

Digraphs in Sava Mrkalj's Writing System

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Abstract

Sava Mrkalj is known for his role in the reformation of the writing system of the Serbian literary language, as he proposed the new Cyrillic writing system in his work *Salo debeloga jera libo azbukoprotres* [*Fat of the Thick Jer, or Alphabet Reshuffling*] (henceforth, *Fat of the Thick Jer*) (1810). Compared to the system established by Vuk Karadžić, Mrkalj's writing system is imperfect and transitional, because its alphabet system retains four digraphs (*дъ*, *лъ*, *нъ*, and *тъ*) against the phonemic principle of his reform. This article discusses how Mrkalj's alphabet system maintains consistency, reflecting his order of priority.

Keywords: Serbian language, Cyrillic letters, Sava Mrkalj, language standardization, orthographic reform.

1. Introduction

Modern standard Serbian orthography is based on the principle of one sound corresponding to one letter, and although exceptions exist, the language may be “read as it is written,” to use the words of Johann Christoph Adelung.¹ Nineteenth-century Serbian linguist, folklorist, and

¹ Johann Christoph Adelung (1732–1806), German grammarian and philologist. His main works include *Attempt at a Complete Grammatical-Critical Dictionary of the High German Dialect* (1774–1786) and a *German Grammar for*

man of letters Vuk Karadžić² is known for the modernization of the vernacular Serbian alphabet and the completion of the original form of its orthography, but it should be pointed out that Karadžić referred to Sava Mrkalj's writing system for his linguistic reform. This article will show how Mrkalj's writing system, put forth in *Fat of the Thick Jer* (1810), was linked to Karadžić's orthography. It will also explore the evolution of the Cyrillic writing system of the Serbian language, as well as the connections between members of the Serbian intelligentsia.

While the Latin writing system also has an important place in the overall history of Serbian orthography,³ Sava Mrkalj did not play a significant role in the reform of the Latin alphabet of Serbian, and therefore, this article will be limited to a discussion of the Cyrillic alphabet.

The orthographic reform of Mrkalj has been the subject of studies such as Vukosava Opačić-Lekić's *Sava Mrkalj: život i djelo* (1978), Gojko Nikoliš's *Sava Mrkalj: povijest o jednom stradalniku* (1980), and Milan Moguš and Josip Vončina's *Salo debeloga jera libo azbukoprotres Save Mrkalja* (1983). This article also refers to Miloš Okuka's study on Sava Mrkalj, which may be considered the most recent and thorough work on the topic. In his *Salo debeloga jera libo azbukoprotres Save Mrkalja u starom i novom ruhu*, after providing a detailed analysis of the contents of *Fat of the Thick Jer*, Okuka speaks highly of Mrkalj's contribution to Serbian orthography. However, in relation to the letter *h* and the digraphs that include the letter *ь*, this article proposes that the rationality

Prussian Schools (1781). His *Complete System of German Orthography, with a Small Dictionary for Pronunciation, Orthography, Derivation, etc.* (1788) deals with the subject of orthography, and his exhortation *Schreibe, wie du sprichst* 'Read as it is written' greatly influenced the reformer of Serbian, Vuk Karadžić.

2 Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) was a Serbian linguist, folklorist, and man of letters. He is known as the man who built the foundation of modern standard Serbian and who based the standard written language on the Ijekavian subdialect of the Štokavian dialect.

3 Karadžić created a list of Latin letters for Serbian in his *Serbian Dictionary* (1818). In the 1830s, Ljudevit Gaj prepared a Latin alphabet (Gajevica) with a one-to-one correspondence to Karadžić's Cyrillic letters, to which Đuro Daničić made revisions.

of Mrkalj's writing system, as well as its incompleteness and limitations, have not been fully discussed.

Therefore, after examining Mrkalj's theoretical basis for his alphabet reform and his selection of letters used at the time by the Church, this paper will consider the incompleteness of that writing system. Also, through a discussion of the strong influence that Mrkalj's writing system exerted on Karadžić, this paper will provide an attempt to identify what was responsible for the removal of this incompleteness.

2. A Short Biography of Mrkalj

Sava Mrkalj was born in 1783, in the village of Sjeniĉak (present-day Kordun, Croatia), located at the northern border of the fourth (Slunj) and fifth (Glina) sections of the Military Frontier.⁴ His school education began in the village of Plaški, located in the third (Ogulin) section of the Croatian Military Frontier. After working as a teacher in the town of Gospić in the Frontier's first (Lika) section, he received higher education in the subjects of philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, poetry, and foreign languages⁵ in Zagreb and Buda, and eventually obtained a university degree.

At the time, Serbian communities existed in Buda and Pest. Contemporaries such as Jovan Muškatirović,⁶ Sava Tekelija,⁷ Lukijan Mušicki,⁸

4 The Military Frontier was a line of defense against Islam and the incursions of the Ottoman Empire. Its origins go back to the 18th century, to the time of Maria Theresa. The Frontier stretched from the Adriatic along the Sava River to the Banat region, cutting through Slovenia, Croatia, and Dalmatia. This area was also advanced by the Austrian authorities, and between the 17th and 18th centuries, many Serbians settled here from Ottoman territories.

