

## REVIEWS

DOI: 10.18523/lcmp2522-9281.2025.11.208-226

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### MAPPING IDENTITIES: LANGUAGE POLITICS AND DIVERSITY IN UKRAINE

**Review of: Kiss, Nadiya, and Monika Wingender, editors. *Contested Language Diversity in Wartime Ukraine: National Minorities, Language Biographies, and Linguistic Landscape*. Ibidem-Verlag, 2025**

The title of the volume *Contested Language Diversity in Wartime Ukraine* immediately speaks to the urgency and relevance of its content. In light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, questions surrounding language, identity, and power have intensified and gained new dimensions. Language has emerged not only as a cultural and communicative medium but also as a battleground for ideological and political confrontation. As language is increasingly perceived as a marker of allegiance, the shifting dynamics of linguistic practices in Ukraine call for rigorous academic investigation – an effort this volume undertakes with depth and breadth.

The sociolinguistic and political dimensions of language in Ukraine have long attracted scholarly attention, particularly regarding the legacy of Russification and the Soviet Union's assimilationist policies. Foundational studies such as *Ukrainska mova u XX storichchi: istoriia linhvotsydu* [Ukrainian Language in the Twentieth Century: The History of Linguicide] (Masenko et al.,

2005) and *Mova radianskoho totalitaryzmu* [The Language of Soviet Totalitarianism] (Masenko, 2017) explore how ideological pressures and state apparatuses contributed to the forced convergence of Ukrainian and Russian. Oksana Zabuzhko has sharply characterized the cultural and existential role of language, asserting that “language performs, among other things, a crucial philosophical and worldview function: it anchors an ethnos to its natural environment, to the landscape, to that kin, materially inhabited cosmos – complete with flora and fauna – that constitutes the inorganic body of the people” (Zabuzhko, 2009, p. 108). These discussions have acquired new resonance amid the ongoing war, and a new wave of research has addressed transformations in linguistic and cultural behavior provoked by invasion, displacement, and resistance (Shumytska et al., 2025; Kudriavtseva et al., 2024).

This new volume, edited by Nadiya Kiss and Monika Wingender, makes a timely and empirically grounded contribution to these debates. Based on the final results of the international project *Contested Language Diversity: Dealing with Minority Languages in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia*, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2020–2023) through its “Trilateral Partnerships” program, the book reflects both domestic and international interest in the complexities of Ukraine’s linguistic landscape. Importantly, the study also highlights how language policy in Ukraine has evolved as a post-Soviet state, especially through key legislative developments such as the *Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language* (2019), the *Law on Indigenous Peoples* (2021), and the *Law on National Minorities (Communities)* (2022).

Throughout the volume, the authors examine how language policies and practices in Ukraine have undergone profound changes, offering case studies and empirical data to trace their effects across public discourse, education, media, and everyday life. Notably, the book emphasizes both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, including voices from national minority communities and everyday speakers. As the editors note, Ukraine’s language policy is not merely a matter of regulation but also of contested belonging and symbolic negotiation.

The structure of the volume reflects this multifaceted approach. Section I, “Influence of the War on Language Use and Attitudes”, focuses on shifts in linguistic behavior, attitudes toward Ukrainian and Russian, and the broader implications of language in wartime. Drawing on interviews, public discourse, sociological surveys, and institutional practices, the six chapters explore the

transformation of language ideologies among internally displaced persons, students, business owners, and educators. Topics range from textbook content analysis to the moral values of bilingual youth, all against the backdrop of an intensified sense of national identity.

Section II, “Indigenous People, National Minorities and Regional Perspectives”, expands the scope by investigating language experiences across diverse regions and ethnolinguistic groups in Ukraine, including Crimean Tatars, ethnic Russians, and communities in Transcarpathia, Chernihiv, and the Danube Delta. Comprising eight chapters, this part of the volume foregrounds the interplay between regional diversity and national policy, using tools such as linguistic landscape analysis, biographical interviews, and media studies to map Ukraine’s pluralistic yet contested language ecology.

As the editors aptly observe, “The volume offers not only a broad analysis of Ukraine’s language policy and language situation, but also a broad regional sociolinguistic exploration, tackling such underrepresented regions in research as Odesa, Vinnytsia, Chernihiv, Transcarpathia, Ternopil, and Lviv” (Kiss et al., 2025, p. 9). In doing so, the book enriches both Ukrainian studies and sociolinguistics more broadly, while also laying the groundwork for future research and dialogue.

