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BACK SIDE OF BILINGUALISM IN UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the language situation in Ukraine and the state of bilingualism today due to political and linguistic reasons. In fact, Ukraine is a bilingual country with the population speaking both Ukrainian and Russian. Unfortunately, the language issue has become an integral part of political programs of many politicians due to the fact that one part of the population is Ukrainian-speaking and another part is Russian-speaking. Thus, in order to satisfy their constituent body, some politicians promise to support Russian and other politicians promise to introduce Ukrainian in all the official spheres of life of the country. Therefore, Ukraine today faces an artificially created language conflict between those who defend the rights of their preferred languages. The ‘oppression’ of the Russian-speaking population is claimed to be one of the causes of military intervention into the Eastern Ukraine, producing over a million of internally displaced people. These people who were forced to leave their homes in Eastern Ukraine, on the contrary, state that they did not feel any restriction in use of the Russian languages. Moreover, some of them even made conscious choice to speak Ukrainian as a state language. Thus, the language conflict in Ukraine is an artificial one, and it is a personal choice which language to speak.

Key words: bilingualism, the state language, regional language, language situation, ukrainization.

Introduction

Ukraine is a country, which is located in the geographical center of Europe. Ukraine was a central and integral part of the Kyivan Rus, which was the first official Slavic state in Eastern Europe. The cultural and religious legacy of that original state laid grounds for Ukrainian Nationalism throughout centuries to come after the fall of the Kyivan Rus state.

History of Ukraine has always been turbulent, and the 21st century is not an exception. Having survived the Orange Revolution in 2004 – 2005, in 2013 Ukraine faced yet another turbulent event – the Revolution of Dignity, and this resulted in a long-time military conflict. The Ukrainian conflict, being called a hybrid war in media discourse, has recently become one of the most discussed issues on the

international political arena and still is. In particular, after the events in November, 2013, when Ukraine made its European choice, it became obvious that the concept of ‘The Tribune Russian People’ is irrelevant. Ukrainian people chose European values and European way of life which triggered the wave of violence and mass murders in the early days of 2014. As a consequence it invoked the ethnic conflict within the borders of Ukraine later that year; gave opportunity for highly probable discrimination and possible destruction of the Crimean Tatars to arise in the foreseeable future and eventually led to the fact that the borders of Europe once again were to be changed. The conflict in Ukraine vividly demonstrated that the Ukrainian society is far from being homogeneous and faces great problems in terms of national and ethnical identification. Among other pretexts, the revocation of the language law (the Law of Ukraine on State Language Policy, also called Kivalov-Kolisnichenko Law) in the early 2014 sparked concerns among Russian and EU diplomats and led to armed clashes in the East of the country. Russia Today media source stated that swift repellent of the law was condemned by Russian diplomats as ‘*violation of ethnic minority rights*’ [RT, <http://www.rt.com/news/minority-language-law-ukraine-035/>].

Language situation in Ukraine

Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine, adopted in 1996 and amended several times through the 25 years of independence says that ‘*The State language of Ukraine shall be the Ukrainian language.*’

The State shall ensure 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 shall be guaranteed in Ukraine.

The State shall promote the learning of languages of international communication.

The use of languages in Ukraine shall be guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine and shall be determined by law’ [Constitution of Ukraine, www.kmu.gov.ua/document/110977042/Constitution_eng.doc].

However, the language issue once again was addressed after coming to power pro-Russian Donetsk elite in 2010 – 2013 and thus the Law of Ukraine on State Language Policy was drafted. The Law of Ukraine on State Language Policy was adopted by Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) in June, 5, 2012 in the first reading and it was supported by 234 Members of Parliament and 248 MP’s cards supported the Law in the second reading. The Law was enacted in August 10, 2012. The given Law states that the state language is Ukrainian,

however it substantially widens the sphere of regional languages application under a condition that the number of the given language speakers is no less than 10% of the population of the region under concern, thus allowing for its use in courts, schools, and other government institutions; and in some cases even less than 10%. Under this Law the preferences were given to a regional language, not a state one. The Law covers such languages as Russian, Belorussian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Gagauz, Yiddish, Crimean Tatar, Moldavian, German, Norwegian, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Slovakian, Hungarian, Russianian, Karaite, Judeo-Crimean Tatar [http://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/Povidomlennya/66151.html].

