DURKU VKLYUCHILI! THE ATTITUDE OF RUSSIAN SPEAKERS IN UKRAINE TOWARDS THE UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE AND ITS SPEAKERS

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Ukraine is a country divided by language, with speakers in the eastern half tending to speak Russian natively, and speakers in the west using Ukrainian as their native tongue. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian was perceived as a language for peasants and people with little education. When the official language of the country was changed from Russian to Ukrainian in 1991, tensions between speakers escalated. Seventeen years after the change, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes still appear in public discourse. This paper explores internet forums and other print media for evidence of prevailing attitudes that Russian speakers in Ukraine have toward the Ukrainian language and its speakers, and how those attitudes may be changing through time; negative stereotypes are easily found, but as the new generation of school children speaks Ukrainian as the language of education, those stereotypes are slowly diminishing.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

- Вы говорите: язык... Да разве существует малороссийский язык? Я попросил раз одного хохла перевести следующую, первую попавшуюся мне фразу: "Грамматика есть искусство правильно читать и писать". Знаете, как он это перевел: "Храматыка е выскусство правильно чытаты и пысаты..." Что ж, это язык, по-вашему? самостоятельный язык? Да скорей, чем с этим согласиться, я готов позволить лучшего своего друга истолочь в ступе...

- You say: language...as if the Little Russian language exists? One time I asked a [derogatory term for Ukrainian] to translate the following, the first phrase that came to me: “Grammar is an art of correctly reading and writing.” Do you know, how he translated it: “Khrammar is the yrt of corryctly ryding and wrytyng...” What, that is a language, in your opinion? An independent language? Sooner than agreeing with that, I would pound my best friend in a mortar.

- Pigasiv, from “Rudin” by Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev

The people of Ukraine are divided by politics, culture, and language. The Dnipro river, which cuts through the country, separates not only east from west, but also Russian speakers from Ukrainian speakers. This has been the situation for centuries, although in the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the politics of language have become more heated. In the west, nationalism is strong, and Ukrainian is seen as a part of the cultural history of the people. In the east, Russian is considered to be the language of the educated, while Ukrainian is the language of the villages.

In 1991, Ukrainian was made the national language, and it has since gained status as the language of schools, government offices, street signs, and other official uses,
creating more pressure both for and against Ukrainian. In this paper, I will examine the negative stereotypes that Russian speakers in Ukraine have towards Ukrainian and its speakers, how those attitudes have evolved with the changing of the national language, and how these feelings towards language are affecting the politics of the government.

In order to better understand the situation, I will be examining newspaper articles from newspapers in Ukraine, as well as more informal media such as online forum postings and letters to editors. I will also look at the available scholarly work on the subject, to see if and how attitudes have changed in the 16 years since independence.
Language and national identity have long been considered to be intertwined. In their work, Hansen and Liu reviewed several studies on social identity, most of which included language as a major factor in identity, including Giles and Johnson, (1981, 1987), Gumperz (1970, 1982) and Heller (1982, 1987, 1988). (Hansen and Liu 568).

Politically, language is also a very important issue in bilingual countries. In Patten, the issue of politics and language is examined, and, not surprisingly, language and identity are closely related. Patten writes that there are three factors that are affected by the choice of a national language: communication, symbolic affirmation, and identity promotion. In a country such as Ukraine, where two languages are competing for majority status, it is clear how these three factors come into play.

Ukrainian and Russian are very similar languages, and much of the country is bilingual. As Russian had been the national language, most adults speak Russian fluently; because Ukrainian is now the national language, most children speak Ukrainian fluently. Communication is usually not a problem. There are language communities (such as in Crimea) where Russian is officially used, and many speakers there do not know Ukrainian; similarly, in the westernmost parts of Ukraine, there is no current need for
Russian, and there are monolingual Ukrainian speakers. There are also speakers on either side of the issue who refuse to learn both languages for political reasons. This makes communication a bigger issue than it otherwise might be.

Symbolic affirmation is also vital in Ukraine’s linguistic struggles, as each group of speakers feels strongly that they should be recognized on the national level. Patten points out:

“Throughout history, more powerful social groups have sought to impose their language on the less powerful by requiring linguistic accommodation as a condition of economic and political opportunities and advantages. Against this background, a refusal of recognition can become symbolically connected with a sense of powerlessness and subordination” (696).

There is more at stake than just communication – the official language of the government sends a clear message that one linguistic group is preferred over another; some receive this message to mean that one language is morally superior to the other.

The most pressing aspect of the Ukrainian linguistic situation currently is that of identity promotion. Patten writes:

“For many people, particularly for those in linguistic minorities, language is a central and defining feature of identity. People identify with the (local) community of speakers of their language, recognize one another as members of the same group on the basis of language, and have a more or less settled desire that the group should survive and flourish into the indefinite future” (696).

Historically, Russian has been the language of the group of speakers in eastern Ukraine, typically politically aligned with Russia, as well as ethnically closer to Russia. Ukrainian, however, has been considered to be the language of patriots and western Ukrainians who are closer to Europe; it has often been seen as more provincial. Further, as we will see,
the struggle to keep Ukrainian alive in the west has been long and drawn-out, making the issue even closer to everyone’s heart.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORY

While the issue of a national language in Ukraine is currently an important subject for nearly all of the inhabitants of Ukraine, history shows that this has been a sensitive issue in Ukraine for centuries. One of the major reasons for this is that Ukraine has had such a troubled past, only emerging from under the rule of other nations in 1991.