5 He mastered Russian Church Slavonic, Latin, German, and French, and possessed knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, Italian, and Hungarian.

6 Jovan Muškatirović (1743–1809), Serbian writer born in Senta, Vojvodina.

7 Sava Tekelija (1761–1842), a doctor of law born in Arad in the Habsburg Monarchy (present-day Romania).

8 Lukijan Mušicki (1777–1837), Serbian poet. He was an archimandrite (a member of the Orthodox clergy) at the Šišatovac Monastery and one of Karadžić's main collaborators.

Stefan Stratimirović,⁹ Georgije Hranislav,¹⁰ Josif Putnik,¹¹ and Ivan Savić Jugović¹² also studied in these cities. In addition, around 1810, Mrkalj became acquainted with Karadžić, who was living in Hungary while recuperating from arthritis.

Uroš Nestorović (1765–1825), who became chief inspector of Hungary’s Orthodox schools in 1810, and Stratimirović had opposing views regarding the relationship between schools and the Orthodox Church. Drago Roksandić mentions the possibility of interactions between Nestorović and Mrkalj, even though he holds that contact between the two may have been difficult given their differences in age and social standing (1999: 112). On the topic of Mrkalj’s class consciousness, despite the fact that Mrkalj had received higher education mainly in the Catholic sphere, Roksandić considers him an “agrarian-society intellectual” (1999: 109). Roksandić goes on to point out that compared to Karadžić, who enjoyed the support of German and Russian intellectuals such as Jernej Kopitar,¹³ Mrkalj, who had been born into Croatia’s Serbian society, did not have such strong backing (1999: 113–114).

Mrkalj also wrote poetry, such as *An Ode to Kiril Živković* (1805), but none of his works has received noteworthy attention for literary merit (Okuka 2010: 17). His most well-known piece of writing is *Fat of the Thick Jer* (1810). In this work, he proposed a new orthography based on the Serbian vernacular and insisted on the removal of the *thick jer* (= ѣ), which he considered the *fat* or unnecessary flesh of the Serbian language.

9 Stevan Stratimirović (1757–1836), Metropolitan of Karlovci (1790–1836). Although he took up a position opposed to the language reforms of Obradović, Mrkalj, and Karadžić, he supported the reform of the Cyrillic script.

10 Georgije Hranislav, a bishop of Bačka (1839–1843).

11 Josip Putnik, a bishop of Slavonia (1808–1828).

12 Ivan Savić Jugović (1772–1813), professor at the University of Belgrade, born in Sombor, Vojvodina.

13 Jernej Kopitar (1780–1844), Slovene poet and Slavic philologist. He was born in Repnje, Upper Carniola, and received his education in Ljubljana. In Vienna, he worked as the chief censor for the Austrian authorities for works written in Greek and Slavic, and he also worked as a translator. He is known as one of Karadžić’s main collaborators in the formation of standard Serbian.

Regarding the removal of the letter *ѣ*, however, he was harshly criticized by the clergy of the Orthodox Church, among others. As a result, in 1817, Mrkalj retracted his opinions on the removal of *ѣ* in *Palinode, or Defense of the Thick Jer*, which was published in *Novine Serbske* 'Serbian Newspaper.' This paper will not deal with the contents of Mrkalj's *Palinode*, because it is this writer's opinion that while *Fat of the Thick Jer* called for the removal of *ѣ* based on linguistic principles and was almost entirely unrelated to political motivations, the *Palinode* was merely intended to deflect criticism from the Orthodox Church and had no bearing on Mrkalj's linguistic principles.

However, the attacks on Mrkalj did not lessen in severity. In 1811, Mrkalj returned for a time to the Military Frontier and took up residence in a monastery in Gomilje, but later, he was employed by the Dalmatian College of Cardinals and moved to Šibenik.¹⁴ In 1825, his health started to deteriorate, and after a period of convalescence in 1828 at Gomilje's monastery, he died in 1833 in a Viennese psychiatric hospital.

3. The Use of Cyrillic Letters in 18th-century Serbia

Before discussing the writing system advocated by Mrkalj, this paper will examine the letters used by Serbian writers in their works at the time, in order to show what precipitated Mrkalj's belief in the need for orthographic reform.

3-1. *The Origin of Cyrillic Letters: Brief Overview*

Cyrillic letters have their origin in both Glagolitic and Greek letters, and were created through the "Hellenization of the Glagolitic letter system" (Kobayashi 2010: 41). The brothers Cyril and Methodius, who had been sent to Moravia on an evangelical mission, translated Psalms, the Gospels, and Apostles¹⁵ into what they had decided on as a literary

14 Mrkalj was invited by Kraljević, the bishop of Dalmatia, who supported the union of the Church and schools. Kraljević believed that Mrkalj could be persuaded to support the union, after the misfortune he had suffered at the hands of Metropolitan Stratimirović. However, Mrkalj ultimately opposed the Church-school union and departed for Šibenik.

