## Language policies in UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION:

## language in the firing line?

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## 1.Introduction

#### Ukraine has been a site of cyclical conflict over language rights and policies for decades. The country’s aspiration for statehood in the 19th century and its struggle for independence in the 20th century were closely connected with the fight for free use of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of life. After Ukraine gained independence from the USSR in 1991, the Ukrainian language was employed to support national unity, demonstrably distancing the new nation from the legacy of Russian influences. Thus, since long before the war, Ukrainian language policy has been a matter reaching beyond internal state regulations: language is a central part of the political struggle between Ukraine’s independence, historic alliance with Russia, and more recent attempts to westernise the nation. For the latter, English is of increasing significance. Russia’s interest to influence this volatile situation culminated in a full-scale invasion to Ukraine in February 2022, claiming to defend Russian speakers.

#### Language education can serve the interests of national policies in many respects, and within the education sector, higher education institutions (HEIs) are powerful agents of language policy. As somewhat autonomous policy agents, HEIs sit at a key crossroad of both reflecting national interests and social values, as well as shaping and influencing them. For this reason, this study focuses on current language policies in Ukrainian HEIs, to investigate how their language education policies (LEPs) aim to shape contemporary Ukraine.

#### ***Historical-political background: languages in Ukraine from 19th to 21th century***

#### Tsarist Russia had a clear, consistent and centuries long policy to ban the usage of the Ukrainian language on the territory of Ukraine suppressed by the Russian empire. Ukrainian was prohibited from being used in education, official communication and print (Short guide, 2017) with the aim to preclude the Ukrainian language from gaining full functionality as a standard language (Flier & Graziosi, 2017). Two documents of the Russian Empire epitomise this policy of eradication of the Ukrainian language: in 1876, the Ems Ukaz of Alexander II prohibited “*printing and importing from outside the country any Ukrainian language literature, as well as the bans Ukrainian theatrical performances and printing of Ukrainian texts on sheet music, including national songs*” (Short guide, 2017). In 1863, Valuev circular prohibited *“giving a censure permit to print Ukrainian spiritual and popular education literature: “there is and can not be any separate Maloros [“little Russian”, i.e. Ukrainian] language””* (Short guide, 2017). An 1863 Russian decree stating *“A separate Little Russian language [i.e, Ukrainian] never existed, does not exist, and shall never exist”* is a good summary of the Russian empire Russification policy (Magocsi, 1996).

The first two decades of Ukraine’s existence in the newly formed in 1917 Soviet State (late 1920s - early 1930s) were characterised by reappraisal the Ukrainian language within the policy of the linguistic indigenization that allowed Ukrainian to be widely used in Ukraine (Arel, 2017, 237; Flier & Graziosi, 2017). At that time, as well as in the late 19th century, the Ukrainian language was an important cornerstone of nation building (Bernsand, 2001). Russia’s liberal policy towards Ukrainian was reversed in the 1930s, during the period of the Great Famine (Holodomor) and extermination of Ukrainian intellectual and cultural elite (Flier & Graziosi, 2017; Perehinets, no date). Since then, Russian had strong dominance as the language of state organs, and any attempts to question the status of Russian were qualified as “nationalist” and criminal (Arel, 2017, 237). Ukrainian was not officially prohibited in Soviet Russia, but its usage was limited to traditional peasant culture (Arel, 2017, 240). Ukrainian being tolerated for low status communication, individuals using Ukrainian in higher status domains and pro-Ukrainian activists, were stigmatized as political dissidents and often persecuted or silenced (Hornjatkevyc, 2000; Moser, 2016). Given the dominant support of the Russian language, Ukrainian lacked opportunities to develop its full functionality in all the spheres of social and personal life of the population of Ukraine. After the decades of systematic persecution and suppression (Kononenko & Holowinsky, 2001) the Ukrainian language suffered from significant domain loss (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022).

#### Ukraine gained independence in 1991. In the post-Soviet era, as Eastern bloc countries, Ukraine faced tensions between the then lingua franca, Russian, and a national language, Ukrainian (Fouse, 2000). Having gained its independence, Ukraine focused on both reinforcing its national identity and increasing westernisation, both socially and politically. Linguistically, these align with the promotion of the Ukrainian language and facilitating the learning of European languages, first and foremost English, as a foreign language.

Ukraine became an associate member of the EU in 2017. Attempts to westernize the country span over 30 years by now, reaching back to times considerably before the recent Russian-Ukrainian conflicts. Efforts to reform and westernize Ukrainian education systems have seen increased activity since 1991 but can be traced back to before the country’s independence. Ukraine signed up to the Bologna agreement in 2005 (Harrison, 2021)[[1]](#footnote-0).

In 2014, Russia started aggressions against Ukraine by annexing Crimea, while the Ukraine mainland saw increased attempts to revitalize and modernize their language, e.g. via school education, albeit to modest success (Friedman, 2016). Nonetheless, even before the full-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine in February 2022, many Ukrainians increased their efforts to learn Ukrainian, especially Russian-dominant speakers (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022). The next section expands on how this linguistic conflict accompanied Ukraine since its independence: the war has brought this conflict to the fore.

***Language Legislation in modern Ukraine***

The language legislation in Ukraine has been shaped by two strong competing political forces pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian. Russia, for their part, has exacerbated and exploited this tension to justify the persecution of the Ukrainian language, notionally 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 2018). He repeated the same rhetoric of protecting the Russian language speakers in Ukraine to justify the so-called “special operation” launched in February 2022.

