

Macedonian orthographic controversies

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The standardization of the Macedonian language and controversies surrounding it have been described in detail by many scholars. This paper seeks to contribute to this discussion in several ways. First, I will provide a brief summary of debates concerning selection of an orthography in the period 1944–1945. Significantly, I will expand that discussion through inclusion of important archival materials from the Koneski archive at the Macedonian Academy of Sciences. Second, I will briefly discuss debates that have arisen with suggestions for orthographic reform since the 1940s. In the final section of the paper I will examine the use of Cyrillic and new debates surrounding the use of different systems of transliteration in the Latin alphabet that compete in the linguistic landscape as well as in on-line fora leading to new proposals for orthographic reform.

Keywords: Macedonian language; standardization; codification; orthography; transliteration

1. Introduction

Since the partition of Macedonian territory following the Balkan wars of 1912–13, the Macedonian language developed asymmetrically in the countries in which it is spoken. This paper will focus on developments in Vardar Macedonia, the territory that became one of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia and later, in 1991, the Republic of Macedonia.¹ Macedonian, due to a variety of external and internal factors, was the last of the South Slavic languages to codify a standard written form and the Macedonian literary language took shape in the cauldron of competing nationalisms, the pressure of neighbouring literary languages, shifting borders,

1. There are a number of works focusing on the Macedonian language in Aegean Macedonia (now northern Greece and Pirin Macedonia (now western Bulgaria) and the politics of language recognition. Those interested in challenges to Macedonian national and linguistic identity should consult the representative works by Friedman, Koneski, Kiselinovski, Kramer, Lunt, Rossos, among others, listed in the reference section of this paper.

and changing political alliances. The codifiers of Macedonian were compelled to develop an orthography selecting among options, each of which was loaded with the weight of national traditions, religious history, and competing alliances.

In published and unpublished works written in Macedonian prior to the establishment of Macedonian as the official language of the Republic of Macedonia and the agreement on the form of the alphabet in 1945, a variety of alphabets were used, predominantly, though not exclusively, forms of Cyrillic.² Ilievski (2006:8) notes that between the two world wars Macedonian was written with four alphabets: Serbian, Greek, Bulgarian, and Albanian, depending on where people lived and the education they had received. During the 1930s in Vardar Macedonia there was movement towards a specific Macedonian model, but there was still fluidity in the shape of that alphabet and the same sound would have multiple representations. In work conducted on individual inter-war writers (Kramer 2008) it is evident that some selection of orthography was dependent on the availability of typewriters, and the same author would use different transcriptions dependent on availability of different machines.³ As will be noted again below, it was generally assumed that the Macedonian alphabet would be some form of Cyrillic. A modified Cyrillic had been proposed by Krste Misirkov in *Za makedonski raboti* 'On Macedonian Matters'⁴ and it was widely used in Macedonia, despite some use of the Latin alphabet, for example in the *Abecedar* published in Greece in 1925.⁵ Still the question remained as to the form of Cyrillic to be used: should Macedonian

2. Although Cyrillic was the most frequent choice for Macedonian orthography, Macedonian has also been written in Greek characters (e.g. see Friedman 2000:176) and in Latin characters, e.g. the primer published in Greece in the 1920s and more recently in a variety of on-line fora. See discussion on Latinisation later in this paper. For discussion of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia see Cvetkovski (1990).

3. Problems with fonts continued well after standardization. For example, in Koneski's typewritten proposal for a new *Pravopis* directed to the Ministry of National Education [Ministerstvoto na nacionalna prosvetenost na NRM] Koneski archive 2.2, diacritics are all penned in by hand, both on the dorso-palatals and the grave accent on the pronoun *çè* [se]. Problems still continue. Unicode does not have the correct italic fonts for Macedonian and Serbian. For one site detailing the problem see <http://jankojs.tripod.com/SerbianCyr.htm> accessed 16 February 2015.

4. Misirkov's (1903) work had been destroyed and not circulated. It did not serve as a foundation for the codifiers in the 1940's. Koneski, in an undated Bulgarian notebook, did, however, make notes on Misirkov's articles in *Mir*, including the 19 April 1924 article *Makedonska kultura*. This notebook is in an as-yet unsorted container in the archives of MANU. I am again grateful to the Archives for providing access to this work.

5. The *Abecedar* lists the following letters, given on p. 34: ⟨a, b, c, č, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, š, t, u, ü, v, z, ž, dz, dž⟩. The grapheme ⟨i̇⟩ is used in the texts for schwa, e.g. *dirvo* 'tree'.

Cyrillic follow models provided by Serbian or Bulgarian, or should it develop its own specificity?

My emphasis here will be on several periods of orthographic conflict:

1. Codification and orthographic debates from the declaration of Macedonian as the official language in August 1944 to acceptance of a new orthography in May 1945 and the first orthographic dictionary of 7 June 1945 and the second revised edition of 1950.
2. New controversies developing in the late Yugoslav period through independence, and finally,
3. Issues concerning the transliteration of Macedonian Cyrillic into Latin characters.⁶ The orthographic issues discussed here reflect those that Friedman (1998) has termed *recurring*, *remissive*, *resolved*, *new*, and *nonsalient*. We will review these periods of orthographic conflict in terms of the manner in which these conflicts were resolved or the reasons certain orthographic decisions remain controversial.⁷

2. Codification and orthographic debates 1944–1945⁸

Here I will summarize some of the most salient issues since other scholars have written extensively on the debates of this period. My main contribution here is to

A number of works have mentioned the *Abecedar* but I know of no study focusing on the orthography, which is worthy of separate study.

6. Other authors focus on different periodisations depending on the focus of their work. Blaže Ristovski, for example, focuses on the periods from 1903–1905 and 1945–1948; Friedman has written on Macedonian codification and events leading up to the First Congress in 1944. Ilievski (2006) provides a history dating back to documents from the 7th and 8th centuries.

