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War and Peace:

Language Planning in Ukraine

Introduction

The end of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st century provided striking evidence of how international, political, and socio-economic changes influenced and sometimes even determined linguistic shifts. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc brought political disintegration and the rise of nationalism in almost all post-Communist countries. With the exception of East Germany, which was re-united with West Germany, and Belarus, which formed a union with Russia in 1999, all other countries saw disintegration – the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The disintegration of these countries and the formation of new independent states was directly correlated with the problem of undoing previous status and corpus language planning. In some cases, it led to either the death or the birth of certain languages and varieties. We saw the rise of purism and other tendencies aimed at language cleansing and avoiding the use borrowed lexical items.

It has been a time when globalisation processes have significantly intensified and many languages felt the impact of English and other languages of wider communication. At the same time the European Union adheres to linguistic diversity and multilingualism within Europe, where linguistic diversity can no longer be considered an obstacle to progress, but is an essential part of the multicultural heritage that has made Europe what it is today. Cultural diversity within the EU is one of its strongest points. It will help Europe to move towards a greater interdependence or globalisation while safeguarding its differences. The enlargement of the EU may create certain difficulties in further promoting multilingualism and developing all languages. At the same time, the position of some European languages with a limited number of speakers in Europe has significantly improved in recent years. A good

example is the Welsh language. Quite recently, statistical information was published that the number of Welsh speakers is growing as a result of gradual language planning in Wales.

In the present paper, Ukrainian is used as a case study to investigate the shifts in linguistic planning which take place in a newly independent country that has moved from being a totalitarian regime to a democracy. The process of linguistic changes in Ukraine reveals a major model of post-Communist transformations and provides insights into similar transformations in Eastern Europe. There are numerous common features found in many newly independent countries of Central and Eastern Europe, since they all have certain historical, geopolitical and sociocultural factors in common. Our task here is not to enumerate the list of features and factors, but to analyse the state of language planning in Ukraine since its independence in 1991. The country's internal linguistic situation is characterised by periods of peaceful co-existence at certain times and open war at other times between two major languages which are closely related – Ukrainian and Russian. The 'language war' in Ukraine should not be associated with that country's independence. It has existed for many centuries but its intensity has either increased or diminished according to the socio-political and economic environment of the time. Larysa Masenko (1999) believes that the language war was initiated by the defeat of the Ukrainians in the independence war 350 years ago, after which the Russian Empire left no chances for nations other than Russian to keep and develop their national identities and languages. Slavonic languages were the most vulnerable among those.

Russification and the implementation of Soviet linguistic policy significantly restricted the spheres where Ukrainian was used. The imposed devaluation of the Ukrainian language and culture induced semantic and grammatical shifts, phonetic assimilation and lexical infiltration of Russian forms, which resulted in the further development and spread of so-called *Suržyk,* a mixed Ukrainian-Russian variety.

Undoing status planning

Status planning has been one of the main issues in the political declarations and programmes of all parties in Ukraine. They often put the language issue before economic or other political goals. Many politicians thought they could easily change the linguistic situation in Ukraine by passing appropriate legislative acts. However, the brief history after Ukraine's independence in 1991 shows that this is a very long process which involves significant efforts on the part of the government, NGOs and individuals, considerable financial resources and clear planning and reviewing. The language situation in Ukraine has a number of specific features making the whole process of revival even more complex. Among major features we can name:

- The fact that the Russian language was used in all spheres of life and the use of the Ukrainian language was very limited
- The fact that the Ukrainian language began to lose its functionality in many areas, e.g. business, science, etc.
- The existence of two standard variants: Western Ukrainian and Eastern Ukrainian
- The spread of the Ukrainian-Russian variety – *Suržyk.*

In the period since the adoption of the "Law on Languages in the Ukrainian SSR" in October 1989, many noticeable changes have taken place in the country and the linguistic picture has begun to change as well. Ukraine was not alone in its drive for the re-establishment of national and cultural identity. It was a general tendency in the former Soviet Union and by 1990 many republics passed legislative acts aimed at reviving their national languages. These were the first signs of a disintegrating empire and a demonstration of growing national feelings.

