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The Influence of Language Behaviour on the Identity Formation of the Ukrainian Military

Abstract

This article aims to highlight the analysis of language behaviour and language attitude in the military environment. The data included in this research was taken from the series of books *Oral History of the Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)*, which includes interviews with both military personnel and civilians, namely displaced people from the Donbas region and chaplains. The participants clarify their language choices and explain how it has influenced identity construction, as well as developing their linguistic personality. Since the interviewees are mostly from the south–eastern part of Ukraine, it is possible to make some general conclusions about the language situation of these territories, as well as to investigate language attitudes in the military environment. The analysis is informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) involving the analysis of text, discourse and sociocultural practice.
Keywords: language behaviour; language attitude; language choice; military environment; identity construction

1 Introduction

Ukrainian citizens, politicians, and academics are actively deliberating issues of national identity and language policy, as well as identity transformations during military conflicts. The proposed article delves into how identity, language, and memory issues distinguish the conflict from a civil war, as well as how Ukrainian identity has changed since the start of the conflict. I argue that a narrative perspective can help to supplement and extend research on the nature of collective identities.

Smith believes that "memory, then, is bound to location, a special place, a homeland. Memory is also important for establishing one's identity. Indeed, one could even argue that "no memory – no identity, no identity – no nation" (Smith, 1991, p. 14). For this reason interviews from the *Oral History of the Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)* series were chosen for this research. These interviews, in addition to describing military actions and warfare, contain the reported language behaviour and language attitudes of both military personnel and civilians and explore the language situation in Ukraine, specifically in the south–eastern part of the country. The respondents discussed their language preferences and how these reflect their identity. Memories "lift from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary historical events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values" (Schwartz, 1982, p. 377), and hence provide a broad field for the research objectives. They are as follows:

1. To explore the language behaviour and language choices of Ukrainian military personnel and volunteers who participated in the war in the Donbas region in 2014–2019, as reflected in the interviews under the analysis;

2. To recognise the correlation between language choice and identity formation among military personnel originally from south–eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian linguists such as Masenko (Horobets′, 2015), Matveieva (2021), Shevchuk-Kliuzheva (2020), Sokolova (2021), Stavyts′ka (2001), Taranenko (2008), Tkachenko (2006), Tsar (TSar, 2018), and others have summarised the language situation in Ukraine, paying attention to the various aspects and problematic issues of Ukraine's language policy. Although Ukrainian–Russian bilingualism is changing and evolving in new varieties and forms, there has not been much research carried out on language choice, language behaviour, and Ukrainian–Russian bilingualism in the military environment. For example, Renchka studied Ukrainians' language behaviour during the current Russian–Ukrainian war and concluded that "in the context of military conflict in the Donbas region, language becomes a means of preserving one's own identity as well as the 'friend-or-foe' marker" (Renchka, 2020, p. 88). Pidkuimukha (2020b) has analysed Ukrainian–Russian bilingualism among ATO[1] participants based on the talk show "Brave Hearts" that was broadcast in 2014–2015.

The analysis of the interviews from the books *Oral History of Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)* is informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which involves the analysis of text, discourse and sociocultural practice and discovers that the concepts of language attitude, language behaviour, and language tenacity describe the language situation studied.

2 Background

Ukraine's language situation could be classified as bilingual, as both Ukrainian and Russian are spoken on its territory and "almost everyone in Ukraine is bilingual, to varying degrees" (Bilaniuk, 2010, p. 109). Bowring (2014, p. 70) emphasises that "the reality in most of Ukraine is of bilingualism," owing to the small number of people who speak languages other than Ukrainian or Russian. According to a 2017 survey, 64.1% of respondents identified Ukrainian as their first language, 17.1% identified Russian as their first language, 17.4% identified both Ukrainian and Russian as their native languages, and 0.8% identified another language as their first language. 46.9% of those polled use only (or in the vast majority of situations) Ukrainian in everyday communication. In comparison, 31.8% of respondents use only (or in the vast majority of cases) Russian, while a significant minority (0.4%) prefer another language (Masenko, 2020a, p. 31).

According to the findings of The Razumkov Centre's 2017 survey "Basic Principles and Means of the Formation of a Common Identity of Ukrainian Citizens" (The Ukrainian Centre for Economic & Political Studies named after Olexandr Razumkov, 2017), the vast majority of respondents (92%) identify as ethnic Ukrainians, 6% as ethnic Russians, and 1.5% as belonging to other ethnic groups. These figures can be attributed to the 2014 annexation of Crimea, as well as the Russian intervention in the Donbas region, which influenced self-identification processes. I can assume that those citizens who had not previously considered their ethnic background began to consider their identity and that the aforementioned events prompted them to identify as Ukrainians. As a result, many people have abandoned their Russian identity, declaring that they do not want to have anything in common with the Russian Federation. It is worth noting that the level of Ukrainian self-determination is at an all-time high since Ukraine declared independence. Furthermore, these figures have risen significantly among the younger generation. To illustrate, 96% of those interviewed aged 18 to 20 identified as ethnic Ukrainians (ref. Figure 1.

