

**Language Conflict and Fears about Choosing the Appropriate Code in Ukraine:
Ukrainian, Russian, and Mixed Speech (“Suržyk”) between 2014 and 2022¹**

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Abstract

In this study, we analyze the linguistic situation in the central and southern regions of Ukraine using survey data collected from approximately 2,500 respondents before the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. In a first step, we describe the linguistic situation in the area, identifying types of respondents first on the basis of self-declared frequency of usage of three linguistic codes: Ukrainian, Russian, and Surzhyk (a wide-spread colloquial mixed Ukrainian-Russian variety) and, second, on the basis of the (again self-declared) level of proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian. The quantitative analysis utilizes multi-factor statistical tests.

In a second step, a qualitative analysis of so-called open interviews reveals attitudes and fears associated with the use of the three language codes. The age of the respondents varies between 18 and 70, and this is also taken into consideration in the analysis; to a considerable degree, attitudes and fears were different during the Soviet times and in independent Ukraine. Another turning point happened during the years after 2014, that is, after the occupation, by Russia, of the Crimean peninsula and the beginning of the local military conflict in the Donbas-area. Our analysis challenges the Russian claim of persecution of the Russian-speaking linguistic minority on the Black-Sea coast and in regions such as Kharkiv.

1 Introduction: Ukrainian “Tri-Codalism”

Ukraine is generally described as bilingual, with Ukrainian and Russian as the dominant languages, aside from various minority languages.² The distribution of these two languages across the territory of the second-largest country in Europe is geographically diverse. It is not

¹ We are grateful to Dr. Katherine Bird, Berlin, and to the editors of this volume for their help with the English text. Remaining errors are ours.

² In this paper we concentrate on the relation between Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine. This is not the sole instance of (alleged or real) language conflict in the country. The situation for Hungarian speakers in the Transcarpathian part of Ukraine in the farthest West is a case in point (cf. Gazdag and Barany’s 2022 review of Csernicskó 2022; also Lucsok and Artoni, this volume) because it has been instrumentalized by the Orban government in Hungary to justify Hungary’s reluctance to support Ukraine after the Russian military assault.

just a case of two languages in one society or state, with two rather separated speech communities in different parts of the country, but a situation shared by millions of people. Naturally, individual Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism tends to be asymmetrical in terms of the strength of each code. Based on the individual speech patterns of approximately 2,500 respondents, Hentschel and Taranenko (2021) describe a continuum along two axes. The quantitative significance of Ukrainian decreases and that of Russian increases, first “horizontally” from West to East, and, second, “vertically” from the Center of Ukraine to its South and North. The South refers to the oblasts along the Black Sea, while the North includes the oblasts bordering the Russian Federation and Belarus. This chapter, thus, challenges the notion that there is a rather complementary distribution of the two languages, with Russian in the East and South, Ukrainian in the West, and varying configurations in the Center.

The differences in the geographical distribution of Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine are primarily results of history. While the western regions around L’viv fell under Moscow’s control only after 1945, the so-called left-bank Ukraine (the territory on the left of the Dnipro river, seen downstream, toward the Russian border) had already been under Russian influence since the mid-seventeenth century. In the late fifteenth century, already, the first settlement of the Zaporozhian Cossacks appeared. The Black Sea Coast, initially devoid of autochthonous Slavic settlements, became part of the Russian Tsarist Empire in the late eighteenth century. During the Tsarist and Soviet periods, the northern border of present-day Ukraine was of little importance for the communication structures of the neighboring Ukrainian and Russian population.

Another causal dimension for local differences in the presence of Ukrainian and Russian can be seen in social factors connected with industrialization and urbanization. Urban environments, relative to the outlined geographical differences, have been more heavily influenced by Russian, as seen, at least until recently, in the capital Kyïv (Danylevs’ka 2024). Rural, however, areas have more or less remained (dialectally) Ukrainian, though, in the long run, not without influences from Russian.

Ukrainian and Russian are genetically closely related and structurally very similar. The main differences between the two standard languages lie in phonetics, phonology, and morphonology, as well as in large parts of the lexicon. Morphological differences, with a few exceptions, are not categorical but rather differences in expression and substance, often related to the distribution of abundant inflections or affixes in both languages. Syntax is highly similar, with some distinctions in morphosyntax, such as in case assignment.

This constellation is ideal for a type of code-mixing described by Muysken (2000) as “congruent lexicalization.” Unlike in alternating code-mixing, there are no absolute structural imitations on “turning points” from one code to the other one in syntactic structure (e.g. between phrasal constituents of a sentence). Moreover, mixing can occur even within a single word form. Russian root morphemes often combine with Ukrainian derivational affixes, and Russian stems with Ukrainian grammatical endings. (Inverse combinations are rather the exception.) This distinguishes this type of mixing not only from alternating code-mixing, but from insertional code-mixing, too. The latter primarily involves the insertion of individual words from one language into the discourse of another. Congruent lexicalization is also typical of mixing phenomena between a standard language (i.e., the standard variety) and non-standard dialects or vernaculars (i.e., subvarieties of the same “national language” as a conglomerate of varieties). Ukrainian-Russian code-mixing in Suržyk is by no means random or “chaotic” but shows complex probabilistic regularities, based on structural criteria interacting with sociolinguistic ones (cf. Hentschel 2024 on lexical variation and Hentschel & Palinska 2022b on a topic in inflectional morphology).³

Against this linguistic-structural background, under the conditions of constant, albeit temporally varying, political and social dominance of Russian in the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, a mixed Ukrainian-Russian code known as “Suržyk” emerged, especially during periods of industrialization and urbanization, fuelled by migration of the Ukrainian-speaking rural population to Russian-dominated towns and cities. As it became the default code in families, and not just a way of communicating with Russian-speaking surroundings, in the following decades this third code has become much more stable than many Ukrainian linguists would like to admit (cf. Hentschel 2024) and it remains widespread to this day. Among the approximately 2,500 respondents included in this study, there are relatively few monolingual or “monocodal” individuals who self-assess as frequently, if not very frequently, using only one of the three codes: Ukrainian, Russian, or Suržyk. Many are bicodal, and a considerable number are even tricodal (cf. Hentschel and Taranenko 2021).

Consequently, rather than describing Ukraine as a bilingual Ukrainian-Russian country, a “sociolinguistic contact” perspective suggests a Ukrainian-Russian “tri-lingualism” or, better, “tri-codalism” that includes Suržyk (Hentschel and Taranenko 2021).

The focus of this volume is on the linguistic consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Understanding the highly dynamic situation in Ukraine after the

³ G. Hentschel and J.P. Zeller are preparing a volume on further structural phenomena in Suržyk, to appear by the end of 2025 as a special issue of *Russian Linguistics*.

invasion—even only its linguistic aspects—is an ambitious aim. The situation is characterized by extreme emotions oscillating between despair and hope. Extreme changes may be taking place in the linguistic behavior of Ukrainian citizens, in their selection of codes, and in their attitudes toward them. What we will try to offer here is, however, an outline of the situation just before the Russian invasion, concentrating on the people, not on language politics or linguistic legislation. In our opinion, such a picture—on a solid empirical (and less ideological) foundation—has never been the focus of interest among most Ukrainian (clearly pre-Labovian) sociolinguists. Russia, on the other hand, on the basis of the “Novorossiia” ideology, especially after 2014, promulgated a mendacious narrative of persecution of Russian speakers to justify its invasion.

