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## Ukrainian Language in Educational Institutions of the USSR: 1960s–1970s

Język ukraiński w placówkach edukacyjnych ZSRR w latach sześćdziesiątych i siedemdziesiątych XX wieku

### • Abstract •

This article examines the position of the Ukrainian language in educational institutions of the USSR during the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century. It is shown that the Soviet government actively implemented the policy of Russification, the aim of which was the complete destruction of the national-educational space of Ukrainians. Numerous decisions and resolutions of the country's top party leadership have laid a solid foundation for the introduction of Russian as the language of interethnic communication. In the field of education, the ideologues of communism tried to shift the emphasis from the national characteristics of Ukrainians to the “common” for all – the Soviet ones. Oppression of the native language has caused alarm among the Ukrainian public. Realizing that the Ukrainian language is the basis for the preservation and development of the Ukrainian nation, the Ukrainian intelligentsia led the movement to protect it. Disagreeing with Russification, Ukrainians used all possible forms of protest against it at the time. It came to the formation of open opposition to Khrushchev's educational reform. Many letters were received by various levels of government,

### • Abstrakt •

Celem artykułu była analiza sytuacji języka ukraińskiego w placówkach edukacyjnych ZSRR w latach sześćdziesiątych i siedemdziesiątych XX wieku. Przedstawiono systematyczną politykę rusyfikacji, realizowanej przez rząd radziecki w celu całkowitego zniszczenia narodowej i oświatowej przestrzeni Ukraińców. Liczne decyzje i uchwały najwyższego kierownictwa partyjnego państwa położyły podwaliny pod ustanowienie języka rosyjskiego językiem komunikacji międzyetnicznej. W dziedzinie edukacji ideolodzy komunizmu próbowali przenieść nacisk z ukraińskich cech narodowych na „wspólne” dla wszystkich „cechy radzieckie”. Opresja, jakiej poddano język ojczysty, wywołała zaniepokojenie wśród Ukraińców. Uświadomiwszy sobie, że język ukraiński to podstawa ochrony i rozwoju ukraińskiej narodowości, ukraińska inteligencja stanęła na czele ruchu w jego obronie. Nie godząc się na rusyfikację, Ukraińcy stosowali wówczas wszelkie możliwe formy protestu przeciwko temu procesowi. Doszło do powstania jawnej opozycji wobec reform Chruszczowa. Do redakcji gazet, czasopism, wydawnictw, a także do ośrodków na

newspapers, and magazines from various publishers, whose authors were concerned about the unequal position of the Russian and Ukrainian languages and expressed their indignation at the functioning of a large number of Russian-language educational institutions. Ukrainians were encouraged to spread the Ukrainian language and take care of its further development, thus seeking to preserve their own national identity. And the Ukrainian language continued to live and develop in the thick of the masses.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian language; educational institutions; educational space; Ukrainian intelligentsia; opposition; totalitarian regime; Soviet power; Russification; denationalization

różnych szczeblach administracji nadchodziło mnóstwo korespondencji, której autorzy byli zaniepokojeni nierównym statusem rosyjskiego i ukraińskiego języka oraz wyrażali oburzenie z powodu funkcjonowania dużej liczby rosyjskojęzycznych placówek oświatowych. Ukraińców zachęcano do upowszechniania języka ukraińskiego i dbania o jego dalszy rozwój, co było konieczne dla zachowania własnej tożsamości narodowej. Język ukraiński rozwijał się pomimo ograniczających go działań.

**Słowa kluczowe:** język ukraiński; placówki edukacyjne; przestrzeń edukacyjna; ukraińska inteligencja; opozycja; reżim totalitarny; władza radziecka; rusyfikacja; wynarodowienie

## Formulation of scientific problem and its significance

The Ukrainian language has always been and remains the basis of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Ukrainian people, an integral part of its identity. It preserves the national memory of Ukrainians, their worldview, ethnic and moral values. However, in Soviet times there was a destruction of the national educational space in the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR. CPSU – CPU has launched a comprehensive displacement of the Ukrainian language from all spheres of life of the Ukrainian ethnic environment. In this context, it is necessary to focus on the 1960s–1970s, which are characterized by a struggle between the official leadership of the party, which nurtured the idea of creating a “new and indivisible Soviet people”, and the Ukrainian intelligentsia, who advocated the development of the native language and one’s own national identity.

With the independence of Ukraine, democratization of socio-political life, and opening access to many archival sources, favorable conditions were created for free, unbiased, methodologically balanced study of the Soviet past of the Ukrainian nation and expanding the field of national memory and historical consciousness of citizens.

