**Research Study**

# The Instrumentalization of the Language Issue in Ukraine

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**ABSTRACT.** The article focuses on the instrumentalization of the language issue in Ukraine, beginning with a confrontation between the Russophone and Ukrainophone language ideologies used by opposing political parties, and up to the weaponization of language during the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war. The study also analyses the instrumentalization of the language issue in the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas. It is assumed that the concepts of language, nation, and territory are interconnected within identity discourses, and that their interconnections engender different frames that underlie complex ideological and propagandistic argumentation, evoking conflictual discursive practices. The sequential overview of the language and ideological situation in Ukraine is illustrated by typical examples of the instrumentalization of the language issue by political actors, including the media. The analysis considers underlying frames, different intentions of discourse actors and destructive consequences for society. After describing typical cases of the instrumentalization of the language issue in Ukraine, the article focuses on Donbas, the self-proclaimed republic from 2014–2020. The delineation of the special language and identity situation in Donbas is followed by an overview of the instrumentalization of the language issue in this region. The article concludes by outlining five main tendencies regarding the instrumentalization of the language issue in Ukraine.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article s'intéresse à l'instrumentalisation des questions linguistiques en Ukraine, particulièrement dans la république autoproclamée de Donbas de 2014 à 2020. Cet article définit le contexte sous-jacent en commençant par une confrontation entre les idéologies linguistiques russophones et ukrainophones utilisées par les partis politiques opposés, puis par l'utilisation de la langue comme arme pendant la guerre hybride russo-ukrainienne. Un aperçu de la situation linguistique et identifique à Donbas est suivi d'une discussion de l'instrumentalisation des questions linguistiques dans la région élargie. J'argumente que les concepts de langue, de nation et de territoire sont interconnectés aux discours identitaires, et que ces interconnections produisent différents cadres qui sous-tendent une argumentation idéologique et propagandiste complexe, évoquant des pratiques discursives conflictuelles. L'analyse considère les cadres et les intentions sous-jacentes des acteurs du discours, ainsi que les conséquences destructrices pour la société. Cet article conclut par la présentation de cinq tendances maîtresses quant à l'instrumentalisation des questions linguistiques en Ukraine.

**Keywords:** *instrumentalization of the language issue, language conflict, Ukraine, Donbas.*

## THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE LANGUAGE ISSUE IN UKRAINE

The concept of language instrumentalization is based on an old and already trivial idea that language (along with religion, culture, and ethnicity) plays a crucial role in national and state-building processes (Humboldt, 1999). This interrelationship is described in detail in the humanities, using many historical and contemporary cases as examples (e.g., Fishman, 1999; Gorham, 2014; Wright, 2016). In particular, at the end of the 20th century, in Central and Eastern Europe, there was a clear correlation between geopolitical changes and alterations in the status of languages. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of former republics into independent states was also accompanied by the transformation of the republics' national languages into state languages (Wright, 2000). Language was so deeply integrated into state-building processes that it shifted from a linguistic category into "an ideological object used in the construction and reconstruction of national identity" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2014, p. 8) of the new post-Soviet states.

Another example is the Balkan region. Ten years of Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) led to the break-up of the Yugoslavian state. The new republics were declared and proclaimed their formerly-considered "dialects'' of the Serbo–Croatian language as their primary state languages. Even though there is still a linguistic debate about the issue, today we consider Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and even a small language, Bunjevac, separate languages with official state status in the newly independent countries (Greenberg, 2008).

One of the most recent examples from western Europe is Catalonia. Over the last ten years, Catalonia has taken systematic political steps to separate from Spain, including informal referendums on independence in 2009–2010, an official referendum in 2017, and unsuccessful declarations of sovereignty (2013) and independence (2017). Atienza-Barthelemy et al. (2019) showed a clear interrelationship between political opinion on Catalonian independence and the language used in public communication. The researchers found that Twitter users with a clear anti-independence opinion tweeted almost exclusively Spanish, while users with pro-independence opinions preferably used Catalan (Atienza-Barthelemy et al., 2019). Based on their findings, Atienza-Barthelemy et al. concluded that language was a factor of political polarization. I suggest that within political discourse, the reasoning behind opinions on Catalonian independence follows two argumentative models: 1) If people consider Catalan merely a dialect of the Spanish language, they can justify an anti-separatist argumentation, and, conversely, 2) if people consider Catalan a separate language, they can justify the existence of a separate Catalan nation and, thus, the independence movement. Both models use language as an argument.

The Catalan case clearly shows that language issues correlate with political processes within a state and serve as a means for nation- and state–building processes. Moreover, linguists claim language is often used for political gain and ideological conflict, which has been coined the *weaponization of language*. For example, Ryazanova-Clarke (2017) noted that the Russian

language was initially attributed as a unifying instrument within the Eurasian space. Later, the Russian language became a weaponization mechanism of the legislation of Russia's transnational hegemony ambitions, which was particularly evident in Russian warmongering in eastern Ukraine (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017).

This article addresses the instrumentalization of language issues in Ukraine since 2004. The goal is to demonstrate how language was used by opposing political parties and how their political confrontation translated into a clash between the two main language ideologies: Ukrainophone and Russophone. The focus of the analysis is bidirectional. On the one hand, it evaluates a discourse surrounding the complicated language issues that exist in Ukraine, namely a group of relevant and representative statements that reflect a political discussion on the language issue in Ukraine. Also, it considers the instrumentalization of language at a supreme level, namely as a phenomenon of discursive practice that not only displays political discussions but also builds upon public awareness and social reality.