2 Is or Was There a Ukrainian-Russian Language Conflict in Ukraine—and if so, Where?

Hentschel and Brüggemann (2015) argue that there is no evidence for a language conflict among Ukrainian citizens. They report, summarizing results of Ukrainian analyses in the first years of the twenty-first century, that only in the West was there a considerable number of people (although not a majority) who wished the usage of Russian to be more restricted; in all other parts of the country, a clear majority stated that things should remain as they are. A minor contradiction may be seen in the wish of many people in the West, the North, and Center that the scope for the usage of Ukrainian should be expanded. On the other hand, it was in the East, the South, and the Donbas where a majority opted for Russian as a second state language, while there was some opposition to this in the other parts of the country. Similarly, Hentschel and Zeller (2016) report (based on data they collected after the Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and parts of the Donbas) that even in Kharkiv, where the use of Russian clearly dominates, a vast majority of people did not perceive that Ukrainian authorities were violating the rights of Russian-speaking people. Hentschel and Zeller (2016) also point out that there was a vast amount of support for (and only a minor degree of objection to) improving the status of Russian in public areas in the South and the East, and a clear majority for regulating the official or public status of Russian below the status of a state language in a decentralized manner (e.g. on the level of oblasts), even in the Center of the country. Both papers cited here underline that there is a high degree of mutual Ukrainian-Russian linguistic tolerance among Ukrainian citizens.

This is in line with the personal experience of one of the authors (Hentschel), when he visited a rally on the Maidan in May 2014. Traces of the tragic fights on the Independence

Square in Kyïv were still clearly visible on the surrounding buildings, when on a stage (patriotic) speeches or short statements and reports were delivered about what was going on in the Donbas area and the Crimean Peninsula. Every fourth or fifth speaker used Russian, some of them excusing themselves for not being able to use “cultivated” Ukrainian. There was absolutely no sign of displeasure among the very large audience.

Hentschel and Brüggemann (2015) and Hentschel and Zeller (2016) conclude that the alleged language conflict in the middle of the last decade is clearly a phenomenon strongly restricted to political and cultural discourse among the elites. The notion of Russians or Russian-speaking people in Ukraine being endangered and enforced to assimilate linguistically is a significant part of anti-Ukrainian propaganda launched by the Kremlin, for example in Putin’s “Crimea speech” of 2014.⁴ The pro-Russian Ukrainian politician V. Medvedčuk—who took on leading public functions under the presidency of L. Kučma (1994-2005) and until recently was the unofficial owner of (currently closed) pro-Russian propaganda TV channels in Ukraine—argues similarly that Russian and Russian-speaking people are being deprived of their mother tongue in Ukraine. The extent to which such political statements cut any ice with Russian-speaking Ukrainians cannot be clarified here; however, a massive, if not exclusive, consumption of Russian media may definitely create the basis for fears.

After the brutal Russian invasion in 2022, there were many statements by interviewed Ukrainian citizens and refugees who said that they would no longer use the language of the enemy, even if they had done so previously. In spite of the tolerance among Ukrainians (here in the sense of ethnic Ukrainians) toward Russian language, there were anti-Russian statements with a rather nationalistic tone, for example by the well-known Ukrainian author Yu. Vynnyčuk in 2015 and the Ukrainian politician and linguist I. Farion in 2023⁵—obvious and understandable reactions to the Russian aggression of 2014 and 2022.

When it comes to Ukrainian, disrespectful statements of opinion cannot be found on Ukrainian territories, but they regularly turn up in Russian political discourse. Often they question the status of Ukrainian as a “real language,” pointing out that in “real life” during

⁴ An English translation can be found here: <https://crimea.dekoder.org/speech>. There are many other similar utterances, for instance by the well-known V. Žirinovskij, <https://ria.ru/20210119/zhirinovskiy-1593690550.html> or by the Plenipotentiary for Human Rights of the Russian Federation T. Moskal’kova, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2692281>. All internet links in this article were accessed on February 11, 2025. **HELENA HAS VERIFIED THAT ALL THE LINKS WORK.**

⁵ Cf. https://lb.ua/blog/eugeniy_demenok/321731_bit_bit_ukrainskom.htm and <https://telegraf.com.ua/ukr/intervju/2023-04-07/5786037-poka-est-tak-nazyvaemye-russkoyazychnye-ukraintsy-rossiya-budet-lezt-voynoy-ikh-zashchishchat-irina-farion>, respectively. Farion, known for her nationalist views, was shot dead near her home in Lviv on July 19, 2024. The investigation considered her political and public activities as the main motives.

Soviet times, it was perceived as an idiom of peasants, even in Ukrainian lands,⁶ in spite of the fact that in Soviet times Ukrainian newspapers, literature, grammars, and dictionaries were published, although with a relatively low number of copies. Today, Ukrainian is simply presented as the language of the enemy.⁷

3 Conditions for Conflict and Fear about Code Selection

The third code, Suržyk, is famously stigmatized in Ukraine. It was already considered the “bastard child” of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism, as expressed by Yurii Andrukhovych, long before the outbreak of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 (cf. Stavyc’ka 2014). This stigma may have intensified further after the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (but see below). Thus, fears about using Suržyk outside familiar surroundings are more than expectable. Suržyk is stereotypically associated with the “Sovietization” of Ukrainians, especially those with roots in rural areas, incompatible with the national identity of an independent Ukraine and symptomatic of a low social status, including severe educational deficits. Finally, Suržyk acquired the stereotype of provinciality because of its emergence with Ukrainian rural-urban migrants (cf. Taranenko 2007). Nevertheless, a secondary spread from urban to rural populations over the decades cannot be ignored (cf. Masenko 2008).

In contradiction to the stereotype of a low level of education among regular users of Suržyk, Hentschel and Zeller (2017, 44–51) argue that lack of education is, at best, just one factor that promotes the frequency of Suržyk use. Several respondents with higher education reported using Suržyk frequently or even very frequently, on a level with at least one of the standard languages. This, of course, may raise questions about their proficiency in the other two codes, Ukrainian and Russian. Hentschel and Zeller (2017) also point out that there is a certain degree of polarization in the attitudes toward Suržyk among the general population of Ukraine, with a rather balanced gradation reaching from strict objection to clear sympathy—

⁶ This old stereotype was repeated, for example, by the Russian TV and radio personality V. Solov’ev in 2019 <https://news.obozrevatel.com/abroad/solovev-oskandalilsya-iz-za-ukrainskogo-yazyika.htm> and, earlier, by V. Žirinovskij (2008) <https://korrespondent.net/world/russia/665024-zhirinovskij-ne-nuzhen-nikomu-ukrainskij-yazyk-na-nem-negde-razgovarivat>. While these positions do not in principle deny the existence of Ukrainian as a language, they echo the traditional nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century perception of Ukrainian as a (Little Russian) dialect of an all-encompassing Russian (e.g., Florinskij [1900] or Ljapunov [1919]). In Soviet times this was not in line with the political position of the ruling Communists. However, on 7 March 2022, it was repeated and propagated by the Russian military journal *Voennoe obozrenie*, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://topwar.ru/193115-ukrainskij-jazyk-narechie-russkogo-jazyka.html>). Ironically, such an “anti-separatist” point of view is put forward by nationalistic Ukrainian linguists toward an “emancipated” Rusyn language, spoken for example in Slovakia, Poland, and Serbia (e.g., Belej [2017]; interview with Masenko [2018], accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29464228.html>).

