* both in everyday life and at the official level. In a narrow sense, the term *Malorossiia* continued to be used in relation to the lands of the Left-Bank Hetmanate.

As the national identity of the population grew, the significance of the name *Ukraina* increased, and the word itself began to spread throughout the entire territory of modern Ukraine and was perceived not only as a geographical term, but also as the name of an ethnic identity. This became especially noticeable towards the end of the 19th century. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the term *Ukraina*, as the name of the entire ethnic territory, became completely independent and self-sufficient, displacing other names, in particular *Malorossiia*, *malorossy*, which seemed pejorative.

According to some scholars, such as Fedor Hayda (2019: 99), “Ukraincy ‘Ukrainians’ as an ethnic self-designation finally stuck only in the Soviet era”. However, textual data contradicts this. For example, in folklore the names *Ukraina* and *ukraincy* occurred much earlier. Thus, Ukrainians, unlike Belarusians, had

no problems with ethnic identity. This sense of identity began with the Cossacks, who defined themselves as an integral, consolidated community, around which other representatives of the ethnic group united.

Boris Florya (1997) stated in an article that the ethnic identities of the Eastern Slavs on the territory of Muscovite (Great) Rus' and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, later the Commonwealth, were formed as separate and distinct identities from each other. Based on a wide range of manuscripts, written texts, and scientific researches, the author comes to the following conclusion:

The study of the writings on the historical tradition, created in the Commonwealth of the Renaissance, allows us to single out the last quarter of the 16th century as a time when understanding of differences led to changes in the nature of the ethnic identity of the Eastern Slavs on the territory of the Commonwealth. [...] Later, quite definite traces of the idea of “Muscovites” and “Russians” as two different peoples can be found in polemical literature that arose after the Union of Brest in 1596 (Florya 1997: 16).

The author examines the use of toponyms, named in sections 2 and 3 of this article, which at different times were associated with different territories. Recognizing the primary unity of three peoples, he identifies the factors that determined not only the difference between Belarusians and Ukrainians, on the one hand, and Russians, on the other, but also between Ukrainians and Belarusians. In conclusion, Florya (1997: 27) writes: “The historical paths of parts of the Eastern Slavs on the territory of the Commonwealth diverged in the same way as the paths of the Eastern Slavs once diverged on the territory of Russia and the Commonwealth”.

5. Formation of the linguonymy of Belarusians

To consider the names of the languages spoken by the ancestors of Belarusians and Ukrainians requires a presentation, even if very concise, of the history of the languages themselves. The Belarusian and Ukrainian languages have common roots in the continuum of East Slavic dialects of the 6th–7th centuries, which is usually called the Common East Slavic language.

In the 11–12th centuries, the East Slavic language continuum “was divided into dialect zones: southwestern (Kyiv and Galician-Volhynia dialects), western (Smolensk and Polotsk dialects), southeastern (Ryazan and Chernihiv dialects), northwestern (Novgorod and Pskov dialects), northeastern (Rostov-Suzdal dialects)” (RHED 2002). The Belarusian and Ukrainian languages formed on the basis of the southwestern, western, and partly southeastern dialect zones. Three written variants of the common East Slavic language are usually distinguished: Novgorod, West Russian, and Old Russian of the 14th–17th century (*starorussky*, or *moskovsko-russky*).

The written version of the Common East Slavic language, which is commonly called Western Russian, territorially coincides with the borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Slavic languages of the GDL are Russian, or Ruthenian (*prosta mova*) with Belarusian and Ukrainian variants, as well as Church Slavonic and Polish (Ivanov 2003).

