CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND POWER IN UKRAINE AND KAZAKHSTAN: AN INTRODUCTION

Natalia Kudriavtseva
Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University
ORCid 0000-0001-7641-9543

Debra A. Friedman
Indiana University, Bloomington
ORCid 0000-0001-5733-5088

Contemporary notions of power go far beyond traditional views of authority legitimized by institutional social structures. In social sciences and humanities, power is understood as ingrained in all spheres of life, and even individuals are recognized as capable of exercising power by influencing beliefs and behavior of others. Significant in this respect is that social power can effectively be exercised via symbolic means, of which language constitutes an instrument of especial importance. These means may be realized by the state and embodied in legislation, dictionaries and grammars, or they may involve ideologically-mediated perceptions of language(s) promulgated through public discourses, language pedagogy, fiction, and popular culture, all of which employ language to (re-)structure the real world. As a crucial factor in making and unmaking groups, language is also a powerful means in creating identity and an instrument of mobilization, inclusion and exclusion.

Going beyond the limited definition of language as vocabulary and grammar, a focus on language as used by people in real life brings the perspectives of status and power relationships into the consideration of ways in which words and rules are employed. This focus involves conscious or subconscious decisions on how a language should be spoken, which linguistic variety should be used and whether the chosen form of expression is perceived as authoritative in a particular real-life situation. This inclusive perspective fosters the understanding of language as a kind of symbolic capital which grounds claims to position and power in social, cultural and political contexts. This means that a critical study of language as used in real life is always inevitably a study of underlying power relations.

The approaches that are pursued in this volume are "critical" because they focus on the social and ideological functions of language in the production, reproduction and contestation of social structures, identities and political institutions. In this respect, this special issue continues the tradition of research known as *critical linguistics* or *critical discourse analysis* (Fairclough & Wodak 1997) — a field of academic enquiry which produced a theory of language as a social practice where "the rules and norms that govern linguistic behavior have a social function, origin and meaning" (Hodge and Kress 1993: 204 cited in Simpson, Mayr & Statham 2019).

This tradition was launched by the seminal volumes *Language and Control* (Fowler et al. 1979) and *Language as Ideology* (Hodge & Kress 1979) that challenged the Chomskian view of language as an abstract set of grammar rules. The critical analysis of language and power was taken up by books such as *Language and Power* (Fairclough 1989) and the series *Language, Power and Social Process* (Watts & Heller 1999–2011), which later transformed into *Language and Social Life* (Britain & Thurlow 2015). These volumes made a crucial contribution to the development of critical approaches in the sociolinguistic study of social problems by examining the ways in which language constructs identities, builds communities and mediates inequalities in social life. The field has since produced several introductory and comprehensive textbooks and coursebooks either presenting a broad consideration of language functioning in various social contexts, such as politics and the media (e. g. Thomas et al. 1999; Talbot, Atkinson & Atkinson 2003) or focusing on peculiarities of the application of critical discourse analysis to the contexts of institutions and organizations, gender, humor, race, the law and social media (e.g. Simpson, Mayr & Statham 2019; Kramsch 2020). However, there have been few case-specific volumes devoted to the study of language as situated in particular geographic contexts, such as *Language, Identity and Power in Modern India* (Isaka 2022) or *Language and Power* (Watzke, Miller & Mantero 2022), which included chapters focusing on a range of geographic contexts.

The authors in this special issue examine the exercise of power along the lines of leading traditions in critical research. The classic approach formulated by Weber in 1914 (Weber 1978) is concerned with the *corrective power* of the state and its institutions and investigates the ways in which powerful groups influence how language is used while also exercising control over access to language. Along with the tradition researching the exercise of power through the dominance of the state, there is a more recent approach exploring the exercise of power via *hegemony*. The concept of hegemony as advanced by Gramsci (1971) underscores the routine, "common sense" realizations of power whereby hegemonic opinions on language structure, nature and use are transmitted as "appropriate" and "natural." The concept of hegemony echoes what Bourdieu (1991) understood as *symbolic power,* which is always disguised as something else and requires the compliance of those subject to it to be exerted. Close to this stream of research scrutinizing power as exercised by consent is Foucault's (1972) methodological concept of *discourse* in which power is continuously produced, reinforced and contested in social communication. Being an instrument of power, discourse mediates ideological control as all spoken, written and visual texts are shaped and determined by political ideologies as well as by explicit and implicit attitudes and beliefs, i. e. ideologies, about language.