⁷ See, for example, the opinions of the head of the Russian Gosduma for regional politics and local self-administration, A. Didenko, in May 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230525/mova-1874178714.html>.

another factor to be taken into consideration in the analysis to follow. Again, it is in the discourse of cultural elites with a rather nationalistic orientation where Suržyk is explicitly opposed.⁸

Potential conflicts and fears regarding the use of Ukrainian and Russian are conditioned differently. Expectations regarding the use of Ukrainian have, of course, increased since 1990, gradually promoted by language policies establishing Ukrainian as the state language and massively expanding it, for example as the language of education and other public institutions, notably after the language law came into force in 2019. After 2014 and even more significantly after February 2022, these expectations and the degree of self-commitment to using Ukrainian have undoubtedly grown among those who were previously more oriented toward Russian. Consequently, the issue of insufficient knowledge of Ukrainian (at least the standard variety) applies not only to primarily Suržyk speakers but also to primarily Russian speakers. Fears about using the Ukrainian standard can also be present among individuals who mainly use a Ukrainian local dialect that they perceive as deviating significantly from the standard language. This is primarily expected in the western regions.

One can say that today there has been a marked reversal regarding the use of the standard languages. During the Soviet era, Russian was the generally unmarked code in political and social terms, and Russian could be used in all regions and social contexts (with possibly a few local restrictions). In certain contexts, the use of Russian in public was the inevitable norm that should not be deviated from. This was the case for instance in institutions of higher education and research, apart from Ukrainian philology and history (let alone armed and police forces). Starting with the independence of Ukraine, Ukrainian has gradually developed into the politically and socially unmarked code—socially with exceptions in the farthest East and the South. The Russian aggression in 2014 has obviously enforced the development. When, as has been mentioned above, speakers on a manifestation in Kyiv felt obliged to excuse themselves for using Russian in public due to their lack of proficiency in Ukrainian this illustrates clearly that Russian has lost even the status of one of two “natural” linguistic options in public space. Unlike during Soviet times, people can and should now resort to using Ukrainian almost everywhere in public life. Fears about using Russian may now be related to the risk of being perceived as disloyal to the Ukrainian state and ethnicity. After February 2022, as has been mentioned above, Russian is often seen as the language of the enemy by many Ukrainians.

⁸ See, again, Farion comparing Suržyk with dirty clothing <https://focus.ua/politics/263177> or the writer O. Zabužko stating that practising Suržyk ruins language and thinking <https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/people-newspaper/surzhik-rujnuje-movu-i-mislennya/484726>.

4 Analysis

The following analyses are based on data from surveys conducted in two research projects⁹ organized in wider Central Ukraine (in 2014) and the Black Sea area (in 2020 and 2021). For the former project, the oblasts covered were Xmel'nyc'kyj, Žytomyr, Vinnycja, Kyïv, Čerkasy, Kirovohrads'ka, Černihiv, Poltava, Sumy, Dnipropetrovs'ka, and Xarkiv; for the latter, the oblasts were Odesa, Mykolaïv, and Xerson. Note that all material had been assembled before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There were 2,690 respondents engaged in this study: 1,400 in Central Ukraine and 1,290 in the Black Sea area. (Note, that the corresponding figures in the analyses maybe lower, when respondents did not respond to the questions.) This means the number of respondents per oblast was much higher in the latter area (cf. Hentschel and Taranenko 2015 and Hentschel and Palinska 2022a,).¹⁰ The relevant data for this study will be outlined in the analyses to follow.

4.1 Proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian

One of the background criteria that are possibly relevant for the selection of codes is the proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian. The respondents were asked to assess their proficiency in both languages. The assessment was done on a ten-point scale, ranging from “no proficiency” to “excellent proficiency.” These are the results:

Group	Proficiency in Ukrainian	Proficiency in Russian	Configurations of proficiency	N	%	Center		South	
						N	%	N	%
A	good (min. 8)	good	UR	1,232	45.9	664	47.4	568	44.2
B1	good	medium (5–7)	Ur	493	18.4	307	21.9	186	14.5
B2	good	weak (0–4)	U	197	7.3	124	8.9	73	5.7
C1	medium	good	Ru	246	9.2	94	6.7	152	11.8
C2	weak	good	R	130	4.8	38	2.7	92	7.2
D1	medium	medium	ur	274	10.2	119	8.5	155	12.1
D2	medium	weak	u	65	2.4	36	2.6	29	2.3
E1	weak	medium	r	25	0.9	8	0.6	17	1.3

⁹ The projects are the following: (1) *Variability and stability in a mixed substandard in extensive and time-stable language contact: The Ukrainian-Russian Suržyk in Ukraine*, funded by the Fritz-Thyssen-Foundation (no. 10.14.1.066), headed by Gerd Hentschel and (2) *Hybridization from two sides: Ukrainian-Russian and Russian-Ukrainian code-mixing in the context of the sociolinguistic situation in Southern Ukraine along the Black Sea Coast*, funded in an Austrian-German cooperation by the FWF – *Der Wissenschaftsfonds* (no. I 4189-G30) and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, no. 419468937), headed by Tilmann Reuther and Gerd Hentschel respectively.

¹⁰ A comprehensive socio-biographical description of the 2,690 respondents to the surveys will published under <https://uol.de/slavistik/forschung/sprachwissenschaft/hybridisierung-von-zwei-seiten> by the end of 2025.

E2	weak	weak	zero	24	0.9	10	0.7	14	1.1
			Total	2,686	100.0	1,400	100	1,286	100

Table 1. Configurations of Proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian—Proficiency Types.

Almost half (46 percent) of the respondents claim to have at least a good, if not very good command of both languages. This group A (or UR), with a high and rather balanced competence in Ukrainian and Russian is by far the largest one. The groups B1 (Ur) and B2 (U) show a somewhat higher proficiency in Ukrainian, with the latter group, B2 (U), with a tendency to weak proficiency in Russian. Groups B1 and B2 together make up a quarter of all respondents. These two groups are mirrored by the groups C1 (Ru) and C2 (R) with a clearly stronger proficiency in Russian, making up another 14 percent. The remaining 14 percent exhibit a clear subpar, at best medium confidence in their proficiency in both Ukrainian and Russian, some stating an advantage for one of the two languages.¹¹ We did not ask for proficiency in Suržyk, because such a question would have led to amusement, if not laughter among many of the respondents. As to the differences between the Center and the Black Sea Coast, it suffices to say that the declared proficiency in Ukrainian is slightly better in the Center, in Russian slightly better in the South.

4.2 The Presence of the Three Codes in People's Daily Lives

Another factor that may cause apprehension about selecting one of the three linguistic codes is their prevalence in the respondents' linguistic practices. Hentschel and Taranenko (2021, 283–87) proposed a classification of speaker types based on the declared frequency of usage of the three codes. On the basis of a cluster analysis (in the variant k-means) they differentiated seven speaker types that mirror this prevalence. The results of an analogous cluster analysis on the data from the Center and the South are illustrated below (cf. Table 2). Note that although the types are the same the figures given here are different from those in Hentschel and Taranenko (2021). The difference results mainly from the fact that in Hentschel and Taranenko respondents from villages were not taken into account. As a matter of fact, villages were not included in the investigation of the Center (2014/2015), but they were considered in the study on the Black Sea Coast (2020/2021). As a systematic comparison of the Center and the South is not at issue here, we abstract from these differences (cf. Hentschel and Taranenko 2021, 285-287 for details).

