

ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE POLICY: UKRAINIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIFICATION.

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Introduction

The collapse of the former Soviet Union ended the chauvinism of Russian Language. Ethnic identity changed the nature of relations among scores of ethnic communities in the former Soviet Union, currently independent Sovereign States. The language policy in Ukraine to a larger extent relegated the Russian language to the background. The paper examines the language policy in Ukraine widely accepted as Ukranization and establishes a fair opinion of the ethnic minority groups about the language policy in Ukraine through questionnaires. The views of respondents indicate that Ukrainization is a welcome phenomenon, but it needs to adapt to the needs of ethnic minority groups in Ukraine.

The question of language and identity in Ukraine has become more crucial to sociolinguists after the demise of socialism in 1991. The identity question within the framework of ethnicity should be concerned with the broader issue of the way in which we represent what is foreign, According to Clarke, foreign “is when describing a group or nation to which we do not belong”(Clarke 2005:1).

According to Clarke, “language is a critical component in the construction of identity. If identity is seen as a set of characteristics that define an individual or a group, then language is an important means by which these characteristics are communicated” (ibid: 3).

Keywords: Ethnicity, Language Policy, Ukrainization, Russification, Ethnic Minority, Russophones, Sovereignty, Russian Federation.

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed through the use of questionnaires.

Ukrainization in its current form

On April 25, 2019, the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukraine's legislature adopted a law enhancing the role of Ukrainian as a state language. (Law that Ensures the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language], Verkhovna Rada website. The new Law establishes the legal base of state linguistic policy. This Law replaced the 2012 Law on the Principles of State Language Policy, which had been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in February 2018 because “the procedure for the consideration and adoption of the Law established by the Constitution was violated.”

The aim of the new Law is to strengthen the role of the Ukrainian language in the development of the state and to ensure that the territorial integrity of Ukraine is preserved, and the national security is enhanced. (Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language, preamble.) The Law confirms the status of the Ukrainian language as the state language, as provided in the Constitution.

According to the Law, the use of Ukrainian is mandatory throughout the entire territory of Ukraine “in the exercise of powers by public authorities and local self-government bodies, as well as in other spheres of public life, as defined by this Law.” (Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language art. 1(9) (translation by author).) The Law disallow actions that are aimed at introducing multilingualism at the official level

By the law every citizen of Ukraine is obliged to speak the state language. (*Id.* art. 6(1).) One could acquire the Ukrainian citizenship on condition that the fellow presents a certificate of Ukrainian language proficiency. (*Id.* art. 7.)

According to the new law from 2023, education must be conducted in the Ukrainian language. Aside studying the Ukrainian language, groups or individuals belonging to national minorities or indigenous people have the right to conduct education in their respective native languages through the formation of classes (*grup(s)*). (*Id.* art. 21.) Achievements of science, art, culture, and the print media must use the state language. (*Id.* arts. 22, 23, 25.)

<https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/ukraine-legislatureadopts-language-law/>

Language policy in Ukraine

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By state policy, Ukrainian language became the official state language after 1991. The language policy in Ukraine did not go well with the ethnic Russians and other minority Russophones residing in Ukraine..

Russians and other ethnic minorities residing in Ukraine must also learn to respect the position of the Ukrainian government on language policy. Russians are citizens of Ukraine since they were once citizens of the former Soviet Union. The Ukrainian government has not denied ethnic Russians citizenship.

According to Jonathan Clark, “at the level of the nation or state, membership can be defined as referring to those who are considered to be citizens, usually persons entitled to a passport” (*Ibid:* 3).

Russian language and the language policy in ukraine

After the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the Soviet language policy was terminated and individual state language policies were to triumph.

The historical role of Ukraine in the Russian Empire and the former Soviet Union makes the controversy around the language policy a unique one. .

The Soviet linguistic policy gave prominence to the Russian language irrespective of the long standing ethnic ties. .

