

УДК 81'1'27-048.58(=161.2:520)

**LANGUAGE SWITCH AND TENDENCIES IN
LINGUISTIC CHOICES OF UKRAINIAN BILINGUALS LIVING ABROAD:
LANGUAGE USE OF UKRAINIANS IN JAPAN**

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Controversial shifts and tendencies in language policy in Ukraine brought forth the question of the necessity of linguistic changes among the population of Ukraine and their potential benefits for the future of Ukraine.

The majority of Ukrainians are bilingual: both Ukrainian and Russian are present almost everywhere throughout the country. Although the level of fluency and priority in their use differs significantly depending on the region, based on the common use of Ukrainian and Russian in media, business, education, internet resources, governmental organizations and institutions, we can suggest that for the majority of Ukraine's population both languages are mutually comprehensible. In general, it can be stated that "Ukraine is, at its heart, bilingual and bicultural" (Petro 2015:31).

In Ukraine, language choice and actual language use have always been important issues on both state and individual levels: for the former, mostly because of Russia's efforts to undermine its relations with Ukraine (as well as with other former Soviet republics) with the use of "Russian-speaking population" (Laitin 1998, pp. 263-265); and the latter, as an important element of self-awareness and ethnic identity of Ukrainians during the Soviet era and until now.

Since independence, the status of the Russian language in Ukraine has become a divisive political issue for the Ukrainian society. Initially, Ukrainian language policy was set under the 1989 law, "On the languages in the Ukrainian SSR," which acknowledged the Ukrainian language as the only official one in all of the territory of Ukraine. The Constitution of Ukraine (1996) affirmed that Ukrainian is the only state language. However, while Russian did not have the status of a second official language in any administrative district, in many districts of Ukraine the majority of population preferred to use Russian in their daily communication. When Viktor Yanukovich's pro-Russian Party of Regions took power in 2012, the legal status of the Russian language was reconsidered and Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine) enacted a new law under which, if the percentage of representatives of a national minority in any administrative district of Ukraine exceeds 10% of the total population of the district, the language of the minority should be granted the status of a regional one. It did not contemplate the fact that the Ukrainian language in those districts was already the language of a very small part of local society, which contrasted the situation in some European countries (Belgium, Spain, etc.) where the language of minority needed protection in language conflicts between a dominant nation and a minority. The peculiarity of the situation in Ukraine was in that the official language (Ukrainian) needed more protection and support from the state than the language of minority (Russian). Shevchenko (2015) notes, that "unlike the situations commonly encountered in Europe, it is the majority ethnic group, Ukrainians, who need the support of the authorities to impose the official language. The state language needs to be protected as a 'minority language'." (Shevchenko, 2015: 222).

Linguistic choice is an important marker of identity of an individual or a group. In his research on language and identity, Joseph (2004) discerns between national identity and ethnic identity (Joseph, 2004: 162-163). Research of Kuzio (2002) on language and identity of Ukrainians concludes that the language preferences of Ukrainian citizens should not be considered the main marker of their national identity and can be associated rather with the political choices of individuals. However, when it comes to ethnical identity of Ukrainians, language becomes a key indicator. On the other hand, Kulyk (2011) suggests that the language choice is one of the best markers of an attitude of a Ukrainian individual towards political and social issues and concludes that preferences of Ukrainians in their actual daily language use for daily life are shaped largely by their identities (Kulyk, 2011). As Shulman (2004) describes it: “Language is one if not the most important cultural marker separating Ukrainians from Russians, so perhaps it is not surprising that, to the extent that the people of Ukraine believe that ethnic Ukrainians have a special relationship to the Ukrainian nation, they think it is their language specifically that should be given privileged consideration” (Shulman, 2004:53-54).

Considering the abovementioned, for us, based on mere logic, it would be natural to suggest that in times when Ukraine is involved in opposition with the Russian military and separatists in Donbass, Ukrainians should become more eager to change the language of use from Russian to Ukrainian.

Research question

Hypothesis. In 2015-2017, together with Professor Lewis from Hitotsubashi University, I conducted a joint research on the language use in social networks (Twitter and Facebook) in Ukraine. The research shows that the Russian language still prevails in most of the districts of Ukraine in both Twitter and Facebook (Pavliy and Lewis, 2015, 2016, 2017). I was surprised with our findings that among Twitter users in Ukraine females outnumber males by more than two to one and that there was much stronger preference for Russian among female users. I could find no other explanation to that phenomenon but to suggest that female users are more likely than male to adjust their language to that of their followers (Pavliy and Lewis, 2017: 99).

