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## **UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE 1920S AND AFTER 1991: DEVELOPMENT STAGES AND PRESENT TRENDS**

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This article is an attempt to offer a survey of the language policy adopted in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and in contemporary Ukraine after 1991 highlighting the crucial notion of language as a national treasure for Ukrainian identity. First of all, the Romantic or German model of 'nation' is discussed. The paper also deals with the main premises, choices, and outcomes of the 'Ukrainization' language policy of the 1920s: although the Bolsheviks considered language as a mere tool, noteworthy results were achieved in education, print media, and, to a lesser extent, among the officials. After 1991, Ukrainian language policy faced the complexity of a formal definition of the status of the Ukrainian and Russian languages, as well as a need for the reaffirmation of the state language (Ukrainian) in the spheres previously dominated by the Russian language. The 2012 language law represented a new form of Russification, whereas the 2019 language law focused more on the needs of the Ukrainian society, and promoted a new 'Ukrainization' in the spheres of public administration, media, and science.

*Keywords:* language policy, Ukraine, 1920s, independence, identity

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In today's postcolonial and globalized world, the concept of language policy is growing in popularity: greater attention is paid to themes such as the coexistence of different linguistic codes, issues related to language minorities, endangered languages, and language legislation.

Quite recently, Spolsky (2004, p. 9) opted for a very general elucidation: "language policy may refer to all the language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity". Spolsky suggests that language policy is based on three main components of practices, beliefs, and management. Fishman (2006, p. 311) focuses more on the fact that it "denotes the

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authoritative allocation of resources to language in general and to the written/printed language in particular”.

Cardona (1987, p. 147, mentioned in Klein, 2006, p. 326) clarifies that we can talk about language policy when “a central organism, public or private, intervenes on purpose to modify a linguistic situation, supporting the use of a specific variety, or promulgating norms related to its use etc.”. In fact, the English term and some definitions related to it seem to be very general, also including the ideological and political premises determining the choice of a concrete language policy (Dell’Aquila & Iannàccaro, 2004, p. 22). Moreover, the first definition by Spolsky seems more “democratic”, as it implies that a group of people can influence language policy<sup>1</sup>, whereas other scholars stress that it is mainly the institutions, with their authority, who determine the adoption of a specific policy aiming at influencing the acquisition, the structure — or corpus — and the status, that is, the functional distribution of linguistic codes (see Gazzola, 2006, p. 23).

In Ukraine, Danylevs’ka (2009, p. 24) noted that the term ‘language policy’ is not unambiguous. In the past, both in Europe and in the Soviet Union, ‘language policy’ and ‘language planning’ were considered synonyms<sup>2</sup>. By the end of the 1990s, especially thanks to Calvet, the two terms became more distinct, and the second, in a way, was seen as an application of the first. Today, ‘language policy’ usually refers to institutions influencing the status and corpus of languages, whereas ‘language planning’ is linked to specialists, mostly linguists, directly operating on the corpus, status, and acquisition of languages, especially in a multilingual context (see Dell’Aquila & Iannàccaro, 2004, pp. 22—24). Moreover, language policy, in broad terms, seems to be a multidisciplinary field, where political science, law, sociology, sociolinguistics, history, and other subjects coexist (Danylevs’ka, 2009, p. 26).

During the 1920s, a period which will be one of the main focuses of the present analysis, the concept of ‘language policy’ had not been theoretically developed. However, the main normalizers attached to language a peculiar meaning in the affirmation of the existence of the Ukrainian nation. If one considers some specific passages, especially in writings by linguists such as Olena Kurylo (1890—reportedly 1946), Oleksa Syniavs’kyi (1887—1937), and Ivan Ohienko (1882—1972), language unity and national unity are considered inextricably intertwined.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, in Ukraine, Semchyns’kyi (1988, p. 63) outlined the concept choosing precise words: “Language policy is the totality of measures elaborated for the purpose of consciously managing the spontaneous linguistic process and carried out by the society”. More recently, Iermolenko, et al. (2001, p. 93) defined it as the measures adopted by a state to solve questions concerning the development of language(s) in a country.

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<sup>1</sup> Another important sociolinguist, Calvet, has introduced the concept of interventions in the linguistic situations (Dell’Aquila & Iannàccaro, 2004, *idem*).

<sup>2</sup> In the context of the Soviet Union, as pointed out by Danylevs’ka, the term ‘movne budivnytstvo’, or its Russian equivalent ‘iazikovoe stroitel’stvo’, was very common.

More interestingly, according to the authors, language policy is highly important in multi-ethnic nations, especially in the field of education, and in the creation of an information space (*informatsiinoho prostoru*) able to preserve the integrity and security of a state. As will appear clearly in our article, the notion of nation and the relationship between language and identity seem to be crucial in the conception of language policy in the Ukrainian society. In the encyclopaedia of the Ukrainian language, the entry devoted to ‘movna polityka’ points out that it is the totality of ideological postulates and practical measures oriented towards the regulation of language relationships or the development of the linguistic system in a specific direction. Furthermore, the orientation of language policy is said to be determined by the political situation; the form of government; and the existing economic, religious, and cultural relationships. Language policy often involves an endorsement of the dominant language or, alternatively, an avoidance of conflicts between coexisting languages by means of the support to minority language(s) (Brytsyn, 2004, p. 361).

As one can infer from the above review, language policy can be read in general terms, where it clearly intertwines with other fields and is related to ideology and political science, whereas in technical terms, it mainly involves institutions taking decisions able to influence the structure and distribution of languages in a nation<sup>3</sup>.

In this article, we will embrace the broader perspective related to language policy, focusing on:

- The Romantic model of nation (section 2).
- The historical, social, and political premises together with the specific trends adopted at the beginning of the Soviet era (1920s) (section 3).
- Orientations and outcomes of language policy in independent Ukraine — although in these years, tendencies towards a certain degree of Ukrainization and new forms of Russification have alternated — (section 4).

