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# **COLLECTIVE MONOGRAPH**

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**SCIENTIFIC SPACE:  
CURRENT ISSUES,  
ACHIEVEMENTS, AND  
INNOVATIONS**



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**«SCIENTIFIC SPACE: CURRENT ISSUES, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND  
INNOVATIONS»**

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**LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND WAR: INVESTIGATING  
MULTILINGUALISM IN WESTERN UKRAINE**

The language situation in Ukraine is distinctive in terms of rapid dynamic changes that reflect historical and socio-cultural realities of our time and consequences of its colonial past<sup>1</sup>. The most recent and relevant factors shaping the linguistic landscape of contemporary Ukraine include legislative changes – the 2019 Law “On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language” and the revised Ukrainian orthography of the same year (which reintroduced several elements of the suppressed 1928 orthography as optional variants); the socio-political context – namely, the two revolutions in Ukraine’s recent history (the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014); the decommunization process launched in 2015; and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which escalated into a full-scale war in 2022, when the manipulation of language-related issues became one of the numerous and shifting justifications invoked by the aggressor. The latter factor is particularly emphasized in this study.

One of the most recent sociolinguistic surveys conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation in 2022 shows that 87.7% of Ukrainians currently

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<sup>1</sup> Flier, M., & Graziosi, A. (2017-2018). The battle for Ukrainian: A comparative perspective. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 35(1-4), 11-29.

consider Ukrainian their mother tongue, while 9.9% identify Russian as such<sup>2</sup>. These figures mark a notable transformation in the country's linguistic landscape compared to the earlier data of the 2001 All-Ukrainian Census, particularly in terms of the balance and coexistence of the two main languages – Ukrainian and Russian.

In the western and central regions, the overwhelming majority of respondents name Ukrainian as their native language (98.2% and 92.8%, respectively). In the southern region, 73.6% report Ukrainian as their native tongue and 25% Russian, whereas in the east, 70.2% identify Ukrainian as their native language and 22% Russian<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted, however, that for evident reasons, this survey does not cover the temporarily occupied territories and therefore cannot fully reflect the linguistic situation there.

However, it should be pointed out that the balance between the use of Ukrainian and Russian may currently be somewhat variable and unstable across regions. For instance, in Kyiv, according to a survey conducted by the State Education Quality Service of Ukraine (2025), attitudes toward the Russian language reveal a significant gap between the dynamics of public opinion – which, overall, has been shifting toward reduced use since the beginning of the full-scale war – and actual communicative practices. This is particularly evident among school students, among whom Russian remains widely used<sup>4</sup>.

These findings align with what V. Kulyk observes in his study on language and identity after Euromaidan: the strengthening of national identity does not necessarily lead to a substantial increase in the use of Ukrainian among Russian-speaking citizens, as many of them report that their identity is not tied to their language choice<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation. (2022). National culture and language in Ukraine. Retrieved June 12, 2025, from <https://dif.org.ua/article/natsionalna-kultura-ta-mova-v-ukraini-zmini-v-gromadskiy-dumtsi-pislya-roku-viyni>.

<sup>3</sup> Ilko Kucheriv (2022) <https://dif.org.ua/article/natsionalna-kultura-ta-mova-v-ukraini-zmini-v-gromadskiy-dumtsi-pislya-roku-viyni>.

<sup>4</sup> State Education Quality Service of Ukraine. (2025). Monitoring study of the functioning of the state language. Retrieved November 18, 2025, from <https://sqe.gov.ua/diyalnist/monitoringovi-doslidzhennya/monitoryngovi-doslidzhennya-za-2025-rik/>.

<sup>5</sup> Kulyk, V. (2016). National identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the war. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(4), 588-608.

By contrast, according to the most recent All-Ukrainian Population Census (2001) – to which this study will constantly refer, as it remains the only comprehensive dataset covering the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders (while more recent sociological surveys, for obvious reasons, exclude data from temporarily occupied regions) – Ukraine was home to 77.8% ethnic Ukrainians. The Russian ethnic minority accounted for 17.3%, while other significant ethnolinguistic minorities together constituted 4.9% of the population<sup>6</sup>.

The western regions of Ukraine exhibited the highest level of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity: over 94% of the population were ethnic Ukrainians, and more than 96% considered Ukrainian their native language. The central and northern regions displayed a similar pattern, with a slightly higher proportion of Russian speakers<sup>7</sup>.

The eastern and southern regions demonstrated the greatest ethnolinguistic heterogeneity: although ethnic Ukrainians predominated (67.8% and 70.5%, respectively), the majority of the population used Russian as their native language (52.1% and 47.8%, respectively). This disproportion between language use and ethnicity reflected a complex language–identity configuration shaped by historical and sociocultural factors<sup>8</sup>.

These data indicated the dominant sociopolitical position of the Russian language. Although Ukrainian was legally established as the state language, it had in practice long remained in a weaker position – particularly in large cities in the east of the country, where Russian predominated<sup>9</sup>. The lack of correlation between the Russian language in Ukraine and Russian ethnicity drew considerable scholarly attention. For instance, Wilson examines the persistent disputes over Ukrainian identity, culture, and religion from a historical perspective<sup>10</sup>. The absence of a clear correspondence between

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<sup>6</sup> All-Ukrainian Population Census ‘2001’. (2001). State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. Retrieved June 2, 2025, from [2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language).

<sup>7</sup> All-Ukrainian Population Census ‘2001’, [2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language)

<sup>8</sup> All-Ukrainian Population Census ‘2001’, [2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language)

<sup>9</sup> Nikolska, N., & Pershukova, O. (2020). Development of multilingual education in Ukraine. SHS Web of Conferences, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, A. (2022). *The Ukrainians*. Yale University Press, 207-358.

ethnic and linguistic self-identification among citizens can be attributed to the postcolonial nature of Ukrainian society, in which linguistic identity and habitual language use have been historically shifted toward Russian<sup>11</sup>.

As confirmed by the above mentioned, the complex interplay between language and identity manifests itself spatially – across Ukraine, based on the classical sociolinguistic division, three broad regional patterns can be identified, each revealing distinct linguistic and political characteristics: the weakly Russified West (Volyn, Rivne, Ternopil, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia regions), the moderately Russified North and Center (Khmelnyskyi, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Poltava, Cherkasy, Kropyvnytskyi regions), and the strongly Russified South and East (Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk regions, and Crimea)<sup>12</sup>.

The roots of this differentiation and heterogeneity lie largely in the country's geography and history – namely, in the fact that various territories were governed by different states at different historical periods – as well as in the uneven trajectories of economic, cultural, and linguistic development. Summarizing this tendency, L. Panasiuk notes that post-Soviet Ukraine is characterized by only a partial spread of the Ukrainian language, a consequence of its long-term stateless past<sup>13</sup>.

This situation has inevitably prompted extensive research on Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism in Ukraine. However, the current political course toward European integration – within which Ukrainian society, particularly its younger generation, is increasingly overcoming the language barrier with the EU and engaging in global communication through economic, educational, informational, and cultural ties –

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<sup>11</sup> Sokolova, S. (2022). Bilinhvizm v Ukraini i problema natsionalnoi identychnosti. [Bilingualism in Ukraine and the problem of national identity]. *Balcania et Slavia*. Vol. 2 (1), 2022, 51-72.

<sup>12</sup> Ohar, E. (1998). Ukrainska mova v suchasni movnii sytuatsii v Ukraini. [Ukrainian language in the modern language situation in Ukraine, sociolinguistic and ethnocultural aspect]. *Nezaleznyi kulturolohichni chasopys 'I'*. #12.

