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**Article:**

Lunyova, Tetyana, Lanvers, Ursula and Zelik, Oksana (2024) Bill 7633 on the restriction of the use of Russian text sources in Ukrainian research and education: analysing language policy in times of war. *Language Policy*. ISSN: 1573-1863

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-024-09697-4>

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# Bill 7633 on the restriction of the use of Russian text sources in Ukrainian research and education: analysing language policy in times of war

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Received: 23 June 2023 / Accepted: 5 March 2024  
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## Abstract

For centuries, Ukraine has been a site of conflicts over language rights. During 70 years of Soviet leadership, Ukraine experienced ‘relentless Russification’ (Reznik in *Language of conflict: discourses of the Ukrainian crisis* (pp. 169–191). Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2020 p. 170). After breaking from Soviet rule, the Ukrainian language became an increasingly powerful symbol and means of national identity. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the language issues have gained yet more public and political attention. Addressing the urgency, the Ukrainian parliament adopted, in the first reading, Bill 7633, aiming to restrict the use of any Russian sources in Ukrainian school and academia, a bill that was met with criticism and experienced intensified debates. This article analyses a range of text sources (both governmental and non-governmental) debating Bill 7633, using Discourse Analysis, and reveals how ‘liberal values’ and ‘lived liberalism’ (Fedirko et al. in *Social Anthropol/Anthropol soc* 29(2):373–386, 2021) are practiced or violated through problematising or justifying the Bill. Thus, the article contributes to the (recently emerged, i.e. since the start of Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014) body of research on political and public discourses of the Ukrainian conflict (Epstein in *Studies in East Eur Thought* 74(4), 475–481; Jones, 2020; Lanvers and Lunyova in *Eur J Lang Policy* 15(1), 25–68; Slobozhan et al. in *Soc Netw Anal Min* 12(1), 1–12, 2022). Results show a comprehensive range of arguments both for and against Bill 7633 in both governmental and non-governmental texts which is interpreted as a form of liberalism in fragments (Fedirko in *Social Anthropol/Anthropol Soc*, 29(2), 471–489, 2021). The conclusion debates the unreserved applicability of western conceptualisation of liberal language policy in the context of war and prolonged linguistic contestations.

**Keywords** Ukraine · Language policy · Education · Research · Liberalism/anti-liberalism

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## Introduction

As of February 2024, Ukraine has been in the state of war with Russia which began in February 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and was further escalated in February 2022 when Russia commenced a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The invasion was launched under the false pretext of defending Ukraine's 'Russian-speaking population' (Trudgill, 2022). Russia's invasion has been followed by the restrictions of the functioning of the Ukrainian language on the occupied territories (Російська політика, 2022; Review, 2021). The war has heightened Ukrainians' awareness of the language issues (НІСД, 2023) and encouraged legislative initiatives on language policies.

In December 2022, the Ukrainian parliament adopted, in the first reading, *Bill 7633*, aiming to strongly restrict the use of any Russian sources in education and research in Ukraine. The Bill was met with criticism and triggered intense debates, both in public journalist outlets and legislative discourses.

This study analyses enactment of language policy, in the challenging context of threatened national survival, whereby language as a symbolic form of national identity is caught in the crossfire between protectionism and liberalism. The legal text of *Bill 7633*, governmental comments on it, as well as publicly available journalistic texts, are examined using Discourse Analysis (DA). Thus, this article contributes to the (recently emerged, i.e. since the start of Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014) body of work analysing political and public discourses of the Ukrainian conflict (Csernicškó, 2022; Epstein, 2022; Jones, 2023; Lanvers & Lunyova, 2023; Slobozhan et al., 2022).

Before focusing on *Bill 7633* debates, we explain the historical, political and legal context of languages and language policy in Ukraine.

## Languages in Ukraine: policy, practice and attitudes

*Bill 7633* was created at the times of the Russian war against Ukraine and also in the context of the years-long "tug-of-war" between ideologically opposite language policies in Ukraine. To elucidate this complex context, we will briefly present the history of language policies in Ukraine (Section "[A historical outline of language policies in Ukraine](#)"). We will then discuss language practice in Independent Ukraine (Section "[Language use in Ukraine since Independence](#)"). After that we will describe recent (2020–2023) language attitudes in the Ukrainian population (Section "[Language attitudes in the population](#)") and outline the controversy of the language policy as a contributor to instigating Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Section "[Language policy as a contributor to the outbreak of war controversies](#)").

## A historical outline of language policies in Ukraine

In this Section, we will follow the chronological principle and briefly describe language policies towards Ukrainian during the period of Ukraine's political subordination to the tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union and then Ukraine's independence. The latter will be discussed with particular attention to waves of promoting Ukrainisation or favouring stronger Russification.

### A 300-year struggle for Ukrainian

As both the tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union favoured promotion of the Russian language and practiced suppression of Ukrainian, the Russification policies in Ukraine and struggle for the recognition of Ukrainian stretch over 300 years (Besters-Dilger, 2009). In the tsarist Russia, Ukrainian was prohibited from being used in education, official communication and print with the aim to preclude the Ukrainian language from gaining full functionality as a standard language (Flier & Graziosi, 2017).

Even though the early Soviet state implemented the 'nativization' policy (late 1920s–early 1930s) aimed at supporting the development of non-Russian languages in the USSR and thus nudging hopes for the revival of the Ukrainian language, the window of opportunity for Ukrainian did not last long and Russian had been vigorously promoted since the 1930s (Bilaniuk, 2005). Though Ukrainian was not officially prohibited in the Soviet Union, its usage was tolerated only for low status communication (Bilaniuk, 2003). Using Ukrainian in higher status domains and pro-Ukrainian activism were associated with political dissidence. Russian was further promoted in the Soviet Union after World War II (Kulyk, 2014) since Russian was identified with the Soviet values (Bilaniuk, 2005).

After decades of systematic persecution and suppression, the Ukrainian language suffered from significant domain loss. Overall, "*In the USSR [...], national languages were expected to die out*", (Bilaniuk, 2005, p. 15). Besides, under the pressure from the Russian language, a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, that was pejoratively labelled 'surzhyk' (the word originally meaning a low-grade mixture of wheat and rye), emerged in Ukraine as a speaking practice but was derided as showing low status and poor education (Bilaniuk, 2005).

### The Ukrainian language and gaining Ukraine's independence

It was the promotion of the Ukrainian language that significantly contributed to paving way towards Ukraine's independence: before Ukraine became independent from the Soviet Union, Ukrainian was given the status of the official state language by the law "On languages in the Ukrainian SSR" (Про мови в Українській РСР, 1989, стаття 2). This law became a "*prologue to Ukrainian independence*" (Ажнюк, 2017, p. 28).

Ukraine gained independence in 1991, and since has concentrated its efforts on rebuilding itself as an independent state with, at times, a pro-European and, at times, a pro-Russian outlook. Over this time – for the last three decades, language policy

was repeatedly used, in a veritable tug-of-war, to drive forward at times Ukrainisation, at times Russification. The Ukrainian language took on a vital role in nation building (Azhniuk, 2017). As in other efforts of nation building using the Herderian notion of monolingual-monocultural national identity was fostered, the Ukrainian language served emblematically (Blommaert, 2011), in this case to represent a struggle for further emancipation from Russia. The next section gives an overview of this post-independence tension between Ukrainisation and Russification.

### Tug of war between Ukrainisation and Russification policies

Since the disintegration of the Soviet power, Ukraine has increased its efforts to revalidate Ukrainian (Kulyk, 2014). The status of Ukrainian as the state language was proclaimed in its Constitution that was adopted in 1996. Article 10 reads “*The state language of Ukraine shall be the Ukrainian language*” (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996). Being denied the status of the state language, Russian lost its dominance in Ukraine. The newly formed independent Ukraine overall modelled itself as a European nation-state. In this context, Russian was not endowed with the status of the state language, even though it was still prevalent in the usage (Kulyk, 2014). Instead, Russian was given the status of minority language with a guarantee of free development as all the national minority languages in the Constitution of Ukraine (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996, Article 10). The same Article also emphasised that Ukrainians should learn languages for international communication.

