

The Impact of Unicode: The Case of Church Slavonic

Brian P. Bennett, Ph.D. (bbennett@niagara.edu)

Department of Religious Studies, Niagara University

OVERVIEW

What is the impact of Unicode on the standardization of scripts?

case study: Church Slavonic

sociolinguistic frame: language policy

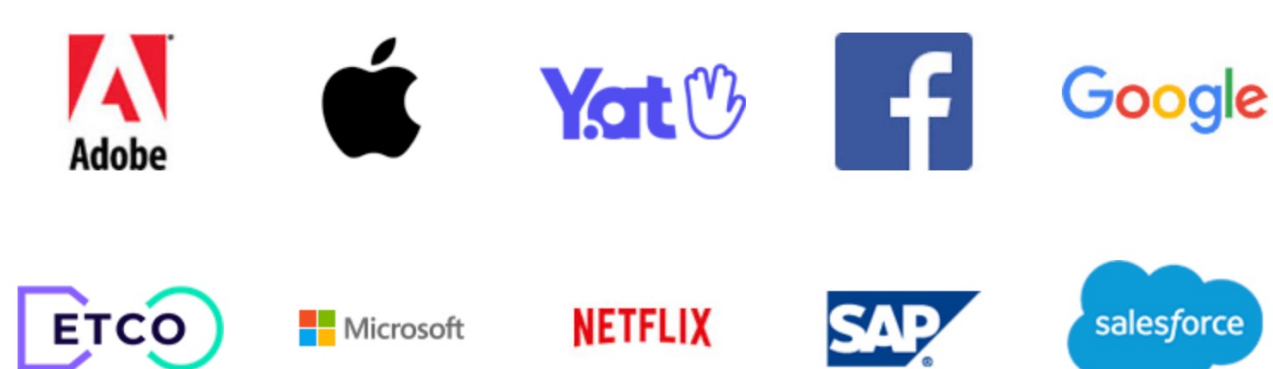
- practices, beliefs, interventions
- “within a complex set of social, political, economic, religious, demographic, educational and cultural factors that make up the full ecology of human life” (Spolsky 2004: ix)

“the most visible merger of technology and social life ... is epitomized by the Unicode Standard” (Kamusella 2012: 62)

UNICODE

97% of websites use (w3techs.com 2021)

Unicode Consortium a nonprofit corporation in Silicon Valley



“The Unicode Standard ... encodes all the characters needed for worldwide use.”

“designed to meet the needs of ... business, educational, **liturgical** and scientific users, and covering the needs of both modern and **historical** texts.” (Unicode Consortium 2021: 14)

