

Sustainable Multilingualism 2017

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Vytautas Magnus University,

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Bilingualism in Ukraine: value or a challenge?

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Post-Soviet Reality

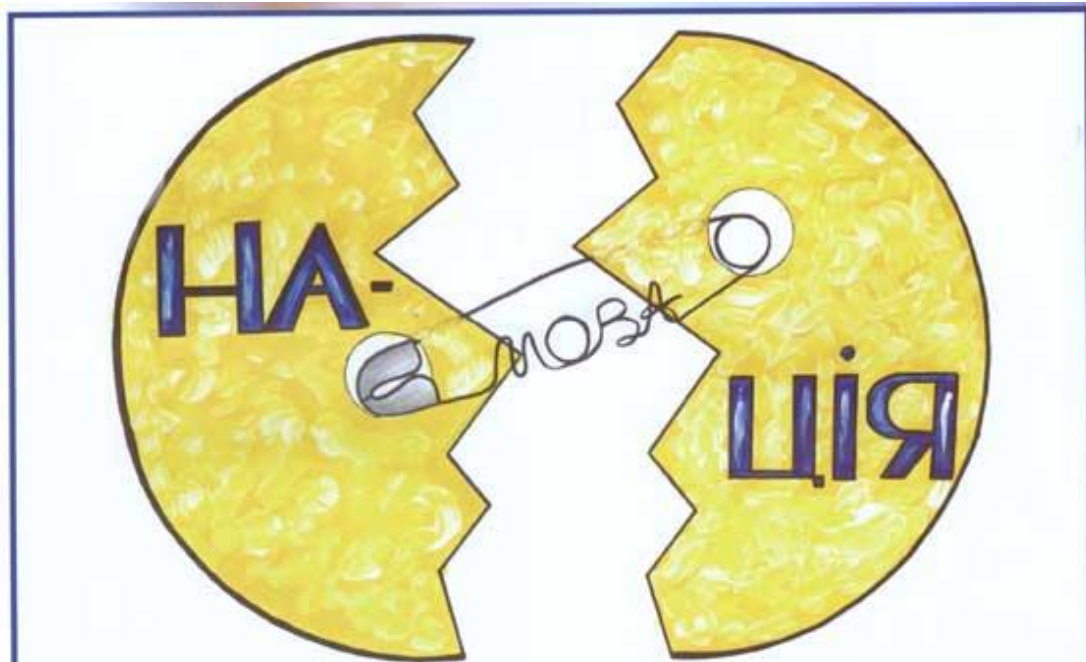
- The fundamental problems of the linguistic situation of Ukraine are the lack of consensus regarding the issue of what role the Ukrainian language has in constructing the new post-Soviet identity and in nation building, what status the Russian language should be given in Ukraine, and what functions can be assigned to other minority languages (Polese, 2011).

How did present-day Ukraine come about?



Language as a political mobilizing factor

- ❑ The language situation of Ukraine was left by the Ukrainian Soviet Republic after the country's independence (1991) was rather complex
- ❑ Having become independent, Ukraine faced a major problem: „**What will the new identity be based on?**”



Bilingualism in Ukraine has become stigmatized



The Ukrainian point of view:



Changing the legal status quo of language rights is practically impossible without conflicts

24th May, 2012.:
the 'dispute' over the language bill in the Ukrainian Parliament



EuroMaidan & Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014)



An immediate symbolic step right after the transfer of power

- ❑ One of the very first actions of the parliament in Kyiv after the removal of Yanukovych was to repeal the language law adopted in 2012 (23rd February, 2014 – one day after Yanukovych's escape)
- ❑ Right after repealing the law, riots broke out in the Crimea region and several eastern Ukrainian cities.
- ❑ The unrest continued also in Kyiv.





❑ Crimea has annexed by Russian Federation.



A 'Little green man'?
NO!



V. Putin speech in March 18, 2014

- “ ...the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in ***defending their rights and lives***, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities. Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part. (...) Our concerns are understandable because we are not simply close neighbours but, as I have said many times already, ***we are one people***. (...) Millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. ***Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means***. But it should be above all in Ukraine’s own interest to ensure that these people’s rights and interests are fully protected. This is the guarantee of Ukraine’s state stability and territorial integrity.”
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In spring 2014 the language issue has become a *casus belli*.

