The Interslavic Language: Way of Communication Among the Slavic Nations and Ethnic Groups

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The idea of All-Slavic language has a long story because of many similarities among all the Slavic languages and history of Slavic nations. There were many different projects of that kind of auxiliary language for centuries. Today, a more popular conlang is the Interslavic Language Project, that consist of some different languages, each of them shares common politics, vocabulary and grammar. To demonstrate it, we made a short comparative analysis between Interslavic and other Slavic languages. This essay talks about the Interslavic language and author's experience of using it.

Some historical background

«Because all our Slavic languages derive from that common Proto-Slavic tongue, knowledge of one Slavic language will often allow one to have at least a rough understanding of text written in another Slavic language - but not sufficiently enough to achieve a strong comprehension» wrote V. Merunka and M. Molhanec (Merunka, Molhanec, 2015: 227). That note can explain the idea of the Interslavic language in its origin.

The thought about a common Slavic language is an old and long-life idea. First example of it is the Old Church Slavonic language made by Saint Constantine (Cyrill) and Methodius in the 9th century to christen Slavic tribes. Actually, that language wasn't the interslavic, but it was the first literature language for the Slavs and was common for all of them (and even for Romanians) for centuries. The Slavic influence on early Romanian culture also was responsible for a great influx of Slavic names, toponyms and hidronyms. Also that influence can be noticed in Hungarian language.Even in the 18th-19th centuries it was used instead of local Slavic languages in Russia and the Balkans. Now, Old Church Slavonic is still used in Russia, Czechia, Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus and Bulgaria in liturgy of the Orthodox Churches.

In the late 17th century Croatian priest and scientist Juraj Križanić made a project for an All-Slavic language (1665) based basically on Russian and Croatian languages with idea of political union of all Slavs under the rule of the Russian Czar, because Alexis Mikhaylovich (ruled 1645-1676) was the most powerful ruler of Slavdom in Križanić's time. That project was the first that had an idea of creating a special language instead of using already existed ones. Other notable examples of early Pan-Slavic language projects are *Universalis Lingua Slavica* by Ján Herkeľ (1826), *Uzajemni Pravopis Slavjanski* by the Slovene Matija Majar (1865), and the project of a Czech translator and writer Václav Bambas (1861). In the past, the authors were motivated by the belief that all Slavic languages were dialects of only one single Slavic language rather than separate languages (Merunka, Molhanec, 2015: 227).

Cultural and linguistic similarity of Slavic ethnical groups, that can be easily noticed, led to the idea of a Slavdom Union in 19th century, called Panslavism. One base of that idea was creating a Multi-Slavic State. But this idea failed in practice, what as can see looking on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. We think the main problem was a domination of one people among the other ones. Modern Panslavism often states, that we do not need to make a political but cultural union because of that very reason. A Cultural Union seems to be more effective than a political one, because culture is independent from the policy of states, what is often against any form of Slavic unity or unity between some particular Slavic nations (e.g. between Russians and Poles, Serbians and Croatians or Russians and Ukrainians). Language is one of the most needful tool to make a cultural unity of Slavdom.

Among almost 70 different interslavic languages (Constructed Slavic Languages - site) the most popular now is the Interslavic Language created by Vojtěch Merunka, Jan van Steenbergen, Ondrej Rečnik, Gabriel Svoboda in 2006-2009, firstly as two different independent projects: Neoslavonic (*Novoslověnski*) and Slavic (*Slovianski*), that were united from 2011 to 2017. Our own project of that kind, released in 2012 called Venedian (*Venedski*) (from Latin*Veneti* or *Venedae* for «Slavs»), is now a project that actually states itself as a part of Interslavic language, but in role of a dialect or another literature norm.