In Michel Foucault's (1972) discourse theory, discursive practice is a "body of anonymous, historical rules" (p. 117) that "determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc." (p. 46). In other words, discursive practices define the conditions of public communication, impose frameworks, and set rules that determine the development of discourses at a given historical period for a given society. From this perspective, I am interested in how language, nation, and territory have been interconnected in discursive practice in Ukraine, and what frames have been activated in the opposing political forces' arguments.

I describe the linguistic situation in Ukraine by providing specific examples from the discourse that illustrate the dynamics of language conflict and the dynamics of language's instrumentalization, including its weaponization, during the hybrid Russian–Ukrainian war. The purpose of this article is not to explore the entire complex discourse on the language and political situation in Ukraine, but to highlight typical examples of the instrumentalization of language issue and the related dynamics of the conflict between Russophone and Ukrainophone ideologies. I focus specifically on the language situation and instrumentalization of the language issue in Donbas. I assume that the instrumentalization of the language issue is related not only to nation- and state-building goals, but also to other goals that go beyond identity issues.

## THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF LANGUAGE: ARGUMENTATION SCHEMES IN DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

Identity discourses can be considered within the *romantic language model,* which postulates the interrelation of language, nation, and state territory (Kuße, this issue). These three main components—language, nation, and territory—are linked together in a single triangle; they

presuppose each other, mutually validate and strengthen each other, and argue for each other. This means that during syllogistic reasoning in discursive practices, one component's existence can be deduced as self-evident from two other components. Using the classical terminology of Toulmin's (1993) argumentation theory, it is possible to formulate the following universal frame-building syllogisms (FBS henceforth), which can be implicitly or explicitly activated in discourses regarding different national identity issues:

> FBS 1: If we have a particular language (Data), we therefore have a particular nation (Conclusion 1), and we are entitled to state sovereignty (Conclusion 2);
>
> FBS 2: If we have a particular nation (Data), we therefore need to have a particular language (Conclusion 1), and we need to be entitled to state sovereignty (Conclusion 2);
>
> FBS 3: If we have state sovereignty (Data), then we need to identify ourselves as a particular nation (Conclusion 1), and need to have a particular language (Conclusion 2). Within these discursive practices, the arguments are even more convincing, where the third component is derived from the two:
>
> FBS 4: If we have a particular language (Data 1), and identify ourselves as a special nation (Data 2), then we are entitled to state sovereignty (Conclusion);
>
> FBS 5: If we identify ourselves as a special nation (Data 1), and we have state sovereignty (Data 2), then we need to have a particular language (Conclusion);
>
> FBS 6: If we have state sovereignty (Data 1), and have a particular language (Data 2), then we need to identify ourselves as a particular nation (Conclusion).

In line with the romantic language model highlights mentioned above, all six syllogisms display: a) that the language, nation, and territory are interdependent, convergent arguments, and b) have the unity of language, nation, and territory as an end-goal. In political, and especially propagandistic discourses, such frames are only the starting point for building further complex ideological or propagandistic argumentation. For example, the conclusion above, "we are entitled to state sovereignty" (FBS 4) turns into a second-order argument that justifies a separatist movement and even a violent militaristic struggle for territorial self-determination. In this case, the language and nation become instrumentalized in the course of hostilities. The conclusion "we need to have a particular language" (FBS 5) turns into an argument in favour of carrying out a particular language policy (also violent)—that is, language planning. In this scenario, the nation and state become instrumentalized in the course of language planning. The conclusion "we need to identify ourselves as a particular nation" (FBS 6) can justify and legitimize right-wing radical ideological movements, while the territory and language are instrumentalized during the ideological struggle. All of this demonstrates the conflict potential

within ideologies based on the unity of language, nation, and territory; that conflict potential has been exemplified by many cases both historically and in today's world.

Undoubtedly, language's instrumentalization is not limited to areas of national identity and state-building processes. In a globalized world, language has become an economic resource, which means that a specific market value can be attributed to it. In particular, global macro-languages such as English, French, Chinese, or Russian are essential economic tools, thus defined by their "commodification" (Cameron, 2012; Heller, 2010; Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017). Languages can also be instrumentalized within religious discourses and attributed as sacral (Kuße, this issue). The instrumentalization of language within political discourses represents a fascinating phenomenon: Language issues become a tool for political struggle, and the explicit instrumentalization of language for nation and state-building purposes often hides the relatively trivial aims of political actors, such as raising their political image and attracting voters. Notably, irrational manipulation of the language issue can be destructive to society, leading to its ideological polarisation and the symbolic delimitation of state territory. In the next section, the problem of the instrumentalization of the language issue is discussed using the case of Ukraine.

## THE LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGICAL SITUATION IN UKRAINE

### Conflicting potentials of Ukrainophone and Russophone ideologies

As a result of the suppressive imperial language policy towards Ukraine, both during the Russian Empire and then in the Soviet Union, Ukraine has entered its newest independent history with a complicated language situation. In addition to the stereotypical (but statistically fixed) dominance of two languages—the farther to the west, the more Ukrainian is used, the farther to the east, the more Russian is used (Masenko, 2009)—the Ukrainian language situation over the last 30 years has had different characteristics. These characteristics are: different forms of functional diglossia and individual bilingualism (Bilaniuk, 2009); different language landscapes in urban and rural areas (Bilaniuk, 2009; Masenko, 2009); the existence of mixed language forms of Surzhyk throughout Ukraine, which have apparent regional differences (Gaudio, 2010; Gaudio & Tarasenko, 2009); and unique small languages and dialects, which are particularly rich in western Ukraine (Dickinson, 2010).

