

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTERS OVER THE NEW 2019 UKRAINIAN ORTHOGRAPHY¹

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to analyze discourses around the introduction of the new Ukrainian Orthography in 2019. Debates on the perceived or ideal standard of the Ukrainian language have been percolating for centuries in various social circles and contexts. Since May 2019, these debates have been receiving heightened attention, accompanied by politicization, conflicts, and strong responses on all sides. Societal reactions and emotional responses by the public towards these new orthographical norms are at the core of this investigation. The study relies on the sociocultural model of orthography (Sebba 2009, 2012), in which orthography is viewed as a social practice, going beyond its understanding as simply written representations of speech. The premise is that orthography is a set of symbols that are endowed with historical, cultural, and politicized meanings (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), and these meanings are ideologically laden (Sebba 2009). Thus, this study focuses on the new orthographic policy, and analyzes various discourses on the new orthography and how these constitute language ideological debates. Texts from three social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, are examined. These texts are viewed as “ideological sites” (Silverstein 1979) which allow us to explore people’s beliefs, ideas, and sensitivities about particular language policies and practices, in other words, the underpinnings of societal positions about the new orthographic norms. The analysis of these language ideologies is also tied with the concepts of attribution, iconization, and branding (Sebba 2015), which are relevant in the context of the orthographic reforms and transformations taking place in Ukraine. The results allow us to discuss two major ideological positions: the position of pro-change and the position of safeguarding the status-quo, which display constructions and enactments of language ideologies in the society. The analysis reveals that these positions are distinct within and across generations.*

Key words: *orthography, Ukrainian orthography, language ideologies, attribution, iconization, iconization, branding, orthography and generations.*

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Orthographies are mirrors of their surrounding history.

Michael Moser (n.d.: 2)

1. Introduction

This article provides an examination of the debates surrounding the 2019 reforms to Ukrainian Orthography (*Ukrains'kyi Pravopys* 2019), introduced as a result of lengthy and heated deliberations and disputes in the circles of Ukrainian language policy makers and the public, particularly since Ukraine's independence in 1991, with orthographic conflicts going as far back as the eighteenth century. As known from scholarship, introductions of new orthographies or implementations of orthographic reforms, particularly due to the prescriptive powers of these reforms, normally and most often lead to discomfort, fears, lack of acceptance, opposition, contestation, and protest (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994; Sebba 2009). These reactions and feelings in the context of language debates in general and orthography in particular are never about language alone (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994); they are always tied to social, political, and cultural processes and events in a particular community. Orthographies cannot be viewed as written representations of speech only: orthographic systems act as symbols loaded with historical, cultural, and often politicized meanings (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 65) with “all models of orthography as fundamentally ideological” (Sebba 2009: 14).

Ukraine is yet another example among many in which, over centuries, a number of models of orthography have been politicized, conflicted, and accompanied by heated discussions. The 2019 Orthography, as is typical in these cases, elicited a strong emotional response from the public (for several other cases of often turbulent orthographic reform contexts, see Sebba 2009). The premise of this study is not to focus on the linguistic side of the new Orthography, but to view it as “complex social and cultural achievements, best viewed as sets of practices—some highly conventionalized and others relatively unconstrained... [which] are microcosms of language itself, where the issues of history, identity, ethnicity, culture and politics which pervade language are also prominent” (Sebba 2009: 167). Accepting Sebba's (2009, 2012) sociocultural model of orthography, which views orthography as social practice, this study draws on societal attitudes towards this social practice as reflected in social media discourses. These attitudes about orthography or “beliefs about what language is, should be, and should be used for” (Sebba 2009: 25) provide ideological stances for the debates, thereby allowing us to study discourses surrounding the implementation of the new orthography within the framework of language ideologies.

2. Background

2.1. Historical conflicts over the Ukrainian Orthography

Orthographic reforms contributing to language standardization processes in Ukraine as in many other cultures and societies have not been simple,

but rather turbulent, debated, disputed, conflictual and importantly tied to historical and sociopolitical landscapes and contexts. Battles for a unified Ukrainian Orthography have been visible since the end of the eighteenth century, with crucial peaks of attention during the twentieth century, and most recently with the introduction and implementation of the newest 2019 Orthography (see Table 1). Without going too deeply into the historical past, it will suffice to note that the establishment of a Ukrainian state in 1919 facilitated the development and acceptance of unified Ukrainian language orthographic norms, published as the “More Important Rules of the Ukrainian Orthography” and later as the “Most Important Rules of the Ukrainian Orthography.” In 1925, a State Orthography Commission at the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic was formed, the task of which was to revise the earlier rules, developing a new all-Ukrainian orthographic canon. The work of this commission culminated in an orthography, unified and accepted by all areas of Ukraine, with Western Ukraine being part of Poland and Eastern Ukraine being a recent addition to the Soviet Union. This orthography came to be known as the 1928 Orthography, or *Skrypnykivka*, as endorsed by the People’s Commissar for Education, Mykola Skrypnyk. The 1928 Ukrainian Orthography, primarily based on the language of Central Ukraine, was in use until 1933, when the Soviet authorities began to fear Ukrainian national sentiments, which they perceived as political threats. In the sphere of language practices of Ukrainians, the Soviet authorities were also afraid of the outcomes of the Ukrainianization movements of the 1920s and thus ruled the 1928 Orthography as “nationalistic.” As Huzar notes about this time period, “Very often the Ukrainian identity in its essence (with the Ukrainian language and its Orthography being the major elements of this identity) was treated as potentially dangerous in the context of Russification, and therefore became an object of repressions” by the Soviet government (Huzar 2004: 506). In 1933, as a part of a general policy of Russification of the official languages of the Soviet republics, the Soviet authorities enforced a revised Ukrainian orthography, the goal of which was to bring the Ukrainian orthographic conventions closer to those of the Russian language, thereby promoting the similarity and “sisterhood” of the two languages and strengthening Russian imperial unity.¹ Among several tamperings with the Ukrainian language, the emblematic changes of the 1933 reform included abolishing the letter **ґ** from the Ukrainian alphabet, with arguments being that Ukrainian cannot have two graphemes **ґ**/g and **г**/h while Russian has only one **г**/g (see Hornjatkevych 1980), and replacing the genitive case ending of nouns of the third and fourth declensions of **-и/-y** with **-і/-i**, mirroring the Russian ending **-і/-i** (радост**и**/radost**ы** → радост**і**/radost**і** ‘joy’).² These and several other changes in the 1933 Orthography constituted enactments

¹ The policy of Russification affected not only the Slavic languages of the Soviet Union, such as Ukrainian and Belarusian, but also non-Slavic languages such as Kazakh, Tatar and other. The non-Slavic languages were required to switch to the Cyrillic alphabet and to include large numbers of Russian loanwords. These transformations were imposed allegedly to enhance languages’ “proletarian” character (I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point).