The Ukrainian government came out with a language policy tagged ‘Ukrainization’. Ukrainization according to www.tryukraine.com is “the Ukrainian government’s efforts to establish, or re-establish Ukrainian as the dominant language of Ukraine’s civic and cultural life”. These efforts referred to as “Ukrainization” are most striking in predominantly Russian speaking cities such as Kiev, Kharkov, Simferopol, etc. where all official signs and most external advertising are now in Ukrainian”.

In order to strengthen Ukrainization the government of Ukraine proposed that international channels be dubbed in the Ukrainian language (Poludenko, 2008). It was also required that foreign movies should have Ukrainian subtitles or be dubbed into the Ukrainian language. This 1998 law received the seal of the constitutional court. Further measures taken to consolidate Ukrainization was the use of the Ukrainian language in schools. To a greater extent, the Ukrainian language was used as the main language of instruction in elementary and secondary schools from the advent of Ukrainization, specifically from 1991 (Bilaniukand Melnyk, 2008; Hrycak, 2006).

It is important to recognise the reasonable attitude of the policy makers towards the Russian language. This is manifested through the constitution of Ukraine.

Article 10 (aspects)

‘In Ukraine, the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine is guaranteed. The state promotes the learning of languages of international communication. The use of languages in Ukraine

is guaranteed by the constitution of Ukraine and is determined by law.” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2008)

The constitution is clear on the fact that Ukraine is the state language. However Russian language should be seen as an important factor in the development of the Ukrainian market economy. Aside, the language should be seen as a unifying force cementing relations between former republics of the former Soviet Union (<http://www.romyr.com>).

The transition period from Russification under the Soviet regime to Ukrainization is somehow a strenuous linguistic process for ethnic minority groups whose active language for communication was the Russian language. For instance a former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma was fluent in Russian than Ukrainian. Ukrainization was a matter of state policy required by most new states dominated by a foreign language, irrespective of the anticipated conflict.

According to Even-Zohar, it is not actual language contact or language diversity that generates conflict rather language conflict is a result of ideologies that determine the goals of society based on its conception (Even-Zohar, 1986).

After the demise of the former Soviet Union, the Ukrainian language was to promote Ukrainian culture in all spheres of public life. The promotion of education, industry, economic activities, media relations and other areas of socio-political and religious life of the country was to be dominated by the Ukrainian language. It was clear however that in practice it was going to meet some resistance due to the fact that it was going to be difficult for people living in Kharkov, Kiev, Simporopol and other areas where the population is dominated by ethnic Russians to accept this policy with wholehearted allegiance. It was therefore reasonable to effect these changes at the state level, but at the regional or district levels it would be realistically impossible in the teething stages of Ukrainization. It was evident that Ukrainian Russophones who had never studied the Ukrainian language before 1991 were going to encounter initial difficulties with the use of the Ukrainian Language. According to www.tryukraine.com, the Russian language before the implementation of the language policy was the official language of public interaction in Ukraine. Surveys according to the paper shows that more people are speaking the Ukrainian language quite more than

two decades ago and this is due to the fact that Ukrainians are permitted to move to cities and settle, a practice which was not possible in the Soviet times. In the Soviet times, where people were registered as Soviet citizens became their permanent place of stay, places of birth was the basis for the acquisition of passports, one could live in different places on temporary basis . The city population in Kiev according to the paper has spread from an official 2.6 million to 4 million due to the fact that ethnic Ukrainians are moving from the hinterlands to settle in Kiev.

It is obvious that with the historical and ethnic relations between Ukraine and Russia for decades, it is not surprising to observe that more than fifty (50) percent of the population of Ukraine can speak and write Russian language. It is therefore logical to suggest that Ukrainianization should take a soft and humane character. The following positions have been advanced in this language problem.

