



Research Study

Bloggers as Social Actors in Language Policy Debates in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT. Based on the actor-centered and discourse-analytic approaches, the article highlights the role of bloggers in debates on language policy in contemporary Ukraine. The article analyses 118 blogs, published on different platforms in the Ukrainian online media space (Ukrainska Pravda, Radio Svoboda, BBC Ukraine, Liga.net, Hromadske, Obozrevatel and others). All blog entries were circulated in the period between March and May 2019, and discussed from different perspectives the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian as a State Language" (2019). The article tackles the three thematic trends in the blogs: concept of change, myth refuting, and financial sanctions of the law. Close attention is paid to writers as bloggers and opinion-makers, as well as their arguments in language policy debates. Multimodality, as a special feature of language-related blogs, is analysed on the material of images, memes, infographics, photos, and videos. Conceptualisations of the state language and the new language law are depicted within the framework of multimodality.

RÉSUMÉ. Sur la base de l'approche axée sur les acteurs et l'analyse du discours, cet article met en évidence le rôle des blogueurs dans les débats sur la politique linguistique en Ukraine contemporaine. L'article analyse 118 blogs qui ont été publiés sur plusieurs plateformes de l'espace médiatique ukrainien en ligne (Ukrainska Pravda, Radio Svoboda, BBC Ukraine, Liga.net, Hromadske, Obozrevatel et autres). Tous les articles de blog ont été diffusés pendant la période entre mars et mai 2019 et ont présenté, selon différents points de vue, la loi ukrainienne « Sur le fonctionnement de la langue ukrainienne en tant que langue d'État » (2019). L'article aborde trois tendances thématiques des blogs : le concept de changement, la réfutation des mythes et les sanctions financières de la loi. Une attention particulière est portée aux écrivains en tant que blogueurs et faiseurs d'opinion, ainsi qu'à leurs arguments dans les débats sur la politique linguistique. La multimodalité, en tant que particularité des blogs sur les langues, est analysée à partir des images, des memes, des infographies, des photos et des vidéos. Les conceptualisations de la langue d'État et de la nouvelle loi linguistique sont décrites dans le cadre de la multimodalité.

Keywords: *language policies in Ukraine, blogosphere, actor-centered approach, language-related blogs, the law on the state language in Ukraine, digital media, Ukrainian language multimodal blogs.*



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, language policies and language situation in Ukraine have undergone significant changes. First of all, the researchers identified a “shift in Ukrainian identity” (Nedashkivska, 2015, p. 296), “dramatic change in Ukrainian national identity” (Kulyk, 2016, p. 588) that have a considerable impact on language choices and language attitudes. In addition, based on the analysis of in-depth interviews, Seals (2019) emphasised that the recent events of EuroMaidan and the Russian-Ukrainian war have led to linguistic ideological movement “Change Your Mother Tongue” (p. 111), which encourages more and more people to switch to Ukrainian. Moreover, by describing the recent trends in the Ukrainian language situation and explaining the motifs of language behaviour, Bilaniuk (2020) pointed out considerable changes that she defined with the term *linguistic conversion*: “Speaking Ukrainian became a way for people to feel that they were doing something for the country and taking action in securing their country’s sovereignty and forging its future, especially for coming generations” (p. 79). The researcher considers these changes as a positive, balancing language situation in the country.

As the recent sociological data demonstrate, 69% of Ukrainians support the status of Ukrainian as the only state language in the country. Moreover, according to Espresso TV (2020), “Most Ukrainians believe that Ukrainian should be the only state language, and Russian can be used freely in private life.” Thus, these societal transformations influence language legislation. The wave of language activism that grows in the country, especially after the EuroMaidan protests in 2013-2014 and with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, brings the new draft law on the state language into the parliamentary agenda. Drafted within a working group under the Ministry of Culture, the law on state language was developed in 2016, went through the parliamentary hearings and discussions, and was finally adopted on April 24, 2019. It is important to note that the working group, led by professor of law Volodymyr Vasylenko, includes not only lawyers, public servants, and linguists, but also language activists.

The law of Ukraine “On ensuring of Functioning Ukrainian as a State Language” (further referred to as the law on the state language or the new language law) introduces numerous changes in the language regulations field. For instance, according to the law, the new language management institutions started to work, such as the National Commission on the State Language Standards and an Ombudsman on the Protection of the State Language (Zakon, 2019). Furthermore, the law considerably broadens the use of Ukrainian in the diverse spheres of public life, such as education, mass-media, public space, and establishes a demand of the state language certification to a number of professions—public servants, doctors, lawyers and others (Zakon, 2019). It should be noted that the law was adopted during the change of political power, at the end of the presidential elections in Ukraine, when Volodymyr Zelenskyi won over ex-President Petro Poroshenko. The second round of the elections was on April 21, the law was passed in the Parliament on April 25, signed by Poroshenko on May 15, four days before he left the post. The law entered into force on July 16, already during Zelenskyi’s presidency.



From a theoretical perspective, Zhao and Baldauf proposed the “I-5” model of the process of realising language planning goals. This model includes such stages as the initiation, involvement, influence, intervention and implementation (see for detailed: Zhao, 2011, pp. 911– 912; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012, pp. 7–9). The law on the state language already went through all these stages, as of the current moment it is in the midst of its implementation—language institutions are functioning, Ukrainian schools with the language of instruction other than Ukrainian have started to shift fully into Ukrainian from September 2020. It is important to remark that various actors play major roles in different stages of this process. Therefore, initiated by the politicians and national deputies, the law on the state language involves language activists, lawyers, linguists, and representatives of the Ministry of Culture at its drafting stage. Moreover, bloggers, journalists, writers influenced the law at the stage of its public discussion. As a result, many amendments were introduced into the law, when it was under consideration on the parliamentary agenda, politicians, in particular the national deputies, intervened into that process (see for details: Kiss, in preparation, 2021). For instance, the establishment of Language Inspectorate was removed from the law after the public discussion. Finally, starting from 2020 public servants, teachers, and representatives of the ministries have been implementing the law.