¹¹ Of course, there were differences in the stated degrees of proficiency or proficiency patterns in subareas of the territory (especially in the Center) where the data were gathered. This will be the topic of another study.

	whole area			Center		South	
Type	N	%	in regular and frequent usage	N	%	N	%
U	389	15	only Ukrainian	252	18	137	12
U-R	206	8	Ukrainian and Russian	94	7	112	10
U-S	688	27	Ukrainian and Suržyk	516	37	172	15
U-R-S	384	15	all three codes	212	15	172	15
R	345	14	only Russian	113	8	232	21
R-S	184	7	Russian and Suržyk	67	5	117	10
S	319	13	only Suržyk	146	10	173	16
Total	2,515	100		1,400	100	1,115	100

Table 2. Speaker types calculated by a cluster analysis (k-means).

In the South 175 of the 1,290 respondents were not classified as one of the speaker types, with no such cases in the Center. This results from the technical fact that the response option “hard to tell how often I use the code” was available only in the survey in the South. This phenomenon is almost entirely connected with Suržyk.

What should be noted about the quantitative results presented in Table 2 is the fact that if a letter (U, R, S) in the labels is absent, this does not mean that the respondents do not use the code that letter stands for. As a rule, this one code or these two codes are in less than frequent use. Only one out of ten respondents stated that he or she never uses Ukrainian or Russian, whereas every third stated that they never use Suržyk (cf. Hentschel and Taranenko 2021, 284).

An interesting question would be: What relationships can be identified between the stated proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian on the one hand and the stated usage frequency of the three codes, Ukrainian, Russian, and Suržyk, on the other hand? The answer is: The relation is highly complex. The elementary findings are these: (a) The bivariate correlation (Pearson's r) of the stated usage frequency with, first, the declared proficiency in Ukrainian is only moderate, $r = 0.515$, and, second, with proficiency in Russian is even weaker, $r = -0.245$. This means, roughly, that, for example, a stated frequent use of Ukrainian goes hand in hand with a medium probability of a good stated proficiency in Ukrainian and a slight probability of a weak proficiency in Russian. (b) Regarding the correlation of the stated usage frequency of Russian, the figures point in the opposite direction with comparable strength: with the proficiency in Russian $r = 0.514$ and in Ukrainian $r = -0.258$. All four correlations are

statistically significant (at the level of 0.01), but clearly not strong. (c) There is absolutely no correlation between the stated usage frequency of Suržyk and the stated proficiency in Ukrainian $r = 0.0006$ and in Russian $r = -0.056$. Following Evans (1996), significant correlations with $r > 0.8$ should be interpreted as “very strong,” with $r > 0.6$ as “strong,” with $r > 0.4$ as “moderate,” and with $r > 0.2$ as “weak”.

For our purposes, the potentially interrelated factors of usage frequency of the three codes and proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian can be seen as broadly independent from each other. Some specific observations underline this: (i) More than 10 percent of the roughly 500 respondents who stated that they frequently use only Ukrainian also judged their proficiency in Ukrainian as moderate at best. (ii) Similarly, an only slightly higher percentage of the near-exclusive Russian speakers stated their proficiency in Russian to be moderate at best. (iii) The observations in (i) and (ii) indicate a lack of self-assurance in the command of one of the two standard languages, although that language is in frequent use. The following observation, on the other hand, obviously suggests an over-estimation of the own proficiency in at least one of the standard languages: (iii) Out of the almost 200 respondents reporting that they frequently use only Suržyk, roughly 60 percent estimated their command of Ukrainian or Russian or of both as good or very good.

Although a detailed comparison of the Center and the South is no aim of this study, a couple of observations should be noticed: Irrespective of the fact whether named alone or together with other codes as a frequently used code (i) Ukrainian (U, U-R, U-S, U-R-S) reaches 77 percent in the Center, and 52 percent in the South. (ii) The corresponding figures for Russian (R, U-R, R-S, U-R-S) are 35 percent in the Center and 56 in the South, (iii) for Suržyk (S, U-S, R-S, U-R-S) 67 percent in the Center, 56 in the South. In other words, Ukrainian as a frequently used code, is clearly stronger represented in the Center than in the South. It should nevertheless be noted that roughly one half of respondents in the South declare to use Ukrainian frequently. As to Russian, the quantitative relation between Centre and the South are reversed: the figures are clearly higher in the South.

Whereas in Central Ukraine quantitatively dominates as a frequently used code over Russian (77 vs. 35 percent) the relation is balanced in the South (Ukrainian 52 vs. Russian 56 percent). It may well be that the linguistic *Zeitgeist* in Ukraine (see above) favors to a certain declaring Ukrainian but not Russian as frequently used. For the declaration of Suržyk as in frequent use (67 vs. 56 in the Center and the South respectively) one can only state, that whoever confesses to the use of this stigmatised code does it honestly. Maybe there were respondents that felt too ashamed to do so.

4.3 Opinions and Attitudes Regarding the Use of Languages and Codes in Ukraine

A third factor leading to apprehension about selecting codes can be seen in respondents' attitudes toward them. The research projects discussed here focused on Suržyk, including attitudes toward this mixed code. As Suržyk is conditioned by the long-term linguistic impact of Russian in Ukraine, attention was also paid to attitudes toward Russian. There were no direct questions regarding attitudes toward Ukrainian. These attitudes can, however, be inferred from the results of the analysis of the other two codes, and from the relation between the declared mother tongue on the one hand and the frequently practised code on the other: If respondents declare Ukrainian as their (sole) mother tongue without practising it frequently, then their attitude toward Ukrainian is with high probability positive and symbolic (cf. Hentschel and Palinska 2022a).

Suržyk

In both surveys presented here, there were six statements that respondents were asked to agree or disagree with on a four-point scale, from full agreement to full disagreement: (1) *The mixed language poses a threat to Ukrainian culture.* (2) *The mixed language harms Ukrainians' knowledge of Ukrainian.* (3) *The mixed language harms Ukrainians' knowledge of Russian.* (4) *One should not use the mixed language in public.* (5) *The best way to express your feelings is in mixed language.* (6) *The mixed language plays a significant role for me.*

Working with the data on the Center, Hentschel and Zeller (2016) applied a factor (principal component) analysis to the answers and determined two factors which they named: *Suržyk is ...* (a) *culturally destructive*—corresponds to statements (1–4), (b) *useful in private life*—corresponds to statements (5–6). In other words, the factors are “latent hyper variables” (Field 2009, 627–73). Each respondent, who answered all six questions, was assigned the relevant values of the two variables, and then a (k-means) cluster analysis was conducted, which yielded four clusters (groups) of respondents. We did the new analysis here for the material from the three Black Sea oblasts; the figures for the Center are from Hentschel and Zeller (2016):

Figures for respondents	Components		Center		Black Sea	
Clusters	(1) culturally destructive	(2) useful in private	N	%	N	%
“Dedicated Opponents”	yes	No	400	29.8	293	22.8

“Moderate Sceptics”	no	No	322	24.0	297	23.1
“Ashamed Friends”	yes	Yes	218	16.2	362	28.1
“Dedicated Friends”	no	Yes	403	30.0	334	26.0

Table 3. Components of attitudes towards Suržyk and corresponding clusters of respondents.

Dedicated opponents of Suržyk judge it to be culturally destructive and not of use in private life. Dedicated friends have a diametrically opposed view on Suržyk and see it as culturally harmless and as useful in private contacts. Undecided positions are held by moderate sceptics (nor harm/no use) and ashamed friends (rather harmful, but still useful). As can easily be seen, the results in the two subareas are very similar. The four groups (clusters) of respondents are quantitatively quite balanced.

