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## **“MULTILINGUALISM AS A WAY TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. CASE OF UKRAINE”**

**“You can never understand one language until you understand at least two.”**

Geoffrey Willans.

World in general and Europe in particular nowadays seem to be in search of new values related to mutual understanding, cooperation and consent and wishing to create new multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic societies.

When it goes about multiculturalism and multilingualism as its immediate manifestation we tend to refer rather to common elements characteristic of different multilingual societies of the world, than to specific elements distinguishing one country from another. However, it may lead to somehow simplified vision of the problem. We see combination of common features neglecting the phenomena which fail to get under the title of “commonness”. In the article we are going to make an attempt to describe the situation with multilingualism in Ukraine on the background of the situation with multilingual societies of Europe.

The phenomenon of multilingualism in Ukraine both in present-day practice and in possible perspective is difficult to equalize with the examples provided by the European or

world experience. Even the countries the language legislation of which is close to the Ukrainian one in one way or the other solve the problems of multilingualism by means and with purposes which are totally different from the Ukrainian model. For the majority of developed countries in Europe as well as in the rest of the world the phenomenon of multilingualism, both in de jure and de facto variants, is a natural element of the language policy aimed at maximal possible ensuring of communicative needs of different ethnic groups of the society.

While speaking about multilingualism as the optimal practice and the main tendency of the development taking into consideration the needs and challenges of the present, it seems necessary to make a reservation that we are going to focus on the functional aspect of multilingualism apart from making it an instrument in pursuing political goals.

Nowadays there are between 5,000 and 7,000 languages in the world. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of languages as the distinction between a language and a dialect is not always clear. In fact languages are not

isolated entities and in many cases there are no evident boundaries between them. Linguistic diversity has been defined in a broad sense as the ‘range of variations exhibited by human languages’.<sup>1</sup>

There is a growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, in attaining quality education for all and strengthening cooperation, in building knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage, applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development. It is thus urgent to take action to encourage broad commitment to promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity. As language issues are central to all fields in UNESCO’s mandate, the Organization promotes an interdisciplinary approach to multilingualism and linguistic diversity involving all programme sectors: education, culture, science, communication and information and social and human sciences.<sup>2</sup>

As it was mentioned there are between 5,000 and 7,000 languages in the world and only about 200 independent states; thus multilingualism is indeed a very common phenomenon.

Striving to analyze the functional aspect of multilingualism it is necessary to give the definition to the concept itself as well as specify

the level of command of languages to be accepted as sufficient for defining the person as being by- or multilingual.

Multilingualism is the act of polyglotism, or using multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. Multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness.<sup>3</sup>

But any multilingual speaker acquires at least one language during childhood (the first language). The first language is also referred to as the mother tongue. It is usually acquired without formal education and maintained through practice and education.

The questions hence are as follows: “What level of the second (next) language acquisition can be regarded sufficient to be recognized as by- or multilingualism?” and “What is behind the concept ‘knowledge of languages’?”.

There may be a number of answers some of which are:

1. It is a well-known fact that many non-native speakers not only successfully operate in their non-native language societies, but in fact may become advanced or even proficient users of the

<sup>1</sup> Durk Gorter, “Cultural diversity as an asset for human welfare and development” in Sustainable Development in a Diverse World (SUS.DIV) [www.ebos.com.cy/susdiv/uploadfiles/RT1.2\\_PP\\_Durk.pdf](http://www.ebos.com.cy/susdiv/uploadfiles/RT1.2_PP_Durk.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Languages and Multilingualism | United Nations Educational - Unesco [www.unesco.org/en/languages-and-multilingualism/](http://www.unesco.org/en/languages-and-multilingualism/)

<sup>3</sup> Tucker. G. Richard A Global Perspective on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education Online Resources: Digests August 1999 EDO-FL-99-04 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multilingualism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multilingualism)

non-native language (as, for example, writers, politicians, etc).