The cultural and linguistic background these two periods have in common will be the object of the following section.

## **2. LANGUAGE AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NATION: THE ROMANTIC MODEL**

The premise for understanding the importance assigned to processes of language policy in the Ukrainian society is the very notion of ‘language’ itself. Even if we can agree with Benedict Anderson’s definition of nations as “imagined

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<sup>3</sup> In Saussurean terms, language policy refers to the so-called “external linguistics”, because it is not related to the linguistic system. Moreover, the sign system resides in the minds of the speaking mass; therefore, an individual cannot create or modify the language. In this sense, language policy seems an anti-Saussurean concept. In the Soviet Union, Iakubinskii (1931) wrote that Saussure seems to imply the notion of the ‘untouchability’ (*nedosiagaemosť*) of the linguistic system, for individuals as well as for the totality of the speakers, and this leads to the impossibility of language policy. Iakubinskii argued that this is not true, as proven by the work on concrete languages (for example, Czech): specialists and speakers can intervene and modify linguistic systems. This divergence is due to epistemological differences: for Saussure, the term ‘language’ indicates an arbitrary and abstract system, mostly synchronic, whereas for Iakubinskii, it denotes the concrete, standard languages, changing according to historical and social mutations.

communities”, many scholars have highlighted the existence of two main ideas of nation, and the crucial role played by language for both: on the one hand, the Jacobinic or French concept of nation and, on the other, the Romantic or German notion of nation<sup>4</sup> (see Renzi, 1981, pp. 120–126; Sériot, 2010a, p. 15; Sériot, 2010b; Symaniec, 2012, p. 49). In brief, according to the Jacobinic idea, nations are created by citizens for different purposes, and languages are merely tools used to achieve political unification; to the contrary, the Romantic idea implies that a common language and culture constitute the very foundations of the nation and that they are natural facts whose origins are very remote. The latter sees ‘nation’ as a sort of “collective soul” (Sériot, 2010a, p. 15), and seems very widespread, as in Tomasz Kamusella’s (2017, pp. 415–416) use of the analytical tool he named the “normative isomorphism of language, nation, and state”, especially in Central, but also in Eastern Europe.

The German, or ‘naturalistic’ notion of nation is certainly influenced by the ideas of Johann Herder (1744–1803), Johann Fichte (1762–1814), and, especially, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). Understanding and interpreting Humboldt’s thoughts on language is never easy, but two of the cornerstones of his theory are crucial for many Slavic nations. First, Humboldt accepted the pre-existent concept of the genius of a language (whose main task is to preserve the soul of a nation), adding specific emphasis on the idea that language, along with climate, customs, religion etc. are the primary features that compose a nation (see Humboldt, 1971). Secondly, according to him, every language is a *Weltbild*, or an image of the world. As Formigari (1993, p. 176) sums up: “it influences the thought of those who speak it, distinguishing it from that of other peoples; it constitutes a viewpoint for their representation of the world; it is itself a view of the world”.

Clearly, the Romantic model of nation easily applies to countries which, diachronically, did not possess a strong form of government (an empire or a monarchy), but, to the contrary, experienced fragmentation and foreign rule. This is the main reason why Ukraine — as well as other Slavic countries — seems to have absorbed this specific epistemological and cultural background when referring to the notion of language<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, not only nations but also languages have been planned, and this is especially true for language families that constitute dialectal continua: the Slavic languages, at least approximately, can be ascribed to this category (Moser, 2016a, p. 337). Therefore, the meaning attached to language as the foundations of a nation in the case of this group gains in importance. One

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, in Italy, the historian Chabod (1997, pp. 68–78) has opted for different, but clear-cut definitions of the same concepts, namely “voluntaristic” and “naturalistic” nations.

<sup>5</sup> One may discuss whether the reference for Ukraine has been the German or, for instance, the Czech model. Clearly, Czech has been important, especially for what concerns a certain purism in the normalization activity. However, it seems perfectly possible to indicate Germany as a reference model, first because of the administrative fragmentation, compensated by a strong meaning attached to ethnolinguistic features, and second for the influence exerted by the above-mentioned German philosophers on the linguistic thought of Ukrainian philologists and scholars such as Potebnia (1835–1891) and Zhytets’kyi (1837–1911), and, consequently, on the linguistic and epistemological approach of the normalizers active during the 1920s (see, among others, Kurylo, 1925, pp. 1–8, 189–194), a period still relevant for contemporary scholars and linguists.

can certainly agree with Iavors'ka when, describing the impact of ideologies on the standardization of modern Ukrainian, she points out that for standard Ukrainian, and for its relationship with other Slavic languages — especially Russian — Romantic and European models are essential, because the Ukrainian language is seen as a 'national treasure' and not merely as means of communication (see Iavors'ka, 2010).

These epistemological premises are no less important than historical and technical developments for understanding the evolution of language policy (and language planning) in Ukraine: thus, when presenting its main features in the 1920s and after its 1991 independence, we will bear in mind the aforementioned background, pivotal for the Ukrainian society, and to be considered by the institutions when dealing with linguistic issues.

### 3. LANGUAGE POLICY IN SOVIET UKRAINE IN THE 1920S

The language policy in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s was the local application of the Soviet policy known as indigenization (*korenizatsiia*)<sup>6</sup>. According to Martin (2001, p. 75), its aims were the creation of national elites and the promotion of local national languages in the non-Russian territories. This choice is usually explained by the fact that previous tsarist language policies, especially those since Catherine the Great, were oriented towards a strong Russification in the territories of the whole empire<sup>7</sup>. As is well-known, in the 19th century, the Valuev Circular (1863) banned virtually almost all publication in Ukrainian, and the more severe secret imperial decree, the Ems *Ukaz* (1876), proscribed the printing of any texts, original and translated, in Ukrainian, with the exception of belles lettres and historical records. Moreover, its usage in public and teaching were forbidden, as was the importation of any Ukrainian books published abroad; then, in 1892 all translations from Russian into Ukrainian were banned, and in 1895, children's literature in Ukrainian was forbidden (Shevelov, 1989, pp. 5–6; Remy, 2017, p. 45). These choices certainly slowed the functional development of the Ukrainian language in Russian-ruled Ukraine<sup>8</sup>, while in Galicia, the linguistic tradition and the functionality in all spheres of society were more solid<sup>9</sup> (see Moser, 2016b).