- That Ukrainianization as a policy of increasing the usage and the facilitation of the Ukrainian language in the promotion of the Ukrainian culture is a good policy. Ukraine as a sovereign state has the right to emphasize the usage of the Ukrainian language as the official state language.
- The methods of achieving Ukrainianization should be systematic and manageable by Russians and other ethnic minorities.
- If Ukrainianization is to popularise the use of the Ukrainian language without any extreme nationalistic attachments, then it is a welcome linguistic policy to strengthen national orientation, Russians and Ukrainians have had a long common history. Intermarriages increased after 1917 when more Russian specialists migrated to Ukraine to work for the Soviet government. Ukrainianization at such a tempo will be suicidal to the new independent Ukraine.
- Russification did not abolish the use of the Ukrainian language, Ukrainians can formulate the same language policy, but Russian language must be considered as the second official language.
- The Ukrainian language and the Russian language should be used as languages in educational institutions. In Ukraine where teachers and lecturers feel that they can better express

themselves in Russian or Ukrainian they must do so. There should not be any marginalization of the Russian language.

The conflict

Russian became the official language for the Soviet Union and it was evident that the social functions of national languages were restricted. According to academician Oleg Trubatchov, all languages in the Soviet Union form a language union where the leading role belongs to Russian (Mati Hunt, 1990).

The 1991 ethnic volcano brought convictions to conscience and this great linguistic awakening did not give priority to the Russian language especially in Ukraine.

Russian language was not discarded entirely at the state level, nevertheless it was not given a leading role in state official businesses in Ukraine.

Possible ways of resolving the language conflict

Indeed, there have been mixed blood relations. It is therefore quixotic to allow language to create antagonism between people of almost the same ethnic relations like Russians and Ukrainians.

The following suggestions have been put forth to resolve the language conflict.

- It is obvious that after 1991, there have been numerous language conflicts based on the pursuit of native language rights in the former Soviet Union. Russians should understand this development,
- For seventy years, Russians and Russian language sociopolitical, economic and cultural life of countries of the former Soviet Union. Russia should now seek partnership and change from the chauvinistic disposition of the past.

It was going to be difficult to switch to the Ukrainian language even for Ukrainian Russophones who have never showered any attention on the Ukrainian language before 1991.

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According to Yuriy Dzyadyk, a Ukrainian Tutor at the Modern languages department University of Ghana, “there is not much problem with the language, neither are there any tensions except that southern Russians pretend not to know the Ukrainian language. He admitted that initially the use of Russian Language was forbidden in public schools in Western Ukraine but it is now allowed”.

Participants in the data collection

One hundred people from different ethnic groups responded to the questionnaires in Kiev. Some have travelled from other towns and villages in Ukraine for business transactions and other engagements. Some lived in Kiev for few days. Their perception was not based on the language situation in Kiev but the overall situation in Ukraine.

Questionnaires on ukrainian language policy

Respondents: russians and other ethnic minority groups in Kiev

Ukraine was chosen for this study because the issues concerning minority groups in Ukraine could be identified with people living in Kiev. Members of all the ethnic minority groups could be found in Kiev. The purpose of the study is to unfold the difficulties being encountered by ethnic minority groups in Ukraine. It is also to unfold the attitude of the minority groups towards the language policy. It is obvious that Russians are spearheading the struggle to adopt Russian Language as a second official language in Ukraine. Kiev was chosen for this purpose because it is a predominantly Russian-speaking city. There are Ukrainian Russophones in Kiev, but they are not in the target group. The age group enables us to have a wider range of opinions about the language policy in Ukraine.

Age: between 15 years to 70 years

Date - june 2016

State your status, age, and ethnic affiliation

The questionnaires

Question №	Option	Percentage
1	A	10%
	B	70%
	C	20%
	D	0
2	A	30%
	B	50%
	C	10%
	D	10%
3	A	11%
	B	80%
	C	9%
	D	0
4	A	19%
	B	10%
	C	12%
	D	59%
5	A	5%
	B	20%
	C	15%
	D	60%
6	A	16%
	B	40%
	C	29%
	D	15%
7	A	0
	B	63%
	C	18%
	D	19%
8	A	4%
	B	45%

	C	5%
	D	46%
9	A	20%
	B	40%
	C	20%
	D	20%,
10	A	75%
	B	13%
	C	2%
	D	0
11	A	5%
	B	50%
	C	30%
	D	15%
12	A	8%
	B	8%
	C	30%
	D	54%
13	A	10%
	B	10%
	C	20%
	D	60%
14		
	A	14%
	B	9%
	C	55%
15	D	22%
	A	45%
	B	20%
	C	21%
	D	14%