The six contributions to this volume represent the first collection of essays presenting a critical examination of language and power relations in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The post-Soviet period in Ukraine and Kazakhstan has been characterized not only by changes in the economic marketplace in the transition from communism to capitalism, but also in the linguistic marketplace. During the Soviet period, Russian was the primary language of schooling, media, and government administration in both countries, leading to widespread language shift away

from their titular languages, especially among the educated urban elites. In addition, following independence in 1991, both countries found themselves with a large ethnic Russian (and Russian speaking) diaspora. Since independence, Ukrainian and Kazakh, which occupied relatively peripheral positions in the Soviet-era marketplace, have been elevated to the status of national languages and institutionalized in government and schools, thus increasing their symbolic power. Nevertheless, the years since independence have also seen contentious debates around language. Employing various methodological tools ranging from surveys to critical discourse analysis of legislation, literary texts and social media products, the authors in this volume seek to demonstrate and explain how political relations and hegemonic ideologies have been reproduced and negotiated at both the macro-level in legislation on language and state-sponsored media channels and embodiments of political and linguistic ideologies in translations, as well as at the micro-level of everyday language practices, school choice, and discourses on social media platforms.

Much of the research presented in this volume was collected during the tumultuous decade beginning with the so-called "language Maidan" in Ukraine — a mass public protest against adopting the 2012 law "On the Principles of the State Language Policy," also known as the Kolesnichenko-Kivalov law, that was largely seen as a means of allowing Russian to function on a par with Ukrainian, or even to substitute for it, in official domains – and culminating in the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This period also saw the 2013–2014 Euromaidan protests, a three-month mass protest triggered by the government's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union, followed by Russian aggression in the Donbas and Crimea, as well as the "Bloody January" protests in Kazakhstan in 2022, which were triggered by anger over economic conditions and government corruption and violently suppressed with the assistance of a military force from Russia. Although these events took place in the political sphere, they have also had profound effects on the linguistic marketplace. While largely focusing on Ukraine in the years leading up to the full-scale invasion, these contributions also relate to the current realities of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war as they critically analyze and dismantle Russian propagandistic narratives, expose the repercussions of the Russian invasion on Ukraine's occupied territories, and raise potential implications regarding the impact of the ongoing hostilities on language policies, attitudes, and practices in the region.

The volume opens with Svitlana Melnyk's comprehensive overview of the impact of these political events on the evolution of Ukrainian language-in-education policy and the shifting attitudes towards the status of Ukrainian, Russian, and minority languages (i.e., Hungarian, Polish, etc.) in the Ukrainian educational system and in Ukrainian society in general. Drawing from a wide range of policy documents and media commentary, the paper uses Churchill's (1986) model of education for linguistic and cultural minorities to trace recent changes in Ukraine's language-in-education policy away from "minority language immersion" (i.e., education in the mother tongue, including Russian) to "bilingual education" (instruction in the minority language along with Ukrainian) and to situate them within their historical, political, and ideological contexts.