### **Section I: Influence of the War on Language Use and Attitudes**

The first chapter, “Language Behavior of Ukrainians Against the Background of the Full-Scale War: Trends of Change” (Svitlana Sokolova), offers empirical insight into shifting language practices during wartime, focusing on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities. Based on comparative data, the study reveals a significant increase in positive attitudes toward Ukrainian (over 50%) and a sharp decline in support for Russian (over 70%). Half of the IDPs transitioned to speaking Ukrainian, with 93% approving its broader use. These findings suggest that “the situation is now very favorable for strengthening the position of Ukrainian as the state language, but the problem of possible conflict between those who use Ukrainian and Russian requires in-depth study” (34). This observation reflects how societal upheaval is reshaping linguistic norms – not as passive consequence but as active re-definition of identity.

The study also invites further inquiry into how regional linguistic dynamics are influenced by patterns of displacement and resettlement across Ukraine – such as in Dnipropetrovsk region (in particular Kryvyi Rih) or Kiro-

vohrad region (notably Kropyvnytskyi) – where shifts in language use may signal complex processes of mutual adaptation and transformation between local populations and newly arrived communities.

The next chapter, “Language and War: Language-Related Discourse in Ukraine Since the Beginning of the Full-Scale Invasion” (Olena Ruda), builds on this observation by analyzing how language has become not only an issue of communication or preference but a powerful discursive marker of survival, resistance, and ideological affiliation. As the author notes, the discourse on language has undergone a radical transformation, becoming “more radical, symbolic and pejorative”, reflecting “the existential state of society – the experience of collective and personal trauma” (37). In this discursive shift, Ukrainian is framed as a language of moral choice, while Russian becomes the language of occupation. The physical invasion is paralleled by symbolic acts such as the replacement of Ukrainian toponyms – *Mariupol* (Маріуполь) with *Маріуполь* – and the removal of Ukrainian books and textbooks from occupied territories, underscoring the idea that “language is the same weapon in terms of damage as missiles” (45). The phrase “I against Z”, referencing letters emblematic of Ukrainian and Russian military-cultural imaginaries respectively, encapsulates the symbolic war: “This war is a war for the letters I, Ї, Є, І” (43).

In this context, language is no longer merely metaphorically politicized – it becomes mobilized in wartime initiatives such as the national language marathon, the “Yedyni” course, and discourse-monitoring platforms like “Analyze”. These reflect a heightened awareness that “the Ukrainian language is not only a sign of national identity and citizenship but also a weapon for fighting the enemy” (Ukrainer, qtd. in Kiss & Wingender, 2025, p. 42). The rhetorical shift is mirrored in public discourse, including statements by top officials: for instance, the Secretary of the National Security Council Oleksii Danilov’s assertion that Russian “must disappear from our territory altogether as a part of the enemy propaganda and brainwashing of our population” (39). While such declarations could be misinterpreted internationally as linguistic violence, the chapter carefully distinguishes between state-driven regulation and grassroots acts of linguistic solidarity and cultural reassertion.

Ruda also addresses long-standing ambiguities in Ukrainian language policy, shaped by mass bilingualism and politically motivated hesitation to enforce regulation. The “centrist” stance often led to strategic vagueness, as seen in former slogans like “Yedyna Kraina – Yedinaia Strana”. Yet the war

has prompted a more defined position among both politicians and the broader population. President Zelenskyi himself, who previously communicated primarily in Russian, has come to embody this shift as his public use of Ukrainian increasingly reflects authenticity and alignment with national sentiment – paralleling changes observed among local leaders such as those in Kharkiv or Kryvyi Rih.

Importantly, the chapter highlights how linguistic manipulation functions as a tool of disinformation and conflict. Tactics such as redefining “native language” or “right to choose” are used to mask or distort the implications of language use in public space. As Ruda notes, trolling is a tactic in information warfare that provokes opponents into poorly judged statements through manipulative techniques like spreading disinformation, distorting facts, misinterpreting statements, discrediting individuals and groups, labeling, and using irony and derogatory language (56). The analysis of common memes and phrases – “Russian warship, go to f\*ck yourself”, “Good evening, we are from Ukraine”, “Put the seeds in your pocket” – attests to how language has also become a means of humor, resistance, and shared trauma (64). At the same time, the shift in media identity, such as the rebranding of *Novoie Vremia* to *NV (New Voice)*, illustrates how institutions seek to sever associations with Russian language and culture as “the antithesis of everything we believe in” (46).

