ISSN 3072-3140, eISSN 3072-4376
Copyright © by Tatsiana Amosava, 2025
Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial 4.0
(CC BY-NC 4.0)
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.ijbg.2025.1

Tatsiana Amosava

Carleton University, Canada
Карлтонскі ўніверсітэт, Канада
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0767-6117
e-mail: tanya.amosava8@gmail.com

Teaching Belarusian to English-speaking Belarusians in Canada: Manifestations of Language Ideology and National Ideology in Textbooks*

Выкладанне беларускай мовы англамоўным беларусам Канады: моўная ідэалогія і нацыянальная ідэалогія, якія праяўляюцца праз падручнікі

Abstract: This article presents a case study of teaching Belarusian to English-speaking Belarusian children in Toronto. It examines the features of Belarusian textbooks by Valentyna Pashkevich, published in the United States in 1968 and later in Canada in the 1970s with support from the Canadian government. These are analyzed alongside the Soviet primer by Nadzeya Siŭko (1961), a prominent and prolific author of Belarusian textbooks in the BSSR. The aim of the study is to identify both the shared and unique features of these textbooks, taking into account the different political conditions under which they were published. The methodology involves identifying the general characteristics of the textbooks and comparing their vocabulary and thematic content. Although these books differ in genre, Pashkevich used them as a set of tools for teaching Belarusian to ethnic Belarusians in Toronto, forming a sequence of teaching resources in which each element serves as a prerequisite for the next. The Belarusian used in Pashkevich's textbooks displays considerable variation; at times, it appears constructed and experimental compared to the strictly normative language of Siŭko's Soviet primer. Interestingly, despite her opposition to the Belarusian authorities of the time, Pashkevich presents her Canadian readers with an attractive image of Belarus as a cultured and developed country. These readers had never visited Belarus, having been born abroad to Belarusian emigrant families. Thus, Pashkevich sees her goal as fostering patriotic education among her readers through her language textbooks.

Keywords: Belarusian language in Canada, lemantar, primer, textbook, Pashkevich, Siŭko.

* While preparing this article, I consulted three experts to receive their advice and broaden my knowledge on the topic. I thank Dr. Curt Woolhiser for his insights on Belarusian dialects and thoughtful comments on the text; Dr. Natallia Hardzienka for her assistance with information about Nadzeya Siŭko (who kindly shared her article with me); and my BSU colleague Alena Barysevich for her advice regarding Polish influence in the Belarusian textbooks in question.

Tatsiana Amosava

Рэзюмэ: Артыкул з'яўляецца даследаваннем выпадку выкладання беларускай мовы носьбітам англійскай мовы. У артыкуле разглядаюцца асаблівасці падручнікаў беларускай мовы Валентыны Пашкевіч, выдадзеных у ЗША ў 1968 годзе, а таксама ў Канадзе ў 1970-х гадах пры падтрымцы канадскага ўрада. Яны аналізуюцца разам з савецкім букваром Надзеі Сіўко [1961], якая многія гады была найбольш значным і прадуктыўным аўтарам беларускіх лемантароў у БССР. Мэта даследавання – выявіць агульныя і спецыфічныя рысы гэтых падручнікаў, улічваючы розныя палітычныя ўмовы, у якіх гэтыя кнігі выдаваліся. Методыка даследавання – вызначэнне агульных характарыстык падручнікаў, параўнанне іх лексікі, тэматычнага зместу тэкстаў. Гэтыя кнігі – розныя па жанры, але В. Пашкевіч выкарыстоўвала іх як набор інструментаў для навучання этнічных беларусаў Таронта па-беларуску. Яны ўтвараюць ланцужок дыдактычных інструментаў, дзе адзін элемент з'яўляецца перадумовай наступнага. Беларуская мова ў падручніках В. Пашкевіч – вельмі зменлівая, часам здаецца, што яна мае сканструяваны і эксперыментальны характар у параўнанні са строга ўнармаванай мовай савецкага буквара Н. Сіўко. У той жа час дзіўна, як В. Пашкевіч, якая не падтрымлівала тагачасную беларускую ўладу, стварае вельмі прывабны вобраз Беларусі як культурнай, развітой краіны для сваіх канадскіх чытачоў, якія ніколі не бачылі Беларусь, бо нарадзіліся за яе межамі ў сем'ях беларускіх эмігрантаў. Такім чынам, В. Пашкевіч бачыць сваёй мэтай патрыятычнае выхаванне чытачоў праз свае падручнікі па мове.