² The change of **-и/-y** with **-і/-i** in the genitive case was imposed in most nouns of the third and fourth declensions, except those with the suffix **-ат/-at** most often used for baby animals. Therefore, the Ukrainian forms such as теля**т**и/teliat**ы** ‘calf’ remained unchanged. This exception was most likely because in Russian a similar noun group has a different suffix **-ёнок/-ionok**: телёнок/telionok ‘calf’.

of Russification policies in Ukraine, which Ukraine endured for many decades, leading to the reforms of 2019.

Table 1: Ukrainian orthographies: A brief historical overview (based on *Ukrains'kyi Pravopys* 2019: 5-10; Moser n.d.)¹

Year	Event	Notes on importance/role/main features and/or changes
1798-1905	50 different orthographic systems were proposed and/or used	See <i>Ukrains'kyi Pravopys</i> (2019: 6)
1919	"The More Important Rules of the Ukrainian Orthography" & "The Most Important Rules of the Ukrainian Orthography" were published	The first official orthographic codex in the history of Ukraine
1928²	The "Kharkiv Orthography" (known also as the <i>Skrypnykivka</i>) adopted	The first orthography fully accepted by both Western Ukraine (Poland) and Eastern Ukraine (Soviet Union)
1929	Orthographic Dictionary published	Written by Hryhorii Holoskevych
1933	The new Ukrainian Orthography created	Enforced by Soviet authorities and changed to more closely resemble the Russian orthography, emphasizing the "similarity" of the Ukrainian and Russian languages *The 1933 Orthography was not accepted beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The 1928 norms remained in use in Western Ukraine and in the Diaspora.
1930s/ 1946/1960	Additional changes to the Ukrainian Orthography are added	Continued Russification of the Ukrainian orthography
1989-1990	New Redaction of the Orthography published	*Return of the letter r/g

¹ For a brief, but detailed historical overview of the codification of Ukrainian, with special attention paid to orthographic developments, see Belej (2020).

² Bold highlights indicate events that are particularly relevant for the focus of this study.

1999	Proposal for a revised Orthography were circulated and debated	Not made official
2019	The 2019 Ukrainian Orthography (<i>Ukrains'kyi Pravopys 2019</i>) adopted and regulated	Return to certain norms of 1928 (de-Russification); Allowance of variants (coexistence of “old” and “new” spelling and forms)
2021	In January, a 12-year-old from Kherson challenged the legality of the orthography at the District Administrative Court of Kyiv. The court found the acceptance of the new Orthography illegal, which led to protests. Later, the Appellate court ruled in favour of the Cabinet of Ministers' approval of the orthography.	Debates surrounding the new Orthography resurface

2.2. The key changes in the 2019 Ukrainian Orthography

The 2019 Orthography was developed by the Ukrainian National Committee on Issues of Orthography, which began its work in 2015 (*Ukrains'kyi Pravopys 2019*: 7–8). This committee consisted of linguists from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and representatives from higher educational institutions from different regions of Ukraine. As noted in its introduction, the 2019 Orthography “returns to life some of the peculiarities of the 1928 Orthography, which constitute the Ukrainian orthographic tradition and renewal of which has a contemporary scientific basis” (ibid.: 8). This tradition also preserves the “inheritance in the language” strengthening “the connections between generations, which lived, live and will live in Ukraine” (ibid.: 10). Furthermore,

At the same time, the orthographic committee was driven by the fact that language practices of Ukrainians of the second half of the twentieth—beginning of the twenty-first centuries has already become a part of the Ukrainian orthographic tradition. (*Ukrains'kyi Pravopys 2019*: 8)

The authors note that they view the abolition of the 1928 norms as a criminal act of repression of the Soviet totalitarian regime against Ukrainians and their language (ibid.: 8). Nevertheless, considering Ukrainian as an “open and dynamic” language (ibid.: 8), they state that it is not possible “to ignore the fact that history creates people’s languages: languages change and their orthographies need to reflect first and foremost their contemporary state” (ibid.: 8). This requires the language to reflect practices familiar to and currently used by the speakers of Ukrainian in Ukraine. The committee also underscores that the new Orthography, “reacting to challenges of language practices... widens boundaries for the use of orthographic variants” (ibid.: 9).

The reasoning behind this is that “variance constitutes an organic part of any orthographic codex and is characteristic of every language at various point of its historical development” (ibid.: 9).¹

In summary, the committee’s main goals were to find a balance between the established and new developments in the contemporary language while also preserving, and in certain cases resurrecting, some traditional characteristics of Ukrainian (ibid.: 10). In other words, the new orthography represents a compromise between a re-establishment of historical authentication² (de-Russification practices within the Ukrainian language) and a reflection on the current trends in the Ukrainian language. Table 2 presents some main changes introduced in the 2019 Orthography, with the fifth column focusing on elements highly discussed in social media, corroborated by the analysis of the corpus under discussion.