In 1989, when Ukraine was aiming to gain independence from Soviet Russia, Ukrainian was given the status of the official state language by the law “On languages in the Ukrainian SSR” («Про мови», 1989, стаття 2). This law became a *“prologue to Ukrainian independence”* (Ажнюк, 2017: 28), but provided Russian with the status of a language of interethnic communication («Про мови», 1989, стаття 4). What then followed is an intricate legal ‘tug of war’, lasting nearly two decades, favouring at times Ukrainian, at times Russian. This is sketched below.

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has increased its efforts to revalidate Ukrainian (Azhniuk, 2017). The status of Ukrainian as the state language was proclaimed in its Constitution that was adopted in 1996, 5 years after Ukraine became independent in 1991: Article 10 reads “*The state language of Ukraine shall be the Ukrainian language*” (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996). The Constitution categorizes Russian as a minority language and guarantees free development to all the national minority languages. However, Article 10 also emphasises that Ukrainians should learn languages for international communication. In contrast to the 1989 law, Russian is not classified as an interethnic language anymore. Thus, this legislation emphasises westernization. Having recognised Ukrainian as the sole state language, the Constitution made it harder for the pro-Russian political forces to confer any formal state status to Russian in Ukraine (Azhniuk, 2017: 311).

In 2003, Ukraine (Law of Ukraine, 2003), adopted a law on regional minorities. According to the Law, *“provisions of Charter shall apply to languages of the following national minorities in Ukraine: Belarusian, Bulgarian, Gagausian, Greek, Jewish, Crimean Tatar, Moldavian, German, Polish, Russian, Romanian, Slovak and Hungarian”*.

In 2010, the 1996 legislation was furthered by framing Ukrainian as core element for the national cultural and historic identity (Про Концепцію державної мовної політики, 2010). However, in 2012 under the pressure of the pro-Russian political forces the law *“On the principles of the state language policy in Ukraine*” was passed with the aim to expand the sphere of the Russian language (Azhniuk, 2017). The terminology was altered to comply with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In practice, however, it resulted in Russian substituting Ukrainian in the public sphere in the southeast of Ukraine (Azhniuk, 2017). After several protests by pro-Ukrainian forces (Мовне законодавство, no year), it was finally abolished in 2018 (Закон України «Про втрату чинності Закону, як такого, що не відповідає Конституції України (є неконституційним)», 2018).

In a further ‘tug of war’ change, Ukrainian was strengthened again in 2019 with the *Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language* (Nedashkivska, no date)*,* stating that “*The Ukrainian language shall be the only State (official) language in Ukraine”* (Law of Ukraine, 2019, Article 1). This law intended to reduce languages other than Ukrainian from public life, e.g. by stipulating that all citizens should master the language, that publications are to be in Ukrainian or translated into Ukrainian, unless they are in Crimean Tartar or a European language, and that bookstores hold at least 50% of their stock in Ukrainian. It also decreed that State sponsored professional positions need a qualification in Ukrainian (Law of Ukraine, 2019, Article 9 Section III). This model of linguistic integration has been labelled critically as ‘monolingual-unified integration’ by some (Zhu, 2022: 1668). The Human Rights Watch (Denber, 2022) and Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (Opinion No 960 / 2019, 2019) judged the legislation to be wanting in the protection of minority languages: in the eyes of critics, the law infringed minority languages rights (Cernicskó & Tóth 2019).

In July 2021, in response to the appeal of 51 people’s deputies of Ukraine claiming that the law “*On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language”* does not comply with the Constitution of Ukraine, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine ruled out that this law is constitutional. In its verdict, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine highlighted (Конституційний Суд України, 2021):

*“<...> the Ukrainian language is an inseparable attribute of Ukrainian statehood which preserves its historical continuity since the ancient Kyiv era. The Ukrainian language is the ultimate condition (conditio sine qua non) of Ukraine’s statehood and its unity. <...> therefore, any encroachments on the legal status of the Ukrainian language as the state language on the territory of Ukraine are inadmissible, as they violate the constitutional order of the state, threaten national security and the very existence of the statehood of Ukraine.”* (Appendix 2:1 for the original in Ukrainian)

The website of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine makes it explicit:

*“The threat to the Ukrainian language equals the treat to the national security of Ukraine”* (Appendix 2:2)

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

***Efforts to ‘Ukrainianise’***

The notion of Ukrainian as a unifying language is widely acknowledged in the population, although as a language of schooling, both Ukrainian and Russian continued to sustain a lot of approval, with bilingual education receiving much support (Kudriavtseva, 2021). Both before and after Ukrainian independence, the Russian language continued to be an important language of instruction in HEIs. In some administrative areas, Russian dominated in HE (Besters-Dilger, 2007), but on the other hand, many Ukrainian HEIs tried long before the war to de-Russify their institutions (Goodman & Lyulkin, 2010). Overall, despite the strong legislative initiatives since Ukrainian independence, the results of efforts to ‘Ukrainianise’ the nation have often been described as poor (e.g. Dzyuba, 2000). In recent years, however, Ukrainian in school education has gained ground again, but never to the extent of justifying the notion of Russian being persecuted (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022).

The war has triggered, in some cases intensified, anti-Russian language sentiments. Since February 2022, more and more schools have excluded Russian from the curricula (Барсукова, 2022; Суспільне новини, 2022: 18 травня; Кречетова, 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). Russia, for their part, doubled their efforts to marginalize the Ukrainian language in all Russian-occupied territories - on the Crimea peninsula since 2014 (State Language Protection Commissioner, 2022).