7. I thank Victor Friedman for reading this paper and suggesting a number of clarifications. I also thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their many helpful suggestions and critiques. The editor of this journal also provided invaluable assistance.

8. There is a wide-range of published material on the debates surrounding codification. I am including some of that debate here to acquaint readers unfamiliar with this history. The reference section contains other works that discuss codification, see for example Friedman (1993, 1998, 2000, 2004), Ilievski (2006), Koneski (1948), Kramer (2015b, 2008), Lunt (1959, 1984), Risteski (1988), Ristovski (2006), and Stamatovski (1986). Here I wish to give particular weight to the Koneski alphabet of spring 1945. This alphabet proposal has been over-looked in the literature. While a transcription of Koneski's spring 1945 alphabet is included in Risteski (1988), it has not been cited elsewhere and the transcription provided by Risteski contains dozens of transcription errors.

draw attention to another alphabet drafted by Blaže Koneski in the spring of 1945, one that is little known. That proposal was followed by the alphabet accepted in late spring of that year. Still, this earlier draft alphabet draws attention to the political climate at the time and contributes to our understanding of the final resolution of the new orthography.⁹ In order to place this work in context it will be necessary to review in some detail discussions that began in 1944.

During the period of codification in the 1940's each alphabet that was proposed attempted to balance linguistic considerations with their potential politically symbolic ramifications. The wholesale adoption of either Vuk Karadžić's Serbian Cyrillic or the Cyrillic used in Bulgaria, regardless of the era, could, and would, be read as politically motivated and driven by shifting political alliances. It must be borne in mind that prior to the declaration of Macedonian as the official language of the People's (later Socialist) Republic of Macedonia within a federated Yugoslavia, both Serbia and Bulgaria had laid claim to Macedonian territory as an extension of their own linguistic territory. Guentcheva (1999: 356) summarizes these claims: "This region [Macedonia] is differently called in the Bulgarian and the Serbian historiographies, "Western borderlands" and "South-eastern Serbia" respectively. The politics of naming is another telling example of the pervasive use of geography for political ends in the Balkans."

The issues to be discussed here arose during codification and some of them continue to resonate in the outline for a new *orthoepic* dictionary, *Pravopis*, being compiled in Skopje in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The major controversies include: whether spelling should be phonemic or morphophonemic, particularly in clusters; the representation of palatal /nj/; how to represent the lateral sonorant /l/; the phonemic representation of the dorso-palatals /k'/ and /g'/ (inherited reflexes of *tj and *dj); and finally whether or not schwa should be included in the inventory of vowel phonemes in contemporary standard Macedonian.

In 1913 Macedonian territory was partitioned under the Treaty of Bucharest. Each country – Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria – that received Macedonian territory¹⁰ followed a policy of assimilation to the official language. Thus in the decades

9. For a short article focused solely on this draft alphabet and a more detailed critique of Risteski, see Kramer (2015b).

10. These territories are referred to as Aegean Macedonia, Vardar Macedonia, and Pirin Macedonia respectively. For discussion on the status of Macedonian in Pirin and Vardar see, for example, Čašule (1970), Cvetkovski (1990), Friedman (1998, 1993), Kramer (1999), Rossos (1991, 1995, 2008). A number of border villages are also located in Albania where Macedonian has also been written with both Cyrillic and Latin characters, but the issue of

preceding the first codification conference of 1944, Macedonian codification was delayed due to the policies of those states that controlled these territories. Officially Macedonian was a dialect of Serbian in Yugoslavia and a dialect of Bulgarian in Bulgaria. It was forbidden in Greece and, in Albania, it was at times forbidden, at others allowed in limited domains in some specific geographic regions. In all these regions Macedonian had no official status and efforts were directed at assimilating the population, see Friedman (1993: 163).

Once the possibility of codification developed in the 1940s, there was, as Friedman (1993: 163) has noted, intense debate and conflict over the orthography. We will look at the issues that arose concerning problematic letters. It is telling that at the first meeting of ASNOM (The Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia) on September 30, 1944 (cited in Risteski 1988: 221) the following provisional alphabet of twenty-five letters was proposed that avoided any of those that were controversial, (given here in Cyrillic, Latin transliteration, and IPA):

Table 1. Provisional Alphabet of 30 September 1944

Mac.	а	б	в	г	д	е	ж	з	и	ј	к	л	м	н	о	п	р	с	т	у	ф	х	ц	ч	ш
Trans.	a	b	v	g	d	e	ž	z	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u	f	h	c	č	š
IPA	a	b	v	g	d	ɛ	ʒ	z	i	j	k	l	m	n	ɔ	p	r	s	t	u	f	x	ts	ʃ	ʃ

The ASNOM directive concerning proposals for a preliminary alphabet (cited in Risteski, 1988: 220) stated that close to 75% of the people were illiterate. The Czech Slavist Antonin Frinta, who taught the first course on Macedonian outside of Yugoslavia in the 1940's, termed Macedonia the most analphabetic region in pre-war Yugoslavia (see Kramer 2015c). In this period schools were being established and textbooks written to speed the process of literacy after more than a century of attempts to get primary education in Macedonian.¹¹ When the debate over controversial letters began, recourse was made time and again to mastery of the alphabet in both primary and adult education.

Macedonian in Albania is beyond the scope of this paper. For further details see, for example, Steinke and Ylli (2010), Kramer and Schallert (2002).

11. For more information on the history of textbooks in Macedonian and attempts to introduce Macedonian as the medium of instruction see, for example, Friedman (2000), Kramer (1999, 2015a).