2. In recent years, linguistic research has focused attention on the use of English as the lingua franca. In such situations, most speakers of the common language are functionally multilingual.
3. There are a) maximal definition which means that the speakers are as proficient in one language as they are in others and have as much knowledge of one language as they have of the others; and b) minimal definition, based on use. For example, tourists who successfully communicate phrases and ideas while not fluent in a language may be seen as bilingual or multilingual. Most multilingual speakers fall somewhere between minimal and maximal definitions. Vivien Cook calls these people multi-competent.<sup>4</sup>

Multilingualism is the natural potential available to every normal human being rather than an unusual exception: "Given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs".<sup>5</sup> The advantages for multilingual speakers go beyond purely linguistic sphere. "A person who speaks multiple languages has a stereoscopic vision of

the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, learn reading more easily. Multilinguals, therefore, are not restricted to a single world-view, but also have a better understanding that other outlooks are possible. Indeed, this has always been seen as one of the main educational advantages of language teaching".<sup>6</sup>

According to Michael B. Paradowski both children and adult learners enjoy a number of additional qualities and competences if compared to monolingual speakers. Some of them are as follows:

- Keener awareness and sharper perception of language.
- More rapid learning of their native language regardless of race, gender, or academic level.
- Ability to communicate more efficiently in one's first language.
- Greater vocabulary size over age, including that in their first language.
- Better ear for listening and sharper memories.
- Better not only verbal, but also spatial abilities.
- Greater cognitive flexibility, better problem solving and higher-order thinking skills.

<sup>4</sup> Cook, Vivian J. Requirements for a multilingual model of language production.  
<http://www.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/RequirementsForMultilingualModel.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Paradowski Michał B. The Benefits of Multilingualism.

<http://www.multilingualliving.com/2010/05/01/the-benefits-of-multilingualism-full-article/>

<sup>6</sup> Cook, Vivian J. Requirements for a multilingual model of language production.  
<http://www.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/RequirementsForMultilingualModel.htm>

- Expansion of personal horizons and possibility to see one's own culture from a new perspective, enabling the comparison, contrast, and understanding of cultural concepts.
- Improved critical thinking abilities.
- Better understanding and appreciation of people of other countries, thereby lessening racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, as the learning of a new language usually brings with it a revelation of a new culture.
- Ability to learn further languages more quickly and efficiently than one's monolingual peers.
- Social and employment advantages and increasing job opportunities in many careers.<sup>7</sup>

The current 48 states in Europe have 38 different official state languages. However, in total there are about 240 spoken indigenous languages. States such as Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, France, Spain, Romania, and Ukraine have many indigenous minority or regional languages.<sup>8</sup>

The peculiarity of the national structure of the population of Ukraine is its multinational composition. According to All-Ukrainian population census data, the representatives of more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups

live on the territory of the country.

The part of Ukrainians in the national structure of population is the largest. It accounts for 77.8% of the population. Russians are the second numerous nation of Ukraine. They account for 17.3%. The other ethnic minorities are Belarussians (0.6%), Moldavians (0.5%), Crimean Tatars (0.5%), Bulgarians (0.4%), Hungarians (0.3%), Romanians (0.3%), Poles (0.3%), Jews (0.2%), Armenians (0.2%), Greeks (0.2%), Tatars (0.2%), Georgians (0.1%), Gypsies (0.1%), Azerbaijanians (0.1%), Germans (0.1%), Gagausians (0.1%).<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the language situation in Ukraine is quite complicated. On the background of the general linguistic situation in Ukraine the social-linguistic place of the Ukrainian language is very special. Though de jure the Ukrainian language is supposed to be the language prevailing on the territory of the whole state, de facto the situation is entirely different. Moreover, in big cities of the eastern part of Ukraine it is the Russian language that has a dominating position. There is no other European country where the language of ethnic minority has the same expansion as the state one. What is more, on some territories the state language is a minority language. On the prevailing territory of Ukraine one can witness