Table 2.1. New 2019 Orthography: Major changes³

Feature/ Change	1928	1933- →1990s→2000s	2019	Emblematic and highly discussed features of the 2019 Orthography
The use of the letter ʀ /g vs. ʀ /h [for the ‘g’ sound]	ʀ (*in foreign words)	аґрус /ahrus ‘gooseberries’, ґава /hava ‘crow’	аґрус /agrus, ґава /gava	ʀ /g (*somewhat discussed)
Words with the Latin root -ject or suffix -e/-e vs. -є/- ie		проект /proekt ‘project’	проект /proiekt	проект /proiekt ‘project’
No hyphen in compound words		поп-музика / роп-музыка ‘pop music’, веб- сторінка / veb-storinka ‘web page’	попмузика , вебсторінка	(*not discussed)

¹ The Ukrainian approach to allowing variance may also be viewed as a reaction to the imposed language standardization under the Soviet government. The Soviet Russian standard language ideology, imposed on other languages of the Soviet Union including Ukrainian, emphasized a prescriptive ideal of language not based on real practices and regarded any type of variance as highly undesirable (I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this observation).

² For the discussion of the notion of “authentication” vs “authenticity” see Bucholtz (2003), who argues that “authenticity presupposes that identity is primordial” with authentication viewing identity “as the outcome of constantly negotiated social practices” (408).

³ For detailed analyses of the orthographic norms implemented in 2019 and their comparisons to other versions of orthographies, including the 1928 Orthography, see Moser (n.d.) and Hornjatkevych (2020; 1980).

Adjectival surnames from Russian -ой/-oi→-ий/-yi	Донской/ Donskoi	Донськой/ Dons'koi	Донський/Donskyi	(*not discussed)
Changes based on corresponding norms: -н/-n→-nn/-nn		священник/ sviashchenyk 'priest'	святенник/sviashchennyk (similarly to письменник/pys'mennyk 'writer')	(*not discussed)
Renewed capital letters		бог/boh 'God', трі́ця/triitsia 'Holy Trinity'	Бог, Трійця	(*not discussed)
From capital letters to small letters		Президент/ Presyident 'president'	президент (unless president of a country or state)	(*not discussed)
Expanding feminines for professions		директор/ dyrektor 'director', президент/ prezydent 'president'	директорка/ dyrektorka 'director _{Feminine form [Fem]} ', президентка/ prezydentka 'president _{Fem} '	директорка, президентка and also: міністерка/ministerka 'minister _{Fem} ' філологиня/filolohynia 'filologist _{Fem} '

Table 2.2. New 2019 Orthography: Major changes allowing variants

Feature	1928	1933- →1990s→2000s	2019	Emblematic and highly discussed features of the 2019 Orthography
The sound 'g' in surnames or place names: r/h vs. r/g	г' (*discussed for foreign words only)	Гуллівер/Hulliver 'Gulliver'	Гуллівер/Hulliver and Ґуллівер/Gulliver 'Gulliver'	Ґуллівер, Горґвартс/Hogwarts 'Hogwarts'
и-/y vs. і-/i word initially	Ірод/Irod 'Herod'	Ірод	Ірод/Irod and Ирод/Yrod	индик/yndynk 'turkey' (*this form is not present in 2019 Pravopys)

Words of Greek and Latin origin with -au- ав vs. ay	ав диторія/ av dytoriia 'auditorium' пав за пав за/ pav za 'pause'	ау диторія/ aud dytoriia, пау за/ pau za	ау диторія <i>and</i> ав диторія, пау за <i>and</i> пав за	ав диторія/ av dytoriia пав за/ pav za
Words with Greek th: т vs. ф	ка те дра/ kated ra 'department', мі то логія/ mitolohi ia 'mythology', е те р/ eter 'air'	ка фе дра/ kafed ra, мі фо логія/ mifolohi ia, е фі р/ efir	ка фе дра <i>and</i> ка те дра, мі фо логія <i>and</i> мі то логія, е фі р <i>and</i> е те р	ка те дра/ kated ra, мі то логія/ mitolohi ia, е те р/ eter
The genitive case of nouns of third and fourth declensions: -и vs. -і	рад ост и/ radosty 'joy' _{Genitive[Gen]} , см ер ти/ smerty 'death' _{Genitive[Gen]}	рад ост і/ radosti , см ер ті/ smerti імен и / imeny (1933) → імен і / imeni (1945)	рад ост і <i>and</i> рад ост и, см ер ті <i>and</i> см ер ти імен і / imeni <i>and</i> імен я / imia	рад ост и/ radosty

3. Theory and Methodology

3.1. Theoretical framework

Because this study focuses on people's reactions, that is, their attitudes and beliefs towards a particular language reform, in this case an implementation of a new orthography, it is logical to rely on the concept of language ideologies, a concept very much favored by sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists. The texts analyzed below, which I view as "ideological sites" (Silverstein 1979), represent social reactions to the new orthographic norms: acceptances or endorsements, protests or contestations. These reactions form language ideological debates (Blommaert 1999, cited in Ahmad 2012: 103), in which "the structure and use of language constitute the central axis of discussion and dispute" (Ahmad 2012: 103). Relying on Silverstein's understanding of language ideologies as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structures and use" (Silverstein 1979: 193), the goal of this project is to analyze people's sensitivities towards particular language issues. The analysis is carried out through the prism of language ideologies because language ideologies are beliefs and ideas that speakers have about their language, and these are interconnected with social processes in a particular sociopolitical environment (Kroskrity 2000, 2004). In addition, this study links the discussion of different language ideological positionings with concepts developed by Sebba (2009, 2015): attribution, iconization [iconisation], and branding. Sebba, who has studied many cases of orthographies, sees these three processes as relevant and recurring when orthographic reforms and transformations are in place.

Attribution, being a necessary precondition to iconization, “involves the perceived association of elements or practices with a group of people” (Sebba 2015: 209). In the present study, this concept is also extended to include the perceived association of language structures or practices with a particular language, language variety or language standard that people use, maintaining the view of orthography as social practice. According to Sebba, attribution is a process “whereby one group of people, A, make an association between a linguistic feature or language-related practice, X, and a group of people, B, who (supposedly) use that feature or engage in that practice. Use of the feature or practice in question can then be said to be attributed to the supposed user group B by the group A” (Sebba 2015: 209). In other words, attribution is “a process in which a particular linguistic [structure, sign, and] practice is constructed as characteristic of a (perceived) group” (Sebba 2015: 214) or a particular language, language variety or language standard.