The multiple language varieties used in Ukraine overlap with different state language policies and language ideologies, which are transferred by political and societal actors. This results in a multiplicity of language beliefs and attitudes toward the languages in Ukraine (Nedashkivska, 2020). In the following, I focus on just two diametrically opposing language ideologies that have provoked linguistic conflict in Ukraine: the Ukrainophone ideology and the Russophone ideology.

Kulyk (2014) explained in detail the difference between the Ukrainophone and Russophone ideologies. Supporters of the Ukrainophone ideology, taking into account the "one language, one nation" idea, defend Ukrainian speakers' interests and consider Ukrainian a titular language and single state language (Kulyk, 2014). In contrast, the Russian language is viewed as a minority language, as the language of a neighbour state, and the language of the former empire (Kulyk, 2014). Kulyk (2014) also explained that:

> The obvious deviation from the nation-state norm in post-Soviet Ukraine, namely, the use of Russian in many domains where the titular language is exclusively used in most nation-states, was perceived to result from the tsarist and Soviet policies of Russification and, therefore, had to be remained by a determined effort of the Ukrainian state. (pp. 124-125)

The Russophone ideology is based on the fact that the Russian language is a language of (more than) half Ukraine's population and a language that all Ukrainians know well and prefer to use in everyday communication, even when they value Ukrainian more (Kulyk, 2014). Supporters of the Russophone ideology consider neither the maintenance of national identity nor the rehabilitation of historical truth. For them, the most important arguments are freedom of individual language choice, equal treatment for the two halves of the population, and the comparatively broader functionality of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space (Kulyk, 2014). Therefore, in Russophone discourse, Russian is constructed as a language of inter-group communication and even as a window on the world (Kulyk, 2014).

Different political actors have instrumentalized these two mostly widespread ideologies for their electoral purposes. Speaking about Ukraine's recent history after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the language issue has been used by all political actors in Ukraine since the beginning of independence. The entire language situation in Ukraine cannot be simplified as bijective opposition (north-western regions of Ukraine are Ukrainian speaking and south-eastern regions of Ukraine are Russian speaking); however, this simplification underlays the propaganda on various sides of political discourse. Within the political propaganda, many political and social conflicts have been attributed to the imagined language conflict. Thus, these two opposing language ideologies inspired the two opposing political camps that fought in the 2004 and 2010 elections.

The Party *Nasha Ukraina* [Our Ukraine] and its satellites—the parties of the Orange Revolution represented by President Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010)—won the primary electorate in Western and Central Ukraine. They generally relied on Ukrainian ideology and advocated enhancing the Ukrainian language in all country communication areas. In 2010, the Decree of the President of Ukraine, *Pro Kontseptsiiu derzhavnoi movnoi polityky* [On the Concept of the state language policy], was signed by Viktor Yushchenko. It formulated the principles of the state language policy based solely on the Ukrainophone ideology:

Незважаючи на задекларованість державного статусу української мови, аналіз мовної ситуації в державі свідчить про наявність політичних спекуляцій щодо її використання, що суперечить інтересам національної безпеки України, ставить під загрозу її суверенітет. Для усунення такої загрози необхідно розширити сферу застосування української мови, стимулювати формування і захист національного мовно-культурного та мовно-інформаційного простору. (...) Незалежна Україна успадкувала деформовану мовну ситуацію, що склалася внаслідок асиміляції українців. У минулому під гаслами боротьби з 'малоросійським сепаратизмом' та 'українським буржуазним націоналізмом' знищувалася мовно-культурна ідентичність українців. Їх природне бажання зберегти українську мову розглядалося як прояв прагнення до державної незалежності. (...) Пріоритетом державної мовної політики має бути утвердження і розвиток української мови — визначального чинника і головної ознаки ідентичності української нації, яка історично проживає на території України, становить абсолютну більшість її населення, дала офіційну назву державі та є базовим системоутворюючим складником української державності й Українського народу — громадян України всіх національностей.

[Despite the declaration of the state status of the Ukrainian language, analysis of the language situation in the state shows that there is political speculation about its use, contradicting the interests of national security of Ukraine and threatening its sovereignty. In order to eliminate this threat, it is necessary to expand the scope of the Ukrainian language and encourage the development and protection of the national linguistic cultural and informational space. (...) The independent Ukraine has inherited a distorted language situation resulting from the assimilation of the Ukrainians. In the past, under the slogans of fighting 'Malorussian separatism' and 'Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism', the linguistic and cultural identity of the Ukrainians was being destroyed. Their natural desire to preserve the Ukrainian language was seen as an expression of their desire for state independence. (...) The priority of the state language policy should be the establishment and development of the Ukrainian language—the determining factor and the main sign of identity of the Ukrainian nation, which historically resides on the territory of Ukraine, constitutes the absolute majority of its population, gave the official name to the state and is the basic system-forming component of the Ukrainian statehood and the Ukrainian people—citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities.] (*Pro Kontseptsiiu*, 2010, para. 5-16).

