

# БІЛЯ ДЖЕРЕЛ СЛОВ'ЯНСЬКИХ КУЛЬТУР

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## THE OVERVIEW OF STUDIES ON UKRAINIAN-BELARUSIAN TRANSITIONAL DIALECTS

У статті в хронологічному й тематичному порядку окреслено стан досліджень українсько-білоруських діалектних контактів, зокрема говорів перехідного типу. Це перший крок у подальшому дослідженні східнослов'янських міждіалектних контактів. Особливу увагу автор приділив українсько-білоруським перехідним говорам у північно-західному ареалі Чернігівської області.

**Ключові слова:** українська мова, білоруська мова, Полісся, міждіалектні контакти, перехідні діалекти, стан досліджень.

В статье в хронологическом и тематическом порядке очерчен статус исследований, посвящённых теме украинско-белорусских диалектных контактов, особенно говорам переходного типа. Это первый шаг для дальнейшего исследования восточнославянских междиалектных контактов. Особое внимание автор уделит украинско-белорусским переходным говорам в северно-западном ареале Черниговской области.

**Ключевые слова:** украинский язык, белорусский язык, Полесье, междиалектные контакты, переходные диалекты.

Studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian *transitional dialects* have experienced alternated phases of linguistic interest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a number of reasons, e. g. peculiar ethno-geographic position of these dialects, predominance of national orientated dialectological research etc.

In this article we intent to provide a chronological outline of the studies devoted to the problem of Ukrainian-Belarusian *transitional dialects*, with particular attention to those contributions on the transitional dialects spoken in the area north-west of the town of Černihiv. The concept of

«transitional dialects» will not be addressed to in this paper since it will object of a separate discussion.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polissia, dialect contacts, transitional dialects, literature review.

## Introduction

Studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects have gone through alternated phases of linguistic interest. This can be easily explained if one thinks of the material difficulties involved in carrying out empirical research, fundamental for the dialectologist and sociolinguist, in large peripheral areas, often subject to geo-political, military and border modifications.

Early linguistic-dialectological accounts on the vernacular(s) spoken along the Ukrainian-Belarusian, and one could add Russian, border areas go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless the most significant studies on the issue of Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects were only developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this article we intend to outline, within a chronological-thematic framework, the most salient contributions devoted to this topic. This will be a useful starting point for further research in the field of East Slavic (Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian) language and dialect contacts.

Moreover the large territory situated between Ukraine and Belarus' (Polissia) is of paramount importance also for ethno-linguistic and historic-archaeological research since it was allegedly the first settlement area of Proto Slavic people at the beginning of the first millennium of our era, and earlier. Although the zone of our interest is situated within the larger ethno-geographic Polissian region, contributions dedicated to dialects spoken in western Polissia, e. g. Klimčuk [15], and the problem of a presumed Polissian «micro-language» on a western Polissian base, e. g. Duličenko [36, c. 119–131], will be omitted in the present contribution.

## 1. Early Accounts on Northern Ukrainian (Černihiv) Vernaculars

Chronologically, the question of Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects was already touched upon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Šafons'kyj (1740–1811). In his «Description of the Governorate of Černihiv» (1786), besides valuable material about ethnographic and economic aspects of this region, the scholar provided an account of the dialectal partition of the Cossacks' State or Hetmanate (ukr. – Het'manščyna). He divided the Northern or East Polissian Ukrainian dialects spoken in the Hetmanate into three groups:

1. The first group or North-western was spoken in the territory between the rivers Desna, Iput', Sož and Dnipro;

2. The second group that he considered the authentic Černihiv vernaculars and the best form of «Ukrainian» were spoken in the area between the rivers Desna, Sejm, Sul and along the Dnipro (Dnepr) down to Kyiv, including the towns of Krolevec', Korop, Konotop, partially Hluhiv and Lubny;

3. The third group was characterized as a coarser kind of vernacular.

He did not assign to the first group any special literary-linguistic value. Nevertheless he noted its similarity to Belarusian dialects<sup>1</sup>, claiming that only in the most northern parts of the Governorate of Černihiv, i. e. in the areas of Suraz'k, Mhins'k, Starodub etc., one could speak of dialects with a Belarusian base; whereas south of this line one had to do with a kind of transitional dialects from Ukrainian to Belarusian. The latter subgroup coincides with the area of my initial research interest. According to Šafons'kyj, the territory of the transitional dialects had to be placed between the rivers Dnipro and Desna. On the other hand, authentic Ukrainian vernacular was spoken in the territory between the rivers Desna, Sejm and Sula. Šafons'kyj's viewpoint was later shared by Šyšac'kyj-

Illič and Tyščyns'kyj who studied some specific groups of local dialects (ukr. – *Hrupa hovirok*) in the Černihiv area.

