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Righting the Writing.
The Power Dynamic of Soviet Ukraine Language Policies and Reforms in the 1920s-1930s

The historical and current situations of the Ukrainian language offer perhaps an especially graphic illustration of Jacques Derrida's well known paradox: "We only ever speak one language… (yes, but) We never speak only one language…" (Derrida 1996: 10). The current existence of minimum four varieties of standard Ukrainian (Danylenko 2015: 242) has deep roots in the history of political divisions and extensive language contact. As posited by George Ševel'ov (1996) and increasingly established in contemporary studies, "standard Ukrainian is a pluricentric language which, contrary to its exclusively 'Kyjiv-Poltava' foundational myth, has undergone both centripetal and centrifugal codification" (Danylenko 2015: 243). From the perspective of political centralisation, this has always been perceived as a deficiency, lamented by Ahatanhel Kryms'kyj (1927: 342): "As we regretfully know from everyday experience, there are still two literary Ukrainian languages".

This deficiency was precisely what the Orthographic Commission of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat for Education (Narkompros), created in 1925, and the First All-Ukrainian Orthographic Conference, summoned in Charkiv in 1927, sought to eliminate. It led consequently to the first comprehensive spelling reform that codified a single literary standard Ukrainian based on two extant literary standards, the Western-Ukrainian and the Eastern-Ukrainian. This article aims to consider broader social implications of the linguistic policy fluctuations in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s-1930s. Departing from Derrida's grammatological critique of the modern preoccupations with spoken language, which predicates writing as both secondary and a threat, able to distort the 'pure' language; and on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields and symbolic power of language, this study purports to show how writing and language standardisation became a central focal point of linguistic contestation in Soviet Ukraine.

The role of the Soviet authorities in creating a standardised Ukrainian language in the late 1920s is in the centre of this discussion. The publication of the 'Charkiv orthography' is regarded a pinnacle of the *korenizacija* policy, the preferential nationalities policy launched in 1923 Union-wide. Nevertheless, as the article shows, the role of the Soviet orthographic projects is somewhat overestimated with regards to practical application: the core of the writing system was codified, stabilised and even implemented by 1920. Hence, the Soviet orthographies were aptly used as a tool in the on-going power-struggle between central (Moscow) and local (Charkiv) political actors. The fate of the 'Charkiv orthogra-

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phy', invalidated by Soviet authorities following its 1933 condemnation as 'bourgeois na-
tionalist', extrapolates Soviet Ukraine's overall power dynamic at the turn of the decade,
when, despite previous relative political pluralism, any attempts to emphasise a separate
trajectory of the Ukrainian political and cultural development from the Russian one came
to be deemed anti-Soviet, as the one rejecting the slogans of the "united family of Soviet
peoples", "fraternal friendship" or "proletarian internationalism". In comparison with the
1920s, the 1930s represent a break with the attempts to establish a single Ukrainian literary
standard autonomous of the Russian, introducing Russification of Ukrainophones and the
policy of 'rapprochement of languages' that altered the very structure of Ukrainian target-
ing its characteristic features and seeking to obliterate its difference with Russian. Needless
to say, all of the above was brought about by coercive mechanisms that included arrests,
imprisonments, and executions.

Dwelling on Vakulenko (2009) who sees the 1929 standard as a two-directional pro-
cess, towards both logical reordering of orthography according to the language's underly-
ing principles and autonomising the language by reorienting it towards direct borrowings
rather than those via Russian, we argue that this linguistic motivation – the marriage of
Ferdinand de Saussure and Mykola Chvyl'ovyj, that is, of structural linguistics and national
liberation – was inscribed into the knowledge / power paradigm. Within this paradigm,
the motivations of finalising the distinctiveness of Ukrainian linguistic community amal-
gamated with the party-driven objectives of social homogenisation as well as gaining in-
fluence on West Ukrainians (the project that Education Commissar Mykola Skrypnyk
personally cherished). Thus, different groups taking part in this process used a variety of
techniques (such as 'the First Congress' or 'protection from writing' argumentation) to
assert its power of performative utterance. From the perspective of field theory, it repre-
sented a merger of the political field and an academic field, while a Derridean interpreta-
tion suggests a complex dynamic of modernisiation / demodernisation that unfolded in
1928-1933 around Ukrainian orthography.

1.   *Theoretical Framework 'Linguistic Market' and 'Protecting Language from Writing'*

Pierre Bourdieu conceptualised the social formation of language through the concept
of linguistic community as a "product of political domination" that forms and is formed by
its own "linguistic market" (Bourdieu 2012: 46). Sociologically speaking, he accepted the
distinction between purely linguistic acts and "performative utterances" (Bourdieu 2012:
74) that constitute a social act in itself and are invested with symbolic power to carry legal
consequences (as in a swearing in or a naming of a ship). However, he also insisted that
eventually many non-performative acts, including the ones that explicitly define a linguis-
tic community (especially if it is contested) possess this symbolic power effect. Establishing
a codified prescribed standard of written language falls within this category; moreover, this
act of making / unmaking a community blends together power and knowledge in a way
fundamental for the French sociologist:

> Specifically political action is possible because agents, who are part of the social world, have a (more or less adequate) knowledge of this world and because one can act on the social world by acting on their knowledge of this world. This action aims to produce and impose representations (mental, verbal, visual or theatrical) of the social world which may be capable of acting on this world by acting on agents' representation of it. Or, more precisely, it aims to make or unmake groups – and, by the same token, the collective actions they can undertake to transform the social world in accordance with their interests – by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others (Bourdieu 2012: 127).

The primacy of the written language is of special importance for the present discussion. As Joseph Vachek (1989) demonstrated from a functional linguistics perspective, the written language is functionally autonomous from the spoken language. More broadly and with further reaching implications, Jacques Derrida (1967: 29-30) criticised the modern linguistics preoccupation with phoneme and consideration of writing as a derivative endowed with the function to represent the somehow more fundamental, originary spoken word. In this, the founding father of structural linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure who conceptualised the spoken word as the sole object of linguistics continued the tradition that began with Aristotle's definition of spoken words as symbols of mental experience and written words as symbols of spoken words, thus secondary of the former.

> Writing would thus have the exteriority that one attributes to utensils; to what is even an imperfect tool and a dangerous, almost maleficent, technique [...]. It is less a question of outlining than of protecting, and even of restoring the internal system of the language in the purity of its concept against the gravest, most perfidious, most permanent contamination which has not ceased to menace, even to corrupt that system (Derrida 1967: 34).