Among the models proposed were Serbian Cyrillic, Bulgarian Cyrillic,¹² a compromise between the two, as well as suggestions for an independent, Macedonian national development. The question revolved around political, pedagogical, and linguistic considerations. These types of orthographic controversies were certainly not unique to Macedonia. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, Bulgaria, for example, had undergone similar challenges to orthographic reform: “The overriding concern about delineating Bulgarian linguistic boundaries against the boundaries of other South Slavic languages, first Serbian and later Macedonian, was the primary cause for the protracted orthographic discussions which erupted periodically in Bulgaria in this period.” (Guentcheva 1999: 357) The codifiers of the Macedonian standard orthography thus had to chart a course that would provide Macedonian with an alphabet that satisfied the goals of a national alphabet but was, as far as possible, politically neutral. Moving in one direction – north to Serbian Cyrillic or east to Bulgarian Cyrillic – led to charges of Serbianisation or Bulgarianisation; charges that have been echoed in the decades since codification.¹³

On 26 November 1944,¹⁴ the first day the committee charged with establishing an alphabet convened, discussion focused on the problematic letters, namely how to encode the dorso-palatals /k/ and /g/; palatal /nj/; clear /l/; palatal glide /j/; affricates /dz/ and /dž/ and schwa /ə/. Milka Balvanlieva, a teacher from Štip, proposed using Vuk’s Serbian Cyrillic since this would create a “Yugoslav alphabet”.¹⁵ Venko Markovski, a member of ASNOM, was first to challenge this notion, raising the importance of an alphabet that had a more specifically national character. He pointed to the representation of the following phonemes as problematic: /nj/, /l/, /k/ /g/; /dz/, and /ə/. He proposed Vuk’s letters for the phonemes /lj/ and /nj/, i.e. ⟨љ⟩ and ⟨њ⟩ respectively. In addition, special signs would be designed for the dorso-palatals that would be unique, but consistent with Vuk’s Cyrillic. He

12. Serbian Cyrillic includes the following special characters: ⟨ђ, ј, љ, њ, ћ, џ⟩ and excludes ⟨й, щ, ъ, ь, ю, я⟩ found in Bulgarian (and Russian, though not all with the same value, e.g. Russian voiceless alveo-palatal /ç:/ and Bulgarian affricate /št/ are both represented by ⟨ш⟩). Both Serbian and Bulgarian alphabets share: ⟨а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, и, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, у, ф, х, ц, ч, ш⟩.

13. For an interesting discussion of script shift and controversies surrounding encoding in Cyrillic or Latin, see Sebba (2006), which also contains an interesting discussion of Eira’s (1998) treatment of ideologies and alphabet selection.

14. Detailed analysis of the Congress’s discussion on alphabets can be found in Risteski (1988) and Friedman (1993, 1998), which also contains a critique of Risteski. For the purposes of this paper, I will cite some of the more salient parts of the discussion as cited in the stenographic notes used by both Risteski and Friedman.

15. See Friedman (1993) for details on each of the members of the Commission.

proposed that ⟨κ⟩ and ⟨r⟩ be written with a small circle reminiscent of the lower part of the front jer from which its softening derived: **К Р Н Љ**.

Mirko Pavlov Neproštenski expressed support for an alphabet that would follow, as far as possible, the phonetic principle and Vuk's maxim: Write as you speak and read as it is written.¹⁶ He, too, maintained that the Macedonian alphabet had to have its own features that would give it a recognizable Macedonian character. He supported the proposal for the dorso-palatals to be composed of ⟨κ, r⟩ with the addition of a small circle. He supported use of the Serbian graphemes ⟨љ, њ⟩ for /nj/, /l/. He also felt it important to keep the grapheme ⟨s⟩, since, he noted, for a sound to be preserved, no matter how marginal, there needed to be a letter for it. Further, to increase the uniqueness of the Macedonian alphabet, he proposed using ⟨i⟩ rather than ⟨j⟩ for the palatal glide. He also included a letter for schwa.

Note that the different graphemes for the dorso-palatals /k/ and /g/, the graphemes ⟨ṭ, ḳ⟩, in different form, will shift position in the final alphabet following ⟨д⟩ for /d/ and ⟨т⟩ for /t/ respectively, to signify their development as reflexes of *dj and *tj, an order that also corresponds to Serbian alphabetic order. Risto Prodanov, who earlier in the day had been declared president of the conference, also confirmed the phonetic principle, each sound with its own letter, but he proposed a different solution for some sounds, e.g. a haček above ⟨κ⟩ and ⟨r⟩ be used for the reflexes of *tj and *dj to create specific graphemes for the dorso-palatals which, he argued, was a solution present in some old Macedonian texts. Such an alphabet, he argued, would be clear and readable. Further, he proposed that clear /l/ and /nj/ should also be written with haček to avoid confusion with the Serbo-Croatian symbols that represented palatals, a problem particularly relevant for the opposition of Macedonian /ṭ/ and clear /l/, rather than /l/ and /ḷ/ as in Serbian. He also supported the use of the grapheme ⟨ị⟩ rather than ⟨j⟩ because of its use in old Macedonian manuscripts. The grapheme ⟨ụ⟩ for /dʒ/ was noncontroversial since /dʒ/ was phonemic in Macedonian and the grapheme had existed in early Macedonian texts. For the affricate /dz/ he stated that since students would also be learning the Latin alphabet, the grapheme ⟨s⟩ might cause interalphabet confusion and therefore some new symbol should be devised. Others, such as Mihail Petrushevski, agreed with the diacritic solution and proposed either hačeks or accents on ⟨κ, r, л, н⟩.

This view was not unanimous, however. Venko Markovski, for example, argued for letters that could be written without having to lift the hand, i.e. to avoid diacritics. An interesting proposal was put forward by Risto Zografski, who

16. Guentcheva remarks (1999:358) that in discussions of Bulgarian orthography the phonetic principle was considered by a number of factions as too Serbian.

proposed taking the provisional alphabet (see Table 1) as a starting point and then determine whether or not those twenty-five letters were sufficient and, if not, add what was needed. It was necessary, he said, to create an alphabet that was suitable for the contemporary language, one needed to proceed with caution since, he stated (my translation) “It is better for us to make a grammatical mistake rather than a political one” (cited in Risteski 1988:263). He stated that decisions, such as the inclusion of a grapheme for schwa or adoption of the Serbian graphemes ⟨h̄⟩ and ⟨ḥ⟩ to encode Macedonian dorso-palatals would be read through a political prism and should be avoided.