15 This refers to excerpts from the book of Acts and the Epistles used for liturgies.

language—that is, Old Church Slavonic—and wrote down their translation using letters they had devised. This alphabet is known today as the Glagolitic alphabet and contains approximately 40 letters. Each letter corresponded to the phonological patterns of the Slavic languages at the time, which were richer than those of Greek. Between the 9th and 11th centuries, the Glagolitic alphabet was used by Slavic members of the Eastern Orthodox Church in a wide area spanning Moravia and the Balkans,¹⁶ but it was soon replaced by letters that later came to be known as Cyrillic.

The Cyrillic alphabet came about as an uncial script of the Greek language at the time. As for the creator of the Cyrillic alphabet, it is claimed that the uncial script was invented by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius, represented by Constantine of Preslav,¹⁷ who then named it in honor of Cyril (Kobayashi 2010: 41), but evidence supporting this claim remains inconclusive.

The Cyrillic alphabet of Old Church Slavonic contains 40 letters, although some counts exclude the ligature **ѣ** and the digraph **ѣи** for a total of 38 letters (Milanović 2004: 27). Of those, the following 26 letters originate from Greek letters.

а, б, в, г, д, е, з, ѓ, и, і, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѡѣ, ф, х,
ѡ, ѣ, ѡѣ, ѣи, ѣ

These letters correspond to the Greek letters Α, Β, Γ, Δ, Ε, Ζ (in lowercase, ζ), Ζ, Η,¹⁸ Ι, Κ, Λ, Μ, Ν, Ο, Π, Ρ, Σ, the diphthong ου, Φ, Χ, Ω (in lowercase, ω), Ξ (in lowercase, ξ), Ψ, Θ, and Υ.¹⁹ Slavic phonemes not

¹⁶ Also used in Bohemia and Croatia.

¹⁷ See Kimura (1985: 33). After the death of Methodius, many of his disciples were expelled from Moravia and ended up in Bulgaria. Old Church Slavonic spread throughout the Slavic world due to the activities of the Ohrid school (in present-day Macedonia), in which those disciples, especially Clement (the future bishop of Bulgaria), played a central role, and of the Preslav school (in present-day Bulgaria). Constantine of Preslav was the key figure of the latter and was active during the 9th and 10th centuries.

¹⁸ In Greek pronunciation, this expresses the long vowel e.

¹⁹ Pronounced /ju/ in Greek.

present in Greek were represented by the following 14 (or 12) letters. These letters formally resemble the Glagolitic letters that express the same sound.

Б, Ж, И, Ц, Ч, Ш, (Ѡ), Ъ, Ы, (ЪИ), Ћ, Ю, Ж, А

In addition, the following ligatures combining 2 letters into 1 letter may be found in manuscripts from the 10th century onward.

Ѣ, Ѧ, ѢѢ, ѢѢ, Ѣ, (Ѡ)

The following letters, which are each treated as a single letter, are examples of digraphs.

ѠѢ, ЪИ, (ЪИ)

The use of these Cyrillic letters in Serbia was dominant from the 12th century onward (Milanović 2004: 39). For several centuries, traditional Serbian Church Slavonic was the only literary language, but at the start of the 18th century, the main thrust of Serbian literary activity shifted to languages modeled on Russian and Russian Church Slavonic. As a result, the first half of the 18th century saw the introduction of Russian Church Slavonic letters and secular letters to an orthographic situation that already contained Cyrillic letters transcribed from Glagolitic letters, Old Church Slavonic Cyrillic letters, and Serbian Church Slavonic Cyrillic letters. Furthermore, when Zaharija Orfelin's poetic works in the vernacular appeared in the 1760s, the alphabet was not yet equipped with the means to express Serbian as it was spoken. According to Okuka, up until 1810, the year in which Mrkalj wrote his *Fat of the Thick Jer*, the following three types of Cyrillic letters were used in Serbian writings (2010: 67–68).

a) Transliterated Cyrillic letters based on the Glagolitic letter system

А, Б, В, Г, Д, Е, Ж, З, И, І, Ћ, К, Л, М, Н, О, П, Р, С, Т, ѠѢ, ѠѢ, ѠѢ, (Ѡ, Ѣ), ѢѢ, Ю, А

terials in Serbian in the Serbian territories. As a result, religious books deemed necessary by the Serbian Orthodox Church were often secretly imported, which led to the influx of the Church Slavonic language used in Russia. The teaching of and literary activity employing Russian Church Slavonic, as carried out by Maksim Suvorov,²³ who came to Serbia in 1726, or by the group of the teachers that arrived in 1730 led by Emanuel Kozačinskij,²⁴ also served to fuel interest in Russia on the part of young Serbian intellectuals. Thus, starting in the 1740s, a literary language modeled on Russian Church Slavonic and 18th-century Russian became the mainstream language for Serbian literary activity at the time. Two types of letters existed in the alphabet of these two languages: the Church Slavonic letters used in liturgical books and the secular script promulgated by Peter the Great in 1708. Consequently, the Serbian works which were modeled on these languages would vary in both language and script, depending on whether the content was religious or secular. These inconsistencies only exacerbated the confusion surrounding the Serbian writing system.