Ключавыя словы: беларуская мова ў Канадзе, лемантар, буквар, падручнік, Пашкевіч, Сіўко.

Introduction

The first Belarusian language grammar in English was created in Canada primarily for the children of Belarusian post-war emigrants, with the largest community located in Toronto. I have the privilege of personally knowing the "child" who was the initial target audience of this book, and who shared his personal impressions of acquiring the Belarusian language, as well as the set of books used by the prominent Belarusian educator Valentyna Pashkevich in her teaching practice. However, it was not only about the language.

Research question: What was the toolset for teaching Belarusian to English-speaking Belarusian children in Toronto (Canada) in the second half of the 20th century, as developed by Valentyna Pashkevich?

The main argument of the article is as follows: In selecting and creating didactic materials for teaching the Belarusian language, to ethnic Belarusian children in Toronto, during the second half of the 20th century, V. Pashkevich effectively combined Soviet methodologies with her own developments. She subordinated linguistic reality to her language ideology, asserting that the Belarusian language she constructed should differ more significantly from Russian than "narkamauka" (the Russified version of Belarusian used in the BSSR). Additionally, V. Pashkevich utilized language textbooks as a medium for patriotic and nationalist education.

Methodology: This research employed textual analysis, meticulously studying every page of the mentioned books. Four books from different genres form a cohesive unit, where each element serves as a prerequisite for the next. The order in which they are presented for language acquisition is as follows: The Primer; The First Reading; Fundamental Byelorussian, Book 1; and Fundamental Byelorussian, Book 2.

Valentyna Pashkevich as a Belarusian Language and National Ideology Educator

This article focuses on a set of textbooks that I received as a gift from a Canadian gentleman of Belarusian descent. He studied Belarusian at the

Belarusian Greek Orthodox Church of St. Ephrasinia from Polatsk in Toronto, located at 1008 Dovercourt Road. His studies were supervised by Valentyna Pashkevich, the author of the first Belarusian grammar in English, titled *Fundamental Byelorussian in Two Books* (the books were published in 1974 and 1978, respectively, and he received them later in life; they are referred to as *FB-1* and *FB-2* in this text). These textbooks have already garnered attention from Belarusian language scholars; for example, Volha Barysenka included them in her overview of Belarusian textbooks for speakers of languages other than Belarusian [Barysenka 2017: 16–17]. However, this analysis aims to provide a more detailed examination. Pashkevich was a Belarusian linguist and educator. Although she was born in Russia in 1916, her parents were from the Brest region. She studied at the Pruzhany Gymnasium, and at Vilnius University. During World War II, she lived in Berlin, where she was cared for by Belarusian Scouts before moving to Toronto in 1949. The donor of the books was between 10 and 13 years old (1963–1966) when he studied Belarusian with Pashkevich. The class consisted of approximately 10 children whose parents attended the Belarusian church in Toronto. Their classes lasted for one hour. They used the Belarusian primer by Nadzeya Siŭko, published in the BSSR in 1961, along with handouts compiled by Pashkevich that were published as *The First Reading After the Primer* (referred to as *FR* in this text) a bit later, in 1968.[1]

Nadzeya Siŭko and Her Creative Path

Unlike the *FR* and the two volumes of the *FB*, the *Primer* by Siŭko is composed in "narkamauka", the Russified version of the Belarusian language that emerged from the reform of the year 1933. Siŭko remains a mysterious figure. She was a prolific author of Belarusian primers and copybooks for 40 years, from the late 1920s to the late 1960s, only pausing her publishing during World War II. The Belarusian National Library holds 29 different works attributed to her, yet there is no trace of her biography, not even in the Belarusian Encyclopedia. I attempted (in vain) to discover Siŭko's birthplace in Belarus to understand her inclination towards using Belarusian dialects. Dr. Natallia Hardziyenka even asked the renowned Belarusian writer Frantz Siŭko whether they were related, but they were not. In her article dedicated to Apalonia Radkevich (Savyonak), who created a Belarusian primer in exile, Dr. Hardziyenka notes that A. Radkevich (Savyonak) collaborated with Siŭko at some point, and their primers share many similarities [Hardzienka 2021: 217–220]. There is at least some evidence that Siŭko is a real person, not a myth.