<sup>7</sup>Paradowski Michal B. The Benefits of Multilingualism. <http://www.multilingualliving.com/2010/05/01/the-benefits-of-multilingualism-full-article/>

<sup>8</sup> Durk, Gorter. "Cultural diversity as an asset for human welfare and development" in Sustainable Development in a Diverse World (SUS.DIV)

[www.ebos.com.cy/susdiv/uploadfiles/RT1.2\\_PP\\_Durk.pdf](http://www.ebos.com.cy/susdiv/uploadfiles/RT1.2_PP_Durk.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Матеріали Всеукраїнського перепису 2001 р. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

bilingualism, though there are city communities where multilingualism is a real fact. The specificity of the linguistic situation in Ukraine is an incongruity of the linguistic groups and the ethnic ones, as a big part of ethnic Ukrainians as well as representatives of other minorities are Russian-speaking.

Consequently, the language policy should be aimed at promoting the Ukrainian language among the bilinguals without endangering the Russian component as well as ensuring the latter the possibility to occupy the functional niche in the all-Ukrainian cultural realm. For the Ukrainian language, however, in order to gain the proper social status, it is necessary to become a lingua franca for all nationalities and strata of the society.<sup>10</sup>

The linguistic choice of an individual is far from being an independent act. It is determined by a series of extra-linguistic social-psychological factors. They may be specified as follows:

- following – often sub-consciously – the models dominating in the language environment;
- pressure of negative stereotypes aimed to dissolve the difference between urban and rural population;
- deep crisis of national identity and

decay of national culture.

This choice is also motivated by historical tradition. The population of the southern and eastern regions, having been for a long time a part of the Russian Empire, distanced itself from their national beginnings to such extent that it started to be turning into a new ethnos.<sup>11</sup> Thus, with respect to the Ukrainian language it is important that multilingualism should not mean the loss of identity.

Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine goes as follows: “The State language of Ukraine shall be the Ukrainian language”. Alongside Article 53 stresses that “Citizens belonging to national minorities shall be guaranteed, in accordance with law, the right to education in their native language, or to study their native language at the state and communal educational establishments or through national cultural societies”.<sup>12</sup>

The linguistic composition of the population of Ukraine according to the 2001 census is as follows:

- Ukrainian language is a mother tongue for 67.5% of population;
- Russian language is recognized as a mother tongue by 29.6%;
- a share of other languages identified as mother tongues constitutes 2.9%.

<sup>10</sup> Ажнюк Б. Мовна ситуація в Україні і зарубіжний досвід мовного планування // Українознавство. – 2007. – № 1. – С. 176–182.

<sup>11</sup> Кісь Р. Лінгвокультурна маргіналізація у містах України (неофункціональне бачення) // Мовні

конфлікти і гармонізація суспільства: Матеріали наукової конференції. – К., 2002. – С. 55–58

<sup>12</sup> Constitution of Ukraine. [http://www.static.rada.gov.ua/site/const\\_eng/constitution\\_eng.htm](http://www.static.rada.gov.ua/site/const_eng/constitution_eng.htm)

The Ukrainian language was recognized as a mother tongue by 85.2% of ethnic Ukrainians and the Russian language – by 95.9% of ethnic Russians which is by all means an indicator of national self-identification of the population by the language criteria.<sup>13</sup>

The data concerning the usage of mother tongue, as well as Ukrainian, Russian and other ones by the main ethnic groups is presented in Table I.