The official written, literary language in the Grand Duchy of the 14th–17th centuries was called *Rus'ky* ‘Russian’ or *prosta mova* (‘simple language’, compare Latin *lingua rustica*). Later it was called: Old Belarusian, Old Ukrainian, Western Russian (literary) written language, Ruten (Ruthenian) language, South Russian language, Russian, Rusyn, Slavic language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the clerical language of the GDL, and others (see, for example, Danylenko 2006). It was a mixed bookish language that developed from the local version of the Common East Slavic language with different dialectal features, primarily early Belarusian and early Ukrainian ones. The influence of the Church Slavonic language on *prosta mova* was relatively weak compared to the Old Russian of the 14th–17th century in Muscovite Rus’. Over time, there became more and more local elements in *prosta mova* – the written language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Thus, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, from the earliest periods of its existence, Ukrainian and Belarusian dialects were distinguished in the spoken language and Old Belarusian and Old Ukrainian variants in *prosta mova*. The differences between these variants are summarized in Uladzimir Svyazhynsky’s article “On the status of the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages in the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania” (Svyazhynsky 2003; see also Getka 2010). On the basis of these variants, the national Ukrainian and Belarusian languages were subsequently formed.

Boris Uspensky (1994: 68) writes that “*prosta mova* is opposed both to the Church Slavonic language and to Ukrainian or Belarusian dialects” (see also Berynda 1627: 104), but this distinction was not consistent. In particular, the name *rusky* (*rus'ky*) *jazyk* ‘the Russian language’ during the heyday of the GDL was used without differentiation. Three different languages were hidden behind this linguonym: *prosta mova*, Church Slavonic, and Old Russian of the 14th–17th century, the forerunner of the modern Russian language. In case of an urgent need to distinguish between them, contemporaries used additional definitions: *litovsko-rusky* ‘Lithuanian-Russian’ for *prosta mova*, *knizhno-rusky* ‘bookish-Russian’ for Church Slavonic, and *moskovsko-rusky* ‘Moscow-Russian’ for Old Russian of the 14th–17th century.

Syarhey Zaprudsky (2013) has written about how the ancestors of the Belarusians referred to their language and identifies the following stages:

1) From the 14th century, the name *rus'ky jazyk* was used both as an endo- and as an exolinguonym, and this name remained until the 17th century. It was *Ruskiye, rosy* ‘Russians’ that was the name of the Belarusian-Ukrainian population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later the Commonwealth, as opposed to *Moskva, the Muscovites* and *jazyk moskovsky/moskovskaya mova* ‘the Moscow

language’, later *rossiyskaya mova* ‘the Russian language’ (unfortunately, the linguonyms *rus’ka mova* and *rossiyskaya mova* are translated into English the same way).

2) From the 16th century the name *litovskaya mova* ‘Lithuanian language’ began to be used in connection with the use of the polytonym *Litvin*. The very word *mova* ‘language’ itself was only in Belarusian and Ukrainian of all the Slavic languages. It is found in manuscripts from the 16th century.

3) The linguonym *belaruskaya mova* (Bel.), *belorussky jazyk* (Rus.) ‘the Belarusian language’ appeared as an exolinguonym from the 17th century, and spread with the ethnonym *belarus(ec)*. “*Belaruskaya mova, belorussky jazyk* was the name of the language in both Belarusian and Ukrainian lands from the second half of the 17th century; the books printed in Belarusian and Ukrainian territories were called Belarusian” (Zaprudsky 2013: 88–89).

Book printing, the first translations of the Bible into *rus’ky jazyk* by Francysk Skaryna, and dictionaries and grammars of the East Slavs first appeared in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and were actively used in both East Slavic states. The grammar of Meletius Smotrycky (1618–1619) was used by Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–1765), and was in use until the 19th century. In the second half of the 17th century Juraj Križanić (Croatian Christian thinker – A.R.) called the first printers, grammarians and authors of dictionaries (e.g., F. Skorina, P. Berynda, M. Smotrycky, etc.) *beloruscy* ‘Belarusians’ and mentioned the Belarusian language in the *Gramatično izkazanje ob ruskom jeziku* ‘Grammar essay about the Russian language’ (1666) (Zaprudsky 2013: 102).

The names of the Belarusian language (*rus’ka* ‘Russian’, *litovskaya* ‘Lithuanian’, *belaruskaya* ‘Belarusian’ *mova*) mentioned above have been used in parallel for centuries.