For example, due to the phonetic differences between Russian Church Slavonic and Serbian Church Slavonic, letters and sounds did not always share the same relation. The letter **ѧ**, which did not exist in Serbian Church Slavonic, expressed the sound /ja/ in Russian Church Slavonic. The letter **Ѣ** expressed the consonant cluster *št* in Serbian Church Slavonic but *šč'* in Russian Church Slavonic. The letter **Ѧ**, which was only used in Serbian for words of Greek origin, expressed the same sound /f/ in Russian Church Slavonic.

Furthermore, the thin *jer* **Ѣ** and thick *jer* **Ѧ** were used ornamentally, having no phonetic value in either Russian or Serbian at the time. In particular, the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church viewed **Ѧ** as a political expression of the importance they placed on their link to Russia. This predilection explains why, as mentioned above, Mrkalj's insistence

23 Maksim Terentevič Suvorov was a translator for the St. Petersburg Council of Bishops and educator. At the request of Metropolitan Mojsije Petrović, he was dispatched to Karlovci in 1725 as a teacher.

24 Emanuel Kozačinskij was the leader of a group of six teachers dispatched to Karlovci from the Kiev Academy in 1733.

on the removal of ѳ in *Fat of the Thick Jer* would invite the wrath of the Orthodox Church.

3-3. *The Use of the Serbian Literary Language and the Letter ѳ*

The privileged position of Russian Church Slavonic and Slavicized Russian began to be threatened in the 1780s by the use of the Serbian vernacular. Among Orfelin’s works are texts written in a language based on “Serbian,” one example of which is a guidebook to wine preparation titled *The Experienced Winemaker* (1783).²⁵ The following letters are used in this text.

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, ѕ, з, и, ї, ѣ, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, н, оу, ѳ, ф, х, ѿ, ц, ч, ш, щ, ѷ, ы, ь, Ѹ, є, ю, ѡ, ѧ, ѣ, ѵ, ѿ, ѣ, ѿ, ѿ, ѿ

The use of the letter *h* should be noted. The letter *h* may also be found in Rajić’s²⁶ *Catechesis* (1774), which was published before *The Experienced Winemaker*. Although the *Catechesis* bears a Church Slavonic title, its contents are fairly vernacular. This is because in 1770, the Austrian authorities requested a catechism written in the vernacular. The 1845 edition²⁷ of this work, published in Buda, employs the following letters.

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, ѕ, з, и, ї, ѣ, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, н, оу, ѳ, ф, х, ѿ, ц, ч, ш, щ, ѷ, ы, ь, Ѹ, є, ю, ѡ, ѧ, ѣ, ѵ, ѿ, ѣ, ѿ, ѿ, ѿ

Rajić’s epic poem *Battle between Dragon and Eagles* (1791)²⁸ also uses the letter ѳ.

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, и, ї, ѣ, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, н, оу, ѳ, ф, х, ѿ, ц, ч, ш, щ, ѷ, Ѹ, є, ю, ѡ, ѧ, ѣ

²⁵ *Iskusni podrumar*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-II-0892>

²⁶ Jovan Rajić (1726–1801) was a Serbian clergyman born in Karlovci.

²⁷ *Katihizis mali ili sokraštenoe pravoslavnoe ispovedanije*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-I-0206>

²⁸ *Boj zmaja sa orlovi*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-I-0751>

The letter *h* is also used in the works of Dositej Obradović,²⁹ for example, *A Letter to Haralampije* (1783).³⁰

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, и, і, ї, й, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѣ, у, ф, х, ц, ч, ш, щ, ъ, ы, ь, ѳ, э, ю, я, ѿ

In this text, however, the author's signature is given as *Обрадовичь*. The replacement of *h* with *ч* in Serbian family names is a feature of Russian Church Slavonic (Milanović 2004: 81).

The use of *h* is the same in *The Life and Adventures of Obradović* (1783).³¹

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, и, ї, й, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѣ, у, ф, х, ц, ч, ш, щ, ъ, ы, ь, ѳ, э, ю, я, ѿ, ѵ

In addition, a comparison with the version of this text included in his collected works (1833)³² shows that the alphabet of the later version was slightly altered, and that the script had become more modern-looking.

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, ѣ, з, и, і, ї, й, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѣ, у, ф, х, ц, ч, ш, щ, ъ, ы, ь, ѳ, е, ю, я, ѿ, ѵ

The most significant changes are the omission of the letter *у* and the addition of the letters *ы* and *ђ*. This implies that there was no distinction

29 Dositej Obradović (1744?–1811) was a pivotal figure in 18th-century Serbian literature who introduced spoken language to written Serbian. Born in Čakovo in the Banat region (present-day Romania, at the time a Hungarian territory), he became a monk at the monasteries of Novo Hopovo and Hilandar.