The aporia here resides in the supposedly independent status of the spoken language, whereby writing is its representational derivative that somehow manages to "usurp" (Saussure's terminology) the main role and is thus seen as a treacherous, malleable, dangerous thing to protect the pure language from. As the article will demonstrate, the cornerstone of the language debates in the 1920s was the question of how to best protect the Ukrainian language from its writing. The 1920s debate remained largely within the confines of Western modernity, with linguists advocating for 'distancing the writing from Russian' in a characteristic modernist move towards autonomy and structure-building while the authorities' eventual demand to 'push it back towards Russian' represented an essentially de-modernising manoeuvre.

2. *Writing Makes the Language: The Ukrainian Graphical Way from Abstand to Ausbau*

The centrality of writing was not the invention of the twentieth century but a more generic modern phenomenon. Creating a new standard language involved primarily creating a written language. It is no wonder that both intra-Ukrainian language feuds, such as

azbučni vijny ('alphabet wars' of 1834-36 and 1859 in Galicia around the use of Latin graph-
ics based on Polish or Czech traditions for Ukrainian writing) or Ivan Nečuj-Levyc'kyj's
and Borys Hrinčenko's crusade against Galician elements in literary Ukrainian, and the
imperial persecutions, such as the Valuev circular or the Ems decree, concerned exclusively
the written language, while there is virtually nothing in the major language controversies
on the spoken vernacular that existed in the form of *Abstand* language (Klos 1967) and was,
as it seems, almost of no interest to the parties involved.

As Remy (2005: 189) argued, "from the 1820s onward, the orthographic discussion
was dictated and motivated mainly by the political orientations of the participants". Ap-
plying Einar Haugen's four-part model of language planning, Yavorska (2010: 165-166) sug-
gested the following periodisation for the Ukrainian language:

1. norm selection (1790s-1840s);
2. codification (1840s-1910s);
3. implementation (1920s-1940s);
4. elaboration (1950s-ongoing).

While not without grounds in sociolinguistic processes, such clear-cut scheme is still
problematic, especially given the concurrent development of the stages. In the absence of
a single power centre, making the *Abstand* language into an *Ausbau* language by writing
was a chaotic process. Between 1798 and 1905, there were nearly fifty different graphisa-
tions of the Ukrainian (Ohijenko 1990: 15-22). However, not all systems were equally de-
veloped and widely used. When the New Standard Ukrainian (NSU) was first put into use
by Ivan Nekraševyč[1] and Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj in the 1780s-1790s, its orthography was im-
plicitly formulated under influence of the Church Slavonic orthography of the Meletian
recension and *prostaja mova* (cfr. Kryms'kyj 1929: 178-179). The etymological orthography
oriented towards ensuring accessibility by Great Russians was further developed by Mychaj-
lo Maksymovyč in his diacritic system while the educational spread of the Great Russian
pronunciation rules stimulated writers interested in accessing a broad Ukrainian public to
use the Russian graphic in *jaryžka* favoured by the Russian imperial government (Kryms'kyj
1929: 180-181). Since 1853, Pantelejmon Kuliš boldly compiled a number of earlier dispersed
innovations in the so-called *kulišivka* (dropping ы, and introducing є and і borrowed
from Oleksij Pavlovs'kyj's 1818 graphisation). His two-volume collection *Zapiski o Južnoj
Rusi* ('*Notes on Southern Rus*'), 1856-1857, and *Hramatka* (an ABC) for Ukrainian Sunday
Schools, 1857, became one of the first examples of books printed in this new phonetic or-
thography. Later on, it was also used for Taras Ševčenko's *Kobzar* (1860) and the first Ukrai-
nian monthly in the Russian Empire, *Osnova*, published in St Petersburg in 1861-1862.

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[1]   It seems that he has to be considered among creators of the new idiom alongside
Kotljarevs'kyj (see Danylenko 2008: 103).

Kuliš's phonetic orthography, although a milestone in the Ukrainian cultural development, did not become standard for the Ukrainian literary language. The 1860s, despite initial hopes for democratisation of the Russian autocracy[2], witnessed further repressions in response to numerous student unrests and revolutionary activities, intensified Polish separatist and Ukrainophiles movements. On 30 July 1863, a tsarist minister of Internal Affairs Petr Valuev issued a so-called Valuev Circular, a secret instruction, placing limits on Ukrainian-language publications, stating "no separate Little Russian language ever existed, does not exist, and could not exist"[3]. The Circular banned publication of religious and educational books in Ukrainian, limiting its usage primarily to belles-lettres. Consequently, the Ems Decree from 1876 further restricted the use of the Ukrainian language, now banning the publication of all Ukrainian books and their import from abroad. These restrictions remained in force until the first Russian Revolution of 1905 (Remy 2007; Miller 2000; Saunders 1995; Weeks 1996).

In the meantime, all the Ukrainian-language publications and journalist activities were moved abroad, especially to Austrian Galicia. Western Ukraine saw the combination of etymological orthography and gradual adoption of *kulišivka*; for a time, a Latin graphisation by Oleksandr Lozyns'kyj was in governmental use (Čornovol 2001). Mychajlo Drahomanov came up with his original system that, however, did not take hold. Eventually, the 1885 development of *kulišivka* by Jevhen Želechivs'kyj – *želechivka* with a broad use of *ï* and other peculiarities – became the official orthography used in Austrian Ukraine since 1893. The modification of *želechivka* by Borys Hrinčenko used in his fundamental *Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language* (published 1907-1909) marked the final stage of the orthographic codification: with its no separation of -*ся*, no *ï* after palatalised consonants, use of apostrophe, the orthography of the core vocabulary was finally stabilised. Hence, the tenet of Rowenczuk (1992) that placed the peak of standardisation process between 1909 and 1929 appears only partially true.

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned graphisation endeavours for the Ukrainian language had limited ramifications and did not evolve into a standardised orthography for the Ukrainian language approved and used on the entire territory of Ukraine. The main reasons for the failure of the above-discussed language reforms were, of course, a lack of governmental interest in standardising the written language and a non-existent school system (cfr. Bourdieu 1992: 48)[4]. Not surprisingly, language reforms were given new impetus by the February revolution of 1917, which initiated different projects of national state-building on Ukraine's territory. The language question entered the agenda of both the Ukrainian People's Republic (*Ukrajins'ka Narodna Respublika,* UNR), formed on 20 November

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[2]   On reforms and democratisation attempts in late imperial Russia see: Pipes 1970, Rogger 1983, Waldron 2007.

