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## ADDITIONAL NAMES OF SETTLEMENTS IN THE PODLASKIE PROVINCE OF POLAND AS A UNIQUE PHENOMENON IN BELARUSIAN TOPONYMY

The article deals with the successful initiative of the Belarusian national minority in Poland to approve local names of settlements in the Orla Municipality, Bielsk County, Podlaskie Province, in addition to the official Polish-language names. The linguistic analysis of these additional names has shown that representatives of the Belarusian national minority consider the names of settlements that are linguistically non-Belarusian to be Belarusian as well. This fact is unique for Belarusian toponymy because in Belarus, names of settlements in official usage are formed in strict compliance with the norms of modern Belarusian literary language. In the case of additional names of settlements in the Orla Municipality, the national identity of the Belarusian minority turned out to be more significant compared to the language affiliation of local toponyms.

### Key words

toponymy; Belarus; Poland; national minority; national identity

### 1. Introduction

In Belarus, the standardised form of the names of settlements is currently established by the State Committee on Property of the Republic of Belarus. This institution is responsible for maintaining the State Catalogue of Names of Geographical Objects of the country. Its purpose, among others, is “to ensure a uniform and sustainable use of names of geographical objects in the Belarusian and Russian languages, as well as in the letters of the Latin alphabet” (Names of geographical objects). A six-volume directory titled *Names of Settlements in the Republic of Belarus* (2003–2010) has not lost its normative nature either. However, this directory does not reflect the changes made in recent years, such as the disappearance of some settlements and the appearance of new ones, changes in their status, and the revision of the administrative division of the country.

At the same time, the approach to forming of settlement names in Belarus has been and remains unchanged. In particular, according to the Law of the Republic of Belarus of 16 November 2010 on *Names of Geographical Objects*, it has to comply “with the derivative, pronunciation and stylistic norms of the Belarusian and Russian languages” (Art. 16, Par. 1), although the local forms of names are used as the basis (Liemciuhova, 2003, p. 18). Of course, dialectal variants of names also exist, but they are used only in oral form in the vicinity of the settlements. In this regard, the successful initiative of the Belarusian national minority in Poland

to approve local names of settlements (in the Cyrillic alphabet) in addition to the official Polish-language names in one of the municipalities of the Podlaskie Province deserves attention.

The aim of this article is to establish the real language affiliation of the additional names of settlements in the Orla Municipality, Bielsk County, taking into account the norms of modern Belarusian literary language, as well as the dialectal peculiarities of the south-eastern part of the Podlaskie Province. The correct conclusions will be facilitated by consideration of the demographic situation in the region, as well as by linguistic analysis of the additional names of settlements using descriptive and structural methods. This research will make it possible to evaluate the initiative of the Belarusian national minority in Poland from the point of view of the peculiarities of the official use of the names of settlements in Belarus.

## 2. Official information

In September 2009, the authorities of the Orla Municipality, Bielsk County, Podlaskie Province in the Republic of Poland adopted Resolution No. XXV/211/09 on the approval for additional names of settlements in the language of the Belarusian national minority.<sup>1</sup> This was preceded by the establishment of the Orla Municipality as a municipality in which an auxiliary language (Belarusian) is used in addition to the Polish language for official communication between the officials and the population, both orally and in writing (Maroz, 2009, p. 1). This is due to the fact that, according to the 2002 National Population and Housing Census for the Republic of Poland, 68.93 percent of the population of the Orla Municipality were Belarusians (Hachuła, 2011, p. 128). According to the Polish law of 6 January 2005 on *National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language*,<sup>2</sup> the authorities of a municipality in which the number of representatives of minority exceeds 20 percent of the total population of the municipality may request the introduction of the minority language as an auxiliary language (Art. 9), as well as the introduction of additional names of settlements or physiographic objects in the minority language (Art. 12).

In 2009, Białystok-based Belarusian-language newspaper *Niva* published the opinion of former municipality head P. Selwesiuk on this subject, “The Orla Muni-

<sup>1</sup> The document is titled *Uchwała nr XXV/211/09 Rady Gminy Orla z dnia 30 września 2009 r. w sprawie ustalenia dodatkowych nazw miejscowości w języku białoruskiej mniejszości narodowej* (= Resolution No. XXV/211/09 of the Orla Municipality Council of 30 September 2009 on the Establishment of Additional Place Names in the Language of the Belarusian National Minority).

<sup>2</sup> In Polish, the document is titled *Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym*.

pality became the first and only municipality, not just in the Podlaskie Province, to take advantage of the opportunity to introduce bilingual Polish-Belarusian place names. (...) It is a record of the actual condition we have here, and by this I mean that people talk the way they talk, in their own way... (...) On a countrywide scale, our ordinance emphasises our confessional, cultural and language difference and as such serves a step forward” (Mincevič, 2009, p. 1).

