Psychological peculiarities of language use among Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking different native languages

I.V. Danyliuk

ORCID: 0000-0002-6522-5994
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

I.V. Kozytska

ORCID: 0000-0001-8045-4683
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

S.O. Shykovets

ORCID: 0000-0003-1299-6434
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

The article presents results of the study and practical analysis of the phenomenon of the influence of ethnolinguistic identity on the formation of the language image, as well as the psychological well-being and personal health of Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland. The article attempts to reveal the value of the welcoming status of linguistic identity to achieve the psychological well-being of a personality in a modern multicultural society. The prospects for studying the impact of ethnolinguistic identity and psychological well-being and the personal health of representatives of Ukrainian language communities and migrant groups with prediction of possible spheres of application of the obtained results are also described.

The empirical research, the psychological peculiarities of language use of Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking different native languages were studied. As a result of a data analysis based on the description of statistics, we have described the general situation in the psychological sphere of language use among Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking different native languages. These results provide the basis for further researches on the psychological peculiarities of language use with a wider cultural context and inclusion into a sample both male and female representatives. The results of the research may be useful in the context of an implementation of the programs of psychological support for migrants. The results may be significant for the field of ethnic, cross-cultural and political psychology.

Key words: ethnolinguistic identity; psychological components of ethnolinguistic identity; psychological well-being of personality; personality health; welcome status of ethnolinguistic identity; ethnolinguistic communities.
Introduction

According to the 2012 Eurobarometer Report “Europeans and their languages”, within the European Union there are only twenty-three (twenty-four since 2013) officially recognized languages, but actually there are more than sixty (actually many more) indigenous regional and minority languages, as well as numerous non-indigenous languages spoken by migrant communities whose status remain entirely unrecognized and legally unprotected and whose continuity and intergenerational transmission are at high risk. This situation represents, in fact, the result of strong homogenization process in European recent history. The situation at the level of separate European states (for example Poland) is not much different. Historical, social, political, and geopolitical developments of the last sixty years have transformed Poland from a multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic society into one of the most homogenous nation-states in Europe. At the same time, the number of immigrants is increasing and will likely continue to do so in the future. Their economic impact cannot be overestimated, both in term of their productivity and the costs related to their physical and psychological health.

This multicultural and multilingual Europe needs to develop and implement wise strategies that successfully respond to the threats to its linguistic and cultural diversity as well as the challenges posed by linguistic mobility. Only by doing so, can it achieve a high level of general well-being and economic sustainability, while cultivating cultural and linguistic diversity, understood as a fundamental societal asset. The proposed project responds to these challenges, combining necessary research with the construction of practical solutions and recommendations aimed at applicability and socioeconomic impact.

There is a lack of awareness, at the state, societal, economic, and educational levels, of the broad and varied benefits of preserving linguistic-cultural diversity and promoting stable multilingualism; and this constitutes an obstacle to their applicability in these spheres. The advantages are linked to the human capacity for problem solving and creative thinking. “In the face of present-day economic and technological change, opening up vast prospects for creation and innovation, particular attention must be paid to the diversity of the supply of creative work” [31, 5].

A broad scope of psycholinguistic research has shown that bilingual children and adults have expanded cognitive potential, reflected in greater flexibility and capacity for task-solving and in higher intellectual and social skills [4; 2; 3; 9]. The use of more than one language in children as young as two years, seems to be crucial in enhancing the executive control responsible for the selection and utilization of the data necessary to solve problems and achieve goals [26, 567–579]. It also offers significant advantages to the elderly, hindering cognitive decline and possibly delaying the onset of symptoms of dementia [6, 240–250]. Minority children going through immersion education in their mother tongue always match or surpass their peers participating in programs based on the usage of a dominant language, both in classroom performance and standardized testing; in pursuit of academic education they tend to show much better results.

Ukrainians are the largest immigrant group in Poland. Some of them fled the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, others came to work in Poland due to difficult financial situations. Still others came to study at Polish universities. It is estimated that there are between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Ukrainians working in Poland [33]. This is approximately 2–2.5% of the country’s population, a figure that represents a dramatic increase compared to the 150,000 Ukrainians reported in Poland in 2009. Ukrainian is among the nations that are disliked in Poland. Although during last twenty years, attitudes toward all of Poland’s neighbors have become more favorable, the general perception of Ukrainians has worsened in the last year.

Similarly, hate speech targeting Ukrainians in Poland has risen in the last years. In 2014 only one in five Poles reported having witnessed hate speech directed at Ukrainians, but in 2016 the number had risen to one in four. There was an even steeper rise in the amount of anti-Ukrainian hate speech on the Internet: 46% of young people had contact with it in 2014 while in 2016 it was 71%. Thus, Ukrainians in Poland might expect to experience discrimination. We must determine if this results in fear, and if it is a factor in the decision of many Ukrainians to avoid speaking their language in public. We must also examine how this relates to psychological well-being, health and economic productivity.

Materials and Methods

Research suggests that language revitalization and the use of the mother tongue throughout the stages of an individual’s development are not only closely linked to improvements in psychological well-being and higher self-esteem, but also to higher indexes of health; there appears to be a strong correlation between language loss, deterioration in indigenous health, symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress, and elevated suicide rates [7; 22; 1]. Heritage languages play an important protective role in addressing health crises and lowering behavioral risk factors.