In addition, by 2019 around 29% of the interviewed people in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Donbas region announced themselves as ethnic Ukrainians. Figure 2 demonstrates the results of the survey "Attitudes and Identities Across the Donbas Front Line: What Has Changed from

[1] ATO stands for Anti-Terrorist Operation.

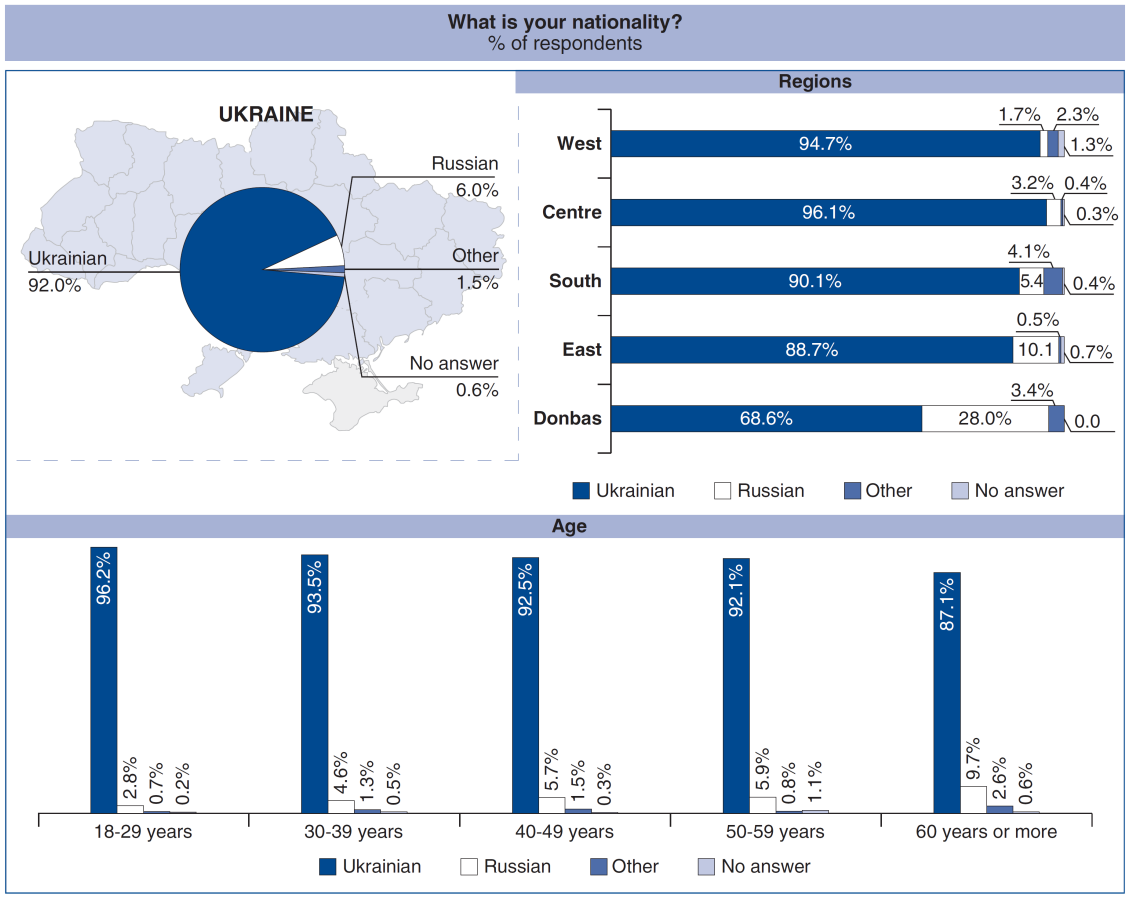


Figure 1. What is your nationality? /Source: The Ukrainian Centre for Economic & Political Studies named after Olexandr Razumkov (2017, p. 25)/

2016 to 2019", which was carried out by The Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin.[2]

In 2016, only about 11% of people chose this option. As a result, respondents in 2019 were approximately three times more likely than those in 2016 to identify as ethnic Ukrainians in order to distance themselves from Russia and the war. Furthermore, in 2016, 7% of citizens polled claimed to be members of both the Ukrainian and Russian ethnic groups. By 2019, this index had risen to 12% (Sasse & Lackner, 2019, p. 7). In 2016, approximately 8% of respondents said they felt like people from the Donbas region, whereas nearly 13% of respondents in 2019 said the same. More survey participants chose regional identity as their primary identity in 2019 (Sasse & Lackner, 2019, pp. 7–8). In 2019, approximately 3% of those polled identified as bilingual,

[2] The research was conducted in February–March 2019 in the run-up to the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election. The same methodology as in 2016 was followed. ZOiS commissioned the agency R-Research to conduct face-to-face interviews with 1,200 people in the government-controlled Donbas, split evenly between Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and 1,200 telephone interviews in the non-government-controlled areas. The face-to-face interviews were based on a multi-stage quota sample, with the age, gender, and educational attainment quotas of the urban and rural populations taken from the latest available official statistics (Sasse & Lackner, 2019, p. 5).