[3]   The translation of the Valuev Circular can be found in Magocsi (2010: 393-94)

[4]   The importance and the political use of schooling for language standardisation in the Soviet Union in the 1920s was discussed in, Pauly 2014; Smith 1998; Ewing 2006; Holmes 1991.

1917 and proclaimed independent on 22 January 1918, and the Soviet Republic in Ukraine, which existed under various names from December 1917[5].

The UNR leaders devoted much attention to de-Russification of all spheres of public life, aimed at accelerated development of national identity and national culture. Already on 22 April 1917, a national legislative authority, *Central'na Rada* (Central Rada), declared its course on the sweeping Ukrainization of the republic, yet focusing mainly on the army and schooling (DZZ: 69-71; Ševčenko 2013). These daring endeavours, however, required standardising the Ukrainian language first. Thus, in 1917, an orthographic commission chaired by Ivan Ohijenko, a well-known Ukrainian academic and future UNR Minister for Education was formed. The Commission was tasked with developing the *Major Rules* (*Holovniši pravyla*) of Ukrainian language, officially endorsed in April 1918.

Nevertheless, due to the instability of the civil war years, the implementation of these reforms was postponed until later. The project finally was published in January 1919 and developed into the *Most Essential Rules* (*Najholovniši pravyla*). With some corrections, it was approved by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (VUAN) in April 1919. This codification was confirmed by the Soviet authorities in 1920 (Nimčuk 1999: 250-251). In 1921, the developed version of Ohijenko's rules was adopted by the Lviv Ševčenko Scientific Society (with modifications such as non-use of apostrophe, broader use of ґ and ль in loan words – cfr. Simovyč, Rudnyc'kyj 1949). With these developments, Ukrainian for the first time received an orthography that was officially implemented by state authorities and accepted in both major literary traditions (Dnieper and Western Ukraine), despite a number of disagreements retained in practice. As such, the *Most Essential Rules* constitute the first empowered orthography forming the basis for all further Ukrainian writing projects. From this vantage point, the emphasis on the 1929 project in the current historiography and lack of interest to the 1917-1921 language reforms seems disproportionate at best (even though it can be explained by the superficial and haphazard level of codification in the earlier attempts as compared to the elaborate Charkiv rules). This interpretation sets the stage for a new perspective on the 1929 orthography.

3.   *Language and Power: Different Views on Soviet Ukraine*

Undeniably, the intensity of the language debates during the 1920s was enabled by the relative political pluralism in Soviet Ukraine in the wake of the revolution and the civil wars. Similarly, the fate of the Ukrainian orthography in the 1930s extrapolates the radical shift in the balance of political powers between the all-Union centre (Moscow) and the peripheries (in our case, Charkiv). To understand the trajectory of language, and more

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5   The name of the Soviet Republic in Ukraine changed from Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets (adopted by the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in December 1917), Ukrainian Soviet Republic, proclaimed on 19 March 1918 and Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, declared on 10 March 1919.

broadly, cultural reforms in Soviet Ukraine, it is necessary to provide an overview of the political negotiations between different actors within the Soviet camp in Ukraine.

The Soviet regime in Ukraine was only established in 1921, when the Bolsheviks succeeded in occupying its entire territory[6]. And yet, this victory presented the Bolshevik leadership with a number of challenges. One of the most vital tasks was the need to neutralise numerous political and ideological opponents, who claimed their right to represent the Ukraine's toiling masses, composed of the republic's proletariat and the peasantry, and sought an independent communist Ukraine. The ideological heterogeneity of the communist camp in Ukraine was observed by Moisej Ravič-Čerkasskij, the first historian of the KP(b)U [Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine, *Komunistyčna Partija Bil'šovykiv Ukraïny*], who suggested that the history of the KP(b)U was "a sum of two histories: that of the Ukrainian proletariat and that of the Russian proletariat in Ukraine" (Ravič-Čerkasskij 1923: 5).

Accordingly, there were two distinct ideological roots in the KP(b)U, one extending from the Russian Revolutionary movement and another from the Ukrainian socialist movement. The first camp was represented by former ideologists and members of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks) (RSDRP(b), the Mensheviks, and Russian Socialist revolutionaries (SRs) in Ukraine, who after their merger with the Bolshevik party contributed to a pan-imperial horizon, with clear orientation towards an all-Russian political space and support to the idea of unchanged political borders and, as before, a centralist government. Consequently, they contributed to strengthening a centralised vision of the Soviet Union and a single Communist party leadership. Conversely, the descendants from the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Working Party (USDRP) and the Ukrainian SRs (UPSR) after their merger with the KP(b)U in 1920 continuously asserted a separatist orientation, advocating Ukraine's broadest autonomy in political, economic and cultural matters. This Ukrainian wing in the KP(b)U, also known as Ukrainian national communism, focused on the rebirth of the Ukrainian nation within its ethnic boundaries, defending the idea of a self-standing Communist party and a loose federation with other Soviet republics (Velychenko 2015; Palko 2014; Mace 1983; Majstrenko 1954).

The two different political horizons, developed during the 1920s parallel to each other within the institutional framework of the KP(b)U, contributed to the on-going debates about the sovereignty of Soviet Ukraine, the status of its Communist party, as well as the implementation of all-Soviet policies within the republic's borders, especially the nationalities policy of *korenizacija*. *Korenizacija* (literally, 'rootenisation' or 'indigenisation') was adopted at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (RKP(b)[7], held in April 1923. As defined, the new Soviet nationalities policy was meant to fight both "Great-Russian chauvinism" and any manifestations of local nationalism (Stalin 1953: 269-

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[6]   On the Ukrainian-Soviet War see: Udovyčenko 1995; Mirčuk 1957; Kul'čyc'kyj 1996; Mazepa 1934; Borys 1960; Adams 1963.

[7]   The name was changed to *VKP(b)* - the All-Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks in 1925, and finally the KPSS, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, until 1991.

81) by "systematically promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation-state" (Martin 2001: 1). At the same time, encouraging ethnic diversity (or ethnic particularism) was seen as a tool in the Bolshevik grand "modernisation campaign" (Hirsch 2005).

The 1923 RKP(b) Resolution on *korenizacija* was followed by similar decrees passed by the Central Committee (CK) of the KP(b)U. Ukraine-minded communists, however, quickly took charge over the implementation of this all-Soviet policy in the republic, redefining its rationale and scope. For the Ukrainian communists, *korenizacija* predominantly meant *Ukrajinizacija*, the continuation of the pre-revolutionary initiative of an accelerated nation-building, executed by the national governments in 1917-1919. Not surprisingly, the two chief Ukrainisers of the 1920s, the People's Commissars for Education Oleksandr Šums'kyj (in office 1924-1927) and Mykola Skrypnyk (1927-1933) were the main representatives of the Ukrainian horizon, the Ukrainian national communist group in the KP(b)U, and continuously defended its separate status within the Soviet Union. Consequently, the ideological heterogeneity of the Communist party in Ukraine, as the paper argues, created preconditions for a fully-fledged cultural development of Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s, marked by a unique period of cultural flowering in Ukraine.