While the chapter draws richly from online discourse and social media, one methodological note deserves attention: several quotes – such as “Unfortunately, there are no cigarettes [in Ukrainian]; ‘cigarettes’ [in Russian] – don’t even ask” (53) – would benefit from consistent transliteration and glossing of Ukrainian and Russian lexical forms. Providing such contrasts in Latin script, even for non-Slavic readers, helps illuminate the subtle but significant differences in language use and perception – especially valuable for international audiences unfamiliar with Ukrainian linguistic realities. This approach is effectively employed elsewhere in the chapter, such as in examples of *surzhyk* (53) or the evaluative terms *rosiiski posipaky*, *vata*, and *ruskomirtsi* (58–59), which are accompanied by concise definitions and cultural explanations.

Shifting the focus to the business sphere, the chapter “Russia Must Be Opposed on All Fronts: How the Full-Scale War Has Changed Language Situation in the Ukrainian Business Environment” (Liudmyla Pidkuimukha) further demonstrates how wartime conditions have redefined linguistic behavior. Drawing on interviews with business owners and CEOs as well as their public

social media posts, the author explores how language choices have become a matter of identity construction, ideological positioning, and economic strategy. As she notes, language behavior, language choice, and language attitude describe the language situation studied during the full-scale Russian–Ukrainian war (70), revealing a growing tendency to abandon Russian in favor of Ukrainian as both a civic responsibility and a brand of reputational alignment.

The chapter contributes new ground to the volume by focusing on a previously underexplored sphere – business – and highlights how linguistic transformations here reflect broader social shifts. The Ukrainian language is now regarded as an “essential identity marker” (71), and sociological data supports this reorientation: 86% of respondents in a 2022 survey by the “Rating” group favored Ukrainian as the only state language – a 10% increase compared to 2021. Only 3% supported Russian as a second state language (72). These author’s findings offer a clear picture of language attitudes in flux, though they raise broader questions that remain unexplored in the chapter – for instance, why a significant share of Ukrainians continue to report Russian as their “native” language, even when it is not tied to ethnic Russian identity. The historical circumstances of Soviet-era linguistic policy and the reasons behind the enduring legacy of Russian as a default medium of business or daily interaction remain largely implicit. Why is the focus of such surveys predominantly on Russian, and not, for example, Hungarian, Polish, or Bulgarian minority languages?

Nevertheless, the statistical data is illuminating. By October 2022, employers posted 84% of job listings in Ukrainian and only 13% in Russian, according to Work.ua analysts (75). Among CVs, Ukrainian was used more often by younger candidates aged 16–25 and those in the 40–44 range, while applicants over 55 – those raised during the Soviet Union – still predominantly submitted resumés in Russian (75). These generational patterns are critical, as they reflect the long-term effects of Soviet-era Russification, the persistence of inherited language habits, and in many cases, the unintentional reproduction of those habits by post-Soviet generations. This dimension opens space for research into how Russian continues to be transmitted to children today – through parental input and social media – even though it is no longer formally taught in most Ukrainian schools, especially after 2022. Such questions are particularly urgent given growing public concern about informal sources of Russian language acquisition, with implications for national cultural policy and educational planning.

In this regard, Pidkuimukha's conclusion suggests important directions for future investigation: "It would be revealing to organize in-depth interviews with the Ukrainian business persons to understand how switching to Ukrainian and removing Russian from the websites and applications has influenced the business and how the situation inside the companies has changed" (86). This idea could also be extended by considering whether these changes are connected not only to symbolic identity but to the reorientation of target markets: the loss of the Russophone consumer base in Russia, Belarus, and occupied territories has rendered investment in Russian-language infrastructure unprofitable. Instead, businesses are likely to refocus on Ukrainian and English-speaking audiences, both domestically and across the diaspora. This trend is not only linguistic but economic and geopolitical.

The article also captures how language choice has become morally charged. For many business leaders, Ukrainian is now seen as "the language of brave and free people" (83), while Russian is increasingly associated with "those who kill, rape, rob, and those who believe that 'not everything is so clear-cut'" (ibid.). This symbolic polarization underscores how deeply language is embedded in the ethical framework of wartime Ukrainian society. As Vladyslav Rashkovan of the IMF noted, even when children already know Russian, "they should communicate in Ukrainian" (ibid.). Such remarks point not only to evolving linguistic preferences but also to shifting expectations of civic conduct.