Much as Russia weaponized the Russian language for their own purpose, Ukrainians retaliated against this with their own language policies and preferences. Ukrainians, both politicians and citizens, have put up a range of countermeasures against the attempted linguicide, from writing *russia* deliberately in small letters (Данильчук, 2022), using the unique letter from the Ukrainian alphabet *ї* as a symbol of resistance to the Russians on the occupied territories (*Українська правда*, 2022, 13 вересня), hiding Ukrainian books and textbooks despite the direct threat from Russian invaders (Bezpiatchuk, & Bettiza, 2022) to imposing fine on the officials who continue speaking Russian even during Russia’s full-scale invasion to Ukraine (Кречетова, 2022) and issuing official recommendations to discontinue the practice of publishing abstracts in Russian in Ukrainian research journals (НАЗЯВО,2022).

The war has dramatically increased the interest in learning Ukrainian. Ukrainians are doubling their efforts to learn and use Ukrainian (Armitage, 2022; Cherchatyi, 2022), especially Russian-dominant speakers (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022). Worldwide, interest in learning (Ahn, 2022) and validating (Gormezano, 2022) the language have increased. Over the past year, the Russian Wikipedia lost 17 million views per month in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian one added 10 million (Danylov, 2022). The use of Ukrainian as morally superior to Russian finds international support. For instance, during their meeting in August 2022, the Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan presidents refused to speak Russian (*The Odessa Journal,* 2022).

***Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism***

According to a 2001 Ukrainian census (Olszański, 2019), about 30% of Ukrainians speak Russian as their first or main language; some statistics report the figure to be higher, mainly arguing that in many urban environments, Russian serves as an unofficial lingua franca, and that informal fluency in Russian as well as Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism is high. The overlap in language competencies and language contacts not only complicates the gathering of correct linguo-demographic information in Ukraine (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022), but also has given rise to the (pejoratively marked) notion of language varieties which mix both languages (‘surzhyk’, Bernsand, 2001), and the discussion of the controversial concept of the” Ukrainian Russian language” (Константінова, 2021). The problem of surzhyk is the problem of the insufficient education of the speakers when they are unable to use either standard Ukrainian or standard Russian (Zhabotynska, 2020: 107).

Although Ukrainian serves as an important identity marker for many Ukrainians (Barrington, 2022), language affiliation does not overlap with ethnicity in that many Russian speakers identify as Ukrainian (‘Russified Ukrainians’, Arel, 2018), are ethnically Ukrainian and often feel at ease in both languages (Zhabotynska, 2020). The co-existence of Ukrainian and Russian has been “*both painful and widely debated within society*” with the politicians exploiting the issue to pursue their own goals (Zhabotynska, 2020: 92). Crimea and Donbas have the largest concentration of Russian speakers; thus, with current (2022) Russian control over Crimea and occupation of the Donbas region, numbers of Russian-only speakers in remaining areas of Ukraine have decreased significantly. Russian competence in the population remains high, for complex historic reasons.

***English in Ukraine***

### As part of increasing attempts to consolidate and unify the country within an orientation to the West (Kuczynska-Zonik & Kowalczyk, 2016), Ukraine has also shown increased efforts to improve language competencies in European languages, first and foremost English, and especially in Higher Education. The interest in English in Ukraine reflects their attempts to westernize their political orientation. The year 2016 was declared the Year of English Language (Ukrinform, 2015); substantial funds were allocated for further training of English language teachers, and the intention to introduce compulsory tests in English for all public servants was announced (Roberts et al, 2019). In 2017, the Ukrainian government passed legislation supporting a nationwide introduction of EMI. However, by common consent, current levels of English are poor in the country (Arel, 2018; Azhniuk, 2017). Thus, the country is committed to Englishize its education system, albeit often unsupported by funding and pedagogical guidance (Roberts et al, 2019).

### A key objective of the Minister of Education and Science is to improve levels of English in schools and HE (Bolotho & West, 2017). The Ministry of Education and Science (2004) declared in 2004 that moving towards EMI in Ukrainian HE is a key aim. Improving levels of English is seen as capacity building for the nations’ economic and political future. “*The longer-term objective is to help Ukraine create its own sustainable ELT capacity, and to introduce standards in universities which produce students at B2 or C1 CEFR levels.”* (Bolitho & West, 2017:15.)

### *‘English as a medium of instruction [EMI], with the aim to increase mobility and improve employability has been a key cornerstone of this attempt. In 2013, the British council report only found 3 EMI Master programmes in Ukraine* (Bolitho & West, 2017).

### Ukrainian HEIs are committed to Englishization of their programmes, in all senses: increasing the offering English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), and the teaching of other subjects using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Bolitho & West, 2017). Despite several efforts to improve and increase EMI delivery, lack of systematic policy development, planning and funding means little progress has been made in recent years. Changes are often developed by academics, Departments or single HEIs, in a bottom-up fashion. The opposite may also occur - as in this example:

### *top-down initiatives [occurred] frequently came when courses were taken by large numbers of overseas students who simply do not have sufficient Ukrainian or Russian to follow classes, and English is seen as an alternative (in Poltava and Uzhhorod, for example).*(Bolitho & West, 2017)

### In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine developed the “Conception of the development of the English language in the Universities” (МОН 2019, 13 липня). The state policy on the development of the English language in the higher education in Ukraine covers teaching English as a foreign language, English for Specific Purposes (ESP); teaching core subjects in English (English as a Medium of Instruction for Ukrainians – EMI-u); teaching whole programmes in English to the international students (English as a Medium of Instruction for Foreigners – EMI-f). All graduates are supposed to achieve B2 for English of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). It is also expected that by 2023, all the applicants to the university bachelor programmes will have English B1 competencies, and applicants to the master course will have English B2 (*Укрінформ*, 2019, 14 липня).