The analysis carefully documents the interconnections between events at the legislative level (e. g., the "Law on Education" of 2017) and the evolving sociolinguistic situation in the aftermath of Euromaidan and the occupation of Crimea and the Donbas, which intensified perceptions regarding the importance of the Ukrainian language in strengthening national identity and unity in the face of Russian aggression and transformed language choice from "a decision about expressing personal identity" or a "politically neutral code choice," to "an activity with real political repercussions" (Bilaniuk 2016: 141, 147). The full-scale invasion that began on February 24, 2022, on the pretext of "protecting" the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine has provided further impetus for this trend. The scope of the paper also expands beyond state educational institutions to consider the impact of grassroots efforts such as *Free Ukrainian Language Courses* (Безкоштовні курси української мови). This is the first nationwide network of volunteer language instructors, who have been teaching Ukrainian to Ukraine's speakers of Russian since 2013, which has since transformed into an online project — the platform *Ye-Mova* (Є-Мова) — designed to target primarily Russian-speaking Ukrainians, including those residing in the occupied territories of Crimea and the Donbas (see also Kudriavtseva 2023). The language-of-education situation in these occupied territories is another crucial focus of this paper, which notes the ongoing "Russification" of education in these areas, a process that includes requiring local citizens to send their children to schools that follow the Russian curriculum and ending instruction in subjects such as the Ukrainian language, literature, and history, in effect, recolonizing Ukrainian consciousness as well as Ukrainian territory.

The second paper, Maryna Vardanian's study on translations of literary texts performed in Soviet Ukraine and Ukrainian Diaspora, is situated in an historical context, yet has clear repercussions for understanding how the corrective power of the state, reinforced by the exercise of power via hegemony, continues to hold sway in contemporary Russia and reinforces its ongoing neocolonialist project. The primary goal of the sovietization of literature for children and young adults in Soviet Ukraine was achieved through the state mechanism of censorship which pursued the implementation of communist ideology into children's books and curated the selection of texts for translation. The political ideology was reproduced via the strategy of literal translation carried out from a preceding Russian translation into the other languages of the USSR "faithfully" recreating the form and content of the Russian "original." The political ideology was further bolstered through the hegemonic policy of Russification whose aim was the assimilation of "fraternal nations" under Moscow's imperial rule. The author also shows the contestations of ideologies in children's translations. In the diasporic translation of Boussenard's *Le Capitaine Casse-Cou*, the Soviet colonial ideology was opposed by attributing the language of the original text to the so-called "cultural languages" and performing the translation from the French original work. The language ideology for the source language (French) is extended onto the target language — Ukrainian — and realized in compliance with the 1928 Ukrainian spelling, which also manifests a protest against the Soviet policy of Russification.

The language ideologies of the diasporic translation serve to transmit the hegemonic diasporic view of the self-sufficiency of Ukrainian culture and identity and socialize young Ukrainians into an imagined community of a self-sustaining Ukrainian nation. Significantly, Vardanian reveals how both the Soviet and the diasporic translations of Boussenard's *Le Capitaine Casse-Cou* negotiated the ideologies of the French original. In the Soviet translation, the purpose of colonization as the goal in the Anglo-Boer War is discursively diluted and the focus is displaced to the French international help in the struggle of the Boers to gain independence, while the diasporic version of *Le Capitaine Casse-Cou* emphasizes the opposition of the colony to the metropolis stressing the idea that only natives of the land can defend it. This study on ideologies in translation remarkably resonates with the current realities of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The Soviet-cultivated image of a fully militarized child coming to rescue the poor and oppressed is harnessed by the Russian propaganda machine which discursively reshapes it into the "liberator of the Donbas bombarded for eight years." As many previous generations born in the USSR, new generations born in modern Russia are still brought up within the same ideological frame for them to be ready to continue the traditions of Soviet colonization.

The remaining papers in this volume remind us of the importance of shifting our gaze from the macro-level of state power and policy to also consider the diverse ways in which supposedly hegemonic state-sponsored ideologies, discourses, and policies are received and renegotiated by individual social actors. Using survey data (Soroka, Kudriavtseva & Danylenko; Ahn & Smagulova) and critical analyses of digital discourses (Nedashkivska; Kolomiyets), these studies highlight the power and limits of state policy and official discourses in legitimating certain languages and instilling them with symbolic power.

