

The Issue of the Jewish-Russian Language and the Case of Samuel Wisticki (Late 17th Century)

The proposed presentation will consider the case of Samuel Wisticki's (Samojlo Abramovič Vistickij) practice of writing Russian in Hebrew letters as an example of Jewish–East Slavic language contact. This requires the application of methods from modern socio- and grapholinguistics as well as contact linguistics. The presentation will examine written evidence for the life of Wisticki, a baptized Jew from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the annexation of Smolensk by the Tsar of Muscovy, Wisticki entered the latter's service, before being exiled to Siberia and subsequently resuming his service in Verkhotur'e, as a manager of various tradesmen's settlements or *slobody* up to his death in 1683/84. Until recently, only one document of his had been widely known, which was signed by Wisticki in 1680 and written in Russian, yet in Hebrew letters. The presentation entails a sociolinguistic and cultural/historical investigation of previously unknown documents about Wisticki that have come to light in Russian archives. Using the new information from these documents, new aspects of his biography will be investigated and described. In addition, the presentation will consider Wisticki's texts as a manifestation of Hebrew–East Slavic language contact and a sub-phenomenon of the so-called 'Jewish diasporic languages' alongside German-influenced Yiddish. Furthermore, from the point of view of grapholinguistics, the case of Wisticki will allow us to develop a typology of xenography, viz. the usage of non-authentic writing systems, and the function of biscriptality, or digraphia, in the Early Modern East Slavic world.