<sup>13</sup> Panasiuk, L. (2021). Ukrainsko-rosiiskyi bilinhvizm u konteksti idealohii "Russkoho Mira", [Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism in the context of the ideology of the 'Russian world']. *Visnyk Lvivskoho Universytetu. Series Philos.-Political Studies. Issue 36*, 239-245. <https://doi.org/10.30970/PPS.2021.36.29>.

highlights the growing relevance of studying multilingualism in Ukraine as an essential factor of both internal and external communication.

Another aspect emphasizing the urgency of research on multilingualism in Ukraine is the active use of various languages in border regions, where the need to master, for example, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and other languages is vital for successful social integration.

Moreover, more than two decades have passed since the last census, and, as noted above, the available data no longer accurately reflect the current state of affairs. This underscores the pressing need for updated research on the language situation in Ukraine.

It should be noted that Ukraine's language policy, shaped within the broader framework of European integration, is aimed at aligning with the principles of multilingualism characteristic of the contemporary Western world. At the same time, certain aspects still require closer adherence to international standards, as reflected in the critical comments issued by the Venice Commission in 2023<sup>14</sup>.

Presumably, Ukrainian occupies the primary position in terms of mentality, while two EU languages are gradually approaching the status of the second ones, replacing what has traditionally been Russian and/or a regional minority language<sup>15</sup>. However, in Ukraine, multilingualism largely reflects the historical policy of forced imposition of foreign languages by invading powers during its colonial past<sup>16</sup>. The prolonged displacement of Ukrainian from everyday use has created a deeply contentious context surrounding the language issue<sup>17</sup>.

Multilingualism is essential for the peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures and ethnic groups; at the same time, it often entails numerous contradictions and embodies

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<sup>14</sup> Venice Commission. (2023). Opinion on the Law on National Minorities, Retrieved August 01, 2025, from [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2023\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2023)021-e).

<sup>15</sup> Dombi, J. (2010). European language policy on plurilingualism and intercultural communication. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, 3(52), 163-166.

<sup>16</sup> Azhniuk, B. (2017). Ukrainian language legislation and the national crisis. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 35(1-4), 311-329.

<sup>17</sup> Masenko, L. (2020). Language conflict in Ukraine: Finding of settlement. In *Discourse and practice of bilingualism*, 31-42.

opposing worldviews. In the Ukrainian context, this duality manifests itself, for example, in the coexistence of Ukrainian and Russian linguistic identities that historically carried different cultural and political connotations, as well as in the complex status of minority languages such as Hungarian, Romanian, or Crimean Tatar in the regions where they are traditionally spoken. While multilingualism promotes intercultural dialogue and inclusion, it may also become a source of tension when language choice intersects with issues of national identity, political loyalty, or social mobility. Therefore, recognizing the key role of languages in preserving cultural diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue, Ukraine must seek its own path toward addressing the challenges of multilingualism within the country<sup>18</sup>.

In this regard, in 2023 the Verkhovna Rada adopted, both in principle and as a whole, a draft law introducing amendments to certain legislative acts concerning the rights of ethnic minorities to use their languages in education, taking into account the expert assessment of the Council of Europe. At the same time, restrictions apply to the languages of ethnic minorities that are official languages of a state recognized by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as an aggressor or occupying power<sup>19</sup>. Although all laws aimed at increasing the use of Ukrainian effectively diminish the position of Russian, they may also, in certain respects, be disadvantageous for other minority languages<sup>20</sup> and, as noted above, have been subject to criticism by the Venice Commission.

Due to its geographical and historical peculiarities, western Ukraine represents a specific intersection of various cultural and political influences. It has simultaneously been shaped by the historical legacy of Polish and Austro-Hungarian rule, the subsequent consequences of Soviet Russification, and the modern influences of both

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<sup>18</sup> Besters-Dilger, J., Masenko, L., Kulyk, V., Trach, N., Del Gaudio, S., & Bauring, B. (2010). *Movna polityka ta movna sytuatsiia v Ukraini: Analiz i rekomendatsii*. [Language policy and language situation in Ukraine: analysis and recommendations]. (2nd ed.). Vydavnychyi dim "Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia".

<sup>19</sup> Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. (2023). *Zakon Ukrainy Pro natsionalni menshyny Ukrainy*. [Law of Ukraine on national minorities of Ukraine]. Retrieved November 07, 2025, from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3389-20#Text>.

<sup>20</sup> Henzelmann, M. (2025). *The language issue in Ukraine: Legal and educational challenges in the Budjak region*. National Publishing House. <https://doi.org/10.53656/for2025-02-01>

European globalist and anti-globalist movements<sup>21</sup>, although the latter two – Russification and globalist/anti-globalist movements – are shared by other regions as well. Additional factors include intensive migration processes resulting from the physical proximity to several national borders, the formation of patriotic forces within the young state through the growing awareness and experience of national identity, as well as ongoing European integration processes.

Thus, the region exemplifies a complex intertwining of historical, social (linguistic contacts among different ethnic groups), geographical (neighbourhood with multiple countries), and individual (language learning opportunities and needs as perceived by speakers) dimensions of multilingualism. This combination creates a fertile ground for studying the phenomenon – especially considering that most respondents are expected to come from this part of the country.

For a more detailed consideration of the phenomenon under study, the main related concepts describing the situation of multilingualism are outlined below. These serve as the theoretical framework for analysing the empirical data obtained in this research.

In particular, the concepts proposed by De Groot are employed. The scholar defines bilingualism as an individual's mastery of two languages and analyses the nature of their coexistence in several dimensions: a) balanced bilingualism, where both languages are used with equal competence, and dominant bilingualism, where one language prevails over the other; b) the age of acquisition, distinguishing between early bilingualism (acquisition of both languages in childhood) and late bilingualism (acquisition of a second language in adulthood); c) the sequence of language acquisition – whether both languages are learned simultaneously or consecutively; d) the use of languages, differentiating between active bilingualism (regular use of both languages in daily communication) and passive bilingualism (knowledge of two

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<sup>21</sup> Kravchenko, P., & Melnyk, A. (2017). Hlobalizatsiini ta antyhlobalizatsiini protsesy v yevropeiskomu sotsialno-filosofskomu dyskursi. [Globalization and anti-globalization processes in European socio-philosophical discourse]. *Filosofski obrii*, 37, 78-99.

languages but active use of only one); and e) the mode of acquisition, either spontaneous/natural or pedagogical/formal<sup>22</sup>.

Mohanty and Perregaux propose a broad definition of bilinguals as those who speak at least two languages with perhaps very different degrees of professionalism in them<sup>23</sup>, thus removing the strict restriction of early definitions that emphasized the acquisition of both languages from birth<sup>24</sup>; accordingly, language acquisition of different levels will also be taken into consideration in the given study.

In contrast to bilingualism, multilingualism is the ability of an individual to use more than two languages, the linguistic practice of the society to use more than two ethnic languages in one or different spheres of communication and the phenomenon of social coexistence of more than two language communities in a multilingual country<sup>25</sup>.

It stands to reason that the abovementioned categories of characteristics of the phenomenon of bilingualism ('balanced/dominant', 'early/late', etc.) can be explicated on the situation of multilingualism, taking into account the focus of analysis on more than two languages.

Although El Euch notes that the term 'plurilingualism', understood as dynamic relationships between languages and cultures, is more characteristic of the French-speaking context, while 'multilingualism' is more common in the English one<sup>26</sup>, the programmatic documents of the Council of Europe provide a clear distinction between these two notions. 'Plurilingualism' refers to an individual's ability to master and use several languages, whereas 'multilingualism' denotes the coexistence of several languages within a single territory or social group<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> De Groot, A. M. B. (2016). Language and cognition in bilinguals. In *The Cambridge handbook of linguistic multi-competence* (pp. 248-275). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Mohanty, A., & Perregaux, C. (1997). Language acquisition and bilingualism. *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology, Vol. II, Basic processes and human development*, 217-253.

<sup>24</sup> Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. Henry Holt and Company.