In order to investigate more on the phenomenon, I decided to conduct an independent empirical research on the language use and language preference. The main objectives of this research are to explore the current language use and investigate the changes in language preferences (if they happened) and to what extent this linguistic choice of individuals is related to some social, political, educational or religious factors and discuss the possible application of such findings in frame of the current language policy of Ukrainian government. The empirical research on the phenomenon of the change in language preferences of bilingual individuals can be conducted with more accuracy in a foreign country, where none of these languages are used and bilinguals are less affected by the linguistic choice of their surroundings.

At the first stage of this research project, to address the special needs of my investigation I decided to conduct a qualitative research based on the in-depth interviews with fifty Ukrainians living (or recently lived) abroad in a country with absolutely different language and cultural environment. As Josselson and Harvey (2012) describe it: “Multiplicity of identity... is best addressed through qualitative studies where people are invited to define for us their social locations” (Josselson and Harvey, 2012).

Research Question. This article will describe only the initial stage of an ongoing empirical research project on language use and language change. In this first stage of my study, I would like to investigate how the desire or habit of the speaker to adjust her or his language to the language of the interlocutor depends on the following three factors: “gender”, “length of stay” or “region of Ukraine” where the speaker is from. Then, my first research question is as follows:

RQ1: Which of these three variables “gender”, “length of stay” or “region of birth/formative years in Ukraine” makes the most impact on the phenomenon of speakers’ accommodating the language to their interlocutors (change from Ukrainian to Russian or from Russian to Ukrainian)?

My second task is to explore, how many of the interviewees have changed their language of daily use from Russian to Ukrainian, when it happened and where (in Ukraine or abroad), and what could be considered the trigger for such a change, if the trigger exists.

RQ2: When and where did the switch from Russian to Ukrainian as a language of daily use happen, and what triggered this switch?

Objectives of Research. In this research, I am dealing with bilingual Ukrainians living (or recently lived) in Japan for more than one year. Although there are many definitions of what “bilingualism” is, varying “from a limited ability in one or more domains, to very strong command of both languages” (Spolsky 1998:45), for this study I stick to the understanding of bilingualism, which can be described with the simple rule: to ensure that the person, whom I interview, clearly understands my questions in Ukrainian and can coherently answer me (while they are not limited to answering me in Ukrainian). Here I do not distinguish between *balanced* bilinguals with similar degrees of proficiency in both languages, or *dominant* bilinguals, whose proficiency in one language is higher than in another (Peal and Lambert, 1962), but rather rely on so-called *nonreciprocal bilingualism* (Bilaniuk, 2005) or *cooperative nonaccommodation* (Pavlenko, 2008), when bilinguals can by mutual consent use their preferred languages.

My main aim is to investigate if the interviewees had a change from Russian to Ukrainian as a language of daily use, and if that happened, what were the factors for that change. I will tackle the subject on how they change their attitudes towards the language use in context of their experience of living in a foreign environment.

Methodology and Limitations

To pursue this project I did not find any existing theoretical framework with which to approach my specific needs and types of questions. The main research method is fieldwork. The research is done through the interviews (online or in person) consisting of 25 questions, which helped me to explore the role each language plays in the life of interviewees. For the description of groups and communities used in this research, I built on my previous experience in sociological studies and adopt a homophily-based approach as in my previous studies.

Grounding on previous research and methodological considerations, I limited my research to the three factors: gender, length of stay of an interviewee in Japan, and region of Ukraine where she or he was raised. In addition to gender, as a possible factor for a phenomenon of accommodating the language to the partners’ one, I decided to deal with such variable as “the length of stay in Japan”, or the number of years spent in Japan (which also usually relates to the age of interviewee). While instead of a *diaspora*, Japan has so-called Ukrainian *hromada*, the relationship between its members and associates resembles a diaspora with its “core values; interpretations of culture; implicit beliefs; prescriptive cultural attitudes; perceived similarities and differences between recent immigrants and established members...” (Lynn 2014:143-144). This means that the time spent in or with Ukrainian *hromada* in Japan can make a remarkable influence on the language choice of the individual. My methodological consideration to include the region as one of the possible factors is that different regions of Ukraine were constantly opposite in their political preferences and their views on language use. For a long time in many areas of Ukraine, Russian language has been considered as a symbol of solidarity with Russia and served as a political or ideological marker of loyalty to Russia or former Soviet Union (Søvik, 2007; Kulyk, 2011).