**Table I.**

Nationality	Mother tongue %			
	The language of one's nationality	Ukrainian	Russian	Other
Byelarussians	19.8	17.5	62.5	0.2
Bulgarians	64.2	5.0	30.3	0.5
Crimean Tatars	92.0	0.1	6.1	1.8
Gagausians	71.5	3.5	22.7	2.3
Germans	12.2	22.1	64.7	1.0
Greeks	6.4	4.8	88.5	0.3
Hungarians	95.4	3.4	1.0	0.2
Jews	3.1	13.4	13.4	13.4
Moldovans	70.0	10.7	17.6	1,7
Poles	12.9	71.0	15.6	0.5
Romanians	91.7	6.2	1.5	0.6
Russians	95.9	3.9	-	0.2

As can be seen from the table for the most part of minorities Russian is considered a mother tongue. This has its strong historical backgrounds. Even without going far back into the history of the Russian Empire, we can see evidence of a profound language policy already in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR) in the times of the Soviet

Union. The Russification in the Ukrainian SSR supposed a range of well-planned measures aimed at erasing social functions of national languages and introduction of the Russian language as a means of international communication in the Soviet society. Moreover, Russian had become the language of official and business communication as well as secondary and higher education on the

<sup>13</sup> Матеріали Всеукраїнського перепису 2001 р.  
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>

prevailing territory of the former Ukrainian SSR. “In the XX century the quantity of population fluent in Russian, and in particular those who claimed it a mother tongue increased dramatically. It was provided by the resettlement of millions of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people of different ethnic origin to the Ukrainian SSR as well as the policy of Russification”.<sup>14</sup>

The reasons for Russification can be described as follows:

- formation of the new entity “the Soviet people” in the former Soviet Union;
- formal attitude of the Russian-speaking authorities to the problems of national minorities;
- proclaiming the Russian language the “language of international communication” on the territory of the former Soviet Union;
- repressions and Holodomor (Great Famine) of 1932-33 (10 million of Ukrainian peasants died) which considerably affected the ethnic and national structure of the Ukrainian society;
- large-scale urbanization;
- deportation and transmigration of the representatives of national minorities.

However, the situation in the western part of

Ukraine and Lviv as its main city, though bearing the characteristic features of the general language policy, is to a great extent different.

According to the last 2001 census Ukrainians constituted 88.1% of the city’s population. The biggest national minority was the Russian one (8.9%), followed by Polish (0.9%), Byelarussian (0.4%), Jewish (0.3%) and Armenian (0.1%) ones. Other nationalities constituted 1.3%.<sup>15</sup>

Though historically, Lviv was founded as a city with prevailing Rus’ (old Ukrainian) population, in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century after the capital of Halych-Volyn Kingdom had moved to it, Armenian and German national minorities started settling there. After becoming the part of the Polish Kingdom Poles and Germans constituted the majority of city’s population who assimilated with time. At the same time the distinct Armenian and Jewish communities were formed and settled densely. In the times of Austrian-Hungarian Empire the similar situation was preserved. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Poles were the majority of population, Jews constituting about one third and only one tenth identifying themselves as Ukrainians.

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<sup>14</sup> Лозинський Р. Мовна ситуація в Україні. – Львів, 2008. – С. 213–314

<sup>15</sup> Матеріали Всеукраїнського перепису 2001 р.  
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As a result of Holocaust and "Visla" operation the share of Poles and Jews shrank dramatically. With the establishment of the Soviet power the share of Russians who were mostly representing authorities of various levels considerably grew, while during the

industrialization period Lviv saw large-scale urbanization with the influx of population from the surrounding rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

As we can see historical and political developments appeared the principal factors contributing to multilingualism in Lviv. Among others it is necessary to state that most ethnic groups who at different stages of history found themselves in the minority or majority situations tried to preserve their cultural identity and maintain or revive their languages. This desire has created situation in which different languages co-exist and are necessary in everyday communication. Not the least factor is increasing communications with the other parts of the world and the need to be competent in languages of wider communication. English being the lingua franca, is used by millions of people who use other languages as well. Education greatly contributes to being multilingual. Second and foreign languages are part of the curriculum of secondary and partly high schools.

Table II shows the percentage of population of different nationalities claiming the language of their nationality, Ukrainian or Russian to be their mother tongue.