<sup>25</sup> Holubovska, I., Zhalai, V., Bykhovets, N., Kruhlykova, O., Lynnyk, T., Parkhomenko, A., Rakhmanova, I., Rubashova, L. & Boboshko, T. (2015). Terminohrafiia, multylinhvizm, multydystsyplinarnist: napriamky maibutnikh doslidzhen. [Terminography, multilingualism, multidisciplinary: directions for future research]. *Linhvistyka XXI stolittia*, 3-23.

<sup>26</sup> El Euch, S. (2011). Plurilingualism: What is known and what is still to be known. In *Proceedings of INTED 2011 Conference* (pp. 1391-1400).

<sup>27</sup> European Charter for Plurilingualism. (2009). Retrieved July 10, 2025, from [https://observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/images/Charte/charteplurilinguisme\\_en\\_v2.13.pdf](https://observatoireplurilinguisme.eu/images/Charte/charteplurilinguisme_en_v2.13.pdf).

However, within the European Union, the term ‘multilingualism’ is often used to encompass both of these concepts – sometimes with additional clarification, such as ‘individual multilingualism’. I will adhere to this convention in the present study.

The language situation is one of the key terms in sociolinguistics, as it denotes the actual position of a language within a society – that is, it characterizes the social-communicative system during a certain period of its functioning<sup>28</sup> – and it is central to the present study of multilingualism in the western region of Ukraine.

The phenomenon of multilingualism in western Ukraine is analysed in this study from both interlingual and intercultural perspectives, grounded in the above-mentioned theoretical concepts.

**The object** of the study is the results of a questionnaire on multilingualism in Ukraine, while **the subject** is the features of multilingual behaviour among students from western Ukraine, including language choice, code-switching, accommodation or rejection, and language ideologies. **The main methods** used in the study include collecting data on the language behaviour of participants through a sociolinguistic questionnaire, as well as descriptive methods (systematization, classification, and interpretation of the data)<sup>29</sup>.

Structurally, the questionnaire is divided into several blocks of questions aimed, first, at the factual collection of information about the respondents (age, territorial affiliation – specific region of Ukraine, rural or urban area, ethnicity, and languages spoken); second, at identifying situations of code-switching and language mixing; and third, at capturing participants’ evaluative positions (such as defining the prestige of languages in certain domains). The questionnaire includes both close-ended and open-ended questions.

The study was conducted in two phases: the first in autumn 2021, already seven years into Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, and the second in 2024, during

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<sup>28</sup> Masenko, L. (2010). *Narysy z sotsiolinhvistyky*. [Essays on sociolinguistics]. Vydavnychiy dim “Kyievo-Mohylianska akademiia”, 106-127.

<sup>29</sup> Kuriata, Yu. (2024) Instrument for the paper “Language, Identity, and War: Investigating Multilingualism in Western Ukraine” and its quantitative results. Harvard Dataverse, V2. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/NJ33D6>.

the third year of the ongoing full-scale war. This protracted conflict is assumed to be a significant catalyst for changes in linguistic habits among the affected population, with long-lasting effects expected in its aftermath.

The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntariness and participant anonymity. Data collection was carried out online for convenience, although the respondents were physically located in western Ukraine. During the first phase of the study, group monitors received the questionnaire in Word format with a request to distribute it among students willing to participate. During the second phase, the data were collected using a Google Form. Mostly different respondents took part in each survey; no internally displaced persons were identified among the participants. The detailed analysis of the respondents follows.

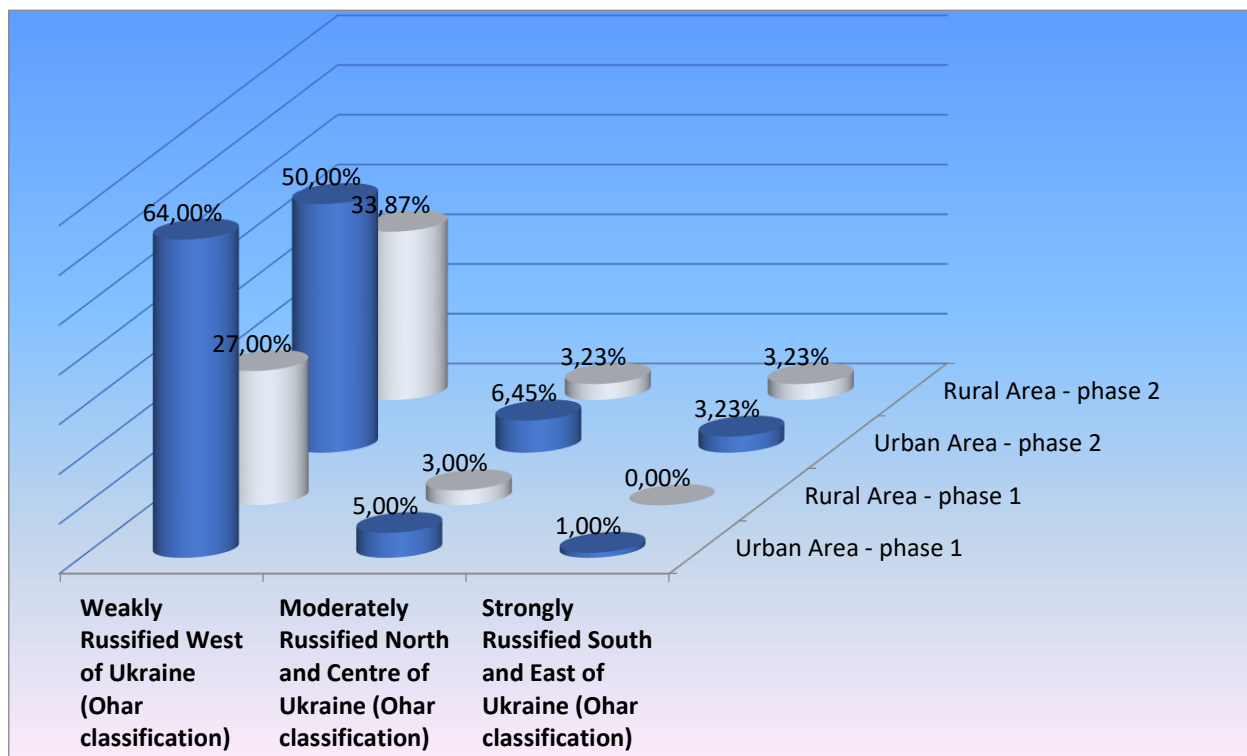
Quantitative data are presented only when answers were available and unambiguous (unclear or missing responses were excluded from interpretation).

Regarding the age and quantitative distribution of the participants, the study involved 163 respondents aged 16 to 35 who belonged to the student community: 100 participants during the first phase of the research and 63 during the second. The numerical difference can be explained by the fact that in the third year of the full-scale war, due to exhaustion and fatigue, students were more difficult to motivate for additional activities. At the same time, the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation remained a key condition ensuring the validity of the results. Nevertheless, the obtained sample size is sufficient to identify general trends relevant to the research aims.

Distribution of respondents by dominant region of residence is calculated by the predominant place of residence throughout the respondents' lives, including the years preceding their student years. For example, if the respondent's childhood was in a region other than western Ukraine, this respondent was categorized by the region dominant in terms of duration of residence and, accordingly, linguistic influences. However, the analysis took into account all respondents' results – including the small number of those who appeared to have dominant linguistic influences from other regions of the country due to having changed their place of residence for a certain

period of time. After all, these students from other regions, who now live and study in western Ukraine, in turn exert linguistic influence both on one another and on the linguistic situation of the region.