It is worth mentioning that in terms of nationalities living in Ukraine the situation looks like this according to the World Factbook: Ukrainian 77.8%, Russian 17.3%, Belarusian 0.6%, Moldovan 0.5%, Crimean Tatar 0.5%, Bulgarian 0.4%, Hungarian 0.3%, Romanian 0.3%, Polish 0.3%, Jewish 0.2%, other 1.8% (2001 est.) (The World Factbook [Online Article] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>); and in terms of languages spoken – Ukrainian (official) 67%, Russian (regional language) 24%, other (includes small Romanian, Polish, and Hungarian speaking minorities) 9% (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>).

html). Thus actually the Law was adopted for the sole reason of giving status of regional language to the Russian in 13 regions of Ukraine. In February, 23, 2014 this Law was repealed; 232 Members of Parliament voted for the revocation of the Law. This revocation was later used as a pretext to start the military conflict arguing that the rights of minorities in the East of Ukraine were violated. The military actions produced over a million of internally displaced people, which did not alleviate the language situation in Ukraine.

On the other hand, the situation is not so grave for the official Ukrainian language. It has become the language of educational system since the beginning of the 21st century. Teachers at comprehensive schools and professors at universities are required to use only Ukrainian (Fimyar, 2008; NL, personal communication, April, 21, 2008), though there is evidence that it doesn't stop them from using Russian both while delivering lectures and on a day to day university life. (Goodman & Lyulkun, 2008; Sjøvik, 2007). The number Ukrainian schools grew comparing to previous decade and the Ukrainian language alongside with 'vyshyvanka' becomes more popular these days.

Ukrainian vs. Russian Language

Ukraine is a complex ethnic society. Being a young independent state of 25 years old, Ukraine has to deal with a long-time tradition

of Soviet mentality, both in terms of culture and language. The ethnic conflict is very acute in Ukraine; one of the aspects is that the modern society has to face the existence of so-called Soviet ethnic group – people who deem their nationality and ethnicity lie within the collapsed Soviet state, rather than any other ethnic group. There is a myth that the majority of people in Eastern Ukraine are predominantly Russian-speaking and solely Russian-understanding people. It is a basic misconception that these people are familiar with Ukrainian only to a small degree and are unable to integrate into Ukrainian society. However, we must agree that the official Kyiv is to offer a language policy that would guarantee stable development of bilingual society. Tadeusz A. Olszański in his work ‘The Language Issue in Ukraine: an Attempt at a New Perspective’ states that the language issue in Ukraine has four basic aspects. He says that we have to deal with ‘*everyday use*’, ‘*formal and official use*’, ‘*the commercial aspect*’, and the ‘*symbolic and identity aspect*’ (Olszański, 2012). **In this piece we will try to analyze these aspects in regard to bilingualism of Donetsk region population. We argue that the issue of discrimination of the Russian language in Donetsk region is an artificial one. We also argue that there is no rights violation of Russian-speaking communities of Eastern Ukraine.** Nevertheless we agree that the language issue is still very topical in

Ukraine; however inability to accept Ukrainian as a state language is rather psychological, not linguistic. Tadeusz A. Olszański believes that the symbolic aspect is the most important as far as ‘Ukrainian national thought identifies belonging to the nation with the use of its language’, however on the other hand he mentions that the Russian-speaking population sees the use of Russian in public life as political statement and ‘declaration of belonging to ‘Slavic/Russian community’, which is opposed to Ukrainian national community (Olszański, 2012). The issue of the state language and national identity is acute in Ukraine; the country is, in fact, bilingual and the complex of measures implemented by the government to resolve the language conflict present in the state should be thorough and should cover not only social aspect, it should also be aimed at language education of all the citizens of the country.

Regarding use of language Ukraine is far from being homogenous. For example, Western Ukraine is predominantly Ukrainian-speaking, whereas The East of the country as well as the South prefers using Russian in all spheres of life.

Olszański dwells upon the reasons, which were the precursors of the current language situation in Donetsk region. Among other reasons he talks about immigration that took place after WWII and was the reason of expanding of Ukrainian population, thus

Ukraine continued to be ‘populated by displaced people from other republics and Ukrainians went to inhabit other republics, which was stimulated by the government of the USSR’ (Olszański, 2012). As a result, the ethnic landscape was very much changed due to mass immigration after the WWII. Displaced people, because of the politics of the USSR lost their ethnicity and nationality and became soviet people for whom the official (and later it became native) language was Russian, it was logical to accept this language as a primary language, because it was the language of international (among Soviet Republics) language of communication. The mix of Russian and Ukrainian languages gave birth to a notion which is called ‘Surzhyk’. It is neither a language, not a dialect, it is a specific phenomenon, which arose due to co-existence of Russian and Ukrainian languages; Russian and Ukrainian are very similar languages both lexically and grammatically, and this similarity made the symbiosis possible. Sociologists believe that Surzhyk is spoken by approximately 18% of the population of Ukraine, primarily in the center, where 40% use “more or less correct Ukrainian” and 42% – “more or less correct Russian” (Olszański, 2012).