The media, which usually “provide an interface between linguists and publics” (Kelly-Holms & Milani, 2011, p. 468), also played a key role in the law discussion and influence at different stages of its development. Numerous Ukrainian online media offer a platform for language policy debates, many of them regularly publish blog posts on language issues, among them *Ukrainska Pravda*, *TSN*, *Radio Svoboda*, *Zahid.net*. The range of social actors involved in the process of blogging includes journalists, politicians, public servants, language activists, historians, linguists, writers. In this article, I will focus on the stage of intervention, when the final amendments were made into the law before its adoption and discussion after its passing in the Parliament and signing by Andriy Parubij, then-speaker of the Parliament and Petro Poroshenko, then-President. Therefore, I will concentrate on the blog entries that were published between March and May 2019.

In this article, I refer to methodology of political discourse analysis. As van Dijk (1998) pointed out, this approach includes not only analysis of politicians’ speeches, but also of reaction and messages of public, and citizens. In this article, I also refer to the concept of public sphere in Habermas’s sense. As it is reconsidered by Fraser (1990), public sphere is “a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state” (p. 57). Moreover, Maratea (2008) underlines the increasing power of blogs as public arenas for expressing opinions: “Unlike traditional arenas where carrying capacity is more static, blogs can be expanded beyond their actual Web space. Bloggers can effectively utilize the entire scope of cyberspace to support their claims” (p. 155). Therefore, the bloggers are to some extent mediators between politicians and citizens, since they have influence on both categories, actively engaged in public sphere.



THEORY AND METHOD

The policy brief, *The right to blog* (2013), underlines the ambivalent meaning of the *blogger* concept:

in some countries, the term 'blogger' is usually applied to someone who is a freelance journalist and is not used for the myriad of other individuals who may be blogging in their spare time or on a more regular basis. (p. 9)

In the context of today's Ukraine, both above-mentioned meanings circulate in an informational space. However, in this research I apply the term *blogger* in its narrower sense, as a freelance journalist who publishes texts on online-media platforms for blogging. In a broader sense, this term includes not only freelance journalists, but also politicians, experts, and writers who publish their opinion texts on diverse socio-political issues. In this article, I introduce and apply the term *language-related blogs* to depict the blogs that react to sociolinguistic changes in the country, describe language policies, and express language attitudes. Language-related blogs could also include the blogs on stylistics and grammatical advises, however, this type of the blogs is beyond the scope of my current research interest.

Undoubtedly, in contemporary information society, bloggers are influential opinion leaders. They not only inform the readers about societal changes, but also provoke them: "blogs play an increasingly important role as a forum of public debate, with knock-on consequences for the media, politics, and policy" (Farrell & Drezner, 2008, p. 17). Therefore, bloggers should be considered as notable social actors in language policy debates. Moreover, defining bloggers as new actors on the socio-political stage, Duong (2013) assumes: "This new actor is able to articulate, in the name of the collective, two rights of the modern citizen in its classical formulation: the right to know and the right to act" (p. 13).

The corpus of the language-related blogs, analysed in this article, consists of 118 texts, that were published in the period between March and May 2019 in the Ukrainian online media. Castell (2007) concluded that the mainstream media use their blogs "to distribute their content and interact with their audience, mixing vertical and horizontal communication modes" (p. 247). A noteworthy fact is, that 52 % of the texts were published on April 25–26, on the day or just a day after the new law on the state language was adopted in the Parliament. The corpus covers a broad range of the online media, among them:

- 1) the mainstream all-Ukrainian media, TV-channels, and news agencies: Hromadske, Ukrainska Pravda, Priamyi, Gazeta.ua, Den', Ukrainske Radio, Tyzhden', ZIK, 5 kanal, 112 tv, UNIAN, Fakty, Segodnia, Korrespondent, Obozrevatel, Livyi Bereh, Strana.ua, The Babel, The Village, Censor.net, Shpalta, Rubryka, Rakurs, Texty, Apostrof, Slovo i Dilo, Zmina, iPress.ua, Glavred, Novynarnia, Inforesist, Maximum FM, Liga.net; Zeleni agency, Bukvyi;



- 2) the regional media: Volynski novyny, Krym Realiji, Kurs, Zbruc, Forpost media, Hrechka, Tvoe misto TV, Konkurent;
- 3) the specialised media: Legal Hub, Kadrovik, Detector Media, CEDEM, Buhgalter, Osvitoria, Portal movnoji polityky, Horoshop, Internet Svoboda, Na chasi, Finance.ua; M.E.Doc.Biznes; Naglyad.org, Sudebno-Juridicheskaja gazeta;
- 4) the representative offices of international media in Ukraine: BBC Ukrainian, Radio Svoboda, Deutsche Welle.

Therefore, I include in the analysis popular internet media as well as new start-up media projects. In doing so, I try to balance the analysis, since mainstream media cover a broad reader audience, but at the same time are influenced by their owners—oligarchs. On the other hand, new Internet-media have smaller audiences, but which are more independent. The corpus includes texts that were found by Google search with the key words: *the new language law, adoption of the new language law* (in Ukrainian and Russian) in the Ukrainian online media.

Describing differences of thematising multilingualism in media, Kelly-Holmes and Milani (2011) assumed that multimodality plays a crucial role in spreading the values in the media, especially in case of language issues. As they pointed out: “values and beliefs about language(s) are not simply encoded through verbal text alone, but materialize in a multimodal guise, so that the verbal is in a dynamic interplay with the visual and other semiotic modes” (p. 480). In this research, I pay especial attention for concepts of thematising and multimodality of the language-related blogs. Research questions of this study are: 1) how do the language-related blogs thematise the current language policies in Ukraine?; 2) what multimodal instruments are used in blogs to reinforce the messages to the audience?; and 3) what language conceptualisations do the bloggers as social actors use? In this article, I analyse how language policies in Ukraine are described, discussed, and visually represented in the Ukrainian online media.