Blaže Koneski played a fundamental role in the formation of the Macedonian standard language, Macedonian literature, and Macedonian intellectual life. He played the single most important role in shaping Macedonian. As Ilievski notes (2005:9) (my translation): “At first glance it appears that the introduction of the Macedonian alphabet and orthography, for which other nations needed several decades, were here, thanks to Koneski, resolved very quickly.” Ilievski notes further (2005:9) that the speed of resolution led to claims by Bulgarian linguists and others that the Macedonian language was created by political act rather than as a result of a century of work by leading figures such as Jordan Hadji Konstantinov, Partenij Zografski, Krste Misirkov and others.

Although Koneski left after the first day of this conference, he was to play the most significant role in the discussions that ensued over the course of the following year. During the early discussions, however, he proposed adhering closely to Vuk’s alphabet. He rejected the creation of new letters since there was no justification for the invention of new letters when different Cyrillic systems already had the means to encode the relevant sounds. It would, he noted, be a weak justification to design new letters for the sole purpose of differentiating the alphabets. European nations all used the Latin alphabet without political implications. Further, he argued, in the end, it would not matter which specific graphemes were selected, because, no matter how it was written, Macedonian would continue to be distinct from Serbian and Bulgarian. He felt that the graphemes ⟨ḥ, њ, ħ, џ⟩ were “in the tone and spirit of the Cyrillic alphabet” whereas diacritics were a feature of Latin writing systems not Cyrillic and further, there were historic antecedents to the use of these graphemes in Macedonian texts. Although he recognized that some would say the reason for selecting new graphemes was to avoid confusion with similar-looking graphemes used in Serbian to represent different sounds, he argued that variation in use of symbols was a feature of shared graphemes across many linguistic territories.

Koneski feared that new symbols proposed for the sounds that derived from historic *tj, *dj, for example, an accent over ⟨k⟩ and ⟨g⟩, or these letters combined with *jer*, e.g. ⟨к̄ь, г̄ь⟩ would be confusing for children learning the alphabet. He

believed there was no sound reason not to take Vuk's graphemes ⟨b, h⟩ since these graphemes had occurred in Macedonian works, including, for example the nineteenth century writings of Kiril Pejčinovik. While Koneski believed that the graphemes could be taken without cross-linguistic contact interference, the writers of the 2013 introduction to the new orthographic dictionary will, we shall see, hark back to this decision as a critical one.

The final substantial argument that Koneski proposed for his decision to adopt Vuk's alphabet was based on usage, namely: the majority of the Macedonian people at that time who were literate, were literate through knowledge of Vuk's alphabet and, he feared, the introduction of five or six new letters would be a source of confusion. He rejected the new letters proposed for the dorso-palatals and the archaizing use of ⟨i⟩ rather than ⟨j⟩, which was already in wide use. He accepted both ⟨u⟩ for /ɟ̥/ and ⟨s⟩ for /dz/.

One of the thorniest issues, and a recurring one, was the inclusion or exclusion of a grapheme for schwa. This controversy has been a recurring one and, as will be discussed briefly below, was reignited as a political issue after Macedonian independence in 1991.¹⁷ Koneski cogently argued – and he was supported by other members of the committee – that the west central dialects did not have phonemic schwa. Krume Tošeski agreed with Koneski on this, as well as on several other issues. He, too, cited pedagogical reasons for rejecting diacritics on ⟨κ⟩ and ⟨r⟩ to represent the dorso-palatals, claiming that such an orthography would be confusing to children because they were not graphically distinct, nor did he believe that schwa belonged in the alphabet. In contrast to Koneski, however, he, too, saw the political fall-out that would occur should there be a complete adoption of Vuk's Serbian Cyrillic, namely, Bulgarians would claim that Macedonians had been Serbianized through adoption of Serbian letters.¹⁸

Friedman (1993 and 1998) summed up the debate as follows: On purely linguistic and pedagogical grounds, Koneski advocated the adoption of Serbian Cyrillic, since the phonemic system of Macedonian, while different from that of Serbian, could be adequately represented by the same set of symbols. Others advocated the use of an acute accent (Petruševski) or haček (Prodanov, Petruševski). The First Commission's final resolution proposed that the Serbian letters ⟨j, u⟩ be adopted for /j, dž/, Church Slavonic ⟨s⟩ for /dz/, Bulgarian (and also Church Slavonic) ⟨ъ⟩ for schwa, and Markovski's new letters for /l, nj, k̑, g̑/, namely composed of Cyrillic ⟨л, н, к, г⟩ with the addition of a small circle derived from the

17. See Friedman (1998) and Kramer (2008).

18. Again one must note that Bulgaria was at this time also engaged in orthographic reform in light of political realignments following World War II.

letters ⟨л, н⟩ plus ⟨ь⟩ at the lower right of each letter except ⟨г⟩ where it is attached to the upper right (see figure 1 above).