The Resolution No. XXV/211/09 approved the following additional names of settlements in the language of the Belarusian national minority (in the Cyrillic alphabet):

**Table 1:** Official place names in Polish and additional place names in the language of the Belarusian national minority in the Orla Municipality

Number in order	Official place name in Polish	Proposed form of additional name in the language of the Belarusian national minority
1.	Antonowo	Антоново
2.	Baranowce	Бараноўцы
3.	Czechy Zablotne	Чэхі Заболотны
4.	Dydule	Дыдулі
5.	Gredele	Грэдэлі
6.	Gregorowce	Рыгороўцы
7.	Koszele	Кошэлі
8.	Koszki	Кошкі
9.	Kruhłe	Круглэ
10.	Krywiatyceze	Крывятычы
11.	Malinniki	Маліннікі
12.	Malinniki-Kolonia	Маліннікі-Колёнія
13.	Miklasze	Міклашы
14.	Moskiewce	Москоўцы
15.	Oleksze	Олекшы
16.	Orla	Орля
17.	Paszkwowszczyzna	Пашкоўшчына
18.	Pawlinowo	Паўліново
19.	Reduty	Рудуты
20.	Spiczki	Спічкі
21.	Szczyty-Dzienćelowo	Шчыты-Дзенцёлово
22.	Szczyty-Nowodwory	Шчыты-Новодворы
23.	Szernie	Шэрні
24.	Topczykały	Топчыкалы
25.	Wólka	Волька
26.	Wólka Wygonowska	Волька Выганоўска

In accordance with the adopted resolution, the installation of road signs with bilingual names of settlements in the Orla Municipality started in 2011.<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the newspaper *Niva* cited another opinion of former municipality head P. Selwe-siuk, “Road signs with place names in Polish and Belarusian in our municipality convey a sense of pride and a reference to our identity and history. There are no reasons to be shy and afraid. (...) Bilingual road signs can affect tourism and economic development in the municipality. When a tourist from Poland arrives in our municipality and sees boards and road signs in two languages, he will start to wonder who lives here, then he can stay to learn more about our special municipality and compare it with other municipalities in Poland” (Maroz, 2011, p. 1).

### 3. Linguistic analysis

The Resolution No. XXV/211/09 states that additional names of settlements are formed in the language of the Belarusian national minority. Analysis shows that only 11 additional names from the list comply with the norms of modern Belarusian literary language (provided that the stress for these names, as in Polish-language names, is retained on the penultimate syllable). The remaining 15 additional names represent several dialectal peculiarities of the region:

1. absence of the reduction of vowels [o] and [e] in pre- and post-stressed syllables (“okanye”): *Антоново, Грэдэлі, Топчыкалы*, etc.;
2. compressed one-syllable ending of adjectives in some forms (NOM SG F, NOM SG NE, NOM PL): *Волька Выганоўска, Круглэ, Чахі Заболотны*.

The combination of these dialectal peculiarities indicates that in linguistic terms the territory of the Orla Municipality is a continuation of the area for the West-Polesian dialects distinguished in Belarus (Avaniesau et al., 1963, mm. 1, 8, 115, 128). In other words, the territory of the Orla Municipality is not a continuation of the main dialectal area of the Belarusian language, but according to the opinion of Belarusian linguist A. Kryvicki (2003, p. 156), is opposed to it. Polish dialectologists also do not consider the dialects between the Narew and Bug rivers in the Podlaskie Province to be distinctly Belarusian. In particular, W. Kuraszkiewicz (1985, p. 22) and E. Smułkowa (2002, p. 91) use the definition “transitional” to characterise these dialects, while M. Sajewicz (1997, p. 106) believes them to be of Ukrainian origin. According to Ukrainian dialectologists M. Lesiv (1997, p. 279),

<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that nowadays the Belarusian language has the status of an auxiliary language in five municipalities of the Podlaskie Province, additional names of settlements in this language have been approved only in the Orla Municipality (National and ethnic minorities).



**Figure 1:** Bilingual road sign in Malinniki, the Orla Municipality (Author: Mikołaj Grycuk, 2014a)



**Figure 2:** Bilingual road sign in Spiczki, the Orla Municipality (Author: Mikołaj Grycuk, 2014b)

H. Arkušyn (2012, p. 41) and others, these dialects are a structural part of the Northern dialectal group of the Ukrainian language.

Thus, the information published in the newspaper *Niva* stating that the names of settlements in the Orla Municipality were approved in the Polish and Belarusian languages (Mincevič, 2009, p. 1; Maroz, 2011, p. 1) is only partially true. In this regard, the opinion of A. Gołub, former deputy chairman of the Orla Municipality Council, is illustrative, “Turning to history, in the First Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth there was the Polish state and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, that is, the Crown and Lithuania. And in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the state language – along with Lithuanian – was the language we speak today. But time has done its work and our language has become a dead language in the Polish state; it has lost its status as the state language. Stagnation followed and that language did not even get the status of literary, Belarusian or Ukrainian, it remained ‘local’, a language that we speak” (Mincevič, 2009, p. 1).