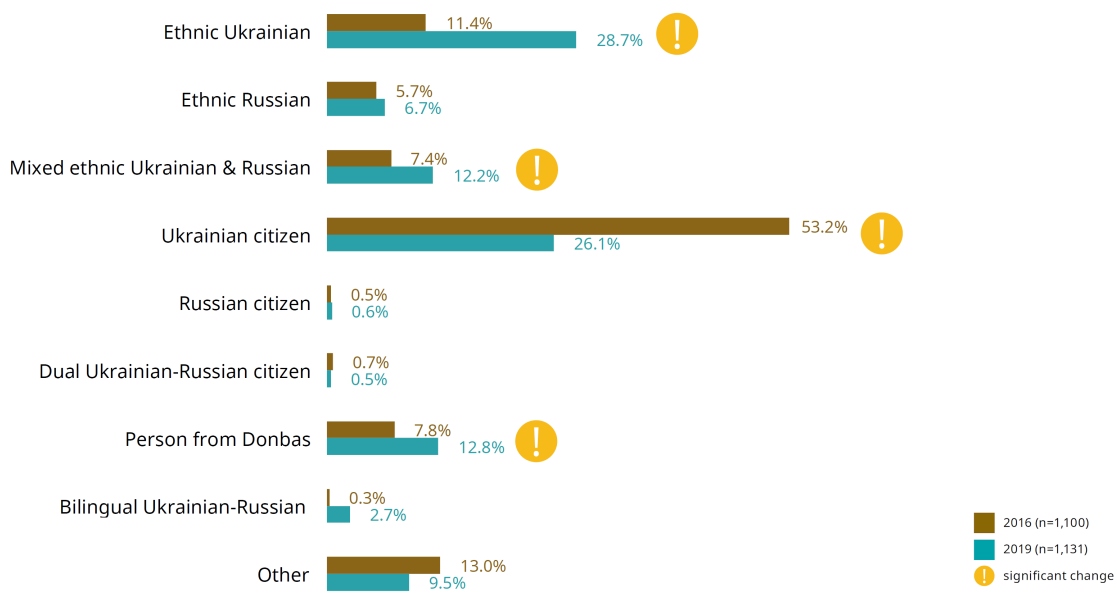


Figure 2. Donbas: Identity first choice. /Source: Sasse and Lackner (2019)/

whereas this figure was nine times lower in 2016. I believe that these figures can be explained by the dominance of Russian in daily communication.

According to the Ukrainian Centre for Independent Political Research's survey "Russophone Identity in Ukraine in the Context of the Armed conflict in the East of the Country" ("Russophone Identity", 2017, p. 18), the conflict has made people question who they are, which ethnic group they belong to, and why it is so important to identify themselves as Ukrainians.

Many Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians have either implicitly or explicitly denied their Russian identity. There are numerous examples to support this thesis. For example, an inhabitant of Kyiv notices that "he or she has many friends and relatives among ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. Due to various factors, their decision to associate themselves with Ukraine or choose the Ukrainian identity is accompanied by the renunciation of their Russian identity" (Russophone Identity, 2017, p. 16).

The vast majority of those who took part in the interviews and focus groups emphasised the absence of a genuine threat to Ukrainians who speak Russian. They highlighted that Russian even triumphs in various aspects of life. Respondents from Kharkiv, Kherson, and Kyiv stated that they had not been "discriminated against on the basis of language, and thus there is no need to preserve or protect the Russian language" (Russophone Identity, 2017, p. 18). According to the interviewees, declaring discrimination against the Russian language in Ukraine is merely a deceptive technique. Furthermore, the Razumkov Centre has carried out the project "The Identity of Ukrainian Citizens in New Circumstances: State, Trends, and Regional Differences" (The Ukrainian Centre for Economic & Political Studies named after Olexandr Razumkov, 2016). According to the survey results, more than 70% of military personnel involved in the conflict in the Donbas region speak Ukrainian as their mother tongue, while only 6% speak Russian as their first language. In contrast, 55% of civilians declare Ukrainian as their mother tongue, and 19% of this group claim Russian as their native language, which is three times as likely as among Joint Forces Operation participants (JFO). The share of respondents who answered that both Ukrainian and Russian are native for them is almost identical among military personnel and civilians (19% and 23% respectively). This statistic illustrates figure 3.