Iconization, a concept originally introduced by Irvine and Gal (2000), follows an association of signs or language practices with a specific group of people, or a particular language, language variety or standard that people use. It involves “a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social image with which they are linked” (Irvine & Gal 2000, cited in Sebba 2015: 212). After such a transformation takes place, “linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them [not just a normal part of the linguistic practices of the group], as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence” (Sebba 2015: 212, citing Irvine & Gal 2000: 37).

Branding “highlights the strategic promotion of the branded product or concept, its distinctiveness or ‘unique selling point’ ...[and] may include visual images (in particular, logos) but refers more broadly to a process of identity creation by verbal and/or visual discursive means” (Sebba 2015: 213). I extend this definition of branding to encompass not only products or concepts, which, in this study, relate to language forms and practices, but also ideas and values around these forms and practices, which signal certain positioning geared towards making a particular impression on others.

With respect to orthographies, Sebba also notes that branding includes processes in which orthographic elements such as graphemes turn out to be emblematic of a particular community who use these elements in their language practices (Sebba 2015: 213). In addition, “[b]randing necessarily involves selection of a salient element from the relatively large repertoire of visual signs which are used in a script or orthography; this element then comes to be emblematic of the group who use it” (ibid.). Moreover, these salient elements, while being attributed to a particular group, prior to becoming emblematic may also be viewed as non-attributed to another group, thus differentiating the new brand from something else:

The identity-marking potential of branding is increased when two alternative features, with similar functions, come to brand different groups. (Sebba 2015: 216)

These three concepts are pertinent to the orthographic debate in Ukraine and will be brought into the discussion below where relevant.

3.2. Data collection and procedures

Social media texts devoted to debates surrounding the implementation of the 2019 Ukrainian orthography constitute the core of this study's database. My initial observation revealed that discussions about the new Orthography were taking place on a variety of social media platforms, particularly on *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok*, prompting my focus on these three platforms for the data collection. This selection allowed also for studying texts produced by different age groups or generations of users, with *Facebook* being favored by the oldest age-group participants while *TikTok* being represented by the youngest users.¹ In addition, a pilot search determined two peak time periods of the debates: i) May 2019 to early 2020, the time period surrounding the legislation of the 2019 Orthography; and ii) January 28, 2021, the proposed cancellation of the 2019 Orthography initiated by a 12-year old from Kherson, to March 2021, the toning down of the renewed discussions.

In *Facebook*, a key word search included the following: pravopys 'orthography'; Pravopys 2019 'orthography 2019'; Ukrains'kyi pravopys 'Ukrainian orthography'; and Novyi ukrains'kyi pravopys 'New Ukrainian orthography.' This search allowed me to delineate the following communities as devoted specifically to orthographic discussions: Pravopys 2018 'Orthography 2018' (created on November 7, 2017);² Kliasychnyi pravopys 'Classic Orthography' (created in 2012 and re-launched in 2019); Proty pravopysu 2019 'Against Orthography 2019' (created November 15, 2019³);⁴ and Istoriia ukrains'koho pravopysu 'History of the Ukrainian orthography'. This last is not considered in the analysis because during the data collection period, this community did not have any posts about the 2019 Orthography. The first two groups were created prior to the legislation of the 2019 Orthography and display discussions since May 22, 2019. The data set from these two sites include the five-month time period of May 22, 2019–October 30, 2019. The 'Against Orthography 2019' was created later;

¹ Statistics for January 2021 (midpoint of data collection for the present study) on social media use in Ukraine is available for *Facebook* and *Instagram*. With respect to age groups, the following is noted: (i) *Facebook*, with 21 920 000 users in total, displays: 13-24 age group→24.5%; 25-34 age group→26.5%; and 35-65 age group→49%; and (ii) *Instagram*, with 13 690 000 users in total, displays: 13-24 age group→34.7%; 25-34 age group→30.7%; and 35-65 age group→34.6% (<https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-ukraine/2021/01/>).

The most comparable data for *TikTok* use in Ukraine could be found for August 2022 (1 654 148 users), with the following numbers: 18-24 age group→60.1%; 25-34 age group→25.9%; and 35-55+ age group→13.9% (<https://www.start.io/audience/TikTok-users-in-ukraine>).

² The 'Orthography 2018' community was established before the 2019 Orthography was legislated. Discussions about the proposed orthographic changes began prior to its legislation.

³ On March 10, 2022, the administrator temporarily stopped posting on this site, most likely due to Russia's war against Ukraine, which had begun the previous month.

⁴ The 'Classic Orthography' site has another address: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/pravopys>. It appears that the sites were combined in a re-launched version in 2019. Administrators' note: "Created anew and re-launched, we return to our initial topics—problems of the Ukrainian orthography, including the new one." <https://www.facebook.com/pravopys>. Accessed July 28, 2022.

thus, in order to collect a comparable five-month set, an alternative timeline of November 2019 to April 2020 was determined. The second set of data from all three sites are from January 28, 2021 until March 28, 2021. For both *Instagram* and *TikTok*, data collection was limited to the same two primary time periods.

The data from *Instagram* were based on a key word search with the hashtags #pravopys 'orthography'; #Pravopys2019 'orthography2019'; #Ukrains'kyipravopys 'Ukrainianorthography'; and #Noryiukrains'kyipravopys 'NewUkrainianorthography'.

Data from *TikTok* were most visible during the second timeline, the proposed cancellation of the 2019 Orthography, with young people reacting to and defending the new norms. Initial hashtags were #pravopys 'orthography', #novyipravopys 'neworthography', #pravopys2019 'orthography2019', plus additional hashtags which emerged as relevant: #proiekt 'project' and #han'baOASK 'shameonRegionalAppealCourtofKyiv'. Please note that *TikTok* texts constitute short videos, on average 44 seconds long, which were studied based on the verbal content of the posts, including relevant comments.