Worth mentioning, however, is that the vision of the Soviet Ukrainisers differed significantly from the previous attempts to de-Russify the republic, executed by the UNR and a short-lived Hetmanate (*Het'manat*, or the Ukrainian State), that existed with a significant German support in April-December 1918 (Ševčenko 2013; Hunczak 1977). The difference was mainly ideological. Unlike their predecessors, the promoters of Soviet *Ukrajinizacija* dreamed of a self-standing Soviet Ukraine, where both national and social questions would be successfully resolved. At the same time, this separatist *Ukrajinizacija* project ran counter to the vision of *korenizacija*, as defined centrally. Despite the fact that both interest groups promoted Ukrainian, the use of the language differed significantly. Whereas the Ukraine-minded activists saw the Ukrainian language as a prerequisite for creating a modern urban Ukrainian culture with equal appreciation of the traditional social structure (Ukrainian-speaking peasantry) and the nineteenth century cultural trends, the centralist group used the Ukrainian language (the language of the largest ethnic group in the republic) as a necessary concession in order to achieve their far-reaching strategic goals.

4.   *The Splendours of Power: The Soviet Ukrainian Orthography*

The course on *korenizacija* was adopted at the Twelfth RKP(b) Congress in April 1923. In Soviet Ukraine, it acquired its local denomination, *Ukrajinizacija*, targeting the Ukrainians, a titular nation in the republic. Linguistic de-Russification (which included e.g., *Ukrajinizacija* or *Belarusizacija*), was one of the key components of the *korenizacija* policy. The promotion of the Ukrainian language and culture was meant to help overcome Russian century-long cultural dominance and, hence, suspicion to the Bolsheviks, seen by many as a Moscow-led and Russian speaking party. Given the primary importance

of the Ukrainian language, comprehensive *Ukrajinizacija* was to be achieved by 1 January 1926 (Zobinna *et al.* 1959: 282-286; Martin 2001: 96). Despite the decisiveness of the central party leadership, these far-reaching objectives were premature. The main predicament for the success of the Soviet plans in Ukraine was the fact that up until the decade's end syntactical and orthographical norms for the Ukrainian language were not implemented republic-wide. The 1919 *Most Essential Rules* were indeed adopted and incorporated by the Soviet authorities. The Soviet Ukrainian authorities, nonetheless, became the first one to intentionally sponsor the effort of language standardisation (Pauly 2014: 25).

Due to its political importance, the language question was prioritised by the Soviet government in Ukraine. Having experienced a number of setbacks during the civil wars, the Bolsheviks took steps to tackle Russification and ensure the status of the Ukrainian language. At first, this often took a form of promoting the equality of the two languages in the republic. For instance, a draft constitution of the Ukrainian SSR, adopted by the Third All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets (March 1919), highlighted the adverse consequences of "forced Russification"[8]. As a follow-up, the Ukrainian Commissariat for Education adopted a resolution according to which the official state language was abolished in favour of free development of local, commonly spoken languages (Pyrih *et al.* 1990: 110). Moreover, adherence to the Ukrainian language was highlighted in the Resolution of the CK RKP(b) "On the Soviet Rule in Ukraine," adopted on 4 December 1919. It was stated that the Ukrainian language should be regarded as "an instrument for the communist education of the working people" and therefore proficiency in the Ukrainian language for civil servants and party workers was desired (Zobinna *et al.* 1959: 60-62). Furthermore, in 1920 Stalin, the Commissar for Nationalities at the time, made a speech stating the need to introduce national languages into schooling, the judicial system, public administration and executive authorities. The same points were reiterated by the Commissar for Nationalities at the Tenth Party congress in March 1921 (Borisenok 2006: 66-69).

The language question was further advanced with the launch of the *korenizacija* policy in 1923. Shortly after, a number of decrees were issued concerning the status of Ukrainian (attempts to proclaim it as the second official language failed due to the opposition of the pro-Russian party members, insisting to make it another commonly-used language), schooling (the Radnarkom Decree *On Measures for* Ukrajinizacija *of Schools, Educational and Cultural Institutions* (Zobinna *et al.* 1959, 1: 71-72) and major tasks to regulate political education and propaganda in the countryside (Pančuk *et al.* 1994: 130-132). The most decisive decree on *Ukrajinizacija*, *On Measures for Guaranteeing the Equality of Languages and on the Equal Development of the Ukrainian Language*, was issued on 1 August 1923. It was stated that:

> the formal equality [of languages] [...] is not sufficient. [...] Russian language has, in fact, become the dominant one. In order to destroy this inequality, the Workers'-Peasants' Government hereby adopts a number of practical measures which, while affirming the

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8   Documents on *Ukrajinizacija* were published in BRU; ZZtR; Jurčuk 1976; Pančuk *et al.* 1994.

> equality of languages of all nationalities on the Ukrainian territory, will guarantee a place for Ukrainian language corresponding to the numerical superiority of the Ukrainian people on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. (Pančuk *et al*. 1994: 106-109)

Once all the provisions for a comprehensive language reform were in place, the Soviet Government initiated the process of language standardisation. On 23 July 1925 the Commissariat for Education created a commission tasked to prepare a unified project for the orthography of the Ukrainian language. The commission, headed by Šums'kyj, the Commissar for Education, and later Skrypnyk in the same capacity, included a number of authoritative and well-known academics, writers and cultural figures, representatives of the pre-revolutionary and new proletarian intelligentsia. "Although nominally chaired by the Commissar for Education, the Commission actually worked under the linguist Oleksa Synjavs'kyj" (Hornjatkevyc 1993: 298).

The Commission took the 1919 Most Essential Rules as the basis for their further work. In 1926 it produced a discussion document, in which not only orthography, but also morphology, punctuation, and some other areas were covered. Among the language developers, there were members of the former UNR orthography commission Kryms'kyj and Jevhen Tymčenko; Kyjivan literary scholar Serhij Jefremov; young Charkiv writers Majk Johansen, Mychajlo Jalovyj, Mykola Chvyl'ovyj; and the editor-in-chief of Charkiv newspaper *Sil's'ki Visti* (Rural News) Serhij Pylypenko. In addition, representatives from Western Ukraine were invited, including Roman Smal'-Stoc'kyj, Volodymyr Hnatjuk, Vasyl' Simovyč, and Ilarion Svjencic'kyj.