However strange it may sound, especially on the background of cries that the rights of Russian speakers are violated, it is Ukrainian language that is deemed to be unpopular and

maverick. The Institute of Social and Political Psychology at the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and the National Institute for Strategic Studies in 2006 conducted a research with the aim to establish reasons that prevent people from speaking Ukrainian. They outlined four prevailing factors: 1) *reluctance to be seen as a maverick, don’t know the Ukrainian language and think of Ukrainian as an “uncool” language*; 2) *psycho-ideological stubbornness which includes ideological preferences, reluctance to yield to “pressure”, fear of personal change*; 3) *derogatory attitude towards Ukrainian and the “unattractiveness” of the language*; and 4) *treatment of communication in Ukrainian as something second-rate coupled with the lack of a Ukrainian-speaking environment or the need to speak Ukrainian, after all, “everybody understands Russian”* [<http://ukrainianweek.com/Society/47497>].

It partly has to do with the fact that the Ukrainian language is associated with the language of rural population, while the Russian language is deemed to be the language of urban elite. For the reason of forced Ukrainization the Ukrainian language was perceived in the Eastern Ukraine as extraneous. However the fact of a state language being extraneous in its own state is outrageous. The language issue in Ukraine is purely artificial created with a single purpose to use it during every election campaign to gain votes of Russian speaking

communities and pro-Russian urban elites. President Kuchma was the first to open the box of Pandora – in his presidential campaign he promised close integration with the Russian Federation and what is more important (for the residents of Donetsk region) President Kuchma promised equal statuses for Russian and Ukrainian languages. However the study by Analytical Service of Nikolay Gavrilov states that the expectations of the population of Donetsk region were not fulfilled [Obrechennye terpet obman prezidenta, 1996, www.asng.info/arc/4/3.docx]. However, what is even more interesting is the fact that Ukrainization was the most active under President Kuchma, even regardless the fact that the President himself was a very inarticulate speaker with a minimum lexicon in Ukrainian. The next Ukrainian President was extremely pro-Ukrainian, however, the pace of Ukrainization slowed down under his Presidency. It is explained by the fact that he had to deal primarily with eastern and southern regions of the country as far as the west and the center had already had a number of Ukrainian schools close to 99% [Tsikavi facty schodo ukrainizatsii ukrayinskyh shkil, <http://easternwestern.livejournal.com/32020.html>].

Today, after repealing and vetoing of the Kolisnichenko-Kivalov's Law the only state language is Ukrainian, and Russian is in fact a regional one in the eastern parts of the country,

but the bigger question is why so many spears are broken on the matter of bilingual Ukraine, if the country is bilingual, regardless of the official governmental policy and politics.

Research Methodology

In the offered piece we tried to apply the following methods to our research: 1) desk research; 2) interview; 3) case study. The focus group was 300 internally displaced persons from Donetsk and Luhansk region who are currently living in a module settlement in Dnipro. The present research, apart from general discussion, will contain specific research techniques; a mixed methodology is planned to be used – combination of the qualitative (mainly relying on visual data (observations) and verbal data (words) and reflecting everyday experience) and quantitative methods, focused on numerical data: acts and norms implemented. The rationale for applying mixed methods of research is that if used singlehandedly, neither will offer adequate information on the issue due to its complexity. The analysis will be focused on the environmental conditions for both languages in the eastern parts of Ukraine. Secondly, we will try to analyze current language situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and this is where the methods of interviews and case studies will be applied.

Research Results

The interviews and case studies revealed quite important patterns and facts concerning bilingualism and language issue in eastern parts of Ukraine. The findings can be classified as follows: 1) advanced in age internally displaced persons do have difficulties in terms of speaking Ukrainian language; they admit it is difficult to learn speaking Ukrainian and they admit they felt no urge to learn it before; 2) intellectuals, the internally displaced persons who were white colors have no problem with the Ukrainian language, they could write Ukrainian, could fill out all the papers in Ukrainian when there was a necessity and could speak when necessary; 3) young children who see no difference between speaking Russian or Ukrainian, they can easily switch languages; significant number of those children attend Ukrainian speaking schools in Dnipro and some of them even attended Ukrainian speaking schools in Donetsk and Luhansk. These findings will be discussed further in more detail.