The Interslavic Project

One of the main problems that Slavic peoples are faced with is a domination of the English language in all spheres (science, culture, economy, diplomacy, international policy and business and even educational system) not only in Europe but all over the world. It makes Slavic languages to be in

danger. Even in Europe, where all languages that are official can be used in the EU, Slavs need to learn English instead of using their national languages. Russian language is the only Slavic language with international status, but it has no big influence in Europe and, because of different reasons it can't be a common Slavic language in the modern time (Merunka, 2017: 21-22)

Interslavic language can be a tool Slavs can use to incorporate themselves into the European Community even if their countries are not in the EU or similar organizations. Learning English, you can spent too much time, but for Slavs learning some Slavic or Interslavic language would be faster (Ćapalija, 2017: 13), so they can be socialized more effectively. Interslavic language has no political, national or ethnical connotation, but other Slavic languages have. Also, Interslavic language is an easily-learned language for Slavs (because of its grammar and vocabulary), so it makes that language the best way to communicate between Slavs without any language discrimination that might appear if we used any other Slavic language. Interslavic language as the most popular modern project of that kind (with ca. 2000 users (Merunka, 2017: 152)) can be used officially as a bridge-language between both Slavs and Slavs with non-Slavic people. That language is used in scientific studies, on the interslavic conferences (e.g. Conference in Prague in June of 2017), in Mass Media and in conversations between people of different Slavic nations.

This is how Dr. Merunka sees the possibility to use Interslavic language (Merunka, 2017: 22-23):

> «Modern people are travelling much more than in the past. Six Slavic languages are official languages of the European Union member states. Apart from the long time separation of Slavic nations, Slavic people still feel their mutual cohesiveness and affinity. This is often well manifested during tourism, business and social events, when Slavic people from miscellaneous nations tend to speak together not in English but in some randomly assembled common interslavic language, which is sufficient for many situations. The Neoslavonic edition of the Interslavic language is therefore an original and professional response to this phenomenon as follows:

> 1. A universal common auxiliary language usable in business, international transport (information texts and labels in trains, buses, planes, ...), marketing (product manuals and description), tourism (info leaflets, news, ...) and social events. Neoslavonic was intended for use as an auxiliary tool in scientific and research groups of people from Slavic countries, such as scientists at CERN labs.

2. An auxiliary language tool to facilitate rapid knowledge acquisition of Slavic languages using a receptive method, by which a person is able to gradually receive some real Slavic language using his/her native Slavic language background combined with Neoslavonic grammar. During this learning process, Neoslavonic is step-by-step gradually replaced by the knowledge of the new adopted language.

3. An auxiliary language demonstrating cultural and historical reality for interestedpeople in experimental archeology in order to bring together enthusiasts from various Slavic nations.

4. A practical usable auxiliary language for multinational Slavic groups in tourist destinations, historical and cultural places and exhibitions and religious communities (Slavic Orthodox Church for example).

5. A practical tool to demonstrate the similarity of today's Slavic languages for teaching and learning purposes. This covers also historical themes where Interslavic imitates the original Old Slavonic language (e.g. movies, theatre).»

Speaking about modern Interslavic as an instrument of communication, we need to ask people who use it in their lifes. We made two polls in a Facebook public group dedicated to the Interslavic language community. They were started on January 13, 2018 and the results were taken on January 18, 2018. First question was «How often do you use the Interslavic language? ». We've got 24 answers, 10 (41,7%) out of them are for «just fan», 5 (20,8%) - for «not often per month», 4 (16,7%) - for every day, 3 (12,5%) - for «3 or 4 times per week» and 2 (8,3%) - for «1 or 2 times per week». So, we could say that about 70% of respondents use Interslavic rarely, and only 30% more often. Second question was «Have you ever been in situations when you can't understand the Interslavic language both writing and speaking? ». We've also got 24 answers, 15 (62,5%) answered «no» and 9 (37,5%) said «yes», motivating it by differences in vocabularies used by opponents. But, we could say that the Interslavic language works well between the people of Slavic nations and ethnic groups.

Results of polls are just an example of the modern situation and don't represent opinions of all users of the language, but we can judge about the success of the Interslavic project and problems it is faced with. First of all, language confirms that Slavic languages are familiar one to another (Kuznetsov, 2017: 18), but we can see, that there are not so many ways to use it often, that could be a problem for the language community and its development in perspective.

Comparison between the Interslavic and Old Church Slavic languages

To demonstrate similarities and differences between both Interslavic and Old Church Slavic languages we chose the Lord's Prayer, translated into Interslavic by V. Merunka (Merunka, 2017: 157):

«Otče naš, iže jesi na nebesah, da sveti se ime Tvoje, da priide cěsarstvo Tvoje, da bude volja Tvoja kako na nebesi, i na zemlji. Hlěb naš nasučny daj nam dnes, i odstavi nam dlugy naše, kako i my odstavujemo dlužnikom našim. I ne vovedi nas v napast, ale izbavi nas od lukavogo. Kako Tvoje jest cěsarstvo i sila i slava v věky. Amen.»