- ❑ “The language issue was one of the main causes of the conflict that erupted in the eastern part of the country” (Sakwa 2016: 220) .
- ❑ “The present situation in Ukraine is an example of how can a linguistic and cultural war become a precondition and official principle of a real war” (Drozda 2014).
- ❑ “Wherever we look, the current Russian-Ukrainian war began because of the language. It is an indisputable fact. Russia has just used the language factor as a reason for aggression – by explaining that they need to protect the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine” (Osnach 2015).



- "I hope – Poroshenko said in a statement on 28 June 2014 – *that in the history of Ukraine the issue of language or culture will never again threaten the national unity,*" thereby acknowledging that the unsettled language problem is a security risk for the state.



Spring, 2014: ATO: Antiterrorist Operation



May 25, 2014: Petro Poroshenko wins the presidential election

- ❑ October 26, 2014, parliamentary election: The party of Petro Poroshenko behind the party of Arseniy Yatseniuk.



Is Russian “*the language of the enemy*”?

- "The [...] language law was written on Putin's knee, and had a different purpose. The president keeps talking about the protection of the Ukrainian language, but nothing happens. We are tired of demagoguery. A war is going on here, the Russian propaganda pours from the screen, and no one does anything about it".
- „The Russian language in the chain that bounds Ukraine to the Communist past” (Masenko 2016).



Speak Russian! We will come and protect you!

Where to hear music or pop chanson in Russian, Russian tanks will come





- “The currently popular slogan »Єдина країна – Єдина страна« is faulty: it solidifies bilingualism on a country level, that is, it strengthens Russian as a second state language. In other words, it does not unify the country but divides it. By saying *Єдина страна* in Russian we turn to those living in the east and assert that Ukrainian, which is a special symbol of the unification of the nation, is not obligatory, even for the president, and with this we betray Ukrainians, primarily those living in the east, who are loyal to their language despite the constant pressure from the Russian speaking environment” (Masenko and Orel 2014).
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Yuri Shevchuk, a linguist teaching Ukrainian in the United States agrees:

- “The Ukrainian society has not only become a hostage to the *united and indivisible Russia's* imperial formula »Єдина країна, Единая страна« which confirms the Russification. With its resignation and conformism they take part in destroying their own language and culture” (Shevchuk 2015).



Crisis as an opportunity: new trends in language policy?

- ❑ The law on public service accepted in 2015 indicates the narrowing of the language rights.
- ❑ The new language law specifies the exclusive use of the state language among officials (Article 8).



*Do you want
bilingualism?*

Learn Ukrainian!



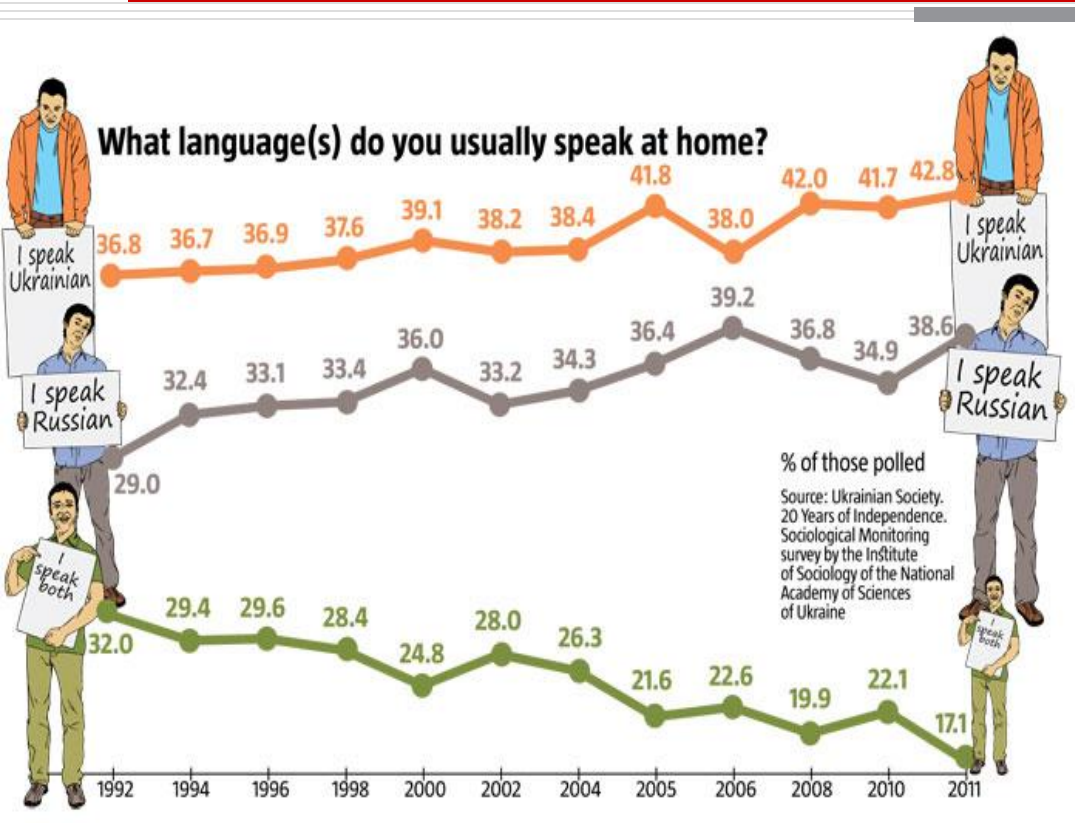
The concern about the language situation is reflected in the three language law drafts, which were submitted in December 2016 and January 2017 by the representatives of the Ukrainian parliament.