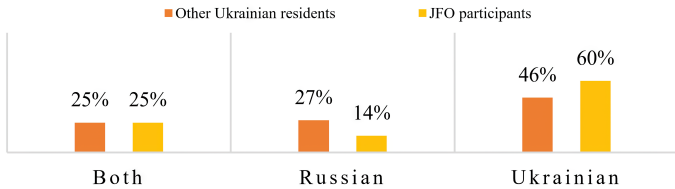


Figure 3. Which language do you consider native for you?

Figure 4 depicts the use of languages at home. The outcomes are as follows: 60% of JFO participants communicate at home in Ukrainian, while only about 15% speak Russian. Among civilians, the numbers differ slightly; approximately 45% declare Ukrainian as their primary language of communication, while 27% prefer Russian. The proportion of interviewed people who use both languages is exactly the same in the categories of military personnel and other Ukrainian residents (25%).

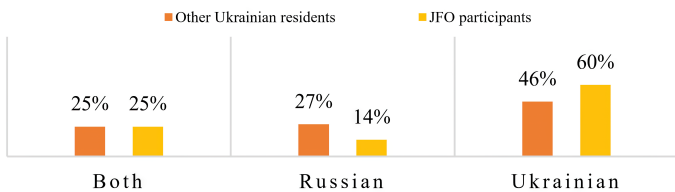


Figure 4. What language do you speak at home?

Furthermore, military personnel fighting in the Donbas region prefer Ukrainian in daily communication when not in a home environment. In contrast, other residents of Ukraine speak Russian outside their home more frequently, 27% and 16% accordingly.

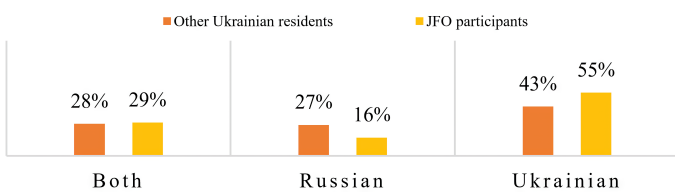


Figure 5. What Language do you speak outside of the home?

What is more, Ukrainian soldiers and officers have better English language skills, with 26% having a sufficient level. In comparison, only 17% of those not taking part in the Joint Forces Operation can communicate in English.

There are known instances in which military personnel have switched from Russian to Ukrainian in their daily communication. They describe such language behaviour and attitude as an "answer to Russia's aggression against Ukraine" (Pidkuimukha, 2020b, pp. 127–128).

According to a survey conducted on March 19, 2022 by the sociological group Rating, 83% support the recognition of Ukrainian as the country's sole state language. This opinion dominates in all macro-regions, age groups, and language groups. In contrast, only 7% of citizens now support the Russian language being recognized as a state language, compared to 25% before the war. According to sociologists, the number of people who consider Ukrainian to be their first language

(or mother tongue) has steadily increased over the last decade, from 57% in 2012 to 76% in 2022. Meanwhile, the number of participants who recognise Russian as their first language has fallen from 42% to 20% (*Shoste zahal′nonatsional′ne opytuvannia*, 2022).

Thus, historical events such as Euromaidan (Revolution of Dignity) in 2013–2014, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the Russian occupation of territories in Ukraine's east have resulted in significant changes in the language and national self-awareness of Ukrainian citizens. Russia's armed aggression has proved the falsity of slogans about "brotherhood", as well as the Kremlin's desire to return Ukraine to the status of a Russian colony. The conflict with Russia has aided in the strengthening of national self-awareness and understanding of the significance of Ukrainian culture, history, and language in nation-building.

3 Research Materials

The research is based on interviews collected in the series of books *Oral History of Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)*. Pope John Paul II argued that "nations, like individuals, are endowed with historical memory. […] the histories of nations, objectified and recorded in writing, are one of the most important elements of culture; it is an element that is crucial for the identity of a nation in the dimensions of time" (Ĭoan Pavlo II, 2005, p. 83).

Issues 1–5 contain memories of servicemen who fought in Ukrainian volunteer battalions, such as the Donbas, Aidar, Azov, and territorial defence units, as well as the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They address issues such as military motivation, combat experience, and assessments of the ongoing Ukrainian–Russian conflict. Furthermore, I am determined to pay close attention to the women's stories included in the special issue *Divchata Zrizaiut′ Kosy* (2018). These books emphasise that "the compilers remained true to the commandment to 'show history as it is', so it is not worth looking for sensations or shocking plots in the text. This series is the quintessence of the 'trench truth' of people who risk their own lives in Donbas" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 9).