Language planning in Ukraine was undertaken by the government with the intention of promoting systematic linguistic change in the country. The Law envisaged a number of activities aimed at increasing the use of Ukrainian in the period up to the year 2000. Since Ukraine has approximately 100 different ethnic groups, it also stipulated the necessary conditions for the development and use of other languages spoken by different nationalities. Bearing in mind that Russians make up 22.1 percent and native Russian speakers 31 percent of the population of about 50 million, a special role had to be bestowed upon the Russian language (Krouglov 1997: 17). However, some scholars believe that the actual number of Russians is smaller and that

a future census 'would reflect that. Among reasons: some mixed marriages and russified Ukrainians earlier tended to identify, or felt compelled to identify with the dominant and more "prestigious" Russian nationality' (Deychakiwsky 1994: 371). The role of Russian in Ukraine may significantly diminish in future, if the tendency of the mid-90s, which saw growing Russian emigration from Ukraine, continues in the 21 century. This situation was mainly a result of economic difficulties in the country. It has been projected that Ukrainians will make up 80 percent of the population and Russians about 15 percent in 2019, and if economic instability persists, this may eventually lead to a monoethnic Ukrainian state (Čyrkov 1999).

The Language Law outlined the principal objectives for the development of Ukrainian. Its main drawback was that it had been developed and passed in Parliament without appropriate sociolinguistic consideration and without any significant studies or evaluations of the existing linguistic situation in the country. It was more of a political manifesto than a well-thought-out programme, specifying dates and actions, but failing to identify the methods by which certain objectives would be achieved.

Independence in 1991 opened up new possibilities for the revival of Ukrainian culture, language and the church. The state of euphoria which prevailed in Ukraine during the first years following independence allowed the government to introduce a number of changes. The most evident of these were in education, where the majority of schools in Western Ukraine and Kyiv began to teach in Ukrainian. Ukrainians and Russians realised that the new policy had a future in a sovereign state. They wanted their children to be able to speak the language in order to obtain higher education or to achieve any position in government. A change in attitude was evident in all spheres of life and even professionals who could not previously speak or write Ukrainian began to learn the language. However, the system of education faced a number of problems:

1. lack of teaching staff who could instruct in Ukrainian;
2. insufficient numbers of textbooks in Ukrainian and/or the inferior quality of the textbooks in comparison with those in Russian;
3. absence of politically unbiased teaching materials;

4.   insufficient financial resources in education.

The main reason for all the difficulties in education has been the lack of financial support and the inability of the government to develop consistent language planning in an unstable economic environment. For example, in 2000 secondary school pupils in the 5-10th forms received only 59% of the books required for their courses, while pupils in the 11th form received only 34% (Kremen' 2000: 4).

Suržyk and 'reverse' *Suržyk*

The imposed devaluation of Ukrainian culture and language had a considerable impact in the linguistic sphere, including semantic and grammatical shifts, phonetic assimilation and the lexical infiltration of Russian forms. All these changes resulted in the spread and development of so-called *Suržyk*, a mixed Ukrainian-Russian variety or a language mix. Some linguists in Ukraine call it a 'language illness' that they propose to fight it by all means available (Masenko 1999). Although there is no single definition that can be said to cover all of the sociocultural and linguistic connotations of the term *Suržyk*, its principal characteristics include non-awareness of the rules of standard Ukrainian and Russian and the desire to use various elements of the languages without an adequate knowledge of their use. Traditionally, it was a Ukrainian-Russian mix, which was used by Ukrainian speakers who made an attempt to adjust their idiolects to the new Russian environment when they were moving from the countryside to a city of predominantly Russian speakers. The Ukrainian Dictionary provides the following definition: *Suržyk* combines 'elements of two or more languages, artificially united, not abiding by the norms of the standard language; a non-pure language' (1978: 854).

Suržyk emerged as a result of the predominant attitude in Central and Eastern Ukraine, that the Russian language had high prestige while that of Ukrainian was low. In some ways Ukrainian, 'as the language of the "lower" strata of the population (caretakers, maids, unskilled labourers, newly hired workers [from the village], rank and file workers, especially in the suburbs)' was juxtaposed with 'the Russian language as the language of the "higher", "more educated" strata of society' (Dzyuba 1970). The

Soviet mass media also contributed to such attitudes since the best programmes were produced in Russian, thus indirectly promoting ideologically-biased cultural values. The appearance and spread of *Suržyk* signalled the fact that Soviet-style bilingualism was merely a policy of ousting Ukrainian from all spheres of life and replacing it with Russian.