RESULTS

In this section of the article, I pay attention to thematic trends in language-related blogs, analysing arguments of the blog authors, and the main conceptualisations of language and the language law, represented in the blog entries. I highlight the instruments of multimodality used by the authors. Almost half (48%) of the analysed blogs are authored, while others are more informative by nature or are reposting information from mainstream media. Concerning the language of publication, 73% of the texts were published only in Ukrainian, 6% only in Russian, 30% were published in two languages—Ukrainian and Russian, and 2% in three languages—Ukrainian, Russian, and English. It is important to mention that the language of publication depends mostly on language policies of the media and is not necessarily an echo of certain language ideologies. There are publications in Ukrainian that criticise the new language law, as well as publications in Russian that support it. Based on the materials from Russian-language blogs, Maksimovtsova (2019) underlined this discursive trend in the Ukrainian media language debates: “At times of political turmoil, being ‘Ukrainian’ means being loyal to the ideas of the



country's sovereignty, political independence and respect to the state language, which becomes the uniting idea for both groups of the discursive conflict" (p. 307).

Thematizing Language Policies in Language-Related Blogs

In the analysed period of March to May 2019, most of the blogs thematise the new language law mostly in a neutral explanatory way, clarifying to the audience its main functions and features. The bloggers underline that adoption of the law is a notable transformation of social communication rules, therefore they often use a concept of *change* in the headlines, see Table 1.

Headline	Source
The Parliament passed a new law on language. What will change and how will it affect me? Let's explain briefly	https://thebabel.com.ua/texts/29368-rada-uhvalila-noviy-zakon-pro-movu-shcho-zminitsya-i-yak-ce-mene-torknetsya-poyasnyuyemo-korotk
The new law on the Ukrainian language: what can change	https://www.the-village.com.ua/village/city/asking-question/284439-zakon-pro-ukrayinsku-movu-2019
The law on the state language 5670-d: what will change for Ukrainians	https://maximum.fm/zakon-pro-derzhavnu-movu-5670-d-komu-i-de-treba-govoriti-ukrayinskoyu_n159408
The language law: what has changed for citizens and businesses	https://inforesist.org.ua/zakon-pro-ukra-nsku-movu-detarno/
The language law: how the Internet and the media will change	https://netfreedom.org.ua/article/zakon-pro-movu-yak-zminyatsya-internet-ta-zmi
The Parliament adopted a new language law 5670-d. What will change	https://nachasi.com/2019/04/25/uhvaleno-movnyy-zakon-5670-d/
Language law: how it will affect education	https://osvitoria.media/experience/zakon-pro-movu-yak-vin-vplyvatyme-na-osvitu/
The language law: how it will affect the work of online stores	https://horoshop.ua/ua/blog/zakon-pro-movu/
What changes will the new law on language bring to Ukrainians?	https://sud.ua/ru/news/publication/140705-yaki-same-zmini-prinese-ukrayintsyam-noviy-zakon-pro-movu
This is a victory! How the Parliament adopted the law on the Ukrainian language and what it will change	https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/ce-peremoga-yak-rada-priymala-zakon-pro-ukrajinsku-movu-i-shcho-vin-zminit-50018613.html

Table 1: Thematic trend of change in the headlines of language-related blogs



The blogs in the mainstream media focused on the key changes, while the blogs in the specialised media explained details about their sphere of interest—media, Internet, and business. Hence, some of the headlines with the concept of change were of a provocative nature, for instance: *For “palianycia” – execution? What will **change** the new law on language* (<https://hromadske.ck.ua/shho-zminyt-novyj-zakon-pro-movu/>). The blog with this headline appeared on the *Hromadske Cherkasy* website, one of the regional affiliates of the mainstream media. The word *palianycia* (in the Ukrainian language means *loaf*) has many distinct Ukrainian phonetic features, which makes it difficult for non-native speakers of Ukrainian to pronounce it correctly. Thus, this word is often used in jokes on language issues in Ukraine. The blog quotes Maksym Kobeliev, a language activist, who was a member of the working team on the law drafting:

There was a myth that people on the streets would be caught and checked to see if they could pronounce the word ‘palianycia’. Or if a person utters a Russian word, he or she will be thrown into prison for 10 years. This is absurd, of course. First, there is only administrative liability, it means violators will be fined, and only if the violations are not eliminated after the warning. There is no criminal liability. There is also no language inspection or language patrol. (*Hromadske Cherkasy*, 2019; author’s translation from Ukrainian)

The blog applies a provocative headline to attract the audience’s attention and unmask myths about the new language law and its implementation. In fact, refuting the myths about the new language law is another thematic trend in the analysed blogs. Some examples of this type of blog headline are included in Table 2. It could be explained by the fact that these blogs appeared at the time of the adoption and implementation of the law. Beforehand, the law was hotly debated in the media when it was on the parliamentary agenda from the beginning of 2017 until spring 2019. As a positive result of these debates, many amendments were made in the text of the law. Hence, as a negative effect, numerous myths started to circulate online and on social media.

Headline	Source
The condition of the nation’s survival. Myths of the language law	https://rpr.org.ua/news/umova-vyzhyvannya-natsiji-mify-i-nyuansy-schodomaibutnoho-zakonu-pro-derzhavnu-movu/
TOP-7 myths about the language law: who will have to actually take the exam and what will happen to Russian-language books	https://www.segodnya.ua/ua/ukraine/top-7-mifov-pro-yazykovoy-zakon-komu-pridetsya-sdavati-ekzamen-na-samom-dele-i-cto-budet-s-russkoyazychnymi-knigami-1270262.html . 20 травня 2019
Fines, crime and language patrol: refuted myths about language law	https://konkurent.in.ua/publication/41322/shtrafi-kriminal-ta-movniy-patrul-sprostovali-mifi-pro-movniy-zakon/



What involve the adoption of the language law, fakes and the reaction of society	https://www.poglyad.tv/shho-peredbachaye-uhvalennya-movnogo-zakonu-fejky-ta-reaktsiya-suspilstva/
How to answer horror stories about the language law	https://kurs.if.ua/blogs/yak_vidpovidaty_na_strashylky_pro_movnyy_zakon_74833.html
The law on language. We refute horror stories and lies	https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2019/04/30/7213925/

Table 2: Thematic trend of myth refuting in the headlines of language-related blogs

One of the new features that the law on state language brings into the Ukrainian language policies, is financial sanctions for its violation. In comparison with the previous language legislation that mostly was of a declarative nature, this law prescribes the mechanisms of its compliance (for an analysis of the previous language legislation see, for instance, Moser 2013). Bloggers often focused on describing these mechanisms, some of which are shown in Table 3. The function of this thematic group of the blogs was to inform the audience about new rules in public communication and to some extent prevent possible violations.