Siŭko's *Primer*

The Primer by Siŭko teaches the Belarusian alphabet and handwriting, not in alphabetical order but by following the logic of producing the simplest words with minimal means. Since handwriting is crucial in Soviet and post-Soviet schools, the design of the *Primer* focuses on the shapes of letters in cursive. It begins with letters that have the simplest cursive forms, allowing for combinations like the interjection "ay", which we shout when lost in the forest, to convey basic meanings immediately. The font size of the letters gradually decreases as children gain confidence in reading.

This *Primer* is typical of its time in content, featuring multiple stories about animals, the Soviet way of life (including texts about collective farms and socialist enterprises), subtle hints of militarism disguised as aspirations for peace (e.g., "Our Strength" [Siŭko 1961: 69], "Our Aviators Are the Heroes of the Soviet Country," [Siŭko 1961: 85]), and numerous texts instilling moral values. One of my favourites is "A Bundle of Money" [Siŭko 1961: 106], which tells the story of a girl who finds an old woman's lost money and returns it. The text asked if Klava, the girl,

[1] Everyone can access V. Pashkevich's books for free on the website of the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences, Canada: https://binim.org/index.php/valiancina-paskievic/

did the right thing. The only text that shocked me due to its cruelty was the account of killing wolves [Siŭko 1961: 74], in which a peasant boy's father kills a wolf to scare off the rest of the pack approaching their home.

As was typical of primers from that era, the book includes a portrait of Lenin and a poem dedicated to Moscow and the Kremlin titled "The Heart of Our Motherland" [Siŭko 1961: 110–111]. I endeavored to uncover the Russifying elements in this *Primer*. Besides the fact that it was written in "narkamauka", there were not many such elements: first, the title of the book itself, Bukvar, would have been called Lemantar (derived from the word elemental) before the 1930s. Additionally, in one of the poems, "Snow Balls" [Siŭko 1961: 101], there is a line: "І, як Мурамец Ілья, у атаку рушыў я" ("I went on the attack like the legendary Russian warrior Ilya from Murom"). This reference to a legendary Russian hero indicates that Russian folklore and fairy tales were integral to the Belarusian child's worldview. At the same time, there are traces of Polish influence: for example, a classroom picture features a teacher's chair [Siŭko 1961: 73] labeled крэсла, which is unusual, as we would expect the word стул instead.[2]

Similar instances can be found elsewhere [Siŭko 1961: 93]. There is a text titled "Лякарства"(medicine) [Siŭko 1961: 99], where we would expect another word (*лекі*). This word choice may reflect either Polish or Russian influence. All the texts presented in Siŭko's Primer are attributed solely to Siŭko, as if they were her original work. However, I identified verses from the poem "Our Day" by the famous Belarusian poet Andrei Alexandrovich in one of the framed slogans [Siŭko 1961: 98]: "Хочаш знаць пра ўсё, пра ўсіх – сябрам будзь цікавых кніг!" ("If you want to know about everything and everybody, be a friend of interesting books!")[3] By the way, Alexandrovich was an ardent supporter of the Russification of the Belarusian language; he denigrated colleagues who adhered to the pre-reform version of Belarusian but ultimately ended up in a Gulag.

Systemic Errors in Translation From Belarusian to English by Pashkevich as a Sign of the Language in Transition

By "an error in translation", I mean an inappropriate choice of words or expressions in the target language that may lead to significant misrepresentation of reality, and sometimes harm the commissioner of the translation. From my own experience as an interpreter, I recall a situation where an Israeli general came to Belarus as a construction investor intending to renovate the BSU campus. He was invited by the BSU authorities to the ecovillage Dudutki, where he was offered locally-made moonshine. I incorrectly interpreted the alcohol's strength as 84 degrees instead of 48. This caused significant embarrassment, as he categorically refused to drink it while the entertainers in Dudutki stood with a tray, bowing deeply in front of him.

The most intriguing aspects of Siŭko's *Primer* are the numerous handwritten annotations made by the Canadian-born Belarusian gentleman (the book's donor) between 1963 and 1966 under the dictation of his teacher Pashkevich. I was particularly struck by the inaccuracies in the translations of Belarusian words into English, especially concerning the names

[2] Dr. Curt Woolhiser commented on this passage in personal communication: "You describe the use of *крэсла* in the meaning of chair (Russian *стул*) as an example of Polish influence, but in fact, in contemporary standard Belarusian *крэсла* corresponds both to Russian *стул* and *кресло*. See, for example, the entry for *крэсла Беларуска-рускі слоўнік* (рэд. К. К. Крапіва, Мінск 1962): КРЭСЛА ср. 1. кресло; 2. стул. The only meaning for the entry *СТУЛ* in this dictionary is the medical term stool (feces), as in stool sample. Some modern sources insist on the use of the Polonism *фатэль* in the meaning of armchair, but I rather doubt that many Belarusian speakers use it." Given that Belarusian is a very dynamic language, I find Dr. Woolhiser's comments quite relevant, but I reserve the right to express my opinions.

