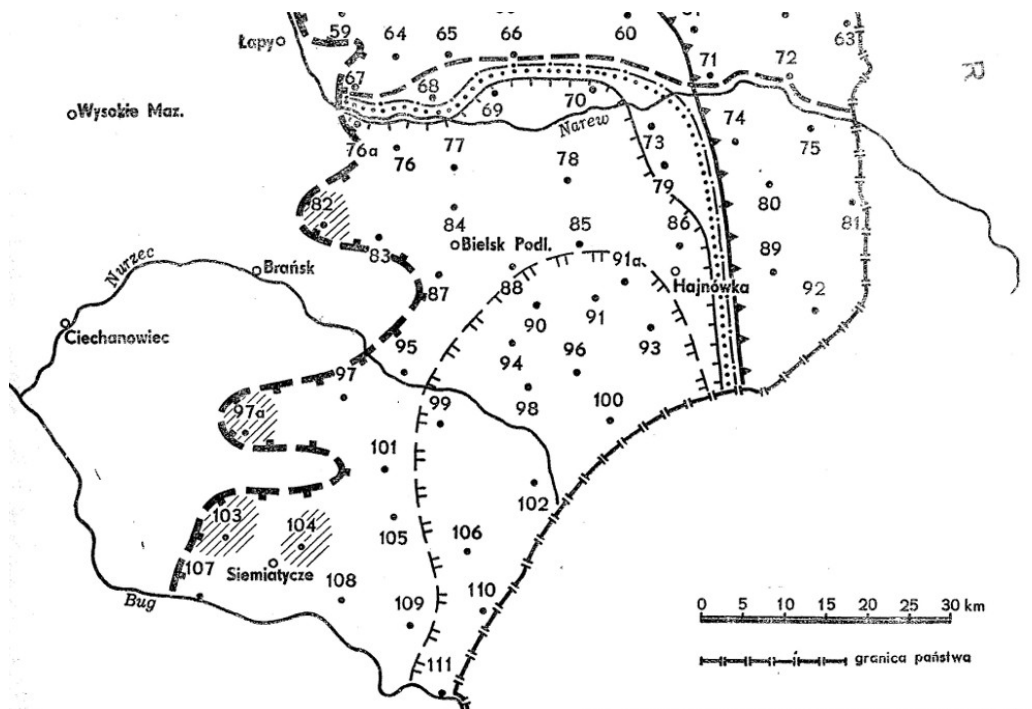


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The Development of a Latin Spelling System for Podlachian

The generic term Podlachian refers to a variety of East Slavic dialects that are spoken in the region between the Narew and Bug Rivers in the north-eastern part of Poland, which bears the historical name of Podlachia (*Podlasie* in Polish) and administratively belongs to the Podlachian Province (see Map 1). These vernacular varieties were classified by linguists in the past as either Belarusian-Ukrainian transitional local dialects, local dialects with Ukrainian traits, or Ukrainian local dialects (Glinka and Obrębska-Jabłońska, 1980).



Map 1

The paper deals with Podlachian as a standalone language and proposes for it a standardized Latin-based orthography that is “computer friendly” and takes into consideration the prevailing writing habits of Podlachian speakers, all of whom are familiar primarily with Polish orthography.

Podlachian speakers – who identify their ethnic identity as Belarusian or, to a much lesser extent, as Ukrainian – have so far produced at least half a dozen spelling systems for their vernacular, which are based on either Latin or Cyrillic alphabets or both. However, these orthographies do not always take into account that Podlachian has a different phonemic inventory and cannot be rendered satisfactorily in writing by means of either Belarusian or Ukrainian spelling rules.

Pietruczuk (1977) and Maksymiuk (2014) established that Podlachian has 39 phonemes. There are three diphthong vowels in Podlachian that do not appear in standard Belarusian or Ukrainian: [uo], [ie], [ie̯]. The diphthong vowel [uo] represents an individual phoneme, /uo/. The diphthong vowels [ie], [ie̯] are allophones of another phoneme, which can be denoted as /ie̯/: [ie̯] stands only after palatalized consonants while [ie] appears only after the non-palatalized Podlachian consonants [ʃ], [ʒ], [ʧ], [dʒ], [r]. The diphthongs [uo], [ie], [ie̯] in our orthography are represented by the graphemes ô, iê and ê respectively. These graphemes can be easily produced in a standard word processor with standard keyboard layouts.

The proposed orthography also rectifies errors and inconsistencies in spelling of the Podlachian consonants [p], [b], [f], [v], [m], which cannot be palatalized before [a], [u], [o], [e]; and in spelling of the consonants [ʃ], [ʒ], [ʧ], [dʒ], [r], which are non-palatalized in all positions. The former writing systems, which were modelled on either the Belarusian or the Ukrainian orthography, suggested the forbidden palatalization of Podlachian consonants.

Our standardized Podlachian orthography is presented to a wider readership on the Svoja.org website (<http://svoja.org/>), which has published Podlachian-language texts since March 2008. This orthography won support in early 2013 from the *Howorymo po swojomu* (in Podlachian: *We Speak Our Own Language*) community in Facebook, which adopted the symbols ô and ê to represent the Podlachian diphthongs in its written messages. The *Howorymo po swojomu* community, which promotes a wider use of Podlachian local dialects in public, counted more than 6,000 friends and followers in November 2014.