Compared to the quantitative studies on the language use, qualitative study can help the researcher to delve deeper in the psychological aspect of the research. It provides an opportunity to explore “a socially constructed dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive; i. e. an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved” (Yilmaz, 2013: 312). On the other hand, qualitative research on the language use has its limitations. Dealing with such complicated and sensitive matters as the language choice and the change of the language of daily use, it should be mentioned that the understanding of the linguistic choices by the objects of the research are subjective and cannot be proven by just mere observation of their language behavior before after, or during the interview. My qualitative research deals with what people think they are, rather with what they really are. In other words, I have to trust all fifty interviewees in what they said or thought about themselves and that their assessment of their own deeds is correct. On that point, I cannot but agree with Luker (2010): “The point of interviews, however, is not was going on inside one person’s head, but was going on inside lots of people’s heads” (Luker, 2010:167)

Findings

To answer the research questions, I have conducted interviews with fifty citizens of Ukraine living in Japan for one year or more. The shortest length of stay was one year, the longest was thirty years. The interviews were taken in between November 4, 2018 and March 11, 2019 and recorded in person or through Facebook Messenger.

Interviews included twenty-five questions related to the language environment, languages in family, school, with friends, etc. Interviewees were asked about what was the language situation in the days of their youth and how it changed now. These questions are followed by the questions on interviewees’ language preferences in social networks, news, comments on the internet sites and music favorites. The next set of questions was targeted on the interviewees views on the necessity of Ukrainian for the children, growing up in a Japanese language environment, identification of their desire to keep Ukrainian at least as a second language, interpretation of what language (s) should be used in Ukrainian *hromada* in Japan, the relation between the Ukrainian language and their national identity. The last questions were about the percentage of use of each of the four languages (Ukrainian, Russian, English, and Japanese) in the daily life of interviewees and also about language in the church (if visited). All these questions will be omitted in this paper due to the lack of time and massiveness of the data to be processed and analyzed. As it was mentioned above, this article describes only the initial stage of an ongoing research, and most of the questions of the interview will be dealt with in future.

There was one question, though, which I repeatedly asked each of the fifty interviewees: “Do you switch your language from Ukrainian to Russian (or from Russian to Ukrainian) to adjust the language of person (s) you communicate with (your partner (s) / opponent (s))?” Given that most of the Ukrainians are bilingual (Arel, 1995, Janmaat, 1999; Bilaniuk, 2005; Zhurzhenko, 2010; Kulyk, 2011; Polese, 2011), such a switch is rather a mental phenomenon, so the desire of a speaker to adjust or accommodate her or his language to the language of a partner can be crucial in preventing the change from Russian to Ukrainian or from Ukrainian to Russian.

Findings on relation of gender, length of stay and region of birth/ formative years in Ukraine to the language switch

In total, thirty-one persons (62%) out of fifty interviewees adjusts her or his language to the interlocutor’s one, and only nineteen respondents (38%) continue to speak the language they prefer, even if their partners or opponents do not change their language and continue

Ukrainian→Russian or Russian→Ukrainian. This means that only one third of the interviewees is consistent in their choice of language of daily use.

If we investigate the relation between gender and accommodating language to partners (Table. 1), we can find that there is no serious difference between genders. Moreover, my research shows that females are more consistent in keeping their language and not switching to the language of interlocutors than males.

Table 1

Gender and language switch

Gender	Number of those who switch their language	Total	Percent of those who switch their language
female	19	33	58%
male	12	17	71%
Total	31	50	62%

Concerning the relation between the length of stay in Japan and adjustment of the language of use to the partner's one, the length of stay was divided into three ranges.

- 1) 1~5 years: approximately in a period from the time of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity.
- 2) 6~14 years: approximately in a period from the Orange Revolution until Euromaidan
- 3) 15~and more years: before the Orange Revolution.

Table 2

Length of stay in Japan and language switch

Number of years in Japan	Number of those who switch their language	Total	Percent of those who switch their language
1~5	16	24	67%
6~14	10	16	63%
15 and more	5	10	50%
Total	31	50	62%

Table 2 shows the consistent pattern, in which the percent of those who stick to their language of preference (in most cases Ukrainian) and do not tend to adjust their language to the interlocutor's one, slowly increases with their length of stay (and presumably, their age).