According to the 2001 population census, urbanization in Ukraine was characterized by the following figures: urban population 67.2%, rural population 32.8%<sup>30</sup>. Further studies of various levels, which can be found in open sources, record the continuation of this trend, and the urban population reaches the figure of 68.9% and slightly higher, so the results of both phases of my regional study (see Fig. 1) generally reflect all-Ukrainian trends. Since 91% and almost 84% of the respondents in both phases identified western Ukraine as their dominant region of residence – with the largest share coming from the Volyn, Rivne, Ternopil, and Lviv regions – I can claim that this study is mainly representative of this area.



**Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by dominant region of residence**

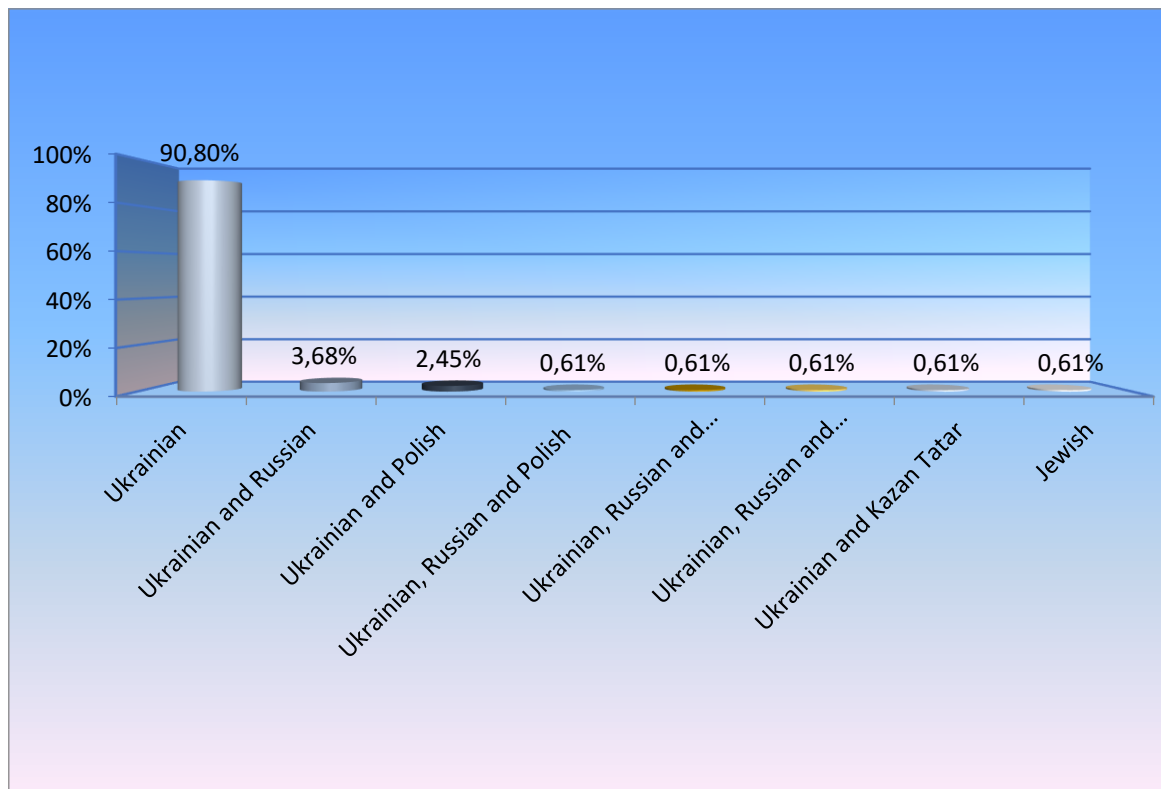
In the section of the survey concerning the respondents' occupational (non-study) experience, the figure of 41% of students with such experience in the first phase generally correlates with similar data from other studies on this issue before the full-

<sup>30</sup> All-Ukrainian Population Census '2001'

scale Russian-Ukrainian war (43% in the research GfK Ukraine, 2016<sup>31</sup>). In the second phase, however, this figure rises to 71.4%, which can be explained by the overall decline in the financial situation of Ukrainian families during the war, prompting students to begin working earlier.

This block of questions about respondents' work experience was important for further analysis of their answers regarding language choice and code-switching at their working place (to whom it was relevant).

The ethnic diversity of the respondents (of both phases) is represented by those who consider themselves to be mono-ethnic Ukrainians – dominant figure of almost 91%, and those who indicated some other ethnicity(s) – about 9%. In total eight variations of ethnicity were noted (see Fig. 2).



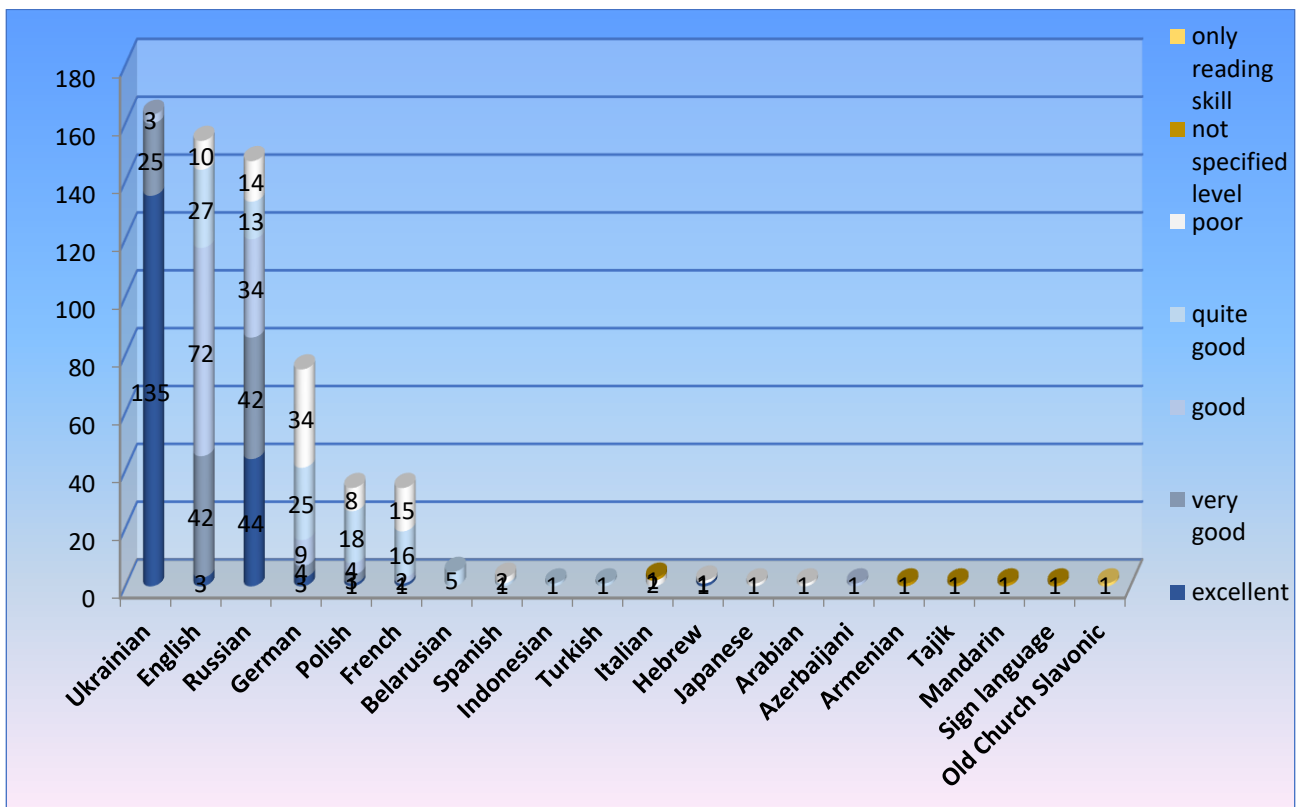
**Figure 2. Ethnic representation of respondents**

A higher proportion of individuals identifying themselves as Ukrainians can be observed compared to the 2001 census data (77.8%), which may be a characteristic feature of the western region of the country. This observation aligns with recent surveys

<sup>31</sup> GfK Ukraine. (2016). Students' socio-economic portrait: Survey results. Retrieved August 20, 2025, from <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/sotsialno-ekonomichnyi-portret-studentiv-rezultaty-opytuvannia/>.

indicating an increase of this figure to approximately 80%<sup>32</sup>. Besides, after the beginning of Russian aggression changes in self-identity and the desire to separate from the aggressor (symbolic rejection) could also have caused this figure to increase.