These searches generated a corpus from all three social media communities, which was narrowed down using the following criteria: the topic of the post and comments relating primarily to orthographic discussion and/or debate; discussions that did not originate from a specific institution, establishment or political entity; posts that were not produced or managed by scholars or educators; and posts created within the specific time period. Posts and comments in both Ukrainian (predominant majority) and Russian (very few) languages were considered. Table 3 presents an overview of the entire corpus.

Table 3. Data set

Social media platform	Time period i) May 22, 2019- October 22, 2019 (*except FB:AO2019: November 15, 2019- April 15, 2020)	Time period ii) January 28, 2021- March 28, 2021	Posts and comments total
<i>Facebook</i> : Pravopys 2018 'Orthography 2018' [FB:O2018]	Posts: 19 Comments: 660	Posts: 30 Comments: 505	Posts: 49 Comments: 1,165
<i>Facebook</i> : Kliasychnyi pravopys 'Classic Orthography' [FB:CO]	Posts: 2 Comments: 22	Posts: 4 Comments: 113	Posts: 6 Comments: 135
<i>Facebook</i> : Protty pravopysu 2019 'Against Orthography 2019' [FB:AO2019]	Posts: 65 Comments: 925	Posts: 54 Comments: 401	Posts: 119 Comments: 1,326

<i>Instagram</i> [INS]	Posts: 22 Comments: 228	Posts: 7 Comments: 105	Posts: 29 Comments: 333
<i>TikTok</i> [TikTok]	Posts: 1 Comments: 106	Posts: 24 Comments: 1,075	Posts: 25 Comments: 1,181

The texts were studied and classified based on their most visible themes/positions, with respect to theme saliency, identifying key arguments of texts. This approach allowed establishing a number of themes (i.e. language and nation, language and Ukrainian identity, distancing of Ukrainian and Russian, cleansing of Ukrainian from Russian influences, uniqueness of Ukrainian, and timeliness of the new Orthography, as well as indifference towards the Orthography and criticism towards the proposed changes, among other themes). These specific themes were then grouped into two broader categories of pro and against the new Orthography, representing language ideological positions with respect to orthography and the Ukrainian language in general (see analysis below).

The goal of this project is not to present statistical significance of certain positions and attitudes towards the 2019 Ukrainian Orthography. Rather, the analysis seeks to provide a close reading of the texts under discussion, pointing out the evident positions, attitudes, and interests of particular communities as representing these communities' language ideological stances, which are visible in the context of orthographic debates.

4. Results

The analysis of main arguments and themes allows us to establish two distinct positions underpinned by multiple language ideologies surrounding the debates about the 2019 Ukrainian Orthography: the position of pro-change, liberation and progress and the position of safeguarding the status quo. These two main ideological positions, pro and contra arguments regarding the implementation of the new Orthography, are in no way surprising and are common in most cases of orthographic reforms. With respect to the Ukrainian orthography studied here, each of these positions is built on a number of language ideologies, some of which are peculiar to the Ukrainian context.

4.1. The position of pro-change, liberation and progress

The analysis reveals that texts classified under the position of pro-change, liberation and progress demonstrate a number of key language ideologies. First and foremost, in the orthographic debates, the language ideology of an inherent role of the Ukrainian language in nation- and state-building of independent Ukraine is present. This ideology, also encompassing an idea of the importance of language to the stability and vitality of the Ukrainian national identity, is visible. The following representative examples are cases in point:¹

¹ Examples are translated to resemble the original text as much as possible.

1. *[in response to the contra Orthography arguments]* Why are you against the orthographic changes? Are you against interests of the Ukrainian nation? Why are you against the evolution of Ukrainian?

I'd like to repeat for those who are conservatives: conservatism is bad for building of our Ukrainian national state! [FB:AP2019]

2. ... To the new Ukrainian spirit, the ORTHOGRAPHY,¹ we need to say 'YES', because if we say to the ORTHOGRAPHY 'NO', we will destroy our true essence and will once again resemble others. [FB:AP2019]

3. The language is not a toy for you to like or dislike. It is our history, history of language creation, our genetic and mental code. We will not be a deserving nation until we defend and love our own. [INS]

All three posts demonstrate the connection between language and nation, language and state, language and the Ukrainian "self," and language and the Ukrainian identity. The messages also caution Ukrainians not to retreat into resembling others and not to return to the dominance of the Soviet past with influences of the Russian language (2). Instead, Ukrainians should defend and love their own identity, their Ukrainianness (3).

The ideology of Ukrainian as a national and state language of Ukraine is strengthened by the thesis that the new Orthography, by reinstating some elements from the 1928 Orthography, is a marker of pre-Russified Ukrainian. Therefore, in view of those who support the 2019 Orthography, the new norms promote de-Russification of Ukrainian, liberate the language from Russian influences, thereby distancing Ukrainian from Russian and detaching Ukrainian from the Soviet past:

4. We need to cleanse the Ukrainian language from the russianism!² All the words that have Russian provenance are to be expelled. We need to return our [Ukrainian] words that have been repressed. [FB:O2018]

5. We need to erase the russianisms such as **ефір**/efir 'air', **проект**/proekt 'project,' **аудиторія**/**auditoria** 'auditorium' ... from our orthography. Everything that brings us closer to Russian needs to be erased! To cleanse our language! We need a correct orthography... [FB:AO2019]

6. We ought to save our language from russianisms. We need to renew words that begin with the letter **И/У**. [FB:CO]

In posts (4)-(6), the distancing of Ukrainian from Russian is transmitted via the idea of cleansing the Ukrainian language from Russian influences and erasing any traces of Russianisms, thereby liberating and saving the language. The return of repressed but symbolic elements, such as words that begin with **и/у** (6), as in **Ирод**/**Yrod** 'Herod' (previously with **і/ї**: **Ірод**/**Irod**), and words such as **етер**/eter 'air,' **проект**/proiekt 'project,' or **авдиторія**/**avdytoria** 'auditorium,' instead of those with the Russian spelling mentioned in (5), signals the process of attributing these elements to the 'true,' pre-Russified Ukrainian self. By non-attributing these features to the Russian language, participants present them as iconic cases of the de-Russification of Ukrainian.