After many protests and petitions, the tsarist government decided that specific committees nominated by the Imperial Academy of Sciences were to discuss the task of reforming the laws: they agreed that the previous restrictions should be lifted, and in 1906 the legislation on preliminary censorship was abolished by tsarist decree (Danylenko, 2017, pp. 65–66).

<sup>6</sup> Smith (2017, pp. 159–160) explains that the term is a bureaucratic neologism emphasizing the real nature of this policy, which was centred on less nationalization and more centralization of efforts.

<sup>7</sup> On the Russification of Russian-ruled Ukraine from the mid-17th century to 1914 see Danylenko & Naienko, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as recently proved by Remy (2017) there were some inconsistencies in tsarist censorship, and some literary publications were legally published between 1859 and 1904.

<sup>9</sup> This is probably the reason why in the collection of contributions edited by Picchio and Goldblatt the part devoted to Ukrainian is only occupied by studies focused on the Galician variety, where the notions of *norm* and *dignitas* are clearer.

When the Bolsheviks took the power, they faced the legacy of the imperial ‘national problem’ together with the related linguistic questions<sup>10</sup>. In 1913, Josef Stalin, at that time *Narkomnats* (People’s Commissar of Nationalities), wrote the pamphlet “Marxism and the National Question”. The author defined the nation as a community of people united by language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up. As for the national question, Stalin conceded to nations the right to use their languages and affirm their self-determination, but he did not approve any project of national-cultural autonomy or secession (Van Ree, 1994, pp. 214, 222). Stalin always admired great multinational states, and his perspective was one of gradual dismissal of the traditional concept of nation.

The Bolsheviks understood that perpetrating tsarist severe language policy was a mistake, as it had caused discontent among many ‘oppressed nations’, including Russian-ruled Ukraine. The previous form of colonisation was considered exploitative. The Bolsheviks opted for a formal turn from the past<sup>11</sup>, because, as brilliantly summarised by Smith: “[...] these leaders understood language as a “factor” (*faktor*) or technology of rule. They offered language rights to the various nationalities as a necessary and benevolent compromise, but ultimately only as a substitution for their own true civil societies and representative democracies. They conceded the existential functions and ontological forms of national languages, but without the participatory “idea” of the nation. Language was a means, not an end, the way of political calculation, not the sum of self-determination” (Smith, 2017, p. 144).

In the case of Soviet Ukraine, the policy took the name of Ukrainization (*ukrainizatsiia*). In 1919, Lenin himself forced the Ukrainian party to adopt a decree whose aim was the support of Ukrainization<sup>12</sup> (Martin, 2001, p. 78). In December of the same year, at the conference of the Russian communist party, it was formalized that the Ukrainian language and culture had the right to freely develop, and the party elites were obliged to encourage this process: “Considering that throughout the centuries Ukrainian culture (language, school, etc.) was oppressed by tsarism and the exploiting classes of Russia, the CC RCP (b) obligates all members of the party by all means to help eradicate obstacles to the free development of the Ukrainian language and culture... Measures should be adopted at once, so that in all Soviet institutions there will be a sufficient number of functionaries who are fluent in the Ukrainian language, and so that henceforth they will be able to speak the Ukrainian language” (Iefimenko, 2017, p. 172).

It should be noted that according to Iefimenko, the Bolsheviks who were not attached to Russian chauvinism focused on the necessity to influence the masses using their own language, and at the beginning they did not perceive the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Smith (2017, p. 146), there have been many Russification policies tested in the empire, ranging from coercive to more conciliatory choices.

<sup>11</sup> As pointed out by Hirsch (2005), ethnographers and local elites played a key role in the formation of the Soviet Union because they assisted the government commissions.

<sup>12</sup> In the pre-revolutionary period, Lenin frequently referred to Ukraine, apparently conceding the possibility of the formation of a Ukrainian state, but in practice he denied this option (Iefimenko, 2017, pp. 169–170).

development of the Ukrainian language as a threat to their power. However, many members of the Ukrainian party already at the beginning of the 1920s did not support, if not directly opposed, the Ukrainization policy. This is clearly shown by Dmitrii Lebed' (1893—1937), the second-ranking Bolshevik in the country, and his 1923 theory of the “battle of the two cultures”. In his opinion, there were two different cultures coexisting in Ukraine: on the one hand, a higher, urban, proletarian Russian culture and, on the other, a lower, peasant Ukrainian culture of the village, characterised by conservatism and opposition to Sovietization. Lebed' maintained that the Ukrainian language could be accepted only in the villages, in order to clear the way for the next step towards the higher Russian culture, whereas the Ukrainization of the party and the proletariat represented a regression to a backward agricultural world outlook (see Shevelov, 1989, p. 114; Martin, 2001, pp. 78—79; Pauly, 2014, p. 5).

Lebed's viewpoint was not shared by Oleksandr Shums'kyi (1890—1946), People's Commissar for Education (*NarKom Osvity*) between 1924 and 1927, and by Mykola Skrypnyk (1872—1933), who held the same position from 1927 to 1933. Together with Lazar Kaganovich (U Kahanovych) (1893—1991), General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine between 1925 and 1928, they speeded the process of Ukrainization in the country.