According to the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “*On the rules of accepting applicant to the higher educational establishments in 2021*”, applicants to master programmes should demonstrate the language skills in a foreign language (English, German, French or Spanish) on the level of B2 (Наказ No 1274, 2020, 15 жовтня). Furthermore, academics aiming for professorships should provide the certificate according to the CEFR of knowing a language of the European Union at least at the level of B2, or documents proving their foreign language ability otherwise (Наказ No 13, 2016). To ensure compatibility with EU documentation, the Law of Ukraine on Higher Education (2014) states that graduates should have a ‘*European-standard addendum’* (Law of Ukraine on Higher Education, 2014: Section II Article 7).

The Russian invasion increased efforts to learn English. In June 2022, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denis Shmygal announced that *“English in Ukraine can receive the status of a language of business communication”* ([Andreikovets](https://babel.ua/en/team/kostia-andreikovets), 2022). In August 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine developed a draft law on the status of English in Ukraine as a language of international communication (Kholodna, 2022). The First Deputy Minister of Culture Rostyslav Karandieiev was widely quoted (Kholodna, 2022 in the media for saying:

*"Expanding the scope of the English language in Ukraine will contribute to the activation of the processes of integration of Ukrainians into the European community. Every Ukrainian who learns English will be much more aware of European life”*

.

### In sum, lingo-political tensions in Ukraine include the languages Ukrainian, Russian, English and other European languages. The war has given a significant lift to the popularity of Ukrainian and learning of English, including at HEI.

### 2. The study

This study asks how Ukrainian HEIs translate the triple language agenda of De-Russification, Ukrainization and Englishization into their language policies and recommended practices.

*Research questions*

### 1. What language policies do Ukrainian HEIS websites and official documents propagate in respect of

### rationales for LPs

### medium of instruction for Ukrainian students

### medium of instruction for international students

### foreign language teaching?

### 2. How do universities differ in respect of the above? Do any patterns emerge in relating status of the HEI to Ukrainization or Englishization trends in their LP?

### 2.1. Data

### We analysed a large range of documents containing information on LP (52 documents in total: websites, official statues, plans for development, regulations of the organisation of the educational process and others, Table 1, Appendix 1) from a representative sample of 15 Universities in Ukraine. The 15 HEIs selected for our study also participated in a recent British Council (BC) survey of English at Ukrainian HEIs (Bolitho & West, 2017). The advantages of selecting the same institutions as the BC report are that it provides a baseline comparator of levels of internationalization and Englishization, and that the BC selection represents an adequate diversity of HEIs in several respects[[2]](#footnote-1). University documents were coded for information about language policy, preferences and practices, such as the extent to which Ukrainian HEI currently advertise EMI programmes, the use of Ukrainian or Russian as languages of instruction and other LP statements. All universities had reasonably detailed information on LP in their statues and plans for strategic development, but the level of information on their websites varied greatly. Only 3 of the 15 universities published any information in languages other than Ukrainian, and if so, English. The documents date from 2016 to 2022, including some documents dated after February 2022.

### 2.2. Methodological approach and analysis

*Critical Discourse Analysis:* This article adopts the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA assumes a dual interaction between language and community- that is, language can both *create* community, and is *constrained by* the nature of the community in which it is used (Fenton-Smith, 2007). CDA assumes that in the triad relationship between author, reader and ‘talked about’ topic, no representations can be free from social-political powers, and that critical analyses respecting such relationships can reveal underlying ideological stances (Van Dijk, 1993). Within this framework, thematic analysis is well-established methods. Themes were developed using inductive coding (Charmaz, 2006), jointly by authors. Thematic analysis permits insights into implicit stances (Hunston, 2002), especially when comparing themes across different texts and text types. 36 codes were agreed upon by both coders, and grouped under the following overarching codes: rationales, medium of instruction language for international students, medium of instruction language for Ukrainian students, foreign language teaching.

An inductive coding system (Table 2, Appendix 1) was developed jointly by both researchers, following a period of immersion into the data. The researchers agreed on the following hyperthemes:

* rationales for LPs
* the language of instruction for Ukrainian students
* the language of instruction for international students
* the teaching of foreign languages.

Discrepancies in coding were resolved by mutual consent. Results were *quanticised* (Bailey, 2022): after coding qualitative data (a range of HEI policy documents, see Appendix 1), we created coding frequency tables permitting us to observe trend differences regarding above-described language tensions, and between different HEIs.

### 3. Results

In this section, we first present the answers to the first questions, in this order: rationales, instruction language for international students, instruction language for Ukrainian students, teaching foreign languages. We conclude the results section by reporting on individual differences between HEIs.

### 3.1. Rationales

As evident in Table 2 (Appendix 1), complying with legislation is the single most frequent justification for their LP mentioned by all HEIs. All Universities mention this at least once, and most in several documents.