The selected material from the series *Oral History of Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)* incorporates discussions about the state and status of the Ukrainian and Russian languages in the military environment and the role of language, history, and culture in nation-building, as well as in structuring personal and national identity.

Unquestionably, these texts are valuable for analysis in various academic fields. However, I am convinced that this collection is especially a key source of investigation for sociolinguists, as the interviews raise such important questions as the language attitudes and language behaviour of Ukrainian soldiers. As the vast majority of respondents were from the south–eastern part of Ukraine, this research will not testify to the situation in the Ukrainian army in general. However, I believe it will shed light on the language behaviour and language choices of military personnel from these territories, as well as clarify their understanding of language issues in Ukraine.

4 Theoretical Approach

Since identity constructions are instilled with language ideologies and power relations, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) appears to be an appropriate tool choice for conceptualising and analysing the language behaviour and identity of Ukrainian military personnel and civilians entangled in the war in the Donbas region. According to Wodak, CDA is "fundamentally interested in analysing both opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). CDA "remains deeply problematic", according to Collins and Jones. "It claims that communicative practices are critical in processes of social and political change, but it rejects the kind of engagement with 'history and context' that would allow that claim to be demonstrated" (Collins & Jones, 2006, p. 52).

Discursive practices may have crucial ideological effects. They can help produce and reproduce different power relations between, for example, women and men, social classes, and ethnic or

cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they show things and position people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). I decided to investigate the identity formation of Ukrainian military personnel using the theoretical and methodological frameworks provided by CDA. My decision was influenced in part by the fact that CDA can be broadly defined as an approach that is frequently appropriate for analysing language use and the context of language use (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The essential presumption of CDA is that language is a social practice and it helps to outline reality for its users. Having accepted CDA as a theoretical approach for this paper, I agree that representations, articulated in narratives exemplifying constructions of belongingness and otherness, are fundamental to the investigation of personal identity and nation building (Doty, 1996).

According to De Fina, identity is about conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to; where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms (De Fina, 2006, p. 263).

In this article, I will also define the role of language and language ideologies in constructing personal and national identity. Silvertein argues that language ideologies are "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silvertein, 1979, p. 193). Kroskrity later expanded the definition by adding "beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social world" (Kroskrity, 2004, p. 498). Following Chatterjee, I understand identity as a related positioning between the 'us' and 'them'; thus, "the sciences of society become the knowledge of the Self and the Other. Constructed in terms of rationality, it necessarily also becomes a means to power of the Self over the Other" (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 14–15).

National identity is forged and defined through a dual process of stressing the similarities shared by those of the in-group (the 'Self') and its differences with those outside the political community (the 'Others'). Division into friends and foes is not carried out according to ethnical principle, geographical or language affiliation, but rather through the criteria of ideological kinship, mutual views, and social position: "There were also guys from Luhansk and Donetsk. For instance, comrade Sashko is originally from Volnovakha [a city in the Donetsk region – *L.P.*]. I said smiling: so, it turns out that you are fighting against your people. He answered, 'They are as mine as yours'"(Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 24). For the military personnel, the fighters of the adversary units, the so-called DNR and LNR, are their enemies; for the civilians, the enemies are military units on each side.

Some ethical values involve commitments to past events or our ancestors' experiences, rather than to a pattern of action. The disposition to act in an ethically appropriate manner can be characterised as the succession of the behaviour of other individuals or groups. Memory of a heroic victory or victimization in a previous war may be used to explain later conflicts, which is why military personnel involved in the Donbas war emphasise that "a true nation must remember everything from the very beginning to the end – the history of OUN [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists], UIA [Ukrainian Insurgent Army], Kholodny Yar [The Cold Ravine], etc. […]. Instead, the memories of the ordinary citizens are limited to the so-called 'Great Patriotic War'".[3] (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 379). The narrative around the Donbas is built through rituals of commemorations. As Smith states, they are important for the maintenance of national identity (Smith, 1991) – "at war, we are searching for our identity and identity of our nation", argues Vitalii, the respondent (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 374).

Concerning multilingual contexts, Pavlenko and Blackledge provide an expanded review of different approaches to the concept of 'identity', paying particular attention to the socio–psychological as well as to the interactional sociolinguistic. The aforementioned researchers focus on such

[3] The Great Patriotic War (Russian: Великая Отечественная война) is a concept used in the Russian Federation and some other countries of the former Soviet Union to depict the military conflict from June 22, 1941 to May 9, 1945 along the Eastern Front of World War II, mainly between the USSR and Nazi Germany.

particular issues as second language learning and language use, as well as code-switching and language choice. They argue that the poststructuralist framework they are proposing is "well equipped to capture the complexity of postmodern societies, where language may not only be 'markers of identity' but also sites of resistance, empowerment, solidarity, or discrimination" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, pp. 3–4). People form and develop their language identities while choosing the language variant or language varieties that, following Edwards (2009), I call "ethnonational solidarity". As Bucholtz and Hall underline, "language contributes to nationalist identity formation by providing a sense of cohesion and unity for its speakers" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 385). In the next section, I will discuss the current language situation in Ukraine and the role of language in constructing identity and in nation building.

