

Title: Uki, yusy, yery, yati (Уки, юсы, еры, яти): Church Slavonic or Russian? Scripts, Orthography, and Language in Russian Old Believer Cemeteries in the Eastern U.S., Poland, and Lithuania  
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In an immigrant speech community where a native language is coexisting with or is being (or has been) replaced by the local language, the use of the native/heritage language can often serve as an emblem of one's historical or current identity. One of the most lasting (and last) places for such language use can be found in the cemetery, in gravestone inscriptions.

In studying Russian Old Believers living outside of Russia, the matter can be further complicated by the linguistic options open for one's final monument: the local language (as a sign of adaptation or a linguistic bow to future monolingual generations), modern standard Russian (as a symbol of education and status), one's own dialect of Russian (as a symbol of one's origins or simply as the language known best), Russian in pre- or non-reform orthography (as a sign of protest against change, reform, and the authorities), or Church Slavonic (as the language of one's religion, church books, and ritual prayers).

This paper opens with a brief history of the migrational history of the Old Believer communities in the three countries being investigated (the eastern United States, Poland, and Lithuania, all of which are confessionally and genealogically related), followed by an overview description of the some 25 cemeteries involved in this study. The discussion then moves to the types and content of tombstone inscriptions typical among Old Believers in these areas, the array of language forms encountered (e.g., religious formulae, secular formulae, "spontaneous" speech), and the implications of language choice (Holdeman 2000, 2003, 2006). In addition, the relevance and application of such language study is demonstrated in the context of a larger language study in these three countries and in the sociolinguistic subfield of language maintenance and shift (Holdeman 2002).

The focus of this paper is the seemingly simple undertaking of determining whether elements of inscriptions are written in Church Slavonic or Russian. This task—normally approached through an analysis of standard lexicon, orthography, and grammar—is complicated by issues of typefaces ("fonts" as we might say in a computer-centered society), varying alphabetic and orthographic norms spanning over 300 years, certain Old Believer proscriptions (namely against Petrine and Soviet orthographic reforms), elements of non-standard Russian (dialectal forms, non-reform grammar, "archaisms", borrowings, influence from local languages, etc.), incomplete knowledge of the language by the inscription's author (be that the deceased, a relative, or friend), engraver error (either due to carelessness or non-proficiency in the language involved), etc. A discussion of each of these, accompanied by numerous photographs of Old Believer gravestones from each region to illustrate each point, leads to the construction of guidelines for determining whether text is Church Slavonic or Russian and identifies instances where such a determination might be unreliable or impossible.

The material being examined is the product of nine years of on-going fieldwork in the United States, Poland, and Lithuania; over ten cemeteries are being presented and analyzed for the first time. The conclusions in this paper represent the resolution of one significant methodological problem in a much larger longitudinal study of language use and choice in Old Believer cemeteries outside of Russia, and on a larger scale in immigrant cemeteries located outside of their original speech communities and language environments. Though the source materials for this paper are Russian- and Old Believer-specific, the problems discussed have implications for linguists working in non-standard and immigrant speech communities.