Analysis

There is a clear indication that majority of ethnic Russians and other minority groups resident in Ukraine, with special reference to Kiev, would have wished that the Soviet Union did not disintegrate. The language problem is one of the products of the harsh realities of the breakup of the Soviet Union. The results from the respondents of question one indicates that no ethnic minority group feel comfortable in the present condition than before the breakup of the Soviet Union. The development of the events at that time was pointing to the breakup of the Soviet Union. The 20% respondents looked at things in the face of reality, but emphasized the need for a language policy that would suit ethnic minority groups in Ukraine. The respondents in "A" faced the reality. The socio-political developments gave indications of a possible dissolution of the Soviet Union. An interesting exception in question two is that under normal circumstances it would have been expected that less than 50% should have opted for "b", but they were realistic, the respondents accepted the sovereignty of Ukraine and were not ready to be blinded by unfavorable language policy. The 30% who consented to the question were guided by ethnic nationalistic feelings. There was a group of respondents who strongly disagree (10%). It meant that though the language policy ignited tensions between minority groups in Ukraine, there is a group of people who will ever be guided by principle. It is a stark reality that Ukrainians in the Russian Federation are not confronted with any language problem. Even those who migrated to the Russian Federation already spoke the Russian language even before the introduction of Ukrainianization. Respondents of C thought along the same line with "b". Some conditions may demand the usage of the Ukrainian language in the Russian Federation. It is therefore not out of order that 10% opted for A"

It is obvious that majority of the respondents would opt for "D" in question four especially when majority of the respondents are ethnic Russians who are agitating for the adoption of Russian language as a second official language. The 19% respondents for "A" are still thinking as Soviet citizens and have side stepped the fact that Ukraine is an independent sovereign state. In spite of the agitation for a favourable language policy for ethnic minority groups in Ukraine, there

is a group who opted that as a sovereign state Ukraine has the legitimate right to determine its language policy.

It is obvious that majority of the respondents will opt for “D” since majority of residents in Kiev are Russian speakers. Kiev being the capital where most businesses and companies are situated, majority of residents would opt for active use of the Russian language.

Every rational respondent will not consent to the fact that the Russian language should be superior to the Ukrainian language. It is reasonable to suggest that the percentage that opted for “D” is agitating for equity in communication within the framework of government business. There are extremists in every agitation, and it is unreasonable to consent to the fact that while staying in Ukraine, which is a sovereign state, Russian language should be superior to the Ukrainian language. It is also important on the other side not to neglect the respondents' position.

It is significant for residents who think that since the Russian language is dominant in Kiev, it is reasonable to put it ahead of the Ukrainian language for convenience sake, in both government business and other business transactions.

It is reasonable within the framework of sovereignty to disagree. The 5% respondents admitting that Ukraine is a sovereign state recognize the superiority of the Ukrainian language but have not dismissed the fact that the Russian language is not to be relegated to the background. While '**B**' (disagree) and '**C**' recognize the sovereignty of Ukraine. '**B**' (15%) is more emphatic. Many Russians and other ethnic minority groups in Kiev (Ukraine), irrespective of the differences they have with the Ukrainian government, they are objective in the assessment of their relationship with Ukrainians; they have not exported their ethnic sentiments in responding to question six. Reality has overcome ethnic sentiments. Discrimination at any level is possible once one is not an ethnic Ukrainian.

Respondents to “B” being in the majority (40%) presupposes that discrimination is not on the larger scale in Kiev. It however does not presuppose that all cities and towns will attract the same response. The possibility that many Ukrainians are fluent in both languages presupposes that the hostility towards ethnic Russians and other ethnic minority groups will be on the minimal.

On question seven, the respondents to '**B**' in question seven demonstrated realism. It implies that a greater number of ethnic Russians and other minority groups who favour the adoption of Russian language, see the need to learn the Ukrainian language. By learning the Ukrainian language which is not a total departure from the Russian language, one acquires oral skills from all other Slavic languages.