*“Researcher-teachers, researchers, teachers and other employees of the University, except foreigners or persons without citizenship who are invited to the University and are working temporarily as researchers, teachers, researcher-teachers or teachers of a foreign language, are required to know the state language and use it while performing their official duties.”*

(University 5, Statue, p. 29) (Appendix 2, 3)

*“The language of the educational process at the University is the state language. The use of languages at the University is determined by the laws of Ukraine “On supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language” and “On Education”.”*

(University 8, Statute, p.46) (Appendix 2, 4)

*“The language of instruction is determined by the Law of Ukraine* *“On Languages in Ukraine””*

(University 8, Regulations, p. 6) (Appendix 2, 5)

In accordance with national language policy, the legal compliance argument strongly favours the use of Ukrainian (see Introduction). A further rationale which might also favour the Ukrainian language, that of improving or maintaining the standing of their HEI at national level is mentioned less, and if so, often in tandem with equal emphasis on English:

*“Ensuring posting on the Internet-portal of the University information that will contribute towards improving the image of the University in the Ukrainian and English languages”* (University 1, Plan, p. 12) (Appendix 2, 6)

All other material arguments for language policy strongly emphasise the international outlook of their HEI, in particular for academic and teacher mobility (most frequently mentioned), and driving both quality and international reach of research:

*[Objectives are to] “To ensure that the teachers of the university have an opportunity to learn foreign languages to enable their participation in the programmes international mobility and their ability to read lectures in foreign languages to Ukrainian and international students”*

(University 2, Plan, p. 6) (Appendix 2, 7)

*[Objectives are to] “To take the first place among national universities according to the amount of completed international grants”*, Sub-objective *“4.1. Achieving international competitiveness of research”* includes *“Task 4.1.3. Increasing the number of published monographs (chapters of monographs) in English”*

(University 3, Plan, pp. 32–33) (originally in English)

Student and staff mobility, both inward and outward facing, may be framed as one integral aim:

*“3.5. International cooperation and integration into international educational space:* <…> *Intensification of international mobility of students, teachers and researchers”*

(University 3, Conception of Educational Activity, p. 9). (Appendix 2, 8)

When mentioning internationalization as a goal, specific languages are not always cited, but if they are, it is first and foremost English:

*“In order to ensure the possibilities for international academic mobility the University has the right to make a decision to teach one or several disciplines in English and/ or other foreign languages. At the same time the University ensures that the students acquire the knowledge of the discipline in the state language.”*

(University 2, Statute, p. 4) (Appendix 2, 9)

*“As the international mobility of students, young teachers and scientists is expanding, the training of a new generation of teachers, scientists and managerial staff, educated on the principles of global European thinking and European integration activity, with knowledge of English should be intensified.”*

(University 11, Strategy of development, p. 11) (originally in English)

To summarize, material justifications for HEI language policy show a tension between a more technocratic, legalistic argument favouring Ukrainian, and a range of arguments to internationalize their HEI further, the latter clearly favouring European languages, especially English.

All HEIs complement these more pragmatic and utilitarian rationales with a wider vision regarding the purpose of HEIs and of education in general. Here, patriotism is one key focus:

*“Our doors are open to all who seek and spare no effort to work for the welfare and prosperity of Ukraine!”*

(U1, website)(originally in English)

*“The main tasks of the University are the following:* <…> *4) formation of the personality through patriotic, legal, and ecological upbringing, encouraging the participants of the educational process to hold moral values, be socially active and have the civil position and responsibility, carry healthy way of life, have the ability to think freely and self-organize in modern conditions”*

(University 2, Statute, p. 4) (Appendix 2, 10)

Patriotic values are also intrinsically linked to utilitarian national benefits:

*“The main purpose of the University’s educational activities is to train highly qualified and competitive in the national and international job market professionals for enterprises of all forms of ownership, scientific and educational institutions, government and administration at all levels of higher education based on national and universal values.”*

(University 3, Statute, p. 5 )(Appendix 2, 11)

Most HEIs state educational goals of a holistic humanistic education,

*“Values, that are the foundation of the University activities:* <…>

*- democracy and transparency for the society*

*-humanism and tolerance to cultural diversity”*

(University 13, Statute, p. 5) (Appendix 2, 12)

*“The educational activity is based on the principles: 1) humanism, democracy, priority of national and all-human spiritual values* <…> *15) fostering national and all-human values”*

(University 15, Statute, p. 38) (Appendix 2, 13)

but often in the context of patriotic values and national prosperity:

*“humanism, democracy, patriotism, priority of human spiritual values”*

(University 9, The Regulations of the organisation of the educational process, p. 3) (Appendix 2, 14)

In sum, we find HEIs straddling their justifications of their language policies between patriotism and nationalism on the one hand, and the need to internationalize their HEIs. At no point, however, are these rationales, or the relevant languages representing each, framed as opposed or antagonistic. Policy texts may even resort to inserting Anglicisms into their otherwise Ukrainian text, as this citation shows:

*“Promoting the values of Stus [name of the HEI in question] community that live and study together (****living-learning-community*** *[in English])”*

(University 6, Plan, p. 2) (Appendix 2, 15)

## 3.2. Medium of instruction for international students

This section presents all language policies for international students mentioned by the HEIs participating in this study. When teaching international students in Ukrainian HEI, a (almost bewildering) range of language combinations are possible. However, Article 7 of the Law of Ukraine on Education puts a strong emphasis on teaching them Ukrainian:

*“Educational institutions shall provide obligatory study of the state language, in particular, professional (vocational), professional pre-tertiary and higher education institutions - to allow to conduct professional activities in the chosen field using the state language. Indigenous persons or members of national minorities of Ukraine, foreigners and stateless persons* ***shall be provided with appropriate conditions for learning the state language****”* (Law of Ukraine on Education, 2017) [emphasis by authors].

