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On the Language Choices of Ukrainian Refugees in Poland

Abstract

The article analyses the content, structure and functional purpose of an academic paper which examines the multilingualism of refugees from Ukraine who moved to Poland after the full-scale invasion by Russia. The methodological basis of the study is characterized, and the effectiveness of using the method of language biographies and questionnaires is emphasized.
Keywords: multilingualism; Ukrainian language; Polish language; emotional attitude to language; Ukrainians in Poland

The publication of Paweł Levchuk's monograph *Wielojęzyczność migrantów wojennych z Ukrainy w Polsce* is, in our deep conviction, a significant event for both Polish and Ukrainian linguistics. It demonstrates the author's ability to respond to changes in the linguistic situation, as well as to understand the importance of recording them and providing scientific justification. This is not the author's first work on multilingualism. Being a skilled researcher, he sets himself a completely different goal, namely to show the linguistic changes that Russian aggression has brought to the lives of ordinary Ukrainians. Although the Polish language was once the prominent issue in the scholar's research, the Ukrainian language is now his most important focus of attention. More specifically, Levchuk concentrates on how the war between Ukraine and Russian contributes to the language choices of every Ukrainian.

The context of Paweł Levchuk's research is very complex, since the linguistic biographies of Ukrainians forced to leave their homes due to the full-scale invasion of the sovereign Ukrainian state by the occupiers have become the factual material of the study. However, despite the difficult emotional background, the scholar managed to collect and objectively analyse the material, which, in our opinion, will become a solid basis for further research on linguistic biographies. The value of Paweł Levchuk's work also lies in the fact that there are no similar scholarly works dealing with the language choices of Ukrainian migrants in other countries. It is no exaggeration to say that the monograph *Wielojęzyczność migrantów wojennych z Ukrainy w Polsce* is timely, since it comprehensively covers an extremely topical issue that has linguistic, socio–political and cultural backgrounds.

Paweł Levchuk's work is logically structured. It consists of an introduction, eight chapters, conclusions, a bibliography and a list of diagrams and tables. The introduction to the monograph states that the Ukrainian language is the crossroads of the study. Such attention is of key importance, since the Ukrainian language is a symbol of independence, the right to self-determination and freedom for refugees.

The content of the work can be divided into theoretical and practical sections. In the former, the author presents the methodology of his linguistic analysis, relying on the works of Uriel Weinreich (1963, p. 75), which were transferred by Michał Gluszkowski into Polish science (Głuszkowski, 2013, p. 27) as determining the position of the dominant language. Paweł Levchuk's previous

research (Levchuk, 2020) became the basis for the development of a modified questionnaire filled out by a record number of respondents (1,503 people). Both the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the study are impressive, showing the author's long-term and meticulous work on the collected material. It is worth paying attention to the sincerity of the respondents' answers, which is confirmation of their trust in the researcher.

The latter section is devoted to linguistic biographies. The author thoroughly analyses the theoretical foundations of the use of this method of linguistic analysis and also provides examples of its use in practical research by scholars from different countries, including in studies of Polish-foreign bilingualism (Kiss & Shumyts′ka, 2023, pp. 83–133).

In his monograph, Paweł Levchuk, relying on the works of both Polish and foreign scholars (Chan, 2016; Mackey, 1976, pp. 203–214; Miodunka, 1990, pp. 43–44), attempts to show the mechanisms for strengthening the weight of the Ukrainian language on the world stage. In our opinion, the scientist's reflections should be perceived as a thorough project to strengthen the position of the Ukrainian language in the international arena.

The title of the second chapter of the reviewed monograph (Levchuk, 2024, pp. 29–42) does not fully emphasize its content. The author focuses both on the difficult history of the functioning of the Ukrainian language, in particular the oppression it has suffered, and also describes its strengths. The analysis of the development of the Ukrainian language in 1915-1920 is valuable. In our opinion, it would be worth adding more information about the history of the Ukrainian language struggle. Because this chapter is not only about oppression, the author emphasizes the period of prosperity and importance of the Ukrainian language. The scholar looks at the language through a different prism, assessing its resistance to enemy attacks and explaining the causes of Ukrainian language problems. In the research part, Paweł Levchuk analyses problems that have been present in Ukrainian society for a long time, but he bases his description on a slightly different methodology than the one we are used to in Ukrainian linguistics. All survey participants are divided according to their first language, not their mother tongue, so the researcher divides the respondents into those who use Ukrainian as their first language, those who use Russian, and those who use both as their first language. Such an approach, in our view, is effective because it opens a new perspective on the linguistic behaviour of Ukrainians.

The language issue has been repeatedly raised in the pages of Paweł Levchuk's research (Levchuk, 2015, pp. 156–157, 2020, pp. 145–150; cf. Levchuk, Belyavska, & Vaseiko, 2022; Levchuk, Bihunova, & Vorobiova, 2022). However, it is in the reviewed monograph that the language of the aggressor has received a very sharp assessment, as it is perhaps for the first time in world linguistics that Russian has been called the language of death and aggression. The respondents' comments clearly demonstrate their negative attitude to this language, which is mostly marked with negative markers.

The author of the monograph does not ignore the issue of national identity. The study shows that even 80% of respondents who call Russian their first language consider themselves exclusively Ukrainian (Levchuk, 2024, pp. 92–93). This is an indicator of the unification of society.

One of the most difficult tasks facing the author of the study was the systematization of the collected material and its objective evaluation. The biographies of migrants are so complex, often caused by tragic factors, and show that the language issue is not a secondary topic for them. Respondents proudly talk about their decision to switch from Russian to Ukrainian. There are also biographies in which respondents used only Ukrainian, as well as those where Russian is still the language of daily communication. The monograph is valuable for the large amount of factual material presented in the form of comments, including on the problem of language choice. We believe that Paweł Levchuk has managed to systematize the collected material and present a sound analysis of it.

It is worth paying attention to the matrix of multilingualism proposed (Levchuk, 2024, pp. 135–144) by the author of the monograph which clearly demonstrates that for respondents with Ukrainian as their language, Polish is becoming more important than Russian. Usually, linguists do not predict the development of linguistic processes as they are mostly interested in facts of

the past or present. However, Paweł Levchuk's research shows that the linguistic situation may change. The development of the Ukrainian language in Poland which the author has repeatedly written about (Levchuk, 2021, 2023) depends not only on the Polish authorities but also on the Ukrainian authorities in general and every citizen of Ukraine in particular.

Thus, Paweł Levchuk's monograph raises extremely important issues of multilingualism among refugees from Ukraine, as well as the importance of the Ukrainian language for Ukrainians who have left the country and the status of the Ukrainian language in the world.

The book is written in Polish, as it is directed to Polish readers. This is evidenced by the dedication of this work to all those who have helped Ukrainian refugees in Poland. In our opinion, it is very important that the results of Paweł Levchuk's research be made available to Ukrainian recipients and we believe that it is necessary to translate the monograph into Ukrainian.

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