Regarding the languages reported, respondents indicated a total of 20 different options (see Fig. 3) in the questionnaire block on self-assessed language proficiency across both phases of the study – 14 during the first phase and 16 during the second. These results are presented together, there being no statistically significant difference between the phases for this indicator, and the main focus is on the language preferences and choices revealed by these findings but not the actual levels so much, which are difficult to assess accurately due to the self-reported nature of the data.



**Figure 3.** Respondents' self-assessed levels of mastering the languages

All students (100%) noted an excellent, a very good, or a good level of command of Ukrainian (which is quite expected for the west of Ukraine). 94.5% of respondents indicated varying levels of proficiency in English. This high rate of self-reported

<sup>32</sup> Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. (2024). Perception of belonging to the Ukrainian nation. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1458&page=1>.

English proficiency can be explained by the fact that respondents likely retain some recent knowledge of the language from school and also study English at universities, while all-Ukrainian studies show an indicator of approximately 51% for the whole population, though it is worth noting that it is also the youth with the largest share<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, respondents may have overestimated their actual level of foreign language proficiency. Nonetheless, it is worth repeating that the primary interest lies in the language priorities and choices reflected in these findings. Considering English, I focused mainly on whether the mastery of the language is a feature of purely pedagogical passive multilingualism or whether it has signs of active and, to some extent, also early spontaneous multilingualism. 90% of respondents indicated Russian, with German in the fourth place (46%), followed by Polish and French (both at 20.9%) – the three above mentioned languages also taught in schools. The remaining languages receive between 3% and 0.61%, respectively, among which there are quite unexpected ones in the sense that they do not reflect the ethnicity of the respondents (for example, Japanese, Arabic, etc.) and are not studied at the respondents' universities. In this regard, it is interesting to note that although Russian received higher percentages for responses indicating excellent or very good proficiency, English (which is not typologically related) was mentioned 4.5% more often by respondents on this issue.

Since the most represented western regions, as noted above, include Volyn, Rivne, Ternopil, and Lviv, Romanian and Hungarian do not appear in the list of languages – which would have been expected with a greater representation of Zakarpattia.

Mastery of Ukrainian and Russian can be related to a spontaneous, early, simultaneous (considering sequence of formation), homomorphic (based on typological similarity of languages), and active type of multilingualism in Ukraine due to their spread in everyday life and in the information space (besides, before the full-scale invasion, Russian was also studied at school as a subject; thus, it could also be related to a pedagogical one as well).

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<sup>33</sup> Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. (2024). <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1458&page=1>.

Concerning English, German, and French, these languages generally represent pedagogical multilingualism among the respondents (although some of them also mentioned having relatives in English-speaking countries and in Germany), as they study these languages at university, and some also studied them at school. Regarding English, it should be noted that it appears to be a mixture of pedagogical multilingualism (since it is taught at educational institutions) and active spontaneous (in some cases even early) multilingualism. In addition to having relatives abroad, as indicated in some responses, students also widely and willingly use English in online communities, where it is one of the dominant languages. English is frequently mentioned as a language spoken outside classes and used at respondents' workplaces (for those to whom it was relevant), as well as one of the preferred languages of mass media, social networks, and information technologies.

It is worth noting, with regard to Polish, that a significant number of students (within double-degree programs) and/or their relatives also receive higher education or work in Poland (mainly as seasonal workers in the agricultural sector), often with the intention of remaining there in the future for economic reasons. There are also strong historically determined family ties between the countries (the same may be said about the Belarusian language mentioned by the respondents).

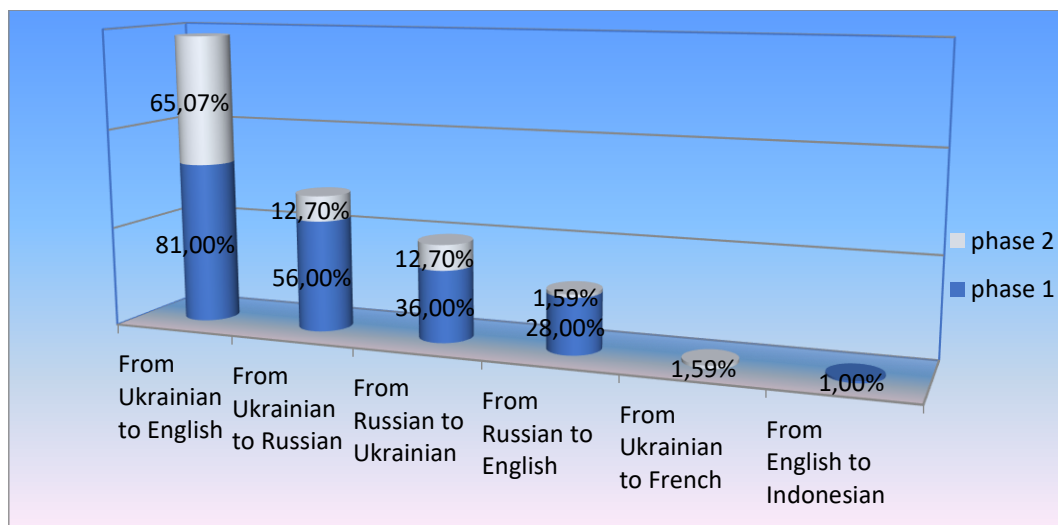
Turkish, Spanish, and Italian may be associated with Ukrainian citizens through labour migration to these countries, which is quite common.

Other languages mentioned only minimally may be related to the students' ethnicity (e.g., Hebrew) or, presumably, to certain hobbies, subcultures, and similar factors.

The three languages with the highest reported levels of mastery were reflected similarly in the responses to the question about the default language(s) of the respondents' telephones: Ukrainian ranked first, English second, and Russian third (although for Russian, in the second phase of the study, the percentage decreased from 30% to 12.7% within each group). Along with the other languages mentioned – albeit with significantly lower percentages, ranging from 3.5% to 0.6% (including German,

Polish, Spanish, and Arabic) – this pattern serves as an indicator of the respondents’ active multilingualism.

Considering switching from one language to another (see Fig. 4), the three languages most frequently mentioned by respondents again appear: Ukrainian, Russian, and English, with Indonesian mentioned in one case. Four students also noted switching to Polish, but without specifying the frequency. Regarding this indicator, the percentage of the sum of positive responses (‘very often + often + sometimes’) was calculated from the total number of respondents in each group across both phases of the study. Such switching was reported to occur in the family, at respondents’ workplaces (for those to whom it was relevant), with friends, in online communication, and in other situations. This, once again, indicates the respondents’ active multilingualism. However, when comparing the results of both phases, an interesting observation emerges – a certain decrease in the percentage of Russian use in the second phase.



**Figure 4. Switching from one language to another**

The mixing of the two languages, code-mixing<sup>34</sup>, can take the form of the simultaneous use of the two literary languages, Ukrainian and Russian, or of word forms and Ukrainian dialectisms common to both languages, known as ‘surzhyk’. Regarding the origin of the term, a mixture of grains – rye, wheat, barley, oats – as well

<sup>34</sup> Bokamba, E. G. (1989). Are there syntactic constraints on code-mixing? *World Englishes*, 8(3), 277-292. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1989.tb00669.x>

as flour from such grains (that is, not first-grade grain and low-quality flour) was called ‘surzhyk’ in Ukraine, carrying a negative connotation as something considered not of high quality. Today, the word ‘surzhyk’ is generally used to refer to a language in which elements of different languages are combined without observing literary norms<sup>35</sup>. In contrast to ‘surzhyk’, a dialect is a local variety of a language.