Another important angle emerges in the analysis of the contribution "Totalitarian Echoes: Mapping the Influence on Ukrainian Language Textbooks" (Anastasiia Onatii), which addresses a less visible but ideologically charged area of language policy: school textbooks. Through comparative content and cartographic analysis, the study investigates how Ukrainian schoolbooks, specifically for grades 4 to 6, have reflected shifting ideological paradigms from the Soviet era to post-independence Ukraine. The analysis centers on the selection and frequency of place names, revealing that Soviet-era textbooks (1955, 1985) included a disproportionately high number of Russian toponyms, while Ukrainian geographic references were either sparse (1955) or only slightly more prevalent (1985). In contrast, post-1991 textbooks (1992, 2013, 2018) display a significant increase in the representation of Ukrainian toponyms, particularly from central and western regions, although eastern Ukraine remains conspicuously underrepresented (91–97).

Onatii's use of cartographic visualization is particularly effective in illustrating how linguistic content reflects geopolitical imagination. By overlaying place name mentions onto a contemporary map of Ukraine, the study reveals overlaps between textbook geographies and the areas targeted by Russia during the first three months of the 2022 invasion. This juxtaposition suggests not only that textbook content was ideologically coded, but that it may have long served to legitimize imperial territorial claims: "The research question concerned whether there is a connection between how the totalitarian empire viewed Ukrainian lands and the events Ukraine has experienced since the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war" (100–101). Such findings underscore the need to critically reassess how educational materials shape national spatial imaginaries, and how this shaping can have long-term geopolitical consequences.

The chapter also makes an important terminological observation: textbooks from the early post-independence period (e.g., *Ridna mova* [Native Language for 6th Grade], Peredrii, 1992) bear the word "*Mother Tongue*" in the title, in contrast to both Soviet and later post-2010 editions that use "*Ukrainian Language*". As Onatii notes, "The attribute 'native' takes on such a strong meaning that it is even reflected in the textbook's title" (106). This return to *ridna mova* [mother tongue] in official usage may be seen as part of a broader discursive decolonization, reasserting Ukrainian as the default and inherited language of Ukrainian children. It also marks a rupture with Soviet practices where "native language" often referred to Russian, while Ukrainian was listed separately. This terminological shift opens avenues for further analysis of how linguistic framing in educational policy affects identity formation.

The focus on school handbooks within Ukraine offers important insight, but it also invites comparison with Ukrainian educational efforts in the diaspora. While Soviet schoolbooks privileged Russian toponyms, Ukrainian diaspora communities – in Canada and Australia, for example – produced textbooks and readers (e.g., those by Petro Volyniak, Mariia Deiko, respectively) that consistently centered Ukrainian geography and culture. Integrating such materials into future comparative studies could provide a fuller picture of how geography, ideology, and language policy intersect across time and space. These diasporic materials also reflect broader cultural efforts to assert Ukrainian identity in contrast to external influences, often through the recurring motif of self vs. other, embedded in both linguistic choices and curricular narratives (Vardanian, *Svii – chuzhyi*).



Although the quantitative increase of Ukrainian place names in post-Soviet school textbooks is clear, Onatii also points to their uneven regional distribution: western Ukraine, absent in Soviet-era books, becomes dominant in the post-independence period, while eastern and southern regions remain under-represented (113). This gap reflects both a historical deficit in national cultural policy and the deep-rooted consequences of Soviet-era Russification in those regions. Yet, as post-2014 curricular reforms continue, attention to regional inclusivity in educational content remains crucial for fostering a shared civic identity. Here too, Ukrainian diasporic materials – long attentive to Ukraine’s territorial wholeness – may offer instructive models.

Further insight into the linguistic consequences of war comes from the chapter “Changes in Language and National Consciousness of Ukrainians in the Period of Russia’s Full-Scale War in Ukraine” (Natalija Matvejeva), which continues the thread of sociolinguistic transformation by emphasizing the link between language use and national identity during wartime. Drawing on a series of sociological surveys conducted throughout 2022 (Rating, KMIS, Gradus), as well as reflections from students at Ternopil National Pedagogical University, the study outlines an observable shift toward Ukrainian monolingualism in public life. The data show a steady increase in the presence and perceived value of the Ukrainian language in various domains of communication. Language here functions not merely as a tool, but as “a kind of marker of the nation” (120), deeply tied to Ukraine’s symbolic and political self-understanding.

Importantly, the author reminds us that “everyone associates France with the French language, Germany with the German language, Great Britain with English, while Ukraine due to its history of colonization is associated not only with the Ukrainian language, but also with Russian” (ibid.). This double association is a result of centuries of colonization, particularly Russification, which, as Matvejeva notes with reference to Masenko (*Mova i polityka*), systematically denationalized the Ukrainian population. This insight is timely and well-framed, yet it may benefit from further nuance. While the Russian imperial and Soviet legacies are central to Ukraine’s linguistic struggles, Ukraine’s history is also shaped by other colonial and regional forces – its division between neighboring empires such as Austria-Hungary, Poland, and Romania has also left linguistic imprints. These layered historical circumstances, and their varying impact on language, are further explored in the later chapters of the volume, offering a broader perspective on how language and identity have evolved under multiple regimes of domination.