However, while HEIs are following the national policy directive and offering opportunities to learn Ukrainian, we found that many of the HEIs policies described could be classified as either ‘favouring Ukrainization’ or ‘favouring Englishisation’ (see Table 3, Appendix 1). In some cases, policies were written with a degree of ambiguity which eluded this classification. They are dealt with separately, as are those dealing with Russian.

*Favouring Ukrainization*

The strongest form of Ukrainization, mentioned by 7 Universities, advocates that international students start their course with Ukrainian as medium of instruction (UMI). However, the most popular option, mentioned by 12 Universities, is the following: international students take a course in Ukrainian as a foreign language and then proceed to study via UMI. This is especially expected of higher degree students:

*“2.3.* <…> *Foreign citizens intending to study for a PhD degree on the basis of a foreign document of previous education, but do not speak Ukrainian, must undergo language training at the Preparatory Department”* (University 6, Regulations Foreigners, p. 3). (originally in English)

*“DVNZ "UzhNU" also accepts foreigners for post-graduate studies, in the programs of the preparatory department, in the study of the state language and/or the language of instruction, as well as for obtaining postgraduate education, advanced training and internships”.*(University 12, web) (originally in English)

This regulation obliges the students to take the Ukrainian language course before they can take their PhD course which is presumably in Ukrainian.

*“Applicants/Students who are not able to speak Ukrainian are encouraged to take intensive language training (Preparatory Courses for Foreign Citizens) before they start so that they are able to communicate with others on a daily basis”* (University 10, web) (originally in English)

A variant of this, mentioned by 7 Universities, is to offer international students first a combination of UMI and Ukrainian language choice, upon which they need to pass a language certificate to be permitted to further study: follow a Ukrainian course with UMI.

*“Listeners study Ukrainian language together with other subjects, the range of which depends on the direction of future university studies …”, “Upon completion of the courses, listeners take exams in the Ukrainian language and other academic disciplines. After successfully passing the exams, listener is awarded a Certificate on completion of the Preparatory Department, which enables foreigners to continue their education in Ukrainian universities”.* (University 6, web) (originally in English)

Even if teaching in a language other than Ukrainian is permitted, the learning of Ukrainian is always emphasised:

*“To teach disciplines in a foreign language the University creates special groups for foreign citizens*<…> ***the University ensures that such students learn the state language as a separate discipline****. The list of the foreign languages used to teach disciplines is determined by the University”.* (University 2, Statute, p. 4) (Appendix 2, 16)

*“2.6. Educational programmes created to teach foreign citizens* <…> *can be implemented in the languages of the European Union. In this case the educational programme provides* ***study of the state language*** *as a separate discipline”.* (University 6, Regulations of the organisation of the educational activity, p. 10) (Appendix 2, 17)

This requirement highlights the ability to communicate in Ukrainian. It is implied that students should then move to using Ukrainian as a means of education.

When Ukrainian language courses are offered by the universities, Ukrainian is mainly referred to by its name Ukrainian, only one university refers to it as the state language (in contrast with the assertion that the language of instruction at the university is the state language).

*Favouring Englishisation*

8 Universities mentioned, a total of 20 times, that international students can start their course with English as medium of instruction (EMI) straightaway with no additional language courses. 7 universities also recommend that international students should take a course in English as a foreign language and then proceed to study via EMI, or do both simultaneously. Several universities explicitly want to link delivery to international students with Englishising their study programmes.

*“Increase the number and improve the quality of English-language programs for foreign students”.* (University 10, Strategy, p. 7) (Appendix 2, 18)

*(Strategic?) ambiguities: Ukrainian, English*

12 Universities mention that international students can start their course with a ‘foreign language’ as medium of instruction, alongside Ukrainian as a compulsory subject. The unclassified listing of several policy option can also leave vague which option is to be preferred:

*“English-based with an English language course; Based on the Ukrainian language with a course of study of the Ukrainian language; Based on English without an English course (for those who speak English); Special course on improving the Ukrainian language (for those who know Ukrainian)”* (University 3, web) (originally in English)

The formulation of many policies suggests that UMI and EMI are equally desirable, even if Ukrainian is always mentioned first.

*“1.7. Education at the University is delivered in Ukrainian and English languages.”* (University 6, Regulations Foreigners, p. 2) (originally in English)

*Russian*

Somewhat surprisingly, Russian is also mentioned as a medium of instruction (RMI), either with or without additional compulsory courses in Ukrainian. The option of RMI without any further language courses is mentioned by 2 universities, and 2 mention both UMI and RMI:

*“Ukrainian and Russian are the languages of instruction of all specialties”* (University 4, web) (originally in English)

2 Universities also allow their pre-study programmes to be delivered via Russian or English:

*“The Educational programs/training by pre-University Program allows students of the Preparatory Department to learn Ukrainian/ Russian/ English language and, if necessary, to repeat the profile subjects of the school course. Educational programs/ training is carried out on the terms of the contract”* (University 4, web) (originally in English)

*“Studying Ukrainian, Russian or English takes place throughout the pre-university training curriculum”.* (University 1, web) (originally in English)

*Summary*

National policy notwithstanding, we observe that universities advocate Ukrainian and English as medium of instruction for foreign students to almost equal measures. Some HEIs elude this categorization by using vague policy formulations suitable for either. The emphasis on English (to a lesser extent, other European languages) is better understood when rationales for LEP are mentioned: the aim is to internationalise and westernise HEIs, to the benefit of home students.

*“To raise the number of international students in the University constantly make grow the number of courses and programmes that are taught in the English and French languages”* (University 2, Plan, p. 19) (Appendix 2, 19)

This attempt to westernise is revealed through the range of languages which are accepted as the languages of instruction for the international students and the use of CEFR when the language proficiency of university applicants is discussed.

