

A Taste of Ukrainian

2.1. Understanding Ukrainian Words

Once you have learned the alphabet, you will find that you can immediately recognise many Ukrainian words. Every language has words in common with other languages, and it helps to remember that:

- the words in a family of languages e.g. French, Italian, Spanish (the Romance languages) have often developed from an earlier language, in this case, Latin; if you already know one of those languages, it should be easier to recognise words in a related language;
- many basic Ukrainian words have a lot in common with words in other European (and, sometimes non-European) languages, because they have developed from one or more earlier languages;
- if you already know another Slavonic language e.g. Polish, Slovak, Russian, Bulgarian etc., and know the main differences between the ways words developed from their Old Slavonic roots, you can work out the meanings of many common words, for example, if you remember that the «vi-» (or «vo-») beginnings of many Ukrainian words of Slavonic origin translate into “o” in quite a few of their equivalents in other languages:

Ukrainian	Polish	Russian	Slovak	English
він	on	он	on	he
вікно	okno	окно	okno	window
від	od	от	od	from
від- (1500+ words!)	od-	от-	od-	prefix de-/re-
відповідати	odpowiadać	отвечать	odpoveda t'	reply
вогонь	ogień	огонь	ohň	fire
вісім	osiem	восемь	osem	eight

- words have been borrowed from other languages (usually, when a material object or concept is borrowed, the word from the original language goes with it!); these types of borrowings can be centuries old, or very recent indeed! Given below are some words Ukrainian has borrowed from other languages – it immediately becomes obvious that the language of a nation reflects its history and relations with other countries, nations and ethnic groups!

Language from which words have been borrowed	Examples of words borrowed by Ukrainian
Arabic	гашиш – hashish майдан – large square
Chinese	чай – tea
English (naval terms)	шквал – squall мічман – midshipman дрейф – drift шторм – storm
English (sport & games)	футбол – football регбі – rugby теніс – tennis старт – start пенальті – penalty бридж – bridge (пів)тайм – (half)time
English (industry, production, trade)	плед – plaid твід – tweed грейпфрут – grapefruit бренді – brandy брокер – broker
Finnish	пельмені – pelmeni (dumplings)
French (refinement, fashion and innovation)	абажур – lampshade пальто – overcoat платформа – platform сувенір – souvenir дирижабль – hot-air balloon шампунь – shampoo

German (administration, army, realia, owing to Western Ukraine being in the Austro-Hungarian Empire)	бухгалтер – book-keeper бюстгальтер – bra кегельбан – bowling alley шпацер – walk, stroll шинка – ham
Greek (origins of Ukrainian Christianity, scholarship)	динозавр – dinosaur демократія – democracy гемісфера – hemisphere
Italian	мараскін – maraschino граніт – granite граціозний – graceful цитаделя – citadel
Japanese	харакірі – harakiri
Latin	юстиція – justice
Persian	хата – (village) house шакал – jackal чемодан – suitcase шахи – chess
Spanish	херес – sherry
Turkic (Turkish/Tatar contacts with Ukraine in the late Middle Ages and Cossack era)	шаровари – wide cossack trousers (shalwar) шашлик – kebab (shashlik) шаман – shaman шербет – sherbet яничар – janissary ярлик – lasso
Yiddish (significant Jewish population)	шмата – rag, piece of cloth (colloquial) хам – cad

A final point: just in case you get the wrong impression about Ukrainian vocabulary, there are lots of beautiful Ukrainian words of Slavonic origin that any student of the language needs to learn. If, though, you learn to look analytically at words right from the start, you can make life so much easier for yourself!

Vocabulary from the slide shows (2.2 and 2.3)

All words in this list are given in their dictionary forms. In the slides they may have different endings, as required by the grammar.

Nouns

мова – language
день – day
привіт – greeting(s)
справа – affair, matter
алфавіт – alphabet
інформація – information
слово – word

Adjectives

український – Ukrainian
добрий – good

Polite phrases

Добрий день! – Good day!
Привіт! – Hello!
Як справи? – How are things?
Добре. – Good (*literally* – Well)
Дуже добре. – Very good. (*literally* – Very well)

Verbs

знати – know (ви знаєте – you know)
розуміти – understand (ви розумієте – you understand)

Adverbs

добре – well
дуже – very
складно – difficult

Preposition

про – about

Other words and phrases

так – yes
ні – no
це – this (is)
не – not
Це (не) складно! – It's (not) difficult!