The linguist and ethnographer Mychalčuk (1840–1914) in his «Narečija, podnarečija i hovory Južnoj Rossii v svjazi s narečijamy Galyčiny» [21] placed the Polissian 'vernacular' (cf. – *полѣшкое нарѣчіе*) in the northern, wooded and, largely, marshy area of the Governorate of Černihiv down to the river Desna. The latter functions as a real border with what he defined the 'Ukrainian vernacular' proper. He first supplied Ukrainian dialectology with a linguistic description of the main dialectal features of Ukrainian dialects and those spoken in the Polissian area, defining the dialects dislocated north of the Desna as a separate group of the larger north Ukrainian or Polissian dialectal grouping. In his terminology they were defined «Siverian subdialects» (ukr. – *sivers'ke pidnariččja*).

## **2. Studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian Transitional Dialects: first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karskij, in his article on «The question of differentiation of Russian vernaculars» (*K vo-prosu o razgraničenii russkich narečij*, 1905) fixed the border between Ukrainian and Belarusian vernaculars along the line joining the towns of Ljubeč, Ripky, through the villages of Krasnovs'ke and Mutyčev and along the river Snov in the north. This interpretation of the dialectal material contrasted with the view expressed earlier by villages of Krasnovs'ke and Mutyčev and along the river Snov in the north. This interpretation of the dialectal material contrasted with the view expressed earlier by Šafons'kyj.

A seminal work in the field of 'Russian' (east Slavic) dialectology<sup>2</sup> was carried out by the Moscow Dialectological Commission (1915)<sup>3</sup>. This team of dialectologists opposed the Great Russian dialectal groups to the Belarusian and Little Russian (= Ukrainian)

ones. The interaction on the language borders of these large dialectal groups led to the formation of transitional dialects, i.e. on the base of one dialectal group appeared the differences caused by the influence exerted by an adjacent dialect. The Moscow dialectological commission [7, c. 2–3] also introduced the distinction between transitional and mixed dialects<sup>4</sup>, distinguishing five groups of transitional dialects:

- 1) Transitional dialects on a northern Great Russian base shifting towards south great Russian vernacular;
- 2) Transitional dialects on northern Great Russian towards Belarusian;
- 3) Transitional dialects on Belarusian basis towards south Great Russian;
- 4) Transitional dialects on a Little Russian base towards Belarusian = Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects;
- 5) Transitional dialects on a Little Russian base towards south Great Russian.

Points four and five correspond to those dialectal groups of transitional dialects based on 'Little Russian'; apart from these two macro subdivisions one can distinguish smaller transitional areas. Besides the well-known dialectal map of the 'Russian' language in Europe (still in use in many handbooks of Russian dialectology), each section of the book is dedicated to a dialectal subdivision. The features distinguishing the Polissian dialects from the rest of Ukrainian (south little Russian) basically correspond to the contemporary distinctive traits with a few remarks of surprising modernity, e. g. the fact that the diphthongs are distinctively kept among the older generation [7, c. 69]. Worth pointing out is the fact that the members of the dialectological commission shared the interpretation given by Karskij, confirming the line separating Ukrainian and Belarusian dialects along the axis Ljubeč – Ripky – Horodnja, according to which the dialects spoken north of this line were classified as Belarusian. They wrote: «*In the governorate of Černihiv, the*

*area around Novhorod-Sivers'kyj is of transitional type with the exception of its north-western part that has to be assigned to the Belarusian language» [7, c. 72].*

The research carried out by Kurylo in 1924 (*«Fonetyčni ta dejaki morfolohični osoblyvosti sela Chorobryčiv»*) was completely dedicated to the phonetic characteristics of the local dialect spoken in the village of Chorobryčiv (Černihiv). In her groundbreaking monograph for the time, the dialectologist, besides a brief description of the historical-geographic background of the village, made a series of relevant 'sociolinguistic' observations. She distinguished between the language used by men and that of women. The male speech displayed a more evident Russian influence, if compared to that of the female [16, c. 4]. Morphological description of this local dialect – which finds correspondences in the contemporary northern dialects with transitional character – is rather limited in her work; no syntax is dealt with. Kurylo seemed not to be interested in the transitional character of this local dialect since she never mentioned it. The theoretical apparatus of her work relied on German linguistic sources which were predominant at that time in Slavic studies.