30 *Ljubzeni Haralampije*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-II-3678>

31 *Život i priklučenija Dimitrija Obradovića narečenoga u kaluđerstvu Dositeja njim istim spisam i izdat*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-II-0832>

32 *Dela Dositeja Obradovića. čast 1. Život i priljučenija*. Accessed December 12, 2011: <http://scc.digital.nb.rs/document/S-II-0840a>

between the letters *h* and *h̄* in the original version. For example, *за лећа мећемо* in the 1833 version (1833: 8) is written as *залећа мећемо* in the 1783 version (1783: 8). To be more precise, *h̄*, as a transcription of the Glagolitic letter *ℕ*, originally expressed the voiced alveolo-palatal affricate (now expressed by the letter *h* in modern Serbian), but in the original 1783 version of this text, *h̄* expresses both the voiced (modern Serbian *h*) and the voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate (modern Serbian *h̄*). The one-to-one correspondence between the letter *h̄* and the sound *h* was enabled by the later invention of the letter *h̄* from *h̄*.

To summarize, *h̄* was already present in 18th-century texts, and it used to be a voiced sound originating from the Glagolitic letter *ℕ*. Next, this paper will examine the issue of “overburdened” letters as analyzed by Mrkalj and the orthography that he advocated.

4. Sava Mrkalj’s Orthography

We now turn our attention to the writing system that Mrkalj proposed in his representative work *Fat of the Thick Jer* (1810). This paper will analyze Mrkalj’s theoretical basis, while focusing on and evaluating the incompleteness and logical consistency existent in his system.

4-1. *Cleaning up Church Letters in Fat of the Thick Jer*

The foregoing has shown that between the end of the 18th and the start of the 19th centuries, there was a growing intention in Serbia toward literature written in the vernacular instead of Russian Church Slavonic or Slavicized Russian, literature that could be understood by the masses. While letters from Russian Church Slavonic had made their way into texts since the first half of the 18th century, the second half saw the use of secular script as well. In the 1760s, starting with the poems of Orfelin, works in the vernacular started to appear in Serbian literature, but there were no means by which to represent spoken Serbian.

Then, in Buda in 1810, Mrkalj published his 18-page tract titled *Fat of the Thick Jer*. With this essay, he argued that the people of Serbia possessed letters unique to the Serbian language that were different from Church letters or the secular script and thus reformed the Church letters of Russia based on Serbian vernacular phonemes.

Mrkalj adopted the principle of one sound corresponding to one letter, based on the policy of “write as you speak,” and he analyzed the Church Slavonic alphabet in order to determine which letters were unnecessary—that is, letters which did not have unique phonetic value—and which were necessary. Based on his analysis, he excluded the unnecessary letters, insisting on the superfluity of ъ in particular. Finally, he articulated the ultimate prospects of the reformed Cyrillic script.

The following 42 Cyrillic letters are used in Russian Church Slavonic, or what Mrkalj calls “our alphabet” (See Mrkalj 1810: 6).

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, и, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѣ, ѱ,
ф, х, ѿ, ц, ч, ш, щ, њ, њь, њь, ѣ, е, ю, ѡ, ѡа, ѡа, ѡа, ѱ, ѡ, ѡ

His choice of these 42 letters for analysis deserves some additional explanation. In the preface to the 1818 *Serbian Dictionary*, under the heading *Serbian grammar*, Karadžić lists the following 45 letters for Slavic, or “our Church language” (See Karadžić XXXIII–XXXV).

а, б, в, г, д, е, ж, з, з, и, ѣ, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѣ, у, ф, х, ѿ, ц,
ч, ш, щ, њ, њь, њь, ѣ, е, ю, ѡ, ѡа, ѡа, ѡа (я), ѡа, ѡа, ѡа, ѡа

A comparison of these to what Mrkalj calls “our alphabet” shows that, aside from the changed form of letter і to ѣ, the three letters з, ѡ, and ѡ have been added. Karadžić’s commentary on these three additional letters states that з is “nothing but another form of з” (1818: XXXIII), that ѡ (jus) is “not used anywhere, not even in Slavic today” and that ѡ together with ѡ is “pronounced as о by us and the Russians” (1818: XXXV). As such, it may be concluded that the 42 letters raised by Mrkalj are, to some extent, standard choices.

In preparation for deciding the necessity of these Church Slavonic letters to Serbians, Mrkalj categorized them into the following five groups.

- 1) *Edinozvučna* or Letters with one sound: one sign represents one phoneme only.

а, б, в, г, д, е,³³ ж, з, з, и, ї, к, л, м, н, о, п, р, с, т, ѓ, ѣ, ф, х, ц, ч, ш, њ, џ, ѡ, ѵ

- 2) *Mnogozvučna* or Letters with multiple sounds: one sign has multiple phonemes (phonetic clusters are represented by one letter).

є(je), ѡ(ot), џ(št), ѣ(je), е(je), ю(ju), ѡ(ja), ѡ(ja), ѡ(ks), ѡ(th)³⁴

- 3) *Zvukopremjenljiva* or Variable pronunciation letters: one sign may have different phonetic values.

д, е, є, и, ї, ѣ, л, н, т

- 4) *Zamjenljiva* or Interchangeable letters: one phoneme or sequence is represented by different means.

є, є, and ѣ; з and з; о and ѡ; ѓ and ѣ; и, ї, ѡ, and ѡ; ѡ and ѡ

- 5) *Složena* or Compound letters: one phoneme is represented by multiple letters.

