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### **Current tendencies and changes in the language policy in Ukraine**

The article highlights the language problem in Ukraine that has been an issue of political debates since its independence. A brief history, peculiarities and current problems of the language policy in Ukraine are highlighted in the article. The author outlines the main factors that affect the language policy in Ukraine – political, religious, historical, social and cultural. The latest figures and statistics are provided in the article. The problem of stagnation of the Ukrainian language policy has been revealed in the article.

Despite the fact that Ukraine got its independence in 1992, the language problem still remains acute because it is, first and foremost, an important part or even the background of the national identity as well as the result of the ongoing assimilative process of the transformation of the Ukrainian-speaking community. Though many efforts have been made by the government, the language problem arises from time to time due to the existing imbalanced regulation of bilingualism in Ukraine. Moreover, the formation of the national thought has always been under the pressure of different ideologies and controversial explanations of linguists, politicians, journalists, etc. that are widely used in the current political struggle both in the Ukrainian and Russian Mass Media.

Thus, an unstable political situation along with the financial crisis, a desperate mood in the society, distorted stereotypes of the language issue and many other consequences of the ongoing conflict with Russia slow down the process of harmonization of the situation. In addition, among other threats that affect the tensed language situation in Ukraine are the process of globalization with its open information borders, an attempt to create a common language (Esperanto), the increasing role of English on the international level, mass culture and

commercial Mass Media as well as the domination of the Russian language in the cinema industry and other products of the Russian show-biz [1].

The **purpose** of this article is to consider current tendencies and changes in the language policy in Ukraine since it got its Independence in 1992.

It is self-understood that a common language stimulates the development of stable political, economic and cultural ties on the international level. Thus, the attributes of an integrative role of a language are the unity formation that is tightly connected with the processes of the national and cultural identity, the raise of immunity to external and internal destabilization effects, the regulation and design of cultural processes and their support, accumulation of information, the government support, the national unity and cross-cultural communication in the language.

Thinking helps people discover the world, the laws of nature and society. Cognitive activity of a person is possible on the basis of a language material, words and sentences. Every moment of any action is determined by a thought and a language. Cognitive processes change along with the development of science and technologies. But there can be another side of the coin. It is well known that in the human history there are many examples of conflicts and even destroying wars that were also based on the language problem. Today, there are about 5,000 languages in the world and that is much bigger than the number of communities or states.

According to the French linguist J. Vendryes, the study of the community role of a language helps understand what a language is. It is an attribute of the state and nation. Therefore, a language is a phenomenon that is deeper and more important than it seems at first glance.

Thus, in the modern world a language remains one of the indicators of distinguishing one country from another because the process of globalization is gaining its identity, characteristics and features. In our opinion, it is important to preserve the language being and not to lose it due to the pressure of many external factors.

The research has shown that the main factors that influence the functioning and prevalence of the language are:

- **geographical** (e.g. the Ukrainian language is represented variegatedly in the western and eastern parts of Ukraine as well as the urban areas and villages);
- **socio-demographic** (it is known that the older generation speaks Ukrainian more in everyday life than the youth though the background matters);
- **historic and socio-psychological** (an image and status of the native language contribute to the strengthening or weakening of its role in the society).

During Ukraine's independence, the language policy has been realized in many ways, including the creation of the language sector in the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers, the adoption of the new spelling, the development of the concept of the Ukrainian language policy, an increase of quotas for the Ukrainian content on radio and TV, the spread of Ukrainian in schools and other educational establishments (according to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine there was a double growth of Ukrainian-speaking schools from 47,4% in 1989 to 74,9% in 2004), etc.

Though it is believed by many politicians that the language policy has not been effectively implemented and supervised despite the confirmation in the new Constitution of Ukraine (1996) that the Ukrainian language has its national status and its status is explained there by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine as a systemic part of Ukraine, the factor of its integrity preservation, the main indicator of the Ukrainian nation identity, a tool for making government regulation and an attribute of the statehood in international legal relations.

Despite many obstacles in implementing the language policy in Ukraine, the Ukrainian language hasn't lost its strong creative energy. Nowadays, the process of the formation of a socio-differentiated culture on the basis of the Ukrainian language has started, especially in the western and central parts of Ukraine, though interesting phenomena are taking place in the eastern part as well.

It is important to point out that a national language plays its state-forming role in case it becomes a communication tool of most part of the society. So, it is

important to overcome the social imbalance of functioning of the Ukrainian language as well as to synchronize the processes of social, language and cultural development in the society.