Hancov [5, c. 262–280] with his *«Dialectal boundaries in the Černihiv Region»* (*«Dialektni meži na Černyhivščyni»*) signed a subsequent milestone in this field. In his contribution he underlined on a few occasions the impossibility of tracing a concrete line between Ukrainian and Belarusian dialect groups because *«this border actually does not exist»*. There is a vast territory of transitional dialects everywhere which, to a greater or lesser extent, combine with the specific characteristics of either one of the two language groups [5, c. 262]. The constant contact of the Ukrainian (Polissian) and Belarusian language territory, their ancient cultural and political relations etc., is similar to the situation between Bulgarians and Serbians. The drawing of a reliable line between Ukrainian and Belarusian dialects is extremely difficult just

as it is in south Slavia. Here, we have a vast territory of transitional dialects which, to various degrees, combine characteristic features of one of these languages with those of the other. The only thing that a dialectologist can do is to establish the areas of diffusion of more or less 'homogeneous' transitional dialects, after he has determined their main features. Eventually, Hancov himself seemed to incline for procrastination of a systematic research on Ukrainian-Belarusian dialect borders to future dialectological tasks: *«Справа систематичного дослідження українсько-білоруського узграниця і встановлення діалектної межі – цілком, ще завдання майбутнього?»* [5, с. 268].

Buzuk<sup>5</sup> also occupies a special place in Belarusian-Ukrainian dialectology and language geography. In the second half of the 1920s he conducted a series of dialectological expeditions both in Belarus' (regions of Minsk, Vitebsk, Mazyr etc.), and in Ukraine, e. g. Černihiv. His numerous contributions on Belarusian dialectology and its relation to other Slavic languages, particularly Ukrainian, laid the foundation for the future development of the «Atlas of the Belarusian Language» (1928). Buzuk's linguistic observations on the question of Belarusian-Ukrainian transitional dialects still offer valid food for thought today. He criticized the theory of the genealogical tree as unsatisfactory to study and clarify the relations between Slavic languages, supporting the wave theory to explain differentiation and similarities in Slavic languages [cf. 38, c. 31]. He suggested an innovative approach to the study of east Slavic dialect contacts, assuming a probable Polissian territorial unity and greater linguistic homogeneity, if certain geo-political and cultural conditions had been met, as could have been the existence on this territory of a unifying cultural-political centre etc. [3]. He also underlined that the attribution of transitional dialects to one or the other language, on the basis of some specific linguistic features, is more a criterion of people's self-identification, rather than a univocal linguistic principle. For this reason, he evaluated the fact that

in her approach to the dialect spoken in the village of Chorobryčiv, Kurylo never mentioned the degree of transitivity of this area. To this purpose he lamented the fact that some linguists, basing their conclusions on a few dialectal features, tend to attribute a local dialect to either language, along the axis of transitivity. A description of the most distinctive phonetic and morphological characteristics of those transitional dialects spoken between western Polissia (Poland-Belarusian-Ukrainian borders) and up to the river Prypjat' also belongs to Buzuk [4, c. 3–12]. Moreover a relevant remark about the fact that «*dialectal boundaries are liable to changes in course of time and a researcher should, first and foremost, concentrate on the contemporary dialectal evolution*»<sup>6</sup>, can be found in his article «on the characteristics of southern Belarusian dialects and transitional to Ukrainian» (Cf. «*Da charaktarystyki dyjalekta ŭ paŭdnëva belaruskich i perachodnych da ŭkrainskich*»).