Having recognised Ukrainian as the sole state language, the Constitution made it harder for the pro-Russian forces to confer any formal state status to the Russian language (Azhniuk, 2017). In the Ratification of European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Russian was classified as a minority language, along with others (Про ратифікацію Європейської хартії регіональних мов або мов меншин, 2003). In 2010, the Ukrainian language was furthered cemented as national language by identifying it as core to national cultural and historical identity and unity of Ukraine (Указ Президента України, 2010). However, the legislative support for Ukrainian did not result in the immediate boost in its usage and Russian remained widespread in many domains (Kulyk, 2014).

Moving in the opposite direction, in 2012, under the pressure of the pro-Russian forces, the law “On the principles of the state language policy in Ukraine” (Закон України, 2012) laid foundation for the increased use of Russian, in practice resulting in Russian substituting Ukrainian in the public sphere in the southeast of Ukraine (Azhniuk, 2017, p. 312). These pro-Russian moves were framed as complying with the principles of the European charter for regional or minority languages, however they were aimed at the objectives opposed to those of the Charter since the law threatened the role of Ukrainian as the state language on a national scale (Azhniuk, 2017).

In a second wave of Ukrainisation, the pro-Russian shifts triggered a series of backlash actions against Russian (Csernicskó, 2022). The policy “On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language” came into force in 2019. This law states that “*The Ukrainian language shall be the only [our emphasis] State (official) language in Ukraine*” (Law of Ukraine, 2019, Article 1). The law

also stipulates that all citizens should master the state language (Law of Ukraine, 2019, Article 6) and use Ukrainian in public spaces (Law of Ukraine, 2019, Sections IV and V). The law bans the use of ethnic languages in the public sphere, including secondary and higher education, but does not prescribe language use for private and religious spheres.

The law fell under severe criticism, especially internationally, for neglecting minority rights (Human Rights Watch, 2022; UN Security Council, 2019; Venice Commission, 2019). This model of revitalising the Ukrainian language has been labelled critically as ‘monolingual-unified integration’ (Zhu, 2022, p. 1668), and judged to be wanting in the protection of minority languages (Csernicskó, 2022). The law significantly contributed to what is described as “‘*maze*’ of political battles, laws and regulations that negatively affect minorities in Ukraine” (Gazdag & Barany, 2023, p. 265).

This fact was exploited by Russian academics for polemic, wide-sweeping criticism (Medvedev et al., 2019). In response to calls to revoke the law, official comments were offered for the international community. In particular, the Embassy of Ukraine in Hungary made publicly available a document (Explanation on the Law, 2019), in which it was stressed that “*The law does not discriminate against the languages of national minorities and foreign languages in the territory of Ukraine*”.

In July 2021, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, having been pressured internationally and nationally to check the law for constitutionality, ruled that this law is constitutional (Рішення Конституційного суду України, 2021).

The debate so far underlines that controversies around the status of language are always about more than language: it is “*emblematic for the larger and deeper issues*” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 246).

The struggle between Ukrainian and Russian also impacts on other languages in Ukraine. For instance, a Draft Bill (9432–1) introduced in June 2023 (Проект 9432–1, 2023), promotes the use of English in Ukraine for international political and cultural communication, in an attempt to lessen the use of Russian for these domains. In short, recent Ukrainian language policy fosters the dual aims of Ukrainization and westernisation/Englishization; a trend that can be traced in university language policies (Lanvers and Lunyova, 2023).

## Language use in Ukraine since independence

Independent Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union somewhat complicated linguistic situation in which the two languages coexisted: Russian which was both imposed and voluntarily learned as the language of social mobility and used in many prestigious domains and Ukrainian performing symbolic and cultural roles as an important characteristic of the nation and being perceived as the ‘native language’ even by those Ukrainians who mainly spoke Russian in their everyday communications (Kulyk, 2014). This linguistic situation could be described as a continuum with “*Ukrainian language use at one end and Russian language use at the other end of the continuum, with varying levels of bilingualism in between*” (Marshall, 2002, p. 241). Furthermore, Ukraine displayed

a unique pattern of “*a wide discrepancy between declared ethnicity (Russian, Ukrainian or other), and actual language use*” (Bowring, 2014, p. 58) since, in particular, many ethnic Ukrainians exclusively or predominantly spoke Russian as a result of the Soviet Russification policies.

A decade after the official governmental policies of Ukrainisation were first implemented, Marshall (2002) noted that although the hitherto fast developing Russification has been halted, language shift towards greater use of Ukrainian outside intimate family context could not be observed. Based on the research results conducted in different parts of Ukraine at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and personal observations made in 2009, Bowring concluded that “*the reality in most of Ukraine is of bilingualism*” (2014, p. 70) meaning that a large proportion of the population uses both Ukrainian and Russian. A decade later Ukrainian-Russian individual bilingualism was still prominent in Ukraine (Zhabotynska, 2020).

In 2020, a public monitoring of language use (Простір свободи, 2020) revealed that at home, 53% of Ukrainians speak Ukrainian, while 29% speak Russian. A study conducted a few years before Russia’s full-scale invasion in Ukrainian region (three oblasts on the Black Sea coast) where Russian use had been domineering even though the region had never been populated by ethnic Russia majority, revealed that speakers of Ukrainian nationality significantly increased their usage of Ukrainian while still retaining the use of Russian (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022).

After the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, 17% of residents of the eastern, southern and northern regions of Ukraine are reported to have switched from Russian to Ukrainian in their everyday lives (Бахіров & Заїка, 2022). This figure is interpreted as having a great significance since it is bigger than under 15% of the same switch from Russian to Ukrainian in all the previous years of independence from 1991 to 2021 (Бахіров & Заїка, 2022).

A sociological survey carried out by the Razumkov Centre, a non-governmental think tank conducting research of public policy, in May 2023 (Разумков Центр, 2023) demonstrated that 69% of Ukrainian citizens believe that they are fluent in Ukrainian, 29% find their level of Ukrainian to be sufficient for everyday communication, but experience difficulties when speaking on special topics, 2% claimed that they did not understand Ukrainian well and it was a problem for them to communicate in it, and 0.6% admitted they did not understand Ukrainian at all. Describing their language use at home, 68% of respondents reported that speak only or mostly Ukrainian (compared to 50% in 2015 and 46% in 2006), 9%—only or mostly Russian (compared to 24% in 2015 and 38% in 2006), 22%—approximately equally use Ukrainian and Russian (25% in 2015, 15% in 2006). For the communications outside of home (e.g., at work, at school), 65% of respondents speak only or mostly Ukrainian (compared to 46% in 2015), 8%—only or mostly Russian (24% in 2015), 26%—equally use Ukrainian and Russian (29% in 2015).

## Language attitudes in the population

In this section we will explore language attitudes in terms of language as an identity marker, native language, and stigmatisation of the language use.

Before discussing language as an identity marker we will have a look at the Ukrainian population perception of their national identity. Wilson (2023) argues that both the civic and the social construction of Ukrainian identity were accelerated by two (2014 and 2022) phases of Russia's war against Ukraine. As a result, Ukraine appeared as "*a consolidated civic and political nation*" with an "*increased consensus on traditional nationalist mythology, defined by opposition to Russia's aggressive reimperialisation*" (Wilson, 2023, n.p.). An analysis (Kulyk, 2023) of the changes which Ukrainian national identity underwent from before Russia's aggression in 2014 till ten months after full-scale invasion in 2022 revealed shifts on all three studied dimensions: attitudes towards Russia, historical memory, and language use. Based on these findings, Kulyk concluded that Ukrainian national identity "*not only became more salient to Ukrainians but also acquired a more radical meaning, thus imbuing supposedly civic attachment to the homeland with the potentially exclusive ethnocultural content*" (2023, p. 1).

Ukrainian serves as an important identity marker for many Ukrainians (Barrington, 2022). However, language affiliation does not overlap with ethnicity in that many Russian speakers identify as Ukrainians ('Russified Ukrainians', Arel, 2018). Hentschel and Zeller (2016), analysing attitudes towards both Russian and Ukrainian in Ukrainian populations before the war, described language conflicts as "not strong", others, however (e.g. Гонтар, 2019) commented that the tension is ripe for conflicts. More recent research tends to observe a strong support in the population for the historicisation of linguicide of Ukrainian, and a support for strong pro-Ukrainian language legislation (Chayinska, et al., 2022; Korolyov & Grytsenko, 2022).

Ukrainian academics also emphasise the unifying factor of the Ukrainian language (Bondar, 2022). As Korolyov and Grytsenko (2022, p. 12) remarked:

the role of the Ukrainian language as a factor in Ukrainian state formation and consolidation of society and one of the factors of self-identification, protection, and preservation of linguistic and cultural identity is growing.