Historical facts make it possible to single out the following reasons for the emergence of Ukrainian-Russian ‘surzhyk’: 1) the incorporation of the south-eastern and central Ukrainian lands into the Russian Empire; 2) the introduction of the Russian language into the administrative and educational systems, accompanied by bans on printing Ukrainian books, teaching in Ukrainian, etc.; 3) resettlement of peoples during the Soviet period; 4) the contiguity of the territories of the two states; and 5) the typological similarity of the languages.

In all border areas, a mixture of the languages can be observed, particularly in regions bordering other countries, such as Ukrainian-Polish or Ukrainian-Belarusian areas, as noted by a few survey respondents.

Interestingly, nine respondents highlighted the mixing of English and Ukrainian. Today, a noticeable number of Anglicisms are integrated into everyday Ukrainian speech, with English words often replacing native equivalents. Ukrainian-English ‘surzhyk’, in addition to the traditionally studied Ukrainian-Russian variant, as a phenomenon arouses keen interest among researchers.

In particular, Navalna, in her monograph, analyses Anglicisms used in texts while preserving the graphics of the source language (barbarisms); Anglicisms transliterated into Cyrillic (‘makaronisms’); Anglicisms with unstable spelling in their Ukrainian forms; and Anglicisms that are actively used in Ukrainian word formation<sup>36</sup>. Naumenko classifies Anglicisms in the Ukrainian language according to different spheres of human activity and assumes that socio-psychological factors play an

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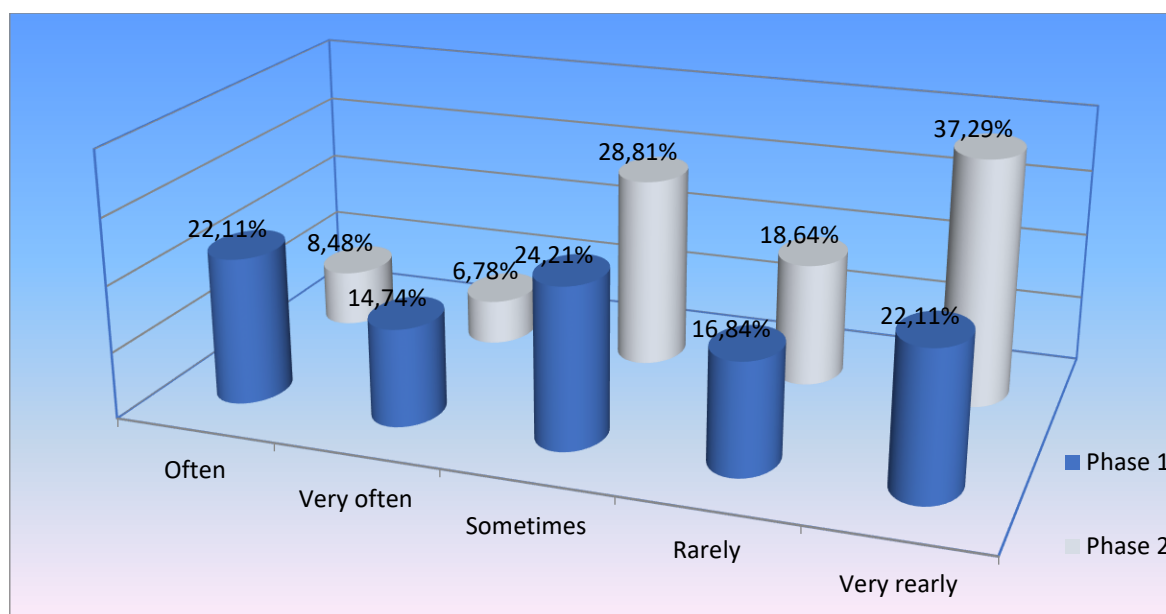
<sup>35</sup> Bilaniuk, L. (2005). *Contested tongues: Language politics and cultural correction in Ukraine*. Cornell University Press.

<sup>36</sup> Navalna, M. (2011). *Dynamika leksykonu ukrainskoi periodyky pochatku XXI st.* [Dynamics of the lexicon of Ukrainian periodicals of the beginning of the 21st century]. Monograph. Kyiv. Dmytro Buraho Publishing House, 252-254.

important role in their emergence, as speakers often prefer foreign words for their prestige, fashionability, or conciseness compared to the native language forms<sup>37</sup>.

Turning back to Ukrainian-Russian ‘surzhyk’, I was interested in outlining the general tendencies of the language situation among student youth in western Ukraine. The questionnaire block on language mixing served as a form of self-reflection for the respondents, which was sufficient for the purposes of this research.

It is worth noting that my study records a relatively high level of mixing of the two languages by the respondents (see Fig. 5), which can possibly be explained by their mistaken perception of certain dialectisms as ‘surzhyk’.



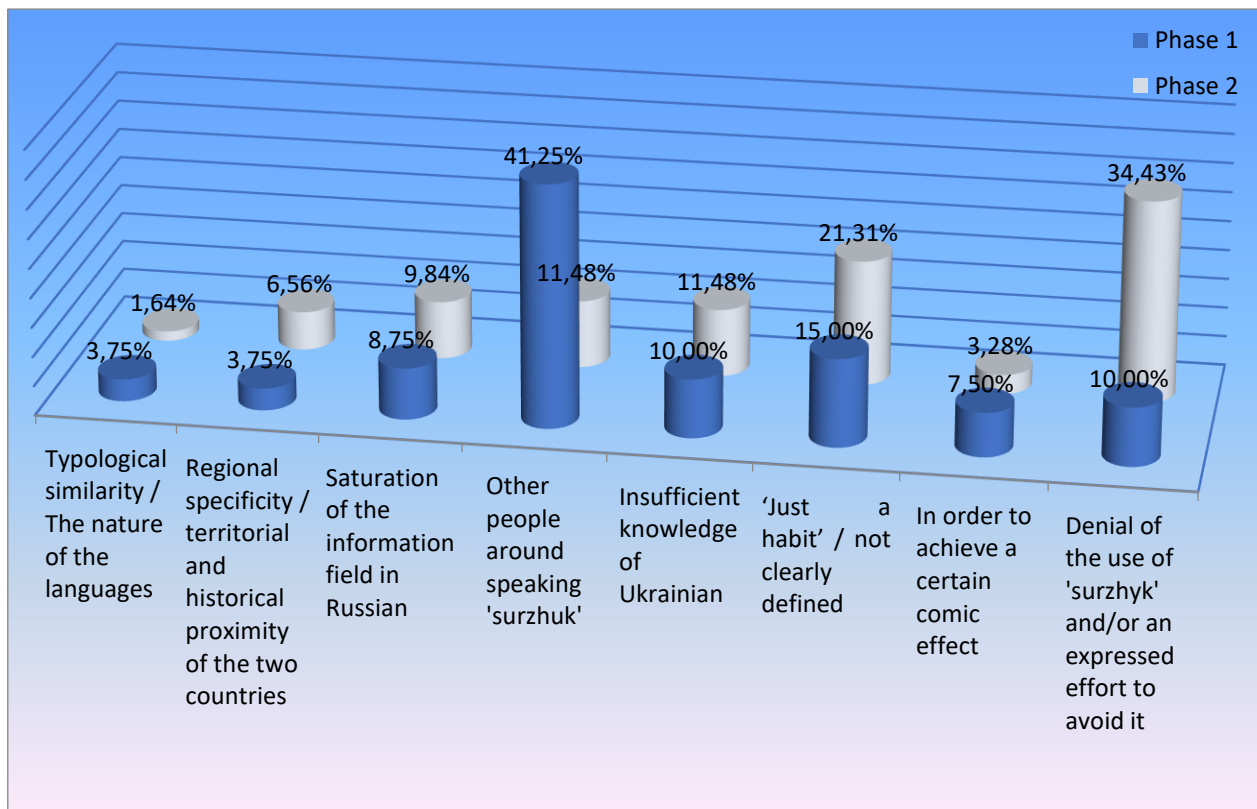
**Figure 5. Mixing Ukrainian and Russian**

At the same time, the results of the second phase of the study show 16.98% lower rates of active use of Ukrainian-Russian ‘surzhyk’: the percentage of positive responses (very often + often + sometimes) calculated from the total number of respondents was 61.05% in the first phase and 44.07% in the second.