Two key frames are implicated in this quote. First, it is argued that speculations around the state language endanger state sovereignty, while the desire to protect the Ukrainian language is interpreted as a desire to protect state sovereignty. These statements are based on the frame that the language presupposes state sovereignty. Secondly, it is stated that the Ukrainian language is a determining factor and the main feature of the Ukrainian nation, while the destruction of the Ukrainian language means the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. This statement is based on the frame that the language presupposes the nation. These statements illustrate the universal FBS 1: The Ukrainian language presupposes the Ukrainian nation's

existence and an independent Ukrainian state. From the arguments of discursive practices based on Ukrainian ideology, of which the above quotation is an example, an explicit prescription is immediately derived: "If we want to save the nation and state sovereignty, we must save the language". That is why this decree On the Concept of the State Language Policy prescribes the Ukrainian language's obligatory functioning in all spheres of public life, on the whole, state territory, and by all Ukraine citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin. Within the Ukrainophone ideology, the Ukrainian language is represented as an instrument of protection and preservation of the Ukrainian nation and the Ukrainian state.

Conversely, the *Partiia Rehioniv* [Party of Regions] and its satellites—represented by President Viktor Yanukovych (2010–2014)—rejected the state and national building role of the Ukrainian language, lobbying for equal official status of the Ukrainian and Russian languages. The party won primary electoral support in the south-east of the country, where the Russian-speaking population prevailed. As part of their political campaigning, they interpreted the Ukrainian ideology as a violation of the human right to speak one's native language. They even appealed to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which advocates the human right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life (European Charter, 1992). They marginalized the Ukrainian ideology as irrational and nationalistic and potentially conflicting in a bilingual country. For example, a member of the Party of Regions, Vadym Kolesnichenko, who became one of the initiators of the new language law in 2012 (see below), condemned his political opponents in his blog, accusing them of "dividing the country and zombifying the society" (Kolesnichenko, 2012, para. 8) and of using the language issue to fight dishonestly for power. He called their language ideology "latent xenophobia" and even compared them to dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Gaddafi:

> Подтверждением и продолжением такой бесчестной борьбы за власть с использованием 'мовного' вопроса является современная политика оппозиции (...) 'на щит' этой политики выносится латентная ксенофобия по отношению к венгерскому, румынскому, русскому, гагаузскому, болгарскому, — в общем к 18-ти языкам (...) Борьба за власть для таких политиков — превыше всего, и свои личные эгоистические политические убеждения для них давно уже заменили знания объективной реальности. Они считают, что для достижения 'благих' с их точки зрения! целей подходят любые методы. При этом никто не обращает никакого внимания на такие с их точки зрения 'мелочи' как общественное мнение, моральные ценности, профессиональную этику или принципы и правила демократии. Так же когда-то считали и Гитлер, Муссолини, Каддафи — люди, оставившие глубокий, но очень печальный след, преисполненный человеческим горем, в мировой истории.
>
> [The confirmation and continuation of such a dishonest fight for power using a 'language' question is the current policy of the opposition…. The latent xenophobia towards Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Gagauz, Bulgarian—in general, towards 18 languages— is being brought 'to the shield' of this policy.... For such politicians, the fight for power is

above all, and their personal egoistic political beliefs have long replaced the knowledge of objective reality. They believe that any method is suitable for achieving the 'good' (from their point of view!) intentions. At the same time, nobody pays any attention to such 'little things' from their point of view as public opinion, moral values, professional ethics or the principles and rules of democracy. Hitler, Mussolini, and Gaddafi once thought the same thing—the people who left a deep but very sad trace in world history overfilled with human grief.] (Kolesnichenko, 2012, para. 6–71)

This single quote (in Russian) already shows how the language issue's discussion is turned into an advocacy battle for political awards. The language issue becomes a tool to humiliate political opponents and to win the electorate.

In addition to the imagined language conflict in Ukraine forced by two oppositional political camps' propagandistic struggle, there are indeed different attitudes toward the Russian and Ukrainian languages. Mass representative surveys evidence these differences. In particular, Kulyk (2017) analyzed three surveys conducted in December 2006, February 2012 and September 2014 in four macro-regions of Ukraine, western, central, south-eastern Ukraine, and Donbas (which, by September 2014, had already become a warzone). He mentioned that the results of the surveys (Figure 1) "vividly demonstrate a large discrepancy between the ethnic and linguistic dimensions of identity on the one hand, and between language identity and language practice on the other" (pp. 317–319) in different macro-regions of Ukraine.