According to a public monitoring of language use (Простір свободи, 2020), 73% of Ukrainians considered Ukrainian as their native language. A survey carried out by the Razumkov Centre in May 2023 (Разумков Центр, 2023) brought the results that 78% of respondents named Ukrainian as their native language (compared to 68% in 2017, 60% in 2015, and 52% in 2006), 16% find both Ukrainian and Russian to be equally native to them (the same as in 2006, compared to 23% in 2013 and 22% in 2015), 5% claimed Russian to be their native language (14% in 2017, 26% in 2013, 31% in 2006). This study also revealed that when asked which language is more prestigious among their friends and colleagues at work or school, 74% of respondents replied Ukrainian, 9%—Russian, and 13%—"it doesn't matter"; in comparison, in 2015, these figures were 43%, 21.5% and 29% respectively.

Since Russia's aggression, we also note in public discourses an increased promotion of the view that Ukrainian is a very distinct language to Russian, contradicting propagated language ideology during Soviet times (Російська за схожістю, 2016; Топ-5 міфів, 2017).

There is evidence of spontaneous anti-Russian language stances within the population, in a variety of spontaneous bottom-up movements, such as writing *russia* deliberately with the small letter (Данильчук, 2022), using the unique letter from the Ukrainian alphabet *ї* as a symbol of resistance to the Russians on the occupied territories (Хотин, 2022), hiding Ukrainian books and textbooks despite the direct threat from Russian invaders (Bezpiatchuk & Bettiza, 2022).

At the same time, there is no strong evidence that individual speakers of Russian are subjected to persecution. Hentschel & Palinska found “*only extremely scant evidence that respondents encounter disapproval or censure from their environment for their choice of code (be it Russian, Suržyk or Ukrainian)*” (2022, p. 260). A recent study (June 2023) conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology has demonstrated that 84% of Ukrainians hold the view that in Ukraine, Russian-speaking citizens are not oppressed and persecuted, with only 8% believing that Russian-speaking citizens are subjected to systematic oppression and persecution (Hruset-skyi, 2023).

On the other hand, there is evidence that the use of Russian as a language of instruction in Ukrainian school or university settings after February 2022 get public attention and condemnation (Осадча, 2023; Горбачова, 2023). This fact is very indicative of the heightened sensitivity to the language issues as previously (before Russia's aggression in 2022) such breaches of the Ukrainian legislation, which postulates that teaching in educational institutions should be done via the state (i.e., Ukrainian) language (On Education, 2017, Article 7), went largely unnoticed.

### Language policy as a contributor to the outbreak of war controversies

Long before the full scale invasion, Russia had a history of justifying the persecution of the Ukrainian language with the need to ‘protect’ Russian speakers in Ukraine (Arel, 2018). In 2016, Putin announced “*We had to protect the Russian speaking population in Donbas*” (Радио Свобода, 2016; Reznik, 2020). The view that language policy indirectly contributed to the outbreak of the war is occasionally echoed by both journalists and linguists, (Csernicskó, 2022; The Economist, 2016). Other linguists (Fortuin, 2022) favour a different interpretation, namely that Ukrainian language policy has been abused to fuel war sentiments:

The war in Ukraine is not about language, but the status of Russian in Ukraine has been abused as a weapon, one of the factors leading up to the actual war crimes by the Russians against Ukrainians, both Ukrainian speaking and Russian speaking, that can be witnessed today. (Fortuin, 2022, p. 342)

In sum, the ideological overlaying of language and nation (*‘ideological constructedness of Ukrainian’*, Bilaniuk, 2005, p. 8) has long been accompanied by language conflicts in Ukraine. Furthermore, similar to other former Soviet bloc states

(e. g. Latvia, see Dzenovska, 2018), independent Ukraine also experiences political tension between liberalism on the one hand, and protectionism on the other.

## This study

This study examines discourses around controversial Bill 7633 in the outlined above context in which language tensions are more than symbolic, they have entered the conflict itself.

## Bill 7633

On 4 August 2022, a Bill entitled “*On Amendments to Some Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Prohibition of the Use of Information Sources of the Aggressor State or the Occupying State in Curriculum, in Research and Technical Activities*” (No. 7633) was submitted to the Ukrainian Parliament (Проект, 2022). The Bill’s title positions the text as protective of the Ukrainian language. On 1 December 2022, 282 Ukrainians parliamentarians voted for the adoption of the Bill as a basis (Проект Закону 7633, 2022). The aims are explicitly to protect Ukrainian education and research in *Educational Programmes, Research and Research-and-Technical Activities* from imperial influences and from Russian propaganda. Even though the name of the Bill does not include the official name “*The Russian Federation*”, the terms “*aggressor state*” and “*occupying state*” in the current socio-political context refer to Russia, as the Russian Federation was officially recognized an “*aggressor state*” by the Parliament of Ukraine in 2015 following Russia’s aggression in Ukrainian Donbas region in 2014 (Проект Постанови 1854, 2015). After Russia’s full-scale invasion into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, “*Russia*” has become synonymous with “*occupier*” in Ukrainian public discourse.

The Bill was prepared by a group of 21 MPs with Inna Sovsun listed as the first author. This MP signed the official document justifying the need for the Bill. She is a teacher in Kyiv School of Economics and was First Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine in 2014–2016. Out of the remaining 20 MPs some or close relation with research and education as university lecturers and/or researchers had/have 6 people with others having very diverse occupations as private interpreters, managers, business or political leaders.

The Bill states that no educational program or research shall contain references to the following sources: *created on the territory of the aggressor state or the occupying state; created by citizens and legal entities of the aggressor state or the occupying state; created in the state language of the aggressor state or the occupying state* (Проект, 2022, p. 1–2). In practice, the law would prevent teachers, students, researchers and others from the use of any Russian source or text, except in the following contexts (Проект, 2022, p. 1–2):

- Illustrating, explaining and criticising phenomena occurring in the aggressor state or the occupying state;
- Educational programmes, the content of which covers the study of the aggressor state or the occupying state, provided that these sources are critically analysed;
- Language classes, training in a minority language.

Both the rationales of external threat and that of national unification are key justifications of this pro-Ukrainian language policy. They follow the verdict of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine (Конституційний Суд України, 2021):

The threat to the Ukrainian language equals the threat to the national security of Ukraine (for the Ukrainian originals of the quotes see Appendix 3:1)

which was repeatedly emphasised, both before and during the invasion in 2022, in public media (Омелянюк, 2021) as well as by language policy makers (Кремінь, 2022).

Like other Ukrainisation laws before it, the Bill attracted wide ranging criticisms both inside Ukraine (Прогресивні, 2022) and internationally (Europe solidaire sans frontières, 2023), for not respecting the rights of bilinguals and multilingual practices in Ukraine and using mechanisms of control which smack of those of the oppressor themselves (THE, 2023).

Even though the Parliament of Ukraine voted for shorter preparation time for the second reading of the Bill (Проект Закону 7633, 2022), it has not been voted for as of February 2024. Currently, it seems to be abandoned as the debates surrounding it have ceased.

Bill 7366 could be viewed as a further weapon in the Russian-Ukrainian war, especially if considering the extent of de-Russification this Bill represents. Liberal understandings of linguistic rights, such as the protection of linguistic minorities, might indeed jar with Bill 7366. Pavlenko (2011, p. 52) warns against the practice of adopting

[...] discourses of language endangerment, historic injustice, linguistic normalization, and language and ethnicity [can be used] to conceal potentially illiberal and coercive nature of the new language policies.

However, the controversy around the Bill needs to be understood in context of a long history of aggressive “de-Ukrainisation” by Russia, a context which cannot be ignored. As Hogan-Brun put it, any “*transferability of Western models of minority rights*” (2005, p. 374) is limited by the specifics of historical and linguistic injustices of the given context.

### Placing bill 7633 in a research perspective

This language policy study is one of the very few that observe policy making in action (Källkvist & Hult, 2016), focusing on the all-important aspect of legitimacy of such policy (Thingnes, 2022). Unlike in other language policy studies investigating the processes of policy creation, the researchers were, in this case, not involved

in the policy making. Since implementing new language policies ‘*is not a linear process, but a complex and often paradoxical negotiation between the provisions of the policy and the agencies of the local actors tasked with enacting it*’ (Savski, 2017, p. 283), this research examines how the controversial nature of Bill 7633 was addressed in its public discussion.