The final chapter of the section, “Moral Values of the Ukrainian-Speaking and Russian-Speaking Students in Bilingual Settings” (Taras Tkachuk), approaches language choice through the lens of value orientations, drawing on Schwartz’s theory of basic human values. Based on a survey of 944 high school students from the Vinnytsia region, the study identifies correlations between language practices (Ukrainian-speaking, Russian-speaking, and bilingual) and dominant moral values. While students from both urban and suburban generally share similar tendencies, some distinctions emerge: for instance, students from Vinnytsia prioritize universalism, power, self-direction, and achievement, whereas those from smaller towns emphasize safety, benevolence, and traditions – particularly among bilingual respondents (141).

Although the author uses the term *periphery* to denote students from smaller settlements, this terminology deserves further scrutiny. Within postcolonial discourse, *center–periphery* binaries often carry connotations of marginality or diminished value, unintentionally framing non-urban populations as second-tier. If this term is retained, it would be important to clarify whether the author indeed subscribes to a socio-symbolic hierarchy between urban and rural respondents, or whether a more neutral designation – such as *suburban* – might better reflect the study’s intent.

At the same time, the chapter introduces a valuable angle by connecting language choice to ethical self-positioning. For instance, Ukrainian-speaking students rank achievement, conformity, and tradition more highly, while Russian-speaking students show greater emphasis on hedonism and self-direction (154). These associations, while tentative, invite deeper exploration into how language socialization intersects with moral development in contemporary Ukraine, particularly in regions historically shaped by overlapping linguistic and ideological legacies.

This concluding chapter reinforces the broader trajectory of Section I, where language use is increasingly linked not only to identity and politics but also to value systems and ethical frameworks – a connection that becomes especially salient in times of national upheaval.

## **Section II: Indigenous People, National Minorities and Regional Perspectives**

The first chapter of the second section, “Crimean Tatars in the Context of War, Displacement and Forced Migration: Language Policy and Behavior” (Nadiya Kiss and Ivanna Car), offers a much-needed focus on a minority per-

spective within the broader Ukrainian sociolinguistic landscape. Drawing on legislative analysis and eleven linguistic biographies, the authors demonstrate how war, occupation, and forced migration have prompted Crimean Tatars to reassess their linguistic practices – most notably, distancing themselves from Russian and reaffirming the role of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar in their identity formation (170–174). Particularly striking is the respondents’ understanding of *mother tongue* as a layered notion that may include both Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian (165–166), reflecting hybrid identities shaped by political allegiance and cultural belonging.

This chapter is a particular strength of the volume, offering rare and timely insight into the linguistic experiences of a community that has long been under-represented in language policy research. As the authors note, the Crimean Tatar case calls for continued investigation using diverse sociolinguistic methods, particularly with regard to age, regional background, and language adaptation (196–197). In accordance with “Strategy for the Development of the Crimean Tatar Language for 2022–2032”, the study’s conceptualization of the Crimean Tatar language as “divided” refers to the coexistence of different alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin), generational shifts in language use, divergent educational practices, and the contrasting language policies of Ukraine and the occupying Russian authorities (qtd. in Kiss & Wingender, 2025, p. 174). In this sense, the chapter lays the groundwork for comparative research on identity and multilingual repertoires among displaced Crimean Tatars. It also highlights the broader need to systematically analyze language issues in other minoritized communities in Ukraine – an agenda that remains both underexplored and urgently necessary.

Continuing the exploration of minority and regional language practices, “Ethnolinguistic Demarcation of Public Space in the Linguistic Landscape of Transcarpathia, Ukraine” (Bohdan Azhniuk) shifts the focus from individual language biographies to spatial and symbolic markers of identity. Drawing on the concept of the linguistic landscape (LL), the chapter examines how multilingual signage – top-down and bottom-up – reflects and negotiates ethnolinguistic boundaries in Transcarpathia, particularly between Ukrainian and Hungarian communities.