| | | Nationality | | | Native language | | | Everyday language | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2006 | 2012 | 2014 | 2006 | 2012 | 2014 | 2006 | 2012 | 2014 |
| Ukraine | Ukrainian | 80.4 | 79.0 | 79.6 | 57.1 | 54.9 | 55.7 | 37.2 | 42.7 | 42.0 |
| | both | 0.7 | 4.4 | 8.3 | 11.7 | 16.9 | 18.7 | 24.8 | 21.5 | 17.9 |
| | Russian | 16.9 | 14.5 | 10.4 | 30.0 | 27.6 | 25.1 | 37.3 | 35.2 | 39.8 |
| West | Ukrainian | 94.4 | 94.7 | 97.4 | 91.6 | 94.0 | 94.3 | 87.5 | 88.4 | 89.9 |
| | both | 0.4 | 1.5 | 1.0 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 4.1 | 6.6 | 6.3 | 4.8 |
| | Russian | 2.4 | 2.8 | 1.2 | 2.7 | 3.3 | 1.4 | 2.7 | 4.8 | 5.2 |
| Center | Ukrainian | 93.4 | 90.8 | 95.0 | 73.6 | 76.6 | 78.8 | 45.1 | 61.3 | 57.9 |
| | both | 0.5 | 2.3 | 1.4 | 11.9 | 13.7 | 12.4 | 33.8 | 24.1 | 21.4 |
| | Russian | 5.4 | 5.5 | 3.2 | 14.0 | 9.1 | 8.6 | 20.7 | 14.3 | 20.6 |
| East/South | Ukrainian | 71.7 | 69.8 | 72.5 | 40.8 | 27.3 | 31.0 | 14.5 | 11.5 | 12.4 |
| | both | 0.9 | 6.2 | 11.8 | 16.7 | 29.3 | 25.7 | 31.3 | 32.7 | 22.4 |
| | Russian | 24.5 | 21.6 | 12.3 | 41.4 | 43.0 | 42.4 | 54.3 | 55.4 | 64.5 |
| Donbas | Ukrainian | 52.5 | 51.4 | 38.0 | 10.9 | 10.1 | 2.7 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 0.6 |
| | both | 0.9 | 9.2 | 25.6 | 13.7 | 19.6 | 38.1 | 16.5 | 15.2 | 19.2 |
| | Russian | 44.2 | 34.9 | 33.7 | 75.0 | 69.3 | 58.6 | 82.4 | 80.7 | 80.1 |

**Figure 1**: Nationality, native language, and the main language of everyday use.
*Source:* As reported in the 2006, 2012, and 2014 surveys (Kulyk, 2017, p. 318)

As is evident in the figure above, the most significant discrepancy between national identification, native language identification, and a language of everyday use was in Donbas. In 2006, 52.5% of Donbas' inhabitants identified themselves as Ukrainians. However, only 10.9% of them identified Ukrainian as their native language, while just 1% said Ukrainian was their only language in daily use. In 2012, the dynamics had not changed significantly: 51.4% of Donbas inhabitants identified themselves as Ukrainian, 10.1% of respondents called Ukrainian their native language, and 2.2% used it in everyday communication. Kulyk (2010), in reference to Donbas, pointed out the "considerable mismatch between language beliefs and practices" (p. 1). In addition, he explained that "people do not always prefer to speak those varieties which they value and which they would like to see more widely used by other people and supported by the state, in particular (Standard) Ukrainian" (Kulyk, 2010, p. 1). This discrepancy between national identification, native language identification, and the language of everyday use makes society vulnerable to manipulation. This is done by using language issues, which make it possible to disseminate propaganda messages. It can also be a catalyst for the spread of conflict potentials in the public sphere of society.

## The escalation of language conflict

The catalyst for enhancing the language conflict in Ukraine was the language law initiated by members of the Party of Regions, Vadym Kolesnichenko and Serhii Kivalov. The Law on the Principles of the State Language Policy (also known as The Law of Kivalov–Kolesnichenko) was implemented on August 10th, 2012 (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2012). It significantly expanded the use of minority languages in regions where the number of native speakers of these languages reached at least 10% of the total population. Such languages gained the status of regional languages and could be officially used in the regions of their dissemination on an equal footing with the state Ukrainian language in all communication spheres:

> У межах території, на якій поширена регіональна мова або мова меншини, … здійснення заходів щодо розвитку, використання і захисту регіональної мови або мови меншини, передбачених цим Законом, є обов'язковим для місцевих органів державної влади, органів місцевого самоврядування, об'єднань громадян, установ, організацій, підприємств, їх посадових і службових осіб, а також громадян — суб'єктів підприємницької діяльності та фізичних осіб.

> [Within the area where a regional or minority language is widely spoken, ... the implementation of measures for the development, use and protection of a regional or minority language specified in this Law is mandatory for local public authorities, local self-government bodies, civil associations, institutions, organisations, enterprises, their officials and employees, as well as citizens — business entities and entrepreneurs.] (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy., 2012, Sec. 1, Art. 7, para. 7)

Although this law officially applied to the 18 different languages used in Ukraine, it mainly referred to the Russian language and officially made it equal to the Ukrainian language throughout Ukraine, except western Ukraine. The danger of this law was that it ultimately weakened the Ukrainian state language position and overturned the Ukrainophone language policy results after the Orange Revolution. In this context, Hentschel and Brüggemann (2015) compared Ukraine and Belarus's language situation. The current official parity of Russian and Belarusian languages in Belarus has not facilitated overcoming the marginalization that the Belarusian language suffered during the Soviet period. Consequently, Belarus's state language is an "endangered language" (Hentschel & Brüggemann, 2015, p. 116), and what is more, the Ukrainian language may have expected the same fate. Especially among the residents of western, northern, and central Ukraine, for whom national and linguistic identities are more strongly intertwined, memory of the Soviet language policy of so-called harmonious bilingualism that covered "the dominance of the Russian language and the marginalization of languages of non-Russian titular nations in the Soviet republics" (p. 117) had intensified. In discursive practices within the framework of Ukrainian language ideology, the triangle of language–nation– territory and corresponding syllogisms were immediately activated, and the loss of the state Ukrainian language symbolized the loss of the Ukrainian national identity, and thus a threat to the state's existence.