The central contention around Bill 7633 is its apparent ‘non-liberal’ nature, necessitating the need to clarify the understanding of ‘liberalism’ for this context. To this end, we differentiate between ‘liberal values’ and ‘lived liberalism’ (Fedirko et al., 2021). By ‘liberal values’, we understand the sharing of norms of what is desirable and worthwhile, such as ‘*liberty, individuality, equality, rationality, accountability of power*’ (Fedirko et al., 2021, p. 378). ‘Lived liberalism’ in contrast, can be traced in actual political and economic processes, such as the reasoned dialogue, publicity, autonomy etc. (Fedirko et al., 2021, p. 378). To gauge the liberal nature (or otherwise) of Bill 7633, then, both shared understandings of values underscoring the Bill, and the nature of ‘lived liberalism’ in creating and debating the Bill, need to be considered.

For a balanced analysis of the Bill, then, it is necessary to engage with the controversy around the Bill in context, asking how different stakeholders, with different vested interests and linguistic priorities, debate the Bill. This study analyses how different stakeholders *within Ukraine* debate the need, the practicality and the consequences of Bill 7633: on the one hand, policy makers and governmental officials, and, on the other hand, non-governmental agents.

## Research question

How do

- a. Governmental texts
- b. Non-governmental texts

legitimise, problematise, critique and/or defend Bill 7633? How do they differ in doing it?

## Methodology

### Discourse analysis

This study sits within the by now vibrant tradition of discursive analysis of language policy texts (Barakos & Unger, 2016). Within this, it follows an ethnographic approach to language policy, which emphasises the human agency and negotiation in the emergence of language policy (Johnson, 2009, 2011; Källkvist & Hult, 2016; Menken & García, 2010).

The study of publicly voiced disputes and discord on language policy (LP), then, are part of investigating democratic and transparent processes in LP, as politicians

engaged in the process might simultaneously fight for—in their perception—optimal LP in the interest of their nation, their political orientation, and their constituents. In such discourses, it is assumed that the relation between speaker, listener, ‘talked about’ topics, and wider stakeholders carries high significance.

One way to determine levels of democratic engagement and transparency in language policy is to investigate to what extent different stakeholders may directly influence LP, and what forms (discursive? material? structural?) these influences take (Tollefson, 1991, p. 211). In this study, the ethnographic approach to studying processes of language policy making serves to uncover relations between the legitimisation brought to the fore in the texts and the socio-political contexts in which they emerge.

Furthermore, in order to reveal implicit ideological processes in language policy construction, we adopt Gal and Irvine’s (1995) (see also Irvine & Gal, 2000) position that any architecting of language policy involves hidden semiotic processes. In their discussion of language ideology, Gal and Irvine (1995; see also Irvine & Gal, 2000) describe three semiotic processes: *iconisation* which “entails the attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection (between linguistic features and social groups) that may be historical, contingent, or conventional” (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 37), *erasure*, i.e. “the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible” (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 38), and *recursiveness* (Gal & Irvine, 1995), or *fractal recursivity* (Irvine & Gal, 2000) as “the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level” (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 974; Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 38). We employ the concepts of *iconisation*, *erasure* and *recursiveness* to discuss our findings and to offer an interpretation of the semiotic aspect of relationships between advancing *Bill 7633* legitimisation and questioning it.

## Data

The data was obtained from two sets of sources: governmental texts and non-governmental journalistic publications. The governmental texts comprise three types of documents: (1) the draft of Bill 7633 itself (L1) which introduces new norms and the official Explanation Note (L2) that accompanies the draft of the Bill and justifies the need for the restrictions suggested by it, (2) opinion pieces by governmental committees (GO), and (3) publication in the official government media (GC). The opinion piece of the Main Committee (GO2) includes references to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, however, all their responses are shaped as a single document with one set of final recommendations concerning the Bill.

The non-governmental texts constitute two subsets: (1) publications with the opinions expressed by education and research professionals (ERP) and (2) information primarily aimed at legal professionals (LP). These texts were selected for their potentially high readership and thus potentially visible impact on constructing the public

discussion of the Bill. We adopted the following criteria: the texts appeared in the media that are freely accessible online and either:

- Are included in the Map of recommended media (Mana, n.d.), created and run by NGOs “Detector media” and “Institute of mass information” to help readers find quality media: ERP1, ERP5, ERP6;
- Have high national ratings: ERP3 is one of the three largest business publications in Ukraine, ERP4 was rated 8th of top 10 Ukrainian media by Gemius;
- Have well-established reputation: ERP2 is one of the oldest legal publications in Ukraine and an information partner of Ukrainian National Bar Association, the Notary Chamber of Ukraine, and Ukrainian Advocates’ Association;
- Have analysis (rather than simple reporting) and discussion as their priority: ERP7.

All the above media and the publications concerning Bill 7633 in them can be easily accessed via Google search engine.

It is worth noting that there were heated discussions of Bill 7633 on Facebook as well. However, Facebook discussions accessibility was limited to the subscribers of several professionally oriented groups. In contrast, the publications subjected to the analysis in this research were available nation-wide and thus relevant for constructing language policies and practices in the whole Ukraine.

The non-governmental texts analysed in this study represent the voices of university lecturers and/or researchers (ERP1, ERP3, ERP4, ERP5, ERP6, ERP7) a legal expert (ERP2, ERP5, ERP6) and the main author of the Bill (ERP4, ERP5, ERP7).

Table 1 lists text sources, length and date of publication. Appendix 1 presents their origins, and Appendix 3 (online) the text in original Ukrainian.

## Coding and analysis

The codes were developed by all the three researchers. All the texts subjected to the analysis were coded independently by the two researchers who are native speakers of Ukrainian and have previous experience of analysing various texts, any (predominantly minor) discrepancies were resolved. Appendix 2 lists the codes and their frequency per text type.

## Ethics

Ethical permission was sought and granted at the level of the writers’ University department. As only secondary data was analysed, no permission from participants was needed.

## Results

In the following we present results by text type (governmental text/ not, opinion piece/official text), and within these sections, by salience of codes (Appendix 2).

**Table 1** data: texts types

text type	Governmental			Non-governmental	
	Legal text	Opinion piece	Official communication	Education and research professionals	Legal professionals
Number of texts	2	3	1	5	1
Text source	L1 486 L2 560	GO1 971 GO2 2,020 GO3 979	GC1	ERP1 1,388 ERP2 601 ERP3 1,535 ERP4 2,014 ERP5 1,347 ERP6 1,289 ERP7 1,522	LP
Word count	1,046	3,970	504	9,696	335
Date span	L1 04.08.2022 L2 04.08.2022	GO1 26.08.2022 GO2 11.11.2022 GO3 21.11.2022	GC1 10.08.2022	ERP1 16.12.2022 ERP2 05.12.2022 ERP3 13.12.2022 ERP4 12.12.2022 ERP5 12.12.2022 ERP6 15.12.2022 ERP7 16.12.2022	LP 10.11.2022

### Governmental legal texts

Governmental texts focus on justifying the Bill with reference to protecting Ukrainian education and research from imperial influences and from Russian propaganda.

### Official legal texts and communications

The ideas of *protecting Ukrainian culture*, education, history, values (*code 1 b*), especially from *imperial influences* and propaganda (*code 1 c*) are mentioned frequently. Both themes are so intertwined in the texts that they often appear as one argument (*code 1 b + c*). This argument is developed with the help of the concepts of “Russian imperialism”, “Russia’s aggressive geopolitical doctrine”, and “Russian world”:

[...] protection of the educational and information space of Ukraine from the influence of Russian imperialism, which has become the basis of the aggressive geopolitical doctrine of the “Russian world” [...] (L1, p. 1) (Appendix 3:2)

Eliminating Russian sources in Ukrainian research and education by Bill 7633 is framed as fostering quality of education of research, ensuring academic freedom and protecting against immoral influences. It is argued that Russian sources are imbued with the state propaganda which makes them dangerous disseminators of Russian narratives and critically reduces their quality (*code 1c*):

*“Research and relevant sources of information in the Russian Federation are of poor quality, as they are adjusted to ensure that they do not contradict the general state propaganda or even confirm the theses that it spreads  
As a result, Russian academic texts carry the threat of propaganda via spreading views on society, history, culture, etc. approved by the Russian authorities [...]”* (L2, p. 1) (Appendix 3:3)