What is particularly interesting, Azhniuk expands the notion of LL beyond official signage to include commercial signs, murals, graffiti, and informal home-made inscriptions (202). This broader scope allows for a more complex view of how public space functions as a site of symbolic contestation and identity-making. Importantly, the author highlights the increasing presence of

the “local vernacular of the Ukrainian language” in commercial signage, particularly in restaurants and cafés. This vernacular, Azhniuk argues, is “not only an exotic decoration” but also a symbolically charged element that “enhances its symbolic power and vitality” (239), “however there is no direct evidence of the dialect’s symbolic competition with the standard Ukrainian for political loyalty of the local residents” (240).

The chapter also stresses the different communicative roles of official and unofficial signs: while top-down signage conveys state-approved messages, bottom-up inscriptions are more personalized and community-driven (210). In areas with high concentrations of ethnic Hungarians, such as Berehovo, LL items often show “symmetrical Ukrainian-Hungarian bilingualism”, though even here Ukrainian tends to dominate in informal signage (239–240). In Uzhhorod, by contrast, Hungarian appears mostly in private commercial contexts. These patterns, as the author notes, have implications for understanding how language hierarchies and group identities are visually articulated. His chapter thus contributes to broader debates about linguistic space, state language policies, and local multilingual practices in post-Soviet contexts.

Turning to another aspect of language practices in Transcarpathia, Lesia Hychko’s chapter “Language Situation of National Minorities in Transcarpathia: Socio-Communicative Elements of Design and Linguistic Landscape” complements Azhniuk’s study by shifting attention to bilingualism in everyday visual communication – particularly in tourism, advertising, and education. Drawing from both public signage and textbook design, the author demonstrates how Hungarian-Ukrainian coexistence is embedded not only in linguistic content but also in graphic aesthetics and national color symbolism. Bilingual and multilingual practices are shown to enhance communicative effectiveness, especially in areas where national minorities are densely settled.

What stands out in this contribution is its attention to technological mediation of language space, including smartphone settings, UI localization (e.g., LinkedIn’s Ukrainian interface), and machine translation tools like DeepL (245–246). This expands the notion of linguistic landscape into the personal digital sphere, underscoring how multilingual identity is shaped not only offline but also through everyday technological interactions. Hychko also provocatively reflects on the graphic potential of Ukrainian Cyrillic, suggesting aesthetic reappropriation as a way to enhance its visibility and symbolic appeal – adding a creative dimension to the broader discourse on language and national representation.

While previous chapters have addressed the linguistic diversity of Transcarpathia, Halyna Shumytska's contribution, "Autobiographical Narrative of Linguistic Personality Formation in a Multilingual Border Region: Documentation Based on In-Depth Interviews," offers an in-depth examination of the linguistic biographies of Hungarian and Romanian minorities, employing a triangulation method that integrates autobiographical narratives, media discourse, and official language policy documents. The author shows how these personal narratives not only recount language use but also function as tools for identity construction and self-reflection.

What emerges clearly is the psychological insight into how narrators reconstruct their life stories and linguistic experiences, gaining new perspectives on their identity (274). This approach recalls the methodology employed by Nadiya Kiss and Ivanna Car in their earlier contribution to this volume, where Tatar linguistic biographies are analyzed to shed light on minority language dynamics. The triangulation situates these individual experiences within broader sociopolitical and institutional frameworks, deepening our understanding of contested language diversity (276).

Shumytska's findings reveal generational differences: older generations educated during the Soviet period speak their native minority language, Russian, and Ukrainian, while younger generations raised in independent Ukraine use mainly their native language and Ukrainian, often alongside other languages. Moreover, urban residents tend to have stronger multilingual skills, and public sector workers demonstrate better command of the official language than those in the private sector (295). These insights highlight the complex sociolinguistic landscape shaped by historical and political changes in the region.

Building on these observations, the chapter "Media Discussions on the Functioning of Minority Languages in Transcarpathia" (Vasyl Sharkan) examines Ukrainian online media coverage of national minority languages in Transcarpathia from April 2019 to December 2022. The study identifies two distinct periods: before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Before the war, media attention focused primarily on the status of the Hungarian language in education, reflecting ongoing regional tensions. After the outbreak, coverage shifted toward the role of the Russian language in Ukraine, debates around the national minorities law, and initiatives to expand Ukrainian language learning opportunities for minority groups (299–314).

Sharkan employs Google News and local media sources to analyze content, revealing that 75% of coverage concerns the Hungarian minority, with much smaller shares addressing Romanian, Slovak, Roma, and German communities. The article highlights a pluralism of opinions in Transcarpathian media, both “external” pluralism from multiple viewpoints and “internal” pluralism within specific platforms, such as *Media Vista* and *Infopost* (318–319).