¹ Capitalization is preserved as in original texts.

² Lowercase is preserved as in original texts.

Several posts discuss the authenticity of the newly introduced orthographic rules. Many posts stress the distance and differences between the Ukrainian and Russian languages:

7. The 2019 Orthography is authentic and Ukrainian. I love it for its **павзи/pavzy**, **лицарі чести/lytsari chesty** and **філологині/filolohyni_{Fem.}** [INS]

8. Ukrainian and Russian have very little in common...Indeed, great forms all of these **Етери/Etery**, **Индики/Yndyky** and **Міти/Mity**. Now the Russians will not understand us for sure ☺ [INS]

Both (7) and (8) underscore the uniqueness of the re-introduced forms, which participants view as truly Ukrainian because they are absent in the Russian language. These examples reinforce the processes of differentiation of Ukrainian from Russian and of iconization of these “true” emblematic Ukrainian elements that augment the distance between the two languages.

The new orthographic changes are discussed as contributing to the preservation of the long history and rich traditions of the Ukrainian language, “which should not be abandoned, but nourished and advocated for” [FB:O2018]. This is seen in the following two posts:

9. Our new Orthography returns us to our everlasting Ukrainian language. [FB:A02019]

10. Skrypnykivka [the 1928 Orthography] is really special, feels dear and magical because it is ours, it carries and cherishes our history. [INS]

In these posts, advocacy for the 1928 orthographic forms to be returned and accepted as ‘special,’ ‘dear,’ and ‘magical’ because these are seen as truly Ukrainian and not at all archaic, is visible. These forms, which Hornjatkevych (2020) calls ‘old—new again,’ are accepted and promoted by some participants in the studied communities. Such forms, being associated with the “everlasting Ukrainian language” (attribution), contribute also to the process of iconization of the truly Ukrainian elements of the language that have a long history and established traditions. However, it should be noted that many on *Facebook* and a handful of participants on *Instagram* are against these forms, which is discussed below.

Texts that argue for Ukrainian as lively, vibrant, dynamic and progressive are of especial interest. Indeed, a language ideology of vitality and progress of Ukrainian is present in all three social media spaces, but particularly prominently on *Instagram* and *TikTok*. The most noticeable stance found on *Instagram* could be summarized by the following quotation of one of the participants:

The New Orthography is not as monstrous as depicted by some.

In fact, this space demonstrates that the new Orthography signals language advancement, is a “recipe for youth and vitality” [INS], and is a fact of life, because the Ukrainian language is dynamic and needs to move forward, thereby demonstrating the language ideology of vitality and progress. *TikTok* posters also advocate for a new Ukrainian as lively and progressive. For them, “knowing Ukrainian, and knowing the correct Ukrainian (that is, following the new orthographic norms) is cool and fashionable!”.

This language ideology is reinforced by slogans such as “Let’s make our language more elegant” [TikTok].

Both *Instagram* and *TikTok* figure as consultation spaces, in which users share their knowledge on how best to use the new forms, what is correct, and which practices reflect the new orthographic norms. These educational practices reflect participants’ promotion of, advocacy for, and ultimately acceptance of the new norms.

Continuing with the language ideology of language vitality and progress, in all three social media spaces, feminitives stand out. These highly debated forms, which deserve a separate investigation, are feminine forms of words used for traditionally male professions or names of professions for which only masculine forms existed until recently (e.g., *chairman* and *chairwoman*). The new Orthography includes these lexical forms, accompanied by morphological rules on how to form them (please note that feminitives are not commonly included in Orthographies nor discussed in studies of orthographies).

On *Facebook*, feminitives are not accepted by all. Those very few who do accept these forms see Ukrainian as lively and not static, and as a language that needs to reflect new social processes and transformations:

11. A living language, such as ours, needs to move forward... feminitives definitely need to be a part of the new orthography. [FB:O2018]

Some *Facebook* participants see feminitives as necessary (11), but those who are still hesitant see them as “acceptable-to-be” because social realities change, “whether we like it or not” [FB:O2018]. Therefore, on *Facebook*, some examples point to a process of attribution of the new orthographic norms to users of the new Ukrainian that accept the new social reality into their language.

On *Instagram* and *TikTok*, feminitives are much more widely accepted and advocated for, notwithstanding some resistance (see below):

12. Feminitives are markers of the Ukrainian language! This allows us to establish borders with Russian, in which feminitives are practically absent. [INS]

13.[*female participant*¹] Women more and more become a part of the public space, that is the society; therefore, feminitives constitute the norm. Why would I be called an artist_{Masculine} and not an artist_{Feminine}? [INS]

14. We should be proud that Ukrainian changes according to its history and embraced changes in the society. [TikTok]

15. I am for the introduction of feminitives. Such changes are cool. [These forms] sound in a new way, contemporary. [TikTok]

In these posts we see an endorsement of new feminine forms as characteristic of the Ukrainian language, including its distinctness from Russian, as discussed above (12), as reflecting changes to professional gender roles (13) and (14) and the newness, coolness, and timeliness of these changes (15). Such reactions on *Instagram* and *TikTok* to many feminitives, and their enthusiastic acceptance and promotion of these forms

¹ In this study, the gender of participants was not taken as a variable; this may prove deserving of further investigation.

on their respective platforms, may be viewed as a process of attribution of these features to speakers of the Ukrainian language who are progressive and cool, and of their non-attribution to speakers of Russian. Additionally, processes displayed in posts (12)-(15) may be viewed as branding, in Sebba's terms (2015). In other words, youth has picked up on femininities as elements that distinguish and differentiate Ukrainian and make it modern and cool. Thus, young people brand their language and advocate for a progressive Ukrainian.

4.2. The position of safeguarding the status quo

Two major stances emerge contributing to the position of safeguarding the status quo: indifference or criticism towards language change in general and opposition to the new orthographic norms in particular on the grounds that they are "foreign," "artificial," or "archaic." Crucially, these two stances are found predominantly on *Facebook*, with *Instagram* and *TikTok* featuring only minor contributions.