There is a coincidence of opinion between the respondents of **C** and **D** (18% and 19% respectively). Nobody opted for **A**, implying that learning of the Ukrainian language is still an agenda for many Russians and other ethnic minority groups. The problem is with the policy makers and not the language per se.

It is reasonable to argue that the Ukrainian and Russian languages must be used as languages of instruction in educational institutions, therefore the 76% respondents is called for, for optimal and efficient teaching. It would be better if Russian lecturers could deliver lectures and other teaching materials in the Russian language. The endorsement of the policy by parents will have no effect on the policy as a constitutional requirement. The 7% indicates that there are a few people from the ethnic minority groups who adhere to the fact that the sovereignty of Ukraine must be respected

On question nine, 40% of the respondents opted for "**B**" implying that listening to lectures in the Ukrainian language could be equally difficult for the school children. The 20% who opted for "**A**" implies that students are grown-ups and might have acquired sufficient knowledge in the Ukrainian language during their long stay in Ukraine.

"**A**" and "**C**" have identical pattern except that the conviction of one group is stronger. "**B**" and "**D**" are also equivalent in views except that "**D**" is superior in its expression than "**B**".

The 75% who opted for "**A**" in question ten are the group of respondents who stayed in Kiev before the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The 13% are the minority group who migrated to Ukraine after 1991. The 12% who are either specialists, or people who have migrated to Kiev (Ukraine) to test the strength of the economy and assess how their business could be compatible with the Ukrainian economy. The state of the Ukrainian economy might be a motivation for many

Russians to settle in Ukraine after 1991. The reverse is that many Ukrainians migrated

to Russia in search of job after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is not much logic to relocate to Russia, a new settlement entirely. The 5% respondents for A indicates that there is a group who might want to relocate to Russia, which is their native country. In question eleven, respondents for "B" (50%) indicates that there are a larger number of ethnic minority groups who anticipated that the collapse of the former Soviet Union would be accompanied with socio-political processes including the language policy. There is the need to resolve the language policy while remaining residents in Kiev (Ukraine). The 30% respondents to "C" is a wishful thinking that may not materialise.

The statistical reality of this question points to the fact that ethnic minority groups would want the resolution of the language problem. The 15% respondents to "D" indicates that there are ethnic minority groups who are realistic and would want the language conflict be resolved amicably, they propose the need to learn the a Ukrainian Language. A few respondents believe that another way of resolving the language conflict is for those who cannot contain the language problem to relocate to some other region or country of their choice. It is also a reasonable stand.

Definitely many respondents will go in for 'D' in question twelve. Majority of course are ethnic Russians. The respondents for 'C' demonstrated moderation even in their quest that the Russian language should be elevated to the status of a second official language. It is significant to note that two groups responded with the same percentage that is 'A' and 'B'. These two groups opine that the language policy does not affect private transactions and therefore see a measure of freedom in their stay in Kiev (Ukraine).

The respondents for 'D' demonstrate some degree of level headedness, they see themselves as people with one ethnic background, and there is therefore the need to use such an advantage to resolve the language problem.

As indicated by respondents to 'C', the European concept becomes a unifying force. They see themselves as people from one continental organization such as Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The 'C' and 'D' bring commonness into mind. Respondents to A recognizes the fact that the two ethnic groups fall

under the United Nations, but then indicates that the UN has its limitations on matters bordering sovereignty. Respondents to 'B' share almost the same view. They amplify the role of the UN in the study of languages, even smaller languages, but again accept the sovereignty of Ukraine to determine its language policy.

Respondents to C in question fourteen indicate that on the individual basis, there is a cord of cordiality, and it may mean that the group behavior at the political level could just be contagious. Ethnic sentiments expressed through political rallies differ from individual relations. The 20% respondents to 'A' indicate that there are personal relations between Ukrainians and Russians even before the collapse of the Soviet Union and that such ties cannot be interrupted by a mere language policy controversy. The level of tensions surrounding language policy debates could disrupt an already existing good relation between individual Ukrainians and Russians.