Going back centuries, Ukraine has been alternately under the rule of Tatars, Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. Although the relationship between the Ukrainians and their rulers varied, the fact that the Ukrainian language and culture consistently survived various rules speaks to the strength of the Ukrainian people, and their unwillingness to see their way of life destroyed. Czubatyj writes, “By six hundred years of effort to reassert and to rehabilitate themselves in the face of enormous odds, the Ukrainians preserved their nation” (104). There has been a strong drive to keep Ukrainian alive, often associated with patriotism; now that Ukrainian is the state language, it is difficult for some of these nationalists to accept Russian speakers in their midst. This complicates the issue – it does not boil down to merely a struggle for comprehension or rights, but has been, in some way or another, a part of every Ukrainian’s history.

Throughout history, one of the first political moves of ruling nations is to assimilate the people into their own culture and language:
One of the most painful lessons mankind has learned since the rise of nationalism in the last hundred years is that language diversity fosters conflicts between states and among peoples living within one state but speaking different languages. Conversely, language uniformity makes for unity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most governments have strongly desired such uniformity” (Weinstein, 333).

Language can be, and has been, used to unify people. This was very much the case in Ukraine, especially with the Russian language.

“The Russian Church, the Russian school and the Russian language in every phase of public life were forced upon Ukraine, and Ukrainian culture was persecuted as separatism detrimental to the state. Thousands died or were driven into exile, including the greatest poet of the Ukrainian people, Taras Shevchenko. The ultimate was reached in 1863 with the Ukase prohibiting in Russia all forms of Ukrainian national life. Even the printing of the Bible in the Ukrainian language was forbidden. The Ukrainian nation as a separate people officially ceased to exist in Russia. Yet it lived in the hearts of millions unofficially and with dynamic power emerged as a new independent nation in 1917 when the Great Russian Revolution broke out in Russia” (Czubatyj, 347-348).

Because of Ukraine’s history, there have been periods when Ukrainian was discouraged. The language managed to survive, despite being restrained by authorities.

With the advent of the Soviet Union, Ukrainians were able to speak their own language; originally, Ukrainianization was used under Lenin’s rule as a means to justify Soviet power. In the 1920s, the Communist Party worked within the individual nations to include non-Russians so as to strengthen the party.

“The Ukrainianization of the Communist Party of the Ukraine and the government of the Ukrainian republic was supposed to reconcile the predominantly Ukrainian peasantry with the Russian and Russified urban working class. The expansion of Ukrainian cadres as well as the increased use of the Ukrainian language in the party and the state apparatus were some of the means of legitimizing Soviet rule in the Ukraine. Thus, the linguistic transformation of book publishing in the Ukraine during the 1920s is one important indicator of the evolution and implementation of the Ukrainianization program and the
application of the Soviet nationalities policy during the period of the New Economic Policy” (Liber, 673).

Lenin’s policy on Ukrainian helped to support the language, which allowed for an early revival.

Although the USSR originally strengthened the Ukrainian language, the Russian language was used throughout the USSR as a lingua franca between republics. Because of this, the use of the Russian language was encouraged in Ukraine (Chamberlin, 1945).

“While basic instruction in the non-Russian republics is guaranteed in the local languages, Russian is the official language, and its study as a second language is compulsory in native schools. Moreover, upward mobility - especially in scientific and political arenas-depends on local elites' mastery of the Russian language and cultural norms, while Russians experience little pressure to master the languages of the republics in which they live and work. Shifts in language policy, which may have been intended to promote national integration, were interpreted as efforts at further Russification and have generated severe resistance and even massive demonstrations” (Lapidus, 104).

Even when Ukrainian was recognized under the Soviet Union, there was general governmental pressure for the Soviet people to learn and operate in Russian. This contributed to mixing of the two languages.

The support for Ukrainian under the Soviet Union was short-lived, however, and only the dedication of Ukrainian speakers kept the language alive. Petherbridge-Hernandez and Raby write:

“In Catalonia and the Ukraine, the 1930s witnessed the supplanting of liberal minority language policies with rigid, devastating policies of Castilianization and Russification. During these years of linguistic suppression, oral and written expressions of Catalan and Ukrainian were considered tantamount to treason. However, in neither case did the minority language become extinct. Rather, it became part of an underground culture that officially reemerged only with the advent of democratization several decades later” (38).
During Stalin’s reign, the use of Ukrainian was “tantamount to treason”; still, the Ukrainian language survived due to the tenacity of its speakers. Since Russian has been forced upon the Ukrainian people in the twentieth century, it is no wonder that this issue is so heartfelt amongst Ukrainians today.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the divide between east and west in Ukraine became pronounced. “By 1970 east Ukraine had become more Russified, especially in the cities, but west Ukraine remained loyal to Ukrainian,” (Szporluk, 93). Given the political situation, the use of language came to symbolize more than communication, but was a political choice – with their utterances, speakers showed a loyalty to their history or a loyalty to the Soviet Union, and effectively took a political stand.