The orthography proposed at the first meeting of the commission was rejected and a new committee was formed. Years later Koneski, in an interview (see Andreevski 1992: 131–171) discussed some of the controversies surrounding these initial discussions, controversies that focused mainly on the representation of clear /l/ and palatal /nj/ and the dorsopalatals. He noted that there was full agreement on the letters ⟨љ, њ⟩ (though see below). The dorso-palatals led to complex discussions (Andreevski 1991: 148). Koneski states here that his proposal to use graphemes used in Serbian was not due to any desire to move Macedonian orthography closer to Serbian, but rather these graphemes were among various other possible solutions all of which were problematic since they visually confused ⟨к, г⟩ with ⟨ќ, ђ⟩. Further, he had noted the use of the so-called Serbian symbols in Macedonian texts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He was, he says, working both as a linguist and phonetician, without considering how those symbols would be read in a wider political context. Yet, he says (p. 149) the use of diacritics may also have resulted from one of his suggestions since diacritics are used in linguistic transcription. Later in this same interview Koneski reiterated reasons for excluding schwa due to its absence in the dialects that form the Macedonian standard language.¹⁹

The political situation in the southern Balkans continued to develop as various players sought a solution to the so-called Macedonian question through a unification of Macedonian territories in a Balkan federation.²⁰ In the mid-forties this discussion focused on a more open linguistic and cultural exchange with Pirin, Macedonia.²¹ By the early spring of 1945 Koneski felt the significance caused by the delay in resolving the orthography question. The establishment of the alphabet would have great national and political significance because “this act would strengthen the path of the Macedonian nation towards an independent writing system, the first condition in the creation of a national culture” (Koneski 1945: 1). Koneski proposed a second alphabet, one that would not ultimately lead to the final resolution of the orthography, but one that reflected the possible political

19. Friedman (1998 and personal communication) states that Koneski also noted another significant problem with schwa was that it was the reflex of different items in different dialects (jers, back jus, vocalic l) and having a letter for it would contribute to confusion and impede the spread of the standard language.

20. This material is presented with different emphasis in Kramer 2015a.

21. For discussion of this period see, for example, Rossos 1991, Kramer 1999, and for the Bulgarian point of view of these facts, Guentcheva 1999.

and/or cultural rapprochement with Pirin.²² In this draft version, Koneski laid out three main principles (my translation):

First. In establishing our alphabet, central place is taken by custom, built up among our people with the use of various alphabets. This practice should be acknowledged.

Second. The political moment is also significant. We cannot view the question of language in general, and the alphabet in particular, as a strictly philological question, because it carries its own political content.

Third. In establishing our alphabet we must have a clear understanding of the phonologic system of our language. The central dialects form the base of our literary language. In terms of phonetics, in the composition of the phonologic system, here more than elsewhere, that which is laid out in the central dialects must be preserved clearly and must be expressed with a corresponding sound system.

This final point was the basis for excluding schwa in the alphabet, despite the fact that it occurred in dialects outside of those on which the literary language was based. No alphabet, Koneski stressed, can account for all nuances of pronunciation across varied dialects. Koneski summed up the debate that had unfolded on orthography as follows: The greatest concern had been how to write the soft consonants: whether or not to adopt the Serbian graphemes ⟨ђ, љ, њ⟩, or whether a special sign should be adopted for softening, either ⟨j⟩ or ⟨ь⟩ producing the digraphs: ⟨кј, гј, лј, нј⟩ or ⟨кь, гь, ль, нь⟩. In addition, should diacritics be used, or should new letters be created as members of the first commission had proposed. Here Koneski rejected out of hand the adoption of new letters reiterating his earlier argument that the Cyrillic alphabet already had means for designating softness. The use of diacritics was, he felt, a better solution, although it was generally a feature of Latin alphabets, and not a feature of alphabets used in Macedonia. The use of ⟨j⟩ in the provisional alphabet suffered, he felt, because the letter did not have a distinctive function. Here he proposed the introduction of front jer, ⟨ь⟩ as a better solution. Therefore, he saw the choice as either front jer, as employed in Bulgarian orthography, or the Serbian graphemes ⟨ђ, љ, њ⟩. Although Koneski favoured Vuk's Cyrillic since it was already well established in Macedonia, he felt that the single most important fact was the political moment. The full adoption of Vuk's

22. Koneski archive, 1.15 *Za azbukata* 'On the Alphabet'. It is not clear from the draft I consulted in the archives, nor the draft cited by Stojan Risteski, to whom this version was sent. I am deeply grateful to the Macedonian Academy of Sciences for providing access to the Koneski archives in 2013.

alphabet would (my translation) “give our enemies an argument that we had been Serbianized. Such an alphabet would, perhaps, distance the Vardar Macedonians from their Pirin brothers who should also be brought into the circle of Macedonian national culture. The alphabet must be an alphabet acceptable to the majority of the Macedonian people, both within the borders of Yugoslavia and outside of it.” Therefore, he proposed adoption of the combinations: ⟨кь, гь, ль, ль⟩ [sic; rather than њ]²³ to resolve the dilemma created by the factors listed above. While the adoption of these compromise combinations for the soft consonants would more clearly demonstrate the distinctness of Macedonian speech, and would give a greater distinctiveness to the Macedonian alphabet, Koneski still viewed such a solution as more impractical than the use of ⟨ћ, һ⟩ (Koneski, 1945: 2).

Koneski’s draft alphabet of early 1945 returned again to the problem of schwa, in particular in combination with vocalic /r/. Koneski rejected claims that schwa should be marked before vocalic r in words such as *srce* ‘heart’, *drvo* ‘tree’, and *brzo* ‘quickly’. Macedonian pronunciation, he argued, differed in this respect from Bulgarian. Macedonian, in particular the central and west central dialects, preserve syllabic /r/. To introduce schwa into the literary language solely on account of some Turkish words like *късмет* /kəsmet/ ‘fate’ that were falling out of use would, he argued, be groundless. This alphabet proposal made by Koneski in the early spring of 1945 has rarely been cited. Events propelled the discussion in new directions.

Later in the spring of 1945, a second commission on the alphabet met and proposed a new alphabet, one that was indeed a measured compromise of the first proposals. The proposal, submitted May 3, 1945, was accepted the same day and published in *Nova Makedonija* on the May 5, 1945 (for more detail see Friedman 1993, 1998; Risteski 1988). It rejects the full adoption of Vuk’s alphabet, it incorporates diacritics for the dorso-palatals, but places them in alphabetic position reflecting their historic development from *tj, *dj, and it rejects the use of schwa.