A related argument is that of low quality of research in Russia, deployed to state that if Russian sources are used, it can reduce the quality of Ukrainian research and education (*code 1b*):

[...] without academic freedom, it is impossible to ensure the proper quality of research, and as a result, sources of information related to this research, created in Russia or by Russians, lower the overall quality standards of education and research activity. (L2, p. 1) (Appendix 3:4)

This argument may also reveal the implicit assumption that for Ukrainian researchers to achieve high standards, they should align more with western and especially European rather than Russian traditions of research. Indeed, value systems are described as incompatible between the assumed immoral values of Russian society and human and ethical values of Ukraine (*codes 1b and 1c*):

[...] the Russian academic texts created in this system generally reflect this authoritarian, chauvinistic, cruel and cynical society in terms of values. They are opposed to the principles and values enshrined in Ukrainian legislation on education and research. Therefore, they should not be used by us. (L2, p. 1) (Appendix 3:5)

These texts also emphasise the need for domain expansion and retention of the Ukrainian language, and expansion of Ukrainian sources in education contexts generally (*code 1a*):

The state promotes the publication and dissemination of sources of information in the field of research and research-and-technical activities in the state language. (L1, p. 3) (Appendix 3:6)

In all governmental sources, it is notable how the Ukrainian language is referred to as *the state language*, reminding readers that Russian is not one. Unsurprisingly, the governmental legal texts express no criticism of the suggested restrictions. Neither the Bill mentions any possible problems relating to its implementation and implications nor its official justification voices any (potential) criticism.

Official governmental communication shows the same preoccupations with *justifications* of the Bill (*code 1 b*):

[...] the use of educational and research literature created in Russia poses a threat to the educational and research sphere of Ukraine. Taking this into consideration, a group of MPs prepared and registered a draft law in the parliament [...] (GC) (Appendix 3:7)

It is worthy of note that the title of Bill 7633 carefully avoids the name “Russia”, thus making this law potentially applicable to any aggressor state. On the other hand, the official government media source in its publication mentions Russia directly. Thus it communicates the main point of the Bill straightforwardly and explicitly (*code 1 b+c*):

The use of educational and scientific literature created in Russia will be banned (GC) (Appendix 3:8)

Overall, governmental discourse presenting Bill 7633 is constructed as “threat discourse” (Heller & Duchêne, 2007, p. 4).

### Opinion pieces

Governmental opinion pieces tend to evoke the same *justifications* of the Bill: the argument of protecting Ukrainian culture, education and research from the negative imperialist influences (*code 1 b+c*) dominates. However, the stance in these texts is decidedly more critical in that several problems of Bill 7633 are reported. Of most *concern* are issues of non-compliance with existing laws (*code 2b ii*), both international (European Union policy) and national (the Ukrainian Constitution, the Laws of Ukraine “On Research and Technical Information”, “On Research and Research-and-Technical Activities”, and potential loss of sources in Russian for Ukrainian research (*code 3a iii*)). The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine raises concern that Bill 7633 runs the risk of being unconstitutional:

The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine believes that there is a risk of unconstitutionality of the proposed draft of the law, as the restrictions provided for by it may be considered disproportionate and violating the principle of proportionality and a number of principles of research, namely objectivity, impartiality, comprehensiveness, completeness, etc. (GO2, p. 4) (Appendix 3:9);

The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine argues that Bill 7633 contradicts the research, educational, cultural and information policy of the European Union because it encourages low quality research:

[...] Draft Law 7633 creates all conditions for pseudo-research – a set of facts and ideas that imitate academic forms and methods of knowledge representation and falsify the results of research, and contradicts the research, educational, cultural and information policy of the European Union (GO2, p. 4) (Appendix 3:10)

Low quality, it is further argued, would lessen chances of further European alignment of Ukraine with the EU:

And its [Bill 7633] introduction will create huge unjustified and illogical obstacles to the open circulation of information, which could cause considerable damage to Ukraine's image as a candidate for EU membership (GO2, p. 4–5) (Appendix 3:11)

The text of the Bill is also frequently criticised for its imprecision (*code 2b iv*) regarding the lack of clarity defining:

(a) “Russian imperialism” and “the aggressive geopolitical doctrine of the Russian world”:

The definitions of “Russian imperialism” and “the aggressive geopolitical doctrine of the “Russian world” used in the draft law due to the lack of their definition in the current legislation may complicate the mechanism of the legislative enforcement of the norm. (GO1, p. 2) (Appendix 3:12);

(b) “critical analysis” that is used in Bill 7633 to introduce the possibilities of using Russian sources of information under some restricted conditions:

The concept of “critical analysis of phenomena” used in the draft law needs to be clarified, as it is not a legal category but a method of research inquiry[...] (GO1, p. 2) (Appendix 3:13);

(c) the difference between basic and applied research:

While not objecting to the need for a careful approach to the use of information sources in the field of education and research, in our opinion, it is worth delineating spheres of research by the fields of knowledge in the context of their division into basic and applied research. (GO1, p. 2) (Appendix 3:14);

(d) time limits for the sources under restriction:

Besides, the proposal under consideration, in our opinion, requires determining the time limits for the application of the suggested norm. (GO1, p. 3) (Appendix 3:15).

The potential loss of sources in Russian in Ukrainian research (*code 3a iii*) receives detailed deliberation and critical evaluation:

[...] restrictions exclude the possibility of using sources of information created on the territory of a state recognised by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as an aggressor or occupying state for doing research and proper documentation of their results. (GO2, p. 3) (Appendix 3:16)

Concerns are raised about the impracticability of not quoting some really fundamental authors and sources, in particular:

Taras Shevchenko's works written in Russian:

[...] according to this principle, the researchers studying the creative activity of Taras Shevchenko will be forbidden to use references to the first edition of his “Kobzar”, which was published in 1840 in the capital of the Russian Empire[...] (GO2, p. 3) (Appendix 3:17);

(b) research papers of the Ukrainians written in Russian:

[...] references by Ukrainian researchers to their own works published in Russian before 2014 [...] (GO2, p. 5) (Appendix 3:18);

(c) publications in high-quality international journals found on Scopus and/or Web of Science:

[...] this will also apply to books and research journals [...] including those that have been or are being indexed by the bibliographic, abstract databases Scopus and/or Web of Science. (GO2, p. 3) (Appendix 3:19),

echoing the concern that the Bill will hamper the desired westernisation of Ukrainian research.

The potential limiting the use of Russian sources by the Bill is also discussed as posing the risk to Ukrainian security (*code 2b v*):

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine points out that it is worth considering the possibility of free use of information sources in a number of fields of science as those that do not contain propaganda risks or are important for studying the potential of the aggressor or occupying state (military affairs, nuclear technology, etc.) (GO2, p. 4) (Appendix 3:20)

Besides, critics demand more consultations with researchers and educators (*code 2a ii a*):

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine believes that the draft law needs to be consulted with representatives of higher education and research institutions, national academies of sciences and the research community and substantially revised based on the results of such consultations. (GO2, p. 2) (Appendix 3:21)

Overall, the of the efficiency of the Bill is doubted (*codes 3a i and 3b iii*):

In view of this, the possibility of achieving the result of the draft law – ensuring the proper quality of research publications and educational programmes in Ukraine – also seems debatable. (GO2, p. 4). (Appendix 3:22)

In sum, governmental sources—the bodies directly involved in the policies in education and research – provide a detailed analysis of the Bill. While not questioning or doubting the rationale that prompted the Bill, they reveal the potential pitfalls of its implementation. These discussions reveal an attempt to comply with all current legislation while not compromising westernisation/Europeanisation.

### **Non-governmental texts**

The texts analysed here give voice to researchers and educators as well as the key figure who initiated the Bill. Being communicated via known, respected and easily reached media, these opinions bring Bill 7633 into the public space for scrutiny and discussion.