As is usual in intense language conflicts, all ideological, political, and value issues, and even (or instead primarily) economic problems within the state were packaged within the language conflict. Nelde (1987) explains that:

> The height of a political language conflict is reached when all conflict factors are combined in a single symbol, language, and quarrels and struggles in very different areas (politics, economics, administration, education) appear under the heading language conflict. In such cases, politicians and economic leaders also operate on the assumption of language conflict, disregarding the actual underlying causes, and thus continue to feed 'from above' the conflict that has arisen 'from below' with the result that language assumes much more importance than it had at the outset of the conflict. (p. 35)

The symbolic significance of this language conflict was confirmed when, on the very day after the official removal from power of the escaped President Viktor Yanukovych, the Parliament of Ukraine's first action was to cancel the *Kivalov–Kolesnichenko* language law.

## Ukraine's language issue in a hybrid war

In 2014, the ordinary conflict between Ukrainophone and Russophone ideologies, built on the binary opposition of the Ukrainian and Russian languages, entered a new phase. Political confrontation among Ukrainian political elites, under the guise of the language conflict, came to the periphery, while Russia's militaristic confrontation came to the fore. In this confrontation,

the Ukrainian and Russian languages became not just tools, but ideological weapons in a hybrid war: "The battle for the Ukrainian language, traced across centuries of Ukraine's interaction with its more powerful neighbours, has ultimately become a metaphor for the struggle of independent Ukraine itself, locked in a hybrid war with Russia" (Flier & Graziosi, 2017, p. 12). Among other remarks, Ukrainian linguist Pavlo Hrycenko spoke directly about this. He called the *Law of Kivalov–Kolesnichenko* the "Law of three Ks"—the Kremlin, Kivalov, and Kolesnichenko—hinting that it was created on the instruction of the Russian Federation:

> Этот закон правильно было бы называть 'Законом Кремля-Кивалова-Колесниченко', ведь это ни что иное, как лекала и сценарий Кремля. Язык — это одно из главных направлений давно осуществляемой гибридной войны против Украины. (...) Никто не отменял правила: чей язык — того и государство. И если у нас будет господствовать не украинский язык, это будет уже не украинское государство (...) Мы здесь хозяева и именно мы должны строить демократическое, правовое, европейски ориентированную, сильную Украину. На это должно быть направлено и языковое законодательство.
>
> [It would be right to call this law the "Kremlin-Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Law", as it is nothing else but the Kremlin's design and scenario. Language is one of the main fields of the long-running hybrid war against Ukraine.... Nobody cancelled the rule: Who owns the language, that one owns the country. And if our language is not Ukrainian, it will no longer be a Ukrainian state.... We are masters here and it is we who must build a democratic, legal, European-oriented, strong Ukraine. The language legislation should also be aimed at this]. (Romaniuk, 2018, para. 8-10)

This quote is a representative example of discursive practice, where convergent FBS 1 and FBS 5 are merged: On the first step of argumentation, the Ukrainian language is presented as a precondition of the existence of the Ukrainian state (FBS 1), and on the second step, it is prescribed that the state's mission is to strengthen its own national language (FBS 5).

For supporters of Ukrainophone ideology, Russian is no longer just a neighbouring state's language; it became the language of the aggressor (*mova ahresora*). In attitudes towards the Russian language, imperial associations began to dominate. In the Ukrainophone ideology, the Russian language became an ideological weapon with which Russia would revitalize its imperial ambitions and, during a hybrid war, strive to restore its imperial status quo. As a symmetrical response to this threat, within the Ukrainophone ideology and related discursive practices, the attitude towards the Ukrainian language as a weapon against the occupants had been intensified (Kuße, 2019; Nedashkivska, this issue). The Ukrainian language was metaphorically called a "weapon against assailants" or a "factor of national security": "…наймогутніша зброя українців — це їхня мова. Мова — це щит, це той найвищий кордонний мур, якого в сучасному світі не зможе здолати жоден агресор" [the most powerful weapon of Ukrainians is their language.

Language is a shield, it is the highest border wall that no aggressor will be able to overcome in the modern world] (Loi, 2016, para. 28).

In this way, in the discourse of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, language went from an ideological to a geopolitical instrument (Uffelmann, 2016). Uffelmann (2016) demonstrated this theory in his geolinguistic analysis of fictional language maps on Russian and Ukrainian online sources by identifying persuasive techniques like simplification, binarization, and the symbolic separation of a unified territory using artificial boundaries (Uffelmann, 2016).

## THE SPECIFIC LANGUAGE SITUATION IN DONBAS

Despite the increasing conflict dynamics of the language issue described above, including the statistics (Figure 1, above), there have been insignificant changes in national and language identities in 2014 in every macro-regions of Ukraine except the Donbas. In this region, the number of people who identify themselves as Ukrainian has fallen from 51.4% in 2012 to 38.0% in 2014, and the number of respondents with a hybrid Russian-Ukrainian identity has proportionally increased from 9.2% in 2012 to 25.6% in 2014. The same trend of hybridization was observed with regards to claims of native language. The number of respondents who declared Ukrainian as their mother tongue fell from 10.1% in 2012 to 2.7% in 2014. The number of respondents who referred to Russian as their only mother tongue fell from 69.3% in 2012 to 58.6% in 2014. The number of respondents with a hybrid Russian–Ukrainian language identity increased by a remarkable degree of almost 20%—from 19.6% in 2012 to 38.1% in 2014. This language–identity dynamic can be viewed as a consequence of heavy speculation around the language issue in the public sphere, provoked by competing political forces. By evaluating all aspects of language attitudes found in the 2006, 2012, and 2016 surveys, Kulyk (2017) summarised the language situation in Donbas in this way:

> Donbas stands apart with its overwhelming preference for bilingualism or the predominant use of Russian [because] for most of its residents, Russian is not just a communicative tool but also an important element of their identity, so they are ready to accept Ukrainian only to the extent that it does not infringe on the accustomed use of Russian. (p. 335)

### Special, regionally-oriented identity in Donbas

Donbas seems to be the region most vulnerable to manipulation around language issues and that is why it has high conflict potential. I suppose this is due to discrepancies between language and identity and some vagueness in matters of national identity and cultural (in the broadest sense) self-determination. In this context, it is common to talk about Donbas's hybrid identity. Hybrid identity in Donbas can most easily be explained by the fact that Donbas is territorially a zone of a cultural and linguistic intersection. If we refer to the theory of limology, it is either a

mixed or hybrid zone, where at least two different spaces (entities) intersect (Figure 2), or perhaps a special border zone—the "zero space" between two enclosed entities (Figure 3). These two phenomena are clearly visualised by Donec (2014, pp. 25–26):
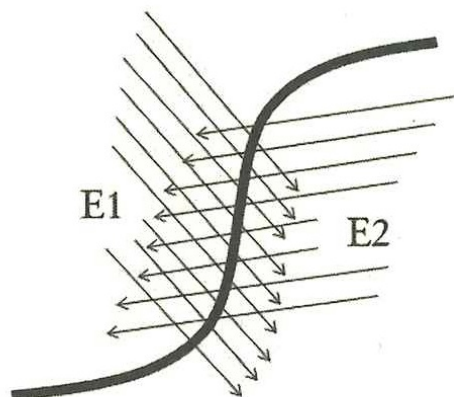


**Image 2:** Mixed or hybrid zone
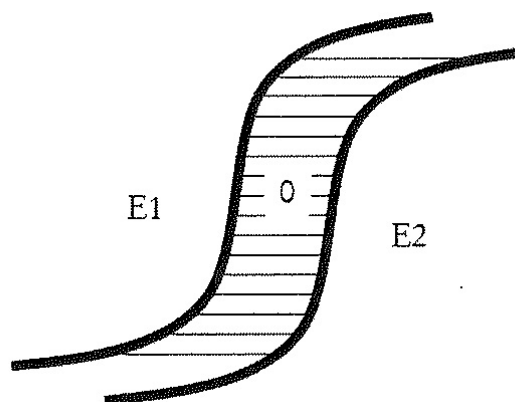*Source:* Adapted from Donec (2014, p. 25)

**Image 3:** Border zone
*Source:* Adapted from Donec (2014, p. 26)

Border zones are interpreted in limology as transition areas—specific corridors where there is a smooth transition from one culture to another and a preservation of certain cultural phenomena of both dominant neighbouring entities. However, border zones always form their own unique archetypes, myths, symbols, values, cultural memory objects, and traditions (Donec, 2014).

Many scholars define Donbas as a cultural borderland where a regional symbolic universe was created and where a special regional identity dominates (Kryvyts'ka, 2018; Kuromiya, 1998; Studenna-Skrukva, 2014). The mythology of Donbas's particularity was originally based on its historical memory as the birthplace of Ukraine's industrialization (Vermenych, 2018). The myth of Donbas as a mining land became "a platform for the future development of not only official but also marginal mythological narratives" (Taranenko, 2005, p. 111). The miners' mythology of Donbas, based on physically demanding and life-threatening work, has given rise to auto-identifying myths about all the residents of Donbas as "people with a special mining character" (Taranenko, 2005, p. 112)—vital, working, strong-willed, with a special sense of honour. Donbas was mythologized as a region that "feeds the whole country" (Taranenko, 2019), which lives by its own laws—"Kiev has no right to dictate to Donetsk people" (Taranenko, 2019), and the capital of Donbas, the city of Donetsk, has a special symbolic status in the country—"Donetsk is not the first city, but not the second" (Taranenko, 2019).

In fact, the visible glorification of labour in Donbas since Soviet times hid "the establishment of an oligarchic government and the development of authoritarian and patronage tendencies in the region's social life" (Vermenych, 2018, p. 293). The political elites of post-Soviet Donbas continued to exploit this hypertrophied regional patriotism and indifferent attitude towards

symbolic national interests (including the issue of the Ukrainian language as the basis of national identity). In pursuit of the voters' sympathy, they emphasized and exaggerated the linguistic, cultural, and historical differences between eastern Ukraine and the rest of Ukraine (especially the west) (Plokhii, 2018). However, most importantly, the pro-Russian-oriented political forces led by the Party of Regions used these differences to foster negative attitudes among their electorate in eastern Ukraine in order to promote pro-European development of the new Ukraine and Ukrainophone ideology. The only economic and axiologically justified alternative was shown to be the pro-Russian political way and the Russophone ideology. The alternative to demonised "European values'' was shown to be so-called "traditional values," which were hailed by Vladimir Putin in his famous "Millennium Speech" (1999) and have been protected by his policy since 1999 (Kuße, 2019).