The post-Soviet period has seen the development of a new *Suržyk* based on a Russian-Ukrainian mix. Since more and more people need Ukrainian for fulfilling their functions at work, there is more evidence of using Ukrainian by Russophones, a situation which often leads to *'reverse' Suržyk,* when a Russophone, by trying to speak Ukrainian arbitrarily mixes lexical units of both languages, inflects them according to either Ukrainian or Russian patterns, violates the rules of the Ukrainian phonetic system, and builds words and phrases contradictory to Ukrainian language paradigms. The examples of this type of *Suržyk* can be found even in speeches made by some of the country's political figures who found themselves compelled to switch into Ukrainian because the Ukrainian language became the only official language in the country.

The existence of 'reverse' *Suržyk* clearly demonstrates that there is a movement towards a wider use of Ukrainian in all official situations and the growing prestige of the language. However, notions such as prestige and 'reverse' *Suržyk* can have a boomerang effect. For example, when a member of the Ukrainian parliament speaks in 'reverse' *Suržyk* it actually works against the spread of the Ukrainian language and the growth of its prestige, since many Russophones are often discouraged from using the language when they hear non-Ukrainophones speaking it poorly. There have been quite a few jokes about the way some MPs and members of government speak Ukrainian. *Suržyk* is one of the reasons why Ukrainophobia is so widespread among Russophones in Ukraine.

What does the future hold for Ukrainian?

In January 2000 the meeting of the Council on Language Policy headed by the Deputy Prime-Minister of Ukraine, Mykola Žulinskyj, actually acknowledged that the 'Law

on Languages' of 1989 had failed and the spheres of Ukrainian language usage are decreasing (Šeremet & Xanža 2000: 1). What are the main reasons for this? What happened to language planning in Ukraine? The problem of Ukrainian and language planning in general is significantly more serious that it may appear upon first examination. The undoing of the status planning which existed before 1989 was a complex and emotional matter. It was approached without proper analysis and/or the necessary evaluation. 'It is not enough to devise and implement strategies to modify a particular situation; it is equally important to monitor and evaluate the success of the strategies and progress shown toward the implementation' (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997: 37). The lack of resources in the country eventually became noticeable a few years after independence of 1991, when the euphoria of the first years of independence was gradually replaced by inertia. Russian began to take the upper hand in the mass media and publishing, while the circulation of Ukrainian newspapers and magazines was decreasing. The film industry was almost destroyed: for example, it produced only 5 feature films in 1999. The higher quality of the Russian mass media is another important factor in promoting both the Russian language and ideas. The Ukrainian mass media has been under significant pressure from Russia. Even Ukrainian TV and radio channels produced bilingual programmes: for example, news was in Ukrainian, while sport events or adverts could be in Russian.

In the mid-90s Ukrainisation stopped almost completely or slowed down to such a degree that any movement in language planning was barely noticeable. The Council on Language Policy confirmed that Ukrainisation was indeed slowing and 'localisation' (irregular use), was taking place, with a number of government departments and local authorities ignoring resolutions on the use of Ukrainian. The process of Ukrainisation was in such a poor state that by the end of 1999 Ukraine's Constitutional Court passed a ruling obliging state and local officials to use Ukrainian during official business throughout the entire country. It also made mandatory the use of Ukrainian as the language of instruction in state schools at all levels.

The Council on Language Planning associated the negative tendencies in the development of the language with the uneven and inconsistent observance of language legislation by both central and local government. Therefore, the Cabinet of Ministers

passed a Resolution on 'Measures to Enhance the Role of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language', which envisaged the following steps:

- monitoring the use of Ukrainian in central and local government bodies and as the language of communication among those bodies;
- testing the language proficiency of officials at various levels;
- bringing into line the use of languages in local schools systems with the ethnic composition of the local population;
- ensuring that television and radio stations allocate the minimum airtime share stipulated by their licenses to programmes in Ukrainian;
- developing programmes for the de-Russification of sport and tourism;
- bringing the repertoire of state theatres in line with their 'language status';
- introducing a new tax system on publications from abroad.

The government's decision was met with a mixed reaction inside the country as well as in Russia. Ukrainian intellectuals fully supported the Resolution since only 10% of books sold in Ukraine were in Ukrainian, only 18% of TV programmes were in Ukrainian and a mere quarter of newspapers published in Ukraine were actually in Ukrainian. Others in Ukraine believe that the Russian language should be given an official status. According to a poll conducted in Ukraine in January 2000 by the daily *Den'*, 46% of respondents think that the Russian language should become an official language in Ukraine, while 36% disagree (2000: 1).