### **3. Studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian Transitional Dialects: second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet (Ukrainian) dialectologists turned once again to the problem of Ukrainian-Belarusian 'transitional' dialects. Žylko, for example, dedicated a few significant articles to this issue [8, c. 9–20; 10, c. 26–38; 12, c. 147–153]. This topic also occurs a few times in his handbooks on Ukrainian dialectology [9, c. 31–34; 11, c. 147–157]. Nonetheless a milestone in studies on transitional Ukrainian-Belarusian dialects (in the area north-west of Černihiv) is represented by his article «*Perechidni hovirky vid ukrajins'koji do bilorus'koji movy v pivnično-zachidnych rajonach Černihivščyny*». In this contribution Žylko [8, c. 9–20], besides a reliable accounts of the most authentic dialectal features involved in this area, a valid starting point even for contemporary research, reached the conclusion that the dialects spoken north-west of the town of Černihiv, particularly in the area between Ljubeč and



Ripky, are to be assigned to a Ukrainian base. In his view, these local dialects still belong to the northern Ukrainian group even though they show a certain degree of variation and intrinsic differentiation if compared to the generalized Ukrainian vernacular spoken by the majority of the population (*zahal'nonarodna mova*). On this basis one may note changes owing to successive overlapping which can approximate these dialects either towards Belarusian or, more rarely, towards Ukrainian<sup>7</sup>. Notwithstanding Žylko's accurate description of the most distinctive dialectal features, the chronology or periodization he had in mind when he spoke of 'successive changes' still remains an open issue today. Yet, Žylko's salient works still constitute a valid and an essential framework for a contemporary approach to Ukrainian dialectology. In his later contributions the descriptive material appears somehow reiterative. In «*Paleskia havorki ukrainskaj movy*», for example, he does not go beyond the traditional historical-dialectal problematic concerning the language contact in the Polissian area between Ukrainian and Belarusian, re-proposing an outline of the most idiosyncratic dialectal (mainly phonetic) features [12, c. 147–153]. The problem of a demarcation line between Ukrainian and Belarusian also attracted other scholars' attention. Nazarova [22, c. 124–140], for example, in her «*Ukrainsko-Beloruskaja jazykovaja granica v rajone nižnej Pripjati*», although not concerned with the area of our research interest, since she primarily focused on the zone of the Low Prypjat' (north-west of Čornobyl'), drew a few interesting parallels with the dialectal situation in the adjacent north west Černihiv area which can be useful for further argumentation. As to the similar problem of the Right-bank Polissian-Belarusian lexical isoglosses, considered as a form of language continuum, one needs to mention Nykončuk's theses [23, c. 83–86].

In the 1970s research on Belarusian-Ukrainian language dialect contacts found fertile ground for discussion also among Belarusian linguists; one can mention Jankova [32, c. 382–388], Scjacko [26, c. 66–67], Jaškin [34, c. 85–86] etc.

About two decades later, Bevzenko [2, с. 10–12] underlined the existence of an ample stripe of mixed dialects of transitional type («широкая полоса смешанных, переходных говоров») along the Ukrainian-Belarusian language border, whose genetic basis is of difficult determination, since it implies a series of related problems. In his opinion, the research carried out by the Moscow dialectological commission and also the Atlases of the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages have not substantially modified the conclusions suggested by Karskij. The latter, in his classification, only adopted a few phonetic criteria (the kind of pronunciation) of the reflexes of etymological [e], [i], [y] and the position of the consonants before these vowels. According to this criterion, the speech with a Belarusian base presents a palatalization of the consonants in front of the above mentioned vowels. Bevzenko [2, с. 10–11] tried to introduce a few more phonetic criteria to those originally proposed by Karskij. They can be undoubtedly useful for the dialectologists working in the Prypjat' area; however they do not substantially modify the representation of the group of transitional dialects spoken in the north-west Černihiv area cf. Bevzenko [1, с. 280]. Therefore the demarcation line proposed by Bevzenko, especially if compared with Karskij's classification, did not mark a significant revolution for those dialectologists working in the above mentioned area. Besides a strictly phonetic classification, additional morph syntactic and lexical criteria would have also been fundamental for a better evaluation of these dialects. Nevertheless, at the time when Bevzenko was writing wrote, morphosyntactic and lexical data were either limited or unavailable owing to the lack of specific studies.