On *Facebook*, in all three communities studied, the common themes with respect to indifference and criticism are based on the ideology that languages should not change; for example, "Why do we need changes?"; "We are fine without the new rules"; and "There are many other issues that matter more than language". Commonly, the government is criticized for "allocating resources for unnecessary matters" rather than focusing on "people's wellbeing."

The stance of opposition to the new orthographic norms surfaces in the expressions on awkwardness, absurdity and unacceptance of the "new-old" forms. These arguments are particularly made against many older Ukrainian forms that go back to the 1928 Orthography, as in the following meme:

16.



The image in (16) lists the "new-old" forms, most of which are presented in Tables 2.1. and 2.2. (see the fifth column). These forms are disliked, as Robert DeNiro's facial expression in the image indicates, and are heavily criticized by those who believe that contemporary Ukrainian should not bounce back in time. These emblematic and widely-debated forms are clear examples of attribution to the "old" Ukrainian. This process is particularly present in the community of *Facebook* in the posts of those who are against the new Orthography. Language elements which they use as symbols for their arguments,

such as **индик/undyk** ‘turkey,’ **етер/eter** ‘air,’ and **авдитория/avdytoria** ‘auditorium,’ are associated with not-own, foreign, and often the Ukrainian diaspora group, which is “frozen in time” [FB:AO2019]. Moreover, the debate around these forms exemplifies the process of iconization with these language elements as marking old and archaic Ukrainian or diaspora Ukrainian.

The opposition views also stress that the new 2019 Orthography, “by returning to the past, cripples the language of contemporary Ukrainians” [FB:AO2019], destroys the contemporary language, and halts the development of Ukrainian. In these arguments, the new Orthography prompts the Ukrainian language to depart from the “self” and abandon its true nature, even becoming a “foreign tongue” for many Ukrainians:

17. Soon we will learn Ukrainian as a foreign language, with a dictionary, because hearing “**Аteny**” ‘Athens’ one would not get it right the way that it is **Afiny** ‘Athens’. These, of course, are my emotions and I am not sure how can I influence the situation. But, I, my children, and my grandchildren will speak the LANGUAGE, and not the artificially created codes. [FB:AO2019]

Example 17 demonstrates the opposition to the new norms and even a protest again using the “old-new” forms, albeit in their status as variants (see Table 2.2.). These reintroduced elements are viewed as artificial and foreign to the Ukrainian language, reinforced by the capitalization of “language” (17).

A protest is also seen in texts that relate to language practices of formerly Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Following the series of political events that have transpired since the early 2000s, those who switched from speaking Russian to speaking Ukrainian declare that because of the new Ukrainian Orthography, they will go back to their previous language practices:

18. Out of all of my friends I am the only one who reads the new Orthography. Everyone else said that they will not learn the new rules and will go back to speaking Russian or Surzhyk (=mixture of Ukrainian and Russian)... Our language is being turned into something incomprehensible and foreign. [FB:AO2019]

19. (*in Russian*) And do not criticize me that I write this post in Russian. Now, I do not know how to write in the new Ukrainian. I will not destroy my ability and knowledge of my beautiful and melodic Ukrainian while discussing the new strange words. [FB:AO2019]

In post (18) and similar examples of oppositional discourse, participants attribute the new norms to unnatural and foreign processes, and these may be seen as signs of language protest. Example (19) is a clear example of a participant switching to using the Russian language because, due to the new Orthography, “they do not know how to write in Ukrainian” and they do not want to damage their “beautiful and melodic Ukrainian” language.

In the opposition discourses, feminitives also play an interesting part in the debate. In the *Facebook* communities studied here, these forms are often ridiculed and presented as “absurd,” “nonsense,” “insane,” “painful,” and a “joke” by those who oppose the new orthography. The opponents, noting that feminitives “destroy the language,”

attribute these “unnatural for the Ukrainian language” elements to some strange external and imposing powers and “uneducated language specialists”:

20. Those who introduced the new feminitives should be ashamed of themselves. They do not have any sense for the native language, or this [Ukrainian] language is not their native. [FB:AO2019]

21. The majority of these “language specialists” [that introduced feminitives] most likely, crawled out of the forest and have never heard about education in schools... they are language idiots that imitate their wild activities with their crazy new forms. [FB:AO2019]

In posts (20) and (21), participants project negativity towards the Orthographic committee, criticizing their knowledge of the “true” and “native” Ukrainian and their educational training. In some posts about feminitives, one can even trace a thread of conspiracy-theory thinking, with accusations that Western organizations paid activists and professional linguists to include feminitives in the new Orthography, and that this constituted an experiment on the Ukrainian society, mirroring changes taking place in Western societies [FB:AO2019]. These examples could be viewed as examples of attributing the proposed orthographic innovations to non-Ukrainians and foreigners or uneducated Ukrainian “language specialists.”

On *Instagram* and *TikTok*, there are very few posts that criticize feminitives. In those that do, feminitives are presented as disrespectful and unnecessary. However, in these spaces, the participants, acknowledging their initial opposition to feminitives, now see them as necessary, and this theme stands out:

22. I do not understand why people dislike feminitives? At first, I also did not like them, but in the language, they sound beautiful. [TikTok]

23. Well, if you do not like the feminitives now, later you will adapt. [TikTok]

This transformative position of young people is seen particularly on *TikTok*, where, in the course of discussions about the new Orthography, some youth who initially opposed the new rules have learned to embrace these innovations and declare, “The new Orthography is to be!” and “The old Orthography is to be forgotten!” [TikTok]:

24. Initially I really hated the N.O. (new Orthography). Then, I decided to look at it a bit closer, I read explanations to each of the new rules. And, now I consider the new Orthography the most logical. [TikTok]

25. ...At first I did not accept the new O., but later I got used to it, and also understood that it is necessary. [TikTok]