This text in Old Church Slavic (version of 1057) looks like: «Отче нашь иже еси на небесехъ, да свѧтитсѧ имѧ твое, да придеть царствие твое, да бѫдеть воля твоя яка на небеси и на земли. Хлѣбъ нашь насѫщьныи даждь намъ дьньсь и остави намъ дългы нашѧ, яко и мы оставлѧемъ длъжъникомъ нашимъ. И не въведи насъ въ напасть, нъ избави ны отъ неприязни. Яко твое есть царствие и сила и слава въ вѣкъ. Аминъ.» or romanized as «Otče naš' iže jesi na nebeseh, da svętitsę imę tvoje, da pridet' carstvije tvoje, da bǫdet' volia tvoja jaka na nebesi i na zemli. Hlěb naš' nasǫštěnyi dažd' nam děněs' i ostavi nam dǒlgy našę, jako i my ostavļejem dlǒžǒnikom našim. I ne vǒvedi nas vǒ napast', nǒ izbavi ny ot neprijazni. Jako tvoje jest' carstvije i sila i slava vǒ věk. Amin.».

In both texts we <u>underlined</u> common words, that have no big differences in grammar. Speaking about both texts we should talk about the evolution of phonetics between both languages. For example, Old Church Slavonic had specific sounds: ѧ /ę/ (nasal e), ѫ /ǫ/ (nasal o), ѣ /ě/ (yat), ъ /ǒ/ (short o), ь /ě/ (short e), щ /št/ - that presented in Interslavic as: *e, u, ě, u, e, č.*

We can notice that the vocabulary of both languages is mostly common. Despite that, phonetics of Interslavic differs from the Old Slavic one. It has evolved connecting with modern Slavic languages. Also, grammar is more standardized and simpler than in the Old Slavonic. We can't see this in that examples, but if we will compare the grammar of both languages, we will notice it. So, we could say that the Neoslavonic version of the Interslavic language can be truely called a heir-language for the Old Church Slavonic (Merunka, 2017: 20) because of its vocabulary and basics of grammar and phonetics.

Comparison between the Interslavic and other native Slavic languages

To make comparisonbetween the Interslavic and other native Slavic languages we used one fragment (Article 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights) officially translated to 11 Slavic languages and Interslavic. First of all we should demonstrate that text «All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience, and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. »

That article is translated by Dr. V. Merunka into Interslavic (Merunka, 2017: 38) as «Vsi ljudi sut rodženi svobodni i rovni v svojih dostojenstvu i pravah. Oni sut obdarjeni razumom i svěstju, i trěba jest jim postupati drug s drugom v duhu bratstva. » in Latin script or «Вси люди сут роджени свободни и ровни в својих достоєнству и правах. Они сут обдарјени разумом и свѣстю и трѣба јест јим поступати друг с другом в духу братства.» in Cyrillic.

We will see this phrase in languages grouped by branches. For each other language we <u>underlined</u> words, that are cognates with the words of Interslavic vocabulary used for translation of that article; also, we marked by numbers words that are: 1 – common for all Slavic languages; 2 – common for branch; 3 – taken from another branch; 4 – taken from other languages but didn't use in translation.

In East Slavic Languages

Russian (Romanization)	Все люди рождаются свободными и равными в своём достоинстве и правах. Они [*суть*] наделены[2] разумом и совестью и должны[1] поступать в отношении[1] друг друга в духе братства. (Vse liudi rozhdaiutsia svobodnymi i ravnymi v svoëm dostoinstve i pravakh. Oni [*sut'*] nadeleny razumom i sovest'iu i dolzhny postupat' v otnoshenii drug druga v dukhe bratstva)
Ukrainian (Romanization)	Всі люди народжуються вільними[1] і рівними у своїй гідності[3] та правах. Вони [*суть*] наділені[2] розумом і совістю і повинні[1] діяти[1] у відношенні[1] один[1] до[1] одного[1] в дусі братерства. (Vsi liudy narodzhuyut'sia vil'nymy i rivnymy u svoyiy hidnosti ta pravakh. Vony [*sut'*] nadileni rozumom i sovistiu i povynni diyaty u vidnoshenni odyn do odnoho v dusi braterstva.)
Belarusian (Latin script)	Усе людзі нараджаюцца свабоднымі і роўнымі ў сваёй годнасці[3] і правах. Яны [*суць*] надзелены[2] розумам і сумленнем і павінны[1] ставіцца[1] адзін[1] да[1] аднаго[1] ў духу брацтва. (Usie ludzi naradžajucca svabodnymi i roŭnymi ŭ swajoj hodnasci i pravach. Jany [*suc*] nadzieleny rozumam i sumlenniem i pavinny stavicca adzin da adnaho ŭ duchu bractva.)