“Extensive data on Ukrainian bilingualism is offered by Yaroslav Bilinsky in his study, based to a large extent on interviews with former Soviet citizens. His evidence reveal a great deal of pressure, subtle and otherwise, in favor of Russian. According to defector testimony, on the eve of World War II, and undoubtedly at present, ‘if an educated Ukrainian in one of the large cities, who was fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian, chose to speak his native language, this was regarded not only as a sign of mauvais ton, but as Ukrainian nationalism, an act of political insubordination’” (Ornstein, 13-14).

Because of the political pressure to speak Russian, Ukrainian survived through the will of the people.

The mixing of the two languages contributed to their similarities; there was a concerted effort by the Soviet Union to “Russify” Ukrainian, in order for the language to sound more like Russian:
“In an important article, A. Mordinov and G. SanZeev stated: "The enrichment of the lexical stock of the languages of the U. S. S. R. through borrowing from Russian is a natural, logical, and necessary process... The struggle for the purity of the national languages means above all to guard them from corruption by the jargon of exploiting circles, archaic terms, religious lexicon, and from every type of alien word" (Ornstein, 5).

The efforts on the part of the Soviet Union to Russify Ukrainian contributed to the current similarities between the two languages. It is often precisely those languages that are the most similar that suffer conflict between speakers.

Taken on the surface, the linguistic situation in Ukraine today seems to be simple: approximately half of the country speaks Ukrainian, and half speaks Russian as its native tongue. But coupled with the sociolinguistic values of national identity as well as the history of Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine, it soon becomes clear that the issue is complicated and delicate. Every Ukrainian is touched by this issue; as language is so closely intertwined with identity, it is a very personal matter. Language is shaping the politics of the country, and dividing East from West.
CHAPTER 4
EARLIER STUDIES

Many scholars have contributed to the study of attitudes towards the Ukrainian language. Although they have different foci, the studies generally look at the way that Ukrainians and Russians interact, how language shapes their lives, and the stereotypes speakers of either language have about the other.

In Lunt’s 1990 work, he touches on the viewpoints of many Russian speakers towards the Ukrainian language itself. He posits that in Russia, many people consider Ukrainian to be a sub-standard language.

“Decades of lip-service to the official thesis that Ukrainian and Belorussian have been independent languages since 1700 have not erased from the routine practice of Russian linguistic writing the fundamental position that can only be characterized as an imperial (Great-)Russian cultural bias. Currently, there seem to be two major groups (at least in Moscow and Leningrad). The radical patriots—indeed chauvinists—combine their assumptions of Russian superiority with a conscious and active xenophobic rejection of non-Soviet scholarship….A surely larger and far less homogeneous group is made up of people who have never noticed that their everyday assumptions include the thesis that Russian culture is and has always been superior” (Lunt, 4).

For many speakers of Russian outside of Russia, Ukrainian is seen as substandard. I contend that this is true within parts of the country of Ukraine as well, as we will see in the next section.

In her work on resistance to Ukrainization, Anna Fournier looked at letters to the editors in Russian-language newspapers, and categorized the types of resistance that
Russian speakers had towards making Ukrainian the official language. She found that the most frequent reasons for resistance to a Ukrainian state language were 1) that it created an artificial division of people along linguistic lines, 2) general resistance to the Ukrainian language, 3) protests against Russian being considered a foreign language, 4) fear of loss of the Russian language and culture in Ukraine, and 5) fear of linguistic definitions of groups in state laws (424). The public resistance towards using Ukrainian as the official language is just one result of the stereotypes speakers of Russian have towards the Ukrainian language; as with all stereotypes, they can affect many other aspects of life.

One of the way that the language question affects the daily lives of Ukrainians is in their apparent politics. The political attitudes of the speakers of both languages is of interest to many scholars. Kubicek (2000) found that most people see Ukrainian speakers as being more content with the current direction of politics.

“This issue, of course, has been one of the major cleavages in the Ukrainian state, and various domestic manifestations of the 'Russian question', e.g. language, also are a prominent source of political cleavages. On domestic issues, one consistently finds those in the west relatively more satisfied with the current state of affairs, although there is no evidence that westerners are unequivocally more pro-market. Those living in central regions have views that do not greatly diverge from the mean, although in the last survey they were far closer to Westerners than in previous ones. Meanwhile, those in the east and the south have more pronounced negative assessments and are in general less supportive of a free market” (280).

According to Kubicek, the political lines are clearly drawn between Ukrainian and Russian speakers in Ukraine.
In his study on national identity and politics, Shulman found that the attitudes towards speakers of the two different languages do not always align with the actual values of the speakers. Most of the studies presented in his work show a belief that Ukrainian speakers are more liberal and supportive of economic reform than Russian speakers. However, Shulman’s study did not find this to be the case:

“Analysis of regional, ethnic, and linguistic cleavages with regard to reformist attitudes do not substantiate the view of those observers who believe western Ukrainians, whether because of their ethnic identity, linguistic patterns, historical ties to Europe, or national identity are consistently or substantially more democratic than their Russian and Russian speaking eastern or southern Ukrainian counterparts, and definitely do not support the contention that they are more capitalistic” (Shulman, 75).

Shulman’s work finds that, while stereotypes exist about the speakers of the two different languages, there is little correspondence to actual political values.

