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‘SCORAPICE’: ADAPTATION OF RUSSIAN SHORTHAND
FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

At present there are computer programmes which transcribe sound speech into a written text without the need for a stenographer. In the near future computers with amazing accuracy will be able to transcribe human speech without any pre-tuning for a speaker’s idiosyncrasy.

The digital Sky wifi smartpen launched by a company called Livescribe makes it possible to record an interview as well as register the writing with a miniature webcam at the tip of the pen.

At the same time it will suffice to browse in the Internet for the words *shorthand* or *стенография* to find hundreds of references to various courses and numerous sources of shorthand applications.

Shorthand allows to take rapidly written notes anywhere. It is well known that in some countries any recording gadgets, including mobile phones, are forbidden at formal meetings and conferences. The only recording devices allowed for the tech-savvy audience are those of the pen and paper kind. Moreover, it is a fascinating and creative hobby that trains your memory and reaction time or serves as a ready tool for hiding your scripts from the uninitiated.

For centuries shorthand has been used as a cultural instrument. George Bernard Shaw used to write his plays by means of shorthand. Charles Dickens, when serving as a court secretary and later as a news reporter, enlivened his shorthand records with new artistic content in his novels. Shorthand was not alien to Fiodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy. Some of Shakespeare’s plays and Martin Luther King’s prayers were all preserved due to shorthand records done by unknown stenographers. No marvel, Sir Isaac Pitman (1813–97), an educator who advocated spelling reform, was knighted by Queen Victoria for his contributions to shorthand.

Pitman shorthand, which is based on the phonetic principles, is still widely used in the UK. It consists of 25 single consonants, 24 double consonants, and 16 vowel sounds. Phonetically similar, related sounds are expressed by similar signs, the shortest signs are used to represent the shortest vowels, and single strokes are used to represent single consonants. It also makes use of *positioning on the line* to express omitted vowels, i.e. writing the signs above, on, or below the line of writing. Additionally, different stroke thicknesses (thick and thin) are used to distinguish related sounds. Pitman shorthand has been adapted to many languages including Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Spanish et al.

The Irish-born John Robert Gregg (1867–1948) invented his own system. Like Pitman shorthand, Gregg’s shorthand is based on the phonetic system, i.e. both of them rely on the sounds not the spellings of the words for their transcription. It can be written with the same stroke thickness and uses slopes and curves for rapid writing. The length of the stroke differentiates some letters. Based on the ellipse or oval and on the slope, all characters are in one position, i.e. written on a single line of writing. Gregg shorthand is highly cursive and fast but only marginally readable. It has been published in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Russian among others.

If you write something and then immediately transcribe it, as secretaries tend to do, then there is no major problem. But if you try to read something you wrote last year, then much greater effort may be needed to decipher it, unless you have mastered sight reading thousands of abbreviated forms.

While Gregg shorthand style is the most used one in North America, other countries including the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and New Zealand use the Teeline shorthand system. First published in 1968 by James Hill (1908–71), it was rapidly put into use as it is quick to learn and easy to use. Teeline is an alphabetic system which is rather awkward in terms of handwriting. So it retains the inadequacies of the standard alphabet. Vowels are mostly omitted for speed at the expense of readability. It is intended to aid in taking dictation by creating word outlines, and so needs to be transcribed as soon as possible. It is, therefore, more suited to professional rather than personal use.

Teeline Shorthand is taught to journalists in the UK and some Commonwealth countries, but is little known elsewhere. Speed building in Teeline is an important part of the Diploma in Journalism.

When you compare it to Gregg you see many similar shapes such as the signs for O, T, M. Vowels are eliminated unless they are the first letter of the word or the last one. When you miss out the vowels you speed up writing but you lose on precision and readability as well.

The present course called *Scorapice* is the adaptation of the Russian shorthand system which was thought out, developed and popularized by Professor Nickolai Sokolov (1900–90) and his numerous followers throughout many years [1]. He grounded his system on the research of biomechanics of hand movements in writing as well as the Russian language statistics. Later it became a unified national system of shorthand which was also taught as a correspondence course (GZOS) [2; 3].