Headline	Source
Fines and strict control: what the language law provides	https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20190514-shtrafy-ta-zhorstkyj-kontrol-chy-potribno-ukrayini-posylyuvaty-zakon-pro-ukrayinsku-movu/
The law on language: whom and for what will be fined	https://buhgalter.com.ua/news/other/zakon-pro-movu-kogo-i-za-shcho-budut-shtrafuvati/
The Parliament passed a historic language law: what punishment awaits violators	https://legalhub.online/intelektualna-vlasnist/verhovna-rada-pryjnyala-istorychnyj-movnyj-zakon-yake-pokarannya-chekaye-na-porushnykiv/

Table 3: Thematic trend of fine and control in the headlines of language-related blogs

As I already mentioned, blogs are mostly informative, updating the readers about the changes, refuting myths about the law, and providing information about the sanctions for its violation. However, bloggers also use arguments, expressing their position—supporting the new law or criticising it. Let us have a closer look at a specific group of bloggers, namely writers. On the material of the contemporary Russian literature, Lunde (2018) assumed: “As professional language practitioners or ‘super users’ of language, writers are regularly invited to express their opinions on the language question” (p. 69). This assumption is also relevant concerning debates in the Ukrainian online media. The writers often are the authors of language-related blogs, or opinion-makers on the language issue, mentioned in the blogs of the other authors.



For instance, Jurij Vynnychuk, a writer from Lviv, Western Ukraine, frequently publishes his blog posts on the language question on different online platforms – *Zbruch*, *Obozrevatel*, *TSN*. He supports the Ukrainian language, often appealing to the European practices of the state languages protection (Vynnychuk, 2019-a). However, the writer estimates pessimistically the new law on the state language, comparing it with the Kerch Bridge, “the structure on shaky ground”. Such a comparison brings the readers into the context of the annexed Crimea, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and depicts a complicated sociopolitical situation of the adoption of the law. Writer’s pessimism is also based on the idea that the law does not have broad societal impact:

The law will be on paper, but nothing will change in life. I visited the Book Arsenal in Kyiv, and it was a beautiful island of Ukrainians. However, no one spoke to me in Ukrainian in shops, restaurants or in the trolleybus. My Ukrainian was answered in different ways: in Russian, *surzhik* (mixed Ukrainian-Russian speech – NK) or approximate Ukrainian. But there was no first address to the visitor in Ukrainian, as is specified in the law. (author’s translation from Ukrainian)

As the visualisation to Vynnychuk’s blog, a meme with word *palianyia* is used. The meme is based on the popular science-fiction film *Arrival* (2016) scene, on which a linguistic anthropologist tries to teach human language to aliens (see Image 1 below).

Similar pessimistic opinions are expressed by Andrii Kokotiukha, a detective writer from Kyiv. Publishing posts in his blog on the language question in March 2019, one month before the law was adopted, he assumed that there is no support for the law in the Parliament, and even in case of its adoption, it will not be implemented correctly (Kokotiukha, 2019). Aside from that, Larysa Nicoj, a children’s writer from Kyiv, also expresses a negative opinion about the law. For instance, she claims that the law is not good enough for the protection of the state language, since it keeps the rights of linguistic minorities as well, in particular in the sphere of education:

It is not a question of banning, banning or oppressing minority languages. But the point is that the bill gives them a lot of rights that restrict the rights of Ukrainians. I appeal to the deputies, in particular, to pay attention to such articles as, for example, the language of education. It says that education in minority languages will remain, this is a very harmful wording. (112 TV, 2019; author’s translation from Ukrainian)

However, her negative attitude has a political background, since her position belongs to the far-right political spectrum that denies any rights of minorities, and she often makes scandalous statements about the language question that attract the media.



Image 1. Visualisations in writers' language-related blogs

Source: Vynnychuk (2019-a)

Text in Ukrainian: *Loaf*

As it was mentioned before, the law on the state language was adopted during the change of political power, which is why the writers also make references to the politicians' opinions or build their arguments as counterarguments to the politicians' statements. For instance, Andrii Liubka, a writer from Uzhhorod, South-Western Ukraine, bases his blog post on *Radio Svoboda* on the argument with President Zelenskyi's reaction to the law's adoption. This political message is reflected in the blog headline: *Zelensky is the best example of the need for a law on language.*ⁱⁱ While Zelenskyi described the law in a negative way, in particular, depicting the establishment of the language management institutions as unnecessary bureaucracy, Liubka estimates the law positively. Appealing, for instance, to the fact that Zelenskyi has a teacher of Ukrainian, the writer concludes that children in Russian-speaking regions should have a possibility to learn Ukrainian (Liubka, 2019).

Another Ukrainian writer, Serhii Zhadan who represents Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine, also reflected on the attitude to language issue of the presidential team. In the blog, published on *Portal movnoji polityky*, the writer's opinion is cited: "If for this candidate the issues of language or territory are not fundamental, such that they can be taken out of bracket. For many Ukrainians this is an issue whose importance is difficult to overestimate." (*Portal movnoji polityky*, 2019; author's translation from Ukrainian). In such a way, the writers engage in a discursive dialogue with the politicians, positioning themselves as opinion-makers that can influence the governmental decisions.



Language-Related Blogs as Multimodal Messages

Kelly-Holms and Milani (2011) described “the use of maps, alphabets, the accompanying soundtracks, hyperlinks” (p. 480) as examples of multi- and hypermodalities. Abas (2011) defined multimodality as “a new form of literacy” (p. 19). The media corpus, analyzed in this article, is also highly multi- and hypermodal, with 75% percent of the blogs including visualizations, such as images, photographs, icons, infographics, screenshots, as well as videos and links to other related materials. The most commonly used pictures, including in the language blogs, to some extent symbolised or have some connection to concept of the state language, such as the state yellow-blue flag, the buildings of the state institutions (the Parliament, the Constitutional Court), or the Ukrainian alphabet (or alphabetic characters that are unparalleled in it in comparison with other Cyrillic alphabets). Since the analysed corpus describes mostly the process of the new language adoption, many blogs include an image of the voting for the law in the Parliament (see Image 2 below). The visualisation of the voting underlines that the law was adopted with most of the votes and adds a persuasive visual message to the texts.