Regardless of the study or results, scholars overwhelmingly agree that Ukraine is not a unified country. Language is consistently used to define the separate groups of people. The attitudes that each group has towards language and the other are defining the politics in Ukraine today.
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

For this paper, I will be looking at print-media sources for evidence of attitudes that speakers of Russian have toward Ukrainian. Specifically, I will be examining internet forums, news articles, and letters to editors. These different types of print media provide a wide view of attitude towards Ukrainian as a language.

The three different types of media each has its own significance. Of particular importance to me are the internet forums – while the sample group is biased towards those with access to the internet, the informal and anonymous setting allows people to freely express their opinions. Further, these forums are generally populated by youth, and their opinions of the linguistic situation in Ukraine reflect the current sentiment as well as that of the near future. The editorials and letters to the editors also reflect the sentiments of their writers, but as they are more formal and not anonymous, they can show us what is generally acceptable to speak out about in society. The newspaper articles presumably give an unbiased view towards happenings in society.

The three forums that I looked at are at ixbt.com, “В Украине "убивают" русский язык!!” In Ukraine they are “killing” the Russian language (140 pages’ worth from 7/4/05 – 9/23/06); oboz.ua, “Зачем вообще, и мне в частности, украинский язык.” What use in general, and for me personally, is the Ukrainian language (38 pages
of comments from 9/19/2007 – 10/19/2007); and lovehate.ru, “Про Український язык,”

*About the Ukrainian language* (from 11/1/01 – 9/5/07, with 211 opinions in favor of
Ukrainian and 94 opposed). The three forums cover roughly the same territory, and
similar themes arise through all of them. Although only one of the forums is registered
as a Ukrainian website (oboz.ua), websites that are registered with .ru and .com are very
popular in Ukraine. It is not possible to determine exactly where the commenters are
located, but as most of them write about direct experiences with the Ukrainian language,
it is safe to assume that most of them are located in Ukraine. The stereotypes and
arguments that run through the forums affect speakers of Ukrainian regardless of where
the commenter is located.

I also did internet searches for opinion pages and letters to the editor regarding
negative stereotypes towards Ukrainian, and the resulting opinion page, entitled
“Держава или Трымава” *State (Russian) or State (Ukrainian)*, by Aleksandr Nikhrist,
published on the website [www.censor.net.ua](http://www.censor.net.ua) on July 30, 2007, is similar in nature to the
forums. Generally speaking, these types of editorials were much more difficult to find.
CHAPTER 6
PREVAILING ARGUMENTS AND STEREOTYPES

The prevailing negative arguments and stereotypes through these media are 1) that Ukrainian is a peasant language, 2) that it is simply a dialect of Russian, 3) that it sounds terrible, 4) that granting political rights to one language divides the Slavic people, and 5) that in recent history Russian has been the language of Ukraine, so it should continue to be so.

While many of these arguments seem to have no merit, the fact remains that they are consistently brought up on these forums. The attitudes of some Russian speakers towards Ukrainian are decidedly negative; the same stereotypes run through each medium, not just about the language, but about those who use it.

Argument #1: Ukrainian is a “peasant language”

The first theme that is covered by the forum is that Ukrainian is a language for peasants, and is not serious. Forum member Michael A de Budyon on August 20, 2002, wrote:

Не то что бы ненавижу, но не могу к нему серьезно относиться, ибо этот язык не универсальный в самом широком смысле этого понятия. На нем может быть и можно описывать жизнь крестьян, но там где требуется выразить то что требует максимального интеллектуального напряжения, он бессилен. Именно поэтому нет ни одного извес(т)ного укр-философа. (lovehate.ru)
It's not that I hate it, but I cannot approach it seriously, since this language is not universal in the broadest sense of the concept. In this language maybe it is possible to describe the life of peasants, but when it is necessary to give voice to something that needs a maximum intellectual effort, it is impotent. This is exactly why there is not one famous Ukrainian philosopher.

Not only does he believe that Ukrainian is a language for peasants, but he also uses that belief to justify his conclusion that Ukrainian speakers are also not intellectually advanced.

Another forum member, Sjevan Garvarjents, continued the argument on July 18, 2005. Not only is the language “wild” and “uncivilized,” but that he’s never met (and therefore there probably don’t exist) any intelligent people that speak it.

Ukrainian is, according to Sjevan, a language for uneducated farmers (his own misspellings notwithstanding).

On June 25, 2003, Hexell used historical figures to prove that Russian is the intellectual counterpart of Ukrainian: Потому что звучит как опримитивленный, деревенский эквивалент русского. Не удивительно, что Гоголь и тот писал на русском. (lovehate.ru). Because it sounds like a primitivized, village equivalent of Russian. It is not surprising that Gogol wrote in Russian. Gogol was Ukrainian by birth
but chose to write in Russian; his choice of Russian over Ukrainian, according to Hexell, was based in the “fact” that Ukrainian is an inadequate language.

In the second forum, the argument that Ukrainian is a lower-level language is taken further with the oft-repeated idea that Ukrainian simply is lacking the lexicon for higher-level thought. [Н]е говоря уже о тупости и не досконалости украинского языка, сколько слов и терминов вообще не существуют в нем, да и вообще смешной он какойто... (ixbt.com). To say nothing of the vacancy and lack of perfection of the Ukrainian language, there are so many words and terms that don’t exist in it at all, and it’s generally funny somehow...This argument is used very often when the subject of Ukrainian versus Russian comes up; it is an interesting one, given that Ukrainian is now used as the official language in schools and many universities, and higher-level science and math are presumably not suffering.