5 Literarure Review

After the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014, also known as the Revolution of Dignity, researchers started investigating crucial transformations in such areas as:

- national identity, where the use of the Ukrainian language is becoming not only a tool of communication, but also creates a sense of being Ukrainian (Kulyk, 2016, 2017, 2018b);
- linguistic landscape with respect to the processes of decommunization (Demska, 2019; Demska & Levchuk, 2020);
- language attitude and language ideologies (Bilaniuk, 2016, 2020; Kulyk, 2018a; Nedashkivska, 2020, 2021; Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, 2020);
- language policy and law (Azhniuk, 2017; Csernicskó & Fedinec, 2016; Matviyishyn & Michalski, 2017; Pidkuimukha, 2020a);
- language conflicts (Wingender, 2020).

Language issues have become an important component of the information war and the Ukrainian language has evolved into a tool of resistance. As a result, the language situation in the broadcast media has recently changed. "This change is the result of national security legislation that prohibited films that were propaganda for the government of a 'aggressor nation' and established a quota of broadcast music, announcements, and discussions on radio stations" (Bilaniuk, 2016, p. 154). Moreover, as the war politicised language choice, "more people are engaging in determining just how language matters, both in their personal choices and in activism to shape the choices of the rest of society" (Bilaniuk, 2016, p. 157). On the other hand, Bilaniuk stresses the complexity of the language situation in Ukraine and underlines that "many people whose sense of Ukrainian nationality strengthened after 2014 continue to use Russian or both languages" (Bilaniuk, 2020, p. 63). Based on a systematic examination of the accounts of twelve prominent pro-Maidan personalities, Kulyk has analysed the images of Ukraine's Russian-speaking citizens as they appear in Ukrainian users' posts on Facebook (Kulyk, 2018a). The author demonstrates "contrasting and conflicting ideologies in the representation of the national 'self' and the internal 'other' in social media discourse, with language playing a prominent role in this conflict" (Kulyk & Nedashkivska, 2018, p. 5).

Having investigated the language behaviour of Ukrainian servicemen and servicewomen based on the material from the TV-show "Brave Hearts" (2014–2015), Pidkuimukha (2020b) points out that language choice depends on geography (military personnel from the western or central parts of Ukraine use predominantly Ukrainian, while people from the south and east of Ukraine mostly speak in Russian) and age (the younger an interviewee is, the more he/she communicates in Ukrainian). Moreover, a considerable percentage of soldiers display language tenacity[4] and do not switch from Ukrainian to Russian or vice versa.

[4] Language tenacity is a behaviour of individuals (or groups) that is directed at the consistent use of a certain language in different communicative situations in order to resist linguacultural assimilation (Pidkuimukha, 2021, p. 203).

In this paper, I focus on the analysis of the language behaviour[5] and language choices of military personnel, as well as their reflections on language, its role in nation building and identity construction, and their thoughts about the language situation in Ukraine.

6 Analysis and Results

In this section, the language attitudes of military personnel will be analysed, as will be their general language practices, including "attitudes towards linguistic change, loyalty towards one's own language (and culture) and, not to forget, attitudes towards bilingual/bilectal language use" (Kühl & Braunmüller, 2014, p. 14).

The vast majority of respondents were from Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, so they mostly spoke Russian. However, some of them had switched to Ukrainian and demonstrated language tenacity. Furthermore, friendly discussions between military personnel based on language issues occurred on occasion: "We frequently discussed the language issue with the 'Scythian'; he was a devout Ukrainian speaker and I was a Russian speaker" (Podobna, 2018, p. 131).

The respondents recognised that language choice depends on geography, describing the situation at one of the checkpoints: "Masiania had a local [Donetsk region – *L.P.*] residence permit, Shamil had a Crimean one, and there was a problem with Max who was such a decent Westerner and spoke only Ukrainian" (Podobna, 2018, p. 120). Ukrainian sociolinguists (Masenko, 2004; Panasiuk, 2014) point out that such a situation in eastern Ukraine is a result of the Bolshevik policies of assimilation and Russification. This is confirmed by Vitalii, a serviceman from the Zaporizhzhia region, who said that "as a Ukrainian I was forced (by creating artificial conditions around me) to switch to Russian" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 378).