Image 2: Voting for the new language law in the Parliament of Ukraine

Source: Bondarenko (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: *The results of the voting #10, for 278, against 38, abstained 7, not voted 25, total 348.*



Numerous blogs include the photos of the action in support of the new language law close to the Ukrainian Parliament in April 2019. The main requirement of the activists was to adopt the new language law. This message was expressed via various slogans on the placards. Mainly the posters referred to the language conceptualisations: *Language matters; Language is our safety; Language is our weapon; Language is important; Language is the genetic code of the nation; Without language there is no nation*. Many of the activists appeal to the national deputies to vote for the law: *To be Ukrainian = to vote for the language law; Vote for the language law!; Only the language law will protect me; I support the law on state language; We demand the law on the state language; Become history – vote for the language law; The law stops the discrimination of the Ukrainian-speakers*. Some of the placards refer to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict: *Derussification = deoccupation = decolonisation; Protect Ukraine; First Russian language, then Russian tanks*. Including photos of the activists into blog posts gives a vivid impression of the event to the readers and represent their claims in a short informative way.



Image 3: The use of the photos in the language-related blogs

Source: Bega (2019)

Text on placards in Ukrainian: *Become history – vote for the language law; Be Ukrainian = vote for the language law; Vote for the language Law!*

Source: Bondarenko (2019)

Text on placards in Ukrainian: *Placard in Ukrainian language*. On the last placard unparalleled Ukrainian alphabetic characters are depicted.

Another example of the visualisation in language-related blogs are the series of the posters – *Language is...* by Andrii Kalistratenko that appeared in the *Ukrainska Pravda* blog. These pictures were stylised as the chewing gum wrappers *Love is...* In such a way their creators communicate to the readers the main purposes of the new language law in a short playful informative way (see Image 3 above). The emphasis was also on numbers, therefore each of the posters contains some number as a demonstration of the changes, introduced by the new



language law: 1) the free test for the knowledge of the state language: *Language is... null hryvnas for the language test... your knowledge of the Ukrainian language is invaluable*; 2) Ukrainianisation of the television: *Language is... 90% of the TV broadcast in Ukrainian... count all the words in Russian*; 3) Ukrainianisation of the printed mass-media: *Language is... 100% of the printed mass-media... you could flip through in Ukrainian*; 4) Ukrainianisation of the book production and distribution: *Language is... 50% of the books in the bookstores... "Think" and read*; 5) Ukrainian as language by default for the websites, social networks corporate pages and mobile applications: *Language is... 100% of the websites... in Ukrainian if you want it*; 6) the language of mass public events: *Language is... it is enough wish of the one participant... to speak in Ukrainian*; 7) fee for the law violation for companies and corporations: *Language is... 11900 hryvnas of the fine... if you say so one more time* (Romaniuk, 2019).

It should be noted that this type of stylisation was already applied in the Ukrainian context during the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014. The activists of the Civic Sector of the Euromaidan made the series of the posters *Euromaidan is...* to explain the principal values of the Maidan protesters. Those posters were bilingual – Ukrainian and English, therefore, its function was to attract attention not only of the Ukrainian citizens, but also of the Western journalists. In the case of the language law, the posters were monolingual, written in Ukrainian, because the primary purpose of these posters was to appeal to new supporters of the new language legislation. Hence, the Ukrainian word for *language* was transcribed with Latin script – *Mova is...* In both cases, the reference to famous *Love is...* wrappers created the atmosphere of friendliness and positive changes (see Image 4).



Image 4: The posters on promotion of the new language law

Source: Romaniuk (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: (Left) *Language is... 100% of the websites... in Ukrainian if you want it*; (Right) *Language is...90% of the TV broadcast in Ukrainian... count all the words in Russian*



As you could see from the previous examples, the visualisation in the language-related blogs mostly combine graphic and verbal elements. Some of them were created as memes, with the use of the references to the classic Ukrainian culture (see Image 5 below). For instance, in the blog on the website *Osvitoria*, which spotlights the issues on education, Olena Jurchenko explains how the new language law will influence the sphere of education. As the illustration to her blog, she provides a collage, created by Olena Pavlova. In the collage, two Ukrainian classic writers, Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko, whose texts are an essential part of the literature course in Ukrainian high schools, are depicted. With the famous quotations from their poetries, the writers are commenting on the new language law: *Shevchenko: Well, what would seem words... Franko: Pound this rock!* The collage also involves other traditional Ukrainian symbols, such as church and *vyshyvanka* – traditional embroidered cloth.

Another example is a cover – created by Julija Derkach, which was used in the blog post, written by Maksym Samojdiuk. The cover is a collage, which consisted of disparate images – 1) real photo of the language activists with the placard *Language is a weapon*, 2) silhouettes of Cossacks, reading books, and 3) the alphabetic character *І* in a magnifying glass with the background of the *Enejida* poem (1798) by Ivan Kotliarevskyi – the notable text that is supposed to be the origin of the new literary Ukrainian language. In such a manner, the authors combined modern (meme, collage) and traditional (classic literature and national clothes) elements. To some extent, this could be referred to the new language law that protects “traditional” values, such as the national language, in a modern form (creating language management institutions, providing new law mechanisms and norms).



Image 5: The use of collages and memes in language-related blogs

Source: Jurchenko (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: Shevchenko: Well, what would seem words...

Franko: Pound this rock!