дѣ, ѡѣ, нѣ, тѣ

Some letters fall into more than one category because their sound varies depending on their position among the letters. For example, the letter *đ* in the word *npeđnocmavumu* becomes the unvoiced *m*, but this does not imply that the letter *đ* itself represents the sound *m*. Also, the letter *e* falls into three groups because it is a single-sound letter when it expresses the

33 According to Mrkalj (1810: 6), it is valid for words such as *vedro* ‘bucket’ and *sreda* ‘Wednesday.’

34 In addition, in the same place, Mrkalj gives the letter *ѡ* for the consonant cluster *ps*.

sound *e* and it is a multiple-sound letter when it expresses the sound *je*, which implies that it is a variable letter with multiple phonetic values.

According to Mrkalj, out of these five groups, the single-sound letters are necessary to the alphabet, and one sign had to be selected out of each set of interchangeable letters. The remaining groups of multiple-sound letters, variable letters, and compound letters—in other words, letters that do not correspond to one sound only—were deemed harmful to the alphabet. The letter **ѣ**, devoid of phonetic value, was also unnecessary.

4-2. *Mrkalj's Alphabet*

Next, Mrkalj sorted these categorized letters. His basic principle was to make each sound *glasčič* correspond to only one grapheme. A grapheme is an indivisible, distinctive unit of writing. Mrkalj held that the use of these graphemes should be prescribed by the orthography, and he decided on the following prescriptions.

Of the single-sound letters, those letters that were not interchangeable would remain in the alphabet. In other words, the letters **а, б, в, г, д, ж, к, л, м, н, п, р, с, т, ц, ч, ш** were essential.

Of the multiple-sound letters, **ѡ, ѱ, ѣ, є, ю, Ѡ, ѡ, ѧ, and ѡ** were to be removed. The letter **є** was necessary, but it should not function as an interchangeable or multiple-sound letter.

Of the variable pronunciation letters, the letters that were to remain in the alphabet would have their sound-to-sign correspondence artificially stabilized. The letter **н** would represent the phoneme **н** only, not function as a semivowel. The semivowel would be represented by **ї**.

Only one of each set of interchangeable letters would remain, or else the entire set would be removed. The letter **з** was necessary, but **ѕ** was combined with **з**.³⁵ Regarding the vowel *u*, the letters **Ѹ** and **ѹ** were interchangeable, but only **ѹ** was retained. The letter **о** was maintained, and **ѡ** was removed.

³⁵ Although the letter **з** represents the voiced alveolar fricative /z/, the letter **ѕ** was originally pronounced as the voiced alveolar affricate /dz/, leading to phonetic ambiguity.

Of the compound letters, **ѣ** and all combinations with the letter **ѣ** were removed.³⁶

In this manner, Mrkalj excluded the unnecessary letters from the alphabet and “arrived at letters that were reliable and completely beyond doubt” (Okuka 2010: 79). This alphabet is as follows.

А, Б, В, Г, Д, Е, Ж, З, И, Ї, К, Л, М, Н, О, П, Р, С, Т, У, Ф, Х, Ц, Ч, Ш, Ъ³⁷

The letter **ї**, which was categorized in a set of interchangeable letters along with **и**, **ы**, and **ѣ**, was differentiated from **и** and included in the alphabet as a semivowel. Also included in this list were the letter **ф**, used in foreign loanwords, and the letter **х**, which was unknown to rural Serbians at the time and spoken only by “more refined people.”

In addition, although Mrkalj deemed the thick *jer* to be “especially unnecessary,” he maintained the thin *jer* **ь** and devised the use of the digraphs **дъ**, **лъ**, **нъ**, and **тъ** at all word-positions in his orthography. This is in contrast to Emanuel Janković’s objection to both the thick and thin *gers*.³⁸

The writing system advanced by Mrkalj, therefore, expressed 29 phonemes using 26 letters. Compared to modern Serbian orthography, the absence of a letter corresponding to μ (voiced postalveolar affricate) becomes clear. This omission has been discussed, but such discussions remain within the realm of conjecture. The use of this letter in Račanin’s *Bukvar* has been mentioned above, and given that the letter **ѣ** could be found in Serbian language texts of his time, Mrkalj had no reason to be unaware of the existence of the phoneme /dž/. Okuka points out that on page 8 of *Fat of the Thick Jer*, the sound represented by the combination **гъ** corresponds to the phoneme /dž/ (2010: 82). Else, according to Ivić’s conjecture, Mrkalj believed that the sound μ could have been represented by a combination, that is, by the letters **дж** (Okuka 2010: 82).

However, either of the combinations **гъ** and **дж** would have fallen into the category of compound letters, by Mrkalj’s analysis. Notwith-

36 See Okuka (2010: 76).

37 It is noteworthy that although Okuka counts 25 letters, there are actually 26.

38 However, Janković used the apostrophe in place of the letter **ь**.

standing the violation of the one letter to one sound principle, Mrkalj could not have been completely satisfied with the representation of this phoneme with a digraph. On this point, Okuka has even gone so far as to suggest the possibility that Mrkalj “forgot” the existence of this sound (2010: 87). However, since Mrkalj had based his discussion on the Cyrillic script of the Church in his *Fat of the Thick Jer*, it should come as no surprise that the letter μ , which was not included in the original list of 42 letters, did not come under close scrutiny.