## Researchers' and educators' stances

Concerning *justifications*, all analysed sources reiterate the argument of the need to protect Ukrainian education and research from the negative influences of the Russian sources (*code 1 b + c*):

On 1 December 2022, the Verkhovna Rada adopted in the first reading [...] a draft law on amendments to certain laws of Ukraine to prohibit the use of information sources of the aggressor state or the occupying state in educational programmes, research and research-and-technical activities. (ERP3). (Appendix 3:23)

The main goal of the Bill is met with moral support:

The declared goal of the authors of the draft law sounds quite noble and appropriate – to limit the influence of Russian and Russian-language educational and research products on the relevant spheres in Ukraine. (ERP7) (Appendix 3:24)

Both the summary of the bill and its somewhat polemic comment share the same patriotic orientation, positioning values of Ukraine and Russia as incompatible. Similarly to the governmental commentaries, non-governmental texts *criticise* the Bill for its lack of precision (*code 2b iv*):

[...] for the second reading some amendments following discussions with academics will be introduced. It is expected that a number of controversial provisions will be removed and more exceptions will be introduced. [...] After all, why create a law where there will be almost more exceptions than rules, not to mention possible ambiguities? (ERP1) (Appendix 3:25)

Critics also point out that even within the writing of the bill, inconsistencies remain, as “*ruskiy mir*” (Russian) is used instead of “*ruskiy mir*” (Ukrainian) (ERP3).

The most fundamental criticism is that the Bill enacts *methods of totalitarian politics* (*code 2b i*):

Why make a law that puts Ukraine on a par with totalitarian states? (ERP3) (Appendix 3:26)

Critics polemically compare the practice to that of the Middle Ages, when some sources were forbidden for ideological reasons:

The scholar also asks whether the next step will be compiling a list of literature prohibited for citation. “What will it be? An “index of forbidden books” that were burned in the Middle Ages and were prohibited from reading? Who will compile these lists? (ERP4) (Appendix 3:27)

Concerns about the Bill’s *non-compliance* with the existing Ukrainian and European legislation are also often raised (*code 2b ii*):

The law directly contradicts the irreversibility of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic course enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution [...] (ERP2) (Appendix 3:28); [...] it [Bill 7633] violates Article 13 "Freedom of the arts and sciences" of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [...] (ERP2) (Appendix 3:29)

Further issues concern the Bill's *practicability*. For example, critics ask if it will be possible to translate many sources from Russian (or other languages) (*code 2a iii*):

According to the authors of the draft law, in five years—this is the length of the transition period—everything that may be needed in research and teaching will be available in Ukrainian. The prospect is brilliant, but anyone who works in the research and educational field knows that it is unrealistic. It is impossible to accomplish this amount of work within the "five-year plan", even if research and education receive budgets comparable to the "Big Construction. (ERP1) (Appendix 3:30)

We also note here the ironic allusion to the terms from the Soviet times "*five-year plan*" and "*Big Construction*", adding to the criticism of the Bill as unacceptable policy making.

One author also asks how feasible it will be to find out the nationality of the authors (*code 2 i*):

But how to determine the author's nationality? Should one write them a letter asking them to confirm their citizenship? And what if the author has several citizenships? This further complicates the work of researchers and teachers. (ERP1) (Appendix 3:31)

More than in governmental commentaries, concerns are voiced regarding the *negative impact on the quality of research* (*code 3 a: negative*):

The amendments to the Law "On Research and Research-and-Technical Activities" proposed by draft law 7633 are essentially a step towards killing Ukrainian research. (ERP3) (Appendix 3:32)

The loss of sources in Russian is also seen as threatening quality, both for research (*code 3 a iii*):

The current reality is that there is a lot of research and educational information available in Russian, which is used by specialists in their professional activities. It should be noted that we are not talking about propaganda materials at all, but about research papers and information sources. What should researchers do in this case? (ERP1) (Appendix 3:33)

and education (*code 3 b ii*), both within the humanities:

Such a refusal [from sources in Russian] will make our humanitarian education incomplete. (ERP5) (Appendix 3:34)

and sciences:

[...] how to teach physics in universities without the ten-volume book "Theoretical Physics" by Lev Landau and Evgeny Lifshitz, and how to teach mathematics without the classical works on function theory, functional analysis and other disciplines that were published only in Russian[...] (ERP2) (Appendix 3:35)

It is also argued that the Bill might invite plagiarism (*code 2a iv*):

Instead, this Bill (if approved) essentially tolerates plagiarism – from the Russian authors. (ERP3) (Appendix 3:36).

The poignancy of this argument is strengthened by specific examples that in order to illustrate the potential loss of sources refer to the works of the intellectuals who have had paramount importance for constructing Ukrainian national self-identification:

[...] which effectively introduces a ban on citing millions of research sources and authors, starting with some works by Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko and Skovoroda's diaries [...] (ERP6) (Appendix 3:37).

Finally, critics echo the need for *more consultations* (*code 2a ii b*) and (*code 2a ii a*):

Perhaps this issue should have been studied with researchers first so that tension in the research community was not created? (ERP1) (Appendix 3:38).

Thus, the legitimacy of the Bill is questioned because of its preparation lacking '*a range of voices and discourses [...] engaged*' (Thingnes, 2022, p. 211):

Besides, the expertise of the authors of the Bill is doubted since only the principal author Inna Sovsun and her 6 co-authors "*have experience in education and research*" (ERP1) (Appendix 3:39) while others are criticised for their incompetence:

The rest are public figures, journalists, political scientists, economists, food technologists, engineers. There is even an athlete. (ERP1) (Appendix 3:40).

However, non-governmental text also counter some of the above criticism in deploying the following arguments (*code 2b vi*):

(a) the Bill offers an opportunity to move from Russian towards English as a second language:

You see, because of the constant focus on Russian, many Ukrainian scholars do not read contemporary English-language sources. (ERP4) (Appendix 3:41);

(b) accepting the Bill is framed as symbolic fight:

The whole of society is making efforts to break ties with Russia. And it seems to me that the academic community could also make an extra effort. Sorry for the pathos, but some people are fighting at the front, while others say it's hard for them to learn English (ERP4) (Appendix 3:42);

(c) the Bill creators promise to listen to the researchers:

Inna Sovsun says that now it is necessary to finalise the amendments, and there is not much time left. However, she promises that before the vote, MPs will meet with researchers to hear their arguments and suggestions. (ERP5) (Appendix 3:43).

### Legal expert text

Finally, we found one text aimed at the legal professionals, freely accessible by anyone. This text summarises the key points of Bill 7633 and reiterates its arguments of protecting Ukrainian education and research from the information sources created in the “occupying state” and “aggressor state”, and raises no criticism of the Bill. The title of the publication “*Verkhovna Rada Committee Supports the Draft of the Law on Protection of Educational and Information Space from the Influence of the “russian world”*” (LP1) (Appendix 3:44) clearly positions this text as fully supportive of the governmental rationales for the Bill.

### Discussion

In our analysis of arguments for and against Bill 7633, we found a significant overlap of argumentation between texts originating from governmental and non-governmental sources. All text types use the same defensive arguments to justify the Bill. At the same time, both governmental and non-governmental voices are strong in criticising the Bill. The governmental commentaries are, in three respects, vocal on the Bill’s shortcomings: concerning the potential breach of both international and Ukrainian law, the potential loss of quality in research especially, and endangering Ukraine’s efforts to further its westernisation. Non-governmental texts, in their turn, are sharper in their criticism regarding loss of quality in education and research, the totalitarian aspect of the law, and its negative implications for international, and especially European, relations. Unlike governmental texts, non-governmental texts are also clear in asking for more consultation and clarification of the Bill. Taken together, governmental commentaries and non-governmental texts capture the whole gamut of arguments against the Bill. Criticism addressing procedures, for instance regarding the consultation and speed of the legislation, is mostly voiced in non-governmental texts, as is the most fundamental critique levelled at “Achilles heel of the Bill”: its violation of both internal and international (human rights) laws, and its smacking of totalitarian procedures hitherto adopted by the enemy.

Examining the hidden semiotic processes underlying language ideology (Gal & Irvine, 1995; Irvine & Gal, 2000) that both motivated Bill 7633 and is advanced by this legal document, we observe that the argumentation in the Bill and the Explanation Note resorts to *iconisation* by conflating the Russian state and the Russian language as being immoral and posing a deadly threat to Ukraine overall, and to school and academia in particular. ‘The moral dimension’ (Milani, 2020) is an important recursive theme in the justification of the Bill. Associating the Russian language

with morally inferior status, the justification of Bill 7633 ideologically aligns with Ukrainian language laws immediately following independence (1991–2010). Then as now, we observe justifications for language policy anchored in the symbolic linking of Ukrainian to moral superiority and national identity, juxtaposed to the Russian language (Pavlenko, 2011, p. 49). Furthermore, *erasure* is practiced in the Bill justification in the form of advocacy of a no-Russian language policy for Ukrainian education and research. Thirdly, *recursiveness* surfaces as the extrapolation of the opposition between Russian and Ukrainian values from the domain of social and political life to the domain of education and research.