Soroka, Kudriavtseva, and Danylenko examine language practices in pre-2022 Ukraine based on data from a nationwide survey conducted in 2017–2018. The aim of the survey, among other things, was to measure social inequalities in Ukraine as related to language. While drawing on Bourdieu's notions of symbolic power and the legitimate language, the authors align with reconceptualizations of Bourdieu's framework, whereby more than one language can be considered legitimate (e. g., Woolard 1985). Examining the symbolic power of Ukrainian and Russian, with the former being legitimized by the state while the latter is endorsed as a habitual means of communication, the authors also probe into the linguistic capital of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism in Ukraine by introducing an additional variable for Ukrainian-Russian bilinguals. The analysis of the survey results for the three identified groups (Ukrainian speakers, Russian speakers, Ukrainian-Russian bilinguals) as regards questions on self-assessed social status, material welfare, sectors of the economy where they are employed and opportunities for overseas travel shows no significant inequalities between the respondents in question. This means that neither linguistic competence (in Ukrainian or Russian) was perceived as linked to more opportunities in pre-war Ukraine, while at the same time neither language was viewed by respondents as a factor contributing to social tension. This is an important finding to be considered against the backdrop of Putin's "pretexts" for the ongoing war whereby

"liberation of Ukraine's Russian speakers" was put forward as a justification for the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion. Similarly important is the conclusion that the authors draw on the traditional perception of Ukraine's south-eastern regions as largely Russian-speaking which, as they suggest, is no longer valid. The revealed bilingualism of the southeast is in line with earlier research on respondents coming from the Donbas while it also accords with another finding that Soroka, Kudriavtseva and Danylenko make on the linguistic capital related to Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism. The author's assumption that there may be greater symbolic power linked to bilingual practice, with bilingualism being achieved by adding Ukrainian to the already possessed knowledge of Russian, offers two important questions to be considered in future research: about the relevance of the label "Russian speaker" in terms of Ukraine, namely, the implication of monolingualism conveyed by this label; as well as about the relevance of the same implication conveyed by the term "legitimate language". While more research is needed in view of the changing realities influenced by the war, the findings of the study are already sufficient to raise these important questions.

Ahn and Smagulova offer another corrective to assumptions regarding the hegemonic power of the state in legitimating languages in their study of school choice in Almaty, Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, longstanding economic disparities between rural and urban areas have also shaped an imbalance between the symbolic power of Russian (spoken by urban residents, many of whom historically were ethnic Russians) and Kazakh (spoken by ethnic Kazakhs who tended to reside in villages). Based on a large-scale survey conducted in 158 classes in 29 comprehensive schools in Almaty between April and May 2014, their analysis demonstrates that despite efforts by the state to raise the symbolic capital accorded to Kazakh by making it the state language and encouraging Kazakh-medium education, Russian-speaking Kazakhs continue to favor Russian-medium education. Kazakh-medium institutions, on the other hand, seem to function almost as ghettoes for Kazakh-speaking rural migrants who, for historical reasons, lack the economic, cultural, and linguistic capital that would enable them to succeed academically. In other words, state-sponsored efforts to increase the symbolic capital accorded to Kazakh since independence do not appear to be reversing the process of language shift among Russian-speaking ethnic Kazakhs, nor are they creating a generation of new Kazakh speakers. In addition, although the expansion of Kazakh-medium schooling in Almaty has provided students with opportunities for mother-tongue education, it has failed to address the socioeconomic inequities that have relegated many students in these schools to the margins of society. As Ahn and Smagulova note, this raises questions regarding social cohesion and may have contributed to the outbreak of protests in January 2022. The effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on this delicate situation remains to be seen; however, some commentators have noted increasingly negative attitudes towards Russia as well as an increased sense of national consciousness among Kazakhs since the outbreak of the war, especially among young people (Dumoulin 2023), both of which have the potential to alter the perceived legitimacy of Russian and Kazakh in the Kazakh linguistic marketplace. Ahn and Smagulova's survey has laid the groundwork for future research to investigate how these developments play out over the coming years.