The incompleteness of Mrkalj's writing system is also evident, of course, in its four digraphs (corresponding to \check{h} , ьb , ьb , and \check{h} in present-day Serbian orthography). Despite his belief that compound letters were harmful, the fact that these digraphs remained in his alphabet is strange, especially given that the letter \check{h} had been used in 18th-century texts. By replacing тѣ with the letter т , Mrkalj could have eliminated one digraph formed with ь . Even if this substitution had been made, however, the other three digraphs formed with ь would have remained, thereby damaging the logical consistency of the writing system. Therefore, the decision not to include т was a rational one.

Furthermore, as shown in the comparison of the 1783 and 1833 versions of *The Life and Adventures of Obradović*, the letter \check{h} functioned as both the \check{h} and \check{h} of modern Serbian orthography, before Karadžić introduced \check{h} in 1818. Therefore, according to Mrkalj's analysis, the letter \check{h} would have fallen into the category of unstable letters with variable pronunciations. This implies that if Mrkalj had included the letter \check{h} in his writing system, not only would it have disturbed the symmetry of digraphs formed with ь , it would also have meant the introduction of another “harmful” letter, resulting in a double blow to the system's consistency. In summary, while Mrkalj's alphabet was incomplete as a writing system, it can be assessed as one that preserved logical consistency.

5. From Mrkalj's Writing System to Karadžić's Orthography

Jernej Kopitar wrote of *Fat of the Thick Jer* that “these 18 pages contain more linguistic philosophy than far thicker grammars,” giving

it high praise (Milanović 2004: 101). Luka Milovanov³⁹ used this orthography to write *Experiment of Teaching* (1810). However, according to Okuka, Milovanov used a writing system based on a 30-letter alphabet that he devised himself, which included the letter μ . In other words, Milovanov had devised an original writing system, at the same time as Mrkalj, which included the $\delta\upsilon$, $\lambda\upsilon$, $\eta\upsilon$, and $m\upsilon$ digraphs formed with υ (Okuka 2010: 83).

Mrkalj's system went against the rule in European culture prohibiting "the creation of new letters,"⁴⁰ and it also received harsh criticism from the Serbian Church, which explains why the response of Slavo-Serbian writers was mixed. As mentioned above, the criticism of the Orthodox Church would go on to cast a significant shadow on the rest of Mrkalj's life. The clergy, represented by Stefan Stratimirović, criticized the attempted removal of the letter υ , or the hard sign of the Russian language, out of fear that doing so would harm relations with Russia. Russia was considered the protector of the Vojvodina Orthodox Church, and the letter υ , which demonstrated clear links to Russian Church Slavonic, was revered by the pro-Russian members of the clergy.

Regarding the position of *Fat of the Thick Jer* in the history of standard Serbian, Okuka states that "traversing the relatively small distance between the modern alphabet reformed by Mrkalj and our Cyrillic script of today was not difficult for Karadžić" (Okuka 2010: 73). In the "Serbian Grammar" section of the *Serbian Dictionary* (1818), Karadžić states that "there are 28 simple sounds" in Serbian and lists the letters representing those sounds.

а, б, в, г, д, ђ, е, ж, з, и, ј, к, л, љ, м, н, њ, о, п, р, с, т, ћ, у, ц, џ, ч, ш

39 Luka Milovanov Georgijević (1784–1828) was a Serbian writer born in Srebrenica (Bosnia). He advised Karadžić on the production of grammars and the dictionary.

40 See also Milanović (2004: 101).

Regarding Latin letters, orthographies were developed mainly by either combining existing letters, or adding accented signs (e. g., for the sound /sh/, the English alphabet has *sh*, French has *ch*, German has *sch*, and Czech/Slovenian/Croatian have *š*).

The addition of *ϕ*, used for foreign loanwords, and *x*, which represented a phoneme unfamiliar to rural areas at the time, resulted in the complete modern Serbian alphabet.

Looking at Karadžić's alphabet, one may say that he fixed the incompleteness of Mrkalj's system by devising the signs *ĥ*, *љ*, *њ*, and *ћ*, but this would prematurely end the discussion on how Karadžić arrived at this writing system and the repeated changes and substitutions that he made. In the *Slavoserbian Songbook* (1814), Karadžić basically inherited Mrkalj's alphabet, but with the addition of *ε*, *я*, and *ю* (Milanović 2004: 117). That same year, he abandoned those letters in favor of *ie*, *ia*, and *iy* in his *Serbian Grammar*. Considering the use of the letter *i* as a semi-vowel, these digraphs conform to Mrkalj's system. In 1815, he restored the letters *я*, *ю*, *ѣ*, *ѥ*, and *Ѧ* to his second volume of *Serbian Folk Songs*. Although Karadžić finally managed in the *Serbian Dictionary* (1818) to address the issues left by Mrkalj, he went through his own process of trial and error before deciding on his alphabet.