Besides Ukrainian and Russian, all languages mentioned as suitable media of instruction for international students are European languages, and large ones only if mentioned by name.

*“Ensuring that the students from Ukraine can have some educational components and blocks of the components (up to the specialisations) taught in English and other languages of the European Union, creating Anglophone (Francophone, Germanophone etc.) language groups for foreign citizens.”* (University 1, Plan, p. 6) (Appendix 2, 20)

The room left for Russian, mentioned by a small minority of HEIs, can be explained by attempts to cater for international students with Russian mother tongue or lingua franca.

## 3.3. Language of instruction for Ukrainian students

This section reports on LEPs for Ukrainian students (see Table 4, Appendix 1).

*Ukrainian*

All Universities agree on the importance of teaching via the state language Ukrainian, and most universities take great pains to emphasise their compliance with national language policy (to instruct in the state language).

*“The language of the educational process in the University is the state language.”* (University 14, Statute, p. 10) (Appendix 2, 21)

*“The language of teaching in the University is the state language of Ukraine.”* (University 2, Statute, p. 4)(Appendix 2, 22)

Policies elaborating on instruction in other languages often add that this will not be to the detriment of Ukrainian:

*“In order to ensure the possibilities for international academic mobility the University has the right to make a decision to teach one or several disciplines in English and/ or other foreign languages. At the same time the University ensures that the students acquire the knowledge of the discipline in the state language.”* (University 2, Statute, p. 4) (Appendix 2, 23)

*“In order to create conditions for international academic mobility, the University has the right to decide on the teaching of one or more disciplines in English and/or other foreign languages, while ensuring that higher education seekers know the respective discipline in the state language”* (University 3, Statute, p. 44) (originally in English)

## *Other languages*

All Universities permit some teaching via EMI to their home students. Internationalization of the HEI and mobility opportunities for staff are mainly cited as reasons:

*“In order to create opportunities for* *international academic mobility based on the decisions of the academic councils of structural units of the University approved by the rector (vice-rector for research-pedagogical activity) disciplines can be taught in the English language or languages of the European Union on the condition that all the students who study these disciplines know this language”* (University 4, Regulations, p. 7) (Appendix 2, 24)

Somewhat less frequently, benefits to students are emphasised.

*“Ensuring that the students from Ukraine can have some educational components and blocks of the components (up to the specialisations) taught in English and other languages of the European Union[...] ”* (University 1, Plan, p. 6) (Appendix 2, 25)

Most universities frame the benefits of teaching via other languages as benefiting the HEI as a whole:

*“To increase the number of consultations, publications of the lectures texts and students guides literature in the English and Ukrainian languages”* (University 2, Plan p. 19) (Appendix 2, 26)

Policies advocating some EMI to home students also stress that students will not be disadvantaged on ground of the instruction language:

*“The academic council of the University has the right to make a decision that one, several or all the disciplines can be taught, individual tasks can be performed and assessment can be carried out in the English language under the condition that all the students who study such disciplines know English. If there is a written appeal from one or more students, the University provides the translation into the state language.”* (University 5, Statute, pp. 33–34)(Appendix 2, 27)

Other large European languages (than English) as MOI are mentioned, albeit very infrequently. Interestingly, despite strong commitment to Ukrainian, there is strong evidence that all HEIs intend to internationalize their institution via the teaching in other languages. To achieve this, no policies mention that staff should be forced to do so, but 4 universities offer financial incentives:

*“To stimulate teachers to use foreign languages as the foundation for quality teaching and CPD abroad, pay them 10% more of their salary”* (University, 2 Plan, p. 13) (Appendix 2, 28)

*“Teachers who teach subjects in foreign languages are rewarded with money in accordance with the Regulation on material incentives for researchers-teachers, teachers, researchers and engineering-technical employees and doctoral students of the National University “Lviv Polytechnic””* (University 3, regulations on teaching in Foreign Languages, p. 3) (Appendix 2, 29)

Finally, a very significant minority language, especially at HE level in Ukraine, is Russian. It is therefore of interest to note that none of the policies mention Russian. However, half of participating universities concede that teaching in a national minority language might be permissible, but these cases are framed as individual ad hoc decisions responding to student needs.

*“Based on the wish of the students the University creates possibilities for them to study a language of a national minority to the level that enables them to carry out their professional activity in the chosen sphere using this language”* (University 7, Statute, p. 7) (Appendix 2, 30)

In sum, although all universities take care to emphasise their commitment to teaching via Ukrainian, an almost equal emphasis can be found on teaching via foreign languages, especially English, an increase of which is clearly desired. Teaching via Russian can be catered for under national minority language policy, in compliance with European legislation on minority languages. The language, however, is never mentioned by name.

## 3.4. The teaching of foreign languages

If HEIs mention policies of FL education at all (4 do not, see Table 5, Appendix 1), a preference for European languages, in particular French, German and English is noticeable.