[3] Here we note instead of the verb *ведаць*, used when referring to knowing facts, the poet chose *знаць*, which we use when recognizing or identifying something or someone. I will revisit this distinction when discussing Pashkevich's books. *Ведаць* = savoir, *знаць* = connaître.

of animals and plants. This tendency is evident in both her *FB* and *FR*. Here are examples of translations provided by Pashkevich to her students at Saturday school, found by me on the pages of Siŭko's *Primer* (Pashkevich's translations are in cursive, and my translations are given in brackets): бор – *heavy bush* (pine forest) [Siŭko 1961: 66], бубен – *drum* (tambourine) [Siŭko 1961: 66], лопух – *rhubarb* (burdock) [Siŭko 1961: 44], колас – *grain* (ear of wheat/rye) [Siŭko 1961: 45], рак – *lobster* (crayfish) [Siŭko 1961: 47], косы – *pony tail* + *bent* (braids or scythes) [Siŭko 1961: 42–43], Пушок Пашы – сыты – *fat* (full, not hungry, well-fed) [Siŭko 1961: 48], сала – *bacon* (lard; however, lard can correspond to *смалец* and *топлены тлушч*) [Siŭko 1961: 30]. The numerous inaccuracies in translation may indicate either a transitional period in the language's evolution or limited language competencies of the educator in the target language.

Brief Comparison of Siŭko's *Primer* and Pashkevich's *First Reading After the Primer*

Continuing the investigation of these curiosities, I will now turn to the *FR*. A striking similarity has been noted between the texts and topics in Siŭko's *Primer* and those in Pashkevich's *FR*. It is clear that Pashkevich used Siŭko's *Primer* as a model and source of inspiration. Let us make some comparisons: "Жывы куток" ("Mini-zoo at school" in *FR* [Pashkevich 1968: 1] corresponds to the text "У жывым кутку" ("In the school mini-zoo"), in N. Siŭko [1961: 95]; "Сваім розумам" ("Think with your own head" in *FR*) [Pashkevich 1968: 3] resembles the text "Цяжкая задача" ("Difficult math problem") in Siŭko's *Primer* [1961: 100]; and "Politeness" in *FR* (about a grandpa with heavy shopping bags) [Pashkevich 1968: 4] resembles "Будзьце ветлівымі" ("Be polite!" about a granny on a bus) in Siŭko [1961: 107], among others. Pashkevich does not copy the texts verbatim: she is original in selecting and producing content, but the topics remain the same. Even the riddles, while differing in wording, address similar themes, such as the riddle about snow: "На дварэ гарой, а ў хаце – вадой" ("It looks like a mountain outside, and it becomes water inside of your house" in *FR* [Pashkevich 1968: 10]), while in Siŭko's *Primer* it is presented as: "Ляціць – маўчыць, ляжыць – маўчыць, а як памрэ, дык зараве" ("It's silent when it flies, and it's silent when it lies, but it starts roaring when it dies" [Siŭko 1961: 104]). Unlike Siŭko, Pashkevich always provides the names of the authors of the texts she uses; if the author is not indicated, I assume it is hers.

I had previously noted that Pashkevich provided incorrect translations of Belarusian words to her students. One particularly amusing translation I found in *FR* is her rendering of *вожык* (hedgehog) as porcupine [Pashkevich 1968: 11]. She continues this translation into *FB-1*, where she lists two translations for *вожык* (hedgehog and porcupine) in the dictionary attached to the textbook [Pashkevich 1974: 240]. Fortunately, she rectifies this mistake in the second volume of her *FB*, where porcupine is correctly translated as *іглак* [Pashkevich 1978: 389]. It is important to note that the porcupine is not native to Belarus. In April 2025, a porcupine escaped from its owner in Belarus, traveled 50 kilometers from its original location, and survived for six months. Animal professionals likely caught it and returned it to its owner. The porcupine became a news sensation in Belarus, unlike the common hedgehog (see Pionova 2025).[4]