When comparing Karadžić's 1818 alphabet to Mrkalj's, we note there are more differences than the conversion of the digraphs *ѡб*, *љб*, *њб*, and *мб* into single letters (*ĥ*, *љ*, *њ*, *ћ*). The letter *μ* has been introduced, and the letter *i* has changed been to *j*. Regarding the latter, Karadžić held that the sign *ĩ*, which originally represented a vowel, should not represent the consonant *j* (palatal approximant); therefore, this change may be regarded as a correction of Mrkalj's system. The introduction of the former, however, seems to have been inspired by a line of thought unrelated to the analysis of Mrkalj's *Fat of the Thick Jer*.

Okuka also gives Mrkalj credit for making use of existing letters for his writing system instead of adding new ones (2010: 84). This meant that printers at the time did not need to develop new type pieces, making Mrkalj's system easier to adopt than Karadžić's orthography, which included several entire new letters.

At printing facilities within the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, the monks were frequently forced, out of necessity, to prepare type pieces by themselves.⁴¹ This meant that the work of carving new letters fell within the limits of handicraft. By the 18th century, however, monks

41 See Febvre Lucien and Martin Henri-Jean (1985: 57).

no longer had to create new type pieces by hand, as type pieces were manufactured by professional craftsmen and traded on the marketplace. Given that Kopitar hired craftsmen to cast the new type pieces for the letters invented by Karadžić, there was clearly no difficulty in terms of printing technology that accompanied the invention of original letters. In a certain sense, this difference in attitude may have something to do with the weaker support that Mrkalj enjoyed compared to Karadžić. However, Karadžić had made a complete break from Church letters through his invention, and it was expected that this act would invite even more severe criticism from the Orthodox Church than Mrkalj had actually experienced (Okuka 2010: 86).

Mrkalj was conscious of his system's incompleteness but held that "while it is not complete, it is a small matter compared to the incompleteness of the previous alphabet" (Okuka 2010: 137). He had lightened the "ballast" of Church letters and trimmed the list of letters, but there remained issues with his alphabet that could not be solved using only those letters. The alphabet put forth in *Fat of the Thick Jer* was only a short distance away from modern orthography, but a certain spark was needed to completely remove the residual "ballast." Since he wished to obey the very rules he created, it was difficult to construct a writing system without inventing new letters. Therefore, it is the opinion of this writer that Mrkalj's system was essentially a transitional one. If modern Serbian orthography were to be taken as a complete system, we might say that Mrkalj came extremely close. However, what was needed to actually complete Mrkalj's system was Karadžić's finishing touch.

6. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the link between the writing system proposed by Sava Mrkalj and Karadžić's orthography. After looking at the types of Cyrillic letters and writing systems in use before Mrkalj and examining the *Fat of the Thick Jer*, this paper showed that while Mrkalj came extremely close to modern Serbian orthography, his proposed system needed the spark provided by Karadžić's invented letters in order to attain completeness.

In addition, this writer also agrees with Okuka's explanation for Mrkalj's omission of the letter *h*. Although this letter was widely known by the start of the 19th century and already existed in printers' cases, Mrkalj needed to avoid the inconsistency that would have arisen from the removal of just one out of four digraphs. Furthermore, this paper concludes that the letter *h* would also have threatened his system's consistency due to the fact that it was an unstable letter that expressed both *h* and *ħ* sounds of the time.

The centers of Serbian printing activity were located outside of Serbia for much of its history, and even at the end of the 18th century, the largest publishing center was the city of Pest. The fact that the base of Karadžić's standard Serbian movement was in Vienna is also remarkable in the history of nationalist movements (Kurihara 1972: 53). As Roksandić puts it, however, "from the 18th century to the start of the 19th century, all levels of Serbian society were constantly moving; without those social dynamics, the national unity of Serbia would not have been possible" (1999: 110). Serbian intellectuals at the time were always in motion: Orfelin wrote in Venice and Timișoara, and Obradović toured the various countries of Europe. Karadžić, who fled to Vienna as a refugee after the failure of the First Serbian Uprising, often returned to Serbia to collect folklore, and even for Mrkalj, whose twilight years were darker than most, his wanderings were not entirely tragic for his time.

By focusing on the relationship between the orthographies of Mrkalj and Karadžić, this paper may have glossed over the overall dynamism of Serbian society and the network among the Serbian intelligentsia and instead drawn a single straight line between Mrkalj and Karadžić's alphabets. When one compares Mrkalj's writing system to modern Serbian orthography, it is not hard to see how the latter derived from the former. From the perspective of Mrkalj and Karadžić, however, such a convenient endpoint would not have been available. This writer would like to emphasize that their writing systems were based on linguistic considerations, the principle of one letter representing one sound, and the products of repeated trial and error.

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Сюко Нисихара

Диграфы в азбуке Саввы Мркаля

Резюме

В статье предлагается анализ принципов реформы азбуки сербского литературного языка на народной основе, предложенной сербским филологом Саввой Мркалем в 1810 году. Данная реформа рассматривается в контексте развития сербской кириллической азбуки начиная с периода общеславянского литературного языка до реформ создателя современной сербской азбуки Вука Ст. Караджича, усовершенствовавшего азбуку Саввы Мркаля в своих работах 1814 и 1818 гг.

Ключевые слова: Сербский язык, кириллическое письмо, Савва Мркаль, стандартизация, орфографическая реформа.