According to Iefimenko (2017), the development of Bolshevik language policy in Soviet Ukraine from 1919 to 1933 can be divided in several periods, but all of them are seen as corrections of the same ideals and vision of communism depending on practical conditions. As he claims, in the years 1921—1922 the party saw Ukrainization as the antipode of Sovietization, and mainly as a form of disguised nationalism. In the period between 1922 and 1925 the Bolsheviks became aware of the fact that Ukrainization had to gain control of the weapon represented by the Ukrainian language in order to manage and monitor the struggle against the party. It is certainly true that these few years, more precisely 1923—1925, are considered the period of ‘Ukrainization by decree’ for the huge quantity of promulgations which were largely ignored (Martin, 2001, p. 80).

From 1925 to 1928, the “Kaganovich factor” led to an acceleration of the process of Ukrainization, whose main tools were agitation and propaganda (Iefimenko, 2017, p. 182); this was possible also because in this period, it was no longer the state apparatus but the party itself that controlled the process, supported by many local committees. As for the status of the Ukrainian language, new decrees prompted its usage in the state apparatus, in the party, in the educational system, and in the media (newspapers and radio). The process of Ukrainization involved mainly the cities and the industrial centres as well as the urban centres in the country; all these areas had been subjected to strong Russification in the past. Moreover, Ukrainization became compulsory for state officials: they had to pass an examination in the Ukrainian language and culture, and if they failed, there were courses to take. If they evaded or still failed, they were to have been fired. In Kharkiv — at the time, the capital of

Soviet Ukraine — programmes of instructions were organized, and inspectors were sent to check up on the policy implementation in institutions and offices (Shevelov, 1989, pp. 115—116).

In the following years, between 1928 and 1932, linguistic support from the party nominally continued: even after Kaganovich left Soviet Ukraine, the People's Commissar of Education, Skrypnyk, continued encouraging the linguistic distinctiveness of Ukrainian while declaring that politics' influence on linguistics should be extremely limited. Nevertheless, due to foreign policy factors, by the end of the 1920s, there was a communist offensive, and this is clearly shown by the return of the old question of the merging of languages (and nations) in the future communist society. According to Stalin, the cultures in the Soviet Union should be “socialist in content and national in form”. This slogan became very popular and quoted, and in Iefimenko's (2017, pp. 186—187) opinion, it meant that the cultural development of the countries required the usage of the republics' native languages, but this was regarded as a necessary step in a more complex process, at the end of which, with the victory of communism all over the world, linguistic boundaries would merge into a single language spoken by everyone.

It is not by chance that during the 1920s Stalin embraced the ideas elaborated by Nikolai Marr (1865—1934), which became the official linguistic theory of the USSR until 1950<sup>13</sup>, when the communist leader officially debunked it from the pages of the *Pravda*. Marrism was born in opposition to “Western linguistics” (Indo-European linguistics) and proposed a typological, and not a genealogical, model of the relations among languages. Marr refused the idea of the protolanguage from which originated the different branches of a language family and proposed in its place the image of the overturned pyramid: from a multitude of languages, through social and economic development, he foresaw in the future the merging into a single language of the communist society. This is one of the many features of this peculiar theory, object of many criticisms because its author lacked a serious scientific methodology, but his ideas proved functional for the justification of some of the choices in Soviet language policy.

The year 1933 is usually considered the official end of Ukrainization, not only formalized by two resolutions in December, but also anticipated by the publishing of the new spelling code in September, which marked a sharp turn towards a new policy of Sovietization/Russification<sup>14</sup> characterizing the

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<sup>13</sup> Shevelov (1989, p. 160) wrote that the journal *Movoznavstvo* had a Marrist orientation, and there were several translations of works by Russian Marrists. However, in practice, the comparative method continued to be used in Ukrainian linguistics, as proved by Leonid Bulakhov's'kyi. It is true that in some numbers of the journal *Movoznavstvo* several articles written by Bulakhov's'kyi were accompanied by a note by the editorial staff distancing themselves from the method used by the author. A feeble attempt to be the Ukrainian coryphaeus of Marrism in Ukraine was made by V. M. Babak in 1936, a collaborator of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistics and one of the compilers of the 1937 Russian-Ukrainian dictionary (see Orazi, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Usually, the policy adopted from 1933 onwards, and anticipated by the destruction of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, is defined as ‘Russification’ because of the prominent role played by the Russian language in the public sphere and in education as well as the tendency towards bringing Ukrainian closer to Russian. Nevertheless, we prefer to use the form Sovietization/Russification in order to distinguish this policy from the previous imperialist policy of Russification.



country until the collapse of the Soviet Union, and relegating Ukrainian to a secondary role in the public sphere. According to Martin (2001, p. 76), linguistic *korenizatsiia* in the USSR failed (with the exception of Georgia and Armenia) because it represented a soft-line policy, whose implementation was secondary to industrialization or collectivization, which were at the core of the Bolshevik's hard-line policy<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, as we have seen through the stages marked by the Ukrainian historian Iefimenko, status policy during the 1920s seemed to be oriented towards an increase in the number of native speakers in Ukrainian and the development of the language functioning in those spheres previously monopolized by Russian. Concrete data show that the language policy was at least temporarily successful in the fields of education and print media. For instance, by 1927, 80,7 % of primary education was in Ukrainian, 61,8 % of elementary schools and 48,7 % of professional schools (Martin, 2001, p. 92). By 1930, there were 14430 Ukrainian elementary schools and 1504 Russian elementary schools. In other types of schools, the change was less important but still noticeable (Shevelov, 1989, pp. 116—117). It should be noted that in the higher educational degrees and in the Eastern regions, Russian still prevailed, but, generally, primary and secondary education in Soviet Ukraine registered an important increase in the usage of Ukrainian. According to Pauly (2014, pp. 4, 8), these educational accomplishments, especially in primary education, should be attributed mainly to teachers, who worked hard to improve the language proficiency of students, and facilitated a more active use of Ukrainian also by party members, workers, bureaucrats, etc., whereas the Bolsheviks inhibited or were passive towards the real application of *korenizatsiia* in schools.