During an attempt to systematize the respondents’ answers regarding the reasons for using ‘surzhyk’ (see Fig. 6), calculated from the total number of comments received (80 in the first phase, 61 in the second), both the expected justifications (similarity of

<sup>37</sup> Naumenko, U. (2016). Vzhlyvannia anhlitsyzmiv ZMI u polikulturnomu prostori. [The use of media anglicisms in a multicultural space]. *Naukovi zapysky NUOA*, 63, 139-143.

the languages, other people around speaking ‘surzhyk’, etc.) and an unexpected one (to create a certain comic effect) were identified.



**Figure 6. The reasons for mixing Ukrainian and Russian languages, as determined by the respondents**

It is worth mentioning that ‘surzhyk’ is now, to some extent, more associated with rural areas, where it often forms an interesting mixture with local dialects. It is frequently overused by those who are not particularly well educated. Consequently, to emphasize that a person is ignorant or to ridicule them, ‘surzhyk’ is deliberately employed. In everyday speech, exaggerated ‘surzhyk’ is sometimes used to add irony to an expression or to sound ‘in the way of common people’. This reflects the generally more negative than positive (conscious or not) attitude toward this phenomenon.

The negative attitude of respondents toward ‘surzhyk’ is reflected in the block of answers systematized as ‘Denial of the use of ‘surzhyk’ and/or an expressed effort to avoid it’. The second phase shows a growth in the number of such replies – 34.43% compared with 10% in the first phase. A striking and emotionally charged example from the first phase of the study is: “I never do that, 7 years of the Ukrainian-Russian war, so it’s weird to use Russian,” made by one of the respondents back in autumn

2021, even though only some elements of Russian are used in ‘surzhyk’, and not Russian itself.

In the second phase, more such replies appear, often with direct reference to the war. This prompts us to consider the internal transformations that the identity of Ukrainians may have undergone, especially during the period of the full-scale war. Such socio-historical cataclysms undoubtedly have a powerful, long-lasting impact on the language habits of the population living through them, creating a basis for further research into the phenomenon.

Considering the prestige of languages, as perceived by the population of a particular region, it is worth noting that it is shaped by a complex interweaving of socio-political factors. A language is considered prestigious if it extends beyond the boundaries of its ethnic area of functioning, since prestigious and non-prestigious languages perform different functions within an ethnos<sup>38</sup>. Thus, non-prestigious languages may serve intra-ethnic communication, while prestigious ones become the languages of social status, education, career, and well-being.

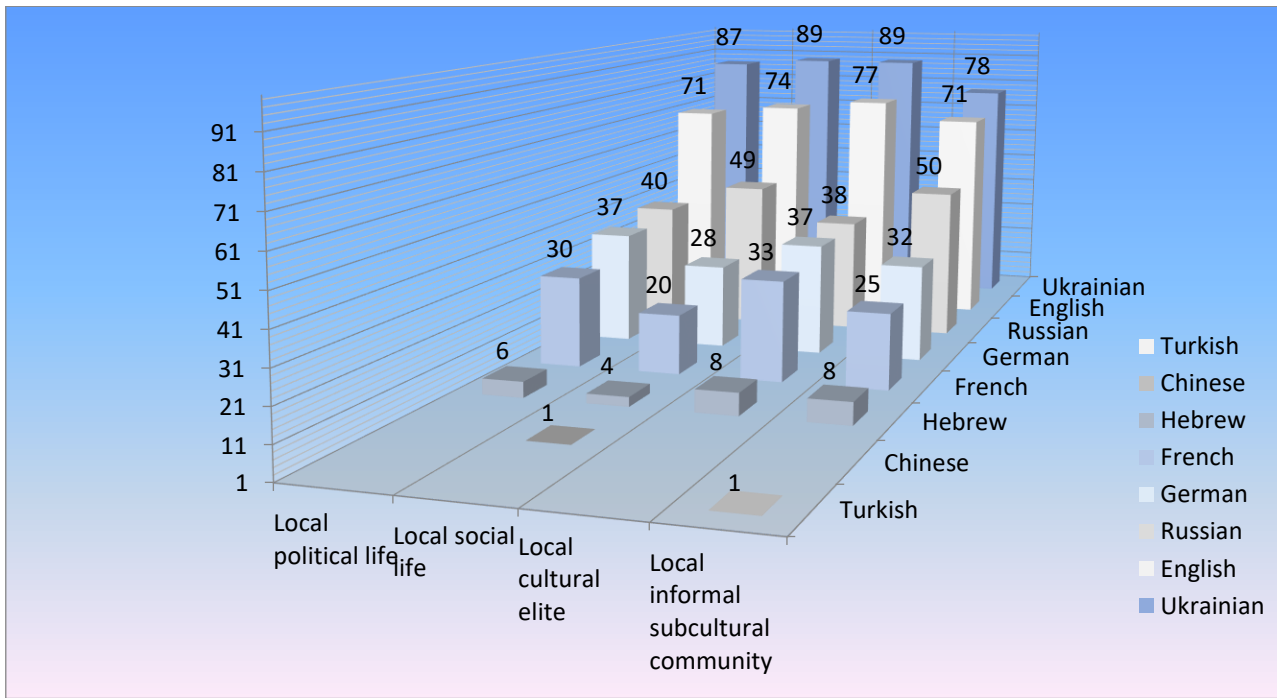
Kahane, examining the phenomenon of a ‘prestige language’ within a given society, notes that the social structure of the target culture that is about to absorb the language, the ways in which the language is integrated, and the domains of modernity it represents may all contribute to its appeal and subsequent spread<sup>39</sup>.

The respondents’ answers to the block of questions evaluating the recognition of languages across different spheres of local life in their region (see Fig. 7 and 8) show the highest indicators for Ukrainian (which is quite predictable for western Ukraine, where the level of proficiency and use of Ukrainian is high in all domains), followed closely by English (indicating the growing prestige of this language in the country overall) in both phases of the study.

