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An Analysis of Ukrainians' Language Attitudes and Ideology: A Conflict-catalyzed Identity Shift

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An analysis of Ukrainians' language attitudes and ideology: A conflict-catalyzed identity shift

Kateryna Kravchenko *Brigham Young University*
Joseph A. Stanley *Brigham Young University*

The History of Russification

- ❖ Russian and Soviet authorities conducted policies of **Russification** of Ukraine from 1709 to 1991
- ❖ 17th century: the Moscow Tsars began ordering the **Ukrainian-language texts to be burned**
- ❖ 1863: Valuev Circular is issued. The circular was directed mainly against Ukrainian intellectuals and their efforts to introduce the Ukrainian language into churches and schools.
- ❖ 1938: the resolution of the USSR and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CCCP) “On the **compulsory study of the Russian language** in schools of national republics and regions”
- ❖ According to Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, **Russian was used at home by 43–46% of the population of the country** in 2004

Literature Review

- ❖ Positions of Russian language have traditionally been strong
- ❖ “The State has to ensure the comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life throughout the entire territory of Ukraine” (Constitution of Ukraine, art. 10)
- ❖ The majority of Ukrainians **(74%)** have **never experienced discrimination against Russian speakers** by Ukrainian speakers, and **67% have never experienced discrimination against Ukrainian speakers** by Russian speakers (Masenko, 2009, pp. 117-119).
- ❖ After 2014, **slight changes in attitudes**: more positive views towards Ukrainian, worsening of attitudes towards Russian (Kulyk, 2016)

February 2022



рест | ксенон  @xenon_rat · 21 лют. 2022

...

Думаю, это мой **последний твит на русском**. Хотя я ещё и не знаю, на каком языке продолжу общаться ирл, тут все же хочу перейти на украинский



1



12



александрович @alexandrovichr · 21 лют. 2022

...

У відповідь [@max_katz](#) і [@Nat_anest](#)

Пошёл нахуй, Максим.

Кстати, я очень рад, это тоже мой **последний твит на русском**



1



1



32



Оболонська Більярдистка @HanSoloSashka · 21 лют. 2022

...

Получается, это и мой **последний твит на русском**



1



1



7



Драконя @panika_kom · 21 лют. 2022

...

Штош, это мой **последний твит на русском языке**



2



4



22



ТІТІ-А @dimko1 · 21 лют.

...

Это мой **последний твит на русском**. Так дальше быть не может.

Русофобію в кожен дім.



61



247



3 410



Yevhenii Monastyrskyi @YMonastyrskyi · 24 лют.

...

Думаю это мой **последний твит на русском**:

каждый гражданин россии несёт личную ответственность за происходящее сейчас.
это **на** вашей совести.



10



165



1 278



Той самый Х'юстон @lifewithjaskier · 21 лют.

...

Пошли вы нахуй. Это **последний твит на русском**.



118



231



4 894



No time to DIY @boomtuch · 21 лют.

...

Сегодня мне впервые стало по-настоящему омерзительно от того, что я знаю русский. Посему - это мой **последний твит на русском**, дальше только украинский/английский/иврит.



9



8



71



політікал крінж @polcoringe · 22 лют.

...

Друзья, в связи с признанием Россией ОРДЛО, это мой **последний твит на русском**.



1



14



Research Question

RQ: What are the primary motivations for people who decide to switch from speaking Russian to Ukrainian?

- ❖ What is the process like?
- ❖ How do they manage the switch?
- ❖ What aspects/domains are most difficult?

Methods

- ❖ A sample of 20 Ukrainians (ages 18–60) residing in Ukraine prior to February 24
- ❖ Adapted questionnaires from: Taumoefolau (2002) and Droogsma (2017)
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews conducted in a preferred language (Ukrainian/Russian)
- ❖ Thematic analysis

Does the Ukrainian language have a symbolic meaning for you personally?

Does the Russian language have a symbolic meaning for you personally?

Did you ever consciously change your language behavior? If yes, when and why?

Did you notice changes in the language behavior of friends/acquaintances/in the street/on TV following the Russian invasion? If yes, what kind of changes?

In your opinion, what role should the Ukrainian language play in the Ukrainian state and/or in the Ukrainian society?

Figure 1. An excerpt from the interview guide

Results: Pro-Ukrainian Ideologies

- ❖ Pro-Ukrainian ideologies and attitudes appear to be people's motivation for switching.
- ❖ “Я не хочу розмовляти мовою ворога”
- ❖ “Російськомовні українці використовуються для російської пропаганди. Я не хочу бути частиною цього”
- ❖ “Ми розмовляємо російською тільки тому, що нам її історично навязували”
- ❖ “I don't want to speak **the same language as our enemy**”
- ❖ “Russian-speaking Ukrainians are being used as **a tool for Russian propaganda**. I don't want to be a part of it”
- ❖ “We only speak Russian because it has historically been **imposed on us**”