The print media in Ukrainian showed a significant increase as well: for example, in 1923—1924, 37,5 % of newspapers and 32,4 % of journals were in Ukrainian, and in 1927—1928 there was a rapid growth to 63,5 % and 66,4 % respectively. The peak was in 1932, with 87,5 % of newspapers in Ukrainian. Ukrainian-language book production increased during the 1920s, up to 76,9 % in 1931, although the percentage of texts actually available to readers was considerably lower (Martin, 2001, p. 92; Moser, 2016c, p. 521). In the Bolshevik party, the percentage of ethnically Ukrainian members grew even though the highest *nomenklatura* remained mainly Russian (see Martin, 2001, pp. 83, 90).

As for the status of Ukrainian, in December of 1932, a resolution established: “by 15 January 1933 to verify knowledge of the Ukrainian language on the part of functionaries in all institutions and enterprises. Officials who do not demonstrate knowledge of the Ukrainian language must enroll in DKU [state Ukrainization courses ...]” (Iefimenko, 2017, p. 187).

Thus, the Bolsheviks were generally hostile or passive towards the Ukrainization policy, but during the 1920s, they were forced to accept to a certain

<sup>15</sup> Although Martin's terminology can be discussed or improved to define the matter, we think it is important to quote this passage as it confirms Smith's analysis of language as a factor, considered less important than economic, geopolitical, and national questions.

degree the functional development and a more active use and teaching of the language. Nevertheless, is it possible to infer that language policy in the 1920s positively influenced the work on the normalization of the Ukrainian language? It is certainly true that language policy and language planning are related fields; however, according to Moser (2016c, pp. 581—584), Ukrainization for the party represented a tactical delay used to react against the rise of Ukrainian national consciousness, but the contributions to the standardization of the Ukrainian language were the results of the dedicated efforts of the normalizers, who did not enjoy broad support from the Bolsheviks.

Following Shevelov's classification, these scholars can be divided in two main schools of ethnographic and synthetic. The first trend was more puristic and archaizing and includes, among others, the above-mentioned Olena Kurylo in her early writings and Ivan Ohienko as well as Ahatanhel Kryms'kyi (1871 — reportedly 1942), Ievhen Tymchenko (1866—1948), Serhii Smerchyns'kyi (1892—1954), and Vasyl' Simovych (1880—1944), whereas the second trend was more oriented towards European models and was less puristic, including Olena Kurylo in her later writings, Oleksa Syniavs'kyi, Mykola Sulyma (1892—1955) and others. Although we will not discuss here the importance and the results of the normalization of the Ukrainian literary language in the 1920s, we will mention the production of the 1928 spelling code, also known as *Skrypnykivka* or all-Ukrainian spelling, the publication of the Russian-Ukrainian academic dictionary (1924—1933) through the letter P and of many terminological dictionaries, and the realization of handbooks and monographs devoted to the syntactic or stylistic features of Ukrainian (Shevelov, 1989, pp. 109—140). Often, the linguistic production of the 1920s was introduced by words highlighting the vital importance of Ukrainian for the very existence of a unified nation and community. The linguistic normalization in these years is clearly oriented towards the affirmation of the peculiarities of the Ukrainian language, highlighting the features distancing it from Polish and Russian. This proves once again the crucial role played by the Romantic notion of nation in the cultural background of Ukrainian intellectuals and linguists.

To sum up, Ukrainian language policy in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s was oriented towards encouraging the usage and development of Ukrainian as an unavoidable step in the consolidation of the USSR: especially in the Ukrainian Bolshevik party, it was never fully supported although concrete results were registered in the fields of education and print media and, to a lesser extent, among the officials. However, it seems that the political institutions as well as their local ramifications never fully grasped the importance of the meaning attached to language as a fundamental premise of the nation and a national treasure, vivid among scholars working on the scientific development and progress of the Ukrainian nation (among them linguists and writers). Language was perceived mainly as a tool and mere means of communication by party members, whereas intellectuals and the community involved in the nation-building process perceived it as one of the

most notable features characterizing the country and distinguishing it from other Slavic nations and languages and therefore as needing solid support, especially while literacy was spreading among the masses. This divergence between the institutions and features of Ukrainian society and intellectuals will also emerge in the facts analyzed in the following section, devoted to the years of Ukrainian Independence.

#### **4. LANGUAGE POLICY AFTER 1991**

On 24 August 1991 Ukraine proclaimed its independence. The recent Soviet past forced the country to face new possibilities and strategies of language policy from a new post-colonial perspective. Before the collapse of the USSR, in 1989, an amendment to the republic's constitution and a language law established that the Ukrainian language was the only state language of the Ukrainian SSSR (Kulyk, 2013, p. 283).

Like other former USSR republics, Ukraine approached language management by focusing on 1) the reconsolidation of the status of the national/titular language, 2) the status of the Russian language (de-Russification), and 3) support for the languages of national minorities (Hogan-Brun & Melnyk, 2012, p. 594).

In the 1996 Constitution of Ukraine, article 10 is devoted to the question of the state language<sup>16</sup>: “The State language of Ukraine is the Ukrainian language.

The State ensures the comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life throughout the entire territory of Ukraine.

Free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine is guaranteed in Ukraine.

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” (Constitution of Ukraine).