Fundamental Byelorussian: Structure, Ideological Content, and Idiosyncrasies of the Language

Let us now focus specifically on the *FB*. This textbook consists of two volumes; the first volume contains 18 units, while the second contains 11 units (units 19–29). Each unit begins with a text, followed by the presenta-

[4] Commenting on this, Dr. Woolhiser noted: "Regarding the translation of вожык as porcupine, while clearly erroneous, it is worth taking into account that hedgehogs are not indigenous to North America; perhaps this was V. Pashkevich's attempt to adapt the Belarusian word to a North American animal that émigré children would be more familiar with."

tion of a grammatical topic in both Belarusian and English. The grammatical material in Belarusian is presented in greater detail, whereas the English explanation is more organized and structured, providing only the essential information. The book includes numerous phonetic exercises. Its design requires a teacher to guide the students, making independent comprehension of Belarusian challenging, especially given the significant number of typos in the first volume (some pages contain three typos in a row).[5]

A major focus is placed on the use of proverbs, which is a vital yet often overlooked aspect of language acquisition that can significantly impact language-users' test scores. The natural use of proverbs enhances speech by making it more colourful and fluid. V. Pashkevich demonstrates their use in specific contexts, such as in the stories: "Нагі за пояс – ды лататы ў лес" ("A hare put his legs in his belt and ran away to the forest" – referring to an encounter between children and a hare) [Pashkevich 1974: 36]; "Пэўна-ж рука руку мые" ("A hand washes another hand/ Roll my log, and I'll roll yours") [Pashkevich 1974: 38]; "У чужым хляве й блыха валом здаецца" ("In another person's stable, a flea looks like an ox," meaning "The life of other people always looks easy and prosperous") in exercise 59 "Thunder" [Pashkevich 1974: 64]; and "ня ў брыво, а ў вока" ("He hit not the eyebrow, but the eye itself/ hit the nail on the head") in exercise 59 "Thunder" [Pashkevich 1974: 64]. Many exercises are specifically based on proverbs, such as exercise 194 a) [Pashkevich 1974: 201]: "Той багаты, кто нікому не вінаваты" ("That one is rich who is nobody's debtor") and "Вялікаму каню валікі й хамут" ("A big horse deserves a big yoke"/ "A high-rank person has bigger responsibilities").

At a very early stage, within the grammar exercises themselves, Pashkevich introduces an element of patriotic and nationalist education. She explains that Kalinouski is a Belarusian hero who fought against Russia in exercise 49 a) [Pashkevich 1974: 51]. Additionally, in exercise 78, she emphasizes that Vilnius is a Belarusian city: "Гарады Менск, Вільня, Горадзен, Гомель, Пінск, Полацк – на Беларусі" [Pashkevich 1974: 79]. Moreover, in *FB-2*, she states that the BSSR includes only three-fifths of the Belarusian ethnographic territory [Pashkevich 1978: 1]. To illustrate the true ethnographic borders of Belarus, she provides a map of the boundaries of the Belarusian language, prepared and published by the Moscow Dialectologic Commission of the Russian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Petrograd-Moscow, 1914–1915. These boundaries include, among others, Nouharad Sieversky (Ukraine), Pskou, Vialikiya Luki, Taropets, Smalensk, Rzheu (Russia), Belastok (Poland), Vilna, and Druskininkai (Lithuania), as well as Dzvinsk/ Dauhaupils (Latvia) [Pashkevich 1978: 28–29].

In the second volume, there is a text about Navahradak, the first capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [Pashkevich 1978: 25–26]. In this text, she discusses the ethnic differences between Lithuanians (Belarusians) and Samogitians[6] (the inhabitants of modern Lithuania, which she refers to as "Лятува"). She writes that the Samogitians, dissatisfied with their subjugation to the Belarusian king Mindouh and the requirement to use the Belarusian language, regularly revolted against him, and finally killed him: "У змаганьні з Жамойцяй у 1263 годзе быў подступам забіты й сам кароль Міндоўг" [Pashkevich 1978: 26].