4) “In the 19th century the Belarusian language could be called *mova belaruskaya* ‘Belarusian’, *ruskaya* ‘Russian’ (as well as compound linguonyms with the basic component of *ruskaya*: *zakhodnyaruskaya* ‘West Russian’, *lithoŭska-ruskaya* ‘Lithuanian-Russian’, etc.), *rusynskaya* ‘Rusyn’, *rutenskaya* ‘Ruthenian’, *litoŭskaya* ‘Lithuanian’, *kryvickaya* [*kryvichy* was an ancestral tribe of Belarusians – A.R.], and derivative compound names. The situation when a language at some stage of its development had 12 names is apparently not common” (Zaprudsky 2013: 84). The absence of a single linguonym is explained in the case of the Belarusian language by the absence of a stable ethnonym and local-multiple ethnic self-identification over the centuries.

Through the administrative efforts of the authorities of the Russian Empire, the name *ruscky jazyk* ‘the Russian language’ for the “Moscow” variant and *belorusskoye narechye* ‘the Belarusian dialect’ for the Western Russian, Lithuanian and *Kryvicky* language was fixed. The Russian authorities sought to interpret the name *ruscky jazyk* ‘Russian’ as *velikorussky* ‘great Russian’, and *belorussky* ‘Belarusian’, *malorussky* ‘Little Russian’ as dialects of the corresponding administrative-territorial units. Thus, these names facilitated

the interpretation of these idioms as dialects, variants of the Russian language, and not as independent languages.

The name *belaruskaya mova* (Bel.), *belorussky jazyk* (Rus.) ‘the Belarusian language’, was fixed by the 1890s, i.e., by the end of the 19th century. In the 1897 census, it was this name that was proposed, and 5.58 million inhabitants of Belarus called the Belarusian language their mother tongue.

It is important to ask how this idiom *Belarusian* should be interpreted, i.e., as a language or as a dialect? In the 19th and early 20th centuries, three points of view on the nature of the Belarusian language were represented:

a) the official point of view of the authorities of the Russian Empire: Belarusian and Little Russian, i.e., Ukrainian, are dialects of the Russian language;

b) the point of view of poets and revolutionary romantics: the Belarusian language is a fully-fledged independent language; it must be developed and protected;

c) the point of view of linguists, which has been contradictory and inconsistent. The modern sociolinguistic principle of distinguishing a language from a dialect, namely the leading role of the linguistic self-identification of the majority of speakers, has not yet been accepted. Thus, linguists tried to define this idiom through linguistic features, comparison with neighboring languages, history, etc. Different points of view on the problem were represented by [Syarhey Zaprudsky \(2013\)](#). The very concepts of “language” and “dialect” had different, and not always strictly terminological meanings. The idiom spoken by the population of Belarus in the 19th – early 20th centuries was mainly interpreted as *nareczye*, that is, as a dialect. [Yefim Karsky](#), the author of the three-volume work *Belorusy* ‘Belarusians’, wrote that there were 8.5 million Belarusians, but he consistently called the Belarusian language *nareczye* ‘dialect’ (see, for example, [Karsky 1903, I](#)).

The Belarusian language was officially approved as a language – one of the four languages of the Belarusian People’s Republic, or Belarusian Democratic Republic – by the constitution of the BPR in 1918.

6. Formation of linguonymy of Ukrainians

If the ethnic identity of Belarusians and Ukrainians developed very differently, then the names of their languages were asserted in a similar way. It has already been mentioned above that in the eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania there was a single language, which was called variously, but most often, *rus'ky* ‘Russian’. This name was preserved in modern Ukrainian lands, as well as in Belarusian lands, until the end of the 19th century.

According to [Michael Moser & Serhiy Wakoulenko \(2019: 140–142\)](#), in the 16th century the exolinguonym *kozac'ky jazyk/kozac'ka mova* ‘the Cossack language’ appeared. This name was given to it by foreigners, but not Muscovites

and not Poles. With the absorption of Ukrainian lands into Russia, the attribution *malorussky/malorossiysky jazyk/malorosiy'ska mova* ‘the Little Russian language’ appears, as well as the ethnonym *Rusnyak* and the linguonym *rusnyacky jazyk* ‘the Rusnyak language’.