Furthermore, respondents discussed the language and cultural situation in various regions of Ukraine, emphasising that the Ukrainian language did not receive enough support in the Donbas, which is why its inhabitants were predominantly Russian-speaking. According to Oleksandra, who comes from Donetsk, there were mostly Russian-language schools, with only one class taught in Ukrainian. A similar situation was seen in preschool education: "There was also only one Ukrainian-speaking group in the kindergarten" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 122). One of the respondents, Viacheslav, who speaks Ukrainian, calls the city of Energodar in the Zaporizhzhia region a Russian city because of the lack of Ukrainian schools: "My students made me love Ukraine. In the Russian city of Energodar, Zaporizhzhia region. And this is really a fact. Russian city. The only Ukrainian school" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2015, p. 24). Describing the language situation in the south and east of Ukraine, military personnel point out that Ukrainian-speaking people may face problems and difficulties: "There was some pressure [at work – *L.P.*], there were discussions and terrible arguments. However I persevered and I didn't break down. They didn't break me. Yes, it was difficult; they could lower your salary, but you have to be ready for it because it is a sacrifice that has to be made (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, pp. 387–388).

On the other hand, villages in the Donbas region remain more ethnically Ukrainian, namely in terms of language. This phenomenon was an indicator of the state of the region for one of the soldiers: "We came in [the village – *L.P.*] and noticed that they were speaking Ukrainian […] Before that, I had thought that it [Donbas – *L.P.*] is a complete 'pit'". Moreover, Ukrainian and Russian languages are indicators which distinguish checkpoints:

– '*Where are you going?*'
– '*To Zaporizhzhia.*'
– '*All right, have a nice trip.*' (Ukr).

[5] Language behaviour implies choosing a language code, which is manifested through language activity or socially motivated changes in the linguistic consciousness of an individual speaker or a group of speakers. It is determined by a system of interconnected social, legal, psychological, and sociocultural factors, which are decisive in the relations between language and the individual, language and community, and language and society (Mykhal′chuk, 2014, p. 37).

– "Was it at our checkpoints?"
– "Yes, at the Ukrainian ones."
– "And how was at the separatists' checkpoints?"
– "They also went well."
– '*Where are you going?*'
– '*In Zaporozhye'.*
– '*To whom?*'
– '*To a student'.*
– '*Have a nice trip.*' (Rus).
– "That is all" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 99).

Characterising the language situation in the Zaporizhzhia region, the respondent notes that the younger generation speaks both Russian and Ukrainian, while the older generation prefers to use more Ukrainian, as well as Surzhyk. He also underlines that "there is no discrimination based on language" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 100).

Illia, an internally displaced person from the Donetsk region, speaks Russian. However, he says that he is bilingual and can easily switch from Ukrainian to Russian and vice versa and he describes himself as a Russian-speaking Ukrainian: "In school I participated in various competitions. We recited poems by Shevchenko, Kotliarevskyi. Everything was fine. We considered ourselves Ukrainians. It was the norm for us to celebrate Flag Day, Independence Day, to sing the Anthem of Ukraine" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 116). Thus, the respondent recognizes that the Ukrainian language is not an important marker of Ukrainian identity for him. However, Vitalii who was participating in the war in Donbas, condemns such people by saying "I would never identify as Ukrainians those who say I am Ukrainian, but I am Russian-speaking" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 380). He explains himself with the fact that people who move to Poland, Germany or the USA immediately learn the language, respect the country in which they live, study the culture, and comply with the laws. However, "for some reason, in Ukraine, a Muscovite or a Russified Ukrainian behaves as if everything should be the other way around, and not how it is around the world" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, pp. 381–382). Furthermore, he criticised the so-called Kivalov-Kolesnichenko language law,[6] as well as calling the members of parliament who voted for this particular law traitors, janissaries and mankurts (a term referring to a type of brainwashed slave). According to Masenko (2020b), "the post-colonial language situation has led to the fact that in our [Ukrainian – *L.P.*] community, unlike most nation-states, the balance between understanding language as a symbol of identity, on the one hand, and a means of communication, on the other, is disturbed". This is also a reason why some Russian-speaking respondents cannot determine their identity: "Who am I? Ukrainian? No. Russian? Also no" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 65).