She provides explanations for the historic names of the countries: "Лятува – present-day Lithuania. Літва – Lithuania – an old name for present-day Byelorussia. Жамойць, Жмудзь – Samogitia – the old name (in use almost until the end of the 19th century) for present-day Lithuania" [Pashkevich 1978: 26]. In reality, Samogitia is only one of five historical provinces of Lithuania, alongside Lithuania Minor,

[5] I have received criticism from users of this textbook who claim that it is suitable for self-education. In my strong opinion, this is only possible if a learner has either a consultant or some background knowledge of Belarusian, which many learners do possess. As a language instructor with two decades of experience, I know that even slight vagueness in explanation can completely disorient a language learner.

[6] Samogitia is just one of five provinces in Lithuania; however, Pashkevich associates the entire county with this province.

Suvalkija, Dzukija, and Aukstaitija. A particular bias in the presentation of historical realities can be detected in the work of Pashkevich.

It was mentioned above that Pashkevich was connected to the Scouting movement. Numerous references to this movement, known for its patriotic and religious ethos, are scattered throughout the textbook in various exercises. For example, in exercise 168a: "Ваўчаняты рыхтуюцца да экскурсіі ў горы"/ "The wolf cubs are preparing for the excursion to the mountains" [Pashkevich 1974: 164]. Ваўчаняты – refers to cubs (in the Boy Scout organization). Another example can be found in exercise 125 [Pashkevich 1974: 121]: "Скаўт служыць каму? – Богу й Бацькаўшчыне (Скаўцкае Права)" ("To whom does the Scout serve? – To God and to the Motherland (Scout Law)."

What significantly distinguishes Pashkevich's book from its Soviet counterparts is the inclusion of Christian themes. Mentions of Jesus Christ, churches, and priests appear throughout the text, such as in the phrases "Хрыстос вучыў любіць бліжняга свайго, як самаго сябе" ("Jesus taught to love your neighbour as you love yourself") [Pashkevich 1974: 208] and "Вам падабаецца гэты святар" ("You like this priest") [Pashkevich 1974: 207]. Unit 18 of *FB-1* includes an extensive excerpt from Yakub Kolas's poem *The New Land,* dedicated to Easter [Pashkevich 1974: 230]. In this excerpt, children are given alcohol in celebration of the religious holiday, a fragment that would also be banned from Soviet textbooks.

Since the book is designed for Belarusians in Canada, it includes many examples of multiculturalism. For instance, in Unit 9 [Pashkevich 1974: 82] there is a text about a geography lesson in a Canadian school where everyone tries to locate on a map the country where their grandparents live. The children's grandparents are from Ukraine, Belarus, Italy, Japan, and Ireland. Only one student, named Jim, has a grandmother living in Vancouver. Overall, this textbook teaches children about dual loyalty: "Мы любім край, дзе мы жывём, але таксама мы павінны любіць Беларусь, край нашых бацькоў і дзядоў"/ "We love the country in which we live, but we must also love Belarus, the land of our fathers and grandfathers" [Pashkevich 1974: 208].

Although Pashkevich opposes the Soviet regime, she promotes the image of Belarus as an industrially developed and advanced country. Supplementary Information about Byelorussia [Pashkevich 1978: 30] and the accompanying text in Belarusian with pictures [Pashkevich 1978: 31–33] illustrate this point well. In the Belarusian text, she mentions that Belarus produces computers (sic! It's 1978).

A few words should be said about the language of the textbook. It is written in pre-reform Belarusian and contains many debatable features. First, it reveals a significant Polish influence: *мала не* (almost) instead of the Belarusian *амаль*; *браць лекцыі тэнісу* (to take tennis lessons) instead of the Belarusian *заняткі*; *гуляць у сетку* (to play volleyball, which is *siatkówka* in Polish) follow the Polish usage; and V. Pashkevich adheres to the Polish distinction between the verbs for *to know*: *ведаць* (about facts, akin to *savoir* in French) and *знаць* – 'быць знаёмым з кім-небудзь, чым-небудзь' (to identify or recognize something/somebody, to be acquainted with somebody, similar to *connaître* in French). Other examples include *пачка* – 'пасылка' and *чакаць на маці, на сястру*. Pashkevich suggests using the Genitive case with the verb *to wait* and the preposition *на* with the Accusative case, as in Polish, when waiting for something or someone within a specific time frame (e.g., *чакаю мамы*, *чакаю ліста*, but: *чакаю на маму*, *чакаю на ліст*) [Pashkevich 1974: 62]. When she provides the rules of declension for nouns and adjectives, there is an enormous pluralism of endings. For example, the nouns of the third declension, which she refers to as "with the clean stem," have three possible endings in the Instrumental case: *соляй*, *соляю*, *сольлю* [Pashkevich 1974: 100]. Consider the Dative and Prepositional cases of feminine gender nouns: *ягонай дачцы – дачцэ*, *аб ягонай дачцы – дачцэ* [Pashkevich 1974: 204]. There is no clear standard.[7]

