# LANGUAGE SITUATION IN UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the article is to analyze the language situation in Ukraine before the beginning of the full-scale russian-ukrainian war and during the russian aggression on the territory of ukraine. To achieve this goal, the historical and comparative method and the method of analysis were used.

The study shows the linguistic situation in Ukraine, reveals the special conditions for the development of national consciousness and identification and the need for the functioning of the state language. Different views on the problem are presented, as well as the results of a survey of ukrainian citizens, and a positive trend in a significant increase in the number of citizens who consider ukrainian to be their native language and necessary for communication in the Ukrainian state is revealed. it is found that the full-scale war has intensified the process of national self-determination, stimulated the readiness of ukrainians to resist external aggression and protect Ukraine's independence.

Keywords: language, full-scale war, identification, national self-determination

Today, Ukrainians are experiencing a terrible tragedy – a full-scale war on their land. In such periods, as a rule, all public and social aspects become more acute, and attitudes toward a particular phenomenon change. Despite the fact that Ukraine has been an independent state for more than 30 years, the issue of language as an identification dimension has become extremely relevant. According to the well-known Ukrainian sociolinguist Larysa Masenko, the language situation has led to the fact that our community has disturbed the balance between understanding language as a symbol of identity, on the one hand, and a means of communication, on the other¹.

An example is the testimony of the famous football player Mykola Morozyuk, a native of Chervonohrad, Lviv region:

Ukrainian is my mother tongue, but now it is easier for me to speak Russian... I don't want to divide people into Ukrainian and Russian speakers, I have my own vision, it is not a problem for me... I can speak Ukrainian easily. But if you have practice and communicate in Russian much more often, then you will eventually

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Л. Масенко, *Мовна ситуація України в соціолінгвістичних вимірах. Війна з Росією вплинула на багатьох*, "Радіо Свобода", 1 травня 2020 р., [website:] https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30586236.html [access: 14.06.2023].

feel more comfortable speaking this language. Someone may choose to speak Ukrainian as a matter of principle. I respect their opinion. But I have my own<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, it is important to understand how the language situation in Ukraine has changed because of Russian aggression. Hence, the purpose of our study is to analyze the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens towards the Ukrainian language as their native language and the language popular in the media and society. The issue of language and its functioning as a state and native language has been studied by some Ukrainian scholars. In particular, Larysa Masenko and Halyna Matsiuk reveal the interaction between language and society, forming national identity<sup>3</sup>.

Scholars pay considerable attention to ethno-cultural differentiation. Currently, in his research, Volodymyr Kulyk argues that language shows linguistic or rather linguistic-ethnic identity, and it is this identity that most accurately reflects ethno-cultural differentiation in Ukrainian society, in which almost everyone has now become Ukrainian<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops has forced millions of Ukrainians to rethink their historical and cultural roots and their national identity. Today, Ukraine is reviving its public space, where Ukrainian culture is faced with the task of forming a nationally conscious citizen.

Ukrainians have gone through a long period of language formation and awareness of their own national identity, the formation of new images, symbols, propaganda, and a new "Soviet" identity. This is evidenced by the results of a mass survey of the Ukrainian population conducted in 2017 by researchers at the Institute of the Ukrainian Language of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in cooperation with the Giessen Institute for Slavic Studies (Germany), which showed high rates of positive responses to a number of questions about the state language.

The question "Do you agree with the statement that the Ukrainian language is one of the attributes of Ukraine's statehood?" was answered by 79.7% of respondents. The question "Is it obligatory for citizens of Ukraine to speak Ukrainian?" was answered in the affirmative by 90.1% of respondents, while the mandatory knowledge of Russian was supported by significantly fewer respondents – 33.2%, which is even one percent less than the group of those who consider English to be mandatory<sup>5</sup>.

Л. Масенко, Мовна ситуація України в соціолінгвістичних вимірах..., ор. сіт.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Г. Мацюк, *Сучасна соціолінгвістика: тенденції в розвитку теорії і завдання*, "Мова і суспільство" 2010, vol. 1, p. 5–20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> В. Кулик, *Мова та ідентичність в Україні на кінець 2022-го*, "Збруч" 2023, 07 January, [website] https://zbruc.eu/node/114247) [access: 22.08.2023].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> С. Зятьєв, «Мова зникає не тому, що її не вчать інші, а тому, що нею не говорять ті, хто її знає», "АрміяІпfоrm" 2020, 9 november, [website:] https://armyinform.

Native language indicators are declining, although they remain quite high for Ukrainian. Ukrainian is considered native by 64.1% of respondents, Russian by 17.1%, Ukrainian and Russian equally by 17.4%, and other by 0.8%. However, the positive impression of the data is offset by the distribution of responses regarding the use of Ukrainian in daily communication.