By the place of birth or the place where a person spent her or his childhood (formative years) I have divided the respondents into 4 regions:

- 1) South and East of Ukraine, which includes Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Odesa, Mykolayiv, Kherson oblasts and Crimea.
- 2) Central Ukraine, which includes Poltava, Sumy, Zhytomyr, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhya oblasts of Ukraine.
- 3) Kyiv City and Kyiv oblast
- 4) Western Ukraine, which includes Volyn, Rivne, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia, Khmelnytskyi, Ternopil, Vinnitsya and Chernivtsi oblasts of Ukraine

Table 3

Region of birth/ formative years in Ukraine and language switch

Region of birth/ formative years	Number of those who switch their language	Total	Percent of those who switch their language
South-East	7	9	78%
Kyiv/ Kyiv oblast	15	23	65%
Central	7	9	78%
West	2	9	22%
Total	31	50	62%

Table 3 shows that the highest percent of those who adjust their language is in the South-East (78%) and Central Ukraine (78%). In Kyiv and Kyiv oblast the percent of respondents who practice language switch is lower (65%), but still exceeds fifty. Almost two third of the respondents from that region adjust their language, which correlates with the percentage of respondents in total. In Western Ukraine the percent of those who switch their language is very low (22%). Only one in four respondents from Western Ukraine will switch from Ukrainian to Russian to adjust her or his language to the language of interlocutors.

From the above we can conclude that compared to the other factors (gender and length of stay in Japan), the region where the respondents spend their formative years is the factor which influences the consistence of the Ukrainian citizen in their language choice much more than two others.

Tendencies in the language use

As I already mentioned, for this research I incorporated a homophily-based approach. Homophily suggests that the respondents belong to the same groups, have similar interests, hobbies, backgrounds or something else in common. “Birds of a feather flock together” – as proverb says. While searching for the Ukrainians who would agree to be interviewed about their language use, I dealt with a few groups of Ukrainians located in Tokyo, Tsukuba, Nagoya and Kansai (Osaka-Kyoto) areas. Members of these groups formed local Ukrainian communities or belonged to them and for many of the respondents being a part of a community, or *hromada*, made had a profound impact on their language use. Tokyo community, so-called *Krayany* in 2009 founded the Ukrainian school “Dzhereltse”, which some of my respondents visited or worked at. “Tsukuba group” consisted mainly of students of Kyiv National University or Kyiv National Linguistic University, who came to Japan for their Masters or Doctoral studies. “Nagoya group” included some members of Nagoya community active in popularizing Ukrainian culture in Chubu region. And some members of “Kansai group” worked for the same company, or studied in the same university. Along with those who belonged to some communities of Ukrainians there were those who had almost no contact with their nationals. One person even claimed that the only Ukrainians in Japan she stayed in touch with were my family.

People who belong to the same community usually have similar views concerning the necessity of language change. It may happen because of likeness of their experiences, age, education, region of birth, formative years in Ukraine, or other factors. On the other hand, people who joined the communities were often motivated by their desire to share thoughts and views with people of some common understanding.

One third of the respondents (seventeen people out of fifty) admitted that they experienced language change from Russian into Ukrainian and use Ukrainian as their main language of interaction with fellow Ukrainians. Among those seventeen, ten respondents admit that the language change happened in Japan.

What triggers the language change of the respondents?

Below I list the reasons which interviewees considered to be the triggers, which moved them to choose Ukrainian as the sole language for communication with Ukrainians. The reasons are listed in a chronological order depending on time of the interview. The number of the respondents, who mentioned each of the reasons as the trigger for their change of language of use is given in brackets.

- 1) Disappointment with an attitude of Russia towards Ukraine (7)
- 2) Impact of Ukrainian speaking boyfriend or girlfriend (2)
- 3) Use of Ukrainian at Kiev National University (2)
- 4) Events on Euromaidan, Revolution of Dignity (4)
- 5) Russian annexation of Crimea (5)
- 6) Impact of parents (1)
- 7) Considered a new trend among Ukrainians (1)
- 8) The desire not to lose Ukrainian while staying in Japan for a long time (1)
- 9) Interest in politics (1)
- 10) Working on PhD dissertation in Ukrainian (1)
- 11) Conducting research in the Western Ukraine (1)
- 12) Coming to Japan after the military conflict with Russia in Donbass. Did not want to be associated with pro-Russian population of the region (1)
- 13) Encounter with a woman, who called herself Russian, while being Ukrainian: "I also from Russia, from Cherkassy" (2)
- 14) Impact of a school teacher, good memories of writing composition about V. Stus (1)
- 15) Impact of local Ukrainian community *Krayany* (1)
- 16) Indignant of being mocked by Russians in Japan (1)
- 17) Father went to ATO (1)
- 18) To improve the level of Ukrainian of her children (1)

All the reasons mentioned above could be grouped into four main categories: political (attitudes toward Russia, political and military opposition between the countries); educational (use in the university or school); personal and family (relations with family members, friends, etc.) and reputational (status, trend). As we can see from the responses of interviewees, political reasons have triggered the language change much more than any other. Still it is important to acknowledge that personal and family reasons play very important role in language change.