The Ukrainian Constitution of 1996 confirms that Ukrainian is the only state language in Ukraine. At the same time the Russian language was specifically mentioned in the Constitution before other minority languages: 'Ukraine guarantees the development, use and defence of Russian and other languages of national minorities in Ukraine' (1996: 5). This stipulation reflects the actual position of the Russian language in the country and is in full accordance with the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The Constitution of Ukraine also guarantees the right of citizens to use native languages in education (1996: 18).

Ukraine's northern neighbour plays an important role in promoting the Russian language through media and other means. Russia is closely watching the course of

language planning in Ukraine. The Russian Foreign Ministry and many Russian officials repeatedly voiced their concern about the situation facing Russian-language speakers in Ukraine (Šeremet, Trofimova & Mixel'son 2000: 1). They regard them as the 'fifth column' in promoting the interests of Russia in Ukraine and its new foreign policy principles, creating facilities for the spread of Russian culture.

Last year I attended the Congress in Ukrainian Studies in Chernivtsi. It was an excellent opportunity to discuss the issue of language planning in Ukraine. Many Ukrainian linguists are concerned about the present position of the Ukrainian language. They think that the government should introduce new regulations and the parliament should adopt new laws, which will allow the spread of the Ukrainian language. There have been quite a few legislative acts and regulations on status planning in Ukraine. In many cases these acts remained on paper, since they were not enforced, and there were no stipulations how objectives should be achieved or who will prepare language planning evaluation and surveys.

The Russian language in Ukraine

The status of the Russian language began to change in 1991. The scope of its use has particularly narrowed in official circles. However, it still remains one of the major languages in Ukraine by the number of speakers and its use in the media. The 1195 Russian language newspapers amount to 49.7% of the total number of newspapers in Ukraine. There are 14 Russian language State theatres, 2399 schools where the language of instruction is Russian. It is still used in a number of universities in Central and Eastern Ukraine. Russian remains the language of the street, domestic usage, and, importantly, it is employed in business communication together with English.

Another phenomenon which seems worthy of a separate linguistic investigation, comes from the new generation of graduates who attend schools with the instruction in Ukrainian, but who still prefer to speak Russian in situations outside of the classroom. These students appear to have no problems switching between the two languages. However, their Russian remains mostly at the colloquial level: they cannot

write in Russian and their active vocabulary is limited to everyday conversational lexicon.

The corpus of the Russian language in Ukraine began to accommodate changes much quicker. It acquired a number of specific characteristics, such as the phonetic adoption of some specifically Ukrainian sounds and the introduction of some loan words from Ukrainian, e.g. names of organisations, events, places. Many MPs from Eastern Ukraine often use Ukrainian loan words in their Russian speeches, e.g. *nezaležnist'* 'independence', *vlada* 'power', *propozycija* 'proposal', *promova* 'speech', etc. Many examples may be found in everyday Russian, where Russian words like *luk* 'onion', *morkov'* 'carrot', *svjokla* 'beetroot', etc. are gradually substituted by Ukrainian lexical means: *cybulja* 'onion', *morkva* 'carrot', *burjak* 'beetroot', etc. The feature of introducing loan words from another language is usually attributed to speakers who find themselves in a foreign language environment. In this particular case, we can observe that the Ukrainian variety of the Russian language receives more specific linguistic items or features which makes speakers of the variety drift even further away from the standard Russian language. In adopting Russian for specific conditions in the country, Ukrainians subconsciously demonstrate their group or national solidarity even when/if they speak the language of their 'big brother'.

In the current war of words it is difficult to predict the fate of both languages and *Suržyk*. Much depends on how constructive and well-grounded the policy of the government will be. However, it is possible to point out that there is a great degree of certainty that the bilingual or multilingual situation in Ukraine will remain. It is not likely to lead to any open conflicts. In the past nearly twelve years or so, the Ukrainian government has been able to demonstrate flexibility in introducing new Acts which deal with linguistic problems.

Language behaviour and social behaviour are closely related (Fishman 1968) and neither can be altered very quickly. All innovations and reforms contradict the desire for stability. Therefore, the psychological adaptation to something new is a very slow process, particularly in societies with established traditions.