<sup>16</sup> Матеріали Всеукраїнського перепису 2001 р.  
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>

<sup>17</sup> Капраль М. Національні громади міста Львова XVI–XVIII ст. (соціально-правові взаємини). – Львів: ЛНУ ім. І. Франка, 2003. – С. 8.

**Table 2**

Nationality	Mother tongue %		
	Language of one's nationality	Ukrainian	Russian
Ukrainians	98.58	-	1.40
Russians	90.35	9.56	-
Poles	46.98	45.51	7.20
Byelarussians	23.53	26.61	49.54
Jews	5.34	28.22	65.72
Armenians	36.80	21.25	41.12
Tatars	27.53	14.90	58.82

Judging by the above data the languages of their own nationality are recognized as mother tongues by the prevailing quantity of representatives of ethnic minorities. It testifies to multifaceted development of national and cultural life of the city. The evidence to it is also the fact that there are 22 national minorities united into the community of minorities "Ethnos". The languages of intercultural communication in the community are Ukrainian and Russian.

The minorities have a number of different institutions and organizations promoting and developing their corresponding languages and cultures. Among them:

- Russian cultural community as well as 57 schools with Russian language of tuition and 3 schools with Russian and Ukrainian languages of tuition;
- Polish cultural community and 2 schools with Polish language of tuition as well as courses of Polish for pre-school children;
- Jewish cultural community which promotes Hebrew via courses and Sunday

schools as well as museum of Galician Jews;

- Byelarussian community promoting Byelarussian language at a Sunday school;
- Lithuanian community "Medeyna" and a Sunday school and school of Lithuanistics;
- Armenian community which includes 2 organizations: the "Union of Armenian Culture" and the "Union of Armenian Youth in Ukraine" as well as language courses.

The curriculum of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv includes mandatory courses of the Russian language and literature, the Polish language and literature, the Check language, optional course of the Lithuanian language. Ivan Franko National University of Lviv is also one of the two universities (alongside with Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) in Ukraine that have a mandatory course "The Language Policy". Schools of the Russian and Polish national minorities function at the cost of the state budget.

The representatives of all minorities (except the Jewish and the Armenian ones that use Russian) communicate at their organizations in

their mother tongues. Each community doesn't see any threats to its existence and activity.

English being a lingua franca for international communication across Europe has gained grounds in the educational system in Lviv in the primary, secondary and high 58 education . It has got the upper hand as the first foreign language in the majority of primary and secondary schools as well as in all institutions of higher education followed by German, French and Spanish.

In conclusion it seems relevant to draw a parallel between the biological and linguistic diversity.

As David Crystal states in his book "Language Death": "Surely, just as the extinction of any animal species diminishes our world, so does the extinction of any language. Surely we linguists know, and the general public can sense, that any language is a supreme achievement of a uniquely human collective genius, as divine and endless a mystery as a living organism."<sup>18</sup>

Outstanding in this context is the 'language garden analogy' proposed by Ofelia Garcia. According to Garcia it would be dull and boring to travel around the world and see that all gardens are of the same one-colour flower. The variety of flowers of different shapes, sizes and colours makes our visual and aesthetic

experience rich and enjoyable. Linguistic diversity also makes the world more interesting and colourful but as in the case of flowers it makes the garden more difficult to tend. Some flowers (and some languages) spread very quickly and others need extra care and protection. Language diversity requires planning and care and involves some actions such as:

1. Adding flowers to the garden: Learning other languages can be an enriching experience.
2. Protecting rare flowers: Protecting languages at risk through legislation and education.
3. Nurturing flowers (languages) in danger of extinction.
4. Controlling flowers that spread quickly and naturally: spread can be allowed if it does not kill other species.<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup>Crystal, David." Language Death" University Press, Cambridge, 2000. – p. 36

<sup>19</sup> Garcia, Ofelia. From language garden to sustainable languaging: bilingual education in a global world. NOV

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