Alla Nedashkivska's paper focuses on an analysis of social media discourses around the introduction of the 2019 Ukrainian orthography, which reintroduced some aspects of the 1928 orthography that were later abandoned in the 1933 "Russified" version. Adapting Sebba's (2009, 2012) sociocultural model that sees orthography as embodying historical, social, and political meaning, the article explores the diversity of responses to the 2019 orthography and the multiple language ideologies through which individuals sought to justify these responses as reflected on the popular social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok between May 2019 and March 2021. On the one hand, some commentators on Facebook supported the new orthography on the grounds that the changes are necessary to rid Ukrainian of "Russified" forms introduced in the 1933 version, thus revoicing dominant national ideologies and framing the new orthography as emblematic of "Ukrainianness" through the semiotic process of *iconization* (Sebba 2009, 2012). However, these are not the only voices. A fairly radical reframing of the debate over orthography is found in the comments of those who oppose the new orthography by characterizing it as the project of a (possibly foreign) elite and implying that it represents an artificial version of the language that does not represent "real" Ukrainian as it is actually used by ordinary people. This can be read as not just opposition to the new orthography as such, but as opposition to top-down prescriptions of how language should be used and, perhaps more importantly, who decides. And while the young people on TikTok tend to endorse the new orthography, they take their own unique approach. Rather than representing it as a return to an older more "authentic" past practice, they "rebrand" it as something cool and contemporary. The generational divide evident in these divergent discourses, in particular, the impassioned defense of and advocacy for Ukrainian on the part of young people on TikTok, raises some interesting questions regarding future direction and vitality of the language and also points to a shift in attitudes away from young people's preference for Russian as more prestigious that was found in earlier studies (Kulyk 2015; see also Friedman 2016). This is also in line with recent surveys that have revealed that the decade since Euromaidan has seen a trend for "popular Ukrainianization," with growing percentages of respondents who choose Ukrainian as the language of everyday use (Kulyk 2023).

The final paper by Lada Kolomiyets brings us full circle back to wartime Ukraine in a critical examination of current Russian propaganda discourses and their deconstruction in Ukrainian parodistic translation and digital folklore. Employing critical discourse analysis, the author reveals the role of Russian state media in the ongoing war as the media outlets reproduce Russia's political attitudes through their function as the ideological state apparatus (Althusser). Close linguistic analysis of their Orwellian *Newspeak* shows how the Kremlin's manipulative discourse on the ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine constructs a "correct" reality for the population of Russia whose only worthwhile life goal, as proclaimed, is to fall on the field of battle. While the Russian populace largely seems to consent to the power of the state in their routine reproduction of hegemonic opinions, Ukrainians are actively debunking imperial myths via humorous deconstructive translation on social media. Drawing on Derrida's deconstruction,

Kolomiyets suggests that Russian political slogans and statements are deprived of their propagandistic effect through the procedures of neologization, borrowing with meaning transfer, alternative word formation and wordplay in the parodistic translation of Russian messages into Ukrainian. The deconstruction of propagandistic narratives is reinforced in Ukrainian digital folklore by creating new narrative frames and rendering the concepts of Russian *Newspeak* into anecdotal and facetious contexts. An invaluable component of the study is the multimodal analysis of visual images reflecting various episodes in the Russo-Ukrainian war whereby deconstruction is performed by graphically explicating the contradictoriness of Kremlin's messages and the realities. It is remarkable that, in the process of deconstruction in the digital space, Ukrainians overcome not only Russian imperial myths, but also their own centuries-old national traumas. The study raises an important and timely question of the cultures of war and the significance of digital discourse accompanying real warfare. Since the mankind has entered the new age of cyberwars, it is language that is being used as the main weapon in virtual battles.

Taken together, this collection of papers vividly illustrates Kroskrity's (2004) observations regarding the fluidity, multiplicity, and contestation among language ideologies and discourses and how these are employed by states, interest groups, and individuals as resources to construct or deconstruct power and negotiate their place in the social world. That is, the struggles over control of language that have taken place and continue to take place in educational institutions, in literature, on social media, and in everyday language practices that are documented in these papers are never only about language, but are intimately interconnected with larger social issues and political projects. While these struggles are hardly unique to Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the social upheavals and military aggression that have marked the past decade in the region bring them into high relief and underscore the need to move beyond the simplistic notions of language, identity, and power that sometimes characterize popular media discourses to consider the complex mechanisms through which power is exercised in societies undergoing profound social and political change.

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