Therefore, a comprehensive study of the Ukrainian language in educational institutions of the USSR during the 60s–70s of the twentieth century is extremely relevant and requires a special approach to research, and today it is important to promote the growth of national consciousness of Ukrainians, learning the state language, providing the state education of the younger generation in the spirit of traditional values of the Ukrainian state and nation.

## Research analysis

The issue of the situation of Ukrainian language in the USSR during second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was highlighted in the works of such authors as: O. Bazhan (2008), N. Brehunets (2006), O. Sergiychuk (2002), J. Shevchuk (2001), O. Tevikova (2010), M. Yarmolenko (2013) and others. However, in the scientific literature the topic remains understudied. This enables us to continue working in this promising area.

## The aim of the article

Thus, the focus of this article is the study of the situation of Ukrainian language in the USSR during the 1960s–1970s, the place of Ukrainian national motifs in the artistic culture of the USSR during this period, the study of language policy in the USSR, demonstration of all possible forms of protest of the Ukrainian intelligentsia against Russification and denationalization of the indigenous people of Ukraine.

## The main material and justification of study results

The language issue in the period under study was covered by the Law on Equality of Languages in Ukraine (1927), Art. 40, 110, 121 of the Constitution of the USSR of 1936 and similar articles 109 and 120 of the Constitution of the USSR of 1937, which allowed to draw up legislation, conduct court proceedings, and the educational process in the native (Ukrainian) language. However, Russian was officially declared as the language of interethnic communication in the USSR, and it was actively introduced by the ruling communist elite into the public life of the USSR (Kindrachuk, 2014, p. 147).

“It should be emphasized that before the 21<sup>st</sup> Congress of the CPSU (1959), Russification in Ukraine took place in two directions: the first – the approximation of the Ukrainian language to Russian, the second – ‘substitution’ of the Ukrainian language by Russian. The policy pursued by the government to bring the Ukrainian language closer to Russian, with the prospect of further merging of languages, failed” (Kindrachuk, 2014, p. 147). In this regard, it was decided to focus on the second direction of Russification – the introduction of Russian as a language of interethnic communication in the USSR (Sergiychuk, 2002, p. 5).

Realizing the importance of the Ukrainian language as the basis for the formation of the nation, the Soviet government tried to narrow the scope of its use. Against the

background of changes in the political worldview in the USSR, there was a rapid increase in the Russification of Ukrainians.

It should be emphasized that Russification itself was not openly recognized by the Soviet leadership. One of the proofs of this is the speech of the party leader O. Kyrychenko at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1954, where he stated that such term as ‘Russification’ has not been used in Ukraine for a long time (Brehunets, 2006, p. 136). This position of the Communist Party leadership set the tone for how this issue should be officially interpreted in Ukrainian society. All contemporary publications, scientific literature, information in the media were full of such terms as ‘international politics’, ‘internationalization of public relations’ and so on. It is under these definitions that the policy of Russification of all spheres of Ukrainian life was cleverly hidden.

The language of the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR was deprived of the obligatory status in the study and use during the educational process. The functioning of Ukrainian children’s preschools and secondary schools at that time was determined by the Law “On Strengthening the Connection between School and Life and Further Development of Public Education in the USSR” of December 24, 1958, adopted in the USSR on April 17, 1959 (*The Law on Strengthening...*, 1959, p. 10). The ninth article of this law gave parents the right to make voluntary choices of languages of instruction for their children. That is, the study of the Ukrainian language in schools was declared optional (*Cultural Construction in the Ukrainian SSR...*, 1961, p. 511), and this put the Ukrainian language in a difficult, unequal position with other languages, especially Russian. Thus, the school law under the guise of democratization significantly weakened the position of the Ukrainian language and strengthened the position of the Russian language in secondary schools of the Ukrainian SSR.

The system of Russification of Ukrainian national education was covered in a number of other documents, in particular in the report of the Ministry of Education of the USSR to the Central Committee of the CPU and the RM of the Ukrainian SSR, dated January 23, 1960, “On Measures to Improve Russian Language Teaching in Schools of the Ukrainian SSR” (Shevchuk, 2001, p. 12). Total Russification in the USSR was reflected in the new Program approved by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the CPSU on October 17–31, 1961. These documents proclaimed the idea of complete merging of nations and the formation of “a new historical community – the Soviet people” (Panibudlaska, 1972, p. 14), for which Russian was to become a common language, because, according to Soviet ideologues, the Russian people were marked by “exceptional significance” in Soviet history and socialist achievements.