Back in the 60s the author of the project took a GZOS specialist course. Since then I have been using the system in my linguistic career. From the very beginning, the course impressed me by its consistency and forethought, which facilitated successful and staunch acquisition of writing skills. It has become a starting point for the present course of *Scorapice* that is an English transliteration of the Russian word *скоронисъ* for ‘speedwriting’.

However, unlike the Russian system, *Scorapice* depends mainly on the phonetic principles rather than orthographic rules. Although the learner is supposed to know what the prefix or suffix is, it relies primarily on the sounding of a word.

In general terms, the system of Scorapice may be defined as cursive (slanting), positional and combinatory speedwriting based on phonetic principles.

The vowel sounds are expressed mostly by the relative positioning of the following consonants on the line of writing. Diacritics, such as dashes and dots for vowels, play only a subordinate role to exactly specify the true spelling of a term or a rare name. Familiar methods for contraction of words and phrases are being applied, with special characters for affixes,– i.e. morphemes, endings, prefixes, suffixes,– sound / word combinations and conventional signs being assigned on the basis of the British National Corpus and language statistics [4; 5; 6].

The material in the course is arranged in such a way that new elements are introduced gradually, being based on the principles covered earlier in the textbook. By the end of the course the expectable speed may reach more than 100 wpm and would solely depend on the practice time the learner can afford.

Each of the six units contains some guidelines and advice as to the rules and material under study. The units end with a test to estimate learner's progress of training and to encourage further studies. The concise vocabulary *English Scorapice: Frequent Words and Phrases* contains more than 1,500 entries and is meant both for reference and for further consolidation of optimal word / phrase reduction and improving writing skills.

Table 1 shows that the English set of consonants for *Scorapice*, with rare exception, matches that for the Russian shorthand style invented by N. Sokolov and his followers [2].

Table 1

The signs for consonant phonemes in *Scorapice*

[p]	[k]	[ʤ/ʦ]	[m]	[n/ŋ]
[b]	[g]	[C]	[h]	[w]
[t]	[f]	[S]	[s]	[r]
[d]	[v]	[G] / [Z]	[z]	[l]

Certain signs also have specific meanings as well as their traditional alphabetic value, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Fragment of a list of basic common words represented by initial letters

Letter	Meaning	Letter	Meaning
	last/like		good / girl / go / get
	be/but		have / high / how / who
	do/day		must
	can		on
	for		say / so
	general / gist / job / just		shall / show

As shown in Table 3, alphabetic signs may acquire new meaning due to an altered position as to the line of writing. Many common words are represented by initial characters above, on, or below the line of writing.

Shorthand systems can hardly make do without multiple meanings of some signs which are defined by context.

Table 3

Fragment of a list of common words denoted by a single sign raise above the base-line or written through the line

Letter	Meaning	Letter	Meaning
	about / or		machine / mechanic
	necessity / necessary		techn(ique) / term
	due / duty		knew / new / neo / non-
	to / too		fact
	pose / post / past		are / anti-

Frequently occurring clusters of consonants are indicated by special symbols – *blends*, e.g. _____taste, _____ask, _____rent, _____sweet. Blends are also used for denoting certain words: _____state, _____school, _____Sweden.

Vowels are expressed by the relative positioning of the consonant to follow on the writing line. Table 3 lists some expedients for marking vowels within a word. The diacritics (dots, dashes and apostrophe) are occasionally used to pinpoint vowel sounds in unfamiliar or isolated words, but otherwise they are hardly ever indicated. Yet, there are special signs for some diphthongs: [qV] _____, [aV] _____, [eɔ] _____, and [ɪ] _____: _____own, _____bout, _____bear, _____beer.