*“Based on their needs and preferences and in consultation, international applicants/students may be offered to consider studying on one of our English, German, French or Polish language courses which run throughout the year in order to strengthen their language skills to support their studies”.* (University 10, web) (originally in English)

There is a focus on obtaining international certificates and standards:

*“Providing human resources to implement educational activity includes:* <…>*stimulating researcher-teachers and researchers to obtain international certificates in foreign languages”* (University 3, Conception of Educational Activity, p. 11) (Appendix 2, 31)

*“Integration into international educational space:* <…> *Applying and meeting the international standards of teaching foreign languages and requirements for language qualifications”* (University 1, Plan, p. 6) (Appendix 2, 32)

and on aiming for the B2 level of the CERF

*“To intensify the international activity, mobility of the researchers, teachers and students create the opportunities for advanced learning of foreign languages (first of all English and German) to achieve the B2 level. With the same aim invite teachers who are native speakers to work at the University.”* (University 2, Plan, pp. 18-19). (Appendix 2, 33)

The quote above also demonstrates that concerning native speaker preference, although this might seem dated at first glance, at closer inspection, in most cases, they seem to be rationales with reference to teacher recruitment rather than teacher quality:

## 3.5. Individual differences between Higher Education Institutions

The 15 universities selected for this study present a wide range of both national and international rankings, out of the total of 200+ universities in Ukraine. For example, 3 of the 6 Ukrainian Universities (bold in Table 6, Appendix 1) achieving international QS scores are represented. Looking at the medium of instruction language and FL policies for each HEI, a few trend observations reveal themselves. Higher ranking HEIs tend to empathise both national and humanistic rationales for language education, while lower ranking HEIs tend to emphasise material benefits of language skills and language learning. All HEIs, in particular higher-ranking ones, emphasise EMI or the use of European languages over that of Ukrainian when teaching foreign students. Some low ranking HEIs do not specify language policies for foreign students, suggesting that these types of universities might have both few admissions from international students and insufficient staff to teach via EMI or another European language. Regarding the medium of instruction for home students, higher ranking HEIs emphasise English and European languages to equal extent, with lower ranking emphasising English. Finally, only some HEIs mention Russian at all, presumably because they had a relatively large international student intake of Russian speakers.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This article systematically examined how the Ukrainian HEIs frame their languages use: Ukrainian, Russian and English and other languages of the European Union. The multiple resources analysed here suggest that - national policies favouring Ukrainian notwithstanding - there is great desire to Englishize Ukrainian HEIs further. Overall, Ukrainisation, is given equal prominence to Englishization and/ or westernization.

We conclude with several key findings. Firstly, we observe that all university documents are very explicit in showing that they comply with Ukrainian legislation. For instance, all universities mention that rectors need to be able to speak Ukrainian, in compliance with national legislation.

Secondly, our document analysis revealed that the Russian invasion itself has not added significant impetus in the endeavour to further ‘ukrainianise’ HEIs. This finding is of little surprise given the strong emphasis on revalidating Ukrainian before the war. Regarding de-russification, one of the strategies of HEIs has been to discontinue Russian degree and certification (e.g. University 8), and only a handful of high-ranking HEIs mention Russian at all, but in no documents did we find evidence of strong anti-Russian stances that might be interpreted as persecution of Russian in some form or other. Most HEIs’ language policies give space to national minority languages, on the understanding that Russian might fall into this category, although this is not mentioned explicitly. Since 2022, HEIs have responded to Russian aggression by offering more support for the learning of Ukrainian (e.g. University 3).

Regarding westernisation, we observe that the term *‘languages of the European Union’* is preferred over *‘European languages’*, underlining the desire for greater alignment with the European Union in all respects (educational, cultural, political). Westernisation of Ukrainian HEIs strongly favours English, however, different universities, depending on their status and international student intake, also include medium of instruction and language teaching in other European languages. Overall, all institutions develop their language policies both in compliance with the state (language) legislation and with a keen awareness of European language teaching standards. European language policies are developed in an aspiration to attract more international students, and to facilitate both inward and outward academic mobility.

The names of HEIs, themselves a vital part of their public image, deserve special attention Table 7, Appendix 1). Here, we observe that all HEIs use Ukrainian names, and that only a minority of HEIs of technical orientation also list an official Russian name. Generally, universities which tend to attract more international students tend to display their university names in a greater variety of languages, including large EU languages (French, German), EU language in geographical proximity (Polish) and Chinese.

The ongoing legal ‘tug of war’ between Ukrainian and Russian highlights that the Russian aggression cannot be framed as a response to the Ukrainization, nor to the ‘threat’ to the Russian language in Ukraine. Instead, the linguistic tensions over Russian and Ukrainian have, since long before the war, been part of Russia’s attempt to dominate the region. Overall, the war has undoubtedly further sensitised academics, pedagogues, students and the Ukrainian population in general to the issues of language choice and language power. Here, we observe somewhat different stances between the HEI documents analysed, and the public reactions described in our Introduction: bottom-up forms of linguistic resistance are multiple, creative, and often spontaneous, such as the public outcry when a lecturer attempted to continue his teaching in Russian, the spelling of *russian* with a small letter, and bilinguals choosing Ukrainian over Russian for ideological reasons, even if the latter is their stronger language. Such public reactions make the HEI language policies seem balanced and somewhat modest, by comparison.

*Limitations*

Future studies into HEI language policy in Ukraine might want to complement our document analysis with evidence ‘on the ground’, researching, for instance, levels of Englishisation, to what extent RMI is still used, and how Ukrainian HEIs might need to be supported in their attempt to westernise education, other than by Englishisation.

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To follow

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1. For a fuller overview of language legislation in Ukraine, see Kiss (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. The report states: ’*We believe [...] that they (the 15 HEIs) provide a representative sample of the state of English and EMI teaching across the country. The universities surveyed were selected according to geographical location, size and in some cases specialisms, as well as their desire to participate in the project. They include both elite, highly ranked institutions and some with a lower profile.Some had already embarked on the process of internationalisation while others were only beginning to see the possibilities it might offe*r (Bolitho & West, 2017:20). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)