



New Trends in Multilingual Communication and War in Ukraine

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Opinion

Rationalization of the communicative experience during the war fought on the Ukrainian territory makes it possible to draw certain conclusions regarding notable changes in the linguistic behavior of Ukrainians. It is quite obvious that the significant communicative presence of the Russian language in pre-war Ukraine created new formats of social and political reaction to this cultural specificity at the time of the military aggression. The aggressor's political narrative is known to center around the idea of defending the rights of Ukraine's Russian-speaking population through war; the idea is fused with the intention to destroy Ukrainian independence and to return to the model of the Soviet period with the Russian protectorate. Atrocities on the frontline, the large number of victims and the cruelty, culture shock and self-identification crisis of the Ukrainian party have entailed numerous (both top-down and bottom-up) initiatives aimed to push the Russian language from active (and not only public) communication. Within propagandist needs, it was mass media space that was the first to gain popularity: "From the perspective of pre-war times, the unique phenomenon is a widespread usage of vulgarisms and obscene vocabulary in relation to the aggressor-state, its political leaders, army, etc. in public space" *Mova i vijna* [1].

Afterwards, the demarcation line dividing into 'us' and 'others' started to be drawn in everyday communication that is not usually subject to language policies. The bottom-up mass initiative was noticeable during the first year of the war. In particular, social networks became platforms that presented negatively any Russian-language activities. Posts in Russian generated an unprecedented surge of critique caused by their language choice rather than their content. While queuing, people resented remarks in Russian and threatened to call the Security Service. Many citizens made it a

point to switch to Ukrainian in their communication despite the fact that this language had been kept communicatively passive. Willingness to speak Ukrainian was displayed even by those Ukrainians who had not spoken Ukrainian at all. When turning to either a text or an aphorism or a witty joke in Russian, people started to apologize for using the language of the aggressor country. Undoubtedly, no national language may be mastered quickly only by a strong-willed decision and, unfortunately, the side effect of this enthusiasm was 'surzhyk', i.e., an erratic mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, the result of blurred language norms and numerous manifestations of colonial linguistic consciousness *Movne Kalitstvo* [2].

However, the upside of the process may be the fact that this trend was not a fashion for everything Ukrainian, which had happened more than once when the country was swept by the wave of linguistic enthusiasm brought about, for example, by the declaration of political independence or by hopes for better future, by the Ukrainian diaspora's assistance in the language reform, by the new spelling rules or expectations from the country's new political leader, etc. Unfortunately, these waves used to lose their momentum and disappear every time together with a lost chance of establishing an immediate connection between the level of Ukrainian as the official language of the public space and the citizens' living quality, their career prospects and access to other benefits. It should be underlined that the war turned the habit of speaking Ukrainian into the form of existential negation of the enemy caused by the threat *Mova i vijna* [1], self-defense, a sort of mass affective state that is usually accompanied by deviations from ordinary communicative behavior. This form of communicative reflection has brought about significant changes in the very system of the Ukrainian language.

It has been revealed that as a type of deviant behavior, profanity has national, cultural and social features and differs considerably across cultures and social groups. Seminal works in Ukrainian Studies written by scholars of the previous periods develop the idea of a certain lacuna within the corpus of the Ukrainian literary language that lacks obscene (offensive) items. Until recently, even slang and colloquial levels featured expressions of irritation or anger mostly in the form of metaphorical curses (for example, “Щоб ти галушкою вдавився!” (Choke on a dumpling!), “Щоб ти здох!” (Drop dead!) or as the climax “Щоб ти всрався!” (Shit yourself!)) or there was a switch to Russian profanity.

Instead, during the military confrontation, this lacuna has been filled in naturally. Wrathful intentions of Ukrainians were expressed with the language of hostility whose first products were labels of ideological intransigence: орки (Orcs, i.e. Russians, the nomination borrowed from English Orcs used to refer to imaginary terrifying animal-like aggressive and mentally deficient creatures from Western European folklore and fantasy fiction, in particular, works by Tolkien) Мова і війна [1]; орда (the horde, the word used to nominate Turkic nomad tribes), рашисти (Russia + fascists), ватники (vatnyky, the lexeme derived from the name of the “typical” clothing of the socially least “prestigious” and generally the lowest strata of the population - for example, porters, construction workers, etc., but primarily peasants and prisoners in Soviet penitentiary camps / colonies) Мова і війна [1], лугандони (luhandony, the derogatory term used in pro-Ukrainian groups to refer to inhabitants from Lugansk People’s Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) Мова і війна [1], etc.

In addition, there is a set of verbalizers to denote people of vague political identity such as вата (vata associated with too soft), ждуні (zhduny from Russian to wait), почекуни (pochekuny from Ukrainian to wait), sovok (sovok from Russian Soviet), etc. The enemy’s propaganda has, in its turn, contributed to this communicative phenomenon: укропи (ukropy, from Ukrainian опір (resistance)), нацики (natsyky, from Nazis), фашики (fashyky, from fascists), бандери (bandery) and Бандерстан (Banderstan) (derived from Bandera, the name of the leader of the Ukrainian nationalists), Хохляндія (Khokhland) (from khokhly, a colloquial ethnonym to denote Ukrainians), etc. These lexemes may be ironically regarded as the impact of the new Ukrainian-language reality on the Russian language. Each of these labels has its history rooted in the narratives of the Ukrainian-Russian war that are being studied linguistically, in particular in the fundamental monograph *Mova i vijna* [1].

Meanwhile, these labels have been quickly transferred into interpersonal communication since it is natural for people to keep their private space as a safe zone where one easily differentiates

between insiders and outsiders. In 2022, in this new social situation, 76 % of respondents called Ukrainian their mother tongue and started using it in everyday interactions *Mova i vijna* [1]. Mass Ukrainian monolingualism of the youth also became a marker of these changes. Surprising though it may seem, the conflict facilitated the processes that had not been powerful enough to finalize for 30 years of Ukraine’s independence.

Another trend has been the enhanced position of the English language and its acquiring of some functions that used to be performed by Russian *Suspilne novyny* [3]; *Movne Kalitstvo* [2]. This trend is often combined with fluency in Ukrainian as the state language and simultaneously with a calmer (compared to communicative eradication) rational attitude to Russian (and other national minorities) in interactions between Ukrainians. This rationalism is also expressed in tolerance to acknowledging limited rights of Russian in everyday communication, as a language of thought, a language of ancestors, a ‘comfort-zone’ language of certain social groups (elderly people, ethnic Russians, people of mixed ethnic descent, etc.) *Rosijska mova ta ukrainsi* [4]. It correlates with the identity paradigm that prioritizes the value system that is capable of uniting speakers of various languages and diverse ethnicities. This rationalism emphasizes the remarkable potential of the English language to give access to higher living standards, yet it does not contain any assumption of parity between Ukrainian and English in this respect *Movne Kalitstvo* [2].

At the same time, this controversial trend has become a certain reaction to asymmetric initiatives in the realm of language policies, when the baby was thrown out with the bath water (for example, the cases of disrespect for Russian-speaking defenders of Ukraine, irrational renaming, the total ban (illegible, illogical, automatic) on using Russian-language scientific sources, excessive use of English loan words instead of Russian ones, non-Ukrainian-centric criteria of scientific activity etc.). In conclusion, it is necessary to state that the Ukrainian-Russian war has accelerated the communicative trends that function as symbols of the Ukrainian past and the Ukrainian future. However, the position of the Ukrainian language as such remains vulnerable and needs to be nurtured nonstop in peaceful Ukraine.

References

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