The projects of a new orthography developed by the Commission were submitted to a general public discussion. The first All-Ukrainian Orthography Conference, symbolically held in the republican capital city of Charkiv, the stronghold of a distinct, moderately purist school, took place in May-June, 1927. Altogether, the conference was attended by fifty-five scholars, out of them three from Galicia and one Communist functionary from Transcarpathia (Ohijenko 1991: 301-302). Over sixty discussion and review articles were published in *Visti VUCVK* during the Congress (*ibidem*). Shortly after, it was accepted by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Kyjiv) on 31 March 1929, and by the Ševčenko Scientific Society on 29 May 1929. Skrypnyk promulgated the orthography on 6 September 1929 and required its use in all schools and publications. The orthography, widely known as *skrypnykivka*, was published in Charkiv by the State Publishers of Ukraine in 1929 (Hornjatkevyč 1993: 300).

5.   *The Miseries of Power: Reaction and Repression*

The affirmative attitude of the Soviet authorities and its tolerant attitude towards Ukraine's cultural managers did not remain intact for long. The major change in the way the nationalities policy was perceived and implemented occurred during the Stalin's 'great break' in 1928-29. With the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan, the party centrally initiated 'hard line' policies in dealing with alleged class enemies. In historiography, this

period is widely known as 'the cultural revolution' conducted, according to Fitzpatrick by the means of 'class war' (Fitzpatrick 1978). Among those most targeted were the so-called fellow-travellers, a collective name used for pre-revolutionary intelligentsia who after 1917 stopped openly opposing the Soviet regime and tacitly accepted it (Trotsky 1923). In addition, the party took radical stand against any, as perceived, manifestations of local nationalism, including those 'free-thinkers', 'dissenters' and national deviationists within the party.

Following the 1928 Shakhty trial, a show-trial against a large group of mining engineers and technicians from the Donbas area in Ukraine, charged with conspiracy and sabotage, a political confrontation between 'proletarian' communists and the old 'bourgeois' intelligentsia began in earnest. In Ukraine, the 1928 trial was followed by several major national conspiracies and terrorist plots 'unmasked' between 1929 and 1934. The most important trials of the early 1930s were the trials over conspiratorial 'nationalist' organisations: the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (*Spilka Vyzvolennja Ukrajiny,* svu), the Ukrainian National Centre (*Ukrajins'kyj Nacional'nyj Centr,* unc) and the Ukrainian Military Organisation (*Ukrajins'ka Vijs'kova Organizacija,* uvo*).*

The svu trial, held in 1930 at Charkiv Opera Theatre, by right can be defined as the most important event for the cultural and national development of Soviet Ukraine. The persecution of the forty-five Ukrainian intellectuals, writers and theologians, former politicians and activists, and vuan leading members, had serious repercussions for the cultural and political sphere. Firstly, by eliminating the vuan leadership, the autonomous status of this academic institution, granted in the early 1920s, was abolished. By this, the Academy, the main promoter of academic research and language reforms, was subjugated to the political agenda of the Communist Party centrally, who from now on gained control over the activity of their members. Secondly, the SVU trial signalled the process of reconsidering the *Ukrajinizacija* policy, as noted by Pauly: "By tarring Ukrainian literature with the slander of nationalism, conflating it with counterrevolutionary reaction, the SVU trial and its reporting also undermined the public's faith in Ukrainization and pre-revolutionary cultural elites" (Pauly 2014: 249).

The svu impacted the process of implementing the language reforms. Firstly, the entire activity of the Narkompros orthographical commission was scrutinised. The 1929 orthography was condemned as "counter-revolutionary" and "bourgeois nationalist" (Masenko *et al.* 2005: 113-132). Consequently, the steps were taken to underplay the achievements of the commission and the significance of *skrypnykivka.* Secondly, the svu trial targeted the most ardent supporters of the new language reforms, the teachers. The trial had immense scope: some thirty thousand educators and school teachers were arrested all over Ukraine (Šapoval *et al.* 1997: 135). The persecutions against Ukraine's cultural figures and political activists continued. For instance, the most prominent convicts of the unc case were the two Ukrainian academics Mychajlo Hruševs'kyj and Matvij Javors'kyj (Prystajko, Šapoval 1999; Bertelsen, Shkandrij 2014); whereas the uvo trial tackled the representatives of the higher political echelons.

The new perspective on the Ukrainian culture and language was introduced by a CK VKP(b) directive "On suppressing Ukrainian nationalism and introducing communist ideas" on 3 April 1932. The directive initiated a campaign against alleged bourgeois nationalists and was conducted side by side with the industrialisation and collectivisation campaigns. Among those 'bourgeois nationalists' were the Commissar for Education Skrypnyk and other members of the orthography commission, who were arrested shortly thereafter. Skrypnyk was targeted for his activities as the Commissar for Education, which, among others, included the approval of the 1929 orthography. The campaign against the Narkompros chief, the so-called *skrypnykivščyna* emphasised the underlying political aspects of the language reforms:

> Despite the SVU trial, the Commissariat for Education's old leadership championed by Skrypnyk did not learn from their mistakes; they did not fight nationalism and significantly neglected the language front, this important sphere in advancing the Ukrainian Soviet culture. (UP: 3-5; Masenko *et al.* 2005: 108-109).

Eventually, the *Ukrajinizacija* policies were curtailed and Soviet ethnic particularism was replaced by the ideology of all-Union uniformity and Russification. Following the mood of the decade, the 1929 orthography was quickly defined as "nationalistic"; its creators were labelled "Ukrainian fascists" (Chvylja 1933; Masenko *et al.* 2005: 120). In 1933, a chief party propagandist and a deputy Commissar for Education Andrij Chvylja published an article in the official newspaper "Bilʹšovyk Ukrajiny" with a telling title *To Eradicate, to Exterminate the Nationalistic Roots on the Language Front* (Chvylja 1933; Masenko *et al.* 2005: 112-132). The article later appeared as a separate brochure and was distributed republic-wide. The previous orthographic commission was accused by Chvylja of "directing the Ukrainian language along the nationalistic lines" (Chvylja 1933). Skrypnyk's language reforms were seen as means of "constructing barriers between the Ukrainian Soviet culture and the Russian Soviet culture" and redirecting the trajectory of Ukraine's cultural development "towards bourgeois-nationalist path" (Masenko *et al.* 2005: 116). By this, Skrypnyk was put in line with the UNR leaders and the Ukrainian nationalists in Galicia, who, as asserted by Chvylja, repeatedly tried to orient the Ukrainian language and culture towards the "bourgeois Europe" and, thus, against "the fraternal union with the Russian culture [seen as] Asiatic language and culture" (Masenko *et al.* 2005: 120).