In the answers to the question "What language do you speak in every-day life?" the share of Ukrainian is significantly decreasing, covering less than half of the respondents. The answers "only in Ukrainian" and "mostly in Ukrainian" total 46.9%, the same figures for the use of Russian total 31.8%, and the answer "equally in Ukrainian and Russian" was chosen by 20.8% of respondents.

As we can see, the number of Russian-speaking citizens is 14.7% higher than the share of those who consider Russian their native language. This means that in everyday communication, the group of Russian-speaking citizens is growing thanks to those who call Ukrainian their native language.

With the first missiles fired at Ukrainian cities, the importance of preserving the Ukrainian language and culture was realized. That is why even today, Putin's entourage and the silent population of the country consider the Ukrainian language as the main safeguard of the "historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians". For the Russian leadership, the war in Ukraine is a struggle for the existence of its regime and Russia as a whole. It is a matter of survival: either it and the return to the colonial past, or we and the movement towards a European future<sup>6</sup>.

We live in a time when the country is changing every minute. There is a return to its original sources, and there is hope for a better Ukrainian future. Every Ukrainian must come to the realization that the only way to preserve their identity in today's realities is to continue the struggle on the cultural front. They should realize that their own culture and language are a strong pillar for the development of the state and society. According to the vast majority of Ukrainian citizens, the war is a terrible ordeal, but it strengthens the Ukrainian national identity and enhances the linguistic resilience of the population. For many years, the Soviet government committed linguistic genocide, so today the Ukrainian language is still in dire need of state protection.

Ukraine, as part of the USSR, went through a long period of eradication of language and national identity, the formation of new images, symbols, propaganda, and a new "Soviet" identity. Old narratives were destroyed, historical facts were manipulated, and those who did not share the new ideolo-

com.ua/2020/11/09/mova-znykaye-ne-tomu-shho-yiyi-ne-vchat-inshi-a-tomu-shho-neyu-ne-govoryat-ti-hto-yiyi-znaye/, [access: 24.10.2023].

Л. Масенко, Мовна ситуація України в соціолінгвістичних вимірах..., ор. сіт.

gy were eliminated, literally or by silencing their voices through deportation and other means<sup>7</sup>.

The questions asked to the respondents were mainly about language and identity. The Institute also set itself the task of comparing the results of the survey conducted in May 2017, to assess changes over the past five years, and especially over the past ten months, because the biggest changes were caused by the full-scale war.

The comparison revealed that the most important change was a sharp increase in the share of respondents who (say they) speak mostly Ukrainian in their daily lives and a corresponding decrease in the share of Russian-speaking citizens. Thus, in December 2022, 41% of respondents said they spoke only Ukrainian, another 17% said they spoke Ukrainian "in most situations", while 6% spoke only Russian and 9% spoke mostly Russian (another 24% said they used both languages "equally"). Compared to 2017, the share of full and predominant Ukrainian speakers has increased by 8%, while the share of Russian-speaking citizens has decreased by as much as 11%. The regional distribution is striking: in the east and south, the number of Ukrainian-speaking citizens was no less than that of Russian-speaking citizens (29% vs. 27%)8.

On March 19, 2022, the sixth nationwide survey was conducted on the language issue in Ukraine, which revealed that over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of people who consider Ukrainian their native language: from 57% in 2012 to 76% in 2022. Russian has lost from 42 to 20% in 10 years. The following trends should be noted in these dynamics. First, significant changes in linguistic self-identification occurred between 2012 and 2016. Some of the key reasons were:

- a) the reaction of society to the experiments of the then government in language policy;
  - b) the events of the Revolution of Dignity;
- c) Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the temporary occupation of Crimea and certain territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Second, the positive dynamics in self-identification was due to a change in attitudes toward the Ukrainian language in the center, as well as in the south and east of the country<sup>9</sup>.

The results of this survey indicate that the process of switching to another language of communication for those Ukrainian citizens who spoke Russian is not an immediate one and requires a long adaptation. However, it is extremely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> В. Кулик, *Мова та ідентичність в Україні на кінець 2022-го*, ор. cit.

<sup>8</sup> В. Кулик, *Мова та ідентичність в Україні на кінець 2022-го*, op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Шосте загальнонаціональне опитування: про мовне питання в Україні. (19 березня 2022), Соціологічна група Рейтинг, 25.03.2022, [website:] https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/language issue in ukraine march 19th 2022.html, [access: 26.08.2023].

important that two-thirds of those who use two languages in everyday life are ready to switch exclusively to Ukrainian in the near future.