Notes:

1. In Belarusian soft Old Slavic consonants /t'/, /d'/, /r'/ evolved to /ts'/, /dz'/, /r/.

2. In Ukrainian and Belarusian there are prosthetic consonants /h/, /v/, /j/ before vowels.

3. Old Slavic vowel /æ/ (ѣ) evolved in Russian to /je/, in Ukrainian to /i/, in Interslavic to ě.

4. Old Slavic vowel /ǫ/ (ѫ) evolved in East Slavic to /u/, in Interslavic to u.

5. Old Slavic vowel /ę/ (ѧ) evolved in East Slavic to /ja/, in Interslavic to e.

6. Old East Slavic vowel /o/ between consonants evolved in Ukrainian to /i/.

7. Belarusian vowel /o/ without accent evolved to /a/.

In West Slavic Languages

Polish	<u>Wszyscy</u> <u>ludzie</u> <u>rodzą</u> <u>się</u> wolni[1] <u>i</u> <u>równi</u> pod[1] wzgledem[1] <u>swej</u> godności[3] <u>i</u> <u>swych</u> <u>praw</u>. <u>Są</u> <u>oni</u> <u>obdarzeni</u> <u>rozumem</u> <u>i</u> sumleniem <u>i</u> powinni[1] <u>postępować</u> wobec innych[1] <u>w</u> <u>duchu</u> <u>braterstwa</u>.
Czech	<u>Všichni</u> <u>lidé</u> <u>rodí</u> <u>se</u> <u>svobodní</u> <u>a</u> sobě[1] <u>rovní</u> co[1] do[1] <u>důstojnosti</u> <u>a</u> <u>práv</u>. <u>Jsou</u> nadáni[1] <u>rozumem</u> <u>a</u> svědomím[1] <u>a</u> mají[1] spolu jednat[1] <u>v</u> <u>duchu</u> <u>bratrství</u>.
Slovak	<u>Všetci</u> <u>ľudia</u> <u>sa</u> <u>rodia</u> <u>slobodní</u> <u>a</u> sebe[1] <u>rovní</u>, čo[1] <u>sa</u> týka ich[1] <u>dôstojnosti</u> <u>a</u> <u>práv</u>. <u>Sú</u> <u>obdarení</u> <u>rozumom</u> <u>a</u> majú[1] navzájom konať[1] <u>v</u> <u>bratskom</u> <u>duchu</u>.

Notes:

1. Soft Old Slavic consonants /t'/, /d'/, /r'/ are written as *ci/ć*, *dzi/dź*, *rz* in Polish, *t*, *d*, *ř* in Czech and *ť*, *ď*, *r* in Slovak.