Chvylja was later appointed chair of a new orthographic commission, tasked to develop a new and ideologically correct orthography of the Ukrainian language. Unlike in 1925-29, the new orthography was initiated from above by a party directive. No public discussion followed. The main objective of Chvylja's commission was to tackle the "intentional distortions" of the previous orthography, which intended to "Westernise" the Ukrainian (UP: 4). Instead of "bourgeois" Polish and Czech influences, the new orthography was to highlight the similarities between the Ukrainian and Russian languages, which would play into the hand of Moscow communist ideologists, who by the time had started to promote the image of "fraternal peoples" and the historical unity of the Slavic people under the wise leadership of the Communist party.

	1921	1929	1933
NUMBER OF NORMS:	64	400	389
New norms	N/A	336	41
Norms cancelled	N/A	4	16
Norms ignored	N/A	4	36
OF THEM:			
Suffixes regulated	12	46	34
Declination norms	17	213	198
Loan words rules	14	33	21
Proper names rules	0	22	13

TABLE 1.

Quantitative comparison of the three major Ukrainian orthographies in the 1920s and 1930s

6. *Comparing Orthographies and the Two Faces of Soviet Modernisation*

It is now time to turn to the orthographies themselves and trace how these power struggles found reflection and had impact on codification of writing rules and even graphisation of Ukrainian. While the 1928 and, to a lesser extent, the 1933 systems have been studied (cfr. Hornjatkevyč 1993; Masenko *et al.* 2005; Vakulenko 2009; Orazi forthcoming), the earlier, de facto pre-Soviet codifications, peaking at *The Most Essential Rules* remain on the periphery for both historians and linguists (and unduly so). Hence, the present discussion suggests a focus on the quantitative comparison of these three codifications, something that has been rather overlooked previously. While the character of the changes between the three is crucial to understand, the very scope of these changes is vital for understanding the significance and particular standing of the codifications as regards to the language they codified.

For this analysis, the codifications were broken down into calculable units, individual rules, defined here as a prescriptive statement on a particular speech situation or type of situations and differentiable from other such statements (TABLE 1). This quantitative analysis has its limitations, however, since orthographies are difficult to quantify. Their paragraphs often contain more than one rule and sometimes no rules at all; therefore, the norms have to be extracted from the texts deductively by way of coding, which must necessarily be taken with some scepticism. The key challenge is to define what qualifies as an individual rule or norm and what does not. The normative statements are sometimes given in notes or in passing, and their often ambiguous formulations and policies that allow linguistic variance inevitably create irregularities. Equally difficult is to compare systematically the codifications that vary in their levels of detalisation. Still, this analysis is precise enough for the purposes in mind and provides an overall understanding of the scope of changing and resilient patterns in the three orthographies.

From this quantitative perspective, the 1929 orthography represents a dramatic expansion of the set of rules (from 64 prescriptive statements to 400), while the 1933 system, on the contrary, represents a shrinking of the normative scope to 389 rules (even though it added 41 completely new rules, chiefly in what concerns the writing of acronyms and punctuation). The code shrank especially in the chapters covering proper names and loan words where nearly half of the previous norms were either cancelled or simply ignored and not mentioned. But even in the suffixes, declension and conjugation chapters the number of norms fell, so that for example out of 46 suffixes normativised in 1929 only 34 survived in 1933. As a result, not only did the structure of language simplify, but also the diversity of productive paradigms and stylistic repertoires, with orthography once again influencing the structure of the spoken language.

Skrypnykivka was much more traditionalist and inclusive in its attitude to the preceding system, cancelling only four norms of the 1921 code and ignoring other four. In fact, while 1933 is scathing in treatment of the Charkiv norms (overall, only some 250 normativisations remained, or around 60%), in some ways it may represent a certain relative and partial rollback to the 1921 code, for example by taking to the extreme the latter's tendency to minimise the use of г and prefer hard л over the soft ль in loan words. In total, well over 70% (47 individual rules) of the 1921 norms can still be found in Chvylja's orthography, which is notably better than the continuity with the 1928.

Also, Ohijenko and Kryms'kyj's code was oriented rather towards the needs of practitioners such as schoolteachers, bureaucrats and journalists. Thanks to this, it focused on generalities in a much more superficial way, similar also for the 1933 text that certainly lacks the 1929's fundamental academic approach. The emphasis in 1921 was on the writing rules for the core language corpus that would not have yielded to sweeping changes without overturning key paradigms and even the dialectal foundation of the standard language, which would have contradicted the more careful Stalinist planners' tactic to target recent and less strongly established norms and thus create the appearance of language improvement rather than redrawing the core rules.

Unwillingly perhaps, the Soviet language planners solidified the foundational status of the 1917-1921 codification efforts but also – more willingly in this respect – returned the codification of the Ukrainian to an earlier stage, before a number of inconsistencies and omissions of the early effort had been at least partly solved.

The especially radical change in the orthography of loan words (often reversing not only the 1929 suggestions but also the 1921 rules) and proper names hints to the political character of the language autonomy problem. The Charkiv orthography tried to establish the practice of borrowing words from foreign languages directly rather than via Russian, and this was reversed most consistently. Unlike the core corpus where at least the majority of the 1921 basic rules survived, foreign borrowings became the key battleground against the modernist autonomy of the 1928 planners. Only 6 out of 20 norms for loan words in 1921 code remained in force after 1933. Out of 33 rules for the orthography of loan words in the 1929 code, 10 were left largely intact, 2 were essentially modified, 11 cancelled and

10 simply ignored (ignoring previously normativised rules being a typical tactic of the Stalinist planners).

Focusing famously on the г/ґ, л/љ and т/ф problems, the 1933 orthography abandoned the modernist/structuralist principle of forging internally consistent and systematic principles in favour of heteronomic orientation towards Russian, but also the indigenous tradition and changing the graphisation of the language, for example by removing the letter ґ from the alphabet, firmly entrenched by 1917 in practice, allowed by *The Most Essential Rules* and meticulously normativised by *skrypnykivka*. The sole rule for rendering loan words and foreign proper names became, in essence, 'write it the way it is written in Russian', importing the Russian's own internal contradictions and idiosyncrasies instead of, so to speak, developing one's own.