In the context of military aggression, there has been unprecedented unity in society, and this has also affected the status of the language: today, an absolute majority (83%) is in favor of Ukrainian being the only state language in Ukraine. This opinion dominates in all macro-regions, age and language groups. As for granting state status to the Russian language, almost a quarter of the population of Ukraine was in favor of this before the war, and today only 7% support it. In peacetime, residents of the south and east traditionally favored granting Russian the status of an official language. But even in these regions, only a third of them were in favor, and today their number has almost halved<sup>10</sup>.

Another important factor. What affects the identity and thinking of Ukrainian citizens is that in December 2021, 65% of bilinguals considered Russia to be the aggressor, and half of Russian speakers did. At the same time, among Ukrainian speakers, one in ten had pro-Russian views. Attitudes toward Russia were determined not so much by the language spoken as by political views and the influence of propaganda and were adjusted with the level of support for pro-Russian parties.

Today, the majority of Ukrainian citizens (67%) believe that there are no problems between Ukrainian and Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine. 19% believe that the language problem exists, but it is not that important. Only 12% believe that this issue is a threat to internal security. Importantly, the thesis that there is a problem in the language sphere is popular not among the Russian-speaking population, but in the western regions, where Ukrainian dominates in all spheres. It is important that according to a previous survey, only 2% of Ukrainians believe that Russia came to protect Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine – this myth is not accepted by Ukrainians<sup>11</sup>.

The war has had a significant impact on attitudes toward the Ukrainian language and its protection throughout the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, and has pushed millions of Ukrainians to rethink their roots and national identity. Against the backdrop of Russian aggression, we have begun to understand more about the importance of protecting the state language as a factor in the security of the state. The vast majority of Ukrainians now stand for a single state language, Ukrainian, and are cutting themselves off from everything that connected us to the aggressor country. In Ukraine and abroad, there is a steady growth in the number of those who consider Ukrainian their native language. While in 2012 this number was 57%, in 2022 it was 76%. Recent polls show that 83% of Ukrainians Ukrainian language

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

yesterday, today, tomorrow in Ukraine and the world 47 recognize and want Ukrainian to be the only state language<sup>12</sup>.

The people and the government in Ukraine have clearly realized during the war that the "Russian world" is not Pushkin or Dostoevsky, the development of fine arts or architectural masterpieces in Russia. In fact, it is a modernized version of the traditional Russian imperial idea of creating a superpower within the borders of 1914, which cannot be realized without Ukraine. In contrast, Ukraine is currently undergoing widespread de-Russification and decolonization, i.e., getting rid of imperial, post-imperial, and Soviet symbolism in culture, education, architecture, mass media, place names, etc.

Finally, the language unites Ukrainian society and helps Ukraine become stronger in the fight against "the pagans", the enemies. The war has changed the attitude of even yesterday's admirers of the imperial Russians, whom the Russian leadership promised to protect. They are turning away from it because the promised "liberation" brought fear, destruction, death, and despair to their families. Russian aggression has affected irreversible processes in Ukraine – the consolidation of the nation to protect the Ukrainian language yesterday, today, and tomorrow in Ukraine and the world. Patriotism and self-sacrifice have given impetus to the preservation and protection of the Ukrainian language, and have influenced the linguistic resilience of Ukrainians. Speaking Ukrainian today means defending our statehood, strengthening our national identity and dignity, and thus resisting the aggressor with words<sup>13</sup>.

It is now clear to everyone that language does not exist outside of culture as a socially inherited set of practical skills and ideas that characterize our way of life. Language, as a type of human activity, is an integral part of culture, defined as a set of results of human activity in various spheres of human life: spiritual, social, and industrial. However, as a form of thinking and, most importantly, as a means of communication, language stands on a par with culture. Language as a powerful social tool, forming a human flow into an ethnic group, forms a nation through the preservation and transmission of culture, tradition, and social consciousness of a particular language group.

Consciousness and self-identification of a person begin with language. Language is genetically inherent and is a code that connects generations. Language determines the national character of an individual. Self-awareness of a person begins with mastery of the native language. Thinking, and thus con-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> В. Прищак, Як війна вплинула на ставлення до української мови. ГЛАВКоМ 2022, March 25, [website:] https://glavcom.ua/country/incidents/yak-viyna-vlinula-na-stavlennya-doukrajinskoji-movi-doslidzhennya-832891.html, [access: 9.11.2022].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> К. Двірна, Мовний фронт боротьби в умовах російсько-української війни (2014—2022рр.), [in:] Українська мова вчора, сьогодні, завтра в Україні і світі, ed. С. Шевчук, Київ 2022, с. 36–50; Digital Repository Dragomanov Ukrainian State University, [website:] https://enpuir.npu.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/38863/Dvirna.pdf?sequence=1, [access: 12.11.2023].

sciousness and self-identification of a person, is based on the native language. The modern Ukrainian language is a centuries-old heritage of the Ukrainian people, created by the efforts of many generations. Language is the main human communication tool; we use it to express our thoughts. Language, of course, has an impact on the formation of a person's consciousness<sup>14</sup>.