Source: Samojdiuk (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: Language is a weapon



On the other hand, many visualisations in the language-related blogs consist mostly of the infographics – verbal texts, accompanied by icons (see Image 6 below). For instance, Kateryna Kunycka illustrated her blog, devoted to the changes in the language of the mass-media, with infographics, which informed the readers about language innovations in this sphere in a precise way. With the help of infographics, she provides information on how different political parties voted for the new language law, how the principles of the language use would be changed in the online public space, and in the diverse types of mass-media (Kunycka, 2019). The journalist Liudmyla Zablada applies a similar strategy. She uses several infographics in her blog, explaining in what spheres of public life the new language law will be implemented, among them are *theatre, films, TV, Internet, printed mass-media, education, medicine, public space, state and municipal sectors, transport, food establishments, and labeling of goods and services* (Zablada, 2019). Moreover, with the help of infographic she tries to obliterate the fakes about the new language law, spread in social media, such as: *Language inspectors will seize you on the street; You will be fined for communication in another language; Tomorrow you will have test on Ukrainian, otherwise you will not find a job; It will be no magazines in other languages in bookstores; Children will not have possibilities to learn other languages in schools; It will be not possible to speak to police in other language* (Zablada, 2019).

**Що зміниться у
ЗМІ?**



Друковані ЗМІ

можуть виходити і іноземною
мовою, **але за умови друку**
тиражу українською мовою

25.04.2019



Телебачення та радіо

з 7:00 до 18:00 і з 18:00 по
22:00 давати **90%** продукту
українською

Image 6: The use of infographics in the language-related blogs

Source: Kunycka (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: (Left) What will be changed in mass-media? Printed mass-media may be published also in a foreign language, but provided that the circulation is printed in Ukrainian. (Right) Television and radio should from 7:00 till 18:00 and from 18:00 till 22:00 should broadcast 90% of the product in Ukrainian.



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The researchers underline the network nature of blogs: “blogs interact with each other continuously, linking back and forth, disseminating interesting stories, arguments and points of view” (Farrell & Drezner 2008, p. 17). Thus, hyperlinks in language-related blogs give the readers information about similar publications and assist them in developing deeper knowledge about language issues in the country. For example, *Radio Svoboda’s* website pays especial attention to the publications concerning language policies and language situation in Ukraine. Several bloggers publish their posts regularly on this website, describing how language regulations are changing in Ukraine, what are the effects and outcomes of such adjustments, how various political actors react to this process, and, finally, how the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict impacts the language situation. Among these bloggers, famous Ukrainian writers, such as Andriy Liubka, sociolinguists, for instance, Larysa Masenko, and language policies’ experts, for example Taras Marusyk. Thus, each blog includes links to the previous blogs of the same author and to the language-related blogs of the other authors.

In contemporary online-media, video also is a powerful instrument of multimodality; language-related blogs are not an exception in this regard. The video included in the blogs could be divided into several categories: 1) educational video with the main principles of the new language law (*Maximum FM*, 2019), 2) video about the voting for the law in the Parliament (*Priamyj*, 2019; Solonyna, 2019), 3) video about citizens opinions on the law (Procenko, 2019); 4) video of the action in support of the new language law (*Apostrof*, 2019; Bega, 2019; *Texty*, 2019; Solonyna, 2019); 5) interviews about the law (Hromenko, 2019; *Ukrajinske radio* 2019); 6) politicians’ comments on the new law (Solonyna, 2019); 7) video of the Ukrainian intelligentsia supporting the new language law (*Maximum FM*, 2019). In this article, I would like to focus particularly on the last type of video, since it includes numerous conceptualisations of the state language and language law. In the context of present-day Ukraine, Nedashkivska analysed the set of videos concerning campaign *Ukraine is United* in 2014. In particular, she highlighted the concepts of multilingualism in the country, and points out:

It would be revealing to explore further the processes of language practices, as well as the narratives about languages and their legitimization in Ukraine, and how the specific language practices and narratives continue to participate in the legitimization of relations among and between the distinct language and ethnic players. (Nedashkivska 2015, p. 23)

In the video, included in the language-related blog on *Maximum FM* websiteⁱⁱⁱ, 23 participants underline the importance of the adoption of the law on the state language and appeal to the national deputies with a request to endorse it. The video was uploaded to *YouTube* on April 23, when the draft law was on the Parliament’s agenda. It was also the peak of the presidential race, on April 21, in the second round of the presidential elections Volodymyr Zelenskyi won with the overwhelming majority of the votes (73% of the voters) and was awaiting to become a newly-elected President of Ukraine. However, representatives of the cultural elites mostly supported his opponent Petro Poroshenko, despite his defeat in the elections and appeal to the national deputies to still vote for the law on the state language.

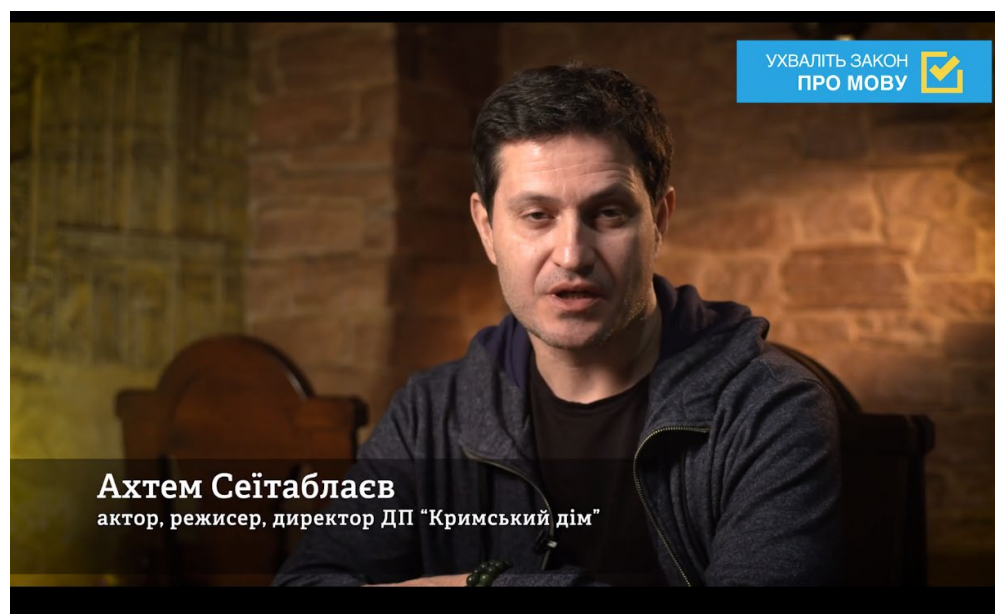


Image 7: Video frame in the support of the law on state language adoption.