Such a disappointing situation has caused alarm among the Ukrainian public. It started dissatisfaction among a large group of conscious Ukrainians, which contributed to the rise of the movement to protect the native language (Kindrachuk, 2016b, p. 97). Representatives of the Ukrainian creative intelligentsia constantly demonstrated their disagreement with the official position of the Soviet government in the language policy of the Ukrainian SSR.

Protesting against the Soviet policy of Russification, the Ukrainian intelligentsia fought against it by all possible means. Thus, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenum of the Writers' Union of Ukraine, which took place in Kyiv on January 10–11, 1962, most of its participants spoke about the then decline of the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture. For example, the Ukrainian poet, writer, and playwright I. Muratov sharply condemned the Educational Law, which provided for the right of parents to choose the language of instruction for their children. He urged Ukrainians to appeal to the top party leadership of the USSR to revise this item, because, in his opinion, "from this recklessness... the whole culture is threatened" (Brehunets, 2006, p. 59). B. Antonenko-Davidovych, I. Drach, D. Pavlychko, N. Uzhviy and others also criticized the Educational Law.

It should also be noted that the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR received a significant number of complaints in which Ukrainians expressed their indignation at the oppression of the Ukrainian language. Representatives of the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR emphasized the existence of a large number of Russian-language schools, kindergartens and nurseries in the republic. In this regard, I. Dziuba said that, "When entering kindergarten, our children do not understand any language other than their mother tongue (Ukrainian), and it is no educational method when educators address them in Russian" (Dziuba, 1998, p. 177).

The question of the position of the Ukrainian language in society and at the scientific-practical conference held in 1963 at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv State University was acute. Its participants, about 800 people, including scientists, writers, university professors, teachers, students, published numerous facts of gradual Russification of Ukraine, condemned the need to eliminate national languages in the USSR and the theory of bilingual nations, which was planted by the CPSU – CPU (Galaychak, 1996, pp. 567–568). At the conference, the intelligentsia discussed all possible options for further expanding the use of the Ukrainian language and removing artificial obstacles to its development. There was also a need to teach exclusively in Ukrainian, therefore it was proposed to conduct educational work in nurseries, schools, colleges, technical schools, and institutes.

Unfortunately, such appeals and proposals did not find wide support and understanding from the authorities and were classified exclusively as "politically

incorrect” and “ideologically unhealthy” statements (Kindrachuk, 2016a, p. 50). At the same time, the spread of radical sentiments in society and the “danger” of some individuals’ views on official language policy provoked a negative reaction from the country’s leadership. During 1961–1964, the KGB under the Council of Ministers of the USSR prosecuted many young people, representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia from Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, and Lviv, who doubted the correctness of the CPSU’s national policy and tried to oppose Russification in Ukraine (Kindrachuk, 2016a, p. 50). Gradually, a climate was created in the republic in which the defense of the native language was accepted exclusively as a manifestation of “bourgeois nationalism” and qualified as anti-state activities.

During the 1960s–1970s, the tendency to use the Russian language while studying in secondary schools of the USSR remained dominant. The Ukrainian language, in turn, acquired an “unpromising” character. Such a disappointing situation contributed to the increase of Russian-language schools in the network of secondary schools of Ukraine and the simultaneous reduction of the number of Ukrainian schools (Kindrachuk, 2015b, p. 63). Particularly disappointing were the numerical indicators of the number of students in Russian and Ukrainian schools, which showed an increase in the number of students in exclusively Russian-speaking schools.

In addition to the quantitative reduction of Ukrainian-language schools, internal processes took place in the education system of the Ukrainian SSR, which led to the partial elimination of the Ukrainian language from education. In the early 1960s, the tendency to reduce the number of hours devoted to the study of Ukrainian language and literature at school was clearly outlined (Kindrachuk, 2017, pp. 155–156). Researcher S. Svorak points out that in Ukrainian-language schools the number of hours for teaching these subjects has decreased by 90, and in Russian-language schools – by 119 (Svorak, 1999, p. 269).

It is also worth mentioning that Russian-language schools enjoyed the support of party and state bodies, whose representatives sent their children to study there. For the same reasons, Russian schools had a much better material and technical base and staffing. Teachers of the Russian language and literature were also paid higher salaries and allowances, which was not done for teachers of the Ukrainian language and literature. Such circumstances increased the prestige of the Russian language in the society of that time.