Another poster puts it simply: to speak Ukrainian gives you away as an idiot. They write, “Человек говорит по украински. Безумец! Ну вот! Дурку включили!” (ixbt.com) A person speaks Ukrainian. Idiot! There you have it! They turned on the stupidity!. This theme is by far the most common when it comes to negative attitudes towards Ukrainian by Russian speakers.

Nikhrist’s article also brings up the argument that Ukrainian is lower intellectually than Russian – alluding to the allegation that Ukrainian speakers are also intellectually inferior to Russian speakers. “Почему происходит мерзкое насаждение неприродной насквозь лживой и выдуманной "мовы", на которой никто ни
Говорить, ни писать, ни думать не хочет. На которой не пишут книг, и не слагают виршей?” Why is the vile planting of the unnatural thoroughly false and invented “language” in which nobody wants to speak, write, or think, in which books aren’t written, and verses aren’t composed? This follows the same line of thought of many of the forum posters – if Ukrainian were intellectually equivalent to Russian, there would be more poets, philosophers, and writers that used it. This, of course, does not give consideration to the political history of the language.

Argument #2: Ukrainian is simply a dialect of Russian

The second most common theme is that Ukrainian is simply a dialect of Russian, and should not be granted status as a language at all, much less the official language.

Orlik, on April 8, 2002, wrote, “Я не ненавижу так называемый "украинский язык", который на самом деле исторически является лишь русско-польским диалектом” (lovehate.ru) I don’t hate the so-called “Ukrainian Language,” which actually historically is simply a Russian-Polish dialect. His problem with Ukrainian isn’t so much with the language, but that it is considered a language at all.

Similarly, Anton Gorskiy on September 16, 2004 wrote that Ukrainian is really just a derivation of Russian, with Polish words thrown in:

В нём слишком много польских слов, вот у меня нет украинско-русского словаря, только польско-русский, и он меня ещё не подводил, это-то и плохо. Ещё плохо, что язык называется украинским, а не киевско-, мало-, южно-, юго-западно-русским или просто русским. Даже если жители России есть помесь славян с тюрками и фино-уграми, это не основание для, следовательно, этнически чистых жителей нынешней Киевской земли называть себя не русскими, а какими-то украинцами, с восторженным
придыханием, и говорить весилля вместо свадьбы, мова вместо язык, пан вместо господин и т. п. (lovehate.ru).

In Ukrainian there are too many Polish words; I don’t have a Ukrainian-Russian dictionary, just a Polish-Russian one, and it hasn’t let me down yet, that’s what’s bad. It is also bad that the language is called Ukrainian, and not Kievan-little-southern-southwestern-Russian or just Russian. Even if the inhabitants of Russia are a hybrid with Turkic or Finno-Ugrian peoples, this is not the basis for, consequently, the ethnically pure residents of today’s Kievan land to call themselves not Russians, but some kind of Ukrainians, with exalted aspirations, and to say “vesillja” in place of “svadba,” “mova” instead of “jazyk,” “pan” instead of “gospodin,” etc.

Gorskiy contends that not only is Ukrainian a derivative of Russian, but the Ukrainian people are Russians as well, and should not try to fool themselves otherwise.

Katenok summed it up nicely on September 18, 2004, “Как будто неправильный русский. Вот.” (lovehate.ru) It’s like an incorrect Russian. There. The first argument that people turn to is that it is a village language for the uneducated; Katenok brings the second argument in line with the first by saying that it is like an improper version of Russian.

Nikhrist also sees Ukrainian as nothing more than a mishmash of dialects. He writes: “Не стану получать и выдавать на ней документы и не стану выполнять распоряжения должностных лиц, издаваемых на гнусовой смеси румынско-татарско-немецко-польских слов.” I will not receive and issue documents in it, and I will not fill out official decrees, published in that nasal mixture of Romanian-Tatar-German-Polish words. Nikhrist takes the use of Ukrainian as a personal affront.

Argument #3: Ukrainian sounds offensive
The third theme for Ukrainian being a sub-standard language is that it sounds terrible. The sound system of the language is very similar to that of Russian (hence the arguments that Ukrainian is simply a dialect of Russian), but nonetheless, the differences are enough to convince many that Ukrainian is less pleasant than Russian, and therefore should not be given status as the official language of Ukraine.

Q-zja, on August 6, 2003, thinks that the Ukrainian language sounds terrible, writing: “Какая-то эта мова полуфабрикатная, ну невозможно к ней серьёзно относиться. Звучит она порой просто ругательно.” (lovehate.ru) Somehow this is a half-made “language,” it’s not possible to treat it seriously. Sometimes it sounds simply abusive. Interestingly enough, Q-zja uses the Ukrainian word for language in her posting, and several other Ukrainianisms pepper her other postings on the site. Still, she maintains that it is an insufficient and awful-sounding language.

Lingvochka, on September 2, 2006, agrees that the sounds of Ukrainian are what make it, in her opinion, inferior to Russian.