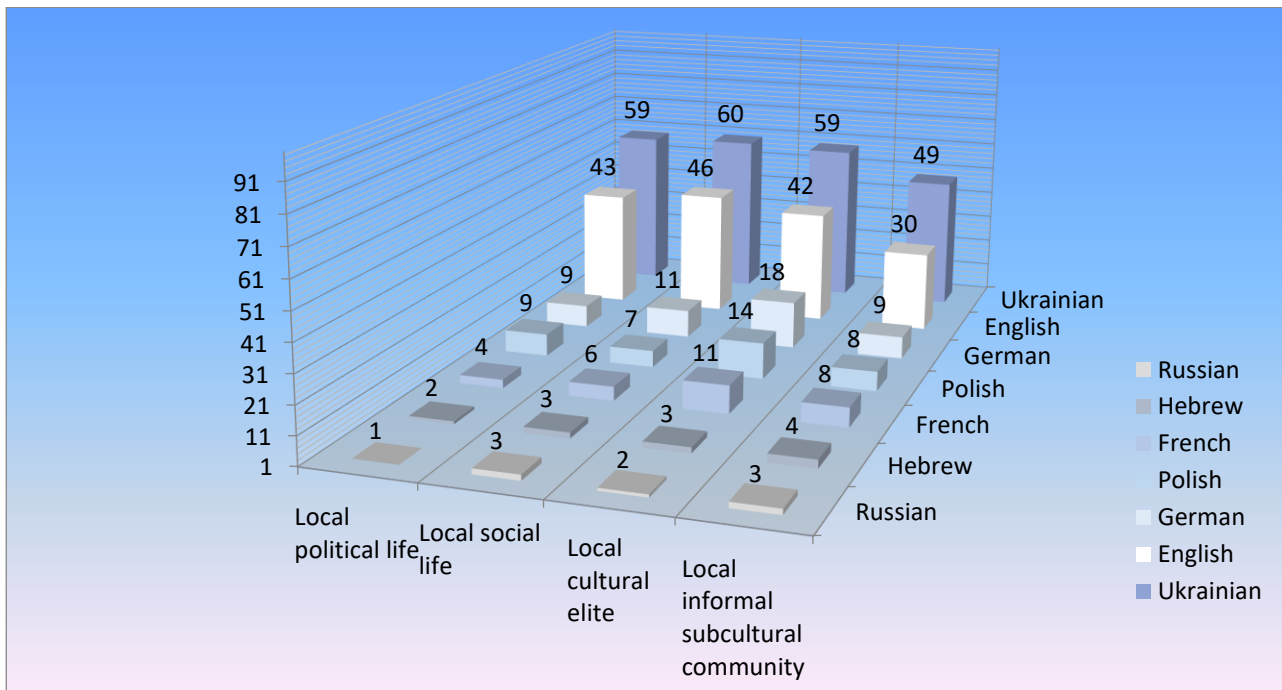
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<sup>38</sup> Heine, B. (1992). Language policies in Africa. In *Language and society in Africa* (pp. 23-35). Witwatersrand University Press.

<sup>39</sup> Kahane, H. (1986). A typology of the prestige language. *Language*, 62(3), 495-508. <https://doi.org/10.2307/415474>



**Figure 7. A high level assessment (‘to a very high extend, quite strongly’) of language recognition in different spheres of local life of the respondents (phase 1)**



**Figure 8. A high level assessment (‘to a very high extend, quite strongly’) of language recognition in different spheres of local life of the respondents (phase 2)**

Next, an interesting shift becomes apparent: Russian, which had a noticeably lower score but still ranked among the top three in the first phase (the figures are lower

than they would be in more Russified regions of the country, yet still sufficiently high to demonstrate the stable bilingualism of Ukrainians), moves to the last position in the second phase. In its place, Polish emerges – absent in the first phase – which may reflect the intensified strengthening of ties between the two countries since the start of the full-scale war.

German and French occupy the fourth and fifth positions in the first phase and the third and fifth in the second, which generally reflects the growing recognition of European languages in the context of Ukraine's European integration movement. Hebrew ranks sixth in both phases of the study, which may point to the presence and cultural importance of Jewish minorities in the region. Single mentions of Turkish and Chinese in the first phase appear statistically insignificant.

**The above-mentioned findings can be summarized as follows:** based on the two phases of the survey, a descriptive study was conducted to present the language situation among students in western Ukraine – primarily those from the Volyn, Rivne, Ternopil, and Lviv regions – and to determine whether it has changed over the three years of the full-scale war.

The research sample of student youth (163 participants in total, aged 16-35) from western Ukraine, according to the 'rural-urban area' criterion in both phases of the study and the 'occupational (non-study) experience' criterion in the first phase, generally correlates with other all-Ukrainian studies.

The second phase shows an increase in the number of students with occupational experience, which can be explained by the deterioration of the economic situation of Ukrainian families since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

The specificity of the region is reflected in the indicated ethnicity: a significantly higher number of respondents identify themselves as Ukrainians (90.80%) compared with the data of the 2001 Census (77.8%). The full-scale war may also have influenced these results by strengthening self-identity and fostering a desire among respondents to distance themselves from the aggressor.

The student youth of western Ukraine is characterized by a combination of spontaneous and pedagogical multilingualism with the dominant Ukrainian (including

‘surzhyk’ as its subsystem), mastery by almost the entire sample of Russian and English (at the higher level of proficiency in the first and at much lower – in English though with 4.5% more of mentions by respondents) as leaders among the mentioned languages, German, Polish, and French being second top three, and some other languages – however, at a significantly lower or almost statistically insignificant level (when 0,6% of a very weak command or even no certain level of a language mastery was indicated).

Among the mentioned languages, Belarusian, Polish, and Russian are homomorphic (related to Ukrainian in the sense of typological similarity); other languages are characteristics of heteromorphic language situations, being typologically unrelated to Ukrainian. Proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian is a reflection of early simultaneous bilingualism due to their spread in everyday life and in the information space, while other languages mainly form non-simultaneous late multilingualism combining features of spontaneous and pedagogical one. We can also call the multilingualism of the respondents active, as they noted, in particular, high rates of using Ukrainian, Russian, and English (the three languages which scored the highest) as setup language(s) of their telephone, switching from one language to another, and mixing them.

The active multilingualism of the respondents is driven by various factors, some of which are quite dramatic. These include labour migration caused by limited economic opportunities in the home country, a shift in attitudes toward Russian following Russia’s military aggression since 2014, and Ukrainians’ aspirations for European integration – a goal for which they paid a high price during the Revolution of Dignity and continued to pay in the full-scale war.

Migration processes require additional clarification. In 2021, according to open sociological data, the number of labour migrants from Ukraine was estimated at 2.5-3 million. Since 2022, this number has increased due to refugees fleeing the horrors of the full-scale invasion; their number is estimated to exceed 6 million<sup>40</sup>. This is a

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<sup>40</sup> UNHCR. (2023). Ukraine refugee situation. Retrieved November 05, 2025, from [data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine).

significant figure, considering that at the beginning of the war Ukraine's total population was assessed by various official institutions as fewer than 40 million<sup>41</sup>.

If we take into account labour migrants who remained abroad as well as refugees, it can be roughly estimated that about 9 million Ukrainian citizens have been exposed to other language environments for years. This prolonged exposure will likely have a strong influence on the country's linguistic landscape upon their return, although the exact number of those who will come back cannot yet be reliably predicted.

It is worth emphasizing that post-war analyses of multilingualism, as well as further examinations of the factors shaping language choice in student life, are of considerable interest, as they reflect the dynamic evolution of the region's linguistic landscape and offer valuable perspectives for future research. In particular, a further decline in the influence of Russian is anticipated. The expected decrease in the presence of Russian is driven both by legislative restrictions on the official use of the aggressor state's language in Ukraine and by the emotional and psychologically traumatic perception of the so-called 'Russian world', including its language, among a significant portion of the Ukrainian population. At the same time, an increase in the role of English is anticipated. This trend is associated with the growing prestige of English in the context of Ukraine's European integration, as well as with recent legislative initiatives – for instance, the Verkhovna Rada's adoption of a law on the use of the English language in Ukraine, which establishes English as a language of international communication, promotes its study among citizens, and mandates English proficiency for certain categories of officials and military personnel<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> United Nations Population Division. (2024). Data Portal. Retrieved November 28, 2025, from [population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/49/locations/804/start/1990/end/2023/line/linetimeplot?df=839345ce-386b-479f-860b-3ef776641010](https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/49/locations/804/start/1990/end/2023/line/linetimeplot?df=839345ce-386b-479f-860b-3ef776641010).

Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. (2024). Zakon Ukrainy Pro zastosuvannya anhliiskoi movy v Ukraini. [Law of Ukraine on the use of the English language in Ukraine]. Retrieved December 01, 2025, from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3760-20#Text>.