#### 4. Contemporary Studies

In recent years, Popova [24, с. 80–117], partially basing her argumentations on Nazarova's previous writings <sup>8</sup>, highlighted the

specificity of the Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional area. The issue of long-lasting inter-dialectal contacts in the formation of the Ukrainian-Belarusian area is also addressed to in her contribution. However Popova, like her forerunner, mainly concentrates on the right bank Polissian dialects spoken along the Prypjat' area. Her remarks about innovative tendencies in these dialects, along with the preservation of archaic features, consequence of their peculiar historical development, is not new in these kinds of studies.

An attempt at systematizing some of the contributions devoted to dialectal lexis in the transitional areas can be found in the overview «*Ukrajins'ko-bilorus'ki movni kontakty jak ob'jekt linhvistyčnoho doslidžennja*» [6, c. 197–199]. The author acknowledges the importance of studying the relation between language and dialect contacts in the intersection point of genetic related language such as Ukrainian and Belarusian. Apart from a synthetic outline of the most salient works dedicated to the problem of Ukrainian-Belarusian dialect contact, especially from a lexicological point of view, Hrymaševyč underlines the «linguistic entirety» of the Polissian territory, emphasizing the importance of Ukrainian-Belarusian lexical isoglosses<sup>9</sup>. In the author's opinion, the study of these isoglosses is significant for understanding the ancient mutual relations between the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages. Ethnogenetic and etymological research would not be complete without taking into account these lexical isoglosses.

In «Lexicographic Traditions of eastern Polissia» Ščerbin [30, c. 155–160] also gave an outline, within the framework of the Belarusian lexicographic tradition, of the main lexicographic sources dedicated to east Polissia. Among the latter one can mention the following dialectal dictionaries: «*Slovnyk dialektnoji leksyky seredn'oho i schidnoho Polissja*» [17]; «*Slovnyk polis'kych hovoriv*» [18], «*Leksika Poles'ja: materialy dlja poleskogo dialektneho slovarja*» [27]; «*Leksika Palessja ŭ prastory i čase*» [19]; «*Dyjalektny sloŭnik Loeŭščyny*» [33] etc<sup>10</sup>.

The most recent and comprehensive work dealing with eastern Polissian dialectal lexis, particularly «on food denomination» is represented by the monograph of Turčyn [28, c. 346].

Also worth mentioning is the recent project of the Homel' State University which, in cooperation with other Ukrainian universities, aims at starting a joint Belarusian-Ukrainian research project entitled: «Conceptosphere of spiritual culture of eastern Polissia: folklore-ethnographic and ethno-linguistic research on the territory of Belarusian-Ukrainian borderlands»<sup>11</sup>. This should be mainly devoted to the study of the 'spiritual' culture of the eastern Polissian border area, investigating this region from an ethnographic, folkloric and ethno-linguistic point of view. Since the primary goal of the project is the realization of comprehensive expeditions to collect ethnographic and ethno-linguistic materials, one cannot *a priori* exclude a dialectal interest in the explored area with the recording of dialectal material. Cf. Stankevič [25, c. 191–197]. At present it is still premature to establish the concrete research development of this project.

Finally, one could mention a recent article by Del Gaudio [35, c. 35–54] in which a preliminary insight into the complex dialectal and sociolinguistic situation of the Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects spoken in the area north-west of Černihiv is given with the aim of creating the premises for further theoretical and empirical research.

## Conclusion

In this brief paper, as stated in the introductory lines, we examined the most significant contributions dedicated to the problem of Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects. This tradition of studies, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier, was chronologically divided into four periods. In the presentation it also emerged that the works of Žylko and Bevzenko (second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) are crucial for a future research focusing on the

transitional area situated in a kind of geographical 'triangle', placed north-west of the main regional town of Černihiv.

The last decade was likewise marked by a renewed interest in the dialects spoken across the Ukrainian-Belarusian border. The most recent approaches seem to prefer lexicological and lexicographic research. Worth mentioning is also the Belarusian-Ukrainian joint project promoted by the Homel' university with the intent of extending ethnological and ethnographic research in the Polissian border area. It must however be said that studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects still tend to be rather limited in number for a series of reasons which can be summed up in the following points:

- 1) Existence of political borders;
- 2) Limited financial means for carrying out international projects in this area;
- 3) National dialectal (protectionist) traditions which focus their research interest on dialects within the already established linguistic borders;
- 4) Last, but not least, the recent political-military conflict between Ukraine and Russia which, in geo-political terms, concerns the entire east Slavic area.