The issue of bad relations between individual Russians and Ukrainians is out of the question.. The respondents of B (3%) indicate that many Russians and Ukrainians have good relationship. The long-standing social ties between Russians and Ukrainians are demonstrated through respondents of 'A' in question fifteen. It emphasizes the fact that ethnic identification became an issue only after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It is obvious that many Russians might have even married in Ukraine before the breakup of the Soviet Union for a purpose. Some were sent to Ukraine as specialists or were recruited in the army and were sent to Ukraine. There are so many other reasons for the percentage (37%). The 28% implies that the minority groups are inter married. The 28% implies that the minority groups are married to Ukrainians. There were a lot of inter marriages between Russians and Ukrainians even before the breakup of the Soviet Union. This is prominent in the respondents' answers.

A considerable number of the respondents to A are young people who have taken decision on the issue, and their position could change in the future. Majority of the respondents to C are young people who either have Ukrainian boy or girl friends or intend marrying Ukrainians. There are different ethnic minority groups in Ukraine and there is the tendency that most of them have decided to enter into inter marriages or one ethnic group marrying from other ethnic groups. Ethnocentric sentiments could also be reason for deciding for D. This category could

be minority Russo phones who have decided not to marry Ukrainians because of tensions around language policy in Ukraine

The differences between the language situation in kiev and other regions in Ukraine

The paper concentrated on the language situation in Kiev because of accessibility.

Heavily russified areas like Kharkov, Donetsk have the percentage of Russo phones higher than Lvov. Because of Russian businesses springing up in big towns and cities, Russo phones are likely to be on the increase in those cities. Other businesses springing in the cities may also attract Russian speakers. There will be the need for a separate research on this issue. On the whole, Ukrainianization has changed the attitude of many towards the study of the Ukrainian language. Many who were deeply inclined to russification have developed interest in the Ukrainian language

Conclusion

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, It was advisable to remain in one's republic of residence, where he or she is working and where one's children are receiving education. This issue brought about the question of liberty, citizenship and language conflict.

According to the Christian Science Monitor, former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko leaned towards the nationalist point of view, Mr. Yushchenko, a former Prime Minister, Speaker of Russian, favourably made his point during visits to Moscow by conversing with his Kremlin counterpart only through an interpreter. He has identified himself as a Ukrainian, on the contrary with President Victor Yanukovich, who hails from the heavy russified Eastern Ukraine, the debate was already assuming a different dimension. The President speaks Russian and according to Vladimir Vyazi Vcky, a parliamentary deputy with Yushchenko's Our Ukraine Movement. "It is terrible to imagine how he (Yanukovich) is going to mistreat not just the Ukrainian language, but also Ukraine's culture and history in future". (<http://www.csmonitor.com/world/europe/0315/ukraine-vs-russian-language—two-tngues-divide-former-soviet>)

The primacy of the Ukrainian language must be promoted once Ukraine has attained the status of sovereignty, but considering the fact that Ukraine is linguistically and ethnically polarized, government should exercise prudence in the implementation of language policy to create a united and integrated nation. There is the need to harmonise all intellectual resources for the betterment of Ukraine. Ethnic minority groups in Ukraine and Ukrainians have their destinies closely interwoven by history. It is imperative to note that the drafting of any law on languages should take into consideration the interests of all ethnic groups in Ukraine. There should not be any ultimatum for non-native speakers to grasp the language of native speakers. In any case, Ethnic minority groups should develop interest in the Ukrainian language. It was obvious that the use of Russian language will be on the decline. The fact remains that, Russians must accept such changes as normal and not discriminatory, unless for instance a particular job requires that the prospective applicant will use the state language. There should not be any discrimination in employment, based on language and ethnicity. There should not be a case where candidates for positions in state institutions and agencies are placed in unequal conditions, priority should not be given to speakers of Ukrainian language on the labour market. In any case, some disparity is expected between ethnic minority groups and Ukrainians. It is anticipated that the share of the indigenous people in administration will be higher than the ethnic minority groups

In the educational system, two languages must be used. It should be encouraged by maintaining the Russian medium and Ukrainian medium schools. The curriculum could be the same, the difference is just in the language.

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