

Title: Is Russian In Retreat In Ukraine?

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A positive answer to the question formulated in the title of this paper would be oversimplified generalization. Obviously, the conflict between Russian and Ukrainian languages was being prepared historically. The last decade has seen an increased number of linguistic studies on the politicized use of Ukrainian (Kulyk 2006, Zaliznyak and Masenko 2001), and Ukrainian as a powerful symbol of an independent Ukrainian state (Kuzio 1998). However, some Russian-speaking Ukrainians, who make up about half the country, while considering the Ukrainian language as “native,” prefer Russian as the primary language of everyday interaction.

Regarding the linguistic situation in contemporary Ukraine, Tetyana Burda (Burda, 2002) maintains that observations of 18-30-year-olds offer insight into the developing trends of language usage. On the other hand, international studies of youth language (Antaki 1998, Beeching 2006, Rampton 1995) that deal with the problems of youth language present young people as especially creative and innovative language users.

This may be the point to address the issue of linguistic identity and language usage in contemporary Ukraine. In this paper I will present empirical materials addressing language use in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous communities. Examples in this paper are taken from interviews with students, journalists, and professional educators who were approached with questions about attitudes towards language instruction at universities, stigmatized speech variety and corresponding prestige speech variety, and standard versus nonstandard speech forms. The paper will also discuss the correlation of Russian and Ukrainian in connection with Ukrainian language vitality. The paper will conclude with suggestions on how findings about language practices can contribute to research on social factors affecting the choice of language for communication.

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