First, the leading role of the Ukrainian language is highlighted as well as full support for its functioning, previously limited by the Sovietization/Russification language policy, which assigned the key role in education, media, administration, and social mobility to Russian. The latter is mentioned together with ‘other languages of national minorities’, and the state assures their protection, use, and free development. It is certainly true that there is a Russian ethnic minority in the country, but it cannot be denied that the consequence of tsarist and Soviet language policies is the pervasive form of coexistence of Russian and Ukrainian in the country so that the definition of

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<sup>16</sup> The terms ‘state language’ and ‘official language’ are said to be considered synonyms throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union, and in the language legislation of many countries they carry a symbolic meaning (Hogan-Brun & Melnyk, 2012, p. 598). However, as reported by the anonymous reviewer of this article, in Ukraine it was proposed to attach to Ukrainian the status of ‘state language’ and to consider Russian as the ‘official language’, thus proving that the two terms were not exact synonyms.

Russian as a ‘minority language’ is not adequate and that assigning it a defined status represents a complex issue<sup>17</sup>.

It must be underscored that the linguistic situation in contemporary Ukraine certainly changed after its independence and that the last years of war in the eastern self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics have contributed to new shifts. Generally, observers describe Ukraine’s sociolinguistic situation in terms of bilingualism Ukrainian-Russian or Russian-Ukrainian (see Sokolova, 2021). An interesting description of the sociolinguistic panorama has been offered by two Italian linguists (we will report it adding a few corrections or clarifications). According to Dell’Aquila and Iannàccaro (2004, p. 196) we cannot talk about bilingualism in the country, but more precisely we find the following:

- Dilalia in the Eastern and Southern Russophone regions, as well as in the northern urban areas: Russian and Ukrainian coexist, but the first is considered the high variety (acrolect) and the second the low variety (basilect), more widespread in informal communication.

- Ukrainian diatopic variations in the areas where Ukrainians constitute the majority of the population: this means that standard Ukrainian prevails but that the geographical origin of the speakers is easily recognizable because of the peculiarity of Ukrainian dialectal varieties; Russian can be present here, but mostly as a second language.

- Russian monolingualism prevails in the Russian community, with Ukrainian as a possible second language.

- Dilalia Russian-Ukrainian + minority language/dialects is the most frequent situation for other minorities.

This interesting description leaves aside the important and well-studied phenomenon of *surzhuk*, Ukrainian-Russian mixed language (see Del Gaudio, 2010). As to the first point above, it must be added that if in the first post-independence years Russian was certainly considered the acrolect, nowadays in the Eastern regions, Ukrainian is often regarded as a high variety, and is the language of official documents as well as the language used by many writers and scholars. Sokolova (2021, pp. 38, 47) prefers the definition of bilingualism but clarifies that it must be studied with a regional and in-depth approach to render the real sociolinguistic picture of the nation.

In the adoption of a new orientation in language policy, Ukraine could observe the main trends developing in other post-Soviet countries. It seems interesting to consider especially on the one hand the Baltics and on the other hand Belarus, as these nations opted for completely different approaches that led to opposite results. The choices of the Baltic states, with a language policy centred on the regaining of national status by previously marginalized languages, are still considered by many Ukrainian observers as a suitable model. Right after independence, language laws in the Baltics required that

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<sup>17</sup> It has been proposed to use the term ‘non-state languages’ (*nederzhavni movi*) for all the languages besides Ukrainian, including Russian, and to avoid a specific definition attached to Russian (Besters-Dilger, 2009, p. 363).

personnel in employment who had contact with the public should demonstrate a level of knowledge appropriate to their level of employment. Central state language offices supervise the process and attest to language proficiency, and a system of language inspections has been created. Moreover, school reform programmes were developed for the purpose of shifting schooling to the national languages as the main languages of instruction. The Baltic republics, members of the EU and NATO, had also to respect many admission criteria, and in this process the main issue of concern has been the status of Russian: according to some observers, the Russian speaking community was somehow discriminated against by the language and citizenship laws adopted, which aimed at the development of language proficiency and schooling in the national language, especially in Latvia (see Hogan-Brun, et al., 2007, pp. 523–524, 530, 539, 617).

On the other side, the Belarusian experience followed the opposite path: after its independence (1991), the country first experienced a period of apparent ‘Belarusization’. In the 1994 Constitution, Belarusian was declared the state language, and Russian was assigned the ambiguous status of “language of interethnic relations” (*mova mizhnatsional’nykh vidnosyn*) (Skopnenko, 2019, p. 210). On 14 May 1995, the question on the possible equal status assigned to Russian and Belarusian was posed to citizens in a referendum, and the majority of the voters opted for a positive answer. In 1996, the constitution was amended, declaring official bilingualism in the country. Then, several laws focused on education, and nominally guaranteed the support to Belarusian as well as the rights of the minority languages (Polish and Lithuanian) but *de facto* left the language choice open to parents (as in the Soviet past). As a result, the Russian language medium of education gradually prevailed. Moreover, there are no higher education institutions where Belarusian is the exclusive language medium (see Ulasiuk, 2011). Since 1998, state laws have been written only in Russian, and only in 2020 was the translation of the main legal codes in Belarusian recommended (Skopnenko, 2019, p. 211). Thus, the active use of the Belarusian language is extremely limited, and the majority of the population is not proficient in the state language; it is studied by many as if it were a foreign language, not functional for higher education and for social mobility.

Therefore, Ukraine had to select its language policy orientation with caution, but the decisions taken were influenced by political parties, often using language policy as an ideological battlefield. As a result, in 2012, the controversial law “On the Principles of the State Language Policy” was approved. This text was written by Serhii Kivalov and Vadym Kolesnichenko and promoted by the Party of Regions, which supported strong ties to Russia. This law never formally questioned the key role attributed to Ukrainian as the sole state language, although it introduced the new label of “regional or minority language”, a reference to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Charter was approved in 1992, entered into force in 1998 and represents the European convention for the protection and promotion of

languages used by minorities<sup>18</sup>. Its monitoring mechanism underwent changes which came into effect in 2019.