Nevertheless, if we look at the history of settlement of the region, in the Middle Ages peasant villages and towns of the south-eastern part of the Białystok neighbourhood were inhabited by Eastern Slavs of North Ukrainian origin (Glinka et al., 1980, p. 26). This explains in particular why the above-mentioned dialectal peculiarities are widespread in this territory. The point is that the absence of the reduction of vowels [o] and [e] in unstressed syllables and the compressed one-syllable ending of adjectives (NOM SG NE, NOM PL) are also noted in the north of Ukraine (Hlibchuk – Kostiv, p. 364; Matvijias, 1984, mm. 238, 243; Zakrevska, 1988, mm. 217, 221). This raises the question why a large number of residents of the Orla Municipality consider themselves Belarusians (according to the 2002 National Population and Housing Census for the Republic of Poland). Among other things, this may be related to the historical migration processes, as well as ‘Belarusian influences’ in the 19th century, when the territory of the Podlaskie Province belonged to Grodno Governorate within the Russian Empire (Glinka et al., 1980, p. 27).

An explanation of the phenomenon when the representatives of the Belarusian national minority consider mainly non-Belarusian names of settlements to be Belarusian is offered by Polish dialectologist M. Sajewicz, “Establishing the language affiliation of peripheral dialects does not solve the issue of national identity. Language is indeed the foundational, although still not the only indicator of the said identity. Because language seems to be automatically transferred to children through their parents (it often happens that parents themselves, and even more so children, are not aware of the language they use), national identity is often the result of a long search and is formed in the hearts and minds of individuals. Moreover, the nature of this identity is not always permanent, it may, especially in border areas, be subject to change depending on a person’s level of awareness, knowledge, and life experience” (Sajewicz, 1997, p. 104).

#### 4. Conclusions

The above information demonstrates different approaches to the official use of the names of settlements in the Republic of Belarus and in the region of the Republic of Poland largely inhabited by Belarusians. In the former case, such names must definitely comply with the norms of modern Belarusian literary language. In the latter case, some of the names of settlements are officially approved in their dialectal form, and this is a unique fact in Belarusian toponymy.

At the same time, some of the additional names approved in the Orla Municipality, Bielsk County, Podlaskie Province, have language features (in particular, the absence of the reduction of vowels [o] and [e] in unstressed syllables and the compressed one-syllable ending of NOM SG F / NE adjective forms) that are not typical for the majority of Belarusian dialects and the modern Belarusian literary language, but are typical for a significant part of Ukrainian dialects (Zhovtobriukh et al., 1979, p. 287; Prylypko, 1966, p. 104) and the modern Ukrainian literary language (Rusanovskij, 1986, pp. 14, 66). However, this does not prevent representatives of the Belarusian national minority from considering such names as their own, and often even as Belarusian. In this case, the language aspect turned out to be less significant in comparison with national identity in general.

Perhaps local authorities in the Republic of Belarus should also be more loyal to the dialectal peculiarities and local variants of toponyms in their regions. For example, in some cases the authorities could allow the use of names of settlements in dialectal form. Firstly, this would serve as an additional support for local varieties of the Belarusian language, the interest in which has grown in recent years (Anniversary statistic). Secondly, this would increase the attractiveness of the regions for tourists, a fact also emphasised by P. Selwesiuk, former municipality head of the Orla Municipality, in one of his comments for the newspaper *Niva*.

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## DOPLŇKOVÉ NÁZVY OSAD V PODLESKÉM VOJVODSTVÍ V POLSKU JAKO JEDINEČNÝ JEV V BĚLORUSKÉ TOPONYMIÍ

Článek pojednává o úspěšné iniciativě běloruské národnostní menšiny v Polsku, spojené se schválením paralelního použití oficiálních polských názvů a doplňkových místních názvů osad v obci Orla Bělského zemského okresu Podleského vojvodství. Dialektologický rozbor těchto názvů ukázal, že zástupci běloruské národnostní menšiny vnímají jako běloruské i ty názvy osad, které jazykově nejsou běloruské. Tato skutečnost je pro běloruskou toponymii jedinečná, neboť oficiálně používané názvy osad jsou v Bělorusku zapisované v přísném souladu s normou moderní spisovné běloruštiny. V případě doplňkových názvů osad v obci Orla se národnostní identita běloruské menšiny jeví jako významnější ve srovnání s jazykovou příslušností místních toponym.

### Klíčová slova

toponymie; Bělorusko; Polsko; národnostní menšina; národní identita

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