Russian

Similarly to the procedures carried out to determine attitudes toward Suržyk, an analysis of respondents' opinions and attitudes toward the Russian language was carried out for this study. Both questionnaires contained nine questions on this topic that are important to our analysis. With one exception (number 1), they are quite different from those used for Suržyk: (1) *The Russian language poses a threat to Ukrainian culture.* (2) *The Ukrainian state infringes on the rights of Russian-speaking citizens.* (3) *The Ukrainian state is doing too little to preserve and develop the Ukrainian language among its citizens.* (4) *The Ukrainian state is doing too little to preserve and develop the Russian language among its citizens.* (5) *In the south and east of Ukraine, the status of the Russian language in government institutions should be improved.* (6) *Ukrainian language should remain the only state language in Ukraine.* (7) *Both Ukrainian and Russian should be official languages in Ukraine.* (8) *Russian should be the only state language.* (9) *All citizens of Ukraine should know Russian.* As this analysis of the attitudes toward Russian is completely new, we present basic descriptive results in Figure 1:

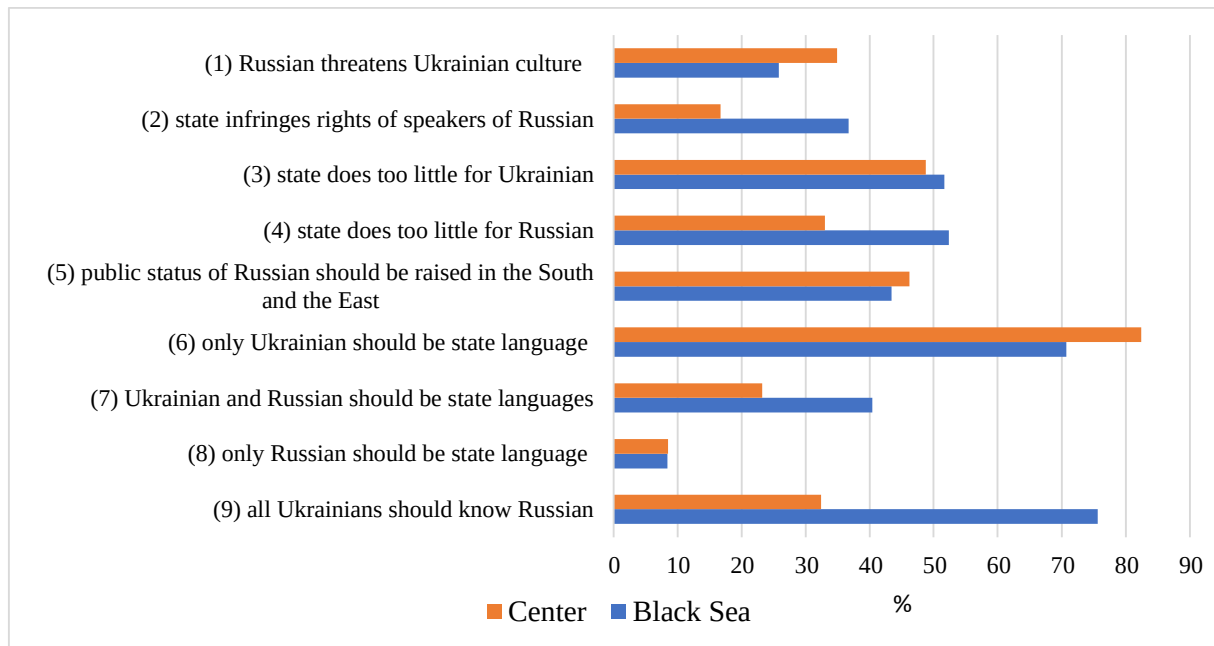


Figure 1. Positive reactions (agreement) to the nine statements in the Center and the South.

For the moment, this can be left uninterpreted. Instead, we try to reduce these nine variables to factors (principal components). Table 4 illustrates the results:

	Factor (principal component)		
	F1 moderate pro-Russian	F2 rather contra-Russian	F3 strongly pro-Russian
(4) state does too little for Russian	0.851		
(2) state infringes rights of speakers of Russian	0.716		
(7) Ukrainian and Russian should be state languages	0.547		0.514
(3) state does too little for Ukrainian		0.777	
(1) Russian threatens Ukrainian culture		0.662	
(5) public status of Russian should be raised in the South and the East		-0.492	
(8) only Russian should be state language			0.850
(6) only Ukrainian should be state language			-0.530
(9) all Ukrainians should know Russian			

Table 4. Factor analysis on attitudes towards Russian.

Note that weak correlations with a value below 0.4 are ignored. Note also that the positive or negative values presented in this table must not be understood as agreement or disagreement

with the statements; they just mirror stronger interrelations between the statements, which themselves may be positive or negative.

We observe that the nine variables can be reduced to three abstract factors describing attitudes toward the statements. The first one (F1) is based on variables (4, 2, 7) which all aim at a certain improvement (from the pro-Russian viewpoint). The two variables correlating highest with this factor (4, 2) are such that the corresponding statements are very general and possibly embrace several potential deficits in the language policy of the Ukrainian state toward Russian (e.g., insufficient Russian lessons in schools on different levels, acceptance of Russian in public and other institutions, and insufficient number of Russian cultural centers and organizations). Variable (7), asking for Russian as a second state language, is included as well. Note that this variable also plays a role for (F3). We name this factor “moderate pro-Russian.”

In contrast, the second factor (F2), based on variables (3, 1, 5), reflects the concern for Ukrainian in Ukraine. In the statements contained in variables (3) and (1), this concern is openly addressed in the wordings as a level of discrimination against Ukrainian. The phrasing of (5), asking for a formal improvement of the status of Russian, seems contradictory here, but note: this is a negative correlation. The discrepancy (+/-) means that respondents agreeing or disagreeing on (3) and (1) clearly react on (5) in the opposite direction. As this factor includes the perception of Russian as a threat to Ukrainian, we name it “rather contra-Russian,” but keep in mind: people may support it or oppose to it.

The last factor (F3) includes statements proposing a strong improvement to the status of Russian. This is explicitly (positively) formulated in variables (8) and (7). The wording of variable (6) contradicts the first two, but it is negatively correlated with F3. Since the highest correlation is found for the variable that asks for Russian to be the only state language in Ukraine, we call the factor “strongly pro-Russian.” Thus, (F3) is similar to (F1), but more strongly accentuated.

Finally, it has to be noted that variable (9) *all Ukrainians should know Russian* does not show even a moderate correlation with any of the other eight variables. In other words, there is no notable interdependency between the answers to question 9 and those to the other eight questions.

On the basis of these three factors, four clusters or groups of respondents with a different general attitude toward Russian can be distinguished. This cluster analysis is based on data given by only slightly more than half of the 2,690 respondents. This is because only those respondents are considered who explicitly agreed or disagreed with all nine statements.

As the numerical values for the cluster centers are relatively complicated to interpret, we do not illustrate them here, we will not show the numbers, but rather offer (for the benefit of an easier interpretation) in Table 5 a simplified symbolization of agreement (Y), disagreement (N), or a balance (Y~N): a “!” signals the strength of either; “!!” signals extreme strength. The symbol “!!” refers to values >90%, “!” >75%, a simple “Y” or “N” to >60%, and a “Y~N” corresponds to <60% but >40%.