The adjective *ukrains'ky* ‘Ukrainian’ is first encountered in the Cossack chronicles in the 17th–18th centuries, but it is not used either as an ethnonym or as a linguonym, only in a geographical sense instead of *kozac'ky* ‘Cossack’. Together with *kozac'ky*, the term *ukrains'ky* referring to the language appears in Ludwig-Albrecht Gebhardi's *Geschichte aller Wendisch-Slavischen Staaten* (‘History of all Wendish-Slavic states’, 1790: 236). There the author writes about the dialectal diversity of these places and about the Ukrainian, or Cossack, language.

The first mention of *ukrain'ska mova* in the Ukrainian language itself was in 1846 in *Knyhi bytia Ukraïns'koho Narodu* ‘Book of the Genesis of the Ukrainian people’ published by the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Kyiv. The brotherhood had a radical pro-Ukrainian character, and the following fragment is very typical of it:

And Ukraine vanished. But it only seems so.

It did not disappear, because it did not want to know either the king or pride, and although there was a king, he was a stranger, and although there were lords, they were strangers; and even though those bastards were of Ukrainian blood, they did not corrupt the Ukrainian language with their vile lips and did not call themselves Ukrainians, and the true Ukrainian, even if he was of a simple, even noble family, now must not love either the king or the lord, but must love and remember the only God Jesus Christ, king and lord over heaven and earth. It was like that before, and it remains like that now (Kostomariv 1921: 21).

The Ukrainian language was mentioned in the grammar of Mikhail Lomonosov in 1755 as one of the important dialects of the Russian language along with “Muscovite” and “Northern” (*Rossiyskaya grammatika... 1788: 53*).

In the works of other authors, Ukrainian was more often called *narechye* ‘dialect’ than a language. An attempt to understand what kind of idiom this or that author had in mind when speaking *ukrainsky jazyk* ‘the Ukrainian language’ is just as fruitless as in relation to the Belarusian language. Michael Moser & Serhiy Wakoulenko (2019: 146) write that this word meant a continuum of meanings from ‘dialect’ to ‘independent language’, and one cannot but agree with this opinion.

Just like Belarus, Ukraine entered the 19th century without a single linguonym. As follows from the above, the language of the ancestors of the Ukrainians was called: *rutensky, rus'ky* ‘Ruthenian’, *kozac'ky* ‘Cossack’, *ukrainsky, malorussky* ‘Little Russian’, *rusnyacky*. None of these idioms covered the entire ethnic territory of Ukrainians. The names *rutensky* or *rus'ky* could not be accepted in the Russian Empire because of the similarity with the name *russky*, already adopted for the Russian language. The term *Cossack* became

meaningless after the collapse of the Cossacks; *malorussky* ‘Little Russian’ seemed to many to be pejorative; *rusnyacky* was very limited in use. The name *ukrainsky* (as applied to the language) spread more and more, and by 1880 it was officially adopted in the Russian Empire.

7. Conclusion

By the beginning of the 20th century for both Belarusians and Ukrainians, a quite stable system of “ethnotoponym – ethnonym – linguonym” had developed.

If we proceed from the thesis in the introduction, that the fixed name of the area, the ethnonym and the linguonym testify to a mature ethnic identity, then both Belarusians and Ukrainians have been aware of themselves as single peoples for over a century. Ethnonyms and linguonyms of Belarusians and Ukrainians were generally well-established, if we do not take into account the appearance of variants *v Ukraine*, *v Ukrainu* instead of *na Ukraine*, *na Ukrainu*; *belarus*, *belarusky* instead of *belorus*, *belorusky*, where the first variant is more preferable for Ukrainians or Belarusians on account of language policy. This study is limited to a particular time and shows that by the beginning of the 20th century Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnonymy and linguonymy were well established.

There were many ethnonyms and linguonyms in the history of Belarusians and Ukrainians. The modern ethnonym of Ukrainians was fixed earlier than the ethnonym of Belarusians, i.e., the ethnonymy of the two peoples was formed differently. The names of the languages and toponyms of both ethnic groups have gone through difficult paths and were fixed at the same time. However, the state of the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages themselves and the ethnic identity of their speakers were determined mainly in the 20th and 21st centuries.

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