The Law of Ukraine “About the principles of the state language policy” states that “Everyone has the right to freely determine language which considers to the family, and to choose communication language, and also to recognize themselves bilingual or multilingual and to change the language tastes. Everyone irrespective of ethnic origin, national and cultural self-identification, the residence, religious beliefs has the right to freely use any language in public and private life, to study and support any language” and gives freedom to the development of the regional languages or minority languages and other languages giving the right of their self-determination. In the context of the European Charter of regional languages, the following languages are implied in this law: Russian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Moldavian, Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, German and others. All the regional languages mentioned are treated in the ways that are defined by the law, e.g. the support of the regional languages in the sphere of education, Mass Media and in the activity of local authorities, courts, economy and society during the conduct of cultural and other events on the territory, where a regional language is used, if the number of people that uses one of the regional languages makes up 10% and more than the number of the population in the given area. Of course, there are both many supporters and opponents of this law, who believe that these democratic values in the language policy undermine the situation implicitly due to the fact that in democratic countries any limits and rules that define the principles of using 14 languages in formal and informal situations can be accepted as a restriction for self-expression. As a result, some regions of Ukraine have already given the regional status to Russian and the lack of the mechanisms of supervision over the language policy has contributed to the prevailing role of Russian in the information and cultural scope in Ukraine. Moreover, the Ukrainian education on the Russian background widens the existing gap between the conversational language of students and the language of their education and leads

to the devaluation of national values of conscious citizens because the national consciousness is formed in a specific language and cultural environment.

Another problem is the combination of Ukrainian and Russian, which is called “surzhyk” and is spoken in the middle of Ukraine. In addition, the process of globalization has brought many new words, especially from English, to the Ukrainian language. Thus, the pure Ukrainian language can be seen only in folk art and classical literature.

The research has shown that Ukrainian is the most widely spread native language in Ukraine. Russian is more popular in big cities in the south and east of Ukraine while Ukrainian is spoken in the provinces. Moreover, Hungarian is spread in the south-west of the Carpathians.

Also, most part of the Russian-speaking citizens of the capital approves the state status of the Ukrainian language. For example, 36% of respondents believe that Ukrainian must be the national language whereas Russian can be used as a conversational language in non-governmental institutions, 16% of respondents think that Ukrainian should dominate as the state language and Russian should be used as a language of the minorities and only 2% of respondents consider that Russian should be displaced in all social spheres.

Another survey of Research&Branding Group made in 2011 showed that 47% of the Ukrainian use the Ukrainian language in everyday life whereas 37% use Russian. This divides Ukraine into two parts speaking different languages, which is a threat for the Ukrainian identity.

The questionnaire of the IRI held from March, 2015 to February, 2016, which enlisted 20,000 respondents from 22 regional centres of Ukraine as well as from some currently occupied territories, has given an opportunity to make a modern map of the language situation in Ukraine [5]. According to the questionnaire, ten regions speak Ukrainian while eleven regions prefer using Russian [4].

Another survey conducted by the movement “Prostir” and based on the state statistics, sociological and monitoring researches in November, 2017 revealed that

Ukrainian is the native language for 68% of respondents (occupied territories were not included) and 13-14% of respondents consider Russian as a native language, both languages are equally used by 17% of respondents. Conversational Ukrainian is used by 46-50% of the citizens whereas 26-32% of respondents use Russian in everyday life. Ukrainian is also used in 89,1% of schools but depending on the region the figures vary – 70% – in Kharkiv, 98% – in Kyiv and Poltava, 99% – in Lviv and 100% – in Rivne.

Also, 88% of films in the cinemas are voiced in Ukrainian. The level of publications of books in Ukrainian has increased to 70% though the amount of newspapers has decreased from 34% to 32%. On TV Ukrainian occupies 39% of airtime, Russian – 32% and bilingual airtime makes up 29%.

As for advertising in Ukraine, 38% of advertising tools (billboards, posters, etc.) of restaurants and cafes in 26 cities are in Ukrainian as well as 49% of staff speak Ukrainian. Of course, the situation varies sharply from region to region. Russian still dominates among the Internet users but the amount of the Ukrainian users is growing. For example, the use of the Ukrainian version of Wikipedia reached 25% whereas the Russian version was seen by 62% and the English one – by 10% of the Ukrainian users. What is more, unfortunately, a great part of the Ukrainian people speak Russian despite the fact that they consider Ukrainian the native language [3].

Having analyzed scientific literature and Mass Media publications, we have come to the conclusion that a great attention should be paid to the implementation and supervision of the language policy in Ukraine. On the other hand, the preferences of our people should be taken into account as well. It would be a good idea to discuss and consider such a keen question with the help of a referendum taking Switzerland as a good example of government management.

To sum up, whatever transformations take place in a society, whatever external or internal policy the government runs, it becomes obvious that a language is the key element of each stage of the state birth and development. In other words, a language is a unique formant of a specific nation and the whole world society in

general. Being one of the attributes of the state, a language provides the correlation of relations in intersocietal and intergovernmental space whereas a language policy will define the direction of the state on the international level and form the self-recognition of its people as a nation.

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