F-s	Variables (statements) / cluster of respondents	C1	C2	C3	C4
F1	(4) state does too little for Russian	N!!	Y~N	Y!	Y
F1	(2) state infringes rights of speakers of Russian	N!!	N	Y!	N!
F1 (F3)	(7) Ukrainian and Russian should be state languages	N!!	Y~N	Y!	N!!
F2	(3) state does too little for Ukrainian	N!	Y~N	N!	Y!
F2	(1) Russian threatens Ukrainian culture	N!	Y~N	N!!	Y~N
F2	(5) public status of Russian should be raised in the South and the East	N	Y~N	Y!!	N!
F3	(8) only Russian should be state language	N!!	Y	N!!	N!!
F3	(6) only Ukrainian should be state language	Y!	Y	N	Y!!
F3 (F1)	(7) Ukrainian and Russian should be state languages	N!!	Y~N	Y!	N!!

Table 5. The schematic descriptive basis of the clustered respondents.

The respondents in Cluster 1 (C1) agreed solely with the point that Ukrainian should remain the only state language (6). They are opposed to all other statements. Most of all, they do not see the need for improvements for Russian, with—interestingly—the weakest opposition against local improvements in the South and the East (5). On the other hand, they do not consider Russian as a threat to Ukrainian culture, nor do they see the need for improvements for Ukrainian. We will call C1 “**self-assured Ukrainian conservatives**”: things should remain as they are.

The respondents in C2 are as a group rather undecided about most of the statements. The fact that the majority (though not an overwhelming one) could agree on Ukrainian as the exclusive state languages as well as on Russian as the only state language underlines that there is no coherent position on the variables and factors. We name this group, which is hard to grasp on the basis of their reactions to the statements, as “**people with diffuse attitudes**.”

Among the respondents of in group C3 one can observe a clear sympathy for improving the conditions for Russian and an attestation of infringements of the rights of

Russian speakers, as illustrated by the strong agreement with the statements (4, 2, 7) and very strong support for the status of Russian in the East and South (5). We can give this cluster the label “**supporters of Russian.**”

Last but not least, the group C4 exhibits a noticeable similarity to C1. The former differs from the latter in that there is a strong majority opting for an intensification of the support for Ukrainian. On the other hand, a majority opts for improvements for Russian as well, without improving its legal status, especially its status as a state language. We find a balanced score of agreement and disagreement for the perception of Russian as a threat to Ukrainian culture. These respondents might be called “**cautious Ukrainian conservatives.**”

In sum, two of the groups can be seen as frankly pro-Ukrainian: the self-assured conservatives (C1) do not see any need for changing language policies. However, it would be false to declare them anti-Russian; at least they do not perceive a threat from Russian. The latter point is by and large true for cautious conservatives (C4) as well. Partially, this group does see a certain threat arising from Russian, but on the other hand, a majority is in favor of improvements for Russian. In other words, neither group is anti-Russian. The explicit supporters of Russian (C3), as the chosen labels suggests, would appreciate formal and real improvements for Russian. However, they are by no means anti-Ukrainian, as indicated clearly by the very strong opposition to Russian as the only state language. What they do strongly prefer is an emancipation of Russian as the second state language. For people with diffuse attitudes, it is impossible to give a coherent characterization in positive terms.

By and large, these findings are in line with the point of view of Hentschel and Brüggemann (2015) and Hentschel and Zeller (2016) that there was a high degree of tolerance toward Russian and that the widely discussed language conflict in Ukraine was a phenomenon within political and cultural elites and not one among citizens of Ukraine, in spite of differences in corresponding attitudes. A clear indicator of linguistic liberalism is that even in the Center there was a clear majority in favor of policies that give regions or oblasts the right to regulate the role of languages below the level of the state language (cf. Hentschel and Zeller 2016, 642)—all this between 2014 and 2022.

Of course, people do realize that the language conflict primarily plays out among politicians. The respondents were asked to agree/disagree with the statement, *The language conflict is one of the most important reasons for political conflicts in Ukraine*. Table 6 reflects the results, differentiated for the Center (in 2014) and the South (2020):

	absolutely agree	rather agree	rather disagree	absolutely disagree	N
Center	20	27.5	22.2	30.3	1,215
Black Sea	34.6	28.9	18.5	18.1	1,108

Table 6. Agreement/disagreement with the statement “*The language conflict is one of the most important reasons for political conflicts in Ukraine.*”

Even though there is little evidence that the respondents see themselves in a situation of conflicting codes, one in two respondents in the Center regards the alleged language conflict as very important for political conflicts. On the Black Sea Coast, it is two in three. Nevertheless, only every fifth or every third respondent, respectively, is absolutely convinced.

As the final point in this subsection, we will describe the quantitative distribution of the four clusters in the two subregions, again differentiating the Center and the Black Sea Coast (Table 7):

	self-assured Ukrainian conservatives	cautious Ukrainian conservatives	supporters of Russian	people with diffuse attitudes	N
Center	31.0	42.4	12.2	14.5	772
Black Sea Coast	14.7	34.3	36.7	14.2	632

Table 7. Rough areal distribution of the clusters.

It is, of course, no surprise that the share of self-assured conservatives is clearly higher in the Center and the share of supporters of Russian is similarly high in the South. However, the differences are not dramatic.

4.4 On Fears about Using the Three Codes

In closed interviews with questionnaires, this topic was included only in the 2020 survey on the Black Sea Coast. The quantitative analysis of fears based on the two relevant questions in the questionnaire is, however, rather unrewarding. There were two questions aiming at occasional uncomfortable situations in everyday communications: *Were you ashamed to speak any of these languages?* and *Did people complain or mock you for using one of these languages?* As these questions were asked for all three codes (Ukrainian, Russian, and

Suržyk), there were actually six questions. Affirmative answers were given by max. 2 percent of the respondents, for the first question 13 vs. 9 vs. 53 for Ukrainian, Russian, or Suržyk, respectively, and for second question 22 vs. 16 vs. 32. On the basis of these figures one can conclude first that embarrassment and fears do not play an essential role and that Suržyk as a means of communication is in this respect the most problematic code, but only on a very low level.

In both of the aforementioned research projects the topic of fear about using a specific code or of negative experiences when using it was addressed in open or semi-structured interviews (without a questionnaire).

The comparison of responses to questions from a closed questionnaire and open interviews of the same respondents, shows that people tend to be more forthcoming in a personal conversation than when answering fixed questions in a questionnaire. There was quite a number of respondents who reported in the in-depth interview to have personally experienced or witnessed discomfort or unpleasant situations, although they did not so in the questionnaire. On the other hand, there was even not a handful of respondents who affirmed such experiences in the questionnaire but denied or did not mention them in the in-depth interview.

What follows now are instances of verbalization of the relevant feelings. One striking point is that some respondents at first give negative answers to direct questions by the interviewer, but later in the conversation they recall their grievances or even traumas.

Use of Suržyk

Unpleasant experiences for respondents are associated with the use of Suržyk. Negative experiences related to Ukrainian or Russian language were mentioned much less frequently. But one should kept in mind that the research projects were primarily interested in Suržyk and thus interviewers often focused specifically on mixed speech, at least when there was no evident reason in the respondents' narratives for considering Ukrainian and Russian with similar attention as Suržyk.

As to the mixed code, there were respondents who unequivocally and directly stated that they had never been subjected to mockery and had not experienced negative feelings when speaking Suržyk, often pointing out the prevalence and normality of Suržyk in their region or surroundings:

(1) По поводу суржика нє. Все нормально. Майже всі люди, яких я знаю, вони розмовляють на суржику.¹²

As to Suržyk, no [nobody laughed]. It's okay. Almost everyone I know speaks Suržyk. (Khe, m, 28, h, UR, U-R-S)¹³

Some respondents did not complain, arguing that they would not care even if there were negative reactions to their speaking Suržyk. They either mentioned characteristics of their personality (being able to stand up for themselves or, conversely, not being easily offended) or described a background that can be perceived as potentially conflicting, as in example (2):

(2) Нєт. А зачєм? Дивіться, якщо я так виросла, якщо мене так навчили, то, тіпа, ну, в смислі? Я должна перестроїтись, тому що комусь не нравиться? Якщо комусь не нравиться, хай закриє вуха і не слухає.