Having realised the importance of the Ukrainian language for identity construction, Vitalii switched to speaking it: "I began developing as a Ukrainian after that [the events of the Orange Revolution – *L.P.*]. Gradually, I started thinking of the reasons why I am ashamed to speak Ukrainian […] That was a tough time for me. I wanted to say: 'I am Ukrainian'" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 369). Since he has understood the importance of the Ukrainian language and how crucial it is not just to speak Ukrainian, but also to think in the language, he has been teaching his 5 year old daughter Ukrainian and national history: "I know that when she grows up, she will make a conscious choice and return to her roots, because I gave her all my feelings, all my love to Ukraine, to the idea, to the nation" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 380). His wife, who was born and raised in Russia, is also learning Ukrainian. Although she has not yet completely switched from Russian to Ukrainian, "she began to respect this country and is proud to live

[6] Law on the Principles of State Language Policy № 5029-VI (unofficially known as the Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Law (2012–2018)) is a law that, while recognizing the Ukrainian language as the state language in Ukraine, significantly expanded the use of regional languages if the number of native speakers was at least 10% of the population of a certain region, and in some cases less than 10%.

here" (Vasyl′chuk & Moroko, 2016, p. 383). These examples illustrate that linguistic personality combines different components such as individual (given by human nature); culture (the level of development of cultural heritage and traditions which contributes to the formation of interest in language and is determined primarily by the preferences of family members); and value (a system of values, life positions, the socialisation of the individual not only in the family but also in the socio–cultural environment). Not only family surroundings can influence language choice, but also society. For instance, a serviceman from the 79th Separate Airmobile Brigade, who is an ethnic Russian originally from the Zaporizhzhia region, switched to Ukrainian after teaching history at the Ukrainian school in Energodar: "I have certain patriotic preferences, despite the fact that I am an ethnic Muscovite" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2015, p. 23).

In the analysed interviews, code switching can be observed in the middle of conversation. One of the respondents, Ruslan, an officer of the 23rd Territorial Defence Battalion "Khortytsia", starts replying to a question in Russian but switches to Ukrainian when listing Ukrainian-speaking cities: "Currently, there are representatives from all regions in our battalion, namely from Donetsk, Crimea, and Western Ukraine, and Ternopil (Rus.) …and Lviv, and Vinnytsia, Poltava. By the way, there were many [soldiers – *L.P.*] from Poltava. I will switch to Ukrainian…" (Moroko, 2018, p. 333). I can assume that the respondent is Ukrainian-speaking, but he started replying in Russian because it was the language of the interviewer's question.

The analysed material also demonstrates a tolerance of the bilingual status of the country by some military personnel. One of the heroines of the book *Divchata Zrizaiut' Kosy* remembers that she switched to Russian with people from Donetsk because "during the war I met a lot of locals who volunteered, went to fight for Ukraine, and realised that they were very cool" (Podobna, 2018, p. 149). Ukrainians are accustomed to switching to another language for friendly, grateful, or tolerant reasons. Masenko (2014) underlines that "with our tolerance, we encourage ignorance of the Ukrainian language. We show that linguistic unity is not necessary for the Ukrainian state, while our language issue is the problem of national self-consciousness and national self-identification".

In the meantime, a representative of the older generation who "was born, studied, educated, served in the Soviet army and was against the collapse of the Soviet Union" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, pp. 54–55) declares himself a Ukrainian patriot. However, he retains language tenacity and does not switch from Russian to Ukrainian: "When I served in the Lviv region, I basically spoke Russian. Back then I travelled through the Lviv region for many years in order to visit my sister and fundamentally spoke only Russian, and now I do exactly the same. And it isn't an issue" (Mil′chev & Moroko, 2017, p. 65). These examples illustrate that the vast majority of Russian-speaking Ukrainians prefer to use just one language – Russian. This may show that the imperial habits of Russians and Ukrainians, and imperial stereotypes in the former colony, still exist.

7 Conclusions & Discussion

In this article, I focused on the analysis of language attitudes and language behaviour of Ukrainian military personnel who participated in the war in the Donbas in 2014–2019. The findings show that respondents of the collection of interviews, *Oral History of Russian–Ukrainian War (2014–2019)*, mostly speak Russian, since they are originally from the south–east of Ukraine where most of the people choose Russian for daily communication. However, some military personnel demonstrate strong language tenacity and use Ukrainian in order to confront linguacultural assimilation. This paper contributes to the discussion about whether and how language choice and language behaviour correlates with national identity in the military environment. For military personnel who switched from Russian to Ukrainian for daily communication, the Ukrainian language is a key factor in expressing personal identity, as well as a crucial element in the consolidation of Ukrainian society and the state unity of Ukraine. On the other hand, for the military personnel who continue to speak Russian and who identify themselves as "Russian-speaking Ukrainians", language is not a major marker in identity construction.

It would be revealing to organise in-depth interviews with military men and women who represents various levels of Ukrainian society, such as the middle class, people living in poverty, people with higher/lower education, and people from different geographical locations and ages. I discovered a lack of interviews which had been conducted with youths (18–25 years) and military personnel from western Ukraine. By comparing the results of these interviews with those given in the aforementioned collection, it will be possible to piece together the puzzle of what the language situation in Ukraine is. This situation has changed significantly since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Thus, the results of this investigation can be used for answering questions relating to links between language behaviour and identity, language and society, and the role of language in constructing a nation.

Texts

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