A similar process concerned the orthography for proper names (not discussed in 1917-1921 but detailed in 22 individual rules in 1929). Only 6 of those rules remained, 4 were tweaked significantly, 3 cancelled and 9 once again not mentioned. Thus the premise for Soviet modernisation was shaped: new ideas and technologies (prominently featured among loan words) could only enter Ukrainian through the control of the Russian language, and names of people and places could not be too distinctly Ukrainian. What Chvylja aimed for was regulation of the language's autonomy and distinction.

The sharp rise in complexity and detail of codification in the 1929 orthography, its radical utopianism of dialectal inclusivity and rationalist structuralism represent the high point of modernity and modernisation effort in Ukraine as long as it comes to language policy, whereas the subsequent decline in complexity, diversity, detalisation and rational systematicity of the codification in 1933 testify to the essentially de-modernising policy of the Soviet authorities towards Ukrainian following the demise of national communist horizon in the party and Skrypnyk's suicide on 7 July 1933. This is evident from the quantitative data above but also from the closer qualitative comparison between the codes.

The 1933 codification systematically excluded all the attempts present in the text of *skrypnykivka* to discuss orthoepy and pronunciation, the link between the written language and the spoken speech. Thus, while the Charkiv project implicitly recognised the Derridean dependence of language on writing, Chvylja's orthography very clearly sought to severe this link and eliminate the phonological and articulatory, grammatical, morphological prescriptions dictated by *skrypnykivka,* as well as its narrative on the history of the language. Equally interesting is that the changes in the illustrative examples show not only the purging of dissident authors, such as Chvyl'ovyj or Hruševs'kyj, and adding examples from Lenin, Ivan Mykytenko or Pavlo Postyšev, but also choosing those examples from classics such as Ševčenko that could only be related to the context of class struggle, and removing most things concerning village life and traditional agriculture. Interesting to note is a moralising approach, whereby such examples as *pljuvaty* 'to spit', *bljuvaty* 'to vomit' or *sp'janilyj* 'drunken' all were censored out of the 1933 orthography.

The 1933 language planners surely used the modernising rhetoric of improvement and cultivation as well as tried to ground the success of the new orthography not only in co-

ercion but in some rationalising and simplifying motions. For the broad public it did represent some carrots alongside the usual sticks, such as simpler though less logical rules for teachers and pupils or more commonalities to Russian for non-native speakers with poor familiarity with literary Ukrainian.

7.   Conclusion

Modernity can be characterised by three foundational features: irreversible dynamisation that opens up a vista of endless reconstruction, ambivalent rationalisation focused on grounding agency in rational principles, and differentiating universalisation which at once separates social fields and establishes for them universal frames of reference (Fornäs 1995: 20-32). From the perspective of orthography as understood by Derrida, modernity epitomised in modern linguistics treated writing as, first of all, secondary to the spoken word and, secondly, as a potential danger that can subvert the primary oral substance of language, thus in fact putting written language in the central position of language discussions.

Even prior to 1917, the Ukrainian orthographic debates were premised on this centrality of writing, the issues of orthography and alphabet discussed most passionately and grammar or vocabulary only following them because their problems stand closer to those of writing; only then syntax, morphology or orthoepy were even considered. The classical Shevelovian example – the alleged decline of hard pronunciation before *i* (*гострий ніж* vs *більше ніж* type) – has practically faced almost no debate because of its insignificance for writing as long as *želechivka* went off the table, although this concerns the phonemic structure of Ukrainian, something that makes it systematically different.

In this context, it seems too hasty to derive a clear periodisation from the history of codification of the New Standard Ukrainian, in particular the one based upon Haugen's four stages. The Ukrainian situation seriously challenges this theory and calls for a better scheme because it has tended to experience three or even all four stages happening simultaneously as well as revisit the stages that seemed completed. In particular, the 1920s and 1930s (marked by Yavorska [2010] as the 'implementation' phase) witnessed in fact the fiercest and most radical struggle around the norm selection and codification as has been demonstrated by contemporary studies, including this article. The lack of debate in Soviet Ukraine regarding the language matters since the 1950s may as well represent the final stage of elaboration. However, at the very least, such view fails to take into account the use of parallel standards in diasporas and problematisation of using Soviet norms post-1991. As the alternatives to the official standard do have some currency in Ukraine, the ghosts of the stages of norm selection and codification (recodification this time indeed!) are looming again on the horizon.

In the context of this, the Ukrainian orthographic perils of the 1920s partook of the aporias of modernity. While the 1917-1921 codifications shaped and reconfirmed key norms, their scope was limited, and the 1929 project – using a typical modernist legitimising technique of a language congress – sought to reconstruct the norm, rationalise it and at the same time differentiate and universalise Ukrainian. In it, it constructed the idea of

orthography as at once following the spoken word and protecting it, thus actively intervening in the realms of orthoepy, phonology, morphology, grammar, and history of language. It was modernist, Saussurean enterprise through and through.

'First Congress' was in itself a not unpopular language planning tool; altogether they number about 30, as counted by Joshua Fishman. However, one would never hear about the first congress of French, English or Russian. Typically, it was a technique employed by postcolonial (Hindi, Wolof or Indonesian), contested (Catalan or Dutch in Belgium), or otherwise disempowered languages of stateless nations (typically in Eastern Europe: Yiddish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Macedonian) or those that required a speedy Europeanisation (Turkish, but possibly also Ukrainian and other East European) (cfr. Fishman 1993: 4-5).

The 1933 orthography, on the contrary, drew its legitimacy from the power of hierarchical coercion rather than collective action of intellectuals, and needed no congress. It dramatically reduced the complexity of the norm, abandoned a number of internal rationalising principles and pushed Ukrainian towards unificatory universalisation that however gravitated to another language, Russian, rather than itself. The differentiation of the academic and governmental fields was also weakened, and rather than grounding political action in knowledge (cfr. Bourdieu 2012: 127, quoted in theory section above), the relationship was reversed as now knowledge had to be grounded in political action. This approach makes it essentially a de-modernising effort that rather prioritised Sovietisation and sought to destroy the representation that made Ukrainians a separate community offering another in which they were part of a common community with Russians. Of course, Sovietisation had to be masked as modernisation, hence the use of modernist rhetoric of reconstruction, protecting the "authentic" speech from "bad" writing; not least, the modernist drive towards reconstruction and rationalising improvement facilitated Chvylja's orthography in passing for a modernising project.