The full-scale war has intensified the process of national self-determination, stimulated the readiness of Ukrainians to resist external aggression and defend Ukraine's independence. At present, the struggle for state independence and the defense of their right to their own future and the future of the country is the main concern for the vast majority of the country's population<sup>15</sup>.

National interests and values are the basis for the formation of national goals. In turn, national goals are the main state task, the fulfillment of which should ensure the realization and protection of national interests and values. Thus, national goals are guidelines on the way to building a new security model for Ukraine.

During the years of independence, Ukraine has had deep regional and linguistic divisions in terms of views on Ukraine's history, national interests and values. The first sharp surge in Ukrainian consolidation occurred after the first wave of Russian aggression in 2014, and the second after the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022<sup>16</sup>.

Today, the value and normative system of society is rapidly changing, as Ukraine has entered an era of radical social change. The social instability caused by the current changes in society is only growing.

It should be noted that further research on national interests and values is extremely relevant and appropriate. There is a need for constant monitoring of both foreign and domestic political vectors of the opinions of the Ukrainian population, scientific study of value (individual and societal) orientations, since the consolidation of Ukrainian society is, unfortunately, still only situational. Further scientific research should be devoted to the search for a common foundation of cohesion among Ukrainian citizens, which will provide a long-term opportunity to stay together, despite any transformation and modernization processes<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> О. Шумейко, Значення мови для саморозвитку особистості в сучасному українському суспільстві, [in:] Проблеми саморозвитку особистості в сучасному українському соціумі, eds. А. Гетьман, В. Лозовой, О. Прудникова, Л. Сідак, Ю. Меліхова Харків: 2019, p. 121.

О. Жулєньова, Вплив війни на ціннісні пріоритети, [in:] Українське суспільство в умовах війни 2022, eds. С. Дембіцький, О. Злобіна, Н. Костенко та ін., Київ 2022, р. 335.
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> А. Редькіна, Українські національні інтереси й цінності: суспільне усвідомлення та переоцінка, "Political Studies" 2023, № 1 (5), р. 144—162, [website:] https://ipiend.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Anna-Redkina.pdf [access: 19.10.2023].

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#### МОВНА СИТУАЦІЯ В УКРАЇНІ В УМОВАХ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

**Анотація.** Метою статті було проаналізувати мовну ситуацію в Україні до початку повномасштабної російсько-української війни та під час агресії росії на територію України. Для досягнення поставленої мети використано історично-порівняльний метод та метод аналізу.

У дослідженні показано мовну ситуація в Україні, розкрито особливі умови розвитку національної свідомості та ідентифікації та необхідності функціонування державної мови. Представлено різні погляди на проблему, результати опитуваня громадян України, виявлено позитивну динаміку у значному збільшення громадян, які вважають українську мову рідною та необхідною для спілкування в Українській державі. Виявлено, що повномасштабна війна спричинила інтенсифікацію процесу національної самовизначеності, стимулювала готовність українців до спротиву зовнішній агресії й захисту незалежності України.

**Ключові слова:** мова, повномасштабна війна, ідентифікація, національна самовизначеність

## SYTUACJA JĘZYKOWA NA UKRAINIE W KONTEKŚCIE WOJNY ROSYJSKO-UKRAIŃSKIEJ

**Streszczenie.** Celem artykułu jest analiza sytuacji językowej w Ukrainie przed rozpoczęciem pełnoskalowej wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej oraz w czasie rosyjskiej agresji na terytorium Ukrainy. Aby osiągnąć ten cel, zastosowano metodę historyczno-porównawczą i metodę analizy.

Przeprowadzone analizy ukazują sytuację językową w Ukrainie, ujawniają szczególne warunki rozwoju świadomości i tożsamości narodowej oraz potrzebę funkcjonowania języka państwowego. Przedstawiono różne poglądy odnośnie opisywanych zagadnień, a także wyniki ankiety przeprowadzonej wśród obywateli Ukrainy, co z kolei ujawnia pozytywną tendencję do znacznego wzrostu liczby obywateli, którzy uważają język ukraiński za swój język ojczysty i niezbędny do komunikacji w państwie ukraińskim. Stwierdzono także, że pełnoskalowa wojna zintensyfikowała proces samostanowienia narodowego, pobudziła gotowość Ukraińców do przeciwstawienia się agresji zewnętrznej i obrony niepodległości Ukrainy.

Słowa kluczowe: język, wojna pełnoskalowa, identyfikacja, samostanowienie narodowe.