The expression ‘regional or minority language’ used in the European Charter refers to languages “1. traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population; and 2. different from the official language(s) of that State” (European Charter, 1992, p. 2). This definition does not include dialects of the official language(s) and the languages of migrants.

Ukraine signed the Charter in 1996, but the ratification process took many years, and it came into force only in 2006 (Moser, 2019, p. 16)<sup>19</sup>. The explicit reference to the terminology adopted in the Charter in the 2012 law seems to be a form of trickery intended to confer to Russian a co-official status: “This term was used to give the Russian language semiofficial status in the majority of the Ukrainian regions and thus prevent the expansion of the Ukrainian language into civil service, the justice system, education, mass media, culture and entertainment, and other areas. Many provisions of the law stipulated the use of either the regional language or state language, which in practice meant the substitution of Ukrainian with Russian, or at best reducing Ukrainian to peripheral functions” (Azhniuk, 2017, p. 312).

Technically, the law defined ‘regional or minority language’ as the language spoken as native by at least 10 % of the population of administrative units; this led to the recognition of Russian as the regional language in most of Southern and Eastern regions and cities (13 of the 27 oblasts; see Moser, 2013, p. 297) as well as Hungarian and Romanian in the regions where there is a significant number of speakers. The main problem was that the reconsolidation of the status and functioning of the national/titular language was put aside, and the protection of regional or minority languages, mainly Russian, became more important.

Consequently, there were immediate critical responses, and the law was adamantly opposed by many experts and citizens as well as by the opposition parties. Many questions pertained to the violation of constitutional principles and other Ukrainian laws, and the majority of observers perceived this act of law as a new form of disguised Russification of the country when the official state language was still trying to strengthen its position in the Ukrainian society, educational system, media, etc. (see Moser, 2013, pp. 298–300). The

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<sup>18</sup> The European Charter supports language minorities as well as the awareness of rights both for minorities and the majority of the population of the states which ratified the document. However, there are problems related to the interpretation of the Charter itself: for instance, the definition of ‘regional’ or ‘minority language’ is different in each nation. Moreover, governments may often experience technical difficulties in the implementation of the Charter, and some minorities not recognised by the Charter may be in conflict with others. Finally, the European Charter was created to avoid the death of endangered languages, but, in practice, a document cannot assure their survival (Besters-Dil’ger, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Many scholars have noted terminological problems in the translation into Ukrainian and a certain undefinition of the main concepts of ‘regional language’ or ‘minority language’. Furthermore, the English formula ‘regional or minority language’ present in the Charter seems to contradict the expression ‘regional and minority language’ frequently appearing in many documents of the European Council (Azhniuk 2017, p. 321; Moser, 2019, pp. 17, 19).

main consequence of this trend in language policy has been a form of encouragement to Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism and the importance of Russian speaking media in the country.

Meanwhile, Ievromaidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the conflict in the East partially changed the territorial distribution of Russian and Ukrainian speakers because of the phenomenon of internally displaced persons, according to which many Russophones have moved to the Western or Central regions of the country (see Tsar, 2020). Generally, the conflict has also changed language attitudes for it has pushed some Ukrainians to a more active use of the Ukrainian language as a response to the “language of the oppressor” or the “language of separatists” (Russian). The Ukrainian language seems to have regained its significant role as a ‘national treasure’ and symbol of the unity of the country, now suffering the consequences of a war. The people and citizens have always perceived the symbolic role of language, but in everyday life they usually continued to freely use Russian or Ukrainian according to family habits. However, especially after the beginning of the conflict, some speakers began to feel the necessity of opting voluntarily for the national language; many associations and campaigns supporting the active use of Ukrainian were created, such as the recent media campaign “Perekhod’ na Ukraïns’ku” (Switch to Ukrainian). Language policy towards Ukrainization began to be considered a prominent issue already after 2012, but its popularity grew, as shown by the existence of web-sites such as the specific portal ‘Portal movnoï polityky’ (see Azhniuk, 2019, p. 46).

These facts prove a new awareness and interest in linguistic issues, and politics and institutions tried to mirror this trend: during Poroshenko’s presidency, after the approval of the language law concerning education in 2017, ‘Pro osvitu’ (Azhniuk, 2019, p. 25)<sup>20</sup>, whose project was initially presented by the Ministry of Education and Sciences, in 2018, the law “On the Principles of the State Language Policy” was recognized as unconstitutional. A year later, the new law ‘On Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language’ was approved and signed by Poroshenko, who had recently lost the elections which gave Volodymyr Zelens’kyi an impressive percentage of the vote. If the old law tended towards the Belarusian model of language policy, with a Russification trend disguised under a more polite and reassuring formula of ‘regional or minority language’, the new law seems to reorient language policy towards Western models, not forgetting the above-mentioned Baltic experience.

The law focuses mainly on the support to state language and on the implementation of its functioning in many domains of public life. It is interesting to note that the text opens with a reference to Ukraine’s colonial past of linguistic assimilation and with a remark on the strong relationship exist-

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<sup>20</sup> Hungary and Romania contested the reduction of the usage of their respective languages in the educational institutions where most of the representatives of these linguistic minorities live. Ukraine replied that this change is necessary because of the unsatisfactory level of proficiency in the Ukrainian language, which causes several problems in integration and in the educational process (Azhniuk, 2019, p. 36).

ting between language and identity: Ukrainian is defined as “the determining factor and the key feature of the identity of the Ukrainian nation”, and its functioning is seen as “a guarantee of preserving the identity of the Ukrainian nation and strengthening the state unity of Ukraine”.

