ENCYCLOPEDIA OVERVIEWS

Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online: an international project on Slavic linguistics

Ievheniia Karpilovska
Institute of Ukrainian Language, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0003-1921-9021
Email: karpilovska@nas.gov.ua

Abstract

This communication provides an overview of the large-scale scholarly encyclopedia project, Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online. It justifies the involvement of the "Brill" publishing in the implementation of this encyclopedia, outlines its structure and authorship. The paper emphasizes that, despite the Slavic theme, the majority of contributors of encyclopedia articles are linguists from the United States (including the editor-in-chief) and Western Europe, which affects the level of representation of issues, phenomena, and units related to the Ukrainian language in the encyclopedia articles.

Keywords

encyclopedias, linguistics, Slavic languages, Ukrainian linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

The experience of large-scale scholarly projects, such as the General Slavic Linguistic Atlas and the series of descriptions of the current state of Slavic languages, prepared under the direction of Professor Stanisław Gajda and published by the University of Opole Press (Poland), has undeniably shown that the realization of such undertakings is only possible for powerful international scientific communities in collaboration with specialized publishing houses. The project of the Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online provides compelling proof of this. The purpose of this communication is to inform about this encyclopedia. To achieve this, not only publicly available information will be useful, but also our own experience of working on this project (Petrukhina & Karpilovska, 2020), which was preceded by participation in the Commission on Slavic Word Formation at the International Committee of Slavists.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OVERVIEW

Brill Publishers (Leiden, the Netherlands), a leading international scholarly publisher, invited Slavic experts from around the world to contribute to the Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online project, initiated in 2019. The history of Brill and its specialization in humanities and social sciences explain its decision to undertake such a fundamental Slavic studies project.

Founded in Leiden in 1683 as a bookstore and printing press by the Luchtmans family, Brill has evolved into a major international academic publisher. Since its acquisition by Evert Jan Brill in 1848, the company has focused on publishing scholarly works. Today, with offices in Leiden, Boston, Paderborn, and Singapore, Brill is a global leader in the humanities, social sciences, and law. The publisher specializes in encyclopedias and reference works, producing up to 1200 books and 275 journals annually. For more information on Brill's history, editorial policy, and publications: www.brill.com.

The editorial board of the Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online includes Mark L. Greenberg (chair), Lenore A. Grenoble (secretary), and the following members: Stephen Dickey, Masako Ueda Fidler, René Genis, Anita Peti-Stancič, Björn Wiemer, Nadežda V. Zorixina-Nilsson, Marek Łaziński, Mikhail Oslon and Mladen Uhlik. As noted in the encyclopedia's annotation on the Brill publisher website, the international scholarly community aims to create "the most comprehensive reference work on Slavic languages ever published, with some 400 articles". The encyclopedia will present, at a high scholarly level, "authoritative treatment of all important aspects of the Slavic language family from its Indo-European origins to the present day, as well as consideration of the interaction of Slavic with other languages". The encyclopedia is in English, and a special transcription is used to present examples and sources in Slavic languages. All examples are also accompanied by English equivalents or definitions of the concepts they denote.

Despite the stated goal of the editorial board and publishers to create an authoritative and comprehensive encyclopedia, a noticeable selectivity in the choice of articles and a preference for authors from the United States and Western Europe can be observed. This is particularly evident in the treatment of encyclopedia content related to Ukrainian language. The absence of Ukrainian studies experts on the editorial board and the predominance of Slavic studies specialists have undoubtedly influenced this outcome.

The incomplete coverage of topics, especially regarding the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian Slavic studies, may also stem from limited contact with Ukrainian scholars. Since the onset of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, such contacts have been entirely severed. Additionally, the requirement for Slavic scholars to prepare article materials in a specific digital format and in English may have posed additional challenges.

Nevertheless, the project does involve Ukrainian studies scholars from the USA and Western Europe, such as Andrii Danylenko (USA), who authored a general encyclopedia article "Ukrainian" (Danylenko, 2020), Lada Bilaniuk (USA), and Michael Moser (Austria). Contributors from Ukraine include Maria Shvedova, Maksym Vakulenko, Serhii Vakulenko, and Yevhen Redko.

The articles of the encyclopedia are published by the editorial board and the publisher as they are completed, following approval by the editor of the respective thematic section and the entire editorial board. Currently, the Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online features articles organized into the following thematic sections:

1. Languages of the Slavic Language Family: Their Structure and Their History;
2. Theoretical Approaches;
3. Phonetics and Phonology;
4. Grammar and Semantics;
5. Lexicon and Lexicography;
6. Discourse and Pragmatics;
7. Historical Linguistics, Diachronic Change, and Diatopy
8. Writing;
9. Sociolinguistics and Political Status of Languages;
10. Language Contact, Areal Linguistics, and Multilingualism;
11. Language Acquisition;
12. Special and Interdisciplinary Topics.

Online access to the already released materials of the Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics Online is subject to a fee. Following registration and payment, the publisher grants users time-bound access to specific or requested materials within the encyclopedia, ranging from daily to monthly periods. In this regard, the encyclopedia aligns with the publishing house's broader business model, whereby approximately 90% of its content is restricted to paying subscribers. (Veldman et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The Online Encyclopedia of Slavic Languages and Linguistics is an ambitious, large-scale academic endeavor involving both renowned linguists contributing encyclopedia articles and a specialized academic press overseeing the publication. However, the uneven scientific representation of various Slavic languages, particularly the small number of Ukrainianists among the authors (which also applies to several other Slavic languages), can be seen as a certain shortcoming of this publication.

Despite this, and limited access to the encyclopedia's materials, the project is highly relevant and undoubtedly a valuable professional source of information for a wide range of researchers of Slavic languages.

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