The observations in this chapter are thought-provoking and intertextually reference recent news about “espionage scandals” involving Hungary, which have heightened public attention to ethnic and linguistic loyalties in Transcarpathia (Spike, 2025; “SBU vykryla”, 2025). These “spy-scandals” reveal how geopolitical tensions influence both local public sentiment and the policies of Ukraine and Hungary concerning minority languages. The media discourse thus becomes a site where language ideologies intersect with national security concerns and identity politics. This dynamic illustrates how linguistic issues are not isolated cultural questions but are deeply embedded in broader political strategies aimed at managing (or contesting) minority loyalty and integration.

By contextualizing media representations within these broader tensions, Sharkan’s contribution provides a timely and nuanced understanding of the interplay between language policy, minority rights, and interstate relations in the border region of Transcarpathia. This adds an important dimension to the analysis of minority language functioning in Ukraine and highlights the need for further research on the intersection of language ideologies, regional geopolitics, and media influence (317–319).

The next chapter “Language Adaptation of Ethnic Russians in the West of Ukraine” (Ivanna Car) explores the language biographies of three ethnic Russians living in a Ukrainian-speaking village in the Lviv region. Through qualitative analysis of these biographies recorded in 2021, Car examines how prolonged exposure to a Ukrainian-speaking environment – combined with political and psychological factors – shaped the informants’ language behavior, national identity, and language attitudes (325–326).

The study applies the method of language biography, which enables a diachronic perspective on language use, preferences, and shifts, as well as on sociocultural embeddedness (327–328). The analysis is structured around such themes as childhood, education, career, family, identity, and perceptions of language policy and the broader sociopolitical context. Notably, none of the informants reported experiences of discrimination based on language or ethnicity, although their individual trajectories of adaptation varied (325).

One of the article's most compelling observations is that language adaptation occurred in parallel with sociocultural integration: the informants adopted local traditions and, in some cases, even altered their political views. This correlation between linguistic and ideological transformation makes the case particularly relevant in the broader context of post-Soviet identity negotiations. Moreover, the author convincingly shows how the language choices of these individuals influenced the national and linguistic identification of their children and grandchildren.

In their chapter, "From the Observations of Dynamics of Language Situation in the Multilingual Area Between the Dniester and the Danube Rivers", Andriy Kolesnykov and Maryna Delyusto present the results of a long-term observation of language dynamics in one of Ukraine's most linguistically diverse areas: the southern region between the Dniester and Danube rivers (TBDD), also known as Southern Besarabiia or Buiak (348). Drawing on extensive empirical material – language biographies, participant observation, responses to language and education laws, media analysis, and public discourse – the authors identify three key stages in the development of the regional language situation: the post-Soviet period (1991–2000), the pre-war period (2001–2022), and the ongoing war period (since February 24, 2022).

The study provides a critical view of language policy in Ukraine by highlighting the tension between *de jure* and *de facto* language use and emphasizing the need to strengthen the communicative functionality of Ukrainian as a state language – particularly in everyday and interethnic communication. The authors argue that the true marker of the Ukrainian language's entrenchment in the region is its adoption as the primary means of interethnic communication.

The article provides a critical assessment of Ukraine's language policy, especially the persistent gap between official policies and everyday language use. During the pre-war period (2001–2022), the authors argue, Ukrainian still failed to become the main tool of interethnic communication in the region, revealing the limited effectiveness of state policy over three decades of independence. This insight invites reflection on the paradoxical situation in Ukraine itself: while neighboring countries such as Hungary and Romania actively promote their languages in Ukraine through well-funded cultural institutions, Ukraine has long lacked a comparable strategic vision for promoting Ukrainian, even on its territory. This raises the fundamental question of whether the Ukrainian state truly believes in the value of its language and is willing to

position it as a European language. In this context, Kolesnykov and Delyusto suggest that Ukrainian should be granted the status of an official EU language even before Ukraine's formal accession. They frame this move as a symbolic and practical boost for the language's prestige and future development.

The final chapter "Perception of the Ukrainian Language Amongst National Minority Representatives in Chernihiv" (Svitlana Nemyrovska) explores the perceptions and language biographies of representatives of six national minorities in Chernihiv, focusing on shifts in attitudes toward Ukrainian and minority languages from Soviet times to the Russian invasion in 2022. Based on nine interviews conducted in 2021, the study reveals a predominantly bilingual environment (Ukrainian–Russian), in which minority languages have been almost entirely marginalized. Russian remains dominant in the private sphere, while Ukrainian, though formally accepted as the official language, is often not actively spoken by respondents. A notable strength of this chapter is the inclusion of bilingual interview transcripts (393–394). Presenting both the original responses and their English translations allows readers to grasp nuances of the original speech that are often lost in translation. This approach improves the transparency of analysis and should be more widely adopted in studies of multilingual contexts.