We propose that the mechanism of these kinds of positive changes is the so-called “social cure”; it is known that affirmation of one’s social identity improves psychological well-being and allows one to deal with stress, illness and trauma. Furthermore, improvement in health indexes has significant economic consequences.

In order to obtain sample that is highly comparable across language contexts for analytical rigor in addressing the overall project objectives, we designed and employed a standard set of data collection procedures and analytical framework in all language contexts, with limited exceptions. In the synchronic context, a core elicitation kit designed to obtain quantitative linguistic data, information about language attitudes and ideologies, linguistic proficiency, mental and physical health indexes, and economic standing was deployed to age-stratified, gender-balanced samples in all
The calculation of the Language strength index followed by a comparative analysis of the statistical significance of the index differences between these speakers using the Student t-criterion gave the results that are shown in the Table 1.

The comparison of Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking Ukrainian and Russian language’ Group strength index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Average indicator</th>
<th>Significance of differences by the Student t-criterion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group strength</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>4.23, 2.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be seen from the Table 1, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Group strength index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

The calculation of the Language strength index followed by a comparative analysis of the statistical significance of the index differences between these speakers using the Student t-criterion gave the results that are shown in the Table 2.

The comparison of Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking Ukrainian and Russian language’ Language strength index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Average indicator</th>
<th>Significance of differences by the Student t-criterion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>5.07, 3.13</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength index</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be seen from the Table 2, among the Ukrainian and Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 3, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Collective Angst index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 4, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Linguistic Angst index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 5, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 6, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 7, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 8, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 9, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

As it can be seen from the Table 10, among the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland the Accult_stress index seems to be significantly higher than among the Russian speaking Ukrainian migrants in Poland.
Accult_stress isolation and Accult_stress work indexes are medium in meaning and seem to be like both groups of Ukrainian migrants in Poland.

Table 5.
The comparison of Ukrainian migrants in Poland speaking Ukrainian and Russian language* Accult_stress index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Average indicator</th>
<th>Significance of differences by the Student t-criterion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accult_stress discrimination/prejudice Ukrainian</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accult_stress isolation Ukrainian</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accult_stress work Ukrainian</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accult_stress language Ukrainian</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussions

In the duration of the research, we analyzed the psychological peculiarities of language use with a wider cultural context and inclusion into a sample both male and female representatives. The results of the research may be useful in the context of an implementation of the programs of psychological support for migrants. Also, the results may be significant for the field of ethnic, cross-cultural and political psychology.

The impact and practical applications of the results of the proposed project would reach into:
(a) academic research oriented toward the protection of linguistic and cultural diversity, stimulating social benefits and protecting human rights with special regard to the discriminated minority and migrant groups,
(b) the policies of the state,
(c) educational institutions,
(d) local governments and NGOs,
(e) healthcare strategies, and
(f) economy.

It will also have the potential to contribute to the development of a civil, inclusive society.

A better understanding of processes, hitherto unstudied in the European context, is not only aimed at providing a cross-case diagnosis, but also well-thought recommendations for dealing with consequences of language loss and associated deterioration of well-being and health in minority and migrant communities. With a better understanding of the role language plays in general health and economic standing, practical models and policy recommendations can be developed in favor of healthy multilingualism. Summing up, a broad applicability and impact of our project will be achieved in several interconnected ways:
- Proposing specific strategies for language maintenance/revitalization, for dealing with the effects of discrimination and trauma as well as for increasing the well-being of the groups and communities included in the project
- Creation of more general (but precise) guidelines for language, educational, and migration policy as well as for economic strategies involving the potential of minority/migrant communities and groups
- Proposing significant improvements to the European Charter for Minority Languages, its national implementation, national legislation dealing with minority groups and languages, and other international conventions
- Providing practical, useful solutions and knowledge for multilingual European and world heritage with regard to language maintenance and revitalization programs and their place in educational systems
- Raising the effectiveness of research and innovation in direct response to key societal challenges related to minority groups’ rights, linguistic-cultural diversity, and language policies, accomplished by setting
new goals and social as well as cultural responsibilities for academia in the research within the social sciences and humanities.

Raising awareness of the benefits of successful dealing with such issues as language endangerment, trauma and discrimination linked to language and culture loss, especially in the context of national and European minority and migrant groups.

We will propose specific solutions and strong recommendations for language, educational (at both state and local levels), and migration policies, efficiently supporting “healthy” use of minority language and contributing to well-being, sustainability and productivity of minority groups/migrants; we will especially focus on conditions favoring balanced multilingualism and respecting human/civil/linguistic rights. In-depth diagnosis based on cross-linguistic evidence and working closely with psychiatrists and health practitioners we will also provide guidelines for prevention and treatment of psychological consequences/PTSD linked to linguistic discrimination and loss. Finally, along with collaborating NGOs, foreign partners, community stakeholders and specialists in economy, we will propose case-specific strategies for reversing the language shift in close connection with stimulating activities and initiatives of economic potential for individuals (and their self-esteem and professional performance), local groups, and entire communities. Pilot implementations will be carried out together with local stakeholders.

References