“просто его противно слушать! я когда была в Турции я пару раз включала хохляцкие каналы,то ни слова не поняла,но слушать было невозможно! я нормально отношусь к самим хохлам,но только если они при мне не разговаривают на своем наречии... глупо ненавидеть какой-то язык, согласна..но этот язык мне противен! если бы меня заставляли его выучить,я бы умерла!...” (lovehate.ru)

*It’s simply offensive to hear! When I was in Turkey a couple of times I turned on [derogatory word for Ukrainian] channels, I didn’t understand a word, but it was impossible to listen to it! I usually have fine relationships with [derogatory word for Ukrainians], but only if they don’t speak in their own dialect in front of me... it is stupid to hate some language, I agree, but this language is offensive to me! If they made me learn it I would die!*
Lingvochka proclaims that she hates the Ukrainian language based simply on the way it sounds, which, incidentally, is not dissimilar to the Russian language. Her posting is also very interesting in that she attempts to present an unbiased viewpoint, but her language is clearly anti-Ukrainian (the language as well as the people).

Revil, on July 4, 2005, expresses a similar sentiment – Ukrainian is simply strange to hear. Українська мова – це іскривлений російський, імхо, слухати його дійсно дуже смішно (ixbt.com) Ukrainian language – it is a distorted Russian, IMHO, to listen to it is really very funny. Although there are several different lines of thought brought up in these forums, many of the anti-Ukrainian users mention the actual sounds of the language.

Nikhrist’s opinion piece, not surprisingly, also presents this argument – he contends that people are standing up for a language that is, in his opinion, ugly. This echoes the sentiment from the forums, where many posters felt that Ukrainian simply sounded “ridiculous.”

There isn’t any discordant abomination, which incompetent partisans of the “mova” wouldn’t drag into their “language.” And the more indigestibly you vomit, the more ridiculous and awkward your language, the more you cover its “yking” and “eking” with dung, the more you will be honored by them!

Nikhrist is making two arguments here – that the Ukrainian language sounds stupid, and that those who speak it are intellectually inferior.
Argument #4: Giving official status to Ukrainian causes a rift amongst Ukrainians

Another theme that is common through these forums is the idea that the Ukrainian language, and especially the naming of Ukrainian as the state language, artificially divides the Slavic people.

Forum user Diego strongly expressed this particular sentiment on November 10, 2005:

Абсолютно ненужный язык, созданный чтобы отделить когда-то братские народы друг от друга. Ну зачем он вообще нужен - украинец, работающий в России будет все-равно учить русский, а русский, отдыхающий в Крыму, не будет учить украинский. Да и язык этот звучит ужасно - говорят как-будто на базаре сало покупают. (lovehate.ru)

It is an absolutely unnecessary language, created in order to divide the formerly brotherly peoples from one another. Why would it be needed in general? A Ukrainian that works in Russia will learn Russian anyway, and a Russian that is relaxing in the Crimea will not learn Ukrainian. Furthermore, this language sounds terrible, they speak it like they are in the market buying fatback.

Diego’s main point is that Ukrainian is simply a wedge in Slavic brotherhood, but, like many posters, also brings in the idea that Ukrainian is for uneducated people and that it sounds terrible.

On September 20, 2007, Lisij posted the idea that Ukrainians are simply Ukrainians, whereas Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians are divided from the whole. Лисый stands up for his belief that Ukrainians should speak Russian, which is more useful:

Украинцами нас назвать, просто украинцами. А вас - украиноговорящими украинцами, чтобы обозначить то отличие от просто украинцев, которые знают оба языка, предпочитая активно пользоваться русским, как языком, на котором не только песни красиво звучат, но который действительно пригоден для всех сфер общественной жизни. (oboz.ua)
We should be called Ukrainians, simply Ukrainians. And you – they should call you Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians, in order to indicate the difference from simply Ukrainians, who know both languages, but choose to use Russian actively, as a language which is not used just to sing pretty songs, but which is truly fitting for all spheres of public life.

Lisiy talks about the division between Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians from those who choose to speak Russian, and reiterates his idea that Russian is a serious language while Ukrainian is silly, though pretty.

Nikhrist takes the argument a step further, drawing from history and the fact that Kyiv was the original center of Rus’, from which Russian descended. He believes that the Russian language and culture belong to Ukraine, and have been stolen by those to the east. “Когда наша Русская земля стыдливо именуется украиной, а азиаты присвоили себе всё, от чего вы с такой лёгкостью и презрением отказываетесь?”

When our Russian land shamefully changes its name to Ukraine, and the Asians have appropriated everything for themselves, what do you so easily and scornfully refuse?

Nikhrist believes that to speak Ukrainian means to give up the Slavic heritage that rightfully belongs in Ukraine.

Argument #5: Ukrainian is not my native tongue, why should I have to use it?

The final most common reason for anti-Ukrainian sentiment is, in my opinion, the easiest to understand (and, in all likelihood, at the root of most of the other arguments). The motive for the negative attitudes for the Ukrainian language for these posters is that they already speak Russian, Russian is easier (since they already speak it), and it is not fair to force people to use a language that is not their native one. All of the other
arguments can be disproved or dismissed, but this one gets to what is really at stake: can national politics force a person to change their identity? While I believe that this is what most of the other viewpoints boil down to, it is the least commonly expressed of all of the arguments.