A key historical insight is that Russification shaped Chernihiv's linguistic identity for over a century, reinforced by the region's border location and perceived detachment from national cultural processes. The study underlines the paradox of minority representatives supporting Ukrainian as a state language, despite limited competence or daily use, and notes intergenerational differences: younger people tend to emigrate, while older generations retain sentimental attachments to Russian and the Soviet past.

Although the methodology of language biographies provides valuable insight into lived linguistic experience, the inclusion of historical context – tracing the city's political and demographic shifts from Kyivan Rus through the Russian Empire –proves essential. It not only enriches the sociolinguistic analysis but also challenges potential manipulations of historical narratives, particularly in international discourse. As seen in other chapters (e.g., on Hungary and Romania), such background helps explain how current language attitudes have evolved over centuries of geopolitical transformation.

This volume employs a robust sociolinguistic methodology, notably the use of language biographies, to explore the complex language dynamics in contemporary Ukraine. The analytical material extends beyond personal narratives to



include official data, media content, and a rich historical context – although a more consistent inclusion of historical background and linguistic unification in the representation of proper names would further strengthen the work.

A recurrent challenge throughout the volume is the inconsistent transliteration of Ukrainian proper names. For example, the author Halyna Shumytska's name appears with different spellings in the table of contents and the bibliography. This inconsistency disperses efforts toward standardized transliteration, potentially hindering discoverability of personal names, place names, and institutional titles. It is recommended that authors uniformly apply official transliteration standards across the entire text (see, e.g., "Ofitsiina transliteratsiia"). For instance, the official English spelling of "Ощадбанк" is "Oschadbank", as reflected on its official website, yet variants appear in the volume. Another example is the spelling of "Mykolajiv" instead of the official form "Mykolaiv" (84). Similarly, other examples reveal transliterations influenced by Polish or Czech conventions, reflecting an attempt to approximate Ukrainian contexts for a European readership but ultimately diverging from established international standards. Clarifying the transliteration system used and adhering to it consistently would aid both scholarly rigor and practical utility. Thus, it would have been helpful to indicate at the beginning of the volume which system of transliteration is being used for Ukrainian names. This book review applies the official system of Ukrainian transliteration to ensure consistency in rendering proper names, except for personal names of the contributing authors, which are cited as they appear in the original chapters.

This inconsistency also underscores a broader issue in the field of Ukrainian studies: the need for standardized transliteration and equivalence of Ukrainian proper names in English-language publications. A well-known example is the spelling of "Chornobyl" in English. While the official Ukrainian documents have not yet updated the spelling, the Russian-influenced form "Chernobyl" has been commonly used in the past (Plokhyy, 2018). More recently, both Ukrainian and international scholars (e.g., Vardanian, 2022; Zelenenka et al., 2024; Rush-Cooper, 2024) have increasingly adopted the standardized Ukrainian transliteration "Chornobyl". Addressing this issue is crucial for the dissemination and recognition of Ukrainian scholarship and cultural identity globally. The volume's highlighting of this discourse – language policy and representation of Ukrainian within academic research – is a valuable meta-reflection that warrants further investigation and harmonization.

The appeal of this book lies in several key strengths:

1. It provides a broad and nuanced academic perspective on language situations and language policy in Ukraine from a sociolinguistic viewpoint.
2. The volume's evidence-based approach offers insights grounded in empirical research rather than propaganda, addressing important topics such as the contested role of Russian as a second official language, the status and use of Hungarian and Romanian in other Ukrainian regions, and ongoing improvements in state language policy alongside the growing recognition of Ukrainian as a European language.
3. The examples and reflections around language use inspire further engagement and dialogue. Readers find themselves immersed in the discourse on language issues, where previously invisible social phenomena become visible, and grassroots language activism – by bloggers, social media contributors, and language clubs – gains new significance.
4. The extensive factual material, drawn from surveys, interviews, social media, blogs, and official statistics, is accompanied by critical analysis and a rich visual apparatus (graphs, charts, screenshots, etc.), which collectively document the real presence of languages and their speakers in Ukraine's sociolinguistic landscape.

Overall, the volume offers a timely and necessary contribution to understanding Ukraine's language realities and policies, while pointing toward the need for greater methodological rigor in linguistic representation and transliteration in academic publishing.

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