Educational factor is also very important. Several respondents admitted that their switch of language of use to Ukrainian took place during their studies in Kyiv National University, where they found Ukrainian speaking environment not only among professors and lecturers, but also among the students. Lack of proper education in Ukrainian causes the limitations for further use of the language. Two of the interviewees complained that they would consider switching into Ukrainian for political and social reasons, but feel unsure, and do not want to be ridiculed because of their bad command of this language. They blamed their education in Russian, which was provided in schools or universities in Ukraine, as one of the hindrances to use the official language of their country.

From the interviews I realized that a switch from Russian to Ukrainian can cause serious problems in family life. One of the interviewees described the situation with her unsuccessful attempt to switch to Ukrainian and remarked that the switch did not succeed because of the lack

of support and understanding from family members and friends. This switch happened in 2013-2014, mainly for political reasons, when she was a university student. Parents did not like this change, while friends showed no interest and remained neutral. Moreover, after graduation, she started to work, and soon found that mentally it is too difficult for her to use Ukrainian at her job place and switched to Russian in communication with co-workers, while continuing using Ukrainian at home. Finally, she turned back to Russian after an argument with her mother. In the time of interview she spoke good Ukrainian, and I expect that if she stays in Japan for a long time, switch to Ukrainian may occur again.

Conclusion

My findings from the interviews with fifty Ukrainians who lived or stayed in Japan for more than one year show that of the three variables “gender”, “length of stay in Japan” and “region of birth/ formative years in Ukraine ” the last factor makes the most impact on the phenomenon of speakers’ accommodating the language to their interlocutors. Concerning the full change the language of use from Russian to Ukrainian, there are various factors which triggered it. Most of those respondents who experienced the switch admit that it happened in Japan and a few of them also admit that it is difficult to keep Ukrainian as the only language of use when they come back to their local communities in Ukraine. The respondents who belong to the same community in Japan tend to share similar views on the necessity of language change and use of Ukrainian as their main language in communication with fellow Ukrainians.

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ПЕРЕХІД НА ІНШУ МОВУ СПІЛКУВАННЯ ТА ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ В ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОМУ ВИБОРІ ДВОМОВНИХ УКРАЇНЦІВ, ЩО ПРОЖИВАЮТЬ ЗА КОРДОНОМ: ДОСВІД ЯПОНІЇ

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Передумови: У своєму попередньому дослідженні про використання мов у соціальних мережах я виявив, що в Україні в соціальних мережах (Twitter) жінки більше тяжіють до використання російської мови, ніж чоловіки. Я припустив, що це явище може бути пов'язане з поведінковими відмінностями між чоловіками та жінками, а також їхніми відмінними підходами щодо вибору мови. Емпіричні дослідження феномену переходу на іншу мову спілкування можна проводити з більшою точністю в чужій країні, де на особистості менше впливає мовний вибір оточення.

Мета: Метою даного дослідження є вивчення лінгвістичної ситуації у двомовних українців Японії, їхніх мовних уподобань та поглядів щодо використання мови в Україні та за кордоном. На початковому етапі дослідження проаналізовано, чи відбувся в опитаних перехід на іншу мову спілкування, та визначено чинники, які вплинули на зміну мови. Досліджено, чи схильні жінки пристосовувати свою мову до мови співрозмовника більше, ніж чоловіки, і висвітлено тенденції та чинники, які призвели до зміни мови в деякого з респондентів.

Результати: Отримані висновки показують, що пристосування власної мови до мови співрозмовників залежить більше від регіону народження та років становлення в Україні, ніж від тривалості перебування респондента в Японії або його статі. Стосовно переходу з російської на українську як основну мову спілкування, то можна помітити, що, хоча в більшості опитаних цей перехід відбувався під впливом різних чинників, основними факторами, що викликають перехід, є політичні погляди, освіта, а також особисті чи сімейні питання.

Ключові слова: соціолінгвістика, вибір мови, білінгви, українська мова, російська мова, англійська мова, японська мова.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 10 жовтня 2018 року
Прийнята до друку 6 листопада 2018 року