There was another important and long-lasting implication of the 1933 orthography, however. In the introduction, it was said that the 1929 orthography was adopted to "artificially tear the Ukrainian language away from the language of the millions of Ukrainians, of the Ukrainian workers and peasants; [it was] the departure of the Ukrainian language away from the Russian language" (UP: 3-5; Masenko *et al.* 2005: 108-110). Hence, the dominant role of the Russian language in everyday life of Ukrainian cities and industrial centres was restated. This, however, annulled the decade-long attempts of numerous Ukrainian communists to introduce the Ukrainian language and culture into urban and historically Russified spaces.

It should be admitted that the question of *Ukrajinizacija* of the republic's working class remained a debated issue since the policy's launch in 1923. Despite a common understanding of how important comprehensive Ukrajinizatcija was for the working class's unity (and the Bolshevik's rule over it), the Party was wary of defining proletarians as its immediate target since it could make the process appear to be non-voluntary. The key predicament was the national heterogeneity of the working class, which at the time included many non-Ukrainians and russified Ukrainians, who identified themselves as Ukrainians but

whose native language was Russian. The Commissar for Education Šums'kyj on numerous occasions highlighted the pivotal importance of broadening *Ukrajinizacija* to those russified Ukrainians, seen as a prerequisite for urban de-Russification. In this, however, he was opposed by Stalin himself, who emphasised the difference between the concept of *Ukrajinizacija* of the party and other apparatus (a declared objective of the policy) with *Ukrajinizacija* of the republic's proletariat, which, according to Stalin, "contradict[ed] the principle of the free development of nationalities [...] and [was] equal to national oppression" (CDAHO: 1-7; translation in Luckyj 1990: 66-68).

Skrypnyk, who succeeded Šums'kyj in the Narkompros in 1927, maintained Stalin's view on natural and gradual *Ukrajinizacija* of the working class. Skrypnyk's tenure coincided with the first Five-Year Plan. Hence, his steps in office were conditioned by the atmosphere of antinationalism and 'class war'. Thus, the new Commissar for Education shifted the emphasis towards greater ideological conformity, advancing the question of proletarian *Ukrajinizacija*. This was to be achieved through creating a total Ukrainian urban environment, a favourable setting, in which working masses would either convert or became inclined towards the Ukrainian language and new Soviet Ukrainian culture. In 1933, however, these attempts were condemned as "nationalist twists that had created artificial barriers for the broad Ukrainian masses to become literate" (Masenko *et al*. 2005: 112-132). The pedagogical argumentation strategy citing "difficulties" in the language teaching and teachers' dissatisfaction with the complexity of the Charkiv rules was used strategically to criticise the orthography (Hornjatkevyč 1993: 300). By this, the question of *Ukrajinizacija* of the working class was taken off the table: the decisive role of the Russian language, "the language of the millions of Ukrainians, of the Ukrainian workers and peasants" was given an absolute priority in Soviet Ukraine.

Abbreviations

BRU:	*Budivnyctvo Radjans'koji Ukrajiny*, Charkiv [s.a.].
CDAHO:	*Central'nyj Deržavnyj Archiv Hromads'kych Ob'jednan' Ukrajiny,* F.1, op.20, Spr.2248, ark.1-7.
DZZ:	*Druhe Zagal'ne Zibrannja Ukrajins'koji Central'noji Rady*, in: V. Verstiuk, V. Smolij (eds.), *Ukrajins'ka Central'na Rada. Dokumenty i Materialy,* I, Kyjiv 1996, pp. 69-71.
UP:	*Ukrajins'kyj Pravopys*, Charkiv 1933.
ZUtR:	*Zbirnyk Uzakonen' ta Rozporiadžen' Robitnyčo-Selians'koho Urjadu Ukrajiny,* Charkiv 1924-1925.

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Abstract

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Righting the Writing. The Power Dynamic of Soviet Ukraine Language Policies and Reforms in the 1920s-1930s

 The first post-revolutionary decades became decisive for the development of the Ukrainian language, national culture and identity. The Ukrainian language, previously subject to a number of bans, finally entered the stage of intensive status and corpus planning. Thanks to this, it became a decisive factor in the rivalry between different forms of statehood vying on the Ukrainian territory after 1917. At the same time, the status upgrade and broader public use called for the standardisation of the language. The first practical steps towards the unification of different orthographic traditions were undertaken from 1918 to 1921. The turbulence of civil war, however, determined the failure of comprehensive language reform. Calls for linguistic unification gained new force in the second half of the 1920s: with the introduction of *Ukrainizacija*, the local variant of the all-Union nationalities policy of *korenizacija* introduced in 1923, the Ukrainian language was acknowledged as the means to the republic's Sovietisation. This was part and parcel of the Soviet "affirmative action empire" (Terry Martin) which had to contain the 1917-1921 rise of nationalism of the empire's minorities. Locally, the elites had to negotiate their own interests and the centre's demands. How exactly do the debates on the "correct" codification of the language and the actual steps towards different ideals reflect the changing power dynamic between the centre and the republics in the interbellum USSR? This is the problem this study sets out to tackle using the example of Soviet Ukraine.
 The paper explores the link between language and politics in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s. While examining the political preconditions for the language policies in Ukraine, significant attention will also be devoted to the specifics of the 1928 spelling reform and its reception by the general public in Ukraine and abroad. In general, it is argued that in the Soviet Union language was often used as a tool of political consolidation, and the power struggle between different visions of the future of the republics can be seen in debates and reforms of language. Hence, the correlation between Soviet language policies and the subsequent Sovietisation (or Russification) is highlighted.
 The subsequent debates around the status of the Ukrainian language, its orthography and vocabulary exposed the unbridgeable differences between the political elites in the republic and powers in Moscow. The draft of the new orthography was thoroughly discussed by academics and linguists, representing different parts of Ukraine and the final draft was publicly discussed republic-wide. The spelling reform, adopted in 1929, can rightly be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of *Ukrainizacija*. This newly-acquired status was significantly challenged by the centralisation drive of the Moscow party leadership. This orthography, widely known as '*skrypnykivka*' (after the then Commissar for Education Mykola Skrypnyk) or 'Charkiv orthography' was attacked for its attempts to dissociate the Ukrainian language from Russian and 'westernise' the language. After 1933, the main principles of the spelling reform were labelled 'nationalistic'. The reform was quickly abandoned. Furthermore, after 1937, all the corpus planning attempts were geared towards 'purifying' the Ukrainian language from foreign influence, when Russian equivalents and cognates were introduced or prioritised.

Keywords

 Korenizacija; Ukrajinizacija; Language Reform; Modernity; Sovietisation.