When, in 2014, Russia began first an information war and then a hybrid war against Ukraine (Holovchenko & Doroshko, 2016; Mahda, 2017; Pocheptsov, 2016), the "distinctiveness" of the Donbas region and the dominant Russophone ideology became a springboard for separatist ideology and later for propaganda of the self-proclaimed republics. Just as for supporters of the Ukrainophone ideology, Russian has become the enemy's and occupant's language, and Ukrainian has become a weapon against it. Therefore, for supporters of the Russophone ideology, Russian has become a victim of Ukrainian nationalism that needs to be protected.

## Language policy in the self-proclaimed republics of Donbas

In 2014, two still-unrecognized, quasi-state entities were declared in Donbas: the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (self-proclaimed on April 7th, 2014) and the Lugansk People's Republic (self-proclaimed on April 27th, 2014). Their leaders made no secret of their loyalty to Russia, the Russian nationalist movements, or Russian linguistic hegemony (Arel, 2017). They explicitly declared that the republics should be integrated into a single confederation, Novorossiia (Federal State of Novorossiya), whose very name explicitly appeals to the Russian Empire's past. The imagined formation of Novorossiia was to be a manifestation of strengthening and expanding the "Russian world." Although the Novorossiia project failed within a year and the Russian annexation of Donbas did not occur, both republics in Donbas remain satellites of the Russian Federation and benefit from its economic, political, and ideological protectorate.

The language policy in the newly established republics was ambiguous. On the one hand, in the official communication and republican media, only Russian was used, and the entire language ideology was built on the consistent Russification of the region. On the other hand, in Article 10 of the Constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), starting from the first version on 14 March 2014, two state languages (Russian and Ukrainian) were established:

> "Государственными языками в Донецкой Народной Республике являются русский и украинский"

[The state languages in the Donetsk People's Republic are Russian and Ukrainian.] (Konstitutsiia, 2014, Sec. 1, Art. 10, para. 1)

Besides the fact that the official status of the Ukrainian language in reality was an absolute fiction, the cancellation of its status and its exclusion from the Constitution on March 6, 2020 marked the beginning of a process of instrumentalization of the language issue.

Behind the removal of the Ukrainian language from the Constitution of the DPR was an argument based on the universal FBS 5, in which the nation and the state determine the language, but with a rejection modification: "If we do not identify ourselves as a Ukrainian nation" (Data 1) and "if we are not part of the Ukrainian state" (Data 2), then "we do not need to have Ukrainian as the state language" (Conclusion). The proposal to exclude Ukrainian from the Constitution was raised by the head of the DPR in December, 2019 (*Denis Pushilin*, 2019, para. 2). The reasoning was as follows: "…применение украинского языка как государственного до сих пор не нашло практической реализации. При этом использование русского языка задекларировано рядом нормативных правовых актов Донецкой Народной Республики" [The use of Ukrainian as the state language has not yet been implemented in practice. At the same time, the use of the Russian language has been declared by a number of legal acts of the Donetsk People's Republic] (*Denis Pushilin*, 2019, para. 2).

On March 6th, 2020, when amendments to the Constitution were being made, another geopolitical goal was specified: "В современных реалиях при установлении статуса государственного языка Донецкой Народной Республики необходимо учитывать интенсивность интеграционных процессов между ДНР и Российской Федерацией. Также стоит отметить, что русский язык имеет статус мирового языка" [In modern realities, when establishing the status of the state language of the Donetsk People's Republic, it is necessary to take into account the intensity of integration processes between the DPR and the Russian Federation. It should also be noted that Russian has the status of world language] (Narodnyi Sovet, 2020, para. 4). According to this explanation, the exclusion of the Ukrainian language from the Constitution was not so much a practical matter as a symbolic one, manifesting an anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian political orientation. This is exactly how these changes were interpreted in Ukraine, illustrated by the comment found in the influential Ukrainian media channel Radio Svoboda: "…в Донецке использовали последнюю доступную невоенную опцию для демонстрации недружелюбия президенту Украины Владимиру Зеленскому и его политике достижения мира в Донбассе." […the last available non-military option was used in Donetsk to demonstrate an unfriendly attitude towards the President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelenskii and his peacemaking policy in Donbas] (Kirillov, 2020, para. 1). This event, and especially its interpretation in discursive practices, illustrates the process of the instrumentalization of Ukraine's language issues for other, non-linguistic purposes, namely geopolitical.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I show that interconnections among language, nation, and territory concepts within identity discourses in Ukraine generate six typical frame building syllogisms that underlie complex ideological and propagandistic argumentations. Within these argumentations, each of the elements—language, nation, or territory—can become a tool that serves to support, strengthen, or justify the relevance of the others. That is, for example, when language becomes an instrument, it serves to strengthen national identity and state building processes. However, the instrumentalization of language is not limited to these two areas only.

Using the case of Ukraine, it was found that language can be instrumentalized as (1) a precondition of the existence of the Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian statehood. This was particularly evident in the Ukrainophone ideology and corresponding discursive practices. In addition, within the Ukrainophone ideology, language was presented as (2) a tool to protect and preserve the Ukrainian nation and the Ukrainian state. This was particularly evident during the external militaristic and ideological threat from Russia. During the hybrid war, language changed from an instrument of ideological discourse into a weapon of geopolitical discourse. When a language issue is instrumentalized during internal political and especially propaganda debates between political parties, it becomes a tool for political struggle, (3) a tool to the raising of a politician's own political image, (4) a tool to humiliate the image of political opponents, and (5) a tool to win the electorate.

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