Assessing Soviet education, the S. Svorak noted that “the national in form and socialist in content secondary school in the Ukrainian SSR during the Soviet era was never Ukrainian, but on the contrary, built on Marxism-Leninism with its class approach to education and denials of achievements of the spiritual life of the

Ukrainian people, the school was an effective lever of the Soviet political system in the so-called ‘international’ education of students, the formation of a new historical community of people – ‘the only Soviet people’” (Svorak, 1998, p. 91). Subordinated to the interests of the totalitarian state, the school of the time in the Ukrainian SSR inhibited the awareness of young people’s belonging to a separate Ukrainian nation, deprived the younger generation of the opportunity to be educated by Ukrainians.

During the 1960s–1970s, the ideological factor overwhelmed the educational process in the higher education of the Ukrainian SSR. Relevant party bodies always conducted interviews with entrants, studied their personal affairs in detail. In the biographies of students information was sought about the whereabouts of their relatives during the Second World War, about possible ties with the Germans, with “Ukrainian nationalists”, about the presence of repressed family members, etc. (Tevikova, 2010, p. 158). Such students, due to harassment and prejudice against them, did not have a chance for successful study and career growth.

Speaking about the ideologically rich climate of the student environment, it should be said that the content of education in higher education in the Ukrainian SSR was subject exclusively to the plans of extensive socialist construction and communist education (Kindrachuk, 2015b, p. 64). The educational process focused on devotion to the ideas of the Communist Party and the disclosure of the “reactionary ideology of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism”. There was a forced study of the works of V. Lenin, K. Marx, F. Engels, the resolutions of the Congresses of the CPSU – CPU, which filled all the bookshelves of student libraries of the Ukrainian SSR.

It should be noted that since 1954, knowledge of the Ukrainian language has ceased to be a mandatory requirement for admission to universities in the Ukrainian SSR, which created certain difficulties for rural youth, who took entrance exams with “great Ukrainian accent” (*Rules of Admission to Higher Educational Institutions of the USSR*, 1973, p. 8). The possibility of taking entrance exams in Russian was a significant obstacle to the filling of educational institutions by Ukrainians, as their knowledge of Russian was mostly weak. Under such conditions, graduates of Russian schools passed the entrance exams to universities more successfully than graduates of Ukrainian ones.

It must be said that the Ukrainian SSR was deprived of the opportunity to build its own state university. The entire education system of Ukraine was built on the Russian model. The main evidence of this was the fact that the educational process in the universities of the republic was conducted mainly in Russian, although Ukrainians were the majority among the student audience. The number of students and graduate students of Ukrainian nationality in the 1970s was also consistently

high and dominated by representatives of other nationalities (*Consolidated Statistical Report on the Work of Graduate Schools of the USSR...*, 1975, p. 2).

It should be emphasized that the beginning of the 1960s was marked by the positive dynamics of teaching in the Ukrainian language in many universities of the Ukrainian SSR. But conditions for the development of the Ukrainian word have deteriorated sharply since the second half of the 1960s, and especially since the early 1970s. As early as March 1972, at the meeting of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, Soviet high-ranking officials sharply criticized Petro Shelest's pro-Ukrainian activities for "shortcomings in the international education of workers and conciliatory treatment of nationalism", and as a result he was dismissed from the post of the First Secretary of Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The subsequent coming to power of V. Shcherbytsky and his subordinate V. Malanchuk (the latter held the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on ideology) significantly strengthened and expanded the scale of Russification in Ukraine. In the early 1970s, adherence to the Ukrainian word was considered a sufficient basis for accusations of "nationalism". Using only Russian in official communication, the newly elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of CPU noted in one of his speeches that in the process of cultural construction of that time, the role and importance of Russian, which he considered the "second native" language in the USSR, increased and it became a "universally recognized" means of mutual communication of all nations and nationalities of the USSR (Yarmolenko, 2013, p. 370).

It should be emphasized that the combination of the Soviet policy of Russification and centralization became a significant impediment to the development of the Ukrainian scientific sphere. From 1970, by order of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Ukrainian SSR, all dissertations submitted for defense were to be written in Russian. Moreover, their approval took place exclusively in Moscow (Ivanchenko, 1996, p. 310). This approach applied even to scientific works on the subject of Ukrainian language and literature, which in turn significantly complicated their defense. At the same time, prospects for development appeared in those scholars who studied and researched the Russian question in various directions.