26. When I was still a Russian-speaker, I criticized the new Orthography then, but now I am in awe. My favourites are: проєкт(/proiekt ‘project), етер(eter ‘air), мітологія(/mitolohiia ‘mythology), Гортварс(/Hogwarts ‘Hogwarts). [TikTok]

In the above three posts, the openness of youth to change and their acceptance of the new Orthography are pronounced. In fact, young people demonstrate the compromise with and adoption of forms that they did not perceive earlier as suitable for the language in their practices, now viewing these new forms as logical (24). Even for those who switched from being Russian-speakers to Ukrainian-speakers, the emblematic

new forms became their favorites in their Ukrainian language (26). All of these examples from *TikTok* show how youth select salient elements from the language and use these elements as emblematic of their Ukrainianness, signalling a branding of the language that is carried out by young people.¹

4.3. Summary of the analysis

All three social media spaces studied here present evidence of pro and contra arguments regarding the implementation of the new Orthography, allowing us to group these into the language ideological position of pro-change, liberation and progress and the language ideological position of safeguarding the status quo. As the analysis above shows, the three different social media spaces offer distinct results. Notably, these differences align with generational or age-group differences, with *Facebook* being preferred by older generations, and younger age-groups favouring *Instagram* and *TikTok*. The age factor was not a focus when the study was initially devised but has proved significant over the course of the analysis.

The *Facebook* communities present the most conflicting discourses with respect to the new 2019 Orthography, with opinions very heated, at times aggressive, and very much split between the two established ideological orientations. Texts here exemplify various attributions of the new norms and orthographic practices with either selves (pro arguments) or other communities (contra arguments). The distinct discourses attribute, or even iconize, certain elements of the Ukrainian language with certain communities. The most visible are the symbolic elements, as in *индик*/*yndyk* ‘turkey,’ *етер*/*eter* ‘air,’ and *авдиторя*/*avdytoria* ‘auditorium,’ which are being attributed to or iconized as characteristic elements of archaic, distant Ukrainian or the language of the Ukrainian diaspora by those who oppose the 2019 Orthography. Those who support the 2019 Orthography are tolerant towards the new emblematic forms introduced, but mostly via non-attribution arguments foregrounding the differentiation of Ukrainian from Russian.

The process of iconization is somewhat visible on *Instagram* as well. However, importantly, the study of the younger generations on *Instagram*, but even more so on *TikTok*, reveals the prominence of what Sebba (2015) calls branding. Demonstrating acceptance of the 2019 Orthography, youth, through quick attribution of emblematic elements to the “Ukrainian of today,” that is, to the language of young, educated, and cool Ukrainians, strategically promotes and popularizes the new Ukrainian norms, their distinctiveness and uniqueness, thus creating its new brand.

This new brand of the Ukrainian language continues to create discomfort, particularly for the older generations and groups such as those on *Facebook*, which continue their discussions within the processes of attribution and iconization.

¹ Similar tendencies among language practices and attitudes of Belarusian youth have been noted by Woolhiser (2013). Namely, active young users of Belarusian, including formerly Russophone “new speakers” of Belarusian, in the beginning of the 21st century, turn to older pre-1933 Belarusian standard forms. They view these forms as less Russified, thus more authentic, indexing their Belarusian identity.

Moreover, the process that is being created by youth may be viewed as a re-branding of Ukrainian. Earlier or before the 2019 Orthography, the forms such as **индик/yndyk** 'turkey,' **етер/eter** 'air,' or **авдиторія/avdytoria** 'auditorium' were attributed to and iconized as the language of old Ukraine or the language of the distant Ukrainian diaspora. As the data in this study show, some youth initially opposed these forms, but many of them now recognize that change is taking place and "The new Orthography is to be!" The previously symbolic, but now real, language elements and practices contribute to creating a new brand of Ukrainian, which is lively, fashionable, timely, and progressive.

5. Conclusions

This study presented a number of competing and conflicting debates on social media surrounding the legislation and implementation of the new 2019 Ukrainian Orthography. The texts were approached as sites of ideological debates that are constructed within a specific sociopolitical context, representing a multiplicity of stances towards the new orthographic rules. The analysis presented yet another proof that language debates are not only debates about language (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, Nedashkivska 2020, 2021). On the basic level, discourses of orthographies are about correctness of certain forms or appropriateness of language practices in a particular environment or setting. However, at a more profound level, these discourses are about people's positionings in a specific sociocultural or sociopolitical context. This also includes positionings of representatives of different generations, which yielded the most important findings in this study. Indeed, the analysis displayed very vivid generational differences between how the new language legislation, new orthographic norms, and practices are being perceived, contested, accepted, or advocated for. The *Facebook* communities continue to argue and oppose. Those who argue for the new Orthography try to defend and liberate Ukrainian, stressing its differentiation from Russian and therefore showing tolerance towards the new norms. For those opposing the reforms, changes are constructed as ruining the "good" current norms of the language and going back to unknown and distant past forms. By contrast, the younger generations, with more progressive views, are responsive to change. They are ready to leave the past behind, and they are enthusiastic to move forward.

I would like to conclude this study by underscoring remarkable persistence and dedication of Ukrainian policy makers and those who invested their time, efforts and expertise in the new Orthography, despite the possibility that these orthographic reforms might not be readily acceptable by a sizable number of Ukrainians. Indeed,

Any linguistic policy that would be exclusively based on 'purely linguistic facts' takes the risk of going the wrong way, because language is not only an instrument of communication but also carries symbolic values that condition social, political, and economic spheres. (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994: 193)

Sebba also noted that "successful reforms of orthographies, whether marginal modifications or total replacements, are rare. Conservatism is almost always the most attractive option for the majority of language users" (Sebba 2009: 155).

In the Ukrainian case, the proposed 2019 orthographic changes are, in general, viewed by the younger generation as progressive and timely, and thus are accepted, popularized, promoted, and advocated for, pointing to the new Orthography's potential success. As for the *Facebook* generation, one participant wrote:

Of course, old folks, like me, will need to move around a few rules in our heads...But! (we will learn to live with the new Orthography).

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