Trajko Stamatovski, in his book on the struggle for the establishment of the Macedonian language, recalled the pride Macedonians felt when reading the announcement of the resolution of the alphabet published in *Nova Makedonija* in May 1945 (my translation): “Those of us who had the good fortune to be living at the time of these events still recall the issue number 104 of the newspaper *Nova Makedonija* dated the 5, 6, and 7th of May, 1945, when on the second page with excitement and unconcealed pride we read the short ‘Resolution of the National

23. The draft proposal for this alphabet that I viewed in the archives of the Macedonian Academy was typewritten, however these characters were filled in by hand in ink. Here in the document there is an error and ль was inscribed twice, the second time clearly in place of њ.

Government of the Federal Republic of Macedonia concerning the Macedonian alphabet,' which consisted of only two articles: the first that the Macedonian alphabet has 31 letters (with a note on which are the hand-written and which the 'print' forms) and the second, that the resolution enters into effect from the day of publication. Following the text was a note by the editorial board that pointed out which letters were new, (ѓ, ќ, ѕ, љ, њ, џ), and that the newspaper (my translation) "due to technical reasons would not be able to switch immediately to using the new letters." Stamatovski points out the significance of the new alphabet for pedagogical purposes when he mentions that on the same page as the alphabet, the paper included a commentary by Nikola Minčev, then Minister of Education, entitled "Our Alphabet" (Stamatovski, 1986: 190).

In addition to the evolution of the letters cited above, mention must be made of the use of the apostrophe (introduced in the *Pravopis*, 'orthoeptic' dictionary of 1945) and the grave accent (introduced in the *Pravopis* of 1950). In the 1945 *Pravopis* the apostrophe was introduced with two functions. First (1945: 5) it was to be used to designate vocalic r in word initial position: *řžta* 'rye. Second, (1945: 6) it would be used to mark the mid-central vowel in dialectisms and Turkisms, e.g. *ќсмет* (literary *ќасмет*) 'fate'. Further modification to the orthography was made in 1950 (p. 29) with the addition of the grave accent. It is used to disambiguate two clitic pronouns. The feminine indirect object pronoun was now to be written ⟨*ѝ*⟩, to avoid confusion with the conjunction ⟨*и*⟩, 'and', and the first person plural direct object clitic was to be written ⟨*нѐ*⟩, to avoid confusion with the negative particle ⟨*не*⟩. The grave accent is also used (p. 32) to disambiguate the pronoun *сè* 'everything' from the third person plural *се* 'they are' and the reflexive partical. Further, the use of the apostrophe was restricted to its use in transcribing dialect forms (for further discussion comparing the 1945 and 1950 *Pravopis* see Friedman 1985: 42–44).

The alphabet quickly established itself in Macedonia, despite problems waiting for the development of the new typefaces, particularly for the dorso-palatals /*ќ*/ and /*ѓ*/. While most issues of Macedonian orthography were resolved by 1950, several issues remained repeating or remissive.

3. New controversies developing in the late Yugoslav period through independence

In the late 1980's a public debate on the status of the Macedonian language took place. In 1988 a series of articles was published, later collected into a thin volume: *Do We Speak Macedonian?* The authors of the volume criticized many aspects of contemporary language use, including the use of foreign borrowings that violate

Macedonian's ante-penultimate stress, e.g. *invalid* 'invalid', *kreditira*, etc. There were also complaints about continued borrowing from Serbo-Croatian. Later, when the new multi-party system began in the early nineteen-nineties, a campaign was launched by the anti-communist nationalists against the original codifiers from the 1940s, and the academic and political establishment, accusing them of doing precisely what the codifiers had feared the *external enemies of Macedonia would claim*, namely of Serbianising Literary Macedonian. Part of the party platform called for the reintroduction of the mid-vowel schwa.²⁴ The debate over schwa, which Friedman (2004: 202) had labeled as remissive, i.e. those that were resolved at an earlier stage of implementation but raised again after 1989 will be treated as resolved in the proposed new *Pravopis*.

In the spring of 2013 the initial proposal for the development of a contemporary *Pravopis* dictionary was reviewed by the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences. In the opening pages we see yet another attempt to settle on-going alphabet debates. The introduction revisits the decisions made by the codifiers nearly seventy years ago. The authors resolve some issues, while conceding defeat on others. The authors of the *Elaborat* write (2013: 2–3):²⁵ “We will not discuss each of the decisions made by the codifiers of the new Macedonian alphabet. We will just say that each of these graphemes has its own history, or, to put it more concretely: each of these symbols appears in the works of our authors during the entire course of the nineteenth century, as well as in those written by K. P. Misirkov.” A number of the difficult issues raised by the codifiers can be considered in Friedman's typology: resolved or non-salient. The inclusion of ⟨s, ш⟩ is uncontroversial. The use of diacritics for the dorso-palatals, the inclusion of ⟨j⟩, and the palatal ⟨њ⟩ can also be considered resolved and non-salient. The two issues that are both returning and remissive are issues concerning the orthographic encoding of the lateral sonorants and the inclusion or exclusion of schwa.

In the introduction to this new *Pravopis* the authors confirm that the Macedonian alphabet is based on the principle of one letter per sound. They note that the codifiers produced a shallow orthography, free of many of the letters that had been used in earlier centuries. The new spelling outlined in this introduction

24. Readers interested in further remarks on this period should consult Friedman 1998: 46–47 and 2004: 202. A full discussion of the political context of this debate is outside the scope of this paper.