- ❑ The drafts grant far less right to use minority languages compared to the language law, adopted in 2012.
- ❑ According to Article 1 of the 5669th draft law, political discourse initiated about bilingualism is against the law:
- ❑ “Attempts to introduce official multilingualism at national level against the Constitution of Ukraine and the established constitutional procedures are actions aimed at inciting ethnic hatred, linguistic division of the country, a violation of the constitutional order and territorial integrity of Ukraine.”

Conclusion

- ❑ Ukraine today is a state that has been in a transitional period since the proclamation of its independence 25 years ago: it seeks the leaven, which can be the basis for a new national identity.

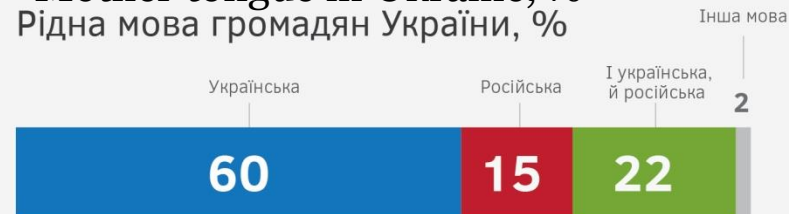
The currently bilingual country can become monolingual gradually.



Становище української мови в Україні в 2016 році



Mother tongue in Ukraine, %
Рідна мова громадян України, %



What language(s) do you speak at home?
Розмовляють удома, %



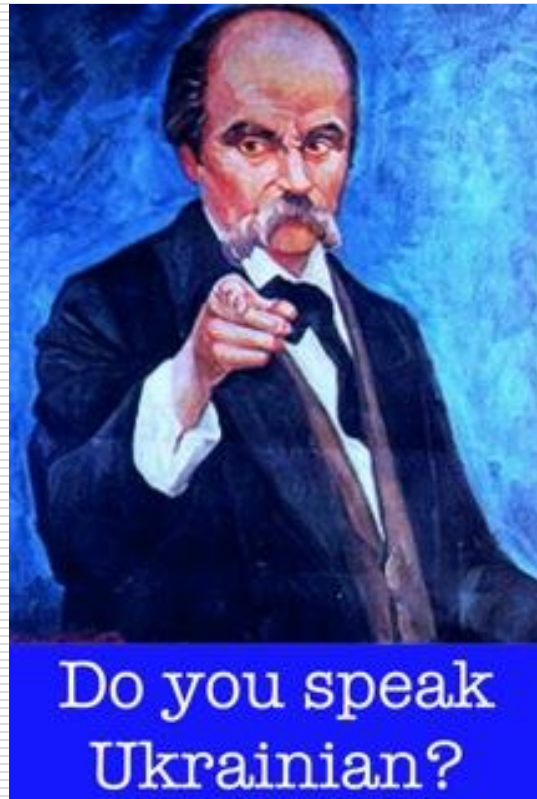
Дані: Центр Разумкова, 2016

Аналіз: рух «Простір свободи»

Візуалізація — TEXTY

October, 2016

Future predictions: anger peace?



Thank you for your kind attention!

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