Source: Maximum FM (2019)

Text in Ukrainian: (Upper Right) Adopt the law on the state language; (Lower) Akhtem Sejitablajev, actor, film director, director of "Crimean House"

It is important to note that in the video we could observe different social actors: politicians, publishers, journalists, lawyers, historians, religious leaders, musicians, singers, film directors, writers, ministers, veterans of ATO (anti-terrorist operation in Donbas), theatre actors, and volunteers. Following Nedashkivska (2015), I analyse several extracts, which portray metaphors and conceptualisations of the state language and the language law (see Table 4).

No.	Social Actor	Conceptualisations
1.	Ivan Malkovych, publisher	<i>There are pages that are troublesome to turn. Such is the law on the state language...</i>
2	Volodymyr Vasylenko, professor of law, the head of working team that drafted the language law	<i>It is an extraordinary law, a fundamental law of the constitutional level...</i>
3	Natalia Sumska, actress, TV presenter	<i>Ukraine is in the world and is grounded on its centuries-old history precisely because the native Ukrainian language is alive...</i>



4.	Viacheslav Kyrylenko, politician	<i>This is the law on the national security of Ukraine, this is the law on the liberation of Ukraine, on the liberation from colonization of each of us...</i>
5.	Volodymyr Viatorovych, historian	<i>Ukraine is the only state on the globe that is obliged to protect Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian language.</i>
6.	Lesia Telniuk, composer, musician	<i>And remember that for centuries, every Ukrainian who loves this land has been expecting for this law. In your hands now there is an extremely important decision.</i>
7.	Serhij Fomenko, musician, composer, poet	<i>...A wise state step...</i>
8.	Ihor Hordiichuk, veteran of ATO	<i>...This is also our frontier...</i>
9.	Jana Zinkevych, volunteer	<i>... Balance for support and popularization of the Ukrainian language...</i>
10.	Valerii Ananiev, veteran of ATO	<i>The law on the state language is the issue of national security...</i>
11.	Akhtem Seitablaiev, actor, film director	<i>I am Crimean Tatar. And for me the language issue is extremely significant. Because language identifies you, it protects you, it speaks about your culture, traditions, what you believe in, what you hope for. If the state language is protected, everyone's native language will also be protected.</i>
12.	Taras Kompanichenko, musician, composer	<i>...A crucial and important for Ukraine decision...</i>
13.	Ievhen Nyshchuk, ex-minister of culture	<i>...A factor that leads us towards our way, our way of the statehood and historical justice.</i>

Table 4: Conceptualisations of the new language law by diverse social actors

From these extracts, it is clear that since 2014 the language model of future Ukraine has been changed, in particular, in the lens of intelligentsia and cultural elites. Unlike the multilingual set of videos, created for *Ukraine Is United* campaign (Nedashkivska, 2015), this video is monolingual, performed only in Ukrainian. Thus, the main vision of this video is that Ukraine should be united around the concept of the state Ukrainian language, at the same time, by providing cultural rights to national minorities (11). Adopting the law on the state language is considered as an issue of national security (4, 10), state obligation (2, 5), important state step (7), wise decision (6, 12), a historical chance to correct historical injustice (3, 6, 13). Including this video into the blog, no doubt, broadens the spectrum of the social actors, voiced on the language issues.



Language Conceptualisations in Language-Related Blogs

Furthermore, Nedashkivska defines several linguistic ideological tendencies, based on analysis of the social media in Ukraine (see Nedashkivska in this volume). In addition, Kusse (2020) analysed patterns of argumentations in language debates. He has defined three main types of the arguments: 1) extrinsic type, stressing the functionality and quality of the language; 2) intrinsic type, underlying aesthetic and cognitive features of the language, and 3) arguments, related to identity issues. The blogs I examined in this article, mostly are informative by nature, since its main function was to inform the readers about the new language law. Nevertheless, they also include argumentative patterns. Therefore, on the material of this research, I define four main conceptualisations of language, revealed in the language-related blogs: *language unites*, *language as an element of identity*, *language needs support*, *language is a weapon* (see for details Table 5). The most widespread conceptualisations are *language unites* and *language as an element of identity*. Moreover, these conceptualisations are sometimes overlapping, since growing national identity supposed to assist the people consolidation (see, for instance, examples 3, 10–12 in Table 5). Kusse (2020) also underlined the intersecting nature of these conceptualisations: "...the argument for identity is intertwined with the extrinsic argument for unity" (137). Furthermore, Kusse (2020) pointed out the popularity of the conceptualisation *language unites* and defined it as an extrinsic type of the argument in the language debates.

On the material of language-related blogs, we could also see that this argument is used as counterargument to the thesis that language issues are divisive, as journalist Vitaly Portnikov applied (see example 6 in Table 2). Concerning conceptualising *language as an element of identity* Kusse (2020) argued that it has deep tradition in Ukrainian poetry and tradition of language praising, as well as widely spread now in Internet. He pointed out:

This leads to the third type of argument, which is related to *identity* (from individual to national or ethnic). In this line of praise, language is constructed as an essential part of identity. What nation is and how people think and feel is expressed through their language. The language should resemble the soul of the people. (Kusse, 2020, p. 130)

It is not a surprise that writer Jurii Vynnychuk continues this tradition of language praising and uses this argument in his blog on language issues (see example 13 in Table 5).

The arguments *language is a weapon* and *language needs support* are less spread in the analysed language-related blogs. Kusse (2020) referred to the conceptualisation *language is a weapon* in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Moreover, on the material of mass-media texts, published in 2017, we revealed the popularity of military metaphor in language-related blogs of that period (Kiss, 2020). However, in 2019 this metaphor was less spread and appears only in the context of politicians' speech or protest movements (see examples 16 and 17 in Table 5, see also Nedashkivska in this volume).