No [there was no embarrassment]. Why should there be? See, if that's how I have been raised, if that's how I have been taught, then, well, what's the point? Do I have to change just because someone doesn't like it? If someone doesn't like it, they should cover their ears and not listen. (Myk, f, 21, h, ur, U-R-S)

This is a clear statement of a self-assured usage of the mixed subvariety. In contrast, some respondents, aware of their “linguistic deficits”, frankly uttered fear about using Suržyk. This category of statements also includes cases when respondents talked about the absence of a specific personal negative experience, indirectly implying that something similar is happening in their environment:

¹² Please note, that the citations in Cyrillic letters in many cases neither correspond to the norm of Ukrainian nor to Russian. They should be read as a rough transcription, even signalling some phonic phenomena like *akanje*.

¹³ Respondents' main socio-biographical characteristics in abbreviations are the following: oblast (Ode 'Odesa'/Myk 'Mykolaïv'/Khe 'Kherson'); sex (m 'male'/f 'female'); age; education (s 'secondary'/v 'vocational'/h 'higher'); type of proficiency (as in Table 2 above, without hyphens, e.g., UR); type of speaker (as in Table 1, with hyphens, e.g., U-R).

(3) Я боялася, що це в університеті станеться, но цього не сталося, того що я кажу, в нас майже вся група говорить на таких своїх суржиках.

I was afraid that [mockery] would happen at the university, but it didn't happen because, as I said, almost all in our student group speak their Suržyks. (Khe, f, 18, s, UR, U-S)

(4) Да, але так, щоб це були відкриті такі насмешки, булінг, такого не було. Мабуть, це я вже застала такі більш лояльні часи... до понаєхавших, до села.

Yes, but not in such a way that it was open mockery, bullying. Nothing like that. Maybe I witnessed friendlier times... toward the newcomers from the village. (Khe, f, 38, h, UR, U-S)

Other respondents report that their speaking Suržyk caused rather good-natured teasing:

(5) Це деколи викликає сміх. Але такий позитивний, ти з цього посміявся і тобі ну..., не так, що «га-га-га» насміхаєшся. А це просто прикольно.

It sometimes causes laughter. But more in a positive sense, you laugh about it, it's not mockery. But it's just funny. (Ode, m, 21, h, Ur, U-S)

The vast majority of statements describe a wide range of negative reactions—from “sideways glances” to subtle remarks, open mocking, and objections.

(6) Бувало, що насміхались, були ситуації в маршрутках, коли ти сидиш зі своїми друзями, наприклад, говориш і там ловиш якісь косі взгляди просто от прохожих.

It happened that I was mocked because of this; there were situations in minibuses where, for example, you sit with your friends, talk and get disapproving looks from passers-by. (Myk, f, 21, h, Ur, U-S)

(7) Весь первый курс наді мною насміхались і одногрупники, і преподаватели, і друзя друзей, і всі такі – у, сматрі, із села приїхав, ха-ха-ха, на суржикє общається, давай на рускам.

The whole first year of my studies I was mocked by my fellow students, lecturers, friends of friends, and everyone else—look [they said], he is from the village, ha ha ha, he speaks Suržyk, come on, speak Russian. (Ode, m, 21, h, UR, R-S)

The “rural” issue as a cause of mockery or objection on the one hand and fears or shame on the other are quite common. Mockery regarding the use of Suržyk is clearly most often reported by residents of villages and urban-type settlements (a type of settlement between village and town). Most of the city- or town-dwellers who reported similar experiences come from the countryside—or large parts of their families live there. Historically, by the end of the nineteenth century, towns and cities on the Black Sea Coast were Russian and “Jewish” (that is, Yiddish) speaking, whereas Ukrainian (in dialectal varieties) dominated in the countryside (see All-Russian Empire Census 1897). So, the stereotype of the ruralness of Suržyk (and also Ukrainian) has a “material” background in the past.¹⁴ Last but not least, some respondents indicate the singularity of such cases, while others describe similar situations as almost “normal,” especially when moving from villages to cities.

Use of Ukrainian and Russian

There is much less material regarding unpleasant experiences related to using standard languages. The very few cases of reports about objections, mockery, and the like can be interpreted as widely unproblematic because of the absence of a language conflict among citizens. Apart from their focus on Suržyk, the in-depth interviews, organized in 2020 and 2021 on the Black Sea Coast, focused on linguistic biographies and especially the possible switch from Russian to Ukrainian in a formerly Russian-dominated area under pro-Ukrainian language policies. Although there are not many utterances by respondent on that topic, some trends, however, can be identified.

¹⁴ One of the authors (Hentschel) grew up in a northern German village near Hanover in the 1950s and 1960s. He used to be mocked or laughed at as well, because he regularly pronounced the *st* in the initial consonantal cluster in words like *Stadt* ‘town/city’ as [st], as it is in Low German (and village-type variants of High German in the north) and not [ʃt] as in Standard German. Low German in those days was still an important code for autochthones in villages, as was the case in the author’s family, though it was avoided when talking to him.

Regarding fears associated with the Russian language, some respondents repeat Moscow's propaganda clichés about the persecution of Russian speakers. The typical account is the following: in western Ukrainian regions, you can be beaten for speaking Russian, and all residents of western regions are "Banderivci" (right-wing followers of Stepan Bandera, the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the mid-twentieth century). Interestingly enough, several respondents alluding to this stereotype explicitly deny themselves having ever experienced such situations. None reported any physical altercations for speaking Russian in a Ukrainian-speaking, e.g. in regions like L'viv. On the contrary, one of the mostly Russian-speaking respondents stated that he was fond of speaking Ukrainian where Ukrainian was the default code.

(8) Наприклад, у Львові я майже ніколи не розмовляю російською мовою, і не тому, що я боюся, що вони мене поб'ють, а тому що я чую українську мову, і <...> мені теж хочеться розмовляти українською.

For example, in L'viv I almost never speak Russian, not because I'm afraid of being beaten, but because I hear Ukrainian and want to speak Ukrainian, too. (Myk, f, 18, s, Ru, U-R)

One of the respondents, however, reports that he once witnessed an instance of a linguistically based conflict provoked by a Ukrainian speaker in Odesa, which, nevertheless, was perceived as a conflict only from the observer's point of view:

(9) Я была в магазине, девочка как бы отвечает на русский, она чисто на украинский с большим негативом, вот это очень нехорошо. Тут я в Одессе наблюдала. Вони приїхали з западної України, єслі єду на западну Україну, єзжу отдыхать, я розговаріваю на українском с уваженієм до них всіх, правильно. Єслі я приїхала сюда, девочка отвечає – почему не? обіжати девочку... я на неї закіпила.

I was in a store; a [sales]girl responds in Russian, and she [the client] responds in Ukrainian with a lot of dislike, that's very unpleasant. I saw it here in Odessa. They [speakers of Ukrainian] come from western Ukraine, and if I go to western Ukraine for vacation, I speak Ukrainian with respect for all of them, that's right. But if I come

here, the girl responds—why not [Russian]? Offend the girl... I got mad at her [the client] (Ode, f, 48, v, UR, S)

It should be noted that the reverse situation—when a speaker of Russian responds in Russian to an utterance of a Ukrainian-speaking interlocutor—is often not conflictual. According to many Ukrainian-speaking respondents, it may even be an impetus for them to switch to Russian:

(10) В том самом городе... Иногда я приїжджаю, і люди на руском общаються в основном, то я перехожу на їх язык. Так їм удобней, і так мені удобней.