CHURCH SLAVONIC

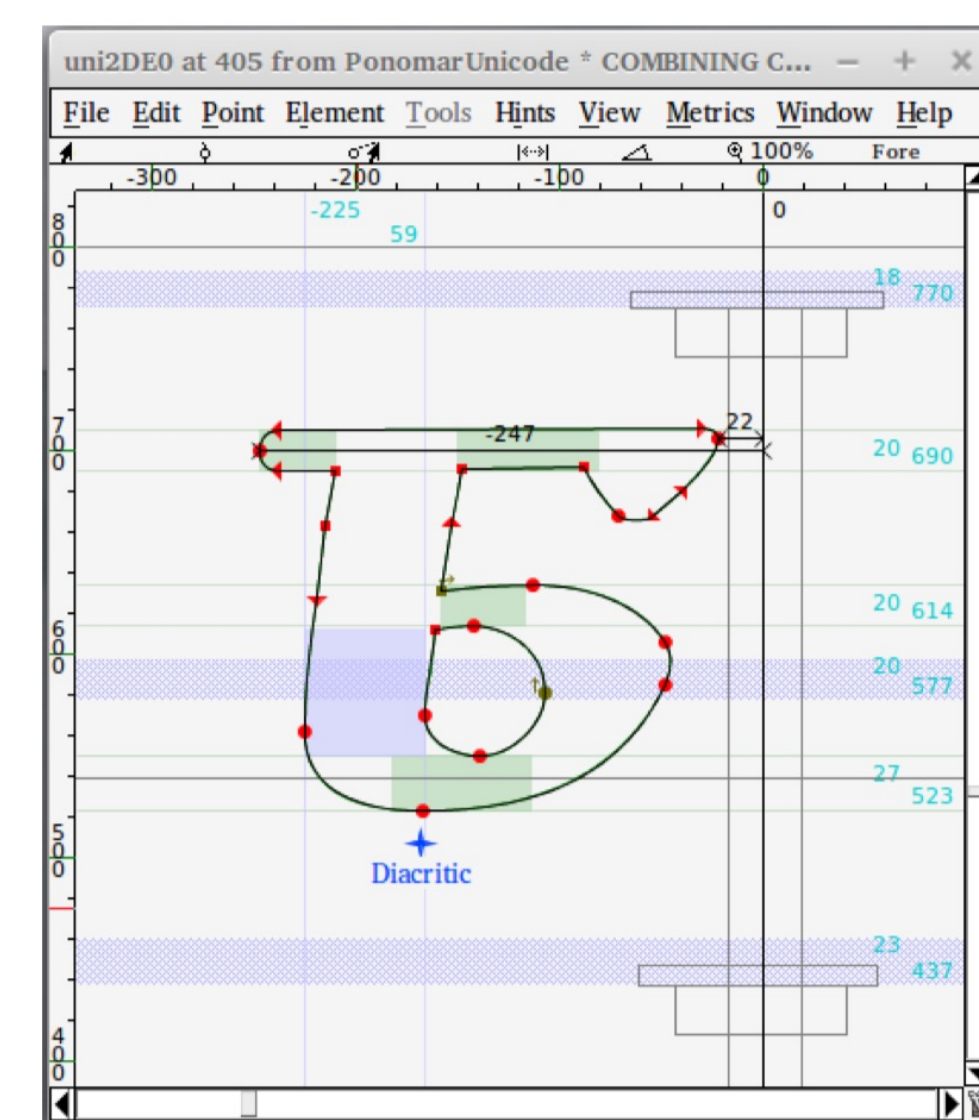
Church Slavonic (CS), a.k.a. Church Slavic, developed from Old Church Slavonic (OCS)

written in Glagolitic then Cyrillic

historical *Schriftsprache* and current **liturgical** language of Russian Orthodox Church & other ecclesiastical bodies



post-Soviet revitalization of religion and language (Bennett 2011) means increased demand to publish, transmit, study, etc. **liturgical** texts on electronic devices



hence need for Unicode-compliant fonts, e.g.:

ЦНЬ ОУТРЕНИ ВЕНОЩАГО БУДНЬ

CHURCH SLAVONIC IN UNICODE

	040	041	042	043	044	045	046	047	048	049	04A	04B	04C	04D	04E	04F
0	È	А	Р	а	р	Ѡ	Ѳ	Ѣ	Ѥ	Ѧ	Ѩ	Ѭ	Ѯ	Ѱ	Ѳ	Ѵ
1	Ě	Б	С	б	с	ѡ	ѳ	ѣ	ѥ	ѧ	ѩ	ѭ	ѯ	ѱ	ѳ	ѵ
2	Ѣ	В	Т	в	т	ѧ	Ѩ	Ѱ	Ѳ	Ѵ	Ѷ	Ѹ	Ѻ	Ѽ	Ѿ	ѿ
3	Ѓ	Г	У	г	у	Ѡ	Ѣ	Ѥ	Ѧ	Ѩ	Ѭ	Ѯ	Ѱ	Ѳ	Ѵ	Ѷ

technological issues

- historic letterforms
- accents, breathings, *titla*
- regional and temporal variants: e.g., medieval vs. synodal (1721-1917)

social issues

- “... for every character ... someone had to sit down and decide whether it was the same as or different from the other characters in Unicode...” (Gillam 2003: 8)
- CS not given its own locale
- no organization in charge of CS standardization: characters added haphazardly
- Russian skepticism of Unicode (Andreev 2015)
- bias? “...the Unicode Consortium has been relatively unsympathetic to meeting the needs of the Eastern Orthodox Church in providing us with a complete character set in order to professionally reprint our worship service books” (Panomar Project)

CONCLUSIONS

The Internet runs on Unicode.

Church Slavonic ‘unicodification’ raises bigger questions:

- What is a script?
- Who determines?



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