Purist and democratic approaches in the development of Ukrainian

When we analyse status planning in Ukraine we consider the status of two major langages Ukrainian and Russian, and Ukrainian-Russian and Russian-Ukrainian *Suržyk* varieties, and when we analyse corpus planning of the Ukrainian language, we observe two main streams in the current language development: the *puristic* and the *democratic*. *Purist* or archaizing tendencies are usually manifest among new nations, which seek 'to defend, demarcate, and protect that which constitutes self' (Jernudd 1989: 4). The representatives of purism are those who look to the past by trying to substitute already existing means of expression, both lexical and grammatical, with 'true' indigenous forms or with those which existed before Soviet corpus planning began to come into force. The proponents of purism want their language 'to be more than neat and trim and handy. They also want it to be *theirs*, i.e., *like* them in some way, reflective of their individuality in some way, protective of their history in some way' (Fishman 1974: 19). Purism in Ukraine combines both offensive and defensive characteristics, in order to introduce new linguistic forms different from those of Russian and to protect the Ukrainian language from further Russian influence. For example, in lexicology it has been proposed to use words which were registered in Ukrainian dictionaries before 1933, e.g. instead of the word *aeroport* 'airport', a borrowed form, the word *letovyšče* has been suggested for use; instead of the expression *u diametri − poperečno* 'in diametre, diagonally'. In grammar, some sources of the mass media insist on re-establishing the ending '–*u*' for the genitive singular of Feminine nouns belonging to Declension 3 pattern rather than using the ending '–*i*' which had been adopted in Ukraine: (*радости*, *смерти*, *любови* etc.) Purism is a direct response to Russification, aiming at the 'linguistic cleansing' of most foreign (mainly Russian) lexical means (Krouglov 1999: 40). They were also able to identify a number of artificially created borrowed lexical items, which violate the existing norms in the Ukrainian language and eventually excluded them from dictionaries compiled during the Soviet era (Ponomariv 1991).

The *democratic* approach to undoing corpus planning is gaining more ground every year. It is aimed at reducing the limitations of language use while developing a variety of new expressive means which will eventually allow each individual to

express his/her identity in a new way. This will enable speakers to avoid the stilted Soviet-type jargon of some sources of the Ukrainian media. These groups propagate 'the aspiration to create a modern and efficient language' (Tauli 1974: 65). Their primary objective is to democratise all spheres of language use, to fight stiffness of expression and allow stylistic overlapping, such as the use of less formal styles in various situations. Denormativisation has been kept in the background since the dominant tendency seems to be normativism and 'linguistic cleansing'. Firstly because normativism is deeply embedded in the tradition of Ukrainian schools, where students are taught only the normative language and any deviations are censured. 'All those who use the Ukrainian language as a means of communication must keep to literary norms. Every speaker is obliged to protect it from pollution, *Suržyk* distortions" (Pljušč 1994: 9). Secondly, it would be unrealistic to expect that linguistic dictatorship will be substituted by democratization and creativity in a very short period of time. The slow acceptance of linguistic democratisation can be explained by the spread of *Suržyk* and other factors which were a result of Soviet opression and Russification.

Conclusions

The period since Ukrainian independence provides sufficient evidence to demonstrate that status and corpus planning will be gradual and painful. Resistance will be encountered from the most politically active layers of Ukrainian society. The 'language war and peace' in high places between Russia and Ukraine does not significantly affect the attitudes of Ukrainians or their language habits. The government of Ukraine pursue gradual change in the status and corpus of the language, at a rate more consistent with developments in society.

It will take several generations before any significant shifts will take place in the actual position of Ukrainian with respect to Russian. It is difficult to agree with those who support the idea of a perpetual struggle between the two languages which will lead to the eventual victory of the strongest. The historical development and recent actions to undo previous status and corpus planning produce enough evidence to propose that bilingual situation in Ukraine will remain, however the status of each

language and the distribution of their functions will change. Much will depend on the government and the consistency of its language planning as well as its ability to influence the people of Ukraine. In this respect the main task of scholars is to evaluate the results of planning through surveys, research, and analysis, and provide the government with recommendations. Larysa Masenko's book on language situation in Kyiv (2001) demonstrates what needs to be done in Ukraine now before proceeding to the next level of language planning. Further development of the Ukrainian variety of the Russian language may significantly slow down the process of Ukrainisation.

The main concern, however, was and to a certain extent still is the actual status of Ukrainian and the spread of *Suržyk*. The language's official status allows a more dynamic way of proceeding with undoing corpus planning by dealing with two principal issues: de-russification and the sociopolitical transformation and modernization of Ukrainian which will allow the language to cope with contemporary technological, sociopolitical, economic and scientific discourse.

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