It should be noted that the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR played an important role in the unification and Russification of the educational and scientific process in the USSR. It coordinated the preparation of all curricula, controlled the ideological content of textbooks, manuals, various scientific and methodological literature, which was usually prepared by Russian authors and sent to the union republics, including the Ukrainian SSR (Gritsenko, 1958, p. 23).



Scientific and pedagogical conferences were often held under the auspices of this scientific institution, which, in the spirit of the CPSU guidelines, outlined further ways of developing education in the Soviet state and determined the place of the Russian language in this process.

However, despite all the obstacles deliberately created by the Soviet authorities on the way to learning and preserving the Ukrainian language, the Ukrainian student community was still full of interest in the development of their language as a factor of national self-identification of Ukrainians in the USSR. Ukrainian youth tried to prove to others the importance of preserving the Ukrainian language as a solid foundation for the existence of the Ukrainian nation and its state. One of the representatives of the galaxy of the Sixtiers, V. Moroz, noted in this regard: “It was a young generation that went to university and could already think of something else, not just the basic conditions of existence...” (Gunchak & Solchanik, 1983, p. 314).

It should be emphasized that the pivotal role in shaping the national worldview among Ukrainian students in the 1960s–1970s played the teaching staff of higher educational institutions of Ukraine. According to archival sources, the lectures of some teachers discussed the realities of the Soviet reality of that time, considered the banned works of Ukrainian writers and historians who promoted the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian statehood (*Certificates of the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CP of Ukraine, Resolutions, Letters of the Regional Committees...*, p. 27). However, such a teaching position immediately fell under the close control and supervision of the Union and Republican KGB. A convincing example of this was the dismissal of teachers: B. Stepanyshyn of the Rivne Pedagogical Institute, P. Raevsky, and scientist, poet, and journalist J. Michuda of the Ukrainian Institute of Water Engineers, who were accused of “bourgeois nationalism” for their civic position (Rozhko, 1983). These facts once again confirmed the existence in the Ukrainian SSR of a whole system of actions in the Soviet ruling circles aimed at destroying the national existence of Ukrainians.

## Conclusions

During the 60s–70s of the twentieth century, the Ukrainian language was discriminated in educational institutions of the Ukrainian SSR. The Soviet state leadership actively implemented a policy of ethnic assimilation and Russification, the aim of which was the complete destruction of the national educational space of Ukrainians. Numerous decisions and resolutions of the country’s top party leadership have laid a solid foundation for the introduction of Russian as the language of

interethnic communication in the USSR. In the field of education, the ideologues of the CPSU – CPU tried to shift the emphasis from the national characteristics of Ukrainians to “common” for all – the Soviet ones.

Ukrainian language was deprived of the obligatory status in learning and use during the school educational process. In the early 1960s, there was a clear tendency to reduce the number of hours devoted to the study of the Ukrainian language and literature, which in turn led to a quantitative decrease in Ukrainian schools while increasing the number of Russian ones. Teachers of the Russian language and literature were paid more than teachers of the Ukrainian language and literature. There were many problems in Ukrainian-language schools, in particular, few state allocations were allocated for their maintenance, as a result of which their premises became in a state of emergency. Instead, Russian-language schools enjoyed the support of the party and state bodies, whose representatives sent their children to study there.

Beginning in 1954, knowledge of the Ukrainian language ceased to be a mandatory requirement for admission to universities in the USSR. The possibility of taking entrance exams in Russian has become a significant obstacle to the access of Ukrainians to educational institutions. Soviet Ukraine was deprived of the opportunity to build its own national university. Unified programs and textbooks fully complied with the ideological principles of the CPSU – CPU. Library funds were filled with Russian-language literature.

The Russification intensified dramatically after the removal of P. Shelest from the office of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the arrival of V. Shcherbytsky, a like-minded and follower of the Kremlin’s political course, who was elected to this position. The new leader resolutely undertook to eliminate even insignificant achievements made on the initiative of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the national-educational sphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The combination of the processes of Russification and ideologization has become an important inhibiting factor in the Ukrainian scientific sphere. Relying on the direct support of Moscow’s ruling circles, the communist leadership in the Ukrainian SSR launched a systematic “ideological purge”.

Such a disappointing situation in the national language policy of Ukraine has caused alarm among the Ukrainian public. Realizing that the Ukrainian language is the basis for the preservation and development of the Ukrainian nation, the Ukrainian intelligentsia led the movement to protect the Ukrainian word. Disagreeing with Russification, Ukrainians used all possible forms of protest against it at the time.

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