2. Old Slavic vowel /æ/ (ѣ) evolved in Polish to *ja*, in Czech to *í* and *ě*, in Interslavic to *ě*.

3. Old Slavic vowel /ǫ/ (ѫ) evolved in Polish to /ą/, in Czech to *ou* or *ů*, in Interslavic to /u/.

4. Old Slavic vowel /ę/ (ѧ) evolved in Polish to /ę/, in Interslavic to /e/.

5. Old East Slavic vowel /o/ between consonants evolved in Polish to /u/, written as *ó*.

In South Slavic Languages

Serbian (Latin script)	<u>Сва</u> <u>људска</u> <u>бића</u>[1] <u>рађају</u> <u>се</u> <u>слободна</u> <u>и</u> <u>једнака</u>[1] <u>у</u> <u>достојанству</u> <u>и</u> <u>правима</u>. <u>Она</u> <u>су</u> <u>обдарена</u> <u>разумом</u> <u>и</u> <u>свешћу</u> <u>и</u> <u>треба</u> једни[1] <u>према</u>[1] <u>другима</u> <u>да</u> <u>поступају</u> <u>у</u> <u>духу</u> <u>братства</u>. (Sva ljudska bića rađaju se slobodna i jednaka u dostojanstvu i pravima. Ona su obdarena razumom i svešću i treba jedni prema drugima da postupaju u duhu bratstva.)
Croatian	<u>Sva</u> <u>ljudska</u> bića[1] <u>rađaju</u> <u>se</u> <u>slobodna</u> i jednaka[1] <u>u</u> <u>dostojanstvu</u> i pravima. <u>Ona</u> <u>su</u> <u>obdarena</u> <u>razumom</u> i <u>sviješću</u> i <u>treba</u> <u>da</u> jedno[1] <u>prema</u>[1] <u>drugome</u> <u>postupaju</u> u <u>duhu</u> <u>bratstva</u>.
Slovenian	<u>Vsi</u> <u>ljudje</u> <u>se</u> <u>rodijo</u> <u>svobodni</u> <u>in</u> imajo[1] enako[1] <u>dostojanstvo</u> <u>in</u> enake[1] <u>pravice</u>. <u>Obdarjeni</u> <u>so</u> <u>z</u> <u>razumom</u> <u>in</u> <u>vestjo</u> <u>in</u> bi morali ravnati <u>drug z drugim</u> kakor[1] <u>bratje</u>.
Bulgarian	<u>Всички</u> хора[4] <u>се</u> <u>раждат</u> <u>свободни</u> <u>и</u> <u>равни</u> <u>по</u> <u>достоинство</u> <u>и</u> <u>права</u>. Те[1] <u>са</u>

(Romanization)	<u>надарени</u> <u>с</u> <u>разум</u> <u>и</u> <u>съвест</u> <u>и</u> следва[1] да <u>се</u> отнасят[1] помежду[1] си[1] <u>в</u> <u>дух</u> <u>на</u> <u>братство</u>.
	(Vsichki khora se razhdat svobodni i ravni po dostoinstvo i prava. Te sa nadareni s razum i súvest i sledva da se otnasyat pomedzhu si v dukh na bratstvo)
Macedonian (Romanization)	<u>Сите</u> човечки[1] суштества[1] <u>се</u> <u>раѓаат</u> <u>слободни</u> и еднакви[1] по[1] <u>достоинство</u> и <u>права</u>. Тие[1] <u>се</u> <u>обдарени</u> <u>со</u> <u>разум</u> и <u>совест</u> и <u>треба</u> да <u>се</u> однесуваат[1] еден[1] кон[1] <u>друг</u> <u>во</u> <u>духот</u> на[1] општо[1] човечката[1] припадност.
	(Site chovechki sushtestva se radzhaat slobodni i ednakvi po dostoinstvo i prava. Tie se obdareni so razum i sovest i treba da se odnesuvaat eden kon drug vo dukhot na opshto chovechkata pripadnost.)

Notes:

1. Old Slavic vowel /æ/ (ѣ) evolved in Bulgarian to /ja/ (written as *я*), inSerbo-Croatian to /e/, /je/, /ije/ or /i/, in Interslavic to *ě*.

2. Old Slavic vowel /ǫ/ (ѫ) evolved in Bulgarian to /ə/ (written as ъ),in Serbo-Croatian to /u/, in Macedonian to /a/, in Interslavic to *u*.

3. Old Slavic vowel /ę/ (ѧ) evolved in South Slavic to /e/, in Interslavic to *e*.

As we can notice, vocabulary consist of similar words that are common for all Slavic languages, not only for some of them, with no words, that do not exist in any Slavic language. We understand that this short texts can't demonstrate fully all similarities and differences between languages, and that we need to study lexicon of all languages, but this is not the main goal of that paper, this is only a demonstration how to answer on that question.

A personal experience with the Interslavic language

If I'd speak about my own experience with the Interslavic language, I'd say that I began to use it since 2012, when I started my work on the Venedian language, which now is a special literature dialect of that project. The sphere of using Interslavic language by me is communication and writing of articles about Interslavic language. Basically, now it is my third working language after Russian and English.As a Russian, I can say, that the Interslavic language is an easily-understood language that can be used to communicate with others Slavs. For example, I use it to communicate with people from Czechia,

Poland, Bulgaria and Serbia. Also, the Interslavic language can be used as a tool to understand texts written in other Slavic languages no matter in Latin or Cyrillic script.

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