Results: Exceptions for family

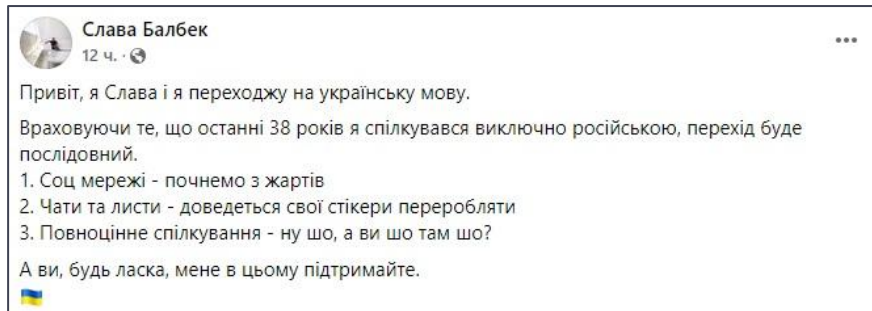
- ❖ Some people make concerted efforts to stick to their vow of only speaking Ukrainian; others make accidental slips, rare exceptions for certain friends or family, or only switch in public domains.

“Я розмовляю українською з новими знайомими, в магазині та в інтернеті. Але мені важко перейти в спілкуванні з батьками”

“I speak Ukrainian when I meet people for the first time, in the shop or on the Internet. But it's **hard for me to switch when talking with my parents**”

- ❖ It appears to be hardest to switch with people with whom they previously have spoken exclusively Russian.

Results: Social Media First



Hello, my name is Slava and I am switching to Ukrainian language.

Considering that I've been speaking exclusively Russian for the past 38 years, the switch will be gradual.

1. Social media posts
2. Online chats and letters
3. Face-to-face communication. What about you?

And, please, support me in this.

Results: Reclaiming Surzhyk

- ❖ Surzhyk, a **historically stigmatized Ukrainian-Russian mixed language** (Bilaniuk 2004; Kravchenko & Stanley 2023), has been reclaimed by Russian-dominant Ukrainians as a helpful bridge towards Ukrainian-dominance.
- ❖ **Positive attitude** towards other people who are in the process of learning to speak **“pure” Ukrainian**.
- ❖ Referred to Surzhyk as a **“transitional period”** between speaking Russian in the past and switching to Ukrainian only:

“Якщо людина реально старається,
я думаю що це класно, це варто
поваги. В таких випадках я взагалі
не проти суржику. Я навіть за”

“If a person is trying their best, I
think it is cool, it is admirable. I
don't mind Surzhyk at all in cases
like this. I'm all for it, even”

Discussion

- ❖ “Language itself can function as such a symbol for which some are ready to die or kill.” (Tabouret-Keller 1997:319)
- ❖ “People are motivated to adjust their speech style, or accommodate, as means of expressing values, attitudes, and intentions towards others. [...] A shift away from the other’s style of speech represents divergence and is considered often a tactic of social dissociation.” (Giles 1982:105)
- ❖ Language is a critical component of cultural identity; understanding the attitudes towards Russian and Ukrainian provides insight into the current social and political climate of the country

Discussion (cont.)

- ❖ “Language is a primary vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and practices from one generation to the next. In this sense, the fate of a language is closely tied to the survival of a culture” (Fishman, 1991).
- ❖ These results help to document the ongoing language shift in Ukraine, contributing to the existing body of sociolinguistic research about Eastern European languages (Gulida 2009), as well as deepening our understanding of how language attitudes and ideologies change in times of conflict and what implications this process has for other speech communities.

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Дякую!

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Слава Україні!

Sláva Ukrayíni!



Bonus Slides

- ❖ “Я почав перехід зі своїх соц. Мереж. Робив пости українською. Потім почав переписуватися з людьми українською. Останнім кроком є живе спілкування, але я не завжди можу втриматися від переходу на російську, особливо якщо співрозмовник російськомовний. ”
- ❖ “I started the switch from social media. I made posts in Ukrainian. Then I started chatting with people in Ukrainian online. The last step is face-to-face communication in Ukrainian, but I can't always stop myself from switching to Russian, especially if I'm talking to a primarily Russian-speaking person.”

❖ “Я поважаю всіх, хто намагається **перейти на українську після того, як почалась війна**. У таких людей є чітка громадянська позиція. Моральні цінності. Для цього потрібен час, багато практики. Це нормально, що спочатку буде важко.”

❖ “До повномасштабного вторгнення я взагалі майже не розмовляла українською, тільки в школі. А потім як задумалася, чому ми в Україні взагалі розмовляємо російською, мені аж моторошно стало. Ми всі русифіковані! Тому тепер суржик мій кращий друг, українською я дуже повільно думаю.”

❖ “I respect everyone who is trying to **switch to speaking Ukrainian after the war started**.

These people have a strong sense of civic engagement.¹ Personal morals. It takes time, a lot of practice. It's understandable that they will struggle at first.”

¹lit. “civic position”

❖ “Before the full-scale invasion I almost never spoke Ukrainian, only in school. And then when I thought about why we speak Russian in Ukraine at all, I felt uneasy. We were all Russified! So now Surzhyk is my best friend, because when I think in Ukrainian I'm too slow.”

Проект було знято **до 24 лютого 2022 року**.
Герої наших реаліті самі обирали мову спілкування
і сьогодні для більшості такий вибір
був би іншим.

“This program was filmed prior to February 24th, 2022. Each participant of this reality show chose which language they wanted to speak.. Today, this choice would be different for most of them.”