25. I am deeply indebted to the authors for presenting me a copy of this proposal and for colleagues both at the Institute for the Macedonian Language and the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences for their support of my work and for providing me with access to the MANU archives.

confirms decisions of the 1945 commission for the dorso-palatals, reflexes of *tj and *dj; the graphemes ⟨ш, ш⟩, as well as the graphemes ⟨л, л⟩. What is interesting to note is that the authors recognize that each decision made by the codifiers was made based on both historical patterns of use as well as the particular historical moment in which the alphabet was codified. They note the decision to use diacritics for ⟨ќ, ѓ⟩ reflects the proposal Krste Misirkov suggested in his 1903 work *Za makedonskite raboti* (Jačeva-Ulčar, et al. 2013: 2). They applaud the decision to avoid the use of the Serbian graphemes ⟨ђ, љ⟩ which had been the subject of such intense debate. Significantly, they suggest that had the Serbian letters been used, the graphemes may have affected Macedonian pronunciation in ways similar to what happened with the phonemic confusion caused by the adoption of the grapheme ⟨л⟩ for the clear lateral sonorant. As mentioned earlier, the opposition in the Macedonian standard language has been described as dark (velarized) /ɫ/ vs. clear /l/. This opposition is neutralized before front vowels and /j/ where only clear /l/ occurs. In Macedonian orthography, distinctive clear /l/ is represented by the grapheme ⟨л⟩, whereas elsewhere ⟨лј⟩ is written. Under influence of Serbian and the Skopje dialect, however, there has been a tendency to pronounce both the grapheme ⟨л⟩ and series ⟨лј⟩ as a palatal /ɫ/ as in Serbian. They believe that the adoption of the Serbian grapheme has had a broad impact on Macedonian pronunciation. This they consider to be a unique instance in which a grapheme has dictated pronunciation (Jačeva-Ulčar, et al 2013: 3). Had Serbian ⟨ђ, љ⟩ for /tʃ, tɕ/ been adopted, the pronunciation of the Macedonian palatals may also have been affected, particularly during the decades of wide bilingualism.

The question of the inclusion of schwa can be discerned in the note contained in a shaded box stating that there will be no addition of letters (Jačeva-Ulčar, et al 2013: 4). Macedonian Cyrillic has 31 letters and there will be no change, i.e. because schwa is not phonemic in the standard language there will be no schwa grapheme.²⁶

4. Latinisation: New controversies arise

In the preceding sections we have seen how the Macedonian alphabet was codified in the context of competing political alliances. The conflicts between members of the commission and state powers led to a series of proposals and

26. The text of the shaded box reads (my translation): “In the updated *Pravopis* there is no addition of new letters. Macedonian Cyrillic has 31 letters and there is no change in the forms of the letters (neither in the printed or handwritten ones).”

compromises. The alphabet that arose out of those discussions solved many issues and produced an alphabet that has, for the most part, met the needs of a population that needed to promote literacy, a rate now above 90%. A number of the original alphabet controversies became topics of internal conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s; the absence of schwa can be deemed remissive, the dorso-palatal letters are resolved and now nonsalient. But there are new issues arising. Another conflict is brewing: the role of the Latin alphabet in the linguistic landscape. Article 7 of the 1991 Macedonian Constitution, which was reformulated in Amendment 5 in 2001, in addition to providing for minority languages and alphabets, establishes the Macedonian language, written in the Cyrillic alphabet as the official language of the Republic of Macedonia. Issues have arisen not only about the use of the Latin alphabet in the public space, but also the form that alphabet should take. The debates concerning the use and form of the Latin alphabet is worthy of a separate work, but here some of the major issues will be highlighted. It is worth noting at the outset that the politics of Latin script bring back many of the political debates of seventy years ago. During the Yugoslav era the official transliteration system involved the use of diacritics.

It was a system based on the Serbo-Croatian Latin subsystem (see Kramer and Ivković 2012) with diacritics and adapted to the Macedonian phonological system:

Table 2. Transliteration system for Macedonian Cyrillic in Latin

a	б	в	г	д	ѓ	e	ж	з	s	и	j	к	л	љ	м
a	b	v	g	d	ǰ	e	ž	z	dz	i	j	k	l	lj	m
н	њ	о	п	р	с	т	ќ	у	ф	х	ц	ч	џ	ш	
n	nj	o	p	r	s	t	k	u	f	h	c	č	dž	š	

Magner (2001:24) anticipated wide-spread variation and Latinisation systems without diacritics particularly in internet Slavic, “From the beginning the Internet has posed a problem for communication among speakers (and writers) of different languages...In the case of the Slavic languages one solution that has evolved might be called “Internet Slavic”, wherein all diacritics are eliminated and, if Cyrillic is involved, transliteration without diacritics also occurs.” In the case of Macedonian, this has led to a number of competing systems not only driven by technical demands of keyboards and various texting devices, but also due to the very nature of multilingualism in Macedonia. Despite the continued use of the former Latinisation with diacritics, several new attempts to introduce non-diacritic

Latinisation have come into use.²⁷ For example, State Bulletin 3 of 2001 introduced a non-diacritic system to be used for proper names, e.g. for passports and other international documents:

Table 3. New transliteration system employing digraphs

a	б	в	г	д	ѓ	е	ж	з	s	и	j	к	л	љ	м
a	b	v	g	d	gj	e	zh	z	dz	i	j	k	l	lj	m
н	њ	о	п	р	с	т	ќ	у	ф	х	ц	ч	џ	ш	
n	nj	o	p	r	s	t	kj	u	f	x	c	ch	dj	sh	

Velkovska and Katarova (2010) in a blog on Macedonian scripts²⁸ wrote on the problem of competing transcriptions. They note the problems of Latinisation sending messages, posting on FaceBook, etc. They conclude that the graphemes ⟨ѓ, ќ, ч, ж, ш, s [sic], џ⟩ for /j, c, tʃ, ʒ, ʃ, dz, dʒ/ are problematic because the transcriptions with diacritics, ⟨k̑, g̑, č, ž, š, dz [sic], dž⟩ are incompatible with most keyboards and, therefore, individuals devise different, idiosyncratic solutions, for example, leaving off diacritics and presuming the reader can successfully decode which letter is intended, e.g. ⟨r, ř⟩ will both be transcribed as ⟨g⟩, ⟨s, џ⟩ will both be represented as ⟨dz⟩. There are, they note, transcriptions formed with various digraphs, e.g. ⟨gj, kj, cj, zj, sj, dz, and dzj⟩, and hybrid systems employing both ⟨j⟩ and ⟨h⟩: ⟨gj, kj, ch, zh, sh, dz, dj⟩ the system they support and which was, in fact, adopted as noted above.²⁹ Still, comments to the blog propose alternative solutions.