One can conclude this section by observing that the nucleus of research and linguistic analysis dedicated to the Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects in the area north-west of Černihiv mainly goes back to the 1950s; although a renewed interest can be noted in the late 1980s. Specific studies on this topic remain therefore scanty.

### COMMENTS

<sup>1</sup> Šafonskyj in his account described some of the typical phonetic features of Polissian dialects: *kon'*, *nož'*, *vol'*; in Hlaxiv and Nižen: *kun'*, *nuž'*, *vul'* and in Lubni: *kin'*, *niž'*, *vil'*. Cf. Shevelov [37, c. 11–12].

<sup>2</sup> The term Russian, at that time of the Moscow Dialectological Commission (cf. – Durnovo, Sokolov, Ušakov) was used as a kind of hyperonym to mean all

east Slavic dialects/vernaculars. It functionally indicated four national dialectal groups: 1) North Great Russian; 2) South Great Russian; 3) Belarusian; 4) Little Russian (= Ukrainian). Worthy of notice is the division between North and South Great Russian, according to which these two vernaculars constitute a unitary Russian language.

<sup>3</sup> The term *narečie* was widely used in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a synonym for language.

<sup>4</sup> I will return to the differentiation between ‘transitional’ and ‘mixed’ dialects in a separate paper dedicated to the terminological problems.

<sup>5</sup> Buzuk (1891–1937) graduated in philology at the University of Odessa where he also worked from 1920 until 1925 before being invited as professor to the Minsk State University, where he was forced by the Soviet regime to abruptly end his career. After his premature death, he was rehabilitated in 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Original quotation: «*Але дзеля таго, што граніцы моўных з’яўза 25-30 гадоў маглi перасунуцца, мы значна большую ўвагу зваралі на сучасныя доследы дыялектаў*».

<sup>7</sup> He wrote: «*Ми спеціально звернули увагу на найбільш помітні відмінні риси цих говірок від загальнонародної української мови і зіставляли їх з рисами білоруських говорів. <...> Говірки північно-західних районів Чернігівської області – Любецького і Ріпкинського – своїми основними диференційними рисами належать до північної діалектної групи, яка має значні відмінності (особливо морфологічні) від загальнонародної мови. Основа, на яку нашаровуються пізніші й сучасні зміни в говірках може бути або білоруська, або (рідше) українська, а зміни і напрями цих змін, спільні із загальнонародною мовою або з північними говорами української мови» [8, с. 20].*

<sup>8</sup> See: section 3.

<sup>9</sup> The problem of Belarusian-Ukrainian iso-lexis, along with a series of questions about Belarusian-Ukrainian interference, was already touched upon in the work «*Belaruska-ukrainskie izaleksy*» [32].

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account, see: Ščěrbin [30, с. 155–156].

<sup>11</sup> Original title: «*Концептосфера духовної культури Східного Полісся: фольклорно-етнографічне й етнолінгвістичне дослідження на території білорусько-українського порубіжжя*».

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## SUMMARY

Studies on Ukrainian-Belarusian *transitional dialects* have experienced alternated phases of linguistic interest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a number of reasons, e. g. peculiar ethno-geographic position of these dialects, predominance of national orientated dialectological research etc.

This can be easily explained if one thinks of the material difficulties involved in carrying out empirical research, fundamental for the dialectologist and the sociolinguist, in large peripheral areas, often subject to geo-political, military and border modifications.

Early linguistic-dialectological accounts on the vernacular(s) spoken along the Ukrainian-Belarusian, and one could add Russian, border areas go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless the most significant studies on the issue of Ukrainian-Belarusian transitional dialects were only developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this article we intent to provide a chronological outline of the studies devoted to the problem of Ukrainian-Belarusian *transitional dialects*, with particular attention to those contributions on the transitional dialects spoken in the area north-west of the town of Černihiv. The concept of «transitional dialects» will not be addressed to in this paper since it will object of a separate discussion.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polissia, dialect contacts, transitional dialects, literature review.