[7] In relation to the aforementioned points, Dr. Woolhiser noted: "You also note considerable variation in inflectional

Sometimes Pashkevich promotes very unconventional vocabulary choices: *сыбота* (*субота*/ Saturday), *чырвень* (*чэрвень*/June), *ірты* (*лыжы*/skies). The last word is a dialect term from the Orlov region of Russia [see: *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo…* (online); *Vslovarike* (online)].

She reinterprets the authentic works of other authors to support her view of the language. She adapts the texts of poets to fit her conception of the Belarusian language. She is quite democratic in her selection of poets, even choosing works from her ideological opponents, such as Andrei Alexandrovich whose poem "Грыб Архіп" ("The Mushroom named Arkhip") was cited in her textbook [Pashkevich 1974: 200]. Although her favourite children's poet is Aviaryan Dziaruzhynsky, let us compare Artur Volsky's poem "The Living Grammar" in Pashkevich's book (*FB-1*) with the original:

Той, хто быць пісьменны хоча,
Знаць павінен з першых год
Род мужчынскі, род жаноцкі
І яшчэ – ніякі род [Pashkevich 1974: 52].

Here is the original:

Той, хто быць пісьменным хоча,
ведаць мусіць з першых год
род мужчынскі, род жаночы
і яшчэ – ніякі род [Vol'ski (online)].

Pashkevich distorts the original poem to maintain the dichotomy of the verbs for *to know* mentioned above. By not using the Instrumental case of the adjective after the verb *to be*, she distances herself from the Russian language. Additionally, she employs the unconventional feminine adjective *жаноцкі* instead of *жаночы*, which ruins the rhyme.[8]

morphology, and attribute this to the absence of a clear standard. This raises an important issue relating to language ideology: does the existence of a standard variety necessarily imply that no variation is permitted? Certainly, in the Russian standard language culture, and to a considerable extent in its Polish equivalent, variation with the standard has been reduced to a minimum. Basically, the prevailing idea seems to be that if there are two ways of saying something, one of them must be wrong. Might one be able to argue that V. Pashkevich's listing of multiple variants of certain grammatical endings reflects a more "democratic" ideology of the standard, allowing the use of variant forms from different dialectal sources? This is in fact not uncommon in newly standardized languages – for example, modern Norwegian allows for considerable variation on all linguistic levels, including pronunciation, and there are in fact two different written standards, Bokmål, based on the Danicized language of Oslo and southeastern Norway, and Nynorsk, based on the more conservative western Norwegian dialects, but nowadays there is a considerable amount of mixing of the two standards at least in writing (albeit relatively few Norwegians actually speak the way they write, using a variety of local or regional dialectal forms). It should also be noted that Pashkevich's listing of multiple variants for certain grammatical endings is very much in keeping with Taraškialevič's practice in his grammar (see, for example, *Беларуская граматыка для школ, выданьне пятае, перароблепае і пашыранае*, Вільня, 1929 г., where he lists multiple instrumental singular forms for 3rd declension nouns such as *косьць* and *рэч*: *касьцёю*, *касьцёй*, *косьцю*, and *рэчаю*, *рэчай*, *рэччу*, p. 82). It is likely that V. Pashkevich used this textbook, or an earlier edition, when she was a student, and it no doubt influenced her linguistic choices.

[8] However, Dr. Woolhiser disagrees that this form of the adjective is unconventional: You describe Pashkevich's use of the adjective *жаноцкі* instead of *жаночы* as "weird", although, as far as I am aware, both words are considered standard Belarusian. The former is sometimes also used in the meaning of the Russian word *женственный* ("feminine"), although some dictionaries treat them as synonyms. But I do agree that some of Pashkevich's lexical choices are rather unusual. I recall that my first teacher of Belarusian, a Belarusian émigré and retired librarian at Indiana University, was critical of some of Pashkevich's lexical choices. For example, he found the word *спадар* "ridiculous" (he said it reminded him of the word *спадніца*). He was a native of the eastern Mahiloŭ region around Kryčaŭ, and had attended school in Soviet Belarus in the 1920s–1930s (as a university student he was arrested and imprisoned for "bourgeois nationalism" in 1937, and released from prison when the Germans captured Minsk in 1941). I recall that he also found Pashkevich's use of the word *пехатой/пехатою* in the sense of *on foot* rather jarring. I believe he said he preferred *пяшком* (although he also regularly used *нада* instead of *трэба*, as is typical for dialects of the eastern Mahilou region). But I have heard many other variants, *пяшком*, *пешкам*, *пешкі*, *пешшу*, *пеша*. In fact, in the *Беларуска-рускі слоўнік* (рэд. К. К. Крапіва, Мінск 1962), all of the following variants are listed as synonyms: *пеша*, *пешкі*, *пяшком*, *пехатой/пехатою*.