On the other hand, our analysis also revealed a significant quantity of critical voices discussing Bill 7633, both in non-governmental texts, and, perhaps surprisingly, governmental texts. Here, authors unmask the justifications of *iconisation*, *erasure* and *recursiveness* as ideological. For example, by reminding readers that not all the texts *in Russian* were written *by Russians*, but some by Ukrainian intellectuals, critics dismantle the ideology of *iconisation*. Similarly, the argument for leaving some room for the texts written in Russian works against *erasure*. Likewise, the discussion of values in the context of compliance with the European values (rather than in contrast with Russian values) counters *recursiveness*. In sum, we observe that ‘lived liberalism’ in the form of rational argumentation (Fedirko et al., 2021, p. 378) is practised via questioning the legitimization of Bill 7633.

As all language policies, Bill 7633 needs to be understood in its context. The notion of Ukrainian as a unifying language is widely acknowledged in the population (Kudriavtseva, 2021). However, despite the strong efforts, since Ukrainian independence, the results of efforts to ‘Ukrainise’ the nation have been described as poor until the 2000s (e.g. Alekseev, 2000). The currently ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war has changed this. Since February 2022, more and more schools have excluded Russian from the curricula (Барсукова, 2022). Some universities declared intentions to discontinue their programme in the Russian language (Слободенюк, 2022), and university teachers continuing to deliver their teaching in Russian received strong criticism (Волошин, 2022; Ключко, 2023). The use of the state language by the officials is being monitored (Звіт, 2022; Кречетова, 2022). Ukrainians are doubling their efforts to learn and use Ukrainian, especially Russian-dominant speakers (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022). Ukrainian ethnic minorities (e.g., Bulgarians, Gagauz and Albanians) who had been using Russian as the language of international communication have started learning Ukrainian (Анастасов, 2023). Since Russia’s full-scale invasion, schools, libraries, local communities, universities have answered the demand for learning Ukrainian by offering (often, free) courses (Уповноважений із захисту державної мови, no date). Over the past year, the Russian Wikipedia lost 17 million views per month in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian one added 10 million (Danylov, 2022). Worldwide, interest in learning the Ukrainian language has increased (The Guardian, 2022). Other Eastern European nations have joined the anti-Russian language stance. For instance, during their meeting in August 2022, the Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan presidents refused to speak Russian (The Odessa Journal, 2022). In Latvia, the Russian speaking population asked Putin “*not to protect*” them and their language (European Pravda, 2023). Bill 7633 is also not the only law of this kind in post-Soviet states. The Estonian parliament passed a bill in 2022

declaring a transition to Estonian-language schooling in Russian-language schools from 2024–2025, with the aim of fostering Estonian medium instruction only (Estonian World, 2022).

On their side, since the start of their aggression in Ukraine, Russia has doubled their efforts to marginalise the Ukrainian language in all Russian-occupied territories—on the Crimea peninsula since 2014, and other occupied regions since 2022 (State Language Protection Commissioner, 2022a). In other words, much as Russia has been weaponising the Russian language for their own purpose in a centuries-long attempted linguicide, Ukraine is currently retaliating against this with pro-Ukrainian language, anti-Russian language policies. However, although Bill 7633 suggests moves towards infringement of one linguistic minority, the protection of minority languages such as Crimean Tatar continues to be supported by Ukrainian politicians (Про схвалення Концепції розвитку кримськотатарської мови, 2021) and academics (Дочу, 2022) alike.

The question of the overall ‘liberalness’ (or otherwise) of the Bill needs to be considered in this context. Regarding ‘liberal values’ underscoring the Bill, we observe that the Bill prioritises some liberal values such as autonomy, over others, such as minority rights. Regarding ‘lived liberalism’, we observe relatively strong liberal and open debates among many stakeholders which can be interpreted as an indicator of the stakeholders’ (both governmental officials’ and non-governmental practitioners’) adherence to principles of liberal democracy: even within governmental sources, critical debate of the Bill’s shortcomings is evident. Thus, the discussion of Bill 7633 legitimacy might best be framed as another form of *liberalism in fragments* (Fedirko, 2021).

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Bill 7633 constitutes an extreme case of discursive construction of national identity (Wodak, 2009). The debates connected with the Bill demonstrate that in the attempt to follow a dual focus on Ukrainisation and westernisation, Ukrainian language policy has brought the tension between Western alignment and self-determination to the fore. On the one hand, European alignment is more important than ever for Ukraine, as Ukrainian State Language Protection Commissioner highlighted during a meeting of the General Assembly of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) in October 2022:

*“We consider Ukraine’s joining the EFNIL as a confident step toward the standards of the European community, new opportunities for the popularization and study of Ukrainian as the future language of the European Union, for exchange of experience and best European language practices”* (State Language Protection Commissioner, 2022b).

On the other hand, as Pavlenko (2011, p. 49) observes, while symbolically distancing from Russia and presenting “a new European face to the world”,

[...] the ethno-nationalist governments alienate the very people whom they claim to integrate under the premises of the European democracy. (Pavlenko, 2011, p. 49).

In sum, Bill 7633 seems to contravene existing principles of political liberalism in many ways. It could even be taken as an exemplification of the difficulties many post-Soviet bloc states experience when trying to implement political liberalism in a context overlaid with both a history of political heteronomy, and struggles to create a new national identity (Dzenovska, 2018). Within Ukraine, tension between liberalism and protectionism is also palpable in the controversies around state control of (purportedly, ‘too’) westernised free media (Fedirko, 2023). Much as Ukrainian journalism is negotiating the difficult path between “*globally circulating liberal norms of journalistic work and the structural conditions under which such work, as dependent wage labour, takes place*” (Fedirko, 2021, p. 484), Ukrainian politicians are faced with the problem of implementing liberal policies in a legacy of illiberalism as well as the threat to the existence of the Ukrainian state as an independent political entity.

The ‘judgement’ on Bill 7633, thus, ultimately rests on the question if Western values of liberalness are sufficient and appropriate given the current threat of physical extermination of Ukraine. We recall Blommaert’s (2001) remark that liberal linguistics aiming to protect minorities often oversee the larger societal conflict. For Ukraine, one consideration is what any alternative to granting Russian more than a minority status would do, given the long tradition of various forms of suppression of the Ukrainian language, coupled with attempts to elevate Russian from the status of the minority language to the official language. Furthermore, we recall that the justifications of Bill 7633 in the forms of what we identified as *iconisation*, *erasure* and *recursiveness*, were strongly criticised by Ukrainian stakeholders themselves: here, we see liberal values of free, democratic and rational argumentation in action.

Refraining from either condoning or approving Bill 7633, we plead for a contextual understanding of a policy which, in Fedirko’s sense, sits between *lived liberalism* in the way the Bill is debated and processed, and *non-liberal values* which (physically) surround the Bill. In a context where, as commentators warned,

First comes Pushkin, then Russian guns. (Кебуладзе, 2022) (Appendix 3:45).

any concession to the Russian language and culture might inadvertently entail more than liberal concession to diversity.

## Appendix 3

See Table 2.