Table 4

Some techniques to render vowel phonemes in *Scorapice*

Vowels	Examples	Vowels	Examples
[R], [ʌ], [ɔ], [aɪ] – omitted between consonants	bar _____ but _____ abet _____ bite _____	[ɔ], [ɒ], [Oɪ] – writing the following sign through the line or shifting it half-size	shock _____ bought _____ boiler _____
[ɪ], [ɪ] – raising the following symbol half-size	bit _____ beat _____	semivowel [w] – indicated by the sign for vowel [u]	_____we _____whistle
[e], [e:], [x], [eɪ] – shifting the following sign to the right or raising half-size	bet _____ berth _____ bag _____ bail _____	[V], [u], [ɪ], [jɪ] – writing the following sign through the line and shifting it to the right	book _____ boob _____ tube _____

In fact, the semivowel [w] is expressed in two ways – either by a sign for [u] or by an extra long vertical stroke: _____work, _____wish, _____within, _____white, _____when.

A number of suffixes and terminations deserve special attention such as _____-tion/sion, _____-(t)ute, _____-ance/ence/nounce, e.g.: _____attention, _____gratitude, _____assistance, _____chance, _____denounce.

There are special signs for prefixes which make up a most numerous array: _____under-, _____inter-, _____,over- in such words as _____understand, _____interval, _____overcharge et al.

Certain frequently used roots have also received special treatment: _____ject, _____-prov/proof, _____-tain in the following words: _____object, _____approve, _____obtain. As seen from the latter example, signs may intersect each other as an expedient for new sign-formation.

Table 5 illustrates several contracting techniques widely used in *Scorapice*.

Table 5

Abbreviation techniques applied in *Scorapice*

Abbreviation by:	Examples		
the word's beginning	_____ candidate	_____ colleague	_____ literature
the initial and final signs	_____ opportunity	_____ manager	_____ method
by conventional symbols	_____ circum-/circuit	_____ surround/circle	_____ from my point of view
signs for prefixes, roots, suffixes, and word terminations	_____ precious _____ pretext	_____ analogy _____ childless	_____ emergence _____ dispute
joining two or more words	_____ full-time job _____ as much as possible	_____ social work _____ as a matter of fact	_____ year-round _____ once a year _____ global crisis

In compound words both roots are usually written in full, while some vowels may be omitted without sacrificing the word readability: _____ daydream, ___ str(aw)berry.

Particular attention has been given to the contraction of conjunctions and phrases as exemplified by Table 6.

Table 6

Contraction of some conjunctions and phrases

Outline	Meaning	Outline	Meaning
_____	at (the) top of (the)	_____	ow(ing) to
_____	(in the) course of the	_____	(it goes) without saying
_____	due to	_____	at (the) back of (the)

As Table 6 suggests, many grammatical elements are being left out in many-worded phrases. These and the other techniques mentioned above secure the achievement of a high speedwriting within half a year.

A pilot self-testing gives promise to believe that *Scorapice* may come in useful for a wide range of specialists concerned with writing:

- Non contradictory system of simple rules based on the previously consolidated material.
- The adequate choice of exercises with keys facilitating the control and profound practice for self-study.
- Low distortion of signs in speed writing which makes *Scorapice* records sufficiently readable after a long period of time.
- The hand follows habitual movements thanks to cursive writing with minimal backward movements of the pen in the course of speed writing.
- The full course of training may take up to six months to secure a speed of 100 wpm and more.
- Writing from dictation at various speed, which is available on the internet, will facilitate attaining a high level performance.

It would be a good idea to take a second look at the course of *Scorapice* after its practical evaluation by learners.

An example of text written in *Scorapice* is shown below.

I love you, citadel of Peter's,
I love your elegant austerity of line,
Your broad Neva, whose gracious waters
Mid granite-clad embankment shine.
I love your tracery iron of gates and railing,
The moonless brilliance of the light
That sheds a beauty never paling
Upon your meditative night.
When, neither lamp nor candle needing
I sit composing verse or reading,
And slumbering mansions towering high,
Stand clear against the lucid sky.

A. Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman*

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