In the Macedonian linguistic landscape one finds numerous competing systems.³⁰ Not only are there systems with and without diacritics, but also transcriptions based on Albanian (and, rarely, Turkish) orthography adapted to the

27. Dučevska, A. (2005) covers a number of competing systems. Her table of last names (p. 24) demonstrates the problems in transcription, for example the name Марковиќ may appear as: Markovikj, Markovik, Markovic, or Markovich. Ivković and Kramer (2012) have also documented a wide variety of bottom-up approaches using various digraphs, no diacritics, and Albanian script. See below for further discussion on Albanian transcription.

28. Lektor 18.10.2010 by Biserka Velkovska and Maja Katarova lektormk.blogspot.ca/2010/10/blog-post_18.html

29. Comments to the blog range from rejecting all attempts at transcription, to proposals for various other idiosyncratic solutions.

30. See Kramer, Friedman, and Ivković (2014) for a study on linguistic landscapes in Skopje.

Macedonian phonological system, e.g. a sign in the market area of Skopje reads: “Duqanot se izdava pod kiria” for Macedonian “Дуќанот се издава под кирија” ‘Store for Rent.’ The writer has employed Albanian ⟨q⟩ for ⟨ќ⟩ and has omitted ⟨j⟩ between ⟨и⟩ and ⟨а⟩ thereby violating one of Macedonian’s spelling rules that requires ⟨j⟩ in this context. Elsewhere in the *čaršija* or market area, the use of transliteration with diacritics is common. In some respects Albanian Latin transcription works quite well. The opposition in the lateral sonorants is encoded ⟨ll⟩ vs ⟨ll̥⟩, the affricate /dʒ/ is transcribed as the digraph ⟨xh⟩, the voiceless dorso-palatal is transcribed as ⟨q⟩ and the voiced as the digraph ⟨gj⟩. Both Albanian and Turkish use ⟨ç⟩ to represent /tʃ/. While it has a number of positive features as a transcription for Macedonian, it is as politically unfeasible as the wholesale adoption of Vuk’s Serbian Cyrillic was in the nineteen-forties.

Many of the script choices are driven by the Latin-based scripts of Albanian and Turkish. Macedonia has long been known for its linguistic diversity and recent laws have affected the presence of multiple languages in the landscape. In other words, Latinisation is driven by both internal linguistic factors, wide-spread use of English in advertising, as well as technical issues mentioned earlier. Ljupčo Stefanovski (2002:222) points to the dramatic changes in language policy when Macedonia became independent. As he notes (my translation): “In the euphoria of the newly created state overnight the status of the Macedonian language increased and it became the sole official language in the Republic of Macedonia. At the same time, the second most widely-used language in the Republic of Macedonia, Albanian, to a great extent lost its former status.” This change led inevitably to language conflict and demands for some type of rebalancing. The 1998 laws governing the use of Macedonian (*Služben vestnik*, 5/98 30 Jan. 1998), Cyrillic script, and minority languages and the changes to those laws following the Ohrid Framework Accord of 2001 were, as Jovan Bliznakovski (2011) notes, reforms predominantly tied to use of minority languages in public domains. Because Albanian is the only minority language that reaches the 20% threshold there is, in Bliznakovski’s terms: a three-tiered approach to language rights: Macedonian, Albanian (over 20%) and others. This layering of languages is evident in the displays of signage.

While debate continues on whether the transcription of Macedonian into Latin script should continue to use diacritics, or whether transcription with digraphs is preferred³¹ no single script has become dominant, but the globalizing pressure of Latin script has led to both top-down and bottom-up solutions leading to a chaotic situation with multiple competing solutions. This led one critic, Daut

31. In particular after the adoption of ICAO 9303 for use in passports and other international documents.

Dauti, to publish in the Macedonian newspaper *Dnevnik* a critique of the current situation with Latin script. The issues he raises are reminiscent of the political context of an earlier era when linguistic and political solutions were balanced to find the correct Macedonian solution. His opening remarks, for example, mention that the leader of the Liberal party proposed that a solution should be found for Macedonian Latin transliteration, a solution that would be made within a Macedonian linguistic context since any solution would impact on inter-ethnic cooperation. In particular ways, one needed to seek script solutions that could lead to a closer relationship with Albanians who also use Latin script. Dauti refers to the current linguistic landscape and present solutions as either no-solution, or amateurish chaos due to the numerous competing transcriptions.

The debates concerning Latinisation are not new, and they are not restricted to the new Internet era, although electronic interfaces have made such debates more salient, and such debates are not limited to Macedonia. Every non-Latin script system is under global pressure to Latinize. Bernal (2007:172) in his article on orthographic debates in inter-war Greece when a Latinisation system was proposed writes:³² “Orthography is probably the most popular linguistic topic in any speech community for both its technical and symbolic character. In short, orthography can be defined as ‘a kind of bridge leading from the spoken norm to the written, or – more precisely – a set of rules enabling a member of a given language community to transpose his spoken utterances into the corresponding written ones.”

5. Conclusion

The debates on Macedonian orthography over the past century have reflected the dynamics of a changing political and linguistic landscape. Current debates on the role that Latin characters play and the best transcription system for a multi-lingual society in an electronic age echo many of the concerns the codifiers had in the mid-twentieth century. Balancing the technical, linguistic, political, and symbolic power of different solutions is not easy. The codifiers of the 1940s produced an alphabet that has served Macedonian well and was, for the most part, an elegant compromise. The new *Pravopis* recognizes that some of the original decisions had a lasting impact on Macedonian. How script conflict in the current century resolves, particularly the competition between Cyrillic and Latin scripts, will be an interesting story, one that is being told in myriad variations around the world.

32. For discussion of current debates on Internet Greek, see Androutsopoulos (2009).

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