Infatuation, on April 14, 2007, expressed anger at people using Ukrainian on Russian forums. “потому что он неудобочитаем.а [ос]обенно меня бесит,когда на русских форумах кто-то пишет по-украински,а мы должны это понимать.” (lovehate.ru) 

Because it is not easy to read and especially it drives me crazy, when somebody writes in Ukrainian on Russian forums, and we are supposed to understand it. Infatuation’s argument against Ukrainian has nothing to do with the language itself, but with the changing importance of the language, and being left behind.

Continuing this argument is the idea that heritage will be lost with the transfer of the official language from Russian to Ukrainian. On ixbx.com on July 4, 2005, X6 posted, “Ээ... Я русский, жена - русская, ребенок - украинец? Смешно.” Ehh, I am Russian, my wife is Russian, our child is Ukrainian? Ridiculous. This argument is taken a step further by another poster, Toha Ktre, that same day: “Мое поколение родилось в Советском союзе а не на украине! И зи[а]чит мой родной язык - РУССКИЙ й почему я должен перестраиватся? Я не хочу!” My generation was born in the Soviet Union and not in Ukraine! This means that my native tongue is RUSSIAN why should I reform? I don’t want to! Both of these posters feel that their language ties them to the past, and changing the official language will cause them to lose some of their cultural history.
Interestingly, this is the argument that is least common on the forums, but Nikhrist articulates this from the beginning and bases his entire opinion piece on it:

Ukrainian is not his native language, and he does not want to have to use it.

Лично, для меня неприемлемо само понятие "украина". С каких это пор мы стали "украинцами"? По выдумкам неучей и бездарей вроде Грушевского и Шевченко? Почему наше природное название "русские" мы отдали каким-то азиатам? Сколько можно издеваться над украинским языком?

Personally, for me even the concept of "Ukraine" is unacceptable. Since when did we become "Ukrainians"? Was it thought up by the ignoramus and untalented like Grushevskii and Shevchenko? Why did we surrender our natural name “Russian” to some kind of Asians? How much is it possible to make fun of the Ukrainian language?

This is just the beginning. Nikhrist feels that even the term “Ukrainian” is some sort of betrayal to the past; the change of the official language is an affront to him personally.

Nikhrist feels very strongly that Ukrainian is a terrible language, and that much is being lost in the Russian language because of the Ukrainian language. He writes,

“Неужели вам не жалко нашего русского языка, что вы губите её мерзкой "мовой" - языком убожеств?” Really you don’t feel bad for our Russian language, that you destroy with the vile “language” – the language of wretchedness? Nikhrist feels so strongly that Ukrainian is a substandard language that he believes that it is ruining his own language, the language that he thinks rightfully belongs to Ukraine.

Nikhrist’s article also recalls the idea that it is not fair to expect a Russian speaker to understand Ukrainian. “Почему я должен получать документ, в котором написано "отрымання"? Зачем мне все эти мерзкие немецкие словеса в польской раскладке?”

Why should I receive a document on which is written “otrymannja”? What do I need
with all of these vile German words in Polish packaging? Nikhrist’s feels very strongly that he should not be forced to work in a language that he chooses not to use.
CHAPTER 7
SURZHIK

In many parts of Ukraine, neither Russian nor Ukrainian is exclusively spoken, but a hybrid language, known as Surzhyk, is prevalent. Surzhyk is widely considered a substandard language, and the attitudes of both Ukrainian and Russian speakers towards Surzhyk is negative. “As Ukrainian and Russian have competed with each other to fulfill the role of high language in Ukraine, Surzhyk has performed the function of low language” (Flier, 114). As Flier points out, Surzhyk is mostly an oral language, and carries a stigma.

If the attitudes towards Ukrainian are negative, the attitudes towards Surzhyk tend toward disdainful. In the magazine Proza, the literary critic Miron Petrovskiy was quoted as saying, “Суржик – это смесь мороженого и мыла. Не съесть и не помыться” Surzhyk – it is a mixture of ice cream and soap. One can’t eat it or wash with it (Proza, June 3, 2004).

For some, the “pure” languages are automatically more legitimate, for others, Surzhyk is used as a warning against mixing languages. Anatoly Pogribnoj, a writer, literary critic, and professor, wrote: “Суржик - это языковая реалия, которая бывает только у народов с тяжелой драматической историей…В Украине суржик – это результат русификации.” Surzhyk is a linguistic reality which happens only in
countries with difficult dramatic histories...In Ukraine, Surzhyk is the result of Russification (Proza, June 3, 2004).

The status of Surzhyk has not been thoroughly explored by scholars, and is a topic deserving of its own chapter. However, the existence of Surzhyk and its substandard status certainly plays a role in the politics of the Russian and Ukrainian languages; Russian speakers’ attitudes toward Ukrainian become more complicated when the idea of Surzhyk is taken into account.
CHAPTER 8

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS UKRAINIAN

The internet forums that I looked at gave evidence of strong negative attitudes towards the Ukrainian language from Russian speakers, and Nikhrist’s article very clearly showed his condemnation of the Ukrainian language. What do these tell us about the overarching attitudes of Russian speakers towards Ukrainian?