Sections II and III of the law establish the importance of proficiency in the Ukrainian language with the purpose of acquiring Ukrainian citizenship in that the state provides all the required opportunities through the educational system; in addition, free courses for adults are organized to ensure language proficiency. Then, the persons required to be proficient are indicated, including the main public and political figures, civil servants, lawyers, judges, military servicemen, education and academic workers, officers and officials, etc. These categories need to be examined to determine their level of linguistic proficiency. According to the 2019 law, the National Commission for Standards of the State Language will be the organ entrusted with the task of establishing the linguistic standards (spelling, terminology, transcription, and transliteration) and the requirements for the levels of language proficiency (section VII). As for the associated examination, it seems possible to retake it an unlimited number of times. The law creates the figure of a ‘Commissioner’ (*U upovnovazhenyi*), who will control the correct application and functioning of the established criteria.

The 2019 law also strengthens the role of Ukrainian in education and science (art. 21–22). As for culture and media, the state language shall have a prominent role in theatre, the film industry, tourism, radio and broadcasting, print etc. Other minority languages can be used, but then an adequate translation in the state language must be assured. Article 57 refers to the procedures for the imposition of fines on economic entities for violating the law.

The law is in force, but its effects can only be evaluated in the medium/long term. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that for the first time, support for the state language is explicitly formalized, although during the first years of his presidency Zelens’kyi and his party did not focus on linguistic issues. It is also worth mentioning that there is a certain uniformity between the 2019 law and language normalization trends as the work of specialists on the Ukrainian standard is oriented towards the affirmation of a stable and unified spelling code (see the recent 2019 reform) and a general purification from unnecessary Russian elements (mostly lexical but, to a lesser extent, also morphological and syntactical). It is not surprising that in the last decades one sees a constant rediscovery of the scientific production of the normalizers active during the 1920s, as shown by the reprinting of the dictionaries, handbooks, and reference books written by Kurylo, Semchyns’kyi, Holoskevych and others: a new wave of Ukrainization, in a completely different and postcolonial context, where some ideologically stirred puristic positions can inevitably occur sometimes (see Del Gaudio, 2015).



## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Language in Ukraine represents the foundations of the nation and is considered a 'national treasure' even though family habits can lead a consistent number of speakers to use Russian in everyday communication. As to the situation in the 1920s, one must distinguish between two different approaches: on the one hand, language normalizers adhered to the Romantic model of nation, and this inevitably influenced their activity in regard to the definition of the spelling, morphological, and syntactical features of the Ukrainian literary language; on the other hand, the Bolsheviks, especially in Soviet Ukraine, were conscious of the fact that in order to reach the main communist goals, they should accept a certain degree of development of the Ukrainian language and support its usage in the official sphere but continued seeing it merely as a tool. In this sense, they seemed not to have fully understood the relevance of the relationship between language and nation in the Ukrainian context. Thus, in the 1920s one finds the adoption of the Ukrainization policy: the Communist party was never fully supportive although actual progress, especially in education and in print media, is undeniable and contributed to a certain stability of this language also in the next, complex period of Sovietization/Russification; linguists and political figures such as Skrypnyk were fully supportive, and scholars actively engaged in the consolidation of the literary norm.

By 1989, and especially when Ukraine regained its independence in 1991, the language policy needed to be reoriented because from 1933 until the collapse of the USSR, Russian had played a prominent role in the public sphere, whereas Ukrainian had been marginal. In the 1990s, Ukrainian language legislation focused on the functioning of the state language and the support to minority languages, but the coexistence of Russian and Ukrainian has always represented a complex and debated issue, including because of Russian political interference. In 2012, language policy was reoriented towards a new form of 'disguised' Russification, whereas in 2019, a new language law was approved with the intent of reaffirming the centrality of the state language (Ukrainian) and to support its functional development all over the country.

In our analysis, we showed the existence of common aspects recurring in the language legislation of the 1920s as well as in the 2019 language law: in both, support for Ukrainian in the state apparatus, educational system, and media has been officially formalized. Moreover, people required to be assessed in regard to their linguistic proficiency are indicated in the 1920s (state officials and functionaries) and in the 2019 language law (main public and political figures, civil servants, lawyers, judges, military servicemen, education and academic workers, officers, etc.). In both cases, the legislation assures the organization of free language courses.

Furthermore, in the 1920s and in 2019, it seems that the institutions, although not convinced or to a certain extent forced, perceived the importance of supporting the Ukrainian language, whether considering this choice a tactical delay (1920s) or a necessary response to the social rising sensibility towards

the linguistic issue (2019), and in both cases because of previous Russification tendencies. Finally, linguists and scholars worked towards the affirmation of a stable and solid linguistic norm, as proven by the spelling reforms of 1928 and 2019, and the adoption of some puristic recommendations or indications. Despite the descriptive nature of this contribution, we hope it will prompt new and more in-depth analyses and comparisons between these two seminal periods in Ukraine's cultural and linguistic history.

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## УКРАЇНЬСЬКА МОВНА ПОЛІТИКА У 1920-х І ПІСЛЯ 1991 РОКУ: ЕТАПИ РОЗВИТКУ ТА СУЧАСНІ ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ

У статті проаналізовано основні характеристики мовної політики в радянській Україні 20-х років ХХ століття та в сучасній Україні, починаючи з 1991 року. Визначено фундаментальну роль мови у становленні української національної ідентичності. У 20-х роках більшовицька влада схвалила, проте втілила частково політику так званої українізації. Упровадження цієї політики дозволило досягнути значних результатів в освіті, видавництві та, меншою мірою, у політичному житті країни. Після здобуття незалежності Україна відбудовувала та провадила мовну політику вже в постколоніальному контексті. Необхідно було зміцнити центральне місце української мови та відлагодити її співіснування з російською. Прийняття Закону України *Про засади державної мовної політики* (2012) призвело до нової форми російщення. Натомість Закон України *Про забезпечення функціонування української мови як державної* (2019), підтриманий широкими верствами громадянського суспільства, сприяв використанню української мови у сферах, де раніше переважала російська.

*Ключові слова:* мовна політика, Україна, 20-ті роки, незалежність, ідентичність