Table 2 Text sources

Text type	Governmental			Non-governmental	
	Legal text	Opinion piece	Official communication	Education and research professionals	Legal professionals
text source code	L	GO	GC	ERP	LP
title, date, source	L1 Проект Закону про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо заборони використання джерел інформації держави-агресора або держави-окупанта в освітніх програмах, в науковій та науково-технічній діяльності No 7633 від 04.08.2022 <a href="https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/40164">https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/40164</a>	GO1 Науково-експертний висновок (Перше читання) (26.08.2022): ВИСНОВОК на проект Закону України «Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо заборони використання джерел інформації держави-агресора або держави-окупанта в освітніх програмах, в науковій та науково-технічній діяльності» <i>Головне науково-експертне управління</i> <a href="https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1450283">https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1450283</a>	Олена Горбунова Заборонять використання навчальної та наукової літератури, що створена в росії <i>Голос України. Газета Верховної Ради України.</i> 10 серпня 2022 р <a href="http://www.golos.com.ua/article/363125">http://www.golos.com.ua/article/363125</a>	Віталій Михайловський Законопроект №7633 про заборону «російських джерел»: патріотичні наміри, сумнівні наслідки для науки <i>Український тиждень.</i> 16 грудня 2022 р <a href="https://tyzhden.ua/zakonoproiekt-7633-pro-zaboronu-rosijskykh-dzherel-patriotychni-namiry-sumni-naslidky-dlia-nauky/">https://tyzhden.ua/zakonoproiekt-7633-pro-zaboronu-rosijskykh-dzherel-patriotychni-namiry-sumni-naslidky-dlia-nauky/</a>	Ярослав Конощук Комітет ВР підтримав законопроект про захист освітньо-інформаційного простору від впливу «руського міра» <i>Судово-юридична газета.</i> 12 листопада 2022 р <a href="https://sud.ua/uk/news/publication/254053-komitet-vr-podderzhav-zakonoproiekt-o-zaschite-obrazovatelno-informatsionnogo-prostranstva-ot-vliyaniya-russkogo-mira">https://sud.ua/uk/news/publication/254053-komitet-vr-podderzhav-zakonoproiekt-o-zaschite-obrazovatelno-informatsionnogo-prostranstva-ot-vliyaniya-russkogo-mira</a>

Table 2 (continued)

Text type	Governmental	Non-governmental
	<p>L2 Пояснювальна записка (04.08.2022) <a href="https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1423810">https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1423810</a></p>	<p>ERP2 Євген Захаров Фізика без Ландау і Ліфшиця? До чого призведе закон про заборону використання російськомовних джерел в освіті та науці <i>Закон і Бізнес</i>. 05 грудня 2022 р <a href="https://zib.com.ua/ua/153999.html">https://zib.com.ua/ua/153999.html</a></p>
	<p>GO2 Висновок Головного комітету (Перше читання) (11.11.2022) ВИСНОВОК до проекту Закону України про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо заборони використання джерел інформації держави-агресора або держави-окупанта в освітніх програмах, в науковій та науково-технічній діяльності (реєстр. № 7633 від 04.08.2022) <i>Комітет з питань освіти, науки та інновацій</i> <a href="https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1539345">https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1539345</a></p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Text type	Governmental	Non-governmental
	<p>GO3 Висновок комітету з питань гуманітарної та інформаційної політики (21.11.2022) Висновок щодо проекту Закону України «Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо заборони використання джерел інформації держави-агресора або держави-окупанта в освітніх програмах, в науковій та науково-технічній діяльності» (реєстр. № 7633), поданого народною депутаткою України І. Совсун та іншими народними депутатами України <i>Комітет з питань гуманітарної та інформаційної політики</i> <a href="https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1550585">https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/pubFile/1550585</a></p>	<p>ERP3 Геннадій Єфіменко Знищити чи сприяти розвитку української науки? Про законопроект 7633 на прикладі історичної науки <i>Ділова столиця</i>. 13 грудня 2022 р <a href="https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/blog/znishchiti-chi-spriyati-rozvitku-ukrajinskoji-nauki-pro-zakonoprojekt-7633-na-prikladi-istorichnoji-nauki-13122022-470969">https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/blog/znishchiti-chi-spriyati-rozvitku-ukrajinskoji-nauki-pro-zakonoprojekt-7633-na-prikladi-istorichnoji-nauki-13122022-470969</a></p>

Table 2 (continued)

Text type	Governmental	Non-governmental
		<p>ERP4            Наталя Сокирчук            Провокація депутатки Совсун. Чому збурена наукова спільнота?  <i>Главком</i>. 12 грудня 2022 р  <a href="https://glavcom.ua/country/science/provokatsija-deputatki-sovsun-chomu-zburena-naukova-spilnota-894433.html">https://glavcom.ua/country/science/provokatsija-deputatki-sovsun-chomu-zburena-naukova-spilnota-894433.html</a></p>
		<p>ERP5            Дмитро Раєвський, Юліана Скібіцька, Катерина Коберник            Парламент хоче заборонити російські джерела в українській освіті та науці. Науковці кажуть, що це заборона на саму науку. Чи це справді так? Детальний розбір із критиками та ідеологами документа  <i>Бабель</i>. 12 грудня 2022 р  <a href="https://babel.ua/texts/88116-parlament-hoche-zaboroniti-rosiyski-dzherela-v-ukrajinskiy-osviti-ta-nauci-naukovci-kazhut-shcho-ce-zaborona-na-samu-nauku-chi-ce-spravdi-tak-detalniy-rozbir-iz-kritikami-ta-ideologami-dokumenta">https://babel.ua/texts/88116-parlament-hoche-zaboroniti-rosiyski-dzherela-v-ukrajinskiy-osviti-ta-nauci-naukovci-kazhut-shcho-ce-zaborona-na-samu-nauku-chi-ce-spravdi-tak-detalniy-rozbir-iz-kritikami-ta-ideologami-dokumenta</a></p>
		<p>ERP6            Олександр Попович            Чому законопроект про заборону використання російських джерел шкодить українській науці  <i>Українська правда</i>. 15 грудня 2022 р  <a href="https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2022/12/15/251797/">https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2022/12/15/251797/</a></p>

**Table 2** (continued)

Text type	Governmental	Non-governmental
		ERP7 Роман Лехнюк Російські методи для української науки Як бажання окремих депутатів бути в патріотичному тренді шкодить українській науці <i>Zahid.net</i> . 16 грудня 2022 р <a href="https://zaxid.net/rosiyski_metodi_dlya_ukrayinskoyi_nauki_n1554716">https://zaxid.net/rosiyski_metodi_dlya_ukrayinskoyi_nauki_n1554716</a>

## Appendix 2

See Table 3.

**Table 3** Codes and their frequency

Code frequency numbers	Text type				
	Governmental			Non-governmental	
	Law	Analysis	Official communication	Education and research professionals	Legal professionals
Number of texts	2	3	1	5	1
1 Justification and rationale of the law					
a) Protecting Ukrainian language	2	1	1	1	1
b) Protecting Ukrainian culture, education, history, values	5	0	5	3	0
c) Protecting from imperial influences and from Russian propaganda	5	3	5	11	0
b + c protecting education and/ or research/ information spaces from imperial influences and from Russian propaganda	14	21	7	24	8
2 Criticism					
a) Of the processes and feasibility of the law	0	0	0	1	0
i) Practicality, e.g. of finding nationality of authors	0	0	0	3	0
ii) More consultation					
a) Would be needed: educators, researchers	0	3	0	3	0
b) Was needed before proposing the law	0	0	0	3	0
iii) How to do all translations from Russian?	0	0	0	7	0
iv) Does it invite plagiarism?	0	0	0	4	0
b) of the law					

**Table 3** (continued)

Code frequency numbers	Text type				
	Governmental			Non-governmental	
	Law	Analysis	Official communication	Education and research professionals	Legal professionals
2 Criticism b) of the law: should be improved	0	3	0	0	0
2 Criticism b) of the law: negative	0	0	0	11	0
i) A Russian type of politics? Censorship=a return to totalitarian (Soviet) and anti-libertarian politics of forbidding sources?	0	1	0	18	0
ii) Not complying with existing laws: Ukrainian and EU	0	13	0	7	0
iii) Is the law needed? Do existing laws not cover the aims of the new law?	0	0	0	2	0
iv) Not precisely enough formulated	0	12	0	10	0
v) Russian skills ARE needed strategically for Ukraine (security)	0	2	0	0	0
vi) Countering criticism against the law as voiced by educators, researchers	0	0	0	15	0
<b>3. Implications</b>					
a) For research					
3 Implications a) for research: NEGATIVE	0	2	0	28	0
3 Implications a) for research: UNCLEAR	0	0	0	1	0
i) Loss of quality	0	2	0	1	0
iii) Loss of sources in Russian	0	13	0	32	0
b) For education					
3 Implications b) for education: NEGATIVE	0	0	0	6	0
i) No problems	0	1	0	2	0
ii) Loss of sources	0	0	0	8	0
iii) Loss of quality	0	1	0	2	0

## Appendix 3

Appendix 3 with citations in original Ukrainian can be found at [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MuVbPCnxxJooX3hP68uwV\\_kgLpKk8\\_Ah?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MuVbPCnxxJooX3hP68uwV_kgLpKk8_Ah?usp=sharing).

**Acknowledgements** This research is supported by the British Academy's *Researchers at Risk Fellowships* Programme.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** Dr Tetyana Lunyova has received research support from the British Academy and Cara within the Researchers at Risk Fellowship Programme. Dr Ursula Lanvers and Oksana Zelik declare they have no financial interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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