The negative attitudes towards Ukrainian that are taken up in the forums is only one side of the issue – there are many Ukrainians who feel pride in the Ukrainian language. However, these forums indicate that there is a subculture of linguistic discrimination happening; many of the posters write about the lack of intelligence or class of the speakers of Ukrainian, and not just their perceptions about the language. Ukrainian has been the national language for well over a decade now – it will be interesting to see how these types of attitudes change as the new generation of Ukrainian speakers comes of age.

However, the lack of letters to the editor and other opinion pieces, in my opinion, shows a trend in Ukraine towards acceptance and understanding of the official language of the country. Nikhrist’s piece was met with strong negative responses from readers who disagreed with him; it seems that it is becoming less culturally acceptable to openly stand behind the negative attitudes towards Ukrainian. This editorial is the only piece
that I can find in recent history that expresses blatantly negative opinions on the
Ukrainian language. Although the forums are riddled with such stereotypes, it may be
that the political climate is changing, and such opinions are not as openly acceptable.

In some parts of the country, the use of Ukrainian is becoming more fashionable,
providing evidence that attitudes towards the Ukrainian language are undergoing a
change. In a recent article about Dnipropetrovsk, it was written:

“Социологи объясняют: лишь несколько процентов днепропетровцев
отдают предпочтение украинскому языку в школах из соображений
национального сознания. Остальные - из практической целесообразности.
70% респондентов считают, что с хорошим знанием украинского их детям
будет легче в будущем получить высшее образование и найти лучшую
работу” (Газета по-українськи, March 4, 2008).

Sociologists explain: only a small percent of Dnipropetrovskans give a
preference to the Ukrainian language in the schools for reasons of national
consciousness. The rest – for practical advisability. 70% of respondents consider
that their children will more easily be able to receive a higher education and find
better work with good knowledge of Ukrainian.

As Ukrainian children grow up with Ukrainian used as the language in schools, the
attitudes are slowly shifting.

In order to get a better feel for the acceptable societal norms in Ukraine, it is
important to look at the current political climate and news articles related to the language
issue in Ukraine. While the internet forums give us a good understanding of the
underlying attitudes that speakers have towards each other, the official newspaper articles
will give us a better view of the more publicly sanctioned trends in language attitudes.

An internet search finds that the language issue is far from over in Ukraine, with
such headlines as “Crimea protesting against forceful imposition of Ukrainian language,”
“Ukrainians to be monolingual,” “Ukraine says foreign films must be dubbed in Ukrainian,” “Lugansk court ‘outlaws’ Russian language,” “Ющенко будет давать свои стипендии за украинский язык,” *Yuschenko will give his stipends for the Ukrainian language,* “Головатый хочет, чтобы украинский язык стал таким, как русский,” *Golovaty wants Ukrainian to gain the same status as Russian [in Russia].* Because language is such an integral part of identity, and because the situation is in flux, it is not surprising that this issue is still a very important one to many Ukrainians.

An article from ua-today.com shows that the number of people who consider Russian to be their native tongue is falling (from 30.7% in 2006 to 25.7% in 2007). Interestingly, the number of people who consider Ukrainian to be their native tongue is staying consistent at around 52%, while those who consider both Ukrainian and Russian to be their native language has risen (from 15.6% to 21.5%). The survey targeted all areas of Ukraine and only those older than 18 years of age. This study is significant in that just in the past year the number of people who consider themselves to be natively bilingual has risen so much; perhaps the use of Ukrainian in schools has created this change for young adults. With the changing number of people who consider themselves to be bilingual, the attitude toward Ukrainian must be changing, as well.

The current political leaders are pro-Ukrainian. A recent Russian news article quoted the current president, Viktor Yushchenko, as defending Ukrainian as the national language of Ukraine. “Ющенко сказал, что уважает положение Конституции, где записано о том, что в Украине есть единственный государственный язык -
Yuschenko said that he respects the position of the constitution, where it is written that in Ukraine there is only one official language – Ukrainian. Although there are minority-language schools available, and people are free to speak whichever language they choose in their daily lives, the current administration is decidedly pro-Ukrainian. This certainly has an effect on the existing attitudes towards the Ukrainian language, especially since many of the stereotypes against it contend that Ukrainian is a substandard language – as it is being used more and more often in official settings and schools, it is undoubtedly gaining respect.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the “language issue” in Ukraine is critical for many Ukrainians. As the status of the language changes in society, various stereotypes and attitudes towards languages become apparent. Currently, many negative attitudes towards the Ukrainian language exist, namely that it is a non-intellectual language, that it is merely a dialect of Russian, that it sounds offensive, that it divides the Slavic people, and that it is unfair to force an official language onto those who don’t speak it as their native tongue. These stereotypes repeatedly arise in opinion forums online, and even among more official publications.

However, the situation in Ukraine is changing. As Ukrainian is used in more and more schools, young people from all over the country are considering Ukrainian and Russian both as their native languages. This, combined with the pro-Ukrainian attitude of the government, is changing the status of the language in many people’s eyes. Already, fewer people are publicly standing behind the negative attitudes towards Ukrainian. As the new generation replaces the older generation, these attitudes towards Ukrainian as a “peasant language” will almost certainly diminish.
BILIBIOGRAPHY