Another noteworthy fact is that, following her tradition of providing incorrect translations for animals and plants, Pashkevich translated *зубр* as *aurochs* in Unit 17 [Pashkevich 1974: 210]. Aurochs (тур) is an extinct species, with the last representative dying in Poland in 1627. It is the ancient ancestor of modern domestic cattle and has nothing in common with the European bison living in Belavezha today. Some close relatives of the aurochs survive in present-day Africa.

At the end of this overview, it is essential to emphasize that both the first and the second volume of *FB* were edited by Prof. Anthony Adamovich and a team of researchers. The second volume contains fewer typographical errors and includes numerous corrections and improvements in grammar, presentation, standardization, and translations (as seen in the case of the porcupine). Despite the idiosyncrasies of Belarusian textbooks published outside of Belarus, I must express my gratitude to the activists and educators of the Belarusian diaspora who worked to preserve the Belarusian language during one of its most perilous periods of Russification (1970s–1980s). Arnold McMillin notes that there were anonymous yet active voices from the Belarusian diaspora in London at that time, who protested against the Russification of Belarusian [McMillin 2023: 65]. Pashkevich, residing in Canada, also made significant contributions to the survival and independent path of the Belarusian language during this critical period of vulnerability in Belarus.

References

Barysenka Vol'ha. 2017. "Vučèbna-metadyčnyja dapamožniki pa belaruskaj move jak zamežnaj. Dyjaxraničny aspekt". *Belaruskaja Mova jak Zameznaja* 1: 15–22 [Барысенка Вольга. 2017. "Вучэбна-метадычныя дапаможнікі па беларускай мове як замежнай. Дыяхранічны аспект". *Belaruskaja Mova jak Zamez-naja* 1: 15–22].

Hardzienka Natallja. 2021. "Cëtka Apalonija i peršy belaruski lemantar u laherax Dy-Pi." In: H.V. Zapartyka, V.V. Žybul' (eds.). *Aŭtohraf. Al'manax*. Vyp. 2. Minsk. 217–220 [Гардзіенка Наталля. 2021. "Цётка Апалонія і першы беларускі лемантар у лагерах Ды-Пі." У: Г.В. Запартыка, В.В. Жыбуль (рэд.). *Аўтограф. Альманах*. Вып. 2. Мінск. 217–220].

McMillin Arnold. 2023. "The Fate of the Belarusian Literary Language over Half a Century." *Acta Albaruthenica* 23: 63–72.

Pashkevich Valentyna. 1968. *The First Reading After the Primer.* Cleveland.

Pashkevich Valentyna. 1974. *Fundamental Byelorussian. Book 1.* A. Adamovich (ed.). Toronto.

Pashkevich Valentyna. 1978. *Fundamental Byelorussian. Book 2.* A. Adamovich (ed.). Toronto.

Pionova Vera. 2025. "V Minprirody rasskazali, otkuda vzjalsja dikobraz v derevne v Gomel'skom rajone" [Пионова Вера. 2025. "В Минприроды рассказали, откуда взялся дикобраз в деревне в Гомельском районе"] [online] https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/112242.html?c [December 2, 2025].

Siŭko Nadzeja. 1961. *Bukvar*. Minsk [Сіўко Надзея. 1961. *Буквар*. Мінск].

Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka Dalja [*Толковый словарь русского языка Даля*] [online] https://slovar.win/tolkoviy-slovar-dalya/irti.html [December 2, 2025].

Vol'ski Artur. *Žyvaja hramatyka*. [Вольскі Артур. *Жывая граматыка*] [online] https://tiny.pl/tc9q8ss7r [December 2, 2025].

Vslovarike [Вословарике] [online] https://tiny.pl/fvfdj51gr [December 2, 2025].