In the city... Sometimes I come, and people mainly communicate in Russian, so I switch to their language. It's more convenient for them, and it's more convenient for me. (Ode, m, 16, s, Ru, U-R-S)

As a matter of fact, this scenario is restricted to areas in Ukraine where individual Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism is widespread. In L'viv, for example, it would be different, because there many Ukrainians are simply not able to switch to Russian without difficulties. Of course, the reverse would be the case in areas where during Soviet times Russian was absolutely dominant, as for instance in the Donbas.

Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with government language policies aimed at raising the status of the Ukrainian language in various spheres of public life. That there is a widespread wish in the Ukrainian south for improvements to the status and public functional sphere of Russian has been reported above. However, the following statement is merely a repetition of Moscow's propaganda:

(11) Примушувать людину, вот, сядь і учи українську мову, і не дай Боже на вулиці почують російське слово, я думаю, це неправильно.

Forcing someone to sit down and learn Ukrainian and God forbid that a Russian word is heard in the street—I think it [such a policy] is wrong. (Myk, f, 30, h, UR, U-S)

Unpleasant emotions associated with the use of the Russian language are often functionally based; people who are not fluent in Russian feel insecure when they have to use it:

(12) Соромилася розмовляти російською мовою, бо боялася, що не так скажу.

I was ashamed to speak Russian because I was afraid of saying something wrong.
(Myk, f, 25, h, Ur, U-S)

Some respondents expressed open displeasure toward Russian:

(13) Мені не нравиться, як вона в мене звучить.

I don't like it because it [Russian] sounds weird to me. (Khe, m, 40, h, Ur, U-S)

Only very few respondents discredit Russian by explicitly alluding to political reasons as the “language of the aggressor” (Khe, m, 22, h, U, U-R-S).

5 Conclusion

What, then, was the linguistic situation in the years from 2014 up to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022? How did citizens of Ukraine view it? To begin with fears, grosso modo the situation among the common people was obviously highly relaxed. Only a small minority in the surveys reported either to have had fears related to their own linguistic practice or to have been openly mocked or objected to by their communicative surroundings. Respondents gave accounts of such negative experiences more readily in open, in-depth interviews—sometimes not when asked directly by the interviewer, but rather in the course of telling. However, there are no accounts of really drastic experiences.

The vast majority of reported negative experiences is connected with Suržyk. Here the open animosity of vast circles of the cultural and political elites toward Suržyk, which treat Suržyk (again in Yu. Andrukhovych's terms) as the “bastard child” of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism, has left its traces with some users of Suržyk and some non-users. However, broad parts of society have a relaxed attitude toward the mixed subvariety; many are even its declared friends, a minority are declared opponents. By the way, the objections of the “anti-

Suržyk-fraction” in Ukrainian elites, including many linguists, are very similar to the objections of Soviet cultural and academic elites against Russian “prostorečie,” literally Easy Speak (cf. Jachnow 1987). Both positions simply mirror an aversion against subvarieties on the basis of an ideology of the “national language,” which in Ukraine is exposed frankly as “national” but in Soviet Russia was camouflaged by superficial communist internationalism. In both cases strict, “centralized” norms are seen as ideal.

Fears about using Russian or Ukrainian, as seldom as they are to be found in our data, are as a rule connected with the speaker’s feeling of uncertainty about their own proficiency. As to Russian, very few respondents repeated stereotypes, for instance, about the danger of speaking Russian in Western Ukraine, be they propagated by Kremlin propaganda or not. Of course, there are some extremely rare utterances by respondents in line with anti-Ukrainian propaganda by the Russian side, including pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians. And, naturally, some respondents uttered openly anti-Russian points of view, which directly mirror the anger about the Russian aggression in the Donbas area and on the Crimean Peninsula. In both cases.

The quantitative analysis of the closed interviews, based on questionnaires, supports this picture of relaxed linguistic relations between the citizens in the Center and on the Black Sea Coast. The (declared) usage frequencies of the three codes exhibit a widespread individual bilingualism in Ukrainian and Russian, with only every tenth respondent saying that they do not use one or the other language at all. For a large number of respondents, the values for the two languages are relatively well balanced, for an equally large group, the relation is more or less asymmetric, with one code, Ukrainian or Russian, dominating in the frequency of use. The higher reluctance for speakers to admit being users of Suržyk is a result of its stigmatization. Interestingly, there is only a slight to moderate correlation between the frequency of usage and the self-estimation of proficiency in Ukrainian and Russian. Hypothetically, one could argue that the yardsticks of measurement vary. For example, individuals who always earned high grades in school for language courses in Russian or Ukrainian may judge their proficiency correspondingly, even if they use this language only rarely.

As to attitudes toward Russian, of course there are differences among the population in Ukraine. The majority of the respondents was in this respect quite conservative, that is, they more or less agreed with a linguistic policy supporting the emancipation of Ukrainian—after decades if not centuries of open or latent suppression by Tsarist and Soviet language policies. The main point uniting this group was that they clearly want Ukrainian to remain the sole state language. On the other hand, there is a clear majority within these “conservatives” who

support local regulations on the public use and status of Russian below the level of a state language. Finally, there is a considerable number of “pro-Ukrainian” respondents who support improvements for Russian in the education system and cultural life in Ukraine. Without any doubt, all these attitudes signal a considerable amount of tolerance, not of conflict potential. Supporters of Russian, as we called them, can be qualified as moderate as well. Of course, the majority would be in favour of two state languages, Ukrainian and Russian. Many of them do see infringements of the rights of Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens, alluding obviously to certain hindrances for Russian in the context of education and culture. On the other hand, there was no evidence in the surveys and in the in-depth interviews for a perceived threat or prosecution for speaking Russian, even in public life.

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine can fundamentally change the attitudes of the population toward language codes. Studies are already being conducted showing the dynamics of the transition of Russian and bilingual speakers to Ukrainian. Regular online surveys conducted by the Gradus Agency since 2022 showed a steady increase in active usage of Ukrainian.¹⁵ The private sociological institutions Democratic Initiatives and the Razumkov Centre, which use traditional sociological methods, are more cautious in their assessment: less than 10 percentage points (cf. *Nacional’na kul’tura*). None of these surveys is representative and comprehensive—because of the war, strong internal migration, and the emotionally charged mood. The situation after the invasion is extremely dynamic.

In the face of the cruel war, the emergence of a strong aversion against Russian would be more than “normal” in the attacked and tortured Ukraine. One might remember the position of German in the Polish educational and cultural landscape in the first decades after World War II. Nowadays, for instance, German studies in Poland are among the most strongly developed branches of that discipline abroad. A final note on Surżyk: There is a definite possibility that, since it shows clear traces of Russian influences, aversion might also develop against this mixed code. However, the traditional Ukrainian-based variety, practised by millions in Ukraine and with its regularities developed over decades, at least currently has the value that the one who speaks it can easily be recognized as “svij,” as “one of us,” whom no Russian infiltrator would be able to imitate.

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¹⁵ Cf. <https://gradus.app/ru/open-reports/wartime-survey-ukrainian-society-eleventh-wave/> (accessed February 16th, 2025).

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