Discussion

There is little doubt that the language issue in Ukraine is rather political and is definitely more political than linguistic. One of the pretexts to start military actions and fight for the independence of Donbas region was the language issue, the so-called desire of the Donbas population to use the Russian language

in both official and unofficial spheres of their lives. The main argument for the beginning this aggressive military campaign was that the whole 100% of Donbas population cannot understand Ukrainian language. However, in one of our interviews in internally displaced persons' temporary settlement in Dnipro, a teacher from Donetsk said that "*none adequate and intelligent person has any trouble about Ukrainian language in Donetsk*".

It should be stated that despite the fact that Ukrainian is considered to be the only state language, it is not the Russian language that is oppressed, but vice versa. In the central and south-eastern parts of the country it is highly unpopular to speak Ukrainian and especially young people show great stubbornness in terms of acquiring Ukrainian speaking skills and this factor in our opinion has the biggest impact on ukrainization. In the article "Russification Via Bilingualism" the author basing on the information from the Institute of Sociology at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine says that "the share of middle-aged Ukrainian-speakers grew from 36% to 39% over 1992-2010, while the number of Russian-speakers increased from 29% to 37% over the same period". As for the young people the picture is like this "33% to 36% and 34% to 39% respectively"

[<http://ukrainianweek.com/Society/47497>].

According to this information the situations changes rapidly for the sake of Russian, the

share of young people under 30 years old is higher than of those who speak Ukrainian and that share grows rapidly. There are many factors that determine one's language choice in a factually bilingual country; among those are media and mass culture and fashion, and those factors are much stronger determinants than state schools and governmental establishments which are the main source of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine [http://ukrainianweek.com/Society/47497].

The Ukrainian language is less popular than Russian and is not commonly spoken in higher educational establishments in central and south-eastern Ukraine – students, who speak Russian as a day-to-day language particularly in regions where the Russian language is a dominant one “are more reluctant to switch when spoken to in Ukrainian, while 90.6% of young Ukrainian-speakers are ready to answer in Russian” [http://ukrainianweek.com/Society/47497]. A Ukrainian-speaking student from Lutsk, who spoke only Ukrainian both at home and school after entering Dnipropetrovsk National University switched to Russian and when asked why, says that “*he wants to be like others*”, so it is rather clear that when a Ukrainian-speaker is in Russian-speaking environment he or she in most cases switches to Russian, while when a Russian-speaking individual is in Ukrainian-speaking environment he or she is more reluctant to

switch to Ukrainian, and that switch rarely takes place.

However, as an MP from Donetsk Egor Firsov stated in his comment to us that “*the problem of language is more specific to Donetsk itself, rather than the rural region of Donbas*”. He also pointed out that on the whole Donbas population has no problem in understanding the Ukrainian language as far as the majority of TV channels are in Ukrainian and the people are “*in any case, surrounded by the Ukrainian language in their day-to-day life*”. To continue his idea in regard to internally displaced people, who are temporarily accommodated in a module settlement in Dnipro it is worth mentioning that among 300 people (predominately from Donetsk and Luhansk) no one feels strongly opposed to the Ukrainian language; 90% of children of school age are willing to speak Ukrainian even in day-to-day life, 65% of those children started academic year 2015/2016 in Ukrainian schools, according to the will of their parents, where all the subjects are taught in Ukrainian. The situation is rather difficult regarding the advanced in age internally displaced persons as far as it is obviously more difficult for them to speak Ukrainian, though there are no problems with receptive skills among the representatives of this group as well and they all understand the Ukrainian language. Returning to the interview of Mr. Firsov, he noted that when children living in Donbas

region major cities get to visit their grandparents in the countryside they often hear and even speak Ukrainian.

On the one hand, there is the number of people whose conscious choice is monolingualism and the only language they chose to speak is Russian. This group of people is always ready to protect their right and will to speak the Russian language and they are ready to fight for that right aggressively on the background of tolerant attitude to all the languages spoken in Ukraine. On the other hand, the fact is that the ability to speak a language is directly related to the desire to learn one. From the linguistic point of view the majority of Ukrainians have exposure to both languages (Ukrainian and Russian) almost from the birth, thus having three major “windows of

opportunity” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, Tracey, 1963, Raising multilingual children: foreign language acquisition and children) to learn both languages, that is why the conscious choice of being either monolingual or bilingual is more a political and psychological issue rather than a linguistic one.

Conclusion

Ukraine has a unique feature – bilingualism is almost natural here – specifics of articulation, environment, windows of opportunity. So, not being bilingual is a choice, while the unpopularity of Ukrainian has purely social connotation. Speaking Ukrainian is not popular; it means you are a redneck. Ukraine is a bilingual country in the essence, as far as the exposure to both languages is vast and intense.

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