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Language conceptualisation	Context (translation into English from the original Ukrainian or Russian)	Source
Language unites	(1) "I see in this law uniting power between persons that speak other languages – minority languages, and Ukrainian language can unite them ", – says Olga, another participation of the action.	https://hromadske.ua/posts/bilya-radi-lyudi-vijshli-na-akciyu-vimagayut-uhvalennya-zakonu-pro-movu
	(2) And the main thing that should be repeated – the state does not intervene in the sphere of private life, creating instead of this united Ukrainian-speaking space outside the house.	https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2019/04/30/7213925/
	(3) ... I suppose, we use achievements of the USSR, we were such a post-Soviet state, where the stereotype dominated that language issue divides society . Now the Ukrainians became mature, as well as political elites, and attitudes towards the Ukrainian language changed. It is really factor of creating statehood, of uniting Ukraine. Ukrainian language is one of the main elements of uniting and wish of Ukrainian people to protect their statehood.	https://ua.krymr.com/a/movnyi-zakon-i-krymchany/29906356.html
	(4) The Ukrainian language is considered as an instrument of the nation unity that does not include encroachments on the cultural identity of national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine.	https://m.censor.net.ua/ua/blogs/3124113/zakon_pro_movu_chomu_tse_vajливо
	(5) " Language unites , where is language, there is victory", Andriy Parubiy, speaker of Verkhovna Rada said before voting.	https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-47403589
	(6) Journalist and publicist Vitaly Portnikov stated that the Ukrainian language does not divide the people , as some people's deputies claim, but unites them . What cannot be said about the Russian language in Ukraine. Vitaly Portnikov stated this in the Radio Svoboda studio "I want to address politicians who say that	https://bykvu.com/ua/bukvy/115935-ukrainskij-yazyk-pomozhet-vernut-krym-i-donbass-portnikov/



	<i>the Ukrainian language is divisive.</i> Enough teasing! <i>It unites our compatriots...</i> This is the only opportunity to preserve and restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine... "	
<i>Language as an element of identity</i>	(7) If a person does not have a concrete <i>national identity - and the Ukrainian language is one of its elements</i> - then she or he is indifferent to the Ukrainian state.	https://ua.krymr.com/a/movnyi-zakon-i-krymchany/29906356.html
	(8) <i>But without its own language, a nation ceases to exist.</i>	https://rpr.org.ua/new/s/umova-vyzhyvannya-natsijimify-i-nyuansy-schodo-majbutnoho-zakonu-pro-derzhavnu-movu/
	(9) We consider the adoption of the language law as one of the main factors of national security and <i>preservation of Ukrainian identity</i> , especially in the conditions of war with the Russian Federation.	https://nationalcorps.org/naconalnij-korpus-vimaga-uhvalennja-movnogo-zakonu/
	(10) <i>Language is one of the main features of the nation.</i> This is what shapes national culture and distinguishes a nation from many in a globalized world. Therefore, <i>the development of the nation depends on how the state regulates language issues.</i>	https://m.censor.net.ua/ua/blogs/3124113/zakon_pro_movu_chomu_tse_vajливо
	(11) The country does not need a declarative document, although at first glance it is correct. We need an effective mechanism for the systematic implementation of language policy aimed at <i>consolidating the Ukrainian nation on the basis of the state language - the basic feature of identity and a tool for overcoming postcolonial inertia.</i>	https://tyzhden.ua/Politics/230479
	(12) For some reason, everyone has forgotten that <i>language is the main factor in the formation of a nation, it is</i>	http://mnk.org.ua/novini/movnii-zakon-5670-



	<i>language that determines our identity, our mentality and provides the people with a dignified existence. Language is the quintessence of all directions of the country's development and not only forms the nation, but also the state as such.</i>	d-chomu-tse-bilshe-nizh-vazhlivo/
	(13) <i>Language is the most important component of Ukrainian national identity</i> , especially in the context of Ukraine's weighty Russification. Unfortunately, this national identity of many people is still not formed.	https://zbruc.eu/node/89670
<i>Language needs support</i>	(14) <i>The Ukrainian language needs systemic protection, the Ukrainian language needs systemic support.</i> And such protection, such systematic support is offered by the law on the Ukrainian language. And this is exactly the law that must be passed by the current parliament, because <i>Ukraine is the only state on the globe that is obliged to protect Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian language.</i>	http://mnk.org.ua/novi-ni/movnii-zakon-5670-d-chomu-tse-bilshe-nizh-vazhlivo/
	(15) <i>The language now needs real and serious support</i> in order not to die and start developing.	https://tyzhden.ua/Politics/229684
<i>Language is a weapon</i>	(16) However, it must be understood that <i>the war for language is not over</i> . Yes, <i>language is a weapon</i> , especially in Ukraine.	https://tyzhden.ua/Politics/229684
	(17) People were dressed in embroidered shirts and wrapped in Ukrainian flags, many had posters with the words "France - French, Ukraine - Ukrainian", "Vote for the language law", "Only the language law will protect me", " <i>Language is a weapon</i> " etc.	https://thebabel.com.ua/news/26480-rada-uhvalila-noviy-zakon-pro-status-derzhavnoji-movi

Table 5: Conceptualisations of the Ukrainian language in the blogs



CONCLUSIONS

As the analysis of language-related blogs has revealed, the language issue in general and the adoption of the new law on the state language, in particular, has gained attention of the mainstream, regional, and specialised media. Blogs became popular instruments for expressing opinions about the law and language situation in the country for politicians, writers, experts, linguists, and journalists. The present study has defined three thematic trends in language-related blogs: the concept of societal change, refuting the myth about the law on the functions of the state language, and informing about possible financial sanctions for the law violation.

A close examination of the writers as bloggers and opinion-makers exposes that they construct discursive dialogues with the politicians, use the examples of language policies in European countries, contextualise the language issue in the frame of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian military conflict and other topical societal problems. High multimodality of the language-related blogs enables to include even a wider range of social actors—designers, video-producers, language activists, and artists. Blogs as multimodal messages convey information to the audience in a precise, informative, and convincing way.

In the context of contemporary Ukraine, language-related blogs are powerful instruments of language policy development and transformation. Further exploration of the language-related blogs in different periods will enable to trace the dynamics of the development of language policy, discursive positioning of the social actors, and the construction of the argument and multimodality.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ See the list of the popular Ukrainian internet-media here: <https://texty.org.ua/d/2018/media